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Between Public and Private: Negotiating the Location of Art Education

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Abstract

This article seeks to articulate developing trends in art education and practice, locating such movements within the broader cultural contexts of globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and postmodernity. Against this more general synopsis, the autobiographical position of the author as a student and teacher of art will be elucidated as inextricably entwined with such cultural movements. This entwinement will be understood both in terms of its capacity to 'position' the subject, and yet concomitantly as a site of disavowal, refusal, and subjective agency. In this manner, the personal commitment of the author to art education will be developed in a way to implicate early school and familial experiences with art. Such early autobiographical experiences arguably form the coordinates of our identities as art educators, and similarly, constitute the key issues with which we must necessarily grapple in pedagogical practice. It is in negotiation with such issues and early enculturation that this article argues our relationship to art curriculum and practice is located.

Preamble

Revised in 1985, the Alberta Art curriculum emerged in a turbulent time punctuated by the ultra conservative tone of American Reaganomics and the lingering ideological, economic and geopolitical anxieties of the Cold War. As the atmosphere of many schools veered toward competitiveness and standardized achievement as a measure of ranking 'cultural capital' on an international stage, many national art education programs saw significant cutbacks and public devaluation. Through the emergence of such new technologies as the video camera, compact discs, and video game consoles, the proliferation of the *image* and emergent influence of Generation X motivated the collapse of art into a commodity of consumerism. As Virilio (2002) contends, "Capitalists no longer [rush for the] gold, but for the totality of the world's images" (pp. 58-59). The seminal postmodern art figure of the age, Andy Warhol, satirizes this collapse through the development of works mimicking the reproductive mechanisms of factorization. Warhol's work is concomitantly invested in the consumption of celebrity and fame, of which he asserted everyone would have their fifteen minutes. Amidst the exhaustion of art as a mis-en-scene of the modernist metanarratives of originality and *genius*, Lyotard (1979) identifies a strand of postmodernity that deviates from postmodern eclecticism. While conservative, this counternarrative to modernity and neoliberalism advocates for *an end to experimentation*. As a foil against tasteless postmodern architecture and incomprehensible artworks, this anti-modernist view advocated for grassroots sensibilities. Lyotard suggests the dissenting voices of this anti-modernist movement similarly critiqued the conceptual work of artists such as Piero Manzoni, who defines the conceptual movement in the act of canning and selling his own feces as "100% Pure Art". Such 'art' is arguably in keeping with the pace of modernity, and is anticipated by Schwitters' Dada '*Merz'* sculptures as early as 1919. Against Warhol's anesthetics, Lyotard unravels a conservative anti-modernist advocacy for a return to aesthetics and 'good sense'. It is at this bifurcated postmodern crossroads that the art curriculum feels the force of its larger material context. Further, it is along these multiple lines of flight that current trends in art education are emerging, and *must* emerge if the discipline is to remain relevant to its greater social hearing (Deleuze, 1997).

Part One: The Public Realm

The philosophical mandate of the Alberta art education (11-21-31) curriculum begins with a concern over the *organization* of visual material. Through this privileged metaphor of organization, a modernist stance or implicate structure to the conceptualization of art education is denoted. The systematic organization of the grade(s) 11-21-31[1] art curricula is evidenced in the philosophical mandate of the program, which equates 'systematic instruction' to 'artistic proficiency', again deploying the rhetoric of causal modeling and transmission models of teaching and learning (Alberta Art Education Curriculum, 1985). Further, the organ of the eye becomes the privileged apparatus of artistic ability (Deleuze, 1997). In this 'sense', the curriculum specifically 'focuses' on the issue of "**how we see, interpret and make sense of visual stimuli**" (Alberta Art Education Curriculum, p. 1). The focus of creating personal meaning as condoned in the curriculum philosophy is organized through the privileged relation of the eye to the mental process of meaning making. This conceptual organization is the staging point for the differentiation of art education from the performing arts, which implicate the affective body to a greater degree. Akin to the robotic persona of Warhol, the student of the 1985 art education curriculum is conceived as dis-embodied, that is, as the art curriculum becomes intellectualized, the affective body is placed at a distance. While the core curriculum documents assert that the intent of the program is to enable students to "think and act like artists", we must understand this invitation in regards to the defining organization of the curriculum philosophy and broader calculus of institutional mores. In its objectifying distance, the (11-21-31) curriculum delimits the artistic process as symbolic and instead treats it is an *object* of study and reflection, inserting it into the discourse of rationality. The invitation to "think and act like artists" is thus grounded in the legitimated terms of the project of Western education, marginalizing the important contributions of paradox, madness, and arationality to the paradigmatic breaks between and within various artistic movements (Joselit, 1998).

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[1] In the Alberta, Canada provincial program of studies, the grade 10, 11 and 12 art curricula are referred to through the designations 11, 21, and 31 respectively.

As with many curriculum documents, the elementary and secondary art programs might be read in ways that radicalize their conservative connotations. Prefiguring the emergence of such feminist film researchers as Mulvey (1990), Berger (1972), in his seminal *Ways of Seeing*, suggests that the gaze is socially organized and therefore intimately bound to the function of power. As Berger suggests, "according to usage and conventions which are at last being questioned but have by no means been overcome - *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (Berger 1972, p. 45- 47). Berger suggests that the assumed neutrality or transparency of 'looking' is bound to the privileged position of patriarchy. In advertising, cinema, and throughout Renaissance art, the spectator assumes the position of the male gaze as if it were the 'objective' lens of a camera. The organization of looking and its patriarchal encoding takes on a more ominous tone as Berger (1972) avers:

> Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world within words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. (1972, p.7)

Particular to Berger's critical analysis of seeing is an exploration of the intersection of poststructuralism and the socially constructed gaze. In interrogating this relationship, the causal correlation of the eye to the rational mind is placed into doubt. Berger disrupts the transmission model of teaching and learning popularized in behaviorist methodology, instead focusing on our inability to unequivocally 'know' for certain the meaning of what we see. Berger furthers this position by demonstrating how the mode of a visual artwork acts to alter interpretation and thus received meaning.

If the Alberta art education curriculum is understood as informed by such radical reconsiderations as Berger's (1972) *Ways of Seeing*, the inherent conservatism of the document is placed at stake. As Berger's Canadian media contemporary Marshall McLuhan suggests (1964), "Art at its most significant is a Distant Early Warning System that can always be relied on to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen to it" (p. 22). With a growing suspicion toward the assumed neutrality of the modernist gaze, the rise of postmodernism and poststructural theory in art education serve as an antecedent condition for other ontological and epistemological upheavals. Following McLuhan's Early Distant Warning System (1964), the discipline of art education has been influenced by several major trends in postmodern thought and theory. First, the *dilemma of reproducibility* is forecast in Walter Benjamin's (1936) caveat that the mass production of art would result in the povertization of the aura or art originals. This fear was never realized, and counter to Benjamin's intuition, the mass production of art has had the obverse effect. The desire to 'own' a favored artwork has not diminished in Western society, proliferating like Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* toward a hyperreal cliché. Such kitsch as Leonardo's Mona Lisa on a coffee cup has not reduced the original, but has instead rendered the original more valuable. The second major trend to impact the art world and the terrain of art education emerges through the rise of *consumerist aura*. The *consumerist aura* refers to the fetishization of items that retain the nostalgia of the relic. In this manner, the reproduction of 'originality' begins to supplant and replace reality as the hypereal. This movement has been dubbed *image consumerism,* an area theorized extensively by Baudrillard (1994), who contends that paradigmatic breaks in art are less influenced by originality or authenticity than by the novelty of fashion and pastiche (Baudrillard, 1994). According to Baudrillard, the revolutionary and original possibility of art has been exhausted, and as a field of inquiry, artistic representation is moribund, fatally collapsing into the logic of simulation (Baudrillard, 2002).

The program rationale of the Alberta art education curriculum is deeply influenced by these cultural influences, and in response, stage the recuperation of skill development and focused analysis that much conceptual art recklessly abandoned or admonished. Yet, other aleatory influences place demands on the curriculum as both plan and existential practice. Post-secondary entrance requirements for art students have changed dramatically over the rise of postmodernity. In the 1980s, secondary art education attributed primacy to the development of technical skill in drawing and painting. As an organizing metaphor for this period, the static and moribund 'still life' achieves privileged status as a signifier of artistic competency. This sentiment is reflected in the post-secondary portfolio requirements of the time, which demanded an overwhelming focus on the presentation of a student's technical capacity in fundamental art principals. As a backlash to the frivolity of conceptual art movements, the art education institution enacted a return to art fundamentals, orienting the classroom to the transmission model of skill development and rage for technical mastery. At heart, it was a strategic recuperation of modernism.

The orientation toward fundamentals has undergone a significant change over the past decade, due in part to advances in technological modes of imagistic rendering. In this manner, the proliferation of technology has enabled the diversification of representational modes. Further, the contemporary focus on the development of divergent and pliable thinking has influenced a move away from the overly technical requirements of post-secondary art programs. As international competitiveness has begun to accentuate the importance of culture as a growth sector in Canadian development, fundamentals have been surpassed by an international move toward student dexterity in critical analysis, multiple perspectives, and in the development of cultural dialogues honoring difference and uniqueness. Emergent creative industries have been recognized as sustainable sites of international development, wherein publishing, film, multimedia, and folk crafts bear direct influence upon a country's economic viability. In the midst of a world produced by a "purely scientific vision", UNESCO insists, "modern progress is no longer able to provide adequate replies to the questions with which this very progress confronts us" (UNESCO, 1999, p. 19). Following, the question for sustained artistic inquiry becomes "can art constitute the horizon whence glows the unique, far-off light of powers which neither philosophically nor science can give?" (1999, p. 19). In this call for the radical reconsideration of the unique contribution of art to the development and sustainability of culture is the suggested break from the domains of technical efficiency and the 'still life' of modernism. As Groomer (1999) avers, "There are very, very few countries in the world where the arts are understood and accepted by governments as education instead of some luxury activity for those who practice the arts and a diversion for those who choose to follow the arts" (p. 25). As a call to preserve the social significance of art education, Groomer continues, "the arts belong in the government budget along with the millions earmarked for Defense; for the arts are themselves the Defense of a vital kind: of the human spirit, in all its terrors and marvels of complexity" (p. 25). Influenced by such international reports as UNESCO's (1999) *Art and Society*, the 1980 *Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist,* and the shifting demands of globalization, post-secondary art institutions have begun to shift their requirement focus toward a call for examples of robust *conceptual* artwork reflecting social consciousness, innovation, and divergent thinking. This has necessitated the inclusion of postmodern artworks and contemporary artists into art programs often dominated by the trace of patriarchal and formalist *masters*. While portfolio requirements of the 1980s and 1990s placed primacy upon technical skill and efficiency, the new millennium has seen a shift in the role of the artist and artwork toward an emphasis upon social commentary and criticism, through which new relations between art and its cultural referents might be negotiated.

A similar shift in elementary art education has emerged as a result of international influences. The philosophical rationale of the 1985 elementary art curriculum functions in accordance to the mandate of the secondary program, and is similarly framed as a distinct, technical discipline. A lack of professional expertise thus emerges as few elementary practitioners develop backgrounds in fine arts instruction and practice. In this scenario, art is often reduced to a common 'aesthetic', relegated to the periphery as a mode of making meaning. As an increasing number of elementary schools advocate for early *textual* literacy, art education becomes marginal, and divorced from the rigors of its own practice. Yet, this understanding of the place of art in the early childhood classroom is currently under question, most notably as a result of the vivid documentation of student work in the pre-and primary schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Reggio Emilia (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993) educators regard the representations of children as vehicles for professional development, curricular unfoldment and as significant data for the social construction of knowledge. The work emerging from Reggio Emilia's primary 'classrooms' is less oriented toward the production of a product than its North American counterparts. The significance of visual literacy lauded by Reggio Emilia educators is not merely the reversal of the North American text/image binary. It is instead an understanding wherein visual literacy becomes, alongside (and prior to) textual articulation, one of "A Thousand" symbolic languages of childhood (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). The visual languages of children are understood as complex and valid ways to negotiate meaning and articulate knowledge. The Reggio Emilia art exhibition, *Thousand Languages of Children* was thus a revelation to many early childhood educators mired in the treatment of art as singularly the perfunctory task of motor development. As Reggio Emilia *atelier* (an artistically trained mentor to teachers) Vea Vecchi articulates:

> It happens very often that some of the children's products are so original that one wants to compare them with the work of famous artists. But that kind of comparison becomes dangerous and fraught with ambiguity, especially if one tries to make comparisons consistently. It leads to false conclusions, such as that the behavior of children unfolds innately, or that the product is more important than the process. (1998, p. 146)

Akin to shifts in secondary education, an emerging reinvigoration of primary art education is located in the rigorous research and innovative successes of Reggio Emilia. It is similarly a turn toward the reinvestment of art as a vehicle of valid meaning making which does not necessarily culminate in the production of an aesthetic product. Further, alike the post-secondary art institution's demand for evidence of critical thought, the Reggio Emilia approach has reframed elementary 'art' as a potential force in developing students' conceptual understanding.

While shifts within the field of art education have been mobilized by international circumstances, they have also shifted locally in relation to other subject areas. For example, revisions in the new Social Studies program treat visual literacy as an indispensable mode of curriculum inquiry. In this manner, the updated primary social studies curriculum understands the important role of artistic representation as a means of building a dialogue across cultures, geography, and time. Alberta Learning's document on teaching and learning entitled *Focus on Inquiry* (2004) identifies the pivotal role of visual literacy in assuming a critical stance to teaching and learning. Drawing upon Gardiner (1993) as a secret point of reference, the *Focus on Inquiry* documents identifies the process of 'drawing' and 'painting' as a strategy to engage kinesthetic learners. In this is a hint at the affective dimension lost in overly instrumental art education practices. The *Focus on Inquiry* document also provides an example of an inquiry into the historical, cultural, and ideological locations of art, art figures, and movements. Outside of the art curriculum 'in itself', other discipline mandates are acknowledging the implications of artistic exploration in terms of their ability to help students negotiate, contest, and build knowledge. This is not to suggest the end of popularized artistic aesthetics in schools, but is instead an alternate means of understanding the place of art education in reference to the demands and requirements of globalization.

Part Two: Personal Commitment

My earliest memories of 'art' are bound to feelings of frustration and anxiety. For me, the 'artistic experience' was exclusively an engagement with production. More accurately, it was a highly instrumentalized encounter with art undergirded by an *ideology* of production. In this mode, I recall how my 'artwork' was defined against its ideal standard, unremittingly installed by the teacher. In the first Grade, Miss. Kellner would clip *Caroline's* work to the board. "Do you see how *neatly* it has been done?" the teacher would rhetorically question. Of course, the answer was implicit. If the teacher desired the *look* of Caroline's picture, it was worthy of thoughtless and direct imitation. Yet, in implying imitation, I am also suggesting the possible creation of something singularly different. This is hyperbole. My early art experiences were most often impelled and organized by precut shapes and models. It was less art than assembly, but in this endeavor, I struggled to emulate my ideal referent. Nothing seemed to 'come together' in a way that satisfied my own internalized desire to produce the 'exemplary' sample. This unrealizable fantasy was constantly met with its awkward and messy material realization as a site of lack. The purpose of art only became clear when attached to themes, when it was superficially imported in production of Christmas cards, glittery Valentine hearts, or Mother's Day mobiles. In this vein, art was almost exclusively conceptualized as a public relations device between the school and home. Art became a stage for the *signs of labor,* through which my (in) ability to achieve an *a priori* standard could be measured. Reduced to a diagnostic apparatus, art became a process alienated from the conditions of its production. Its connotations always emerged elsewhere, in evaluation of participation, neatness, ability to follow directions, and fine motor development. The experience of 'producing art' was therefore in service of a broader apparatus of evaluation and measurement absented from the radical force of art itself.

Years of ambivalence toward instrumental art would pass before it would be recuperated in my personal life through an interest in popular comic book art. While the source of this interest evades conscious memory, I am almost certain it emerged from outside of my direct familial influence. As a child of the late 1970s and early 1980s - a Gen X'er- I grew up in midst of an accelerating media bred from a neoliberal attitude toward its proliferation. Obverse to the overdetermination of art as an institutional practice, I found in comic book art the opening of imaginative possibility and concomitantly, a fantasy space into which I could be projected. My experience of art at school largely denied this affective investment by distancing my labor from the object of its production - that is, creating superficial and inauthentic links between a student's work and the product of the work. Such vacuous 'demands' served only to enact *the signs of labor*, denying complication, struggle, and affective investment. Yet, in an age of rampant commodification, of Max Headroom, IntelliVision, and Madonna's "Material Girl", such surface treatments were ubiquitous, and consumer society was caught in *mimesis*. However, growing up in Revelstoke, British Columbia, then a sleepy railroad and mill town, my experience was very much anachronistic with the surface glitz of MTV and repetitive servomechanism of video games (which my parents refused).

While teachers continued to define the image ideal of artistic production, my vitalized interest in comic art became a private escape, something particular to my own desire, carrying a trace of my agency in ways that possibilized new ways of understanding agency. Much to the consternation of my teachers, I voraciously doodled, the forms and bodies of pulp fiction constituting an escape from the institutional *objet a* (ideal object) from which I became increasingly divested in achieving. Yet, this is only partially accurate. I remained a high achiever while using art as a way to negotiate a passage between institutional recognizability and becoming-other than the often closed circuit of institutional existence. Though only to my vague awareness at the time, drawing became a vehicle to psychically stage subconscious feelings and drives, anxieties and fears. It was thus early on that I appreciated the role of drawing as a means of storying experience, articulating and dispersing affect.

Images are not neutral (a moot point). The current tensions between the Danish government and numerous Muslim communities as a result of the *Jyllands-Posten* publication of 'Muhammad's Face' attests to the affective force carried by an image. This applies also to the selfsame artwork created in classrooms today. While such work is often of an outstanding technical quality, surpassing the ability of many adults, it demonstrates the absence of interpretation and creative application. In this vein, I am drawn to the similarity of my own early childhood 'art education', and am reminded why I theorize about emergence and potential in everyday classroom practice. My teaching was oriented toward the arts, or more accurately, to alternate modes of representation in supplementation to the Foucauldian ‘regimes of writing’ (cited in Aoki, 2000). My work with students also drew heavily upon innovative uses of technology such as the use of green screens, animation, photography, hypertext, and web page development. Growing up amidst the rapid evolution of personal computers, my teaching by extension drew upon technology as a potentially fecund vehicle for teaching and learning; And as art had pervaded all areas of my life, my understanding of the subject areas were conceptualized along visual topographies. Over the first years of my teaching, I taught fractions exclusively through the work of Warhol, nets and tessellations through Escher, and probability through Duchamp. In this way, I began to think the disciplines as already having an ‘art’ at work in their (dis)organization. Yet, this was not the readymade and alien art of my own early education. This ‘art’ was instead a potential to create new knowledge in an affective encounter with the lived disciplines. While this is difficult to ‘orchestrate’ and maintain through external measures, it is not uncommon when the alienating apparatus separating the process of production from its product is dis-organized.

It is at this point that I am also invested as an arts-based researcher. One line of flight in my own research is an exploration of alternate modes of theorizing, collecting, writing and disclosing research. This work is not in any way an admonition of textual expression. Rather, it is an exploration and deconstruction of the limits of text, its organization, suppositions, and limits (Fidyk & Wallin, 2005). The ‘artistic’ process not only plays with the limits of representation, it creates new inter/intratextual relations, opening spaces for (unsettling) conversations. The radical potential of the ‘arts’ have therefore continued to be pertinent to my reading of the curriculum field and the negotiation of meaning as a student, theorist and practitioner. Yet, I have never conducted arts-based research as a sole researcher. My work in this area has been collaborative and has endeavored to grapple with the tensions, misunderstandings, and sudden inspirations of critical dialogue. Along these lines, I fear for the reduction of ‘art education’ as solely the practice of individuals who only encounter the voice of their peers in summative ‘art critiques’. How can arts-based research, as a collaborative and scholarly practice, articulate the *becoming* or imminent quality of working or being-with-others?

In my last two years as a curriculum consultant to early childhood educators, I worked closely with a number of schools and individual teachers examining the ramifications of the Reggio Emilia ‘approach’ to classroom practice. Distinct from considering the role of art as integrable into other disciplines, my own professional development pivoted on the use of visual literacies in building knowledge and formatively assessing student understanding. Obverse to my own art experience as a student, wherein visual literacies were largely trivialized and framed as non-rigorous leisure activities, I began to actively plan for the practice of visual literacy as a sometimes primary mode of articulating understanding, enabling the social construction of knowledge, and making decisions regarding lesson planning and curricular direction. I also drew heavily upon contemporary visual culture in my work, making the case that students are more than ever immersed in a world constituted in and by images. It is therefore imperative that they not only become savvy critics of visual culture, but also creators and re-creators of the visual technoscape (Postman, 1993). This need not carry a negative connotation and might rather be understood as a revision of the scriptocentrism rampant in many early childhood classrooms. My approach is critical of the mantra ‘art for art’s sake’, and is concerned that such an understanding casts ‘art education’ as a closed, solipsistic loop. Instead, I strongly believe that as a practice of signification, art points both to itself (the lived discipline and process) as well as away from itself, toward its greater assemblage and tendency to overlap in rich ways with other disciplines. My understanding of ‘art’ in the classroom thereby attempts to evade its reduction to a separate discipline or field of knowledge. Following the work of Reggio Emilia, visual literacy might otherwise be practiced as a language through which one might conceive ‘worldly’ experience in creative, innovative, and expressive ways. In a sense, *visual* language offers a strategic and subtle means to elude the constraints of textual language and its institutionally organized forms of enunciation.

Autobiographical Statement

As a child, I grew up in a household that unconsciously attested to a Protestant work ethic. In particular, my father met the practice or appreciation of art with ambivalence. He would often downplay his own passion for photography, an interest he unconsciously inherited from his own father. Defined in accordance to the male stereotypes of ruggedness, strength, and control, my father would sometimes decry ‘art’ as flighty, effeminate, and impractical. At an early age, my gender identity was thus constructed in disavowal of ‘art’ as a ‘masculine’ practice. This coding of art as a signification of ‘femininity’ precipitated my reluctance to make my own ‘artwork’ public. In possible preservation of the surface appearance of gender identity informed by my father and broader socius, my encounter with art was largely private and solipsistic. The desire in my family oriented itself toward the ‘masculine’ activities of playing sports, fishing, and logging. In approaching gender and its discursive practices through the purview of poststructuralism, I have begun to unravel the signifying chain linking ‘art’ to ‘femininity’. Moreover, through this approach to meaning and the knowledge/power relationship, I have begun to consciously understand ‘art’ as a means of recoding gender identity asymmetrically to the modernist sexual binary man/woman. In this vein, I have begun to challenge my overtly sexist and misogynist upbringing through participation in counter normative ‘artistic’ practices, thereby waging a pointed critique against patriarchy.

I learned very early from my father that the ‘art’ profession was an untenable future option, fraught with hardship and lack of viable work. This sentiment was conjoined to the geographical location in which I grew up. In the early 1980s, Revelstoke, British Columbia, was predominantly driven by industry, a stark difference to its current status as an eco-tourist and cultural center. As a disruptive or challenging force, 'art' was largely absent in the broader social space in which I lived. The art to which I was exposed largely catered to a common denominator of aesthetic taste, unabashedly mired in realism and direct representation. This had the effect of structuring my aesthetic tastes toward conservatism, and the equation of artistic competence to mechanical replication. Much later, when I would encounter abstract and conceptual art movements, my first reaction would be disavowal, denying its legitimacy as art proper. This backlash mirrored the conservative tone of both my familial, social and political location. As the child of a blue collar, working class family, abstract and conceptual art seemed wasteful, senseless, and 'gay' - fatally removed from 'reality'. Yet, my personal location also intersects with the radical interrogation of 'popular taste' waged by postmodernism. After all, the 1980s saw culture reduced to a lowest common denominator of anti-intellectualism and candid self-consumption. It was here that such early influences as the satire of MAD magazine and publications of EC Comics (Tales from the Crypt, The Vault of Horror, and adaptations of Bradbury in *Weird Science*) began to change both my active relation to popular culture, and the sanctity of a legitimated popular aesthetic taste. It is in this vein that I continue to work in the modes of deconstruction and poststructuralism to reveal the discursive strategies that maintain 'popular taste'. Further, I have continued to draw upon the futurism of science fiction and the force of horror as two ways into theorizing the radical potential of art education and representation.

As addressed earlier, my language acquisition was overwhelmingly oriented toward the visual. This is of course not without its complications, one of which exemplified in the dangerous correlation of the eye organ to brain function. As a student who was slow to acquire proficiency in reading, I relied more heavily upon visual cues in illustrations, signs, and gestures; and while my brother was verbose, I am characterized as a quiet child in the anecdotes of my parents. As the youngest child, I grew up surrounded by others already proficient in textual literacy. As such, a proclivity toward visual representation might have been an attempt to assert agency and create a personalized voice. Narrated as a 'quiet' child, I might have been predisposed to being wistful, assuming the quietudes of 'art' as my native, or 'natural' language. This is perhaps another illusion I am currently attempting to work through as a researcher and practitioner. This illusion is explored through an analysis of an assumed 'naturalness' or 'neutrality' in visual literacy. Through this work, I might better understand my own encounter with the visual not as a 'natural' dispensation, but as a motivated engagement installed by both my upbringing and the binary division of textual literacy/visual literacy. Along this vector, I continue to research the limits of representation, demonstrating potential places of overlap and fertile spaces of "original difficulty" (Caputo, 1987).

Concluding Statement

In navigating the passage between public discourse and private knowledge, I have endeavored to articulate the complex, contested, and difficult character of art education. Yet, this essay similarly traces the complex location of subjectivity in the art education classroom. In this vein, my exploration suggests the importance of carefully considering how the subject is neither the transparent projection of curriculum policy nor the self-enclosed terminus of prior experiences. More aptly, our location as art educators exists at the limin of these horizons in ways which inform, permeate, and provoke one another. In negotiating this intricate horizon of public and private knowledge, I invite the reader into my own life as a vehicle for understanding how private identifications, repressions, and desire play a significant role in approaching and understanding art education. Likewise, I attempt to detail how curriculum policy positions the subject in ways that both accord and conflict with identity and experience. In exploring and working through these sites of tension, our habits and presumptions of art education might be traversed in ways that open us to new opportunities for perceiving the pedagogical potential of art. In this vein, I offer my exploration not as a solipsistic endeavor, but as a screen upon which the reader might project the significance of their experiences and fantasies as they inform their own understanding of art and art education.

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