Global and Local: Rethinking Citizenship in Art and Visual Culture Education

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Abstract

We are all familiar with global colonization by the world’s dominant cultures, especially that of the U.S.: Burger King restaurants found from Helsinki to Seoul to Mexico City, US sit-coms and blockbuster films dubbed in Chinese, Estonian, and Hindi; Microsoft as the prevailing software in Ankara, Makarora, Nuuk, and Tierra del Fuego. Participatory democracy is threatened by globalization because international corporations are beyond the control of nation-states. Yet thinking of globalization as bad or the local as remedy is overly reductive. Societies and cultures are not only in a constant state of change, but influence each other continually—historically as well as currently. Cultures are varied, complex, and in constant flux. In education, it is up to us as teachers and theoreticians, to develop means to guide students in ways to understand, explore, and live in our globalized world.

Based on these theoretical premises, five principles are provided as a basis for visual culture teaching practice committed to cultural and social diversity: identity; understanding beyond ourselves; class, race, and gender awareness; engaging as political subjects and participatory citizens; and engaging in transgression and play.

Globalization

We are all familiar with global colonization by the world’s dominant cultures, especially that of the U.S.: Burger King restaurants found from Helsinki to Seoul to Mexico City, US sit-coms and blockbuster films dubbed in Chinese, Estonian, and Hindi; Microsoft as the prevailing software in Ankara, Makarora, Icheon, Nuuk, and Tierra del Fuego. “In Europe, Asia, and the Americas…markets have already eroded national sovereignty and given birth to

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a new class of institutions...institutions that lack distinctive national identities and neither reflect nor respect nationhood as an organizing or a regulative principle” (Barber, 1995, p. 14). Part of the thesis of Benjamin Barber, in his book, *Mac vs. Jihad*, is that capitalization is beyond the control of nation states and that this poses problems for democracy and citizenship.²

The origins of current globalization are variously traced to the merging of small businesses under larger ones (see, especially, Bagdikian, 2000), to communication technologies, and to migration patterns. David Held (1995), in his book *Democracy and Global Order*, calls the current era a new "global Middle Ages" because nation-states retain vitality but cannot control their borders—they are subject to significant internal and external pressures. Global capitalism, or “designer capitalism” as jagodzinski (2008) refers to it, is often thought of as the new kind of colonialism, invading cultures and societies worldwide with values and life styles that promote a westernized way of life that is pictured in movies, on television, and in magazines. Reasons this is a negative phenomenon are based on “cultural emasculation” (Duncum, 2001, n.p., citing Morley & Robins, 1995, p. 53), meaning that global culture replaces regional culture, values, and customs, resulting in a lessening of identity and agency amongst the colonized (Baudrillard, 2002) and establishing a sense that “the source of the world’s significant action and life is in the West” (Said, 1993, p. xix). There are many side-effects of globalization, such as labor issues—including poor working conditions and salaries on which workers cannot live---an increased gap between rich and poor, an increase in urban violence, and a threat to cultural identity and ideals of democracy as it is taught in schools.

In this paper, I will discuss from the standpoint of postcolonial theory some limitations to the global vs. local debate and suggest that our understanding must extend more deeply. From here, I will describe how this theory takes shape in

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² Under the term "Jihad," Barber (1995) indicates any dogmatic and militant group. His argument is that whereas fundamentalist religion and corporate culture may be ideologically opposed, and are thus driven by different forces, “the one driven by parochial hatreds, the other by universalizing markets” (p. 6), neither respects the principles and ideals that underlie democracies.
teaching and offer goals I work with in scholarship and in preparing future art and visual culture educators. I will conclude with some thoughts on the connections between art making and global—or what I am calling participatory—citizenship.

Globalization, of course, is not always thought of negatively. For citizens of wealthier nations, it means greater access to travel, goods, information, and technologies. For many, it means access to ideas and products that expand their worlds, and make living more interesting or easier. From the perspective of western values, some features of globalization can be thought of as "positive." In Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) book *Provincializing Europe*, he uses Europe not as a place but as "habits of thought." Among European thought habits are citizenship, human rights, individuality, and social justice. These "habits" are usually assumed as universal values and concepts, and many social critiques, argues Chakrabarty, are based in them. The ideas of democracy and the perceptions of globalization that I present in this paper are based in these habits. In education, these values include universal access to literacy and other forms of education regardless of economic status, gender, race, or other identify factors; education for peace, tolerance, and democracy; and eco-pedagogy. Some of these values are historically rooted in non-western cultures, but currently it is the globalization of western ideas and values through which they often take root.

Globalization can be thought of as “one of the fundamental consequences of modernity” (Kim, 2009, p. 20), “not a monolithic and static process but a dynamic one” (p. 25). “Partly because of empire,” argues Edward Said, “all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” (1993, p. xxv). Thus, cultures are, to use James Clifford’s term, “ethnographic collections”

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3 Torres (1998) defines "postcolonialism" as "a theoretical perspective connected with liberation movements fighting against colonialism and racism [that] emerged as an attempt to criticize the rational foundations of colonialism and to decolonize "the mind,"" (p. 121). It is "above all a criticism of the Enlightenment and its legacy of modernity. As does feminism, postcolonialism criticizes the notion of an unqualified reason, universality, the progressive unfolding of history, national sovereignty, and the integrity of a self-identity subject that holds specific, self-reflective interests. Like feminism, postcolonial discourse has had a significant impact on cultural studies, the discourse of minority representation, and most of the discussions in humanities on dramatic, literary, cinematic, artistic, and musical texts" (p. 121).
Binaries between democracy and globalization, global and local, east and west, specialist and citizen, colonizer and colonized extends an “us” and “they,” a premise of colonialism (Said, 1993). The reality is more complex. “No single cultural hierarchy exists, or is likely to,” argues Duncum (2001, n.p.). Bae (2009), for example, notes the phenomenon of halryu (한려) or the Korean Wave, that has swept East and South Asia over the past decade and involves TV dramas, popular music, movies, music videos, fashion, food, accessories, and mobile phones as a site for art and visual culture education. “Such an alternative discourse defies the idea of the US as the center of cultural power and its influence on the rest of the world…there are many emerging centers of cultural power in other parts of the world, particularly in Southeast Asia” (p. 180).

Duncum offers the example of Coca-Cola, an emblem of US imperialism that has, in some places, displaced local drinks. Yet it is attributed meanings not ascribed to it by the company: “In Russia it is thought to smooth wrinkles; in Barbados, to turn copper into silver; and in Haiti, even to revive the dead” (n.p.). Distinguishing between cultural transmission and cultural translation, Duncum notes that widespread access to technology enables local productions and their virtually free export. “Transmission is what happens at a purely technological level whereas the translation of cultural goods involves human agency; translation is a rich, generative process involving the production of a text that may be more or less than, but is always different from, the original” (n.p.).

**Education**

What do these thoughts about globalization suggest for art and visual culture educators? Principles for teaching about global culture in the art classroom suggested by Duncum (2001) include that learners engage directly with global culture, exploring its complexity; that students consider the creativity of global products across cultural contexts, including how they are received; and that local cultural heritage be understood as dynamic and varied. He cautions that agency needs to be acknowledged as well as its limits. Putting these principles into practice, he describes investigating one’s own local heritage through tourism. Noting that “tourism is about presenting a community to others,
not as one sees of oneself necessarily, but how a community believes it should offer itself [to] others in order to best extract money” (n.p.), a group of 8 year olds considered various questions that helped them separate symbols of their home as unique from their daily lives and designed souvenirs for tourists visiting their area.

Other examples include Toku (2001), who looks at the globalization of imagery from Japanese comic books; Grauer (2002), who worked with teenage students to examine their bedroom decorations in terms of a Coke-sponsored marketing strategy, “the global teenager”; Stanley (2005), who had high school students compare Disney’s promotional material with their own experiences of the Sleeping Beauty Castle and with the original story to see how it changes in each context and to consider why; and Tavin and Hausman (2004), whose pre-service art teachers interpreted a site, an image, or an object “in terms of how discourses are produced, consumed, and regulated in the context of globalization” (p. 49) and produced various teaching tools, including guidebooks, large and small group activities, and discussion questions). And there are other examples.

My own teaching and research are grounded in the principle that “the relationships between democracy, citizenship, and education cannot be treated in isolation from the question of multiculturalism” (Torres, 1998, p. 179). Specifically addressing teaching, I have been working with my students to find ways:

- to understand how culture influences our values, experiences, understandings of the world;
- to know, understand, and value cultures beyond the dominant ones, thus considering a broad range of art and visual culture;
- to begin the painful process of looking into how racism, class, and gender discrimination are embedded in culture and implicate all of us; and
- to inspire them to find ways as artists and as teachers to take action in creating a just, sustainable world
These goals are consistent with “reconstructionist” multicultural education⁴, and also with feminist, postmodernist, and postcolonial ideals, along with principles of sustainability. They take shape as a set of principles for teaching that I will outline next. While these principles are in line with the work of the above scholars, the emphasis is slightly different.

Identity is a popular theme in art as well as in multicultural writing and education. Strong identities seem to be a prerequisite to respecting individuals and cultures outside of oneself. Bourdieu (1984) urges that we look at our own positions, asking in what field of power and from what position in that field one writes, speaks, or understands, a position supported by, among others, Wasson, Stuhr, & Petrovich-Mwaniki (1990).

Yet identity can be misunderstood as making monograms or collages of self-identification that touch only on superficial levels of understanding identity. As Rabinow (1986) points out, identity study should not “reduce knowledge to social position or interest per se but, rather, to place all of these variables within the complex constraints—Bourdieu’s *habitus*—within which they are produced and received” (p. 252). Exploration of one’s self must exist in a larger framework of consumer culture and cultural, class, ethnic, racial, gender, and national studies. It must be pursued in the context of critical and reflective questioning and thinking.

Further, identity must be understood as shifting and ever changing in two ways. First, it is not fixed: in any one moment, we are have multiple and

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⁴ As a term, “multiculturalism” is “baggy,” serving a variety of interests, goals, and values (Torres, 1998, p. 180). Research by Banks and Banks (1993) indicates four approaches to multiculturalism: “corporate and conservative multiculturalism”: teaching about contributions of different cultural groups and individuals; “liberal multiculturalism”: adding multicultural lessons as supplement to the existing curriculum; “transformative multiculturalism”: changing the basic curriculum and instruction to reflect the perspectives and experiences of diverse groups; and “policy making approach”: teaching students that inter-group relations are always an integral part of social and historical conflicts and that students should employ political action to achieve greater equality, freedom, and social justice.

Similarly, Sleeter and Grant’s (1987) research resulted in six approaches to multicultural education: “teaching the culturally different” to fit into “mainstream” society; “human relations,” emphasizing different groups living together harmoniously; “single-group studies,” in which students learn to develop awareness, respect, and acceptance of specific groups in society; “multicultural: in which the focus is on reducing prejudice and creating equal educational opportunities and social justice; and “social reconstructionist,” in which analytical and critical thinking are paired with political actions focused on the redistribution of society’s resources, especially power and wealth, among diverse groups.
sometimes conflicting identities: I am a mother, a wife, a scholar, a teacher, a gardener, a rower, a cyclist, a ceramicist, etc. Additionally, identity changes over the course of a lifetime. Second, identity is how others perceive us. Resemblance is relative to the culture and the purpose of classification. In *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, Todd Gitlin eloquently notes,

> To a passerby or a census-taker, I am white. To an anti-Semite, I am simply a Jew. To a German Jew, I may be one of the Ostjuden; to Sephardim, an Ashkenazi Jew; to an Israeli Jew, American; to a religious Jew, secular; to a right wing Zionist, an apostate, or no Jew at all. (cited in Torres, p. 178)

Identity is how we understand ourselves in relation to others. It is an ongoing, reflective, and developmental process. In art, it should involve exploration of the unknown, not the obvious, as well play (Gude, 2007). Indeed, art class is a key arena for such growth and exploration.

**Understanding beyond ourselves.** A lot of art instruction takes place in relationship to self-expression, even in the post-“discipline-based art education” era. Knowledge about art and the world beyond ourselves, however, remains critical to being educated. In my classes, we look at what art and artists can tell us in relation to an artist's culture as well as so-called “human themes.” We look for the unknown rather than what first comes to mind.⁵ Our investigations include local and global. I try to instill in students an interest in looking at the complexity of influences on any artist and the web of their own values and beliefs in understanding that art. In looking at local Korean immigrant culture in his locality, for example, Shin (2009) provides an excellent example of the complexities of local culture by pointing out subtle differences between Korean and Korean-American material culture.

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⁵ To help make this point clear to US students, for example, hamburgers are not a food of all U.S. Americans, just as Spanish is not spoken by all Chicana/os and mariachi music and milagros don’t accurately represent the whole of Mexican art (Garber, 1995).
The position I navigate students towards is that of "border crossers" (Freire, 1993; Garber, 1995; Giroux, 1992). In Henry Giroux's *Border Crossings* (1992), he used the concept of "border crossing" as a way to formulate the role cultural workers (teachers, postmodern theorists, feminists, and others) might play in the development of a critical pedagogical practice that works across these disciplines. In a 1995 article that drew on Gomez-Peña's (1986) call to become a border crosser, I argued that the study of cultures other than our own be approached for the formation of a border consciousness and that this should be a basic component of education.

**Class, race, and gender.** Racism and class are deeply embedded in U.S. culture, as they are in other cultures. Gender awareness begins in the womb and is pervasive throughout identity of ourselves and others. With my students, we learn about issues surrounding class, race, and gender theoretically and through a variety of exploratory exercises. We learn about types of racism (e.g., Helms, 1994, 1995; McLaren, 1997; Roman, 1993), study theories of ethnicity, look at white privilege (e.g. Mcintosh, 1988/1989); investigate class from a material culture point of view (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 1885i Halle, 1987); and explore the pervasiveness of gender as well as its significance to the art classroom (Sadker & Sadker, 1995). We look at our own positions in society, asking what field of power and from what position we act and understand. These are not easy conversations.

**Becoming political subjects.** Freire (1998) and Apple (1979) argue that education is never politically neutral, thus as educators we must assume the political nature of our work. They conceive of students as "neither tabula rasa in cognitive or ethical terms nor fully equipped for the exercise of their democratic

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6 Literary scholar Tomás Ybarra-Fausto (1986) and artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña (1986) have advanced the notion of "border" as a metaphor for positive change resulting hybrid cultures and hybrid thinkers. Ybarra-Fausto notes that the culture of Mexican-Americans draws on two sets of reference codes—Mexico and the U.S.—that operate simultaneously, creating a cultural montage and a border land that is both and then some. Gomez-Peña (1986) argues that “we must learn each other’s language, history, art, literature, and political ideas.' We must travel south and east, with frequency and humility, not as cultural tourists" (p. 97). We must study individually to understand the varieties and subtleties of the culture we teach or write about and with a thoroughness that exceeds most current calls to "multiculturalism."
rights and obligations” (Torres, 1998, p. 162). Teachers must understand the political nature of education and be clear about their position.

A useful clarification here has to do with the conceptualization of democracy. Torres (1998) distinguishes between formal and substantive democracy. He puts forth four models of democracy based on the work of C.B. Macpherson. These are:

"protective democracy," which is based on the hegemony of a market economy "to advance market interests and to protect against the tyranny of the state";
"equilibrium democracy" (or "pluralist democracy"), where apathy among the majority of citizens is crucial to a functioning democracy because participation "overloads the system with demands which it cannot meet";
"developmental democracy, based on elevating working-class people into rational beings who are 'self-interested consumers and appropriators' and democratic participators"; and
"participatory democracy," in which socially equal and conscious individuals contribute to building "a sense of community, of association, of neighboring and joining." (pp. 146-147)

In Freire’s and Apple’s context, as well in this article written in the context of art and visual culture education, we are talking about “participatory democracy.” A participatory democratic education leads towards citizenship where people are responsible and able to participate knowledgeably and reflectively, and are willing to act. Anthropologist Paul Rabinow (1986) uses the term “political subjects,” in which ethics combines with dialogics in an effort “to create a relation with the Other” (p. 255).

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8 In education, Rabinow’s (1986) “Political subjects” is similar to Banks & Banks’ (1993) fourth stage of multiculturalism: the “policy making approach” in which students learn that inter-group relations are always an integral part of social and historical conflicts and learn to employ political action to achieve greater equality, freedom, and social justice. It is also consistent with Sleeter
Many teachers and pre-service teachers would like to dismiss the possibility that education teach students to become political subjects (most recently, Kamhi, 2010). Particularly in art, they argue that it takes the “magic” (Freire, 1998, p. 46) out of learning. Further, we have an idea that education cannot, and should not, be political. Although most of the pre-service people I teach conceive of education within the hopes of a participatory democracy, the blurring of distinctions between participatory, protective, equilibrium, and developmental democracies blinds them to the need to take a position.

Transgression and play. Duncum (2009) argues that visual culture educators are off-base in their emphasis on understanding in teaching visual culture. Important to the young people many of us teach is the transgressive nature of visual culture. Play, a part of many art curricula, must not be lost (Duncum, 2009; Gude, 2007). Said another way, do we as teachers want to support counter-bricolage (what capitalists do when they co-opt teen fashion for the market) or support bricolage (what teens do when they engage in cultural play)? I, for one, want to stand with the bricolagers.

Closing

During a commentary on “Morning Edition,” U.S. National Public Radio’s weekday morning news broadcast, a commentator charged that the information economy is changing our culture, putting us on overload, making us think differently. Thinking like an artist, however, or a poet, means thinking outside the given boundaries and thinking for yourself. These qualities sometimes receive short shrift in as we take on diversity education and visual culture education in art and visual culture education.

Writing on nation and imagination, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) notes the relationship between imagination and interacting with the world as participatory citizens. He develops his argument through the writings of Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore, who won a Nobel Prize for his writing in 1913. Tagore and Grant’s (1987/ 1994) “social reconstructivist” multicultural education in which analytical and critical thinking are paired with political actions focused on the redistribution of society’s resources, especially power and wealth, among diverse groups.
invented a prose form called *gadyakabita*, or prose-poetry, which incorporated "the grime and dirt of Calcutta, lower-middle-lives, and their everyday frustrations" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 163) with the love he maintained for his native Bengal. In *Bansi* (The Flute), Tagore writes about a petty clerk living in Calcutta who is trapped by work and poverty and cannot afford to marry.

The rains become heavy./ My expenses on trams go up.
Sometimes I am fined as well./ On the corners of this lane
Collect and rot in heaps/ Mango seeds and skin,
Cores of jackfruit,/ Gills of fish,/ Dead kittens
Mixed with ashes and other assorted rubbish.
The condition of my umbrella
Resembles that of my salary after fines--
It has numerous holes. (p. 165)

It is here that we can begin to see implications for art and art teaching. Tagore developed his art into a politics of the real, but it was still poetry and it employed his imagination to move beyond the confines of the definition of "poetry"—as something that was only about beauty—that were extant when he wrote. It helped his readers move poetry into the realm of the real, thus making it political as well as aesthetic.

What I’d like to realize in our field is an emphasis on the study and making of art and visual culture as products that are outcomes of individual imagination yet understood as part of a cultural climate. What I’d like to realize is informed, reflective participatory citizen-artists. What I’d like to realize is a socially just, environmentally sustainable world that values art as an important part of our environment. As art and visual culture teachers and scholars, we have a vital role to play in mentoring informed, reflective, sensitive, and imaginative artists and multicultural citizens. It’s a tall order, but can we do anything less?

References


