

# THREE SITES FOR VISUAL CULTURAL PEDAGOGY: HONORING STUDENTS' INTERESTS AND IMAGERY

Brent Wilson

Pennsylvania State University

## Abstract

This paper focuses on the educational sites of visual culture pedagogy: the art classroom, the pedagogical visual culture site constructed by children and youth, and the space between school and self-initiated art. Art teachers have to honor the interests of and the imagery by students in order to build an ideal learning environment for students in today's visual culture.

## Order and Chaos in Art Education

The original and esoteric thinker Morse Peckham wrote a book titled *Man's Rage for Chaos* (1965). Peckham's claim is that most theories of art are based on the assumption that humans, in their quest for aesthetic experiences, seek for works that possess an orderly, familiar, and harmonious structure. Peckham's central thesis is that the opposite is true; that disorder and chaos are the goals of those who pursue artistic experiences. Of course Peckham acknowledges that disorder is only possible when its opposite,

order, provides the norm from which chaotic disruption might emerge. He sees us existing in a space between our rage for order and our rage for chaos - and that only our range for chaos and the unknown and the unfamiliar can balance our rage for the orderly, the predictable, and the familiar.

It seems that within the field of art education, collectively, we have our simultaneous conflicting rages for order and disorder. Just when the elements and principles of design, or child art and creative expression, or discipline-based art education, each in its turn, seemed to provide all the orderly and familiar solutions to our art education problems, something new has come along. Now, with increasing frequency, we hear that art education should become visual cultural education (Duncum, 2001, Freedman, 2003, Kindler, 2003, Smith-Shank, 2002, Tavin, 2003, Wilson, 2003). Once again art education is thrown into a state of disorder; and now we are attempting to make order out of that chaos.

It is worth noting that the changes that occur in art education are the result of forces and factors that we art educators do not yet understand. Art educators in both the East and the West are affected by a collection of factors beyond our field which currently influence both our theory and practice. The very nature of art, and the critical discourse that accompanies it, has evolved from a modernist to a postmodernist ideology. New art forms are emerging - things such as performance art, installation art, video art, and web art, to name a few. Moreover the study of images is undergoing a drastic and chaotic reconfiguration from carefully defined fields of study with classifications such as, say, art history and film criticism, toward the open-ended and vastly more complex new discipline termed visual culture or cultural studies. Like art, the emerging field of visual culture is destined to remain an "essentially contested concept" (Gaillie 1956) open to multiple definitions, changing boundaries, and normative disputations.

The discipline of visual culture reflects a general tendency to reject the conventional art historical study of a canon of aesthetic masterpieces. It is in its very nature disorderly. Visual culture replaces masterpieces and the canon with a vast range of visual objects and events that are studied in light of their meaning and social significance rather than their aesthetic value. As distinctions among high art, low art, popular art, and mass culture disintegrate, the

potential for both creating and interpreting visual culture within art education increases enormously. Moreover, the vastly enlarged and chaotic field of visual culture virtually demands that we think about new theories and new pedagogies. Can we afford to ignore the forces underlying the movement toward visual culture? Does visual culture demand that we exchange our orderly teaching strategies for new and potentially unsettling pedagogies? Do we have adequate theories to support emerging pedagogies? These are the questions I wish to address.

## **SPLAT • BOOM • POW: Intertextuality and Disintegrating Borders**

I find it useful to think about emerging art educational theory and practice in light of artworks. In this paper, I think that it will be useful to explore emerging art educational theory and practice in the context of an art exhibition - to use the exhibition and its artworks as a metaphor for what visual cultural pedagogy might be.

**SPLAT • BOOM • POW: The Influence of Comics on Contemporary Art** is an exhibition, organized at the Houston Institute of Contemporary Art (Cassel, 2003), then shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston,<sup>1</sup> and at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio. The exhibition is organized around three basic notions. The first, SPLAT, presents artists such as Mel Ramos, Lisa Lou, and Andy Warhol who made direct appropriations from the comics and other forms of popular imagery. The second, BOOM, includes artists who used the symbols, the techniques, common to popular visual culture°X Lichtenstein's benday dots and bold lettering from the comics provide the paradigm instance. POW, the third category of artworks, represents artists, who in the wake of multicultural forces, abandoned the appropriation of popular imagery in favor of inventing their own images - images that are reminiscent of and influenced by media stereotypes - in order to criticize or problematize conditions present in contemporary societies.

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<sup>1</sup> I was invited to give a lecture in conjunction with the Boston exhibition and to conduct a workshop for Boston area teachers in which we explored implications the exhibition held for visual cultural pedagogy. Some of the ideas contained in this paper were originally presented in my Boston lecture and workshop.

Whenever I approach an artwork, I'm in the habit of asking, what's the main idea? What is this work about? What does it mean? What are the big ideas to which it might relate? When I approach an exhibition of artworks, I like to ask the same question. What's the main idea - the main idea that I associate with this exhibition? In some respects, it's a vastly more complex task to interpret an exhibition than it is to interpret a single work. Nevertheless, when I interpreted SPLAT . BOOM . POW as one entity I concluded that *the exhibition is a sign that any distinction which may have formerly existed between high and low visual culture has virtually disappeared.*

When the exhibition is viewed in terms of disintegrating boundaries, it demonstrates various kinds of border crossings between high art and works from "low" or popular culture. It also reveals how various borders within the realm of visual culture have become increasingly porous and that the art critics and teachers who policed the border, to protect high art from contamination by low images, have become ineffective. The comics, advertisements, cartoons and anime, illustration, cinema, TV, and other narrative forms at first found only little openings in the walls that once protected artworks of high culture. Those walls have now been breached; the fences have fallen and high images have been allowed to interbreed with the lowborn elements of visual culture, so much so that the old high/low distinctions no longer hold - they no longer count.

Of course, the same phenomenon exists in art education. For more than a century, some art educators have tried to keep children's art free from the influence of popular visual culture, and they succeed only through rigid control of what they permit them to draw, paint, and construct. In our postmodern era, is it possible that in art education, as in the art world, the borders between high and low might also disappear? If SPLAT . BOOM . POW reveals that the borders between high and low have disappeared, then the next questions we might ask are so *what?* What might this mean to art education? If art education were to use the lessons embedded in the exhibition, what would it gain? And yes, what would it lose?

In the SPLAT • BOOM • POW the works of two artists, the Japanese Murakami and Chagoya exemplify not just the dissolution of borders and the subsequent inbreeding of high and low; they are, I think, signs of a new kind

of visual culture. This new visual culture, potentially, has great importance for art education. Let me explain.

Murakami (2000), who both makes artworks and writes theory to explain art, characterizes the contemporary visual cultural situation as "Super Flat." This is what he says:

The world of the future might be like Japan is today - super flat. Society, customs, art, culture: all are extremely two dimensional. It is particularly apparent in the arts that this sensibility has been flowing steadily beneath the surface of Japanese history. Today, the sensibility is most present in Japanese games and anime, which have become powerful parts of world culture. One way to imagine super flatness, is to think of the moment when, in creating a desktop graphic for your computer, you merge a number of distinct layers into one (p. 5).

In his artist-books, the Mexican American artist Chagoya (Gomez-Penna, 2000) objectifies Murakami's "super flat." Chagoya's accordion books bring together on single pages Pre-Columbian, Spanish colonial, 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexican popular woodcuts, images of North American imperialism - the dollar and Coca Cola, modern art - surrealism and cubism, medical illustration, religious imagery, illustrations from pulp fiction, and the comics - Superman, Mickey Mouse and their Mexican transformations, and more and more and more. Like Murakami's super flat, Chagoya's images, as if in a strange rite of passage, are separated from their usual surroundings, they are leveled so that no image has more status than another. They exist on one level as equals. Chagoya's appropriations permit images to speak in their own voices - to condemn and condone, or not. Images are not just juxtaposed; they interbreed. For example, a human skull proudly wears its mouse-ear hat - with its smiley-face badge; a single character is composed of Pre-Columbian, colonial, and contemporary popular elements. Images are of lust and love; the smutty and the spiritual scream at one another. Fools speak wisdom and the wise utter gibberish. They tell us who we are today, and what our global culture is like. They celebrate contradiction and confrontation and congeniality and conflict. Chagoya's artworks are about bringing images from many different levels together in one omnibus level so that they can commu-

nicate and inform one another. Chagoya's texts composed of a multitude of other visual texts. They are texts of texts. In his and other intertextual artworks, is it possible to find a model for visual cultural pedagogy?

## **Art Teaching and Visual Cultural Pedagogy: An Important Distinction**

I have used the term pedagogy without defining it. There is a useful and highly important distinction which may be made between the terms teaching and pedagogy. I wish to use teaching to designate situations where teachers are seen as authority figures who possess predetermined knowledge and art skills that primary and secondary school students should acquire. Typically, art teachers are empowered by the authority vested in national curricula and national standards to transfer to students these predetermined bodies of art knowledge and specified art skills. Precise educational goals and learning outcomes are posited by those who have power and authority and the flow of information is one-directional - from powerful educational authorities to powerless students. In this situation of power and control, the teacher is obligated to teach and the student is obligated to learn.

I wish to use the term pedagogy to designate communities in which proposals and initiatives relating to learning agenda may originate with any individual and with any text within a community. The visual cultural pedagogy which I imagine is a network of relationships. Those relationships consist of teachers and their interests and students and their interests. These interesting relationships also consist of visual cultural texts - artworks and artifacts - which members of specific visual cultural pedagogical learning communities deem sufficiently important to interpret or create. Both interpretations and creations provide occasions for discussion, debate, negotiation, and modification; they each provide opportunities for the exchange of knowledge, values, and meaning. I have just characterized democratic pedagogical sites where teachers, students, texts, images, interpretations and conflicting interpretations each has a voice. Indeed, I have characterized a visual cultural pedagogy for which Chagoya's codices and Murakami's theory of the super flat serve as metaphors. In Chagoya's works images representing differing interests and conflicts of interest, images representing differing cultures,

eras, points of view, values, and purposes, images representing high art and popular visual culture are honored equivalently - or flattened as Murakami would have it - so that they may present and represent their points of view and criticize other points of view. The visual cultural pedagogy I envision is a process of honoring the other - other individuals and images representing the other. This is a performative (Garoian, 1999) visual cultural pedagogy in which humans and visual texts are active participants in an open quest for meaning. Meaning produced in visual cultural pedagogical sites is as variable as the texts and their interpretations. Meaning, however, is always open for modification and reinterpretation. Meaning also emerges through new visual texts which are created by students and teachers - texts that almost always come into existence through a process of reinventing and extending the texts brought to visual cultural pedagogical sites by either teachers or students.

The visual cultural pedagogy I have posited is similar to that found in Reggio Emilia. The theory underlying Reggio pedagogy is characterized by Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999). They see

pedagogical work as co-construction of knowledge and identity and opening up new possibilities for democracy [which] can be viewed as contributing to the exercise of freedom, understood in a Foucauldian sense as being able to think critically - to think opposition, to promote "reflective indocility" - and by so doing to take more control of our lives, through questioning the way we view the world and increasing our ability to shape our own subjectivity. Thinking critically makes it possible to unmask and free ourselves from existing discourses, concepts and constructions, and to move on by producing different ones (p. 79).

They continue by quoting Foucault who writes that pedagogy is:

a matter of flushing out . . . thought and trying to change it; to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that that which is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult . . . As soon as one no longer thinks things as one formerly

thought them, transformation becomes very urgent, very difficult and quite possible (Foucault quoted in Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 1999, p. 79).

## **Visual Cultural Pedagogical Sites**

My conception of the development of a variety of desirable forms of visual cultural pedagogy is utterly dependent upon art educators gaining a clear view of the different sites in which pedagogy is performed. This is because the sites themselves powerfully influence the kinds of pedagogy that will be enacted within them. I wish to characterize three primary sites. They are: (1) the transformed traditional art classroom; (2) the many self-initiated visual cultural sites that children and youth construct for themselves outside and beyond schools; and (3) a third site - a space between the school and self initiated visual cultural sites students construct themselves. (There are, of course, other sites in which visual cultural pedagogy is enacted, which I do not have time to discuss - the museum, private art classes, individual tutoring, and the many sites in which young people instruct one another.) As I characterize the three primary sites I will point to only a few of the many forms of visual cultural pedagogy which might be performed within them.

### **The Art Classroom as a Site for Visual Cultural Pedagogy**

This site is typically the only one to which art educators attend. And, just as typically, it is a an art teaching site rather than a pedagogical site. That is to say, art teachers usually decide in what media students will work, the topics of their paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptures, the skill, media, and design problems students will solve and the steps they will follow to achieve solutions.

I've recently analyzed transcripts from Cizek's teaching (Wilson, in press). In these transcripts the "Father of Child Art," while appearing to give children many choices, like so many other art teachers, manipulated virtually everything his students produced . He provided an ongoing set of instructions that are so precise that all his students were directed to paint pictures of Santa Claus and his opposite, Krampas who punishes bad children at Christmas



time. Cizek's words, given as "suggestions" guided children so that they oriented their pages horizontally, divided their sheets in half, were sure to have the tops of the Santa and Krampus heads touch the top of the page and their feet touch the bottom - so that the figures will be really big. Cizek instructed children to avoid making eyes with a simple dot of the brush, to fill all the spaces with color, and in many other ways controlled virtually every feature of his students' artworks.

In short, Cizek's teaching is not visual cultural pedagogy; like much art teaching in both the East and the West, Cizek's children were like little machines programmed to do just what he wanted them to do. This kind of directed teaching severely limits children's choices - and yet teachers and parents often survey the results and then conclude - "ah, children are so creative." The methods used by Cizek's and Lowenfeld's followers appear expressive and creative. Ironically, children's artworks that result from directed teaching - the works generally thought to most fully represent childhood creativity - are actually among the most highly controlled. Directed imagery is entirely contrary to desirable forms of visual cultural pedagogy in which students have a choice in determining what they will do and how they will do it.

Let me point to an instructional unit in which a desirable form of visual pedagogy begins to emerge. In the *Quiet Evolution* (Wilson, 1997 c, pp. 176-179) I describe how a group of Florida high school students visited the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota where they looked at a portrait painted by Lucas Cranach the Elder. Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg had asked Cranach to depict him as if he were St. Jerome because the cardinal, it seems, wanted viewers of his portrait to believe that he personified the religious piety and scholarly values of the saint. At one point in the complex instructional unit which extended over a period of ten weeks time, the teacher asked the students, "if the cardinal were alive today, whom do you think he would wish to be depicted as?" The students responded with a set of playful suggestions, but then agreed among themselves - in an example of the iconoclastic ironic absurdity high school students are capable of producing - that if the cardinal were alive today, he would wish to be portrayed as Arnold Schwarzenegger. (Of course, students were saying something like, "Arnold is one of our heroes - he's someone we would like to emulate.") Rather than

rejecting the idea as improbably absurd, the teacher and her museum educator collaborator said, in effect, "Okay, if that's what you want to do, paint the cardinal as Arnold." This is precisely what the students did. In a large collaborative acrylic painting, 20 students began by appropriating the composition of Cranach's portrait of the cardinal as they depicted the muscular Arnold seated behind his desk. They depicted him surrounded by all the signs and symbols that inform viewers of his life and his values. In the students' painting a portrait of Maria Shriver, Arnold's wife - and the niece of president J. F. Kennedy - hangs behind his desk taking the place of the Virgin Mary in the cardinal's portrait. A child in a wheelchair symbolizes Arnold's work with handicapped children, barbells represent his body-building, posters show his movie roles, and he is surrounded by sleek cars and other symbols of his wealth, and president George H. W. Bush is present to signify Arnold's membership in the Republican political party.

In this unit the students were given the opportunity to integrate their interests relating to a popular movie star (and the various ways his image has been shaped by popular visual cultural symbols of status, power, and wealth) with the teacher's and the museum educator's interests in the portraiture and symbolism of Northern Renaissance Europe. As the students developed the signs and symbols to represent Arnold's life and values, they simultaneously interpreted and reinterpreted the collection of two-dozen signs and symbols that Cranach had painted to represent Cardinal Albrecht's life and values. And as students conducted their extensive research into Arnold's life they uncovered things such as reports of his sexual harassment of women - the same information that would be revealed during Schwarzenegger's 2003 campaign for governor of California. In other words, they discovered that there are things about heroes that are not typically revealed by the images of popular visual culture. Even more importantly, the students had the opportunity to study the ways in which perceptions of a celebrity's character are shaped by the popular media.

The unit illustrates how the art classroom may become a site in which the high art of the European Renaissance was permitted to engage in an intertextual dialogue with American popular visual culture. The unit represents the complexity of that dialogue between two very different and very complex visu-

al cultural artifacts - one created by an old master and one created by students. The emergence of the intertextual dialogue must be attributed to the collaborative actions of both the students and teachers. Moreover, the intertextual dialogue continued long after the project ended. The museum educator at the Ringling persuaded the museum's director to display the students' painting next to Cranach's painting in the Renaissance gallery. The students' artwork, at least for several months, was given a place and a status similar to that of an old master. The students' artwork based on a popular visual cultural iconic hero was honored; students values and preferences were also honored.

## **Pedagogical Visual Cultural Sites Constructed by Children and Youth**

For more than four decades I have been more interested in the kinds of visual culture kids create for themselves outside school. In the 1970s, sometimes in collaboration with Marjorie Wilson, I began publishing case studies of American kids who drew complex graphic narratives based on comic book superheroes and other forms of popular illustration. An Iowa boy, J.C. Holz, created Birdman, and an amazing cast of characters comprising the United Earth Legion (Wilson, 1974). The novelist Julian Green drew nudes based on Dore's illustrations for Dante's *Inferno* (Wilson, 1976). Bobby Goldman drew the origins of "Goldman" and then inspired his friend Andy to create "The Theme and the Red Glob." Tami drew stories of Three Hawaii Spies, and Kelly created an imaginary world in which her friend "Smiling Jack" could live. Dirk drew "Mr. And & the Change Bugs" who administered electric shocks to humans in order to contort their bodies and limbs and persuade them to steal money from all the banks in the world (Wilson & Wilson, 1982 a). Lois drew thousands of horses running races and also sipping soda through straws and sitting at tables eating their lunches (Wilson, Hurwitz & Wilson, 1987). John Scott created a universe of Star War space ships that were more elegant and detailed than the ones in the movies (Wilson & Wilson, 1980).

My interest in the self-initiated visual culture produced by children and youth led me to Japan (Wilson, 2000, Wilson, 2002) and then Taiwan. In Japan, Masami Toku and I began to study *dojinshi* manga - the comics

drawn by individuals and by groups of teenagers (Wilson & Toku, in press). In Taiwan I continued my investigation by studying the way teenagers organize themselves into groups, assume the role of editors, writers, and artists in order to publish *dojinshi* manga on specific topics. For example, a group in Taiwan created a *dojinshi* manga with ten original stories relating to Harry Potter in just a few months. Once *dojinshi* artists' graphic narratives are completed, they have them printed, and then they sell their publications in the 2000 or more comic markets held in Japan and Taiwan each year. In the largest Comic Market held in Tokyo twice each year, as many as 100,000 young *dojinshi* artists show and sell their work to over 400,000 other young people.

These examples from my research, about young people who make artworks privately to please themselves, and others, like the *dojinshi* groups who seek wide public attention, provide two examples of the complexity and variety of visual culture created by young people. The works they create have several common characteristics. First, and perhaps most importantly, they are made because young people wish to make them. These non-obligatory artworks of visual culture are almost always directed toward the production of narratives. I should also note that many of these works are made with great skill. The kids who create graphic narratives draw well, they understand plots and complex narrative grammars. Their narratives are massive intertextual compilations of the character types, plots, topics, conventional grammars, styles and themes of comics, movies, television, video games, and other forms of popular visual culture. The stories present the big issues of life - birth, growth, trials, success, failure, love, hate, inner life, aspirations, romance, combat, deprivation, and villainy. They narratives are pervaded with moral imperatives and ethical dilemmas (Wilson & Wilson, 1982). They provide opportunities for young people to experiment symbolically with the kinds of selves they might become, with their futures, with the realities of the worlds in which they live, and to test the consequences of following or not following society's rules, norms, and laws. Some narratives are profound and others are trivial. Nevertheless they are continually fascinating to the kids who create them. And one of the primary reasons for their fascination is that they provide for the exercise of agency in the pursuit of knowledge in the form of stimulat-

ing entertainment.

These self-initiated forms of art-making are generally overlooked by elementary and secondary school art teachers. This raises the question, why have I labeled this a visual cultural pedagogical site in which teachers should work? It is because I believe that every art teacher should know as much about his or her students' self-initiated visual cultural production as students' are willing to reveal. Why? Let me speak from personal experience. Every young maker of visual culture I have studied has willingly invited me into his or her life. They have shared with me their works, their sources, and their aspirations. In turn I have offered my encouragement and my thoughts about a their artworks. In one way or another they have indicated that they appreciate my interest. Others have said, in one way or another, you are the first adult who has paid attention to what I do and what I care about.

My interaction with young creators is a form of visual cultural pedagogy. This pedagogy is characterized by young people choosing to make visual culture and my choosing to recognize and, in a non-judgmental way, to appreciate and often to celebrate what young people have created. Moreover, I believe that my attention and my support has encouraged at least some young people to continue creating visual culture longer than they would have otherwise, to produce more, and to gain deeper insights into the significance, importance, and meaning of their own productions than they would have without my attention.

I have just characterized a form of visual cultural pedagogy that, for at least some students, is far more meaningful than classroom art instruction will ever be. I believe that every art teacher should become a connoisseur and appreciator of the self-initiated visual culture created by their students. Every art teacher should practice a pedagogy that consists primarily of awareness and encouragement - and sometimes in this self-initiated visual cultural pedagogical site we pedagogues can help students to clarify their goals pertaining to art. Mostly, however, in this learning community, we should appreciate the opportunity to learn - to learn about the marvels of kid's minds.

## **A Third Visual Cultural Pedagogical Site: The Space between School and Selfinitiated Art**

When I talk about kid's self-initiated production of visual culture, in one way or another, teachers often raise this point: if their self-initiated art is so important, meaningful - and sometimes profound - then shouldn't we teach something like it in school? My usual answer is an emphatic no! kids' self-initiated stuff is frequently disorderly and sometimes subversive. When we obligate kids to do what they have chosen to do themselves, frequently we destroy their interest. We make ours what was theirs. We also tend to emphasize our interest in skill development over kids' interest in things such as character development and the creation of their stories. We try to make unnecessary order out of kids' delightful disorder. We tame what should not be tamed.

Nevertheless, there is a visual cultural pedagogical site located between the school and self-initiated realms where art teachers' and students' interests may converge - if they are facilitated sensitively and knowingly. Let me provide an example.

In 2002 while working with graduate students at the Taipei Municipal Teachers College, I showed two sets of young peoples' graphic narratives. The first consisted of self-initiated works, which I described in the previous section. The second set of drawings were selected from an ongoing research project. It consisted of a large group of elicited narratives where I have gone into many classrooms, in both the East and the West, to ask students to draw stories. I give students sheets of paper on which six frames have been printed. My instructions are simple:

You can tell stories with the pictures you draw. Please draw a character, place that character in a setting, show what happens, what happens next, and finally show how things turn out. You may use as many or as few of the frames as you wish. If you want paper with more frames, so that you can draw a longer story, please ask for it.

Because the narrative task is like drawing a comic or manga, students often appropriate characters and plots from manga. Nevertheless, I have discovered that the stories kids draw frequently deal with the same deeply profound themes and issues found in their self-initiated narratives. I suggested to the Taipei teachers, "why don't you collect some story drawings from your

students?" The responses were something like, "oh, we couldn't do that; we have to follow the curriculum." Then one teacher said, "but we could assign students to draw stories for their homework." Others agreed that such an assignment would be acceptable.

These homework narrative drawing activities took place in a site that exist between the school site and self-initiated visual cultural sites (Wilson, 2003). And just as interestingly, students' drawings reflected influences from both these sites. Students felt obligated to complete the assignment, but they also felt at liberty to include a great many features - characters, plots, themes, graphic narrative grammatical structures, word and thought balloons, and other features from the comics. In a few instances the stories were about their classrooms and friends - but presented in critical and satirical ways. Their stories addressed problems of personal relationships, romance, longing and desire. If these narratives were drawn in school, the results might have been viewed as inappropriate. In this betwixt and between space their narratives were acceptable.

This is only one modest illustration of a visual cultural pedagogical site which could probably be expanded in many different ways. It is the site in which students could be shown how to connect and blend the visual cultural interests represented by school art programs with opportunities to practice integrating those interests with personal visual cultural interest. This site, like the self-initiated sites, holds the potential for students to practice integrating the creation and interpretation of visual culture within their everyday lives.

## **The Celebration of Intertextuality and Students' Interests**

I have posited two major ideas. The first is that we live in an era of democratization of images. That is to say, with dissolving visual cultural borders exemplified by the exhibition SPLAT . BOOM . POW (Cassel, 2003) and the works of artists like Chagoya (Gomez-Pena, 2000) and Murakami (2000), almost any image may encounter as an equal any other image. This relating of images is facilitated by things such as digital technologies and the internet because it is possible for any individual with a computer to have nearly instant access to millions of images which may juxtaposed, modified, and

combined. I have characterized this situation as rhizomatic (Wilson, 2003). In other words, visual cultural pedagogy unfolds in a territory which is impossible to diagram in the manner in which we typically map conventional art education content. In contemporary visual culture images are like an enormous patch of grass, continually spreading by sending out new shoots, new roots, and by broadcasting seeds. The images not only come to rest momentarily alongside one another, they interweave and fuse, producing endless variations. Every image, as theorists of intertextuality such as Kristeva (1980) and Barthes (1977) have noted, carries with it the residue of other images. But this is not all; every image, it seems, may be related to any other image, any other text, any other idea through our interpretations. Art teaching today exists in the era of intertextuality.

Of course this situation of the leveled, or super-flattened collections of images characterized by Murakami, makes the task of the art teacher ever more difficult. With millions upon millions of choices regarding the content of art and visual cultural education, it becomes less and less viable for teachers to make the only decisions regarding the content of art education. Of course every teacher should be acquainted with a wide array of traditional art and contemporary art forms, artworks, and art theories. Of course every teacher should also be acquainted with an array of popular visual cultural images in the form of cinema, TV, video art, the comics, advertising, music videos, anime. But with all this acquaintance notwithstanding, no teacher can know enough images. No teacher can know of all of the interests of his or her students (Wilson, 1997 a, Wilson, 1997 b).

In the rhizomatic realm of visual culture, however, in any one of the three pedagogical sites, students should pursue their own interests. Even in the formal art classroom site where the teacher proposes the images that students should create and study, students must always be permitted to place their own images and their own ideas alongside teachers' choices. In the betwixt and between site where students are invited to address school assignments through their own choices of images, there is an even greater opportunity for the expression of students' choices pertaining to visual cultural imagery and the ideas that surround them. Finally, in the self-initiated site, students make almost all the choices - albeit conditioned by popular visual



culture. It is in the self-initiated site that popular visual cultural imagery, ideas, and students' interests in them flourish most fully.

## Conclusion

Let me return to the artwork of Chagoya and Murakami's theory, super flat. In the three visual cultural pedagogical sites I have envisioned, with the boundaries obliterated between old and new, high and low, comic and profound, there is a opportunity to encourage students and teachers to bring images and ideas from all levels of visual culture to one level where they can interact. This interaction of artworks, texts, and ideas, however is merely the means which enables each visual cultural pedagogy participant to create rhizomes of meaning.

Readings (1996, p. 145) speaks of "the pedagogical relation as dissymmetrical and endless," where students and teachers function as colleagues who are caught in a "dialogic web of obligations to thought . . . [representing] the voice of the other." He also claims that "pedagogy is "the listening to thought." To which we art and visual culture pedagogues might add something like a dialogic web of obligations in which images and the ideas that surround them are endlessly celebrating and debating one another, agreeing and disagreeing, playing and replaying, revealing and hiding - doing all the things that images do when they are honored. Surely it is the case that images in the three visual cultural pedagogical sites have the potential, through their encounters with one another in a myriad of expected and unexpected ways to enriching our lives and our humanity in ways that we cannot now imagine.

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