

AARE Conference, December 1-5

Brisbane

SNEO 2468

Wednesday 4 December 2002

3.00 - 3.30 pm

Room McElwain 302

***The spectacle of authenticity in the assessment of students in art and design.***

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***Abstract***

This study reports a rich localised cultural narrative of what it is like to be an art and design teacher and conduct assessment in the provincial setting of a visual arts classroom. The rhetoric of traditional assessment, literature and readiness of teachers to take up the language and acts of convention, conceal a strata of other agendas in the practice of art and design assessment. Examples of case study research and interviews with art and design teachers inform a critique of authenticity in the assessment of students. This research is now well configured, using naturalistic methodologies, participant observation and interviews. The projects significance lies in the promise of practical examples to model an emergent theory of assessment articulated by visual arts and design teachers. The work exists within an emergent framework of case studies which anticipate a spectacle, as articulated by Guy Debord (1983). My emergent theory aims to test the proposition that assessment is a spectacle and seeks to disconfirm the spectacle of authenticity in visual art and design. By exposing gaps in authenticity, between appearance and reality some of the motives behind the public face of assessment are revealed.

***The perspective of the teacher and approaches to learning.***

As a novice secondary visual arts teacher in the eighties, one of the key issues in everyday life was the disruption and differentiation of focus that working on "doing" assessment in the context of assessment policy and practices invoked. My early approaches to learning denied the social aspects of dialogue and discourse and tended to focus instead on the delivery of content and working with syllabus and other policy frameworks. Examinations, assessment policies and believing there was a "right" way to conduct assessment dominated my thinking. Technical prowess in designing evermore "authentic" examination tasks were my goal. However, my current research and selected educational approaches that account for the "complexity of participation in social practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, 113), such as

situated learning and cognitive apprenticeship suggest that authenticity and examinations do not speak the same language. Situated learning also displaces content and focuses on "legitimate peripheral participation" [and] "In considering learning as part of social practice, we have focused our attention on the structure of social practice rather than privileging the structure of pedagogy as the source of learning". (Lave and Wenger, 1991, 113), Thankfully such theoretical explanations about the importance of investigating and valuing societal practices and in educational theory, situated learning allow me to go on digging into communities of practice in art and design education.

### ***The Spectacle***

Guy Debord (1983) in *Society of the Spectacle*, describes the phenomenological character of the apparent public display. Debord suggests that "In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation." (Debord, 1983, 1). Images provide a useful entry point to the discussion as the re-presentation of signs is in Debordian poststructural terms, seen as "*partially* unfolding", "a pseudo-world *apart*" "detached from every aspect of life" yet present as an "instrument of unification". Images such as the image of an American soldier in Hawaii just before Pearl Harbour (Slackman, 1998,25) included in the presentation is captioned "For a small fee you could pose with a model in a cellophane grass skirt at a photo stand with an artificial backdrop" gives us some of the criteria for spectacular image. This is one of many holiday images, snapshots, a moment in time, however, the all encompassing, all gazing nature of the spectacle allows the display to present as a seemingly unrelated set of actions/events/images, yet "The division of spectacular tasks preserves the entirety of the existing order and especially the dominant pole of its development". (Debord, 1983, 58). Reproduction and making copies upon copies, perhaps for coffee table consumption, adds to the falsifications already established by the artificial backdrop and lighting, the painted palm tree, cellophane instead of real grass, a paid model instead of a real Indigenous Hawaiian person. The ultimate irony is that the image was probably taken in Hawaii, yet nothing in the image is real or really Hawaiian. The spectacular image is at once "unified and divided. Like society, building its unity on the disjunction". (54). The tourist trade adds another "shimmering diversion of the spectacle, *banalization* ... this world being nothing than pseudo-enjoyment" (59). The "dazzling shortcut to the promised land of total consumption" (69) is at the centre of this sailor's social life. Champion (2002) in a paper titled "Applying game design theory to virtual heritage environments", notes "... tourists traditionally look for authenticity. Paradoxically this means a desire for an environment that is both authentic (untouched by crowds of tourists and tourist related industry), and amenable to tourism (replete with contemporary tourist resources and facilities)." (Champion, 2002, 4). Debord reminds us that the object once removed from the spectacle and taken home, "reveals its essential poverty (which naturally comes from to it from the misery of its production) too late. By then another object has already made demands to be acknowledged and the "... unity of the world, of the global social praxis ... [is] spilt up into reality and image." (Debord, 1983, 7).

The original and the copy are age old themes in the visual arts, and articulations of the real and authentic versus the fake and the copy (the appearance of the real) have fascinated artists and designers for eons. The spectacle is embodied in many contemporary movies such as "The Truman Show" and the visual arts provide an evocative communicative medium to explain some of the qualities of the spectacle in for example installation and performance art. The methodology of the spectacle is also appropriate for a study of the social intrigues, artificial relations, conversations and game-plays associated with visual arts assessment. "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (Debord, 1983, 4).

## ***Assessment as a spectacle***

In order to interrogate the 'implicit', rather than the "explicit" practices of assessment and the routines, interactions, actions and events in which students and teachers engage, in their localised everyday work, the theories of Guy Debord (1983), provide a framework of investigation for the research. Traditional assessment in art education Boughton, (1994), and even more modern versions such as "authentic assessment", see Torrance (1995) and Zimmerman (1997) still maintain an interest in definitions, validity and reliability, scoring rubrics and other ways to describe conditions for functional assessment to take place. Spectacle then is an "*instrument of unification*", (Debord, 1983, 3), albeit a false and deceptive unity. Social relations amongst people form the arena for spectacle, which is not additional to the real world, rather "It is the unrealism of the real society." (Debord, 1983, 6), as spectacle provides a "total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals." So spectacle maintains existing social relations and circumstances, simultaneously alienating and accepting existing society. The horror of revealing the truth of the spectacle involves the affirmation of social life as mere appearance and exposes the visible negation of life, the negative and unrealised forms of social production. Revelations about the spectacular divulge the practices of social-economic formations and their use of time in the context of a particular historical moment, which invariably are presented as "enormously positive, indisputable, and inaccessible". (Debord, 1983, 12). A monopoly of self affirming reality, which appears and does not seek a reply.

## ***The Spectacle of Authenticity in art and design assessment***

Authenticity in assessment as an instance of spectacle

Teacher autonomy and opportunities for individual choice, in the context of artistic assessment practice are the focus of Brown's (1996) paper on the "Problem of Authenticity in the Assessment of Student Art." Whilst the focus of the 1996 paper is the assessment student artworks, one of the key ideas is that historically, values and beliefs about what is "good" in the visual arts are linked inextricably to art education. Notions of authenticity are then situated within a particular vocabulary of motives and actions circumscribed by changing beliefs and "... critical terms under which value is accredited for the making of artworks". (Brown, 1996, 73). The way grades are apportioned to students has changed according to "... radical changes in theories of truth and value and their accompanying pedagogies ... and thus what passes as authentic practice". (Brown, 1996, 73). According to Brown, "by any standard authenticity in artistic assessment is as deeply implicated in the professional autonomy of the art teacher as it is in the ethics of student practices". (Brown, 1996, 82). Whilst not seeking to be exhaustive in the brief of this paper nor cover all manifestations of the spectacle in assessment and the co-constitutive spectacle of authenticity, part of the research focused on some of the embedded beliefs and values revealed in qualitative interviews. Such textual conversations explore some possible implicit and therefore unspoken and private meanings of assessment for visual arts teachers. Mirroring the spectacle, assessment has two faces. One, which is spoken and conforms to system and policy, the other, which is the subject of my paper is covert and usually hidden from view. Assessment is the very public face of what occurs in classroom, school and schooling. Take for example, the league tables of HSC results and university admission reportage. The public face of assessment is the end of a very pointy stick upon which the fate of the student, teacher, school, subject and the artworld are hoist.

So, this presentation is not about how teachers design and conduct the marking of artworks, that section of the project is for another time. The focus is on understanding the motives and hidden roles that assessment plays for teachers in three case study sites.

Authenticity in assessment as an instance of spectacle can be understood as the frustration felt by all three respondents in the study. Their frustration and high level of art teacher guilt mimics my initial reasons for beginning this research. A lack of authentic ways of working with assessment and other art teacher practices, is emergent in the speech and actions of the respondents in the study. The daily life of an art teacher is filled with discontent as this response to a question about having to be very organised illustrates.

*"You try to be, but no matter how organised you are you always feel that you are not organised enough. That is one of the problems of teaching, well art teaching, no matter how much you do, how often you are here, how much time you devote to it, you always feel inadequate and that you have left something out, and that you have not done everything that you should do. It does not matter how much you do its always that way."*

(Orange Transcript, Day One, Interview One).

Brown's (1999) articulation of Debord's theory of the spectacle using "symptoms" offers insight into the daily fate of teachers who face frustration surrounding the actual practice of assessment and it seems other aspects of art teaching. Investigating the system of relations which circumscribe assessment is an appropriate subject for Brown's research methodology. How teachers are implicated in securing authenticity in assessment as a spectacle, is about understanding conversational exchanges which reveal the public and private or explicit and implicit practices of assessment. The rules and procedures (or models of identification) and situations involving references to assessment may allow some art teacher motives and cultural understandings to be mapped. Mapping how assessment is presented as spectacle in the public domain as 'organised appearance' (Debord, 1983, 219) and as 'a model for identification' (Debord, 1983, 61), uses the spectacle as a lens through which to view teacher actions and the particular cultural "folk" narrative of three visual arts teachers involved in the research.

The frustrated Orange respondent from above goes on to talk about the way she likes to teach and how that is an individual approach. For this respondent, values about the nature of art as unique and requiring an individual response seem to complicate and frustrate possibilities in programming, together with demands for extension work for gifted and talented students. Also noted by Orange was the paperwork involved in modifying programs to address a new syllabus and importantly " Because profiles, and I suppose to do things properly, you should have an individual program for each child". (Orange Transcript, Day One, Interview One).

The focus of an individual program for the unique and individual child adds another layer of the spectacle in visual arts education as simultaneously assessment as public spectacle is the opposite of the individual where "the agent renounces all autonomous qualities in order to identify himself with the general laws of obedience to the course of things". (Debord, 1983, 61). "The agent of the spectacle placed on stage as a star is the opposite of the individual, the enemy of the individual in himself as well as others". (Debord, 1983, 61).

There is an opportunity here to look further than the overt and regulatory practices of assessment to probe the terms and conditions of motive as described in an historical era and a specified situation. The criteria identified by Brown (1999), as "symptoms of the spectacle" comprise: Knowledge of the spectacle, Social reproduction of the spectacle, The Subject of the Spectacle and The economy of the spectacle. The last two symptoms as defined by Brown (1999) will be used later in the paper to interrogate a piece of data which describes the parameters of assessment as an instance of the spectacle.

### ***Disconfirming authenticity: exposing gaps and inconsistencies***

Tanner's (2001) article highlights some problematics in what he calls the reformist notions of authentic assessment. Tanner objections are aimed at "subtle problems" such as face validity, giving only the *appearance* of validity with real world contexts and the concept of artificiality being maintained in supposedly authentic practices. So he argues that "... some portfolio-based tasks are not at all authentic. Just having the guise of authenticity, say in writing lesson plans, may be a poor indicator of teaching well. In addition, the necessity for highly articulate students with strong language skills is raised as an issue using the work of Koelsch, Estrin and Farr (1995) in Tanner, (2001) it is noted that "The level of language that students are expected to process and produce in the course of completing performance assessments is nearly always more complex than the language of traditional standardised tests...". Adequate coverage of content in traditional assessment modes, rather than an ad hoc sampling of content raises another authentication problem for Tanner. How can you secure reliability in assessment using ad hoc methods, which do not cover all material in a systematic way.

Whilst broadly agreeing with Tanner as validity and reliability are important concepts in assessment, within the localised setting of the visual arts classroom I too am interested in gaps, absences and opacities in the assessment world. However, speaking about assessment vocabularies such as validity and reliability remain circumscribed by traditional assessment literature. Subtle problems are identified rather than system problems comprised of exchange and barter. Defining particular attributes or ways of working as authentic in selected activities begs the question authentic for whom? Yet these examples still support the spectacle of assessment.

My interest is in the specifics of the exchange between teachers, systems, students and associated stakeholders in art and design assessment. The scope of this inquiry does not extend to the move to situate student learning within the framework of real world contexts. My interest is in revealing some of the complexities and game-plans not usually referred to in the assessment literature. In seeking to disconfirm the spectacle of authenticity in assessment my plan is to inform, confirm and enhance teacher knowledge about assessment as actually practised in visual arts classrooms. Revealing glimpses of the ideal assessment character or performative disposition necessary for keeping up appearances may have implications for teaching behaviour. Rather than seeking to review existing authentic assessment in educational approaches to art and design education or the wider educational context, I am interested in the perspective of the teacher. In an earlier paper "What teachers think about assessment in the Visual Arts: searching for authenticity" Snepvangers (2001) the following headings were the emergent categories from my research. Assessment as authority, Assessment as a rite of passage, Assessment as a form of exclusion, Assessment as credentialing, Assessment as formulae and Assessment as self-serving activity. I will apply one of these categories, assessment as a form of exclusion to tease out the spectacle.

#### ***Assessment as a form of exclusion, pulling the wool over your eyes***

*Extract of teacher transcript: when asked about her role in the school.*

*Red Day One Transcript, ways to convince you:*

*Respondent:* So, I had that one period allowance, um. Somewhere, it must have been when our current Principal, who is actually art-trained - but it doesn't necessarily do us a lot of favours, because she, one of the favourite lines is "I'm art background, you know - **don't try and pull the wool over my eyes**". This is when I suggested to her that three unit allowance

- because we have big practical classes and occasionally we had a big history class. You know in some schools they do get a separate allowance but I was told that I was ***pulling the wool over her eyes***.

I did manage to have an allowance one year, separate history prac because I had a huge group - we had 33 kids *and* it was a year when we got spectacularly good results, published in the *Herald* all that sort of nonsense - but the obvious connection about, you know the good PR pay off for the school and the fact that it was a bit of a generous allowance - it was a one-off, I got hopeful at the time, but it was a one-off. I think we're probably in between Principals at that time, there was an acting Principal, and the Deputy was doing the timetable and I convinced her that we needed it because of the class sizes she agreed with me. So, ***I don't know about pulling the wool over the eyes with other things***. Perhaps we can mull on that one. I'll have to finish my allowance story."

Then during the same interview, about five questions later...

"We had a timetabling what's the word oversight last year, the class sizes in Year 7 were over 20 even though - it was ***another pull the wool over your eyes***. [Year 7 class sizes in Visual Arts are capped at 20] When I went to the Principal - I went directly to the Principal and complained about it, she said, "oh, that's not a regulation any more, that's been changed." And I said I really would be very interested to see a copy of that change and I'll file it because it's crucial to us and after that she said "maybe it was in a different subject, maybe I've got it confused, you know" So there was this the ***pulling the wool was in reverse this time***. They were hoping to convince us that you know that the change to larger class sizes was a reality."

Two key ideas emerge from this excerpt.

- 1. Being "good" at the expense of the art teacher's time and the amount of work allocated.
- 2. Ways to convince you and pulling the wool...

Exclusion in this context is focused on the amount of value placed on an individual teacher's work as this respondent felt excluded by not having her work, time and expertise valued by someone in authority. Thus the teacher gets the results but you and your work are seemingly not valued. One idea focuses on the perceived worth of the art teacher's work and the other concept deals with a degree of subversion and 'game play' signalled by the phrase pulling the wool ...

The first concept seems to be about getting "spectacularly good results" and the obvious connection that the respondent identifies between good results (in the HSC examination) which are published in one of Sydney's leading newspapers and having adequate time allocated for the teaching of Year 12 students, equalling being valued as a Visual Arts specialist. The good PR payoff for the school is balanced precariously against what the respondent sees as the nonsense of publication. Exclusion seems to work here in terms of the authority in the school (complicated in this case by their prior art teaching career), and only providing an allowance, extra time off, when the class was large. The respondent saw the perceived lack of support as exclusive in the sense that high achievement and the public dissemination of assessment results were important but the Principal expected them to be good at the expense of the art teacher's time and work allocation. Results, that is, assessment is linked to receiving allowances of time which is interpreted as being valued as a worthy teacher. That is, one who knows their material, especially when the authority figure is from the same discipline background. The significance of the same background is that the respondent felt that a shared experience would lead the person in authority to recognise the

complexities and difficulties involved in having a senior class and running an art faculty by rewarding the respondent. From the perspective of the respondent reward without having to ask, or negotiate, or provide a game plan to secure time allowances should have been forthcoming. Because more time was not readily allocated and had to be negotiated, a particular set of arguments, importantly involving assessment has to be circumscribed and orchestrated. The series of moves proceeds as follows:

- don't try and "pull the wool over *my* eyes" (spoken by person with authority)
- "pulling the wool over her eyes" (spoken by person with authority)
- I don't know about "pulling the wool over the eyes" with other things (spoken by respondent)
- another "pull the wool over your eyes". (spoken by respondent)
- "pulling the wool" was in reverse this time (spoken by respondent).

The person with authority initiates the exchange and a rich pre-determined game plan unfolded. The moves, during the course of one interview, convey separateness, and embody a sense of distrust and relentlessness which keeps up the sensibility of appearances. The statement "They were hoping to convince us that you know that the change to larger class sizes was a reality", conforms to the symptoms of the spectacle as the gaps between reality and appearance are exposed. Yet, it is a "deceived gaze ... of false consciousness and the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of generalized separation". (Debord, 1983, 3). There is a perceived ending and a perceived resolution, yet the lack of autonomy for the teacher in actual practice is striking. Each move has to be carefully measured against the possibility of disrupting the existing order as "the division of spectacular tasks preserves the entirety of the existing order and especially the dominant pole of its development." (Debord, 1983, 58). However, the time allowance issue will continue, and so will the pressure to achieve exceptional HSC results, "... it is the system alone which must continue". (Debord, 1983, 70).

Symptoms of the spectacle as defined by Brown (1999) are now set out below for examination. Many of the ideas resonate well with the previous discussion whilst extending the possibilities for disclosure.

"The Subject of the Spectacle [suggests]

- [that] the spectacle promises true autonomy, yet - autonomy is inconsistent with its spectacle.

The economy of the spectacle [is manifest]

- When workers are not only complicit in the reproduction of the spectacle but systematically dependent on its objects for their survival.
- When the production of the spectacle is coextensive with values of commodification and is the chief product of a domain,

[Conversely] yet - values of commodification determine and select the uniqueness of evaluative judgements. It is not merely the relationship to commodities that is now plain to see - "commodities are now all that there is to see" (29)

- When it promises its producers (workers, students) a material form of access to the world, through the production of spectacular commodities,

yet - alienates and pacifies workers by denying them access to the true material nature of the world.

- When the object of production promises spectacular abundance, yet - offers a false diversity of choice. "Gilded poverty" a phrase describing workers trapped in the spectacular contemplation of the false abundance of a commodified world.

Brown, 1999, 12-13).

### ***Motive and the ideal of sensibility***

For the Red respondent, there is clearly something else going on other than being a responsible professional or just getting good results. Colin Campbell (1993) whilst describing ideals of action, character and motive, as an interpretive methodology for historical explanation of consumption, links the "character ideal of sensibility" to emotional and moral qualities. Ideal sensibility is linked to 'feeling sorry for oneself, feeling sorry for others and being moved by beauty... all indicators of goodness'. (Campbell, 1993, 49). Being responsive to beauty (the aesthetic) had a converse side in that " ... any moral lapse was "bad taste". Consequently, "taste" itself became the most important of an individual's qualities of character". (Campbell, 1993, 49). Ideals of character influence "consumer behaviour". Manifestations of sensibility are vital as indicator of virtue and hence, moral standing and

... as sensibility was increasingly associated with displaying a fashionable sense of 'taste', not to be 'in fashion' was tantamount to being of dubious moral standing. Rather, therefore, than seeing fashion-conscious conduct as evidence of social status-seeking, it would be more accurate to regard it - for those who subscribed to this ideal of character - as an effort to protect one's 'good name'. (Campbell, 1993, 49).

Campbell is interested in the reasons why people act, their motivation, intention and strategies for engaging in social discourse and consumerism. He discusses the 'emulation theory of consumption' and is critical of simplistic descriptions of motive such as 'status maintenance or status enhancement'. Just emulating another position or seeking to change position in a hierarchy are too simplistic as an explanation of motive and denies the complexity of reality. The problem of being good and emulation is encapsulated by the following quote. "... with deliberate attempts to improve one's esteem in the eyes of others frequently doomed to failure, whilst those people who do not consciously seek to impress often succeed in making the biggest impression". (Campbell, 1993, 41).

The main point of the discussion is that any one set of behaviours, manners or "... conduct is actually consistent with a variety of subjective meanings, motives and intentions" (Campbell, 1993, 41). Protecting 'one's good name' and being perceived to 'do the right thing' are implicit in the moves and counter moves which are illustrated here by the recurrent term "pulling the wool" and appear to be part of the story for the Red respondent. Yet, there are a variety of meanings, motive and intentions which are not just about emulation of the authority figure. The professional environment is one where good, even 'spectacularly good results' are valued, yet, getting good results does not appear to be praised or rewarded. There is an implied sense that the authority figure would have, of course achieved the same results without an allowance. The worth of the teacher is as a producer of good results. However, the respondent can't take any praise or comfort from the exchange. Good results do not seem to be linked to time allowances, that is, improving the parameters to repeat the achievement, nor is the value of the teacher's time linked to getting the capped classes of twenty in Year 7. These are separate timetabling issues for the authority, and the respondent is trying to find ways to address the intentions and motives of the authority figure.

Meeting expectations often involves compromise and being thwarted (guilt) as Campbell explains in the previous description of the mis-recognition of meaning, motive and intention. In trying to do the right thing and get good results, often the complexities of the real situation are masked or missed. The cap on class sizes doesn't count so there is a kind of arbitrariness to the issue of time allocation for 33 students. Not securing an allocation is similar to Campbell's description of the futility of trying to be "good" in a strongly delineated hierarchy of social status. 'Pulling the wool' becomes a code for the intersection in the conversations. 'Pulling the wool' is in between 'don't expect an allocation in this place, at this time with these kids in this school as I too have done that and you are not special' (Principal) and 'of all the co-workers, you should recognise the need for an allowance' (Respondent). The teacher is the actor and the Principal the critic/audience. They are working around the same set of injunctions, but foregrounding different aspects of that injunction. The teacher is seeking to be in the spectacular glare of the spotlight as a soloist, yet is constrained by the counter spotlight of the critic. Separate and yet together. In disconfirming the spectacle of authenticity, both players are using the same criteria to negotiate but they are talking about something different. What they are talking about is not what is happening. In the same way that the artificial backdrop and cellophane Hawaiian skirt represent the public face of an impoverished reality, spectacular success with student results is not the subject of the 'pulling the wool' conversation and there are degrees of deflection involved. The discussions keep changing and are not about quality or efficiency, or teachers' work allocation, it is being equitable with the numbers and make up of class sizes. The degree of autonomy possible in such as shifting scenario is limited where the parts are identified as mere representation. An artificial league table is substituted for learning and such a display of spectacularly good results is in reality expected, rather than a bargaining tool. Improving one's self-esteem and trying to be good using assessment as the focus of the charge means that there are a range of alternative game-plans and scenarios being acted out in assessment. The corollary is that the results are spectacular, but it is not about results.

In conclusion, what I have done is provide a sample, a snapshot by running through criteria and some symptoms of the spectacle using a section of the data from my research. 'Pulling the wool', points to a lack of autonomy and control for the teacher, within the boundary of a closed system of relations and a perceived lack of control is a theme important to all respondents in the study. The critic/authority figure will undercut the terms of engagement if it suits the situation and maintains a dominant set of relations. Guilt is an intractable part of engaging in the spectacle as you feel as if you are not doing the 'right thing' for yourself (teachers worth, allowance for results, pressure of getting good HSC results to satisfy all stakeholders) your students (smaller classes) or the authority figure (who decides your allocation). My hunch is that morally doing the right thing is a sensibility which is linked to taste, manners and other systemic misconceptions of motive. Misconceptions challenge claims of authenticity. Assessment probably has a psycho-social dimension which together with an emerging pattern of a lack of autonomy will be subjected to further scrutiny and testing in the analysis of the data.

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## **More information**

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