What are we teaching when we teach art?

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Abstract

This paper presents a historical account of the art curriculum, in order to understand what is being taught in art today. It explains how present-day conceptions of art owe much to Romanticism and the social order which emerged in Europe under the influence of the Enlightenment. These conceptions have been tempered and disrupted by a hundred years of modernism, following from the 1960s by contemporary art. The art curriculum owed much to a combination of apprenticeships to teach skills and art academies to teach drawing and aesthetics. Only in the twentieth century did modern art exert an influence and when it did it was in the form of self-expression and formalism. Both of these have been challenged by contemporary art, which embraces mechanised means of producing art, places the emphasis on ideas, theories and contextual knowledge while subverting some traditional hierarchies. Contemporary art influenced significant art education movements, such as discipline-based and issues-based, learning about visual culture, as well as the use of mechanical means of making art, such as lens-based media. The core of art education is now the ability to explain, contextualise and even theorise. This should abet but not eclipse some of the things art can be, such as thought provoking, entertaining and moving.

Key words

Art education, Art, History of art education, Art curriculum, Contemporary art

Introduction

For several years I've been investigating the history of art curriculum and this has led me to ask a more fundamental question: what is this subject which we teach: art? The thing that makes a discipline a discipline is having a core set of knowledge and precepts. There doesn't have to be total agreement about what all of these are, however there does have to be more than a semblance of commonality. It is claimed that the difficulty that art faces is no longer having this core. Unlike all other disciplines, there is not a single thing which those studying art have to learn, whereas there is no shortage of things they could learn (Farthing, 2002). And as if this wasn't problematic enough, art – even now - sometimes contains a strong strand of self-expression, where learners are provided with opportunities to express themselves, rather than have a curriculum they need to learn. The tradition of art being a vessel for learning about other things (learning through art, rather than about art) is also problematic for some, not only because this implies it is only a vessel but also a hollow vessel (Siegesmund, 1998).

In trying to understand this, it soon became apparent that art education and what is learned in art has always been bound up with developments in the professional art world, while developments in the art world are bound up with and propagated by art education (Osborne, 2002). You can't recount the history of art education without taking into account the history of art and no history of art is complete if it ignores art education.

I find it essential to begin explaining what art is at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries in Western Europe. The reason I start it there is because this is where our present day ideas about art largely originate. Of course art had been produced before then and all over the world, however in those contexts at that time it wasn't considered to be art in the ways we now understand it and often wasn't even called art.

To examine the past through the prism of the present could be considered the sine non qua of history. The past, by definition, is no longer with us and therefore any account of the past is an invention, or re-invention. That is why, when art history as a discipline was invented in Western Europe in the nineteenth century, it was automatically applying the current concept of art and working backwards (Shiner, 2001). These concepts were not static and the definition might be revised to accommodate changes in art practice, such as modern art. However, sometimes a new concept, such as modernism, would exist side by side with earlier concept (Osborne, 2013). A symptom of this would be the way many cities felt the need to build a different museum to accommodate modern art and often a third for contemporary art. I'll be explaining the implications for art education below.

In the last fifty years there has been a growing awareness of a historiography of art history – and by extension of art itself, something that spilled over into art practice, especially in the 1970s. Taken for granted assumptions about what art is have been

challenged, not least through contemporary art and this has included questioning putting the west at its centre. At the same time, art practice has been transformed. By extension, certainties around art education have also dissipated, not only about what to teach but even around what it is (Sigismund, 1998).

Modernity

The mix of the European Enlightenment, industrialisation and urbanisation created a society radically unlike any that had existed before and this transformation was rapid and far reaching (Landes, 1969). From being predominantly rural, western society became largely urban (Davies, 1996) and the social order that emerged at this time is referred to as modernity (Harvey, 1990). Within modernity social change was driven by faith amongst intellectuals in science, technology and human reason, rather than superstition (Lyon, 1994).

The Enlightenment view of technology was that it is secular, materialistic, optimistic, concerned with efficiency and the conquest of nature; its effects are global and irreversible. Technology was unified, because in all its manifestations it was understood to have one goal, which was the improvement of human life. It was the application of absolute, scientific truths, by the most efficient means possible (Lyotard, 1984). (The fact that technological innovation is so often driven by a desire to produce ever more efficient weapons of war was overlooked!)

Some theorists postulate that western culture within modernity oscillated between either putting its faith in a paradise of the future, achievable through technology, or decrying a paradise lost, when humans lived in harmony with nature and from which they are now exiled (Collini, 2000). Whereas Lyotard (1984) has proposed that an aim of the Enlightenment project was to escape the shackles of tradition, in order to progress towards a better future, at the very inception of the Enlightenment the French philosopher Rousseau reversed this argument. He claimed that western society had not progressed but instead had become beset with social and political ills and that it was preferable to live a simple, uncorrupted life as a 'noble savage' (Damrosch, 2005).

Hence on the one hand nature was being exploited through technology and industrialisation, including industrial agriculture. On the other hand, there was a nostalgic idealisation of, and awe before, nature, which for an urban population was considered as something other. It could be argued that this is absurd: you only have to look through a microscope to see that nature is ubiquitous. All the same Romanticism postulated the idea that through moving into modernity, something essential about human existence had been irretrievably lost (Oerlemans, 2002).

When a traditional society industrialises, this can happen in a rapid spurt. All the same, from a global perspective, the process of transforming from a traditional society to modernity has been gradual, albeit accelerating: less a revolution, more an evolution. For more than two hundred years it has spread first through much of Europe

and North America and then continued to move outwards to almost every country. This is still happening. It's hard to exaggerate how far ranging were the many change this brought about. Amongst those, I'd like to draw attention to the aspects which have relevance to the topic of this paper.

On the one hand it spreads standardisation: of dress, of goods, of ways of working and interacting, of technology, of measurements, even of language. On the other hand it eliminates traditional culture and the vernacular. If I look at a picture of a new building in Seoul, it might be very difficult to tell if it is in fact in Korea, or perhaps in London, or Canada or Brazil. This state of affairs causes some to revere a tradition we feel we've lost. But in an impossible attempt to preserve or revive what has been lost, we create something artificial, such as fake vernacular. Indeed the very attempt comes out of this new found self-consciousness about history. That's why the eighteenth century saw the invention of the nation-state, which was predicated on a made-up historical narrative which justified its existence (Chernilo, 2007). The nation-state not only serves the function of providing an identity just as the processes of modernity seem to be taking it away, it also gives people a vehicle for having a consciousness of their place in history. Within modernity, as events unfold, they tend to be transmitted through the filter of media within a particular nation-state and its particular history. Meanwhile, political leaders have the burden and sense of self-importance of believing that they no longer simply make decisions but instead they are making history. And all of us can have the impression that we're not merely living our lives, but living through history.

Postmodernity

By the 1960s, the whole edifice of modernity started to collapse due to the collision of two processes. On the one hand, global standardisation continued apace, abetted by mass media. On the other hand, the quantity of knowledge was growing to such an extent that it was of necessity splitting: into different, specialist domains and even languages. If, at the time of the Enlightenment, a single individual could codify knowledge or put it all down in an encyclopaedia, by the 1960s specialists were trapped within their own disciplines (Nordenson, 1976). Modernity and modernism were coming together and coming apart all at the same time, creating an instability which came to be called postmodernity and postmodernism.

Within postmodernity the processes of modernity continued; what changed were the certainties it contained. There were no more universal laws or truths, even positivist science only claimed allegiance to temporary hypotheses which appeared to be working and therefore could be useful until better ones had been devised to match the empirical data. Other certainties that were called into question included all sorts of borders and boundaries. However, it should be noted that casting aspersion on the Enlightenment project was already contained within modernity and especially modernism. To understand modernity it is essential to acknowledge that it was not

only framed by the Enlightenment, but also by its underbelly. In the cultural sphere this was manifested by, for example, Romanticism, Symbolism and Surrealism.

The concept of art within modernity

The concept of art that emerged when Enlightenment ideas had been tempered by Romanticism. This concept downgraded skill and in its place promoted the ideas of inspiration coupled with innate talent, or in some cases genius. Art was no longer the product of toil, or hard-won skills learned over many years, but of supremely talented, inspired individuals (at that time those who were considered to fit into this category would have only been men) (Shiner, 2001). This was predicated on creativity being claimed by artists and poets, an attribute which has hitherto only been the prerogative of deity (Bruno, 2010).

Meanwhile, as industrialisation gained momentum, the general population learned to live with and amongst machines and there began a slow but steady process of replacing handwork with mechanisation. With a few exceptions art manged to sidestep the conflict between the handmade and the mechanical by proclaiming itself as neither; artists were way above such mundane considerations. This was underlined by a second idea: that art was associated with the person who produced it. This close association of self with one's art and the self-importance this brought about led to artists even willing to go hungry, rather than compromise what they considered to be their artistic integrity. Being an artist ceased to be a profession and became a way of life (Rosen and Zerner, 1984). Out of this was born the concept of art as self-expression. Expression, talent and integrity were all to be considered more important than skill. The story of art within modernity is one of steady de-skilling (Roberts, 2007).

Art within modernity was also one of history consciousness. Just as politicians came to see themselves as making history, so artists came to consider that they were making art history. Art became relevant to the extent that it appeared to be furthering a particular art history narrative. This narrative of art history was one that began with the ancient Egyptians and then moved to ancient Greece, then ancient Rome and proceeded to be centred on Western Europe in general, with Italy being especially important. What it included tended to be art made for elites: either secular or religious or a combination of the two. It favoured carved or cast sculpture or oil painting over other media and an iconography from ancient Greek or Roman myths or history or from Christian religion. From a twenty-first century perspective this narrative can seem not only partial, but also arbitrary. But one thing that has never changed is that art follows the money (Horowitz, 2011)!

History consciousness brought about something else that has dogged culture within modernity: a deliberate attempt to revive, refer to, or demonstrate one's knowledge of art of the past. Even modern art, with its apparent striving for the new and original, often found it necessary to refer backwards (Renoir to Rubens, Picasso to Velazquez etc.). As explained below, the apparent ahistoricism of the avant-garde was

in fact totally reliant on what had gone before. Art within modernity has always had one eye in the rear view mirror.

If history is written by the victors, then so is art history. Left out from this concept of art within modernity was women's art, non-Western art, most craft and traditional, folk or vernacular art. However, the latter wasn't ignored during the nineteenth century, because it was appropriated for the important role of underpinning the nation-state. As explained above, the narrative of western art history meant it popped up here or there at different times and seemed to transcend being tied to a particular place. There might have been schools of painting centred on a particular locale, but their meaning was supposed to be universal, not local. Vernacular art, on the other hand was seen as being a vehicle for the preservation of traditions invested in it and anchored firmly in the locality where it came from. It was also associated closely with the countryside and, in the nineteenth century, was seen to be declining or dying out before the onward march of modernity. There was therefore an urgent attempt by some to collect and document it before it had been eliminated (Anderson, 1991).

What replaced folk art within modernity was popular art made for the masses and transmitted through new, industrial media such as mass printing and, during the twentieth century, film and television. The crucial difference between folk art and popular art being that the former was bottom up and the latter top down (Huyssen, 1986). During the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, art considered itself superior to folk or popular art, first because it believed its content was more serious and profound and second because artists were very reluctant to change from traditional media, except in very minor ways such as from accepting, for example new, brighter pigments made from coal tar. Art itself faced competition from photography, in that this industrial technology was well suited to producing portraits and landscapes, hitherto the preserve of a large number of jobbing painters. There's a good argument to be made that modern art was an attempt by artists to do things a camera couldn't. Until the 1960s, photography had difficulty gaining even a foothold within art discourse. Not only was it a young upstart lacking the mystique of oil paint or the semi-mystical touch of the artist, the printing of photographs involved a level of skill which modern art eschewed.

Two ruptures

So far it has been explained how art within modernity was concerned with history and the past, including consciously trying to revive previous styles. It prioritised talented, individual artists and their creativity and downplayed craft skills. Despite (or perhaps because of) the massive changes in society, art was conceived as universal and timeless. However, this concept faced two ruptures, one in the 1860s, with the advent of modernism and modern art and the second a hundred years later, which brought about contemporary art. The latter was the more radical and far reaching and yet the least documented within art education literature. It is also noteworthy that most

people who have ever studied art education will have studied it since contemporary art came into being.

The rupture of the 1860s was tied up with the idea of an avant-garde, whereby each generation of artists stood on the shoulders of the previous one and stabbed them in the back. The fact that most of society could not (yet) appreciate what these artists did was due to the fact that they were supposed to be ahead of their time; society would catch up, although by the time it did, other artists would be pushing further ahead. Within the discourse of the avant-garde, an artwork was not so much significant in and of itself, but more due to the timing of the intervention (Cottington, 2013).

For all the complexities of modern art, which contained a large number of sub-isms, it is still possible to assert that it had two main concerns: formalism and self-expression. These were closely linked and the work of many modern artists contains both. Within the linear narrative of modern art, formalism led inevitably to an all-white or all-black painting (or cube sculpture) and came to a full stop. Heroic self-expression was running out of steam in the 1960s before critical theory finished it off. Out of this impasse came the second rupture and in the 1960s contemporary art came into being (Roberts, 2007).

If the first rupture is akin to people in a horse drawn coach being told their journey will continue on a high speed train, the second was like people being told that the train has reached its destination, you are free to stay on the train for as long as you like, but you are also free to get off and explore what lies within and beyond the station. If Modernism was a temporal, linear narrative, contemporary art instead expands horizontally (Huyssen, 1986).

It is difficult to overstate the immensity of this second rupture. It used to sometimes be called postmodern, but it is now clear that this term and its attendant association with a particular style fails to capture the extent of what happened and the preferred term is contemporary art (Smith, 2009). Most modern artists had continued to use traditional media (e.g. oil painting, drawing, printmaking and bronze or stone sculptures). Craft skills might have been disregarded, but it was still considered important that the hand of the artist had created the artwork. If, on the other hand, a machine, such as a camera had produced the work, then it was doubted whether talent or genius could be discerned. However, contemporary art postulated that the essence of an artwork lay not in the object, but in the idea behind it (Weintraub, *et al.*, 1996). This led to contemporary art embracing machines as a way to make art and to expand into photography, video, film and to a range of other media such as installation, performance, text, books, sound and (later) online media, which didn't displace, but sat alongside traditional media (Smith, 2009). Contemporary art can be presented in a traditional gallery space or anywhere else. The artist might not play any part in the actual making of the artwork. Anything an artist declares to be art is art. Art should encompass theory and theory largely replaces aesthetics. In the same vein, critical theory displaces connoisseurship. It is pluralistic and post avant-garde:

there is no sense of each generation simultaneously superseding and yet being validated by the previous one. Its roots lie within a strand of anti-art within modern art and the influence of Marcel Duchamp in particular (hence the term post-Duchampian) (Roberts. 2007). Despite this, it is largely ahistorical. Because it is ahistorical and not tied to the western canon out of which it sprung, it can easily spread round the world and be reinterpreted in countless local contexts (Harris, 2011). It is also claimed that contemporary art is ideally suited to an age in which people have limited time spans and has replaced a leisurely scrutiny of the finer points of an artwork with easily absorbed spectacle (Millard, 2001).

Contemporary art spread outwards into other disciplines as if artists had taken possession of a kind of diplomatic passport which enabled them to work in disciplines such as performance and film while giving them immunity from the rules and critical discourse attached to it. Moreover, that passport exempts them from having to learn the skills and techniques which practitioners in that discipline still have to acquire (Van Winkel, 2012). This is more than a postmodern diminution of borders between disciplines because it doesn't work in the opposite direction, for example dancers can't present a painting and claim it is dance. It is a privilege that art and art alone has claimed.

In this brief account it is clear that art has changed from being grounded in making skills to being about critical skills, from object to idea. For many it is a history of deskilling (Roberts, 2007). It is probably preferable to state that in the plurality that is contemporary art that making skills are optional and that is very difficult to pinpoint any particular knowledge which an artist would have to possess (Smith, 2009).

Art education before modernism

Because the concept of art which emerged within modernity was strongly and consciously influenced by a certain tradition of art history, art education continued much as it had before. This combined two main types of education: an apprenticeship and attendance at an art academy.

Apprenticeships have been one of the main ways art (and craft) has always been taught. These might be informal or have some sort of formalised sets of rules and even exams (Cole, 1983). However, the system and form of instruction always remained very similar: it was learned through observation, demonstration and lots of practice (there is a theory that 10,000 hours are required to become fully proficient in a skill (Sennett, 2008)). It works best when apprentices learn most of all from each other. In this way, skills are passed down the line from the more experienced, to those who are just beginning.

There are two other things to note about apprenticeships. The first is so obvious that it is often overlooked: apprentices will only learn what the person taking them on can do. The second is that it does not encourage innovation, but rather tends to be a vehicle for maintaining the status quo.

From the European Renaissance to the mid-nineteenth century, there was a dual education of artists: they would combine an apprenticeship with attendance at an art academy. Thereafter, they ceased to learn through apprenticeships (Pevsner, 1973). Through learning at academies, prospective artists could raise their status, while through apprenticeships continue to learn essential skills. Although the art academies downplayed the skills component of what they taught, in fact they had in large part a skills-based curriculum, with drawing at its core (Goldstein, 1996). This drawing could be from prints, from plaster casts or from a live, human model. It involved not only learning accuracy in shape, but also how to give the illusion of modelling using tone. Painstaking copying was supplemented by lectures in topics such as perspective, composition and anatomy and European Renaissance ideas of ideal beauty. The subject they tackled most was the human figure, which was considered to be analogous with ideal beauty (Goldstein, 1996). Academies spread throughout Europe and to the Americas and beyond but this part of the art curriculum stayed largely unchanged, in most cases until the mid-twentieth century (Pevsner, 1973).

So much of this way of learning art can seem very old-fashioned and alien now. All the same, having been around for so long, it is perhaps not surprising that it continues to exert an influence. One legacy is how drawing and in particular observational drawing is (still) so often considered to be of central importance for art education. Another is the tradition of life drawing (and painting and modelling) which often survives in the curriculum of institutions.

The influence of modernism on art education

The very fact of modernism being tied up with the avant-garde meant that educational institutions, which are generally very conservative, did not rush to embrace these new ideas about art. All the same, during the twentieth century it did come to influence art education greatly – and still does. Its influence came in two distinct ways: through self-expression and formalism.

Self-expression came into art education through the child art movement. This started in Austria in the early twentieth century. Having been brought to America by Victor Lowenfeld, it went on to have a major place in the art curriculum in many countries (Macdonald, 2004).

For some, self-expression is a non-curriculum. Students simply have to be provided with materials, time and space and allowed to express themselves. However, there is more to it than that. It is predicated on the child art movement, which is in turn based on Romanticism and in particular German idealism. This proposed that all children live imaginative lives and through this they have something wonderful and unique to express in their own inimitable way. Art education provides them with opportunities for this to happen through bold use of colour and improvisation (Efland, 1990). Parallel developments in modern art at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Fauvism, opened up the possibility of the aesthetic qualities of children's art being appreciated and acknowledged.

Although instruction was minimal and children were supposedly left to get on with expressing their inner selves, the reality was more often that there was a striking similarity both in the style and iconography. Research by Court (1981) in Africa, which found children drawing European houses they could never have seen, indicates that far from coming from their inner selves, what they are doing is copying.

If the child art movement had promoted the idea that every child had something unique to express, at post-secondary level this was transformed into talented students learning to make self-expression meaningful (de Duve, 1994). This was accomplished through the way that teachers conveyed their connoisseurship, so that students could recognise, for example, why one brushstroke was superior to another (De Ville & Foster, 1994).

It is easy to argue that not only are children copying each rather than expressing their true, inner selves, but also that nobody has such a thing: we have multiple identities. There is no inner self to express. Despite this and a general critique of Romantic conceptions of art, be it myth or reality, the child art movement continues.

This is less true of formalism, which is the other way that modernism changed the art curriculum. If, during the first half of the twentieth century, formalism made only small inroads into art education, there was one notable exception: the Bauhaus in Germany (1919-1933). When, in the 1950s, formalism entered the art curriculum, the Bauhaus proved to be a decisive influence (Macdonald, 2004).

To write about a Bauhaus curriculum is over simplistic, however it is possible to summarise those aspects which went on to influence so many art curricula. This was a concern with the formal aspects of art, such as colour, form, shape (basic geometric shapes were favoured), line, proportion, texture, rhythm etc. (Wood, 2008). Named basic design, it was felt this would provide all art (and design) students with a necessary grounding in art's basic vocabulary and grammar (Yeomans, 1988). This was complemented by a discourse around the formal qualities of artworks. Basic design was incorporated into many secondary and introductory post-secondary programmes. This was usually in the form of exercises, such as building out of identical geometric shapes, or producing a colour wheel (de Sausmarez, 2001).

With the benefit of hindsight it can be seen that not only was basic design a radical alternative to what the art academies had taught, but also shared many characteristics. They both believed that there was a basic knowledge all artists needed to learn, they both favoured geometry, they both propagated the idea of universals underpinned by theory; for the formalist this was gestalt psychology.

The modernist, one size fits all ideas which underpin formalism are clearly at odds with the student-centred orientation of self-expression. For scholars of art education, both have gone out of fashion but this hasn't prevented much of these kinds of art curriculum from still being taught. Meanwhile, a formalist discourse still spills over into much art teaching, existing side by side with its opposite: post-medium discourse (Storr, 2009).

The influence of contemporary art

A new curriculum, based on conceptual art was added to the art curriculum in isolated cases from the late 1960s, but only became common some thirty years later (Storr, 2009). Contemporary art extends beyond the confines and doctrines of conceptual art (Osborne, 2013), all the same it was the post-Duchampian way of making art which has exerted the greatest influence on the art curriculum, especially in the post-secondary sectors. In particular, the priority placed on planning an artwork and the ideas behind it became crucial; in fact the ideas could become more important than the actual artefact, or even supplement the need for one (Grayson, 2004). Those studying art were taught to incorporate the critical discourse about art into the work itself (Van Winkel, 2012). They had to justify where and how the work was to be interpreted and explain its historical and theoretical context (Corner, 2005). In this curriculum therefore, the emphasis changed from talking about the artefact to a discourse around pre-production and the process of realising a concept (de Duve, 1994), while connoisseurship was replaced by critical theory.

One reason for the popularity of this part of the art curriculum could be the assessment regimes. These can vary from country to country; so much so that in some there is no summative assessment, whereas in others, such as the UK (where I work), assessment drives what is learned and taught. Where there have been more stringent assessment requirements, this has led to the necessity for students to be able to explain a work and the ideas behind it - and write essays and a dissertation. Art has also had to fit into established frameworks for research. One consequence was that art became a sort of problem solving, even if the problem to be solved was arbitrary and came from the students themselves. This method of learning art led to the awarding of doctorates in art, usually with a body of work and a thesis linked by a common theme and focus of investigation (Buckley, 2009).

It is now normal for students to have to be able to explain what their work is about and because this way of working has been taught so widely, from the 1990s this had spilled over into what is viewed in galleries and museums. Whereas modernism believed in the autonomy of the art object which spoke for itself, to work out what contemporary art is about is usually a triangle: the work, the spectator and the explanation. Hence when the Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei exhibited a work called 'Straight' at the 2013 Venice Biennale, viewers were able to see a hundred and fifty tons of steel girders spread out in piles across the floor. Just looking at them a viewer would be quite unaware that these were once bent and twisted girders he salvaged from schools which had collapsed in the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 and then had workmen hammer them back into their original straightness. The work itself does not reveal this information, although the catalogue might, but it is this explanation which provides the meaning.

In a context where the meaning of a work of art no longer resides in the work itself, the contemporary art curriculum is not so much interdisciplinary as post-medium. In

any case, there is no need for students to specialise in any particular medium or kind of art making, albeit there is an expectation they will find their own preoccupation or theme for their practice (Storr, 2009). Moreover, what applied for apprenticeships still applies today: students tend to learn that area of art the teacher knows about. It is claimed that because art can be anything an artist says it is and made in any medium or none, this part of the art curriculum can also include almost anything, or nothing (Groys, 2009).

Learning about art or learning through art

Art does not progress in the way science does. In other words Newtonian physics was displaced by the theory of relativity, but contemporary art doesn't render modernism outmoded in the same way. All the same, society changes and ideas around contemporary art have become accepted in more and more contexts. In compulsory education, there have been various attempts to reflect contemporary art in the curriculum.

One reaction, from the USA, was Discipline-Based Art Education, introduced in the 1980s. On the face of it this is flying in the face of a way of making art where there is no prescribed set of skills and it true that it did propose that students should learn basic studio techniques at a time when it was impossible to define what these might be. But there again it has also to be understood as trying to put into place something that filled the void of the non-curriculum of self-expression. Moreover, it did tie in with what was happening in contemporary art and post-secondary education, because it also put a far greater emphasis on learning to be able to make informed judgements about art through learning its theory and its historical and cultural context, as well as about aesthetics. If the latter might seem a little quaint for the 1980s, overall it was an attempt to move beyond modernism (Lanier, 1985). It still exists in a slightly amended form under the title of Comprehensive Arts Education.

A contemporaneous initiative considered producing art should be a vehicle for learning something beyond the subject. The idea goes back to Herbert Read (1943) and art has often justified its place in an overall school curriculum by claiming that it helps students to learn a range of skills or knowledge beyond the domains of art, such as study skills, literacy or self-confidence. However, it was the disruption of modernist orthodoxy caused by contemporary art which made possible the conditions for the widespread adoption of learning through art. In compulsory education, the most common form learning about art takes is multi-cultural or inter-cultural education. This often picks up on the nineteenth century notion, explained above, that a people's identity is expressed through their art. To what extent such traditions survive in any meaningful way beyond meeting the expectations of tourists or Hollywood is a moot point.

But learning through art extends beyond multi-culturalism. The practice of many contemporary artists involves engaging with a topic and communicating a message, be it political, environmental or social. Such issues-based ways of working are also an

important part of art education (Chang, *et al*., 2012). Indeed, where post-medium art has become the orthodoxy, the genesis of an artwork starts with an issue which isn't to do with the making of an artefact.

A third initiative, the Visual Culture movement, moved away from contemporary art and instead turned its gaze on popular art. It was felt that art was becoming irrelevant to many students and that what was studied should connect with their everyday experiences. Moreover, it was claimed that only by learning to interpret contemporary visual culture, could students be equipped with the ability to scrutinise the plethora of images with which they are bombarded, instead of being passive victims.

This has its corollary in contemporary art and for many pop art of the early 1960s is where the second rupture began (Danto, 1992). It also allies with so much art history and theory of the last fifty years which has questioned the prioritising of one sort of art over others. All the same, lest we forget, contemporary art and its accompanying art world of galleries, museums and commerce as well as art as a subject to be studied still lay claim for some sort of special status. Once that hierarchy between different forms of visual culture is dissipated, so it becomes harder to argue for art's place in education.

Conclusion

An advantage of looking back is that shapes and patterns appear, whereas in the present it can be much more difficult to discern what is happening, or make any predictions. If the first rupture in art within modernity brought about the relative cohesiveness of modernism, then the second has brought about the opposite: a splintering. On the other hand, the orthodoxies of contemporary art seem very similar all over the world as standardisation continues to do battle with complexity. It is precisely here that the importance of art can be recognised. Art doesn't offer any sort of a solution, however it does what art has always done and reflects the society (or societies) from which it has come. Whilst it is impossible to expect small children to achieve the meta-knowingness that is necessary for contemporary art practice, it does offer a wide choice of options. The history of art education is definitely one of moving from hand and craft skills towards critical and cognitive skills and engagement with theories. It has also moved from craft to the adoption of machines. In art, many students now learn how to use technology and live in a technological society. This should not be an uncritical engagement any more than the purpose of education is to produce people who never ask questions. The German Enlightenment concept of 'bildung', of ever striving throughout one's life to learn and understand more remains a noble one.

Looked at in this way, art does have a core and that is the ability to explain, contextualise and justify one's art. This doesn't mean that that is all that should be learned, it simply means that studying art should not be a naïve activity. There are dangers with this. Theory can drown out any enjoyment in viewing or making art.

Moreover, art can be devoured by its own theory. The meaning of an artwork should not be so obscure it requires an (absent) explanation. And for young children, learning art will be less about theory and more about themed projects.

We might be at a juncture where art has been moving from the handmade to engaging with mechanised forms of production and from a discourse about making and materials to one about issues and context. If theory can make people think and reflect, then so can art. But art can also entertain and give pleasure, it can change perceptions, it can shock and it can engage the emotions and move people. No amount of critical theory can change this. What is more, art can contain theory, but theory cannot contain art. We need to bear this is mind when we make decisions about we are teaching when we are teaching art.

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