

Chapter 4

Aesthetic Creativity: Bridging Arts, Culture, and Education

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4.1 Introduction

This paper aims to study the controversial subject of creativity in relation to aesthetics. Aesthetics plays a vital role in our everyday life through its rhetoric nature and the ideological value it possesses. As an innovative solution to various problems, creativity relies heavily on aesthetics to express the ideologies it wants to promote. This study demonstrates how the two concepts are closely related by exploring the complexity of aesthetics and creativity. Likewise, this study emphasizes the importance of aesthetics and creativity by focusing on the cultural and creative industry, thus bringing the concepts of creativity and aesthetics back to the center of the discussion on art education.

4.2 Rhetoric, Ideology, and Aesthetics

To understand aesthetic creativity, the complex relationships among aesthetics, ideology, and rhetoric are examined. Aesthetics does not stand in a vacuum. Rather, aesthetics exists and is discussed along with ideology and rhetoric. Discourses on aesthetics, ideology, and rhetoric include the developmental history of each concept (Duncum 2008; Herrick 2009) and the relationship of one concept with another

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(Rampley 2005; Duncum 2008). However, no studies on the relationship of the three concepts as a whole have been reported. Thus, part of this paper summarizes previous discussions on the different aspects. A framework to illustrate the interaction of the three concepts is also proposed. This paper begins with the definition of concepts with a discussion on their relevance to the present paper and using their application in previous studies as guide. The concepts are then applied in an empirical case of a Giorgio Armani advertisement, including how said concepts can be identified and understood in the case presented.

4.2.1 Rhetoric

Rhetoric has been understood as “the art of speaking well” in the Western educational tradition, which considers rhetoric an essential ability possessed by an educated person. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Herrick 2009, p. 77). Addressing the public to defend an argument was considered an oratorical art in Ancient Greece. According to Aristotle, rhetoric comprises three techniques that work to persuade the audience: “logos,” which focuses on “the logic of sound arguments”; “pathos,” the study and positioning of the audience’s emotions; and “ethos,” the speaker’s ability to exhibit good character (pp. 87–90).

In addition to its function in orations, rhetoric can be further used to understand other means of communication such as visual rhetoric. Visual rhetoric considers the three techniques through visual stimulation to persuade the audience in an argument (Rampley 2005). In this study, visual rhetoric is used to communicate and analyze the subject.

4.2.2 Ideology

According to Marxist theory, ideology is often understood from Marx’s perspective in which dominant ideology is denoted by the superstructure. “Dominant ideology” is the system of ideas created and enforced by the dominant class to legitimize and maintain its privileges by persuading the whole society to recognize it as one for their own interest (Gramsci 1971). In this sense, ideology is associated with the interest of a certain social class for others to accept its value, ideas, and beliefs.

At present, ideology is more commonly described as “characterizing ideas, ideals, beliefs, and values” (Duncum 2008, p. 125) without particular association with any particular social class but rather, with various associations with different social groups. Social classes can no longer explain the dynamics of a society. Social groups that divide society through various levels of attributes provide a closer view of social life. The use of ideology in this study will follow this line of discussion, with ideology viewed as a set of ideas, values, and beliefs presented by various social groups to influence the audience’s understanding of the world, as well as their behavior.

4.2.3 *Aesthetics*

The concept of aesthetics has evolved drastically over time. The word aesthetics is derived from the Greek word “*aesthesis*,” which encompasses everything that can be perceived by our senses; the word was initially intended to distinguish between the material world and the imagination (Duncum 2008, p. 124, 2010). However, since the eighteenth century, the concept of aesthetics has been largely influenced by Kant, who used the concept to discuss specifically the beauty and the sublime (Duncum 2010). Numerous modernists and art educators followed Kant’s line of thought and considered aesthetics as a holy, spiritual experience that could only occur upon stimulation of limited cultural forms such as fine art (Duncum 2007). The said line of thought focused on setting and maintaining a hierarchy of experience to differentiate social classes and maintain social order. However, the discussion of aesthetics has recently returned to the originally ascribed concept and focused again on all forms of sensory stimulation. In opposition to the modernists view of associating aesthetics with certain higher-order experiences, recent art educators use the concept of aesthetics to describe all visual experiences without discrimination of the experiences and their effects (Duncum 2008).

This study follows Williams’ use of the word “aesthetics,” which means “visual appearances and effect” (cited in Duncum 2008, p. 123). This definition is closer to the Greeks’ notion of *aesthesis* as sense perception. In this context, no moral or value judgment is inherently associated with the visual stimulations; that is, all forms of visual experiences are considered equally important. The differences among them are based on appearances to categorize different styles.

However, none of the aforementioned concepts can operate alone. The use of one concept in a material world inevitably triggers the use of another concept. Visual stimulations such as aesthetics are not inherently value-centered or ideological. However, aesthetics does not exist in a vacuum but rather, exists within a web of relations. Observation of aesthetics always involves communication. Communication is not neutral; “all communication is rhetorical” (Rampley 2005, p. 137). Aesthetic styles are always intertwined with the agenda of different ideologies in which social power is at play. Reading into the aesthetics of any given object or image is tantamount to embarking on a rhetorical journey. The rhetor aims to convince the audience to accept his argument and the ideology being presented by appealing to aesthetics, which is associated with other ideologies that may persuade the audience.

4.2.4 *A Case Application: Giorgio Armani Advertisement*

The process of rhetoric, which aims to communicate a main ideology, relies on its aesthetic appeal and association with other ideologies familiar to the audience; in this sense, both aesthetics and ideology constitute *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. This is the analysis framework adopted for this study. To apply the framework, this paper

analyzes the Giorgio Armani advertisement. The image used in the advertisement is part of an international commercial campaign for the Giorgio Armani Company. In this case, The Giorgio Armani Company represents the rhetor, which uses visual stimulation (the aesthetics) as rhetoric to persuade its audience (the international population) of an ideology (to become consumers of this product and this brand). To entice the audience to become consumers of the product, the advertisement relies on various aesthetic qualities related to different ideological messages that may already be dominant and thus, are familiar to the audience. The subsequent sections explores how aesthetics and ideology are applied in the context of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.

The aesthetic composition of the image is first analyzed. The image of a White male appears at the center. The text “ACQUA DI GIO” in capitalized Roman letters is aligned on top and the text “GIORGIO ARMANI” appears at the bottom. A square bottle figure with the same letters printed on it is placed on the lower right-hand portion. The color used for the whole image besides the bottle is in a grayscale tone, and the portrait appears in high contrast.

The imperialism that followed the “Age of Discovery” in the fifteenth century established the dominant role and superior status of White males within the social ladder (Fanon 2005). The term “White” (n.d.) is used in this paper to refer to the “ethnic types (chiefly European or of European extraction) characterized by light complexion, as distinguished from black, red, yellow, etc.” as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (White n.d.). This distinction and definition of “White” is problematic. The definition was largely established through a specific movement called imperialism. The influence of imperialism persisted even after the end of colonialism, extending to various economic, political, and cultural regimes (Said 1994). This phenomenon contributed to the belief that Whites are superior and ideal and can be recognized in various forms across the world.

The White figure has become an ideal to some individuals. The rise of cosmetic surgery across Asia has focused on skin whitening, eye lash extension, eye widening, double-eyelid surgery, and nose or cheekbone enhancement (Lah 2011). The purpose of these cosmetic procedures is to reconstruct the features of the patient to resemble those of the Whites. The hegemony of the White sense of beauty has also devastatingly affected African Americans (Patton 2006). Dyeing and hair straightening have become popular among African Americans to resemble the hair texture of the Whites.

The rhetor’s intention in presenting this advertisement is apparent. The aesthetic use of a White male’s portrait attempts to relate to the White beauty ideal. Appealing to the audiences’ internalized ideology ignites resonance among the audience and positions them in a favorable mindset. As the imagery entices the audience, the product brand becomes associated with the proposed ideal. The audience can then easily proceed to the next step, which is accepting the ideology of consumption, to internalize the desired identity (Duncum 2007). This representation also reinforces the ideology of White beauty, which precisely demonstrates how *pathos* operates when aesthetics and ideology are combined.

Another important aspect of White dominance is reflected in the White superiority ideology, mainly White supremacy. The Whites inherited this particular

advantage, the legacy of colonialism, to construct and popularize their economic structure, political system, and scientific knowledge. This provided the Whites access to a position of authority within various regimes (Said 1994). Consequently, Whites have often dominated the upper classes of different societies. Moreover, as the cradle of modern enlightenment and the Whites' place of origin, Europe has become an authoritative figure in history and high culture. Thus, other ethnic groups have identified Whites, especially European Whites, with the educated, knowledgeable authoritative figures of good taste.

In the advertisement, the Roman letters are capitalized. However, unlike the more popular Roman passages, the phrase used is in Italian. "ACQUA DI GIO," means "water of young," and "GIORGIO ARMANI" is a brand named after an Italian designer. The font "Bodoni" was also used in eighteenth century Italian books and present-day VOGUE magazine covers (Dodd 2006). The grayscale picture reflects classical monochrome photography, which was invented and popularized by Europeans.

All artistic elements in the image, including the prestige of the language, the overall monochromatic tone, the text and its font, as well as the authoritative tone achieved through the capital letters, contribute to the ideology that underscores the superiority and authority of the Europeans. This ideology is subtly delivered to the audience through an aesthetic presentation. When the audience accepts the ideological suggestion of this advertisement, accepting the "argument of consumption" that the rhetor has delivered, acceptance follows. This demonstrates the use of *ethos*.

Whereas *pathos* and *ethos* persuade the audience through the subtle presentation of different ideologies, *logos* is that which unifies the entire concept. The aesthetics of this brand as an ideology is the logic behind the advertisement. The aesthetic ideology of "White beauty" and "white superiority" are the ideas promoted by this brand. The bottle placed on the bottom-right corner of the image suggests that this product is a purchasable entity. By purchasing this product, the consumer gains access to beauty, superiority, and authority, as well as all others ideas signified by the advertisement. Moreover, purchasing this product contributes to the ideology of consumable identity, which is the main agendum of the rhetor (Rampley 2005; Duncum 2007).

By applying aesthetics, ideology, and rhetoric in the analysis of an advertisement, this paper presents a framework that identifies the relationships among the three concepts. As demonstrated in the earlier examples, all three concepts are closely related. The co-existence of ideology with aesthetics must be emphasized to engender consent (Duncum 2007). Only through awareness of the rhetorical nature of aesthetics can people refrain from reinforcing ideologies they do not subscribe to.

4.3 Creativity and Taiwan's Art Education

This section focuses on the other important concept of this study: creativity. Creativity has been a key concept in various discussions in education, especially art education; however, creativity seems to have fallen out of favor in the last few

decades because of paradigm shifts. As visual culture dominates the discourse of art education, power and its relation to aesthetics are frequently discussed. In the past, a display of creativity was a genius act. However, in postmodern discussions, the social construct of a genius and/or a creative act is always challenged. Thus, the word “creativity” has often been avoided in favor of political correctness. A paradox arises: Art education, where supposedly most of the creative acts are explored and applied, fails to address the importance of creativity in Taiwan’s academic curriculum.

Thus, this section first illustrates past discussions on creativity and how it should be related to aesthetics at present. The manifestation of creativity in Taiwan’s art education is discussed in relation to recent policies. Examples of aesthetic creativity in the contemporary society are explored.

4.3.1 Meaning of Creativity and Its Relationship with Aesthetics

The meaning of “creativity” has evolved through the years and is understood differently in Eastern and Western cultures. In the Chinese tradition, the word is used to describe an invention that has not been seen before (Chou 2004). According to Piirto (1992), in the Western tradition, the word “create” originated from the Latin word *creatus*. “Creatus” in its strict sense means growth but in another sense could also mean “to produce” or “to make.” The word “creativity” was coined in the nineteenth century by the American writer Herman Melville (1851). Melville was the first to apply the verb as a noun in his work *Moby Dick*, to describe the lightning storm’s mechanical creativity. According to Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, to “create” means to “bring into existence,” and “creativity” means “the ability to create, either artistically or intellectually.”

To understand the core idea of creativity, the focus was divided among the “person” who created the product, the “product” created, the “process” that brought forth the creative product, and the “response” toward the new, creative product (Feldman et al. 1994, p. 19). Sawyer (2006) maintained that the manner by which academics study creativity mainly shifted from the individualist to the contextualist approach.

Wisniewski (1997) explored the general existence of creativity. He studied the way speakers combine ordinary nouns to create new concepts, which is an example of creativity. Finding creativity exists in everyday life. Florida (2002) raised the concept of “creative class” from a geographic perspective. He believed that creativity, similar to culture, is the spirit of a particular era. He divided the creative class into the “super creative core,” which includes professors, poets, artists, inventors, architects, and leaders of societies, and “creative professionals,” referring to people who solve life’s daily problems. He further pointed out that creative communities are the energy core of urban renewal and that having an open, liberal, and diverse

environment is key to collective creativity. This discussion reflects Csikszentmihalyi's (1988) creativity system theory known as domain individual field interaction (DIFI). DIFI maintains that creativity lies in the interaction of the person, domain, and field. The systematic interaction among the three determines the production of creative thoughts, subject, or action. This theory illustrates creativity as an important aspect of society and culture.

The above discussion suggests that creativity is the imagination, collected ideas, or thoughts of a person or community, objectified through various media, and has become a new possibility, a system, or a mechanism. These factors that constitute creativity are the energy core of any type of social, cultural, or artistic change. Although various studies on creativity address the "person," "process," or "product," many studies fail to address the connection between creativity and aesthetics, which involves the person, process, and product through rhetoric and ideology. Creativity is usually acknowledged through the final product and traced back to evaluate its creator and process. The appearances and presentation of creativity become a vital aspect of assessment, which is where aesthetics becomes relevant. Aesthetics is the center in the combination of a creator (the rhetor) generating a visual observable product (the aesthetics) to deliver and convince a message or idea (the ideology) to its audience. Aesthetics is the discernible feature that captures the attention and distinguishes one characteristic from another. The aesthetic aspect of creativity is usually the most easily observed, containing profound meanings, and that which distinguishes the act as creative. Thus, aesthetics and creativity must be discussed together.

4.3.2 Presence of Creativity in Taiwan Art Education

The problem with education of the arts today in Taiwan is that creativity is rarely discussed. This situation becomes ironic considering that creativity has long been acknowledged as the underlying backbone of any art. This lack of discussion has its root in the past paradigm shifts in our field. Since the era of creative self-expression, the main focus has shifted from discipline-based art education (DBAE) to visual culture. Each paradigm comes forth as a reaction toward the former: DBAE against creative self-expression's lack of structure and progress (Barkan 1966) and visual culture against DBAE's hierarchy of knowledge and power (Efland 1992). As each of the paradigms keeps a different focus, creativity has been set aside in the last two shifts.

These paradigm shifts have largely influenced Taiwan's art education, demonstrated in its national curriculum. For the past 10 years or so, Taiwan's primary education has placed art under the integrated curriculum of the Arts and Humanities. It has three main objectives: enable students to "explore and express," through different mediums and forms; enable students' "aesthetics appreciation and comprehension" abilities, in order to recognize arts' value; enable students to

understand the different “cultural applications” of arts, and learn to respect differences (Chen 2011). In the secondary education, the art subject is separated into two focuses: “creation” and “appreciation” (Chen 2011).

We can see that Taiwan’s national curriculum is heavily influenced by the DBAE approach to structures art education into art history, art criticism, aesthetics, and studio creations. This structure came from the interest for students to grasp the different aspect of art education. However, its structural nature separates the connective aspect and flow of creation and appreciation, expression and comprehension. What happens is that, students’ art classes are split into consumption and production. In the class time for art appreciation, history, or criticism, students become the passive observer to the past knowledge and authorities. In the class time for art studio, expression, or creation, students are encouraged to explore the boundaries of their own practices or create “artworks” that express their inner impulses. This split between the appreciation to creation is what blocks aesthetic creativity outside art education in Taiwan.

It is true that creativity has its roots in creation. Oxford English Dictionary separates the creation of a divine being and of a human agent. It is said that creation of the human agent “is always out of pre-existent materials, from which the created product is made, and creation consists not in bringing these materials into existence but in arranging them in an order which did not exist before” (Hospers 1985, p. 245). Thus creativity is often understood as the ability to create combinations that are novel, or new. This leads to the essential relative aspect of creativity; new or novel has to be considered in comparison. Without first observing what is to be compared with, no creativity could be discussed. Creation without the connection to appreciation, hinders students’ chance at creativity.

In recent discussions on Taiwan’s art education, visual culture maintains a dominant position. However, discussions focusing on art education are rather limited because of the constant misinterpretation of the theory of visual culture in art education (VCAE). Academic circles tend to focus on teaching about the daily lives of students and their own personal interests, which is an important aspect of VCAE to redistribute the focus of student studies and balance out the past hierarchy of knowledge. However, discussions seem to end at that point. Educators fail to pursue the matter to analyze how aesthetic qualities contribute to cultural meaning and ideology. This lack of comparison and contextual discussion leave out the possibility for discussing comprehensively the power structure where art is maintained. Without taking that last step, the academe will continue to direct its focus on visual materials and fail to make sense of how the creative process fits in.

Furthermore, as more areas realize the power of art creation and the potential of creativity, teachers of General Education subject are now focused on the study of creativity. Creativity has become the new “it” concept in solving current economic and global problems. Many sectors approach creativity from outside of the art world and art education field. This concept, which has long been discarded, should again be considered.

4.3.3 Recent Policies and Examples of Exploration with Aesthetic Creativity

As a result of the recent interest in creativity in various other fields, the Taiwanese government has formulated policies to enrich the culture and creative industries (Chen and Chiu 2011). As defined by Taiwan's Ministry of Culture, culture and creative industries are "industries that originated from creative or cultural accumulation, through the use of intellectual properties, and has the potential to create wealth and employment opportunities while promoting the improvement of the overall living environment" (Ministry of Culture 2012). As Florida stated (2002, p. xiii), "human creativity is the ultimate economic resource." Scholars have emphasized that substantial reliance will be placed on economic activities that focus on the generation or exploitation of knowledge and information through creativity and innovation because of recent global developments. Thus, by allocating resources to the approved industries, this policy aims to ground Taiwan's industry back to its roots in an aesthetically creative manner.

Under this new policy, many in the industry began exploring aesthetic creativity. One example is the Palace Museum in Taipei, which has undergone significant renovations in combining knowledge, aesthetics, and commerce. New lines of cultural products that promote the grassroots of Taiwanese society, as well as the features of the museum itself, were introduced. They also combined new technical products with the old aesthetic styles of Taiwan, creating the effect of "contrast." By considering the ability of the aesthetics to convey a powerful message, the new Palace Museum used its products to introduce an ideology that focuses on valuing the past, viewing the old as new, and reconnecting the country's heritage. Taiwan and its culture are promoted through these products. This is a clear play of aesthetic creativity.

Another example is the Chin Ho Li Steel Knife Factory in the remote Kinmen Island located on the Taiwan strait. The old shop has operated for 60 years, designing and producing steel knives for the local community. As development progressed, locals no longer acquired knives from this shop. To cope with the evolving economy, they searched for alternatives by acquiring a different target market. They researched the founding history of the factory and promoted the brand by using the acquired historical information. Factory tours were conducted, engaging the tourists into the story of its foundation. According to their research, the factory was established despite the lack of resources on Kinmen Island. Chin Ho Li made knives collected from artilleries dropped by the United States and the allied air forces during the Second World War. Currently, the workers produce knives using the same techniques with more than sufficient sources of material. The factory sells not only knives but also the historical weight and significance of each knife. Through their tours, the factory also sells the historical experience that customers undergo. Each knife is associated with the cultural heritage that all Taiwanese share. With history and aesthetic presentation combined, the old shop has been

transformed into a rhetor that promotes a different kind of commodity, knowledge, and experience. This is a creative approach to solving the problem of industrial restructuring.

4.4 Importance of Aesthetics and Creativity in Art Education

In this study, the relationship of aesthetics with rhetoric and ideology, as well as how they are essential to creativity, has been discussed. More examples of aesthetic creativity can be observed in recent policy implementations. However, a discussion on aesthetic creativity limited to the cultural economic domain is insufficient. Art education constantly deals with creation and experimentation; thus, bringing creativity back to the core of discussion is important.

Art education concerns not only cultivating art experts and professionals. Its major goal should be to educate the public on the significance of art education. Only by educating the masses of their key role in the daily transfer of ideologies will they be able to filter their daily consumptions. Moreover, the sensitivity of the public toward art will result in more citizens who can appreciate creative products at a deeper level. Through the stimulation of creative products consumed, the education of the masses can contribute to Taiwan's economic growth.

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