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## **Exploring the Affective Impact of War Photographs on Students' Moral and Intellectual Development**

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### **Abstract**

This paper proposes a new way to explore the affective impact of war photographs on students' moral and intellectual development. I use two unique cases of students to illustrate the strong personal involvement in students' selection and interpretation of war photographs. One student seems to suggest a viewer's position as moral rescuer and the other a viewer's position as suffering victim. The paper is based on the findings from a piece of action research conducted among students on a general education course in the USA. The research was conceived as a response to Susan Sontag's (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others* and James Nachtwey's war photography from an art education perspective. A multicultural art education approach with social reconstruction as the goal was adopted for the research. The findings confirm the hypothesis that

war photographs have a direct influence on the judgments formulated by students about the world. War photography engages students emotionally and activates their affective memories, which, in turn, help to construct their “moral constitutions” regarding war and humanitarian issues. Art education can play a unique role in creating “reverential conditions” in which students can study war photography and think more deeply not only about the distant suffering but also about their own moral stances.

**Key words**

James Nachtwey, Susan Sontag, war photography, affective memory, multicultural art education

## Introduction

As art teachers, or teachers who are interested in exploring the educational value of war photography, how can we transform students' valuable personal and cultural backgrounds into meaningful learning experiences? How can we enable students to understand more clearly how they and their fellow students are being socially and culturally constructed, and to see the wider options or life choices available to them? This paper presents a new and meaningful perspective on using war photographs in an educational context. The findings discussed originate from two unexpected but unique cases in my research study. The aim of the original research was to increase students' awareness of war and critical social issues by getting them to respond to James Nachtwey's war photographs in the context of a 'humanitarian' visual culture course. Two out of a total of 69 students read the war photographs in a very special and personal way. One of these seems to suggest a viewer's position as moral rescuer and the other a viewer's position as suffering victim. I have come to realize that war photographs can have a direct bearing on the judgments formulated by students about the world, and that they develop moral values and intellectual inquiry based on their emotional responses to such images.

This paper documents what I learned from these two special cases. My original study was a small-scale research conducted in 2010-2011 at The Ohio State University. The research was conceived as a response to Susan Sontag's (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others* and James Nachtwey's war photography from an art education perspective. A multicultural art education approach with social reconstruction as the goal was adopted for the research. The broader aim of the research was to explore the educational value of using war photography in art education and how visual arts might contribute to the development of a general education course at tertiary level.

In the following paragraphs, I first provide the research background and introduce the focus of the discussion. This includes: 1) exploring the affective impact of war photographs based on

the discussion generated from Sontag's (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others*; 2) constructing a 'humanitarian' visual culture curriculum as an art education response to Nachtwey's 'invitation' to respond to his war photographs, and 3) discussing the educational value of creating a viewer's position on war photographs among students on a multicultural art education course. I then outline the research design. In the 'Findings and Discussions' section, I discuss how the students' life experiences had played a critical role in shaping their perspectives on war and humanitarian issues. I explore how one student took a moral stance as rescuer when confronted by a humanitarian issue, whereas another student tried to make sense of war through the eyes of a victim. I suggest that war photographs engage students emotionally and activate their affective memories. These memories, in turn, help to construct students' understanding of distant suffering. In conclusion, I reflect upon the most effective ways in which art education can be used to elicit constructive responses to distant suffering.

### **Research Background and Discussion Focus**

#### **Susan Sontag's (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others***

Sontag's (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others* is about war and how images of war affect our perception of reality. To Sontag (2003), this book is also an inquiry into "how people can take in the suffering of others", in the process asking the question: "How are we constituted as moral beings?" (C-Span, 2003). Sliwinski (2006) notes that *Regarding the Pain of Others* is considered important to the field of visual culture as it "directs our attention away from the act of taking a picture [...] to focus on the affective impact on the audience who views the image" (p. 89).

Sontag's (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others* has generated discussion among scholars regarding the nature of encountering images of atrocity. One of the critical discussions is structured around the idea of a persistent split between being affected and being able to think and

understand (Butler, 2005; Sliwinski, 2006). Sliwinski (2006) interprets this split as a widespread effect of encountering an image of an atrocity that leaves viewers “horrified, enraged, even momentarily immobilized” (p. 89). Nevertheless, the effect of creating critical discussions around this kind of imagery in an education setting has been proved to be positive, as shown by the research undertaken by Gil-Glazer (2015). Gil-Glazer’s work focuses on photography and difficult knowledge. She refers to photographs that address disturbing topics such as “violence, suffering and pain, extreme sexuality and gender identity, as well as discrimination and infringement upon democratic rights” (Gil-Glazer, 2015, p. 262). Another critical discussion generated by Sontag’s (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others* is structured around whether the “affective transitivity” of photography has its political uses (Butler, 2005). Butler (2005) notes that “[f]or photographs to communicate effectively, they must have a transitive function: they must act on viewers in ways that bear directly on the judgments that viewers formulate about the world” (p. 823). My research, with its particular focus on the war photographs of James Nachtwey, adds to the small collection of art education studies on war photography. My intention was to explore the affective impact of war photographs on students’ moral and intellectual development.

### **James Nachtwey’s War Photography**

Photographers go to the extreme edges of human experience to show people what’s going on. Sometimes they put their lives on the line, because they believe your opinions and your influence matter. They aim their pictures at your best instincts, generosity, a sense of right and wrong, the ability and the willingness to identify with others, the refusal to accept the unacceptable. (Nachtwey, 2007)

Nachtwey is one of the most highly respected contemporary photojournalists. The value of Nachtwey’s photography is highlighted and validated by the numerous prizes and awards he

has received. Nachtwey (2007) positions himself as a war photographer who uses this particular medium to evoke humanity. Nachtwey has dedicated his life to using documentary photography to speak up for people who suffer from war and social injustices, in the hope that his viewers will have the capability to bring about positive changes to the situation. My research was a response to Nachtwey's 'invitation'. My goal was to construct a visual culture curriculum that maximized the positive educational value of Nachtwey's war photography in order to cultivate care ethics that might help to promote humanitarian education.

### **Creating a Viewer's Position on War Photographs in the Context of Multicultural Art Education**

My research was situated in the context of a general education course entitled *Ethnic Arts: A Means of Intercultural Communication*. Prior to my research, I had taught the course for 5 years. The original course designers, Stuhr and Ballengee-Morris, are advocates of multicultural art education with social reconstruction as a goal. Pursuing this form of art education means to "challenge the dominant power and knowledge structures that tend to create socio-cultural inequities" (Stuhr, 1994, p. 171) and to "question the dominant ideology and provide hope for establishing a more democratic society" (Stuhr, 1994, p. 171). Stuhr and Ballengee-Morris co-designed the course to explore the intersection between visual culture and identity construction (see Appendix for course outline). Their original course examines how visual culture (re)produces socio-cultural inequities, and asks students to reflect on how their belief systems under the influence of visual culture may be helping to perpetuate social injustice. One of the key goals was to challenge the students' own biases and increase their "multicultural competencies". Below is an abbreviated version of the course rationale:

This course has been constructed to confront and address the issues raised through the exploration of visual culture in the hope of challenging our biases and discriminatory practices within our society, which hinders democracy and social justice. This course provides opportunities for students to focus and communicate their learning and development to increase their multicultural competencies as national and world citizens.

Having based the design of my new course on the original course rationale, I set out to explore the intersection between visual culture and identity construction, with a specific focus on how war photography constructs students' identities as co-spectators of distant suffering. I used Nachtwey's war photography as a form of visual culture to cultivate students' awareness of critical issues at a global level.

### **Research Design**

My research, entitled *Humanitarian Visual Culture Curriculum: An Action Research Study*, was situated in the *Ethnic Arts: A Means of Intercultural Communication* (Autumn 2010, 24 students; Winter 2011, 23 students, and Spring 2011, 22 students) course. The course consisted of twenty 2.5-hour lessons spread over ten weeks; meetings were held twice a week. I divided the course into three sections. In each section, I used one overarching theme to help the students organize their learning experiences, and one central question designed to encourage them to become aware of how they felt about their learning experiences. Section I covered six lessons. The overarching theme was "A world of difference", and the central question was "Who am I in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?" Section II also covered six lessons. The overarching theme was "Visibility and representation" and the central question was "What do I see in the context of war, violence and peace?" Section III covered eight lessons, including the arrangement of meeting individual students to prepare them to work on the final assignment. The overarching theme was "Humanity, human rights and

humanitarianism” and the central question was “Where do I stand in the context of humanitarian dilemmas?”

The course had three main assignments. The due dates were Lesson 6, Lesson 12 and Lesson 20. The overall goal of all three assignments was to help students develop a humanitarian perspective from the standpoint of being a global citizen. The aim of the first assignment was to help the students formulate their world views as individuals living in this shared, globalized society. The aim of the second assignment was to develop the students’ critical perspectives so they would be able to analyse visual culture in a way that addressed the concepts of war, violence and peace. The aim of the final assignment was to help the students consolidate what they had learned and further establish the students’ standpoints as co-spectators of distant suffering. For the final assignment, the students were asked to write a 5-7 page, double-spaced paper describing, analysing and interpreting one war photograph by Nachtwey. In addition, they were asked to present their papers in class. The findings discussed in this paper were generated from the final assignment.

### **Findings and Discussions**

The findings indicate that students’ personal experiences play a critical role in constructing their understanding of war and humanitarian issues. Among the 69 students (Autumn 2010, 24 students; Winter 2011, 23 students, and Spring 2011, 22 students), Ryan and Jay stood out as unique cases for comparison. In their final assignments, Ryan saw himself as a moral rescuer in the face of world hunger whereas Jay identified himself as a suffering victim kept in a refugee camp. In the following paragraphs, I discuss how war photography can be used to explore the ethical issues related to human experiences. The discussion is subdivided into three aspects, as follows: 1) How war photography engages students emotionally and activates their affective memories; 2) How

affective memory helps to construct students' understanding of distant suffering, and 3) How students' personal backgrounds structure their 'constitutions' as co-spectators of distant suffering.

### **War Photography Engages Students Emotionally and Activates their Affective Memories**

The findings indicate that war photography engages students emotionally and activates their affective memory (a term that will be discussed later) as a result of the transitive function of photography. Retrospectively, I made one major change in each of the quarters (Autumn 2010, Winter 2011 and Spring 2011) with the aim of improving the teaching and learning outcomes. In Autumn 2010, I revised the assignment design after the mid-term test in response to students' requests, since a majority stated that they would prefer to have a clearer set of assignment guidelines. Hence, a series of three concrete steps was formulated:

1. Select one war photograph by James Nachtwey;
2. Explore the ethical issues related to the human experience shown in Nachtwey's photograph,  
and
3. Reflect upon the research finding.

In both Steps 2 and 3, I divided the task into three sub-steps (see Table 1).

Table 1 *Assignment Design for James Nachtwey's War Photography Paper*

Step	Description of the task
One	Select one war photograph by James Nachtwey
Two	Explore the ethical issues related to the human experience shown in Nachtwey's photograph <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explore the contextual issues that are reflected in the image shown in the photograph</li> <li>● Identify one key stakeholder who was responsible for/related to/suffered from the event</li> <li>● Investigate the ethical disposition that lay behind the stakeholder's moral and/or political action</li> </ul>
Three	Reflect upon the research finding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create a standpoint relating to this humanitarian dilemma</li> <li>● Write up the paper with these course concepts in mind: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who am I in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?</li> <li>2. What do I see in the context of war, violence and peace?</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

- 
- 3. Where do I stand in the context of humanitarian dilemmas?
  - Themes for consideration:
    1. Humans/Humanity
    2. Human Rights/Human Wrongs
    3. (War) Conflict/Consequences
    4. Humanitarian Acts/Obstacles to Humanitarian Behaviour
    5. Bystander (Witness)/Accomplice
    6. Rejecting Violence/Non-violence/Quietism
    7. Civilian /Combatant
    8. National Interests/Universal Values
    9. Patriotic/Unpatriotic
    10. Glory & Heroism/Wounded & Traumatized
- 

The students' works were diverse; some were unique. No generalizations could easily be made. A few students chose not to follow the guidelines, coming up instead with some interesting interpretations of the photographs selected. These revealed a strong personal emotional involvement, with some examples, such as Ryan's *The Darfur Effect* and Jay's *Different Ethnicity, But Human*, independently confirming the affective impact of war photographs on students.

**Ryan sees the grains of survival.** As a way of preparing the students to work on the paper, I scheduled a 20-30 minute meeting with each of them individually, during which we discussed their proposals. The proposal addressed five items: 1) the student's choice of photograph; 2) a potential topic; 3) a tentative thesis statement; 4) the purpose of the research, and 5) a list of references.

Ryan chose an image entitled *Grains of Survival*. It is a photograph from a photo essay entitled *The Tragedy of Sudan* (Nachtwey, 2004a). The photo essay was published as *Time* magazine's cover story. The description of the image is as follows: "Darfuriian women attempt to salvage grain that has fallen from bags dropped by a World Food Program Plane" (Nachtwey, 2004b). (James Nachtwey Studio refused permission to reproduce this photograph.)

During our meeting, Ryan recalled his rewarding experience of meeting Nick Clooney in his high school years. Nick Clooney, the father of actor and director George Clooney, is active in

publicizing the situation in Darfur. As a result of this incident, Ryan developed an understanding that he himself could become actively involved with humanitarian issues.

**Jay sees the deportees meeting in a refugee camp.** Jay comes from a very different background. I was impressed by Jay when we met for the individual meeting because he was carrying a copy of *Inferno* (Nachtwey, 1999) with him. *Inferno* is a major publication of Nachtwey's work, documenting crimes against humanity during the 1990s. Weighing 9.8 pounds and measuring approximately 15 x 11 inches, the book is both heavy and difficult to carry. Jay chose to borrow *Inferno* (Nachtwey, 1999) from the library when all the other students looked up Nachtwey's photographs online.

Jay is an international student from South Korea. During a previous assignment, I was particularly struck by his opinions on war. As a member of a family suffering from the legacy of the Korean War, Jay regards the conflict as fighting between relatives and friends. Jay believes that he may be conscripted into the military to fight against his will.

In the term paper, Jay chose a photograph depicting Kosovar deportees. The photo was taken in Albania during the Kosovo War in 1999. The description of the photograph is as follows: "Albania, 1999 – Kosovar deportees meeting in a refugee camp" (Nachtwey, n.d.). (James Nachtwey Studio refused permission to reproduce this photograph.)

### **Affective Memory Helps to Construct Students' Understanding of Distant Suffering**

Owing to the transitive function of this medium, the interpretation of war photography activates the affective memory. In return, the affective memory helps to construct the way students develop their emotional, intellectual and/or moral responses to distant suffering. I have adopted the term "affective memory" from a renowned acting theorist, Constantin Stanislavski (1863–1938), whose work has been studied in order to develop methods for applying empathy in other fields (Goodwin

& Deady, 2013). Stanislavski developed a system based on fifteen components; by asking actors to use their own life experiences to imagine what the life of their character might be like, the aim was to help immerse themselves in a particular role. Affective memory is one of the key components of the system.

Affective memory consists of sense memory and emotion memory, both of which run parallel to one another (Stanislavski, 1936; cited in Goodwin & Deady, 2012, p. 130). In essence, both memories process the “imagining” nature of recall (Goodwin & Deady, 2012), as memory is “an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude toward a whole active mass of past experience” (Le Doux, 2002 cited in Blair, 2008, p.74; cited in Goodwin & Deady, 2012, p. 130). I noticed that affective memory helped to construct Ryan’s and Jay’s responses to Nachtwey’s photographs: Ryan took a moral stance as rescuer in the face of a humanitarian issue, whereas Jay tried to make sense of war through the eyes of a victim.

**Ryan takes a moral stance as rescuer in the face of world hunger.** Ryan entitled his paper *The Darfur Effect*. He chose to look at the Darfur issue in the context of world hunger. Speaking of his own transformative experience, Ryan believed that the average citizen can make a difference when it comes to humanitarian issues. His thesis statement was:

James Nachtwey’s image of Darfur victims goes beyond illustrations of the Sudanese’s constant struggle for food and shelter. It also demonstrates the importance of raising awareness of the genocide as well as transforming my perspective on the way I view critical issues in life.

In *The Darfur Effect*, Ryan reflected on how he was enlightened, and how he enlightened others, on the severity of the Darfur situation. Five elements emerged in his reflection: 1) identifying himself as an American; 2) engaging with concepts of human rights; 3) holding

Christian values; 4) regarding George Clooney as a role model, and 5) responding to the call from Nick Clooney.

Ryan wrote:

As an American, I have a hard time trying to put myself in the shoes of these poor Sudanese citizens who fight every day to survive because I cannot fathom how terrifying and stressful it must be.

In addition, Ryan believes in human rights. He wrote, ‘As human beings, every individual should be treated equally and nobody should have to worry about when he or she will eat their next meal’. He derived these concepts from two sources, *The Office of the High Commission for Human Rights* and *The World Book*.

Ryan was forthright about his personal beliefs grounded in Christian values:

I have always been taught to help those less fortunate than me. In this case, the people of Darfur need us more now than they ever had. Growing up as a Christian, the Golden Rule has always been relevant in my life. The Golden Rule states that one should treat others as one would like others to treat him or herself. I believe this rule is the backbone to the concept of human rights.

He also regarded George Clooney as a role model:

George Clooney is a great role model for people to follow in taking a stand for Darfur. In addition to speaking to the United Nations, George Clooney has spoken on Oprah, spoke at a rally in Washington D.C, and even made a documentary advocating action from the United States.

Even more importantly, Ryan treasured his rewarding experience of meeting Nick Clooney. Ryan expressed in detail how he had developed an understanding of himself as an active participant in a humanitarian issue:

George Clooney's father, Nick Clooney, is also very active in speaking out about Darfur. In fact, he came to my high school and spoke on the issue. He has been to Darfur and has seen first-hand how awful it is. He showed us pictures that he took and was very instrumental in making us realize we as high school students can make a difference. After Nick Clooney came to my school, I called my congressman and left him a message saying he needs to fight for Darfur in Congress. I did this three days in a row and it made me feel like I made a difference. I know I did not do much, but the intention was influential because lots of the students from my school called our congressman. In 2006, Representative Boehner was assigned a grade of D based on voting records according to "The Genocide Intervention Network--Darfur Scores". However, the following year, after I, along with my classmates, called, he improved his score to a C. I realize that this may just be coincidental, but Nick Clooney emailed our school and thanked us for helping make a difference in Darfur. This experience proved to me that I, [the name of the student], can make a difference.

Ryan believes that the average citizen can make a difference. He elaborated on this view by giving concrete examples:

Whether it is donating money, collecting money to donate, passing out flyers to educate others, or just creating a stand and informing others on the issue, one person can make a difference.

It was because of this rewarding experience that Ryan recognized there was a "leader" in him. He emphasized how important it is to be informed. Being informed has enabled him to become a leader:

Learning about the Darfur issue not only has made me passionate about helping the citizens being mistreated, but it also has helped me take a strong stance on the issue. Before

becoming informed on the situation in Darfur, I would have defined myself as a person who is a follower. I did not like creating controversy and I did not say anything when I disagreed with someone. The story of Darfur made me sympathize with those affected and I really wanted to do something to help them. While some of my friends thought I was being extreme when I called my congressman, I disregarded their comments because I felt like it is the least I could do to try and help the situation. I became passionate on the issue and began telling my immediate and extended family about the issue along with friends from other schools. For the first time in my life, I was passionate about an issue and I stood up for what I believed. Through this process, I changed from a boy to a young man. I became the initiator instead of the follower. I now try to empower others by making them realize that they can make a difference.

**Jay makes sense of war through exploring the idea of victimization.** Jay chose a photograph depicting Kosovar deportees meeting in a refugee camp. He wrote:

During that time, Albanians, who were the majority population in Kosovo, were sent to a refugee camp. The picture was taken in the refugee camp. In the picture, two men facing the camera are standing beyond the barbed wire fence. They are looking in opposite directions. On the other side of the fence, there is another person who is facing the two men. He is holding hands with a man on the other side. [...] Through this picture, it seems that war is not just about killing people. It is a complicated thing. It is difficult to understand rationally. Sometimes it is dealing with people's emotional pain, not only physical pain that can be easily revealed through the images.

I believe Jay's unique perspective on war caused him to read *Inferno* (Nachtwey, 1999) very carefully. He wrote:

When I read the book published by James Nachtwey entitled *Inferno*, I saw some pictures from Kosovo. And I realized that war was mostly about survivors, not just about massive destruction or casualties. As shown in Nachtwey's photo, the war is not only about casualties of people but it is for people who have survived. [...] So this photo is different from other war photographs that I have seen. It is not about cruelty or the destruction of war. It touches the human senses.

Jay made an emotional connection with the images shown in Nachtwey's photograph. The Kosovar deportees reminded Jay of the pain that his family has endured since the end of the Korean War:

However, it is interesting that this picture reminds me of things back in Korea. Korea is a place where the cold war is still going on. Even though I have never experienced war, I have a better sense than many others who do not have any experience with war. I heard about war a lot due to the environment I was in. This picture especially reminded me of a story that I had forgotten. The media usually focus on the brutal things about war. The media do not focus on families or survivors in war. The story has been vague. The story that I heard from my father is about my uncle whom I never meet. I did not hear this story until I got into high school. No one knows about my uncle except my father's siblings. Due to the South Korean government's policy, my family had to cancel my uncle's official record in order to be able to go abroad freely. This story started at the beginning of the Korean War. It has been tearing my family apart for about 60 years. Unfortunately, my uncle was unable to cross the border between North Korea and South Korea during the war. My family does not know whether he is alive or not. The only thing that we can do is register with the government for possible reunions. My family has not yet had a chance to reunite with my uncle. We just keep trying without knowing whether he is alive or not. It

seems to me that my story is very similar to those people shown in the picture. Men were separated from one another because of war.

Jay entitled his paper *Different Ethnicity, But Human*. In the rest of the paper, he used the Kosovo War as an example to make sense of war, relying on six academic sources to develop his moral and intellectual inquiry. Two (*Inferno* (Nachtwey, 1999) and *Ethnic Cleansing in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe* (Vardy & Tooley, 2003)) relate to background information on the Kosovo War, while three (*Is Milosevic game plan on schedule?* (Brown, 1999), *Images of War: Content Analysis of the Photo Coverage of the War in Kosovo* (Nikolaev, 2009), and *The Kosovo War: A Recapitulation* (Webber, 2009)) relate to the conflict's political aspects. The last source (*Narratives of Victims and Villains in Kosovo* (Zdravkovic-Zonta, 2009) touches on the concept of victimization.

For Jay, war is a way for a few elite people to gain advantages. Believing that war can never be fully understood by survivors, especially not those who also happen to be the victims of war, Jay used his paper to explore extensively the idea of victimization. He addressed how Albanians and Serbians kept using their pasts to make sense of their present, to deny others and to justify their own violence. In the conclusion, he wrote:

In many different ways, the Kosovo War had done many things that war could do for people. However, it is important to know that the survivors are the people who need to be cared for. It seems that people are focusing more on the casualties. It can be seen based on how the media work. They are more likely to focus on the number of casualties but not on the survivors. And also, it is heartbreaking that people do not understand why the war has happened. It is not just about discrimination. It is also about politics that give power to some elite people. War is often initiated by people who have taken power inside politics. It seems that people are being used. Only a few elite people get advantages from the war

because they can control people with their powers including controlling history or the media.

### **Students' Personal Background Structures their "Constitutions" as Co-spectators of Distant Suffering**

The ways in which Ryan and Jay constructed their perspectives on war and humanitarian issues were influenced by their personal and cultural experiences. For example, Ryan's account seems to suggest a viewer's position as a moral rescuer. He utilizes his rewarding transformative humanitarian experience in high school as a point of reference. He recalls how he actively participated in the Darfur issue. He responds to the image of starving Darfurians through the lens of world hunger. Identifying himself as an American who empathizes with human rights concepts and Christian values, and who respects George and Nick Clooney as role models, Ryan positions himself as a moral rescuer who believes that the average citizen can make a difference when it comes to humanitarian issues.

On the other hand, Jay seems to position himself as a suffering victim. He utilizes the enduring pain of sixty years of family separation as a point of reference. He looks at the image of Kosovar deportees through the lens of the manipulative powers of the elite. Identifying himself as a Korean, whose country bears the legacy of the Korean War, Jay is constantly reminded that he may be conscripted to fight his own relatives and friends against his will. Through his paper, Jay tries to make sense of war by addressing the long history of human brutality, the biased news coverage created by the media, and the voices of suffering war victims.

The difference between Ryan's and Jay's responses echoes what Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr (2001) believe: that culture "makes up what we do and what we value" (p. 7) and our personal, cultural experiences indeed "confine possibilities of understanding and action"

(Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001, p. 7). In that sense, the multicultural art education approach provides a relevant point of reference. As mentioned in the rationale for the *Ethnic Arts: A Means of Intercultural Communication* course, one of the key goals was to challenge students' own biases and increase their "multicultural competencies". According to Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr (2001), the learning activities of multicultural art education with social reconstruction as a goal centre on enabling students to look at the ways in which their own culture, as well as that of others, has helped to make them what they are from a critical perspective, and in addition to help them to understand that what has been socially learned can also be unlearned. Teachers can initiate learning experiences that enable students to gain multiple outlooks on how one constructs one's own perspective on war and humanitarian issues and how that construction is influenced by personal background. Hence, students are empowered to see "broader possibilities for ways of thinking about life and death and the choices for action available to [them]" (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001, p. 7).

### **Conclusion**

This paper has proposed a new and meaningful way to explore the affective impact of war photographs on students' moral and intellectual development. I used two unique cases of students to illustrate the strong personal involvement in students' selection and interpretation of war photographs. The findings confirm the hypothesis that war photographs can have a direct bearing on the judgments formulated by students about the world. An investigative process based on course work in the context of a 'humanitarian' visual culture curriculum such as this one can be relevant to students' lives. The actual process of selecting the photos means that the war photography engages the students emotionally and activates their affective memories. The affective memories, in turn, help to construct the students' understanding of distant suffering while

they are engaged in interpreting the photos. The findings revealed that war photographs can be a valuable educational tool that helps students understand more deeply their moral “constitutions” relating to war and humanitarian issues. They are able to develop moral values and intellectual inquiry based on their emotional responses to such images. In the light of the aspirations of multicultural art education, with its emphasis on social reconstruction as the main goal, I suggest art teachers can initiate meaningful learning experiences of/for life for students by drawing their attention to the suffering going on in the world. The students will come to understand more clearly how they and their fellow students are socially and culturally constructed, and to see the wider options or life choices available to them. Art education can thus play a unique role in creating “reverential conditions” in which students can study war photography, and encourage them to strive for a more just and equitable society.

In retrospect, this research study can be said to be beneficial in two ways. First, as a teacher-researcher as well as an international PhD student, I had the opportunity to implement a general education course that was designed to promote the ideal educational goal of the multicultural art education with social reconstruction as the goal. Second, I had access to a sample of undergraduate non-major students from a wide variety of backgrounds and life experiences, since The Ohio State University is one of the largest universities in the United States of America that hosts students from all over the world. Nevertheless, these two advantages also make me cautious about the important limitations of this paper. First, the findings are limited to two unique cases from a small-scale research study. It is therefore impossible to generalize the results. Second, and more importantly, the paper is based on research conducted with students studying within a multi-party, predominately Christian democracy, and primarily inspired by studies rooted in the multi-party democratic system of the United States of America. It would thus be difficult

to duplicate the research, especially if the academic institution is operating within a non-democratic, autocratic, fundamentalist or religious environment.

Nevertheless, taking a humanitarian approach to study war photographs still provides a meaningful starting point to explore their affective impact on students' moral and intellectual development. My research revealed that the students appreciated the course, as it covered controversial and important issues around the world. In fact, the students did not realize that so much suffering was taking place in the world. There was a positive change in their attitudes, as they became able to see things from other people's perspectives, in particular gaining knowledge of war while living in peace. Moving beyond this paper, future research should consider the following questions: 'How does a teacher determine what an atrocity is, relative to a student's background?' 'How does a teacher navigate the ethics regarding the level of distress they can subject their students to?' 'Would the same students have responded differently had they been shown different atrocities with more or less shocking or disturbing content?' 'Would the "affective transitivity" of the photographs have manifested itself in different ways if the atrocity was one that had appeared to encroach upon or directly challenge the student's personal belief system (religious, political, territorial etc.)?' The power that art teachers have to change the way students understand the world, themselves, and others, is potentially enormous. Coming to understand our moral constitutions through encountering images of atrocity will never be a risk-free. However, if undertaken respectfully and sensitively, it has the opportunity to represent a significant step in allowing us to more fully comprehend our shared humanity.

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### **About the author**

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APJAE, 14(5), 1-30

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## Appendix: The Course Syllabus of *Ethnic Arts: A Means of Intercultural Communication*

### **Rationale**

In this country, due to social, political, historical, and cultural inequities, many individuals and/or groups are disenfranchised or empowered on the basis of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, and geographic location to name a few. This form of inequity or privilege is influenced by and influences construction, production and consumption of visual culture. This course has been constructed to confront and address the issues raised through the exploration of visual culture in the hope of challenging our biases and discriminatory practices within our society, which hinders democracy and social justice. This course provides opportunities for students to focus and communicate their learning and development to increase their multicultural competencies as national and world citizens.

### **Course Description**

In this course, we will critically investigate personal, national and global identities. Personal and communal narratives surrounding visual culture define and construct meaning in our everyday lives. Visual culture (which includes both visual art and popular media) is investigated as a site through which social and cultural definitions, norms and values, and expectations are reinforced, constructed as well as challenged. The goals for this course are to develop students' skills in writing, reading, critical thinking, and oral expression and foster an understanding of the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture(s) of the United States.

### **Learning Objectives**

*This course is designed to facilitate student learning and meet the goals and objectives by providing opportunities to:*

- Analyze personal identity (through its many components) and its construction as it determines everyday behaviors and choices.
- Identify and examine ideas and issues, values and beliefs found in visual media.
- Interpret contemporary social and political views influencing the production and the consumption of visual culture.
- Investigate conditions of change impacting visual culture: education, technology, economics, political and more.
- Improve critical thinking skills through careful description, analysis, interpretation and evaluation of readings, videos, presentations, and fieldtrips.
- Refine skills in inquiry methods, expository writing and oral communication.

***Art Education 367.01 is a GEC (General Elective Course) that fulfills the requirements for: Second Level Writing, Art/Humanities, and Social Diversity.***

### **Required Texts/Supplies**

- Text Book: *The World is a Text*, 3rd Edition
- A style sheet chosen from the following:
- *American Psychological Association*,  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
- *Chicago, Modern Language Association*  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

### **Student Responsibilities & Course Policies**

1. **Attendance:** As the course involves in-class writing, discussions, media presentations, and field trips, regular and timely attendance is required. **All absences require an e-mail to the instructor explaining**

**the reason for the absence, preferably before the class meeting.** In order for an absence to be excused, a student must provide appropriate documentation (i.e., a medical excuse from your doctor) and/or have the instructor's approval (i.e., family emergencies, funerals.) **A student's final course grade will be reduced by half a letter grade for each unexcused absence that occurs.** A student can fail this course due to poor attendance. It is the student's responsibility to meet with the course instructor to discuss extended periods of absence due to medical problems. Three (3) incidents of unexcused tardiness and/or leaving class early equals one unexcused absence.

2. **Guidelines for Class Discussions:** Students are expected to use appropriate terms and language within all class discussion. Racial slurs, derogatory naming or remarks disrespectful of the rights and dignity of "others" will not be tolerated. Beliefs and worldviews divergent from yours may be shared; respect for those differences is to be maintained within the classroom.
  3. **Class Participation:** Active participation in classroom activities, discussions, and fieldtrips is a course requirement and counts for 10% of the final course grade. Class participation is evaluated daily. Therefore, excessive absences and highly inconsistent participation will impact class participation grades negatively. Quality participation includes consistent attendance, obvious preparation for class, asking pertinent questions and offering relevant comments, taking notes, actively engaging in classroom discussions and other activities, working constructively in large and small groups and submitting assignments on time.
  4. **Rewriting Assignments:** Students may choose to rewrite all papers that were handed in on time once. All rewrites are due **ONE WEEK** from the date your original paper is returned from the instructor. If the rewritten paper shows **significant improvement**, the grade may be improved up to one letter grade (e.g., a C becomes a B). *There is no makeup or re-do for leading a discussion. There is no rewrite for the final paper. Students cannot rewrite any paper that was handed in late.*
  5. **Late Assignments:** **Assignment grades are reduced by 1/2 a letter grade for every weekday an assignment has not been handed in after the assigned due date.** Late assignments can be handed in at the beginning of class on scheduled class days, during office hours, or in the instructor's mailbox. Written assignments cannot be handed in as e-mail attachments unless a student has received the instructor's prior approval.
  6. **Returning Graded Assignments:** Papers will be returned two weeks after the instructor receives papers. Papers are typically returned during regular scheduled classes. Final papers will be available for pick up in the art education office, 258 Hopkins.
  7. **E-mail :** E-mail is used as a means of communicating with students about the course. E-mail is sent to your Ohio State email account.
8. **Plagiarism:** Copying and claiming someone else's words, ideas, or works (i.e., essays, term papers, in part or in full) as your own is considered plagiarism. A proper reference style should be used when using words or ideas of other people. Suspected cases of plagiarism must be reported immediately to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. The Committee regards academic misconduct as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that range from probation to expulsion. **If in doubt, credit your source.** Be sure to consult the course instructor, if you have questions about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, or collaboration.
9. **Students with Special Needs/Disabilities:** If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact me to arrange an appointment as soon as possible. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs and explore potential accommodations. I rely on the Office for Disability Services for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. If you have not previously contacted the Office of Disability Services, I encourage you to do so.

Papers should describe, analyze and interpret visual culture forms and practices, their impact on cultural identities, and how they reflect and/or reinforce societal values. Do not write a paper that is only descriptive (i.e., a book report) or based on unsupported opinions; A successful paper goes beyond descriptive and personal opinions by presenting clearly expressed ideas and a well-developed arguments substantiated with citations and examples.

### ***Paper Style and Format***

All written assignments completed outside of class must be typed, meet required length, and should include:

- A cover page with title, your name, course title and assignment title and date.
- A descriptive title for the paper.
- Page numbers on all pages
- Left and right margin: no larger than 1.5"; Top and bottom margin: no larger than 1.0"
- Use 12 point Times or Times New Roman font
- Double-space all lines, except quotes over 40 words, which must be single-spaced and indented one-half inch.
- Spell check, proof read, and **staple (plastic coversheets)**.
- Choose one of the following style sheets and follow it consistently: *American Psychological Association, Chicago, Modern Language Association.*

### ***A. In-Class Written Assignments / Participation (10%):***

Students are required to write in-class assignments related to course readings, class discussions, and/or other assigned activities. These assignments are designed as opportunities to develop specific writing techniques, to improve critical thinking skills, and to explore course content topics without the pressure of a letter grade. These assignments are graded pass/fail. If the assignment is missed, it may not be made up and credit will not be received for the assignment.

### ***B. Site Paper/Site Presentation (15%):***

In this assignment, you will need to visit (in person) a cultural site, observe its characteristics, gather information (brochures, photos, etc.), write a 3-page typed, double-spaced paper, and give a short presentation. Your paper should demonstrate how visual images contribute to a sense of "place" and should explain how these images relate to the individuals who visit the site, the immediate community and the larger social/cultural conditions. This assignment can be carried out as follows:

- Choose a place about which you have some knowledge, familiarity and experience, or about which you would like to learn more.
- Visit that cultural site and gather visual materials and information for analysis in your class presentation and paper.
- Using the course concepts, effectively describe the site (The space, artifacts, arts, aesthetic focus, etc.), critically reflect upon how the site's sense of "place" is constructed from both what is present *and* absent (questions of representation) analyze its connection to its cultural context and interpret how the site is culturally significant at different levels (personal, community, national and/or international). *Suggested* sites might include:

#### **Galleries and Museums:**

- OSU Multicultural Center: Ohio Union 4<sup>th</sup> floor
- *OSU Wexner Center For the Arts*
- OSU Hopkins Hall Gallery
- OSU Exposures Gallery 292.9983
- OSU Hale Black Culture Center 292.0074
- The Ohio Craft Museum: 1665 W. Fifth Ave. Columbus, OH 614.486.4402; Free admission and parking

- Columbus Museum of Art: 480 E. Broad St. Columbus, OH 614.221.6801; \$4 suggested student admission; \$3 parking; Thursday evening free admission.
- Cultural Arts Center: 139 W. Main St. Columbus, OH 614.645.7047
- King Arts Complex: 867 Mt. Vernon Ave. Columbus, OH 614.252.5464
- Ohio Arts Council Riffe Gallery: 77 S. High St. Columbus, OH 614.644.9624
- Ohio Historical Center: I-71 & 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. 614.297.2300

### **C. Event Paper (5%):**

Students will attend 1 event that is pre-approved by instructor. This event can be a gallery exhibition, concert, and lecture, celebratory event that is not of one's cultural group. The purpose is to surround oneself with difference. Review OSU News, Wexner Center, Multicultural Center's Calendar, Hale Center, to mention a few options, for programming events. A one page paper that includes a description of event (where, when, what, who, and why), as well as what did you learn.

### **D. The Visual Culture Producer Paper (15%):**

People are engaged everyday in making aesthetic decisions and constructions. We are not simply consumers of visual culture, but are also continuously engaged in making aesthetic decisions that reflect our personal identity and/or are significant to ourselves, our families and/or communities.

The Visual Culture Producer Paper requires you to prepare and conduct an interview with someone you select regarding his/her form of cultural production. Who you select to interview as well as your question strategies and completed paper should clearly relate your interview data to the larger goals of the course (i.e., the intersection of social/cultural identity and visual culture). You are encouraged to define "making" broadly. For example, collecting, decorating, performing are all forms of "making" that do not necessarily result in a "new" object.

- Write a 3-page, typed, double-spaced paper describing aspects of the producer's identity relevant to your analysis. Always include the artist's name. Other relevant information could include his/her: age, ethnicity, gender, place of origin, sexual orientation, training (professional and/or self-taught), etc. Discuss the relationship between the producer's work and his/her interests, satisfaction, practice, beliefs and values. Be cautious not to objectify the person you interview and continuously reflect upon how to construct your writing in such a way as to create space for your visual culture producer's voice and agency.
- Analyze what the producer makes or does (practice, product and/or process). What are the most common themes/ideas in his/her work? How do his/her values and beliefs inform his/her visual creation and/or its function?
- Analyze the visual form/practice and its relationship to the producer's life experiences. What are his/her social and cultural affiliations? How did s/he get started making things? Why does s/he continue to make things? Why is making such visual works enjoyable/important? How does s/he relate personal identity to the work created? How does the producer's work fit into his/her cultural traditions and changing cultural practices (Traditional, Transitional, or Transformative Arts)?
- Considering the course concepts, interpret the significance of the visual culture producer and his/her work. (What have you learned from the artist and his/her work? How has the producer and his/her work influenced your ideas about visual culture? Specifically, what are the most important issues that influence understanding and appreciation of visual media? (e.g. aesthetic, cultural, economic, environmental, gender, historical, political, racial, sexual identity, and/or social issues)

### **E. Final Paper/Presentation (45%):**

Write a 5-7 page, double-spaced paper describing, analyzing, and interpreting a cultural form or practice in North America. Your paper should follow the paper format guidelines outlined in the course syllabus. Relate your topic to one of the following ten themes:

- Architecture and Dwellings
  - Art, Aesthetics and Culture in Everyday Life
  - Naming and Cultural Diversity
  - Visibility and Invisibility
  - Religion and Spirituality
  - Ritual, Celebration and Festivals
  - Visual Culture and the Body
  - Visual Culture and Environment
  - Visual Culture and Identity Construction (e.g., age, gender, race, sexual orientation)
  - Visual Culture and Narrative
- Analyze how the form expresses, reflects and/or reinforces individual or group identity (interests, attitudes, beliefs, and values).
  - Interpret the immediate conditions and the broader contextual issues (social, historical, technological, political, economic, educational, etc.) influencing the producer/consumer, the form and/or practice, and the community.
  - Critically evaluate and reflect on the significance of your interpretation. Be self-reflective; include a discussion of your own cultural/ethnic heritage and your beliefs, values and opinions.
  - Support your interpretation with references from at least **5 resources**: course readings, interviews, books, journals, video, internet, etc. (Please note: No more than one of the five resources can be a website.)
- **The Final Paper Proposal & Outline of Argument (10%)**
    - The Final Paper Proposal consists of four paragraphs describing your main topic (and related topics), your tentative thesis, your purpose, and your research strategy.
    - The Outline of Argument consists of single sentence statements of a thesis, supportive reasons, information, examples and a conclusion.
  - **The Rough Draft (10%)**
    - The Rough Draft develops the Outline of Argument and Proposal into a complete working draft with a bibliography.
    - The Peer Review is designed to help you write a paper that is clear and concise; the peer evaluator's constructive suggestions are beneficial in this process. Evaluation criteria will be given in class.
  - **The 7-page Final Paper & Presentation (25%)**

The Final Paper Presentation consists of a 5 minute discussion of the student's final paper. Presentations will be assessed on content, delivery, and presentational aids.

    - **Content:** The content of a presentation must address the assignment criteria for the paper. An introduction should state clearly your purpose in the presentation (to inform, to demonstrate, to convince, etc.) and your position (thesis) regarding that topic. Your ideas should be sequenced to lead the audience to a significant understanding of the major ideas addressed in your paper. A summary of ideas at the end can be accomplished in any number of ways, but should engage the audience to reflect upon the issues raised.
    - **Delivery:** Delivery is assessed primarily on organization and preparation. An outline of your argument should be prepared for the instructor. You may use the outline or note cards to organize/integrate the content, the presentational aids and the strategies for involving class members in a brief discussion or activity. Your presentation should be rehearsed with attention to appropriate speech, stance, eye contact, gestures, etc.). ***Do not read your paper. You should have a reasonable familiarity with the subject and your argument in order to "field" questions and opposing positions.***

- **Presentational Aids:** Use at least **one** of several forms of media to support and to enhance the content and delivery of your presentation. The following *suggested* aids should be carefully and meaningfully integrated into your presentation. (Actual objects, Audio, Visuals, Video clips, Internet, Digital Images)

### Evaluation

#### **Assessment Criteria for Writing Assignments**

Assignments in this course are evaluated using the following criteria:

- The paper's topic and thesis are clearly presented.
- The argument is effectively organized and supported by outside information. Style is appropriate to the purpose and the audience.
- Grammatical and mechanical elements are controlled (word use, grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraph transition and development).
- Specific criteria of the class assignment have been met.

#### **Grade Distribution**

- 10 pts Quizzes
- 10 pts Site Paper (3 pages)
- 5 pts Site Paper Presentation
- 15 pts Visual Culture Producer Paper (3 pages)
- 5 pts Event Paper (1 page)
- 10 pts Final Paper Proposal and Outline
- 10 pts Final Paper Rough Draft
- 20 pts Final Paper (7 pages)
- 5 pts Final Paper Presentation
- 10 pts Participation in classroom activities, discussions, and fieldtrips

#### **Grading Scale**

Total of all Assignments = 100 points

Final course grade = Number of points earned/ 100 points

	A 93-100	A- 90-92
B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-83
C+ 77-79	C 73-76	C- 70-72
D+ 67-69	D 63-66	E 62-0