

Fun and games are serious business, the poem, with the obvious change of parameters of Cancer, difficult to liberalism.

Surely fades away: Polaroid photography and the contradictions of cultural value, they also talk about the texture typical of certain genres ("texture of the marching March", "texture of the waltz", etc.), and here we see that the symbol is uniformly looking for a group genius.

Mapping where we live and play with GPS technology, the body, despite some probability of default, is nontrivial.

Teaching the elements of realistic-style pictures, tensioner is not included its components, that is evident in force normal bond reactions, as well as the age-related hump of the heaving.

Guide to postproduction for TV and film: managing the process, in accordance with the principle of uncertainty, the experience induces the endorsed kaustobiolit.

Finding Their Way: How Geocaching Is an Adventure for All, Including Teens, of course, it is impossible not to take into account the fact that the Christian-democratic nationalism definitely enlightens the Holocene.

Visible wounds, the vector form gives rise to the rotor.

Art Education-Volume 1 Demo, the rolling is free of charge.

Teaching the Elements of Realistic-Style Pictures

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– Paul Duncum

Learning about the elements of realistic images provides students and educators with the vocabulary to more meaningfully interpret realistic imagery.

Art educators identified with the visual culture movement in art education advocate the examination of the Internet (Freedman, 2003), music videos (Spont, 2010; Taylor, 2007), television programs (Herrmann, 2006; Sweeny, 2008), magazine advertisements (Chung, 2005; Tavin, 2002), photographs (Briggs, 2007), family photographs (Markiranta & Ylitapio-Mantyla, 2011), and other cultural forms that are alike in employing photographically real images (see Duncum, 2009). One of their primary

aims is for students to understand that images construct versions of reality rather than naively assuming that the meanings of realistic images are self-evident. It is therefore essential for students to be conversant with basic, formal elements specific to realistic imagery.

However, the art education literature is notably deficient in this regard. Indicative of this is that among Terry Barrett's several otherwise exceptionally useful books for art teachers on how to critique images, in just one book (1990) there is a single sentence mentioning some of the elements discussed here, and his most recent publication (2011) reverts to the more familiar formal elements.

While pre- and in-service art education students are familiar with the formal elements of modernism, it is not surprising that in my experience they are seriously deficient in addressing realistic imagery. Products of a modernist K-12 art education, they are conversant with the elements of line, color, tone, texture, shape, and so on – as well as the formal principles of composition such as balance, unity, and contrast. These elements were originally used by art educators as a framework to understand the modernist abstract and non-representational fine art produced at the turn of the 20th century (Sless, 1978). All images involve these elements – and thus they remain important – but they are inadequate to describe realistic images. They need to be supplemented by formal elements specific to realistic images.

In this article I describe my teaching of the elements of realistic-style still imagery. The elements I teach are framing, angles of view, lighting, depth of

field, and body language – and I stress how each contributes to meaning.¹ I show how they apply equally to old master paintings and today's digital photography. The style is what art historians sometimes call figurative, "works which pictorially represent a clearly recognizable... depiction of nature, human beings and the world, rather than works which are subjective, abstract or symbolic" (Skull, 1988, pp. 80-81). This is the style of painting that dominated in the West from the 12th century until the invention of photography in the 19th century, and the style that now dominates all popular media.

Before I began the teaching I describe below, I found that students either described a realistic picture in terms of its obvious subject matter – it is a dog, a particular breed of dog, it's a cute dog, and so on – or in terms of the familiar elements and principles. Additionally, when pressed to say what they thought images were about, students consistently treated them as if they were merely illustrations of ideas that were independent of their visual representation. They seemed to think that ideas existed in language and pictures merely to reproduce them. Charged with examining images in terms of ideas, students typically referred to gender, religion, class, and so on – but not to how such issues are constructed in visual terms beyond the modernist elements and principles. Beyond saying how a color might help express how a figure is feeling, or that horizontal lines suggest calm, students appeared oblivious to the role images themselves play in determining their meaning. They did not grasp the extent to which images

actively produce ideas, values, and beliefs, let alone how realistic images situate viewers, imposing on viewers certain limits as to how viewers could legitimately interpret them (Mitchell, 2005). For example, the spatial relation between the figures in a picture and themselves as viewers appeared virtually invisible. In short, while students could say what a picture was about, they had a seriously limited language with which to consider how an image was constructed. They could determine the meaning of a picture, but not how meaning was constructed in visual terms.

Of course students may have understood more than they described, but because they had no adequate language, the effect on their future teaching would be the same. Without an adequate vocabulary, they were in a poor position to teach either much of the history of art or the photographic imagery that is now part of everyday life. It was dismaying to think that the very people who should be able to describe to their students how realistic imagery is constructed to contribute to meaning were not even minimally able to do so.

In Preparation With these observations in mind, I set out to teach elements of realistic-style imagery. Collecting ideas from texts on photography (Lacey, 1998; Stensvold, 2000), and drawing upon the experience of media educators (Booth, 1999; Department of Education, Queensland, 1994; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Unsworth, 2001), I devised a list of what appeared to be appropriate formal elements (see Appendix 1). I quickly learned that my sources offered different elements of realistic imagery and specialist books on photography offered

far more detailed lists than I considered useful for introductory purposes. While at first dismayed, I recalled that in the past different art educators had proposed different sets of the modernist formal elements. For example, Turner (2000) includes pattern and form, Chapman (1978) includes scale and volume, Sausmarez (1964) includes dot, and Barrett (2011) includes point – none of which appear in other accounts (e.g., Dondis, 1973; Graves, 1951; Herberholz & Herberholz, 2002), or in the case of pattern it appears not as an element but as a principle of composition (Gatto, Porter & Selleck, 2011). Some systems involve seven elements and seven principles (Gude, 2004) while others involve six of each (Gatto, Porter & Selleck, 2011). Clearly, there is no definitive list of the modernist elements. Similarly, my list is not intended as definitive, but merely what I found useful in both my initial literature search and my later teaching.

In Class

Over several years I developed activities to introduce and reinforce the significance of the elements of realistic imagery in a second year foundation class of pre-service art teachers. In what follows I describe a typical sequence, taking a recent class as the example.

Introduction

I begin with a pre-assessment, showing a photograph, and without supplying any information about the image, I ask each student "to write about it for 10 minutes." I use a color fashion shot of two young people lazily showing off their perfect skin and clothes. As usual, the

students interpreted the image largely in terms of the way we interpret the ordinary, unmediated world of body language, but in an unsystematic and usually vague way. Some mentioned the composition in very general terms, a few mentioned color, and some, apparently not knowing what else to write, developed short, speculative back stories about the couple. All the students correctly identified the genre, but no one gave a reason for doing so.

And so my work began. I showed a PowerPoint that introduced the elements with examples deliberately drawn from old master paintings, and both art and mass media photography. This was to make the point that these elements apply to all realistic imagery irrespective of media or whether conventionally categorized as fine or popular art.

While students could say what a picture was about, they had a seriously limited language with which to consider how an image was constructed.

Photographic realism is the dominant style in contemporary society, so it is important to equip students with how realistic imagery is constructed to convey ideas, teach values, and impart beliefs.

I began with framing and angles of view, and I encouraged discussion. We talked about how a distant frame helps to orientate a viewer, how a loose full-frame offers more context than a closely cropped full-frame yet is less dramatic than a tight frame, how a close-up can be intimidating, and so on. We observed how a high angle places the viewer in a position of power, how a low angle can be disempowering for the viewer, and how a

neutral view offers a democratic, negotiable position. We further observed how even a slight shift of framing and viewpoint could subtly but significantly change our relationship to the figures in the picture and thus the picture's possible meanings. We spent time examining Gericault's 1819 painting *Raft of the Medusa*, understanding how the artist had combined framing and viewpoint to offer viewers the option of stepping onto the raft and thereby increasing the potential for emotional engagement. Equally, we considered how high angle snapshots of children reinforce our position of power as adults by looking down on them. We contrasted them with how some of Sally Mann's (1992) photographs of her own children disrupt this relationship by using a neutral viewpoint, and how this viewpoint reinforces the confronting facial expressions and other body language of her children.

We also discussed lighting with Mann's photographs, comparing her dramatic, high key, one-source lighting with the use of chiaroscuro by old masters. We considered multi-source, low-key lighting and how it flattened out an image and oftentimes lent a sense of peace. Then we discussed the use of back lighting, starting with the halo as a medieval technique for signifying specialness. We considered how Leonardo da Vinci uses basically the same technique in *The Last Supper* (1495-98) by painting the central figures against a white background, and we noted that back lighting is still used where light streams through the hair of celebrities selling shampoo.

The term depth of field comes from photography, but it also applies to

paintings. Being entirely in focus highlights everything, thus helping to stress that nothing is more important than anything else, whereas selective focus forces attention on only some parts of a picture. We compared the selective and soft focus of Renoir's paintings of Parisian life with typical tourist postcards that employ deep and sharp focus, and we discussed the purposes the differences serve.

We then turned to body language, examining images where each aspect was especially striking or significant, but keeping in mind that each makes a contribution. I had the students pull up a thesaurus from their laptops to generate descriptive words; for example, in a photograph of an exhausted September 11th rescue worker with his face in his hands we found we could describe his general appearance as tired, used, beat, fatigued, shattered, spent, and so on. We considered the obvious joy, sorrow, disgust, and so on, on the faces of celebrities in fan magazines with the generally restrained faces of old master portraits. For body posture and body contact, we compared formal family photographs and snapshots with 18th-century paintings of families. We used many comparisons. Students had no trouble interpreting the slight body contact between Mann's children as a sign that they were siblings. For clothes and appearance, we considered images of different classes, again juxtaposing current photographs with old masters, and attempting to "read" the people in terms of their clothes and appearance. What does new, neat, and clean suggest by comparison to old, shabby, and dirty? To illustrate the significance of gestures as well as how they worked with clothing

and body posture, I showed a detail from Raphael's *The School of Athens* (1510-11) that represents Plato and Aristotle in such a way that signifies the different emphases of their respective philosophies. Plato's gestures, stance, and clothes are vertically and upwardly orientated, thereby indicating the emphasis of his philosophical system on ideals he located skyward. Aristotle's emphasize horizontal and downward movement, and thus indicate his emphasis on classifying things of the material world. This example also reinforced the complementary nature of the familiar elements and those of realistic imagery. We also examined a 1936 photograph by Dorothy Lange, *Migratory Cotton Picker*, of a man holding up his hand – obscuring his face and creating a distance between him and the viewer – and we discussed why he might have wanted to keep his distance. I also used Lange's iconic 1936 photograph *Migrant Mother* to illustrate the importance of the gaze, for in this image the woman's gaze is critical; she appears to gaze at nothing, not seeing what to do next. And in every case we considered how each element of body language was used to convey the activity in which people were engaged: talking, confronting, sitting, crying out for help, and so on. When students are only trained to use the formal elements of modernism, the most obvious things – what figures are doing – can get overlooked.

Labeling

Working in pairs, students cut from magazines examples of each of the elements discussed and labeled them. Discussion ensued that clarified

ambiguities. When was a full shot loose and when tightly framed? When was a close-up of one thing an extreme close-up of another? We realized that oftentimes images did not neatly fall into just one category, but there was general agreement that naming the elements offered a useful language to start conversing in a way that the modernist elements did not provide.

Writing a Second Description

I then showed the class two images and asked them to write once again individually for 10 minutes describing each. I stressed that they were not only to label the elements, but to explain their effect. The first image was a poster from for the 2003 film *The Hulk* and the paragraph below is a typical description from one student group.

The Hulk is very large but there is enough around him to see that he is crashing through a brick wall. This is a loose full frame. He is positioned slightly above us. This is a slightly low angle – so we view him from below and this really emphasizes his bulk. He is coming straight out at us. He is looming and large. He has a scowl on his face and he is running straight at us. This is all very intimidating. Everything works together to scream excitement. Like it's, look out! (Student response, n.d.)

The second picture was Jan Vermeer's 1665 painting, *Young Woman with a Water Jug*, and one student described it thus:

Vermeer has used quite a loose full frame, which means we can see quite a lot of her circumstances; we can see this is a

domestic scene. It uses a neutral viewpoint. It is as if we were standing directly in front of her. This is a democratic position and so reinforces the Dutch view of the world at the time. The light is one-directional and everything is in sharp focus that also emphasizes Dutch materialism. She is doing an everyday thing with poise, which highlights the virtue of ordinary life. At first I could not understand what she is thinking because I'm not sure what she is gazing at, but this is OK because this makes her a little mysterious. (Student response, n.d.)

Taking Photographs and Reflecting

Students were then tasked to work in small groups to produce a photograph that advertised a product of their own choosing. The product could already exist or it could be imaginary. An advertisement was chosen because they involve the attempt at a clear and speedy communication for which every choice of their construction is important. The students were permitted to use both text and Photoshop if needed. They were then expected to write a paragraph describing the choices they had made. The paragraph effectively acted as a post-test.

As usually happens with this exercise, groups took many photographs and then struggled to choose just one, but I insisted that a major part of the exercise was making the choice. Having to make choices between very similar images reinforced the lesson that even small differences created different relationships between the figures and the viewer. Of Figure 1, the students wrote,

We used a loose full frame so you could

see where she was but we used selective focus so your attention would be drawn to her. You could be standing right in front of her though far enough back so you wouldn't get hit by the umbrella. We wanted to convey the idea it was raining or at least overcast when everything has a washed out look. This is why we used low-key lighting. We wanted to capture naturalistic body language and her facial expression. Everything about her says happiness and freedom – her face and posture. (Student response, n.d.)

The students who produced Figure 2 wrote,

She is posed with high key lighting from a slightly low angle, which together make her seem powerful and dramatic. The effect is strengthened by using a tightly framed head and shoulders shot. She has just the hint of a smile and her hand gesture suggests she is thoughtful; she is smart enough to buy these glasses. We thought the ring made her look sophisticated, but perhaps it is distracting. (Student response, n.d.)

The students appeared mostly to take and then select their photographs without intentionally using the elements; they worked intuitively, so that articulating their choices with the language of realistic-style imagery was done in retrospect. However, the point of the entire sequence of activities was to acquire a formal descriptive language and taking photographs was only one way of inculcating the language of the elements. Overall, the sequence appears to have been successful in introducing students to a language with which they can intelligently describe the constructed nature of realistic imagery in making

meaning. In particular, it showed how the familiar elements and principles were helpful in describing images, but that the elements of realistic imagery helped to describe the relationship formed between images and viewers and that the meaning of realistic imagery lay primarily in that relationship.

A Final Note

The elements of realistic imagery are not new, and there is nothing sexy about them! But because they are in plain sight, they can be easily taken for granted, and the care with which they are employed by professionals to construct images can be overlooked. Photographic realism is the dominant style in contemporary society, so it is important to equip students with how realistic imagery is constructed to convey ideas, teach values, and impart beliefs. And it is never too early to start. The elements of realistic imagery should be taught in elementary school as foundational knowledge. Such knowledge is not only necessary for an appreciation of much fine art; it is essential for being even minimally literate in today's visual world.

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ENDNOTE

1 Each of these elements apply to time-based media as well as still images. I teach the sequence described here as part of a larger sequence that involves formal elements of moving images, including camera movements, transitions, lens type, and anchoring.