

THE ROLES OF HAPTIC PERCEPTION  
IN VISUAL ARTS

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THESIS

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## **Abstract**

The term 'haptic' refers to a multi-sensory perceptual system through which we comprehend spatial, tactile, and kinesthetic elements of our environment in relation to our body's position and condition. This study investigates discourses about the roles that haptic perception plays in visual arts, with special attention being given to education. The study includes a historical review of assumptions regarding the haptic, as well as recent interpretations about the potential benefits of integrating haptic sensitivity into visual arts education.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduction of the Study

John Walker and Sarah Chaplin (1997) maintained that popular visual culture tends to “please more than the senses of sight and hearing,” (p. 149), and that multi-sensory experiences induce physical engagement, intellectual, and emotional investment in the popular visual culture that people experience. For example, *Nintendo DS* and *Wii*—two of the most popular gaming systems—engage both the visual and auditory senses of users as well as their tactile and kinesthetic interactions. Users play *Nintendo DS* by clicking or writing on its touch-sensitive screen. Certain *DS* games can sense the vocal responses of the users to the games. The *Wii* allows users to play simulated sports, such as tennis or boxing, using a motion-detection sensor. Multi-sensory media allows these popular visual culture sites to create distinctive sensory experiences, notably, tactile and kinesthetic sensations.

These types of sensory experiences are also used in popular visual culture for the purpose of enhancing the appeal of products to young consumers. I experienced this when I took my daughter to a nationally-franchised toy store, *Build-A-Bear Workshop*®. The store did not simply sell prepackaged stuffed dolls. It instead required consumers to participate in the process of making their own customized stuffed dolls. The playful doll-making process requires consumers to touch, hear, stuff, fluff, and dress their dolls. The doll-making process is visually enticing for young customers. More importantly, the store appeals to the tactile and kinesthetic senses of young customers and successfully encourages customers to purchase its products. As a parent and an educator, I appreciate the significance of Paul Bolin and Doug Blandy’s (2003)

contention that "Learners, particularly adolescents, are currently engaged in multi-sensory lifestyles that extend far beyond the visual" (p. 255). They further argued, "Orientations to educating people about the arts and culture that are vision-centric or focus only on traditional arts disciplines will fail students by preparing them in a much too myopic manner" (p. 255).

Many art educators have recognized the privileging of the visual as a problem (e.g., Belova, 2006; Brodsky, 2002; Halsall, 2004). Elliot Eisner (1994) raised crucial questions: "What kinds of stimuli do we fail to provide in schools, and what abilities do we, therefore, neglect developing? What are the long-term consequences of such neglect?" (p. 27). My analysis of cultural sites suggests that haptic perception has been neglected, and continuing to disregard the importance of the haptic could result in art educators failing to equip students to fully negotiate the increasingly multisensory aspects of contemporary visual culture.

The term *haptic* is inclusively defined as "the various sensibilities of the body to its position in the physical environment and to its condition" (O'Neill, 2001, p. 3-4). The haptic is considered to be multi-sensory in nature because it includes spatial, tactile, and kinesthetic perceptions. For example, a spatial sensation is likely to be intertwined with the kinesthetic and visual perception of a space. Touch commonly involves optic and kinesthetic perception as one feels the texture of an object by looking and caressing/tapping it at the same time.

Some scholars argued that the haptic is an active form of sensory perception that we intentionally manipulate in order to explore and generate meanings regarding matter and motion, whether or not we are conscious of our intent (Loomis & Lederman, 1986; Lederman & Klatzky, 1987; Seeley & Kozbelt, 2008). In the field of visual arts, Stephanie Springgay (2003) proposed, "Art becomes a synthesis of imagined and material experience" where various types of sensory stimulation are woven together (online resource). It is reasonable to state that all of the visual

arts involve this spatial, kinesthetic, and tactile relationship, and therefore, they all draw upon the haptic to a certain extent.

Perception is defined as an experiential and intellectual process, through which we organize and integrate sensory attributes of things in order to understand them (Schiffman, 1982, p. 1). In this study, I consider haptic perception as an individual's active perceptual sensibility that constitutes one's experience of comprehending, viewing, and making visual arts. I used *haptic* in this study as an umbrella term that refers to the totality of the tactile, spatial, and kinesthetic perceptual sensibilities, whereas *tactile* or *touch* refers specifically to the type of perception experienced through the skin.

## **1.2 Theories of the Haptic**

Theories of the haptic in the visual arts have a long but sporadic history. Several of these theories have directly impacted visual arts education, while others have been indirectly influential. Fiona Candlin (2006) argued that Alois Riegl, Erwin Panofsky, and Bernard Berenson were 19<sup>th</sup> century historians, who regarded the tactile as a primitive and limited sense that lacked "conceptual sophistication" (p. 149). She went on to argue that they privileged vision as an intellectual and enlightening perceptual system. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Victor Lowenfeld, a pioneer of visual arts education, opposed these assumptions by privileging the haptic. In his book *The Nature of Creativity* (1939), Lowenfeld proposed his theory of visual-haptic aptitude, positing a causal relation between personality types and the artistic development of children. He claimed that haptic aptitude contributes to genuine artistic expression. Herbert Read (1958) similarly argued that the haptic sense was the source of creative artistic drive and originated in one's inner self. Lowenfeld's and Read's concepts of the haptic encouraged visual arts educators

to regard self-expression as their foremost mission (Keel, 1956; Weider, 1983). Such romantic concepts of the haptic reflected Lowenfeld's and Read's inclination towards *Self-Expressionism*.

As the influence of modernism on visual arts education became stronger, its privileging of vision as a scientific, objective, and intellectual sense put an end to the influence of the haptic as an artistic drive (Candlin, 2006). The viewpoint of modernist art theory is that refined perception is a capability that allows for the contemplation of the pure visual *forms* of an artwork, which are not contaminated by any other bodily sensations, feelings, and ordinary life (Walker & Chaplin, 1997).

Theories of art that developed during the 1970s were influenced by phenomenology and feminism. The phenomenological perspective is that the body is considered to be “a source of consciousness, perception, and reason” (Peters, 2004, p. 14). Feminist artists similarly sought out women's lived, embodied experiences as the source of their art. These feminist artists often used haptic elements in their works to resist the vision-centrism of the male-dominant art world (Korsmeyer, 2004; Marks, 1999).

The range of theories described above show how concepts relating to the haptic have been both promoted and disparaged by different theorists. Although the recent reclamation of the theories of the haptic has influenced visual arts, I found little contemporary research concerning the perceptual aspects of the haptic in visual arts education. The differences between these theories suggest that I should approach haptic perception in a critical manner, and the lack of consensus enables me to challenge my personal assumptions concerning the haptic.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

Visual arts practices have been largely influenced by the linear, objective, and systemized worldview of Modernist and Enlightenment theories (Candlin, 2006). Candlin (2006) argued that such a positivist paradigm would be inadequate for studying the fluid, plural, and multi-faceted practices of contemporary visual arts. My observation also was that visual arts education based on dualistic and hierarchical models of perceptual systems was too limited to provide a complete understanding of the extensive multi-sensory features of contemporary visual culture.

Joyce Brodsky (2002) wrote,

We have become more accustomed to regard multi-sensory and interactive experiences with artworks as part of contemporary viewing practice, although emphasis on just seeing is still a prime factor in theoretical discussions about many contemporary genres. It is therefore necessary to be reminded of how all the senses but seeing were concealed in the discourse about practice and theory from the late Renaissance through modernism. (p. 100)

Brodsky highlighted the broad and multi-sensory perceptual engagements when viewing art. For example, Jackson Pollock's description of his creative process and techniques illustrated the importance of physicality involving a range of perceptual modes during art-making. During his interview with David and Cecile Shapiro (1990), Pollock (1990) said,

My painting does not come from the easel .... I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting. (p. 356, quoted by Brodsky, 2001, p. 100)

While Pollock is perhaps an exemplary case of art-making practices that intrinsically engage a range of perception, it has been argued that visual arts practice inherently involves interconnected senses rather than a single sense (Cazeaux, 2002; Parsons, 2007; Stewart, 1999). Similarly, Dominic Lopes (1997) and Fay Zika (2005) argued for the understanding of the holistic nature of visual arts practice, which engages artists and viewers in a multi-sensorial



manner. Recent trends in visual culture incorporate diverse sensory modes, media, and space, and demand broader perceptual sensibility.

Because haptic perception is a multi-sensory perceptual system, I believe it is a productive and logical point of origin for considering the implications of visual arts education concerned with multisensory aspects of contemporary visual culture. However, haptic perception has not been the subject of extensive research and theorizing to date. James Minogue and M. Gail Jones (2006) observed that whereas vision has been researched extensively in various disciplines the haptic sense remains an “untapped sensory modality” (p. 317). Elizabeth Aden (2008) noted that although theories of the body have received increasing attention, particularly from feminist artists and scholars, “touch has, until recently, been far less discussed” despite its critical role in contemporary visual culture (p. 2).

I argue that previous studies provide neither sufficient information about, nor practical application of, the haptic with respect to visual arts. In addition, the significance of the haptic in visual arts must be redefined and re-conceptualized in contemporary terms, with special attention being given to education. I hope that this study contributes to theorizing the role of the haptic in visual arts and incorporating potential benefits of the haptic sensitivity into visual arts education.

## **1.4 Definition of Terms**

### **1.4.1 Sense, Sensation, and Perception**

This study concerns haptic perception and its influence on the creation and critique of visual art. Before focusing attention on the haptic, however, it is necessary to clarify the terms *sense*, *sensation*, and *perception*. *Sense* is commonly understood as “channels of sensation” referring specifically to the five external sensory modes: vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell

(Gibson, 1966, p. 3). James Gibson (1966) argued that this definition of sense is limited because such a definition fails to include many other sensory experiences that are not externally apparent, such as the haptic perception gained through the nerves in skin, muscle, and joints (p. 49). He continued to argue that there is no exhaustive list of sensory modes that can be generally accepted.

*Sense* is also used as an encompassing term that includes *sensation* and *perception*. However, this definition fails to account for the important dual functions of the senses: the passive reception of sensory stimulation from the external world and the active perceptual ability to process forms of stimulation that arise from within the body (Gibson, 1966). It is difficult to distinguish between perception and sensation because we do not find the perception and its corresponding sensation disjoined (Gibson, 1966).

Passive reception of physical stimulations and the active perception that processes raw sensory data are interdependent and inseparable. However, the former can be seen as the sensation of “immediate and qualitative experiences ... [that are] produced by simple isolated physical stimuli” whereas active perception refers to “psychological processes whereby meaning, past experience, or memory and judgment are involved” (Schiffman, 1982, p. 1). Perception is considered to be a part of cognition (Glass, Holyoak & Santa, 1979; Neisser, 1976; Schiffman, 1982), and the assumption that bodily senses are purely physical, as opposed to intellectual, has been refuted by many scholars. John Dewey (1934) criticized the dualistic assumption that sensory experiences are merely processed stimulation. Eisner (1994) argued that conscious human beings utilize their sensory systems to actively select and organize “aspects of that world for cognition” (p. 26).

The theory of perception suggests that physical sensory systems that receive sensations are present from birth, but perception is modified by learning (Gibson, 1966; Schiffman, 1982). Efforts to develop perceptual learning range from refining sensory perception through training to developing various instructional methods to aid the processing of sensory data, such as association, classification, and interpretation (Gibson, 1966).

#### **1.4.2 Haptic**

The Greek origin of the term *haptic* is *haptikos*, which means "able to touch" (Monigue & Jones, 2006, p. 318) or "able to lay hold of" (Gibson, 1966, p. 97). The term *haptic* is sometimes used as a synonym for tactile (Gibson, 1966). It can also refer to a combination of the tactile and kinesthetic perceptual experiences, given that the haptic simultaneously involves textural sensation on skin as well as kinesthetic sensation from body parts (Gibson, 1966). For example, we subconsciously control the movements of our hands and/or fingers when we touch something. Maire O'Neil (2001) noted that Jean Piaget and Barbel Inhelder (1956) used the term *haptic perception* to designate the sense involved in understanding three-dimensional space, including tactile and kinesthetic properties. On the other hand, Gibson (1966) defined the haptic as:

The sensibility of the individual to the world adjacent to his body by the use of his body will here be called the haptic system .... It is not just the sense of skin pressure. It is not even the sense of pressure plus the sense of kinesthesia .... [The haptic is the sensory system through which one] feels an object [relative] to the body and the body relative to an object ... [and] by which ... men are literally in touch with the environment. (p. 97)

Since the haptic encompasses tactile, kinesthetic, and spatial perceptions, I will use the term tactile when referring specifically to textural perception gained through contact with skin in this study (Aldrich & Shelly, 2006).

Kinesthesia is defined as one of the various sensory systems or pathways through which we gain information (Block, Parris & Whiteley, 2008). This sensory system is stimulated by position, weight, or movement of the muscles, tendons, and joints (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). Kinesthetic sensibility can be regarded as “a second learning input system” that involves creating “mental representations for abstract concepts” (Block, et al, 2008, p. 460-461). In addition, the kinesthetic detects aspects of spaces, such as orientation and distance, and determines “size, shape...and spatial change” through motion (Renz & Nebel, 2006, p. 2).

Filipa M. Wunderlich (2008) noted that perception of spatial properties involves a range of sensory systems, particularly the kinesthetic and tactile. Wunderlich observed that the kinesthetic aids the perception of “direction, perspective, and scale,” and thereby assists our understanding of “body, space, and object in relation to each other” (p. 129). Furthermore, touch is also responsible for yielding the feeling of space and spatial qualities by involving “the whole body reaching out to the things constituting the environment and those things coming into contact with body” (p. 129).

Although the haptic can be explained by dividing it into tactile, kinesthetic, and spatial sensibilities as described above, it should be noted that these sensibilities are not readily separable. Research in neurology indicates that visual and haptic recognition of objects stimulates identical areas of the brain cortex (Sathian, Zangaladze, Hoffman, & Grafton, 1997; Deibert, Kraut, Kremen, & Hart, 1999; Zangaladze, Epstein, Grafton, & Sathian, 1999; Amedi, Malach, Hendler, Peled, & Zohary, 2001). For this reason, the haptic is considered to be a distinct, but simultaneous and interconnected sensory mode; it gains and processes information about texture, weight, pressure, vibration, temperature, wetness, space, and even the ambience of environments, and it involves a range of body parts, such as hands, feet, back, mouth, and

vestibular organs in the inner ears (O'Neil, 2001; Aldrich & Shelly, 2006). In this study, I will use the term *haptic* to refer to the combination of tactile, kinesthetic, and spatial perception, which constitute the active perceptual sensibility that is influenced by cultures and can be developed through education, whereas sensation primarily refers to purely neurological and natural responses to sensory stimulation.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 The Haptic in Literature**

Before narrowing the scope to the educational aspects of haptic perception that have the potential to enrich visual arts practice, I will provide a brief overview of the nature of haptic perception as it has been discussed in education and psychology. The haptic is often considered to be a secondary modality, whereas vision is widely accepted as the foremost intellectual perceptual system connected with cognition (Heller, 1991; Katz, 1989; Minogue, & Jones, 2006). By contrast, some scholars argued that the haptic is an active form of perception we intellectually and intentionally manipulate in order to explore and make meanings, rather than being simply a passive receptor of physical sensations (Katz, 1989; Kennedy, Gabias & Heller, 1982; Hatwell, Streri, & Gentaz, 2003; Lederman, & Klatzky, 1987; Loomis, & Lederman, 1986; McLaughlin, Hespanha & Sukhatme, 2002; Minogue, & Jones, 2006; Seeley, & Kozbelt, 2008; Shillito, Paynter, Wall & Wright, 2001).

However, scholars in the fields of education and psychology appear to concur regarding the introspective nature of the haptic (Darian-Smith, 1984; Katz, 1989; Sathian, 1998). David Katz (1989) contended that the haptic sense—particularly the tactile—provides information regarding the “innards of objects, whereas the eye, remaining fixed on outer surfaces, plays a lesser role in developing the belief in the reality of the external world” (p. 3). He continued, “Such basic concepts of physics as force, impenetrability, resistance and friction are rooted in touch” (p. 3). Furthermore, the haptic and tactile are often associated with instinctive and/or

affective perception, while vision is linked with analytic and/or logical perception (Block, Parris & Whiteley, 2008; Reid, 1984).

Haptic perception is similarly related to tacit knowledge rather than explicit knowledge. Michael Polanyi (1962) emphasized the tacit aspect of knowing and claimed that we know more than we can tell. The word *tacit* originates from the Latin *tacere*, meaning silent. Unlike explicit knowledge, which can be articulated using words and numbers, such as “scientific formulas, manuals, and recipes” (Ozdemir, 2008, p. 552), tacit knowledge refers to “something being understood or implied without being stated” (Jarvis, 2007, p. 203). Tacit knowledge comes in “muscles, intuition, emotions, values and beliefs” (Ozdemir, 2008, p. 552). We often gain such knowledge from “direct experience and action,” which is inseparable from bodily perceptions, particularly the haptic (p. 553). Given that tacit knowledge is “highly personal and difficult to formalize,” it appears that the knowledge and experience we acquire through haptic perception are not easily defined. Perhaps, one of the reasons is that there is little, if any, consensus about haptic perception.

Haptic perception is often considered to be an interrelated or multisensory perceptual system (Hiss, 1991; O’Neil, 2001; Piaget, & Inhelder, 1967), but some scholars distinguish between tactile and kinesthetic perception (Block, Parris, & Whiteley, 2008; Witkin, 1954). Their hypothesis is that the tactile is “an outer-directed sensory modality that corresponds to reliance on vision,” whereas the kinesthetic sense involves one’s inner-self rather than external contexts (Arnheim, 1983, p. 23).

Almost all theories of the haptic agree on the major point that haptic perception is a critical, primary sensory modality during infancy and early childhood rather than adulthood (Barbe & Milone, 1981; Bushnell, & Boudreau, 1991; 1993; Fraiberg, 1979; Mozingo, 1978;

Piaget, 1954; Piaget, & Inhelder, 1967). Some scholars have found haptic characteristics to be more pronounced among females than males (Witkin, 1954; Witkin, Dyk, Faterson, Goodenough & Karp, 1962), although some theorists argue that the association of the haptic with women is a culturally reinforced notion, not a physical phenomenon (Classen, 1998).

Haptic perception is difficult to substantiate, and there have been few empirical studies of the haptic to date. Most studies that focus on the haptic and/or tactile in visual arts are conceptual discourses (Berenson, 1930; Candlin, 2006; Fisher, 1997; Jolles, 2006; Lopes, 1997; 2002; Panofsky, 1927/1991; Perricone, 2007; Riegl, 1893/1992; 1996/2004; Springgay, 2003; Stewart, 1999; Zika, 2005). The majority of empirical studies of the haptic were intended primarily to help people with visual impairments understand the visual arts (Coster & Loots, 2004; Hinton, 1991; Rubin, 1977; Spitzberg, 1997; Vanda, 1982). For example, Judith Rubin (1977) coined the term “tactile aesthetics,” which she defined as a means of helping the visually impaired understand what she described as “their own kind” of artistic features of visual arts—exclusive to people with visual impairments (p. 371).

Several empirical studies have particular relevance for visual arts education. John Forrest’s (1991) study of the traditional American quilt demonstrated the use of multi-sensory inquiry methods in historical research concerning tactile artifacts. George Geahigan (1999) and Olga Hubard (2007) deliberately utilized the haptic sense for the purpose of promoting the bodily engagement of viewers with visual culture in museums through ‘imaginative’ multi-modal participation in critiques. Examples include encouraging viewers to imagine that they are in the space depicted in the painting, and that they are expressing their impressions of the artwork by moving their bodies. Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius (2004; 2008) advocated a pedagogy that utilizes bodily performance in order to promote critical thinking and social



activism. The ideas presented in these studies are valuable resources for multi-modal visual arts education, but they have seldom led to extensive discussions of the haptic.

Laura Marks's (1999; 2002) research illustrated the unique artistic features of the films of transnational artists through her notion of haptic vision. She argued that these artists' intercultural memories were expressed in a manner such that scenes stimulated the haptic sense, which contrasted with the approaches of Western films that are highly dependent on vision and spectacles. Stephanie Springgay (2008) reconceptualized touch as a means of connecting with others, which she calls "inter-embodiment" (p. 19). She provided personal narratives as a means of enabling participatory viewing of a video-essay<sup>1</sup>. Her composition of short narrative vignettes offered readers a vicarious experience of her growing understanding of, and sympathy with the people who were filmed in the video, meaning people whom she at first considered to be "others" and therefore outside her cultural experience. Marks (1999; 2000) stressed that the haptic is a type of perceptual sensibility different from vision expressed in film, while Springgay (2008) emphasized that touch can be a mode of empathetic viewing intended to reduce the emotional distance between the viewer and the viewed, which results from indifferent observation.

These studies provide valuable insights concerning the unique sensory and affective features of the haptic. However, the approaches employed in these studies are primarily oriented towards 'viewing' and 'critiquing' visual culture. Studies that provide analyses of the complexities of the haptic as practiced by both teachers and students who are involved in talking about, and making art in actual classrooms appear to be largely absent from visual arts education literature. A solid theoretical foundation is needed in order to properly examine the role of the

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<sup>1</sup>Video essay is defined as "a genre [that] situates itself between documentary film and video art" (Springgay, 2008, p. 18). The video essay discussed in Springgay's (2008) article is *The Palestine Trilogy* (2006) by B. H. Yael, an Israeli Toronto-based artist. This work is a series of three short documents depicting her troubled homeland.

haptic in visual arts and how it might be incorporated into visual arts education. It is thus necessary to review how the haptic has been traditionally defined in the visual arts, and why those definitions differ. This chapter will also consider the potential benefits that study of the haptic might bring to visual arts education.

The first section is a historical review of assumptions regarding the haptic, some of which remain influential in art history and visual arts education. The second section will review the philosophical traditions that led to suspicion, if not disdain, concerning the haptic.

Disparagement of the haptic originated in Western philosophy, beginning with Plato and continuing through Descartes and Kant. Such disdain of the haptic can be tied to modernist ocularcentrism. My discussion will examine recent anti-ocularcentric movements and focus on phenomenology, feminism, and the feminist art movement. The third section will present the haptic in a new light, which requires a critical reconsideration of the ocularcentric conventions inherent in contemporary visual arts education. I will review recent interpretations of the haptic and the possibility of integrating these perceptual aspects into contemporary visual arts education.

## **2.2 Myths of the Haptic in Visual Arts: A Historical Review**

### **2.2.1 The Haptic in Art History**

Tracing the haptic within the traditions of Western art history provides an overview of how the haptic has been conceptualized over time. The Austrian art historian Alois Riegl, one of the founders of formalism during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, asked “how and why styles of art come into being and change,” and he introduced the concept of the haptic in order to answer these

questions (Brush, 1994, p. 355). Riegl (1966/2004)<sup>2</sup> theorized that art has three primary purposes and listed them in hierarchical order: conceptual, decorative, and practical. He situated the conceptual function of art on the highest level because he thought that such a function sought to convey spiritual and intellectual matters. He argued that the decorative function of art exists solely for visual pleasure, which is the most ancient and basic intention behind the creation of art. Riegl thought that humanity has an innate need for decoration, and that the human visual perception is an essential element of the conceptual function of art.

Riegl (1893/1992) argued that the stylization of art was primarily due to human perceptual development and the inherent artistic urge to seek symmetry, proportion, and rhythm. He hypothesized that 3-dimensional works of art, such as sculptures, consist of haptic materials and reflect a primitive level of perception, while 2-dimensional works of art necessarily require the advanced capability to perceive and abstract reality. Riegl looked to ancient and classical art for support for his theories. He argued that the perceptual capabilities of ancient Egyptians were not fully developed because they used sculptural media to reproduce 3-dimensional objects in 3-dimensional space. On the other hand, Riegl believed that ancient Greek art reflected its creators' advanced perceptions because they were able to conceptualize 3-dimensional objects in 2-dimensional space. For instance, the existence of overlapping human figures on a Greek vase demonstrates the artists' advanced perceptual capacity to abstract 3-dimensional reality and represent it in 2-dimensional space. Although Riegl (1893/1992; 1966/2004) considered the haptic to be a profound human perception because it fulfilled practical needs, he regarded the haptic as a primitive level of perception and elevated optic perception above the haptic.

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<sup>2</sup> This book, *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, is the collection of Riegl's unpublished lecture notes from 1897-1898, which was published in 1966 in German. The reference I use here is its English version published in 2004.

Fiona Candlin (2006) wrote that Riegl's idea of the haptic appears to have been shared by other influential art historians during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. She wrote that German-born American art historian Erwin Panofsky (1927/1991) believed that the presence of linear perspective in paintings was vital evidence of the innovative development of human perception. Panofsky considered the haptic to be a subjective and limited type of perception because tactile experience is tied to an individual's body and position (Candlin, 2006). Panofsky's account reflects negative assumptions concerning the haptic, particularly the tactile sense, because he assumed that the tactile perception inhibited the progressive and scientific features of the optic (Candlin, 2006).

Riegl and Panofsky positioned the haptic within the context of a linear model of human artistic development. Riegl's viewpoint was that the haptic is the initial and primitive stage of perceptual development because the haptic is not involved in processing the complexities of higher levels of artistic expression, such as linear perspective. Panofsky posited that the haptic occupies a lower rank in the sensory modality hierarchy because the haptic is a distorted form of perception and an obstacle to attain advanced artistic sophistication.

European perspectives concerning the haptic appear to have impacted theories of art in America during this period. This is reflected in the work of Bernard Berenson, an art historian who was very interested in the roles of the tactile in visual arts (Candlin, 2006). Berenson (1930) proposed a concept of tactile imagination, which regarded the role of the haptic as essential for deep engagement with the visual arts, nevertheless excluded the haptic from other substantive roles in visual arts by idealizing the optic.

Berenson (1930) developed the concept of tactile imagination, which refers to how our 'imaginary' tactile perception is stimulated by the life-like qualities of objects depicted in art

forms. He contended that the most important quality of a work of art is its capacity to evoke tactile imagination by virtue of providing “a keener sense of reality, of life-likeness than the objects themselves” (p. 64). Candlin (2006) argued that Berenson praised Italian paintings of the Renaissance era—particularly Giotto di Bondone’s paintings during the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries—because these paintings are so life-like that viewers experience the sensation of wanting to touch the figures that are represented on the canvas. She further argued that Berenson believed that tactile experiences during infancy were fundamental for enabling the attainment of tactile imagination through the visual arts. However, Berenson further contended that tactile, gustatory, and olfactory perceptual systems were not only infantile but also animalistic, meaning that he associated the optic with higher-order tasks, such as signaling and reporting (Candlin, 2006).

Candlin (2006) wrote that Berenson characterized touch as an essential perceptual system used for the purpose of “personal and intimate engagement” with the visual arts (p. 149). She went on to argue:

Yet, the touch that Berenson extols is not concerned with the material world. Giotto provokes an illusion of touch and his paintings appeal to the tactile imagination .... This is supposedly a purified experience removed from the grimy realities of the physical world. (p. 142)

Categorizing art using a hierarchy of perceptual development can make the history of art explicit and understandable. However, their works have been criticized in the current era for their Eurocentrism. Their notions of artistic development are implicitly based on the use of linear perspectives, a distinctly Western art convention that disregards the unique contexts of non-Western art (Candlin, 2006; Crowther, 1994). By extension, and along with current theories, I believe that various forms in art can be seen as different ways of communicating ideas, instead of different “levels” of perception or qualities of artistic expression. Visual-

centered value judgments of art miss a large portion of what we should take into consideration in attempting to understand what art does and means, and in what ways.

### **2.2.2 The Haptic in Art Education**

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, art educator Viktor Lowenfeld (1939) developed the theory that there is a correlation between personality traits and manners of artistic expression. The central premise of his theory of *visual-haptic aptitude* is that the people who tend to rely on affective and bodily feelings in order to make art are haptic-types; while those, who emphasize objective and visual information rather than a subjective manner in their art-making, are visual-types (Arnheim, 1983). His experiment, which is known as the ‘table test,’ was designed to determine whether personality traits influence the ways in which children draw two sets of a table and an object. He placed a drinking glass (vertical object) on one table. On the other table, he placed a chessboard (flat object). He assumed that haptic-type children would draw the object on each table “in its most characteristic position” (Ast, 1981, p. 47). For example, a haptic-type child would draw the chessboard in a manner that emphasized its pattern as if it were seen from above, even though the child actually saw the object from the side where the pattern could not be seen fully. On the other hand, a visual-type child would tend to draw the object on each table objectively and “not emphasize the top view or side view in order to accommodate an item which is on it” (p. 47).

Lowenfeld (1939) hypothesized that everybody has a strong haptic aptitude early in life. However, some individuals gradually become visual-types upon reaching adolescence and draw objects in a realistic manner, while others persist in relying on haptic sensations of, and subjective emotional responses to, objects when they draw them (Arnheim, 1983). Lowenfeld valued the haptic and subjective art-making tendencies often found in the art of young children

because he presumed that such tendencies would be genuine forms of artistic expression that emanated from the inner-self. He identified this type of non-realistic depiction with innate creativity and found less artistic value in objective rendering because he believed that realistic representation is merely a copy of reality (Arnheim, 1983).

Lowenfeld's theory was later challenged by other scholars on the basis of its simplistic research design and failure to take into consideration the socio-cultural factors that influence artistic expression (Arnheim, 1983; Ast, 1981; Rouse, 1965; Smith, 1987). It has been argued that Lowenfeld was favorably inclined towards the subjective, spontaneous, and ego-centric art styles of children due to his partiality for German Expressionism, an artistic movement that emphasized the expression of the artist's inner world over the objective reality (Arnheim, 1983).

Herbert Read (1934), a renowned 20<sup>th</sup> century art critic and education policy writer, was interested in the nature of individuality that he found reflected in the artworks of children. He argued that art should be the basis of education because it enriches the artistic sensibilities of children, which he considered to be the source of creativity. Read insisted that artistic sensibility was susceptible to being influenced by a number of factors, such as an individual's personal, cultural, and intellectual background, but the core of artistic sensibility is a sensual, intuitive, and innate quality. Read theorized that babies are born subjective and haptic in nature, and as they mature they obtain a visual and objective understanding of the world. He argued that the mindset of a child is that of an artist's, and that each child has a unique "instinct for primitive creative activity" (Keel, 1956, p. 86). Read (1958) praised Lowenfeld's emphasis on haptic aptitude and self-expressive art styles and further stressed individuality by asserting that there are "as many types of art as there are types of men" (p. 28). He also correlated different styles with children's art to their psychological dispositions, such as haptic, decorative, and organic (Read,

1934). Read advocated that haptic styles of children's art are expressions of their inner selves and subjective feelings derived from genuine creativity (Keel, 1956; Weider, 1983). John Keel (1956) wrote that Read suggested centralizing arts education through "expressive activity...[built on] the world of imagery and sensation which are a natural and spontaneous endowment of children" (p. 4).

Lowenfeld and Read advocated that the haptic was the source of children's creativity, and that their creativity should not be contaminated by adult influences (Arnheim, 1983). Their theories became influential among art educators. The result was that instructional strategies in visual arts education became "hands-off," meaning that children were given no instruction in artistic techniques and knowledge. These theories regarded the haptic as a pure artistic drive that originated in one's inner world, and they convinced many art educators that individual student self-expression was of paramount importance (Keel, 1956; Weider, 1983).

By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, a strand of Modernism, which promoted scientific rationales and formal instruction, began to exert a profound influence on visual arts education. Emanuel Barkan, a pioneer of DBAE (Discipline-Based Art Education) questioned the definition of the haptic as a purely artistic drive (Smith, 1998). Modernist theories of art privileged sight as being the only form of perception that enables us to appreciate pure forms. As a result, the haptic held increasingly less sway and became, at best, simply one of many textural and kinesthetic design elements in DBAE. Furthermore, as the emphasis of visual arts shifted away from the haptic and the inner self and more towards vision and analytic approaches, interactions between visual culture and its viewers came to be regarded as primarily a type of symbolic exchange (Belova, 2006; Bourdieu, , & Nice, 1990; Brodsky, 2002; Garoian, 1999; Garoian & Gaudelius, 2004; Maclagen, 2001).



## 2.3 Battles of the Vision and the Haptic

### 2.3.1 Philosophical Roots of Ocularcentrism and Disembodied Eyes

Disdain for the body is deeply embedded in Western philosophy, and this has influenced Western perspectives of vision and the haptic. From Plato to Descartes and Kant, it was continuously asserted that true knowledge should be independent of bodily perceptions and emotions because sensory and affective experiences distort the essence of truth (Belova, 2006; Broderick, 1998; Brodsky, 2002; Duncum, 2005; Eisner, 1991; Peters, 2004). However, vision was often excluded from the generalized devaluation of bodily perceptions. One reason was that the West considered vision to be the only sense that made distanced observations and objective analysis possible.

Joyce Brodsky (2002) found the origin of the intellectual association of vision with the mental—as opposed to the physical—in ancient Greece. She wrote, “The Greek word *theoria* comes from the verb to see, to look, or to contemplate” (p.106). In both classical Greek and modern English, the word *theory* has the connotation of an “obsolete sense of a sight, a spectacle, or a mental view or contemplation” (Frow, 2005, p. 347). Hilde Hein (1990) wrote,

Since Plato’s glorification of the “eye of the mind” vision has been regarded as the noblest and most theoretical of the senses, and indeed ... non-physical. Because vision is mediated by light and therefore does not have the direct intimacy of touch or taste or smell, it is less primitive than they are and more philosophical. Thus legitimized by distance, vision is epistemologically privileged. (p. 287)

Olga Belova (2006) noted the disdain for bodily senses other than vision that was emphasized in the writing of Kant and Descartes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Descartes believed that “Sight was an objective and accurate way of discovering the external world in which images served as tangible and recordable evidence ... only what one could see with one's eyes is true” (p.

95). Speculation from a distance is believed to enable one to remain unaffected, and, by extension, rational and objective (Belova, 2006). In this regard, the other bodily senses—particularly touch, taste, and smell—are regarded as violations of “the disinterested perception” of “innocent eye[s]” (Broderick, 1998, p. 10).

### **2.3.2 Anti-Ocularcentric Movement: Phenomenology and Feminism**

Ocularcentrism is the pursuit of disembodied objectivity as the core condition of knowing. Marjorie O’Loughlin (1998) criticized ocularcentric views as hyper-rational and overly individualistic because the ocularcentric assumption denies the role of bodily experience in constructing knowledge. Michael Peters (2004) argued that phenomenology represented a philosophical turn away from dualism and ocularcentrism and towards the paradigms that integrate mind and body. Peters also asserted that Friedrich Nietzsche initiated the emphasis on physical aspects of knowing. Nietzsche’s primary interest was not in biological forces but rather in the notion that the body plays a critical role in knowledge formation (Peters, 2004). Nietzsche criticized Platonism and Cartesian-Kantian philosophical stances, which deny bodily senses in favor of “pure rationality” (Peters, 2004, p. 15). Nietzsche instead advocated for the “spatial-temporal” nature of embodied knowing, which emphasizes the significance of one’s bodily experience of here and now (Peters, 2004, p. 15). In other words, knowledge is based on bodily experiences with the world that are “lived-out” rather than “thought-out” (Belova, 2006, p. 97).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/1992) theory of phenomenology follows Nietzsche’s line of argument to the effect that the body is considered to be “a source of consciousness, perception and reason” as opposed to seeing the body as an empty container that holds knowledge and experience (Peters, 2004, p. 14). Clive Cazeaux (2002) reiterated Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that the body is a means of organizing “a coherent sensory picture of the world for us, but also

something active and prospective” (p. 9). Merleau-Ponty challenged the assumption that the five senses are naturally discrete by suggesting that our experience of the world is inevitably multisensory, as if there were an arc that interconnects all of the senses. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/1992), Merleau-Ponty wrote:

One sees the weight of a block of cast-iron which sinks in the sand, the fluidity of water and the viscosity of syrup. In the same way, I hear the hardness and unevenness of cobbles in the rattle of a carriage, and we speak appropriately of a ‘soft,’ ‘dull,’ or ‘sharp’ sound. (p. 230 quoted by Cazeaux, 2002, p. 11)

Merleau-Ponty (1964) argued that ontological and epistemological stances that originated from ocularcentrism make a clear division between subject (the inquirer) and object (the inquired) as well as self and others. He continued to argue that in one’s construction of knowledge, however, the separation of subjects and objects is basically impossible and thus, meaningless. He further insisted on the authenticity of a subject. This authenticity does not distinguish between “the inquirer’s experience and the other’s world: there is only the inquirer’s representation” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 100). Merleau-Ponty’s claim signifies “a return to the direct, lived experience of the individual” inquirer (Schwandt, 2007, p. 100).

Michael Peters (2004) wrote that the philosophical viewpoint of phenomenology assumes that we perceive things in terms of the relationship of our body to the bodies of others, and this viewpoint contributed to the development of contemporary activist feminism. Feminists, such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, argued that intrinsic female power derives from women’s social experiences of being mothers and caregivers, and the essence of these female experiences is to nurture and give power to others (Allen, 2005, online). These feminists thus considered true female power to be the “power-from-within” that reinforces “choice and engagement” (Hoagland, 1988, p. 118), and this feminist movement influenced visual artists who sought genuine acknowledgement of the artistic creativity and sensibility of women (Hein, 1990).

### 2.3.3 Feminist Art and the Haptic

From a feminist perspective, the haptic is considered a perceptual system through which we gain tacit knowledge, which is distinguished from explicit knowledge. In other words, the haptic represents a way of knowing that is contrary to analytical and linear modes of thought and interpretation of what we encounter. This perspective destabilizes the conventional vision-centered ontologies:

We do not know a subject better as a result of meditation; and there is no reason to believe that distance (any more than proximity), whether physical or psychic, is conducive to greater objectivity or better understanding. Why should one suppose that a distant observer would be less partisan than a close one? (Hein, 1990, p. 286)

Moreover, the feminists' suspicion of the objectivity of vision challenged the ocularcentric conventions of the art world. Harvey Scheman (1993) reiterated the influence of anti-ocularcentrism on the art world as follows:

Vision is the sense best adapted to express—dehumanization: it works at a distance and need not be reciprocal, it provides a great deal of easily categorized information, it enables the perceiver accurately to locate (pin down) the object, and it provides the gaze, a way of making the visual object aware that she is a visual object. Vision is political, as is visual art, whatever (else) it may be about. (p. 159)

Increasing awareness of ocularcentric biases helped initiate a search for the potential of the non-visual, and the *haptic* became the catalyst in the feminist art movement (Classen, 1998; Irigaray, 1985; Marks, 2002; Young, 1994).

The haptic has often been considered uniquely female, rather than gender-neutral. Constance Classen (1998) contends that the notion of the haptic as a feminine perception originated with negative associations concerning women and flesh. She wrote that the senses of vision and sound were associated with “the *intellectual* labors by men outside the home” (p. 86). On the other hand, the corporeal or proximal senses, such as smell, taste, and touch, were linked with “the *manual* labors undertaken by women within the home” (p. 86). However, the new

conceptualization of genuine female power as nurturing and empowering changed the concept of the haptic as a medium for the expression of the desire of women for plurality and fluidity (Allen, 2005).

Mary Devereaux (1995; 1998; 2003) maintained that although there is a range of differences regarding the details, feminist art theories share the following core ideas: first, they reject the modernist notion of ‘art for art’s sake’ and pursue art in the context of social relationships; second, they reject modernist assumptions that art exists solely for the purpose of contemplation and is therefore something apart from the practical functions or concerns of everyday life; third, they disagree with the argument that an elevated experience of art can be obtained only through purely visual perception that excludes the roles of other bodily senses.

Some feminist artists use the haptic—particularly the sense of touch—in order to convey the notion of “self-in-relation” or “embodied reciprocity” (O’Loughlin, 1988, p. 288), or inter-embodiment (Springgay, 2008) through the practice of visual arts, as opposed to the ocularcentric pursuit of the autonomy of art. For example, Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s performance piece, *Touch Sanitation* (1977-1980), demonstrates the use of the haptic for connecting the self with others. Ukeles created the artwork by walking, talking, and shaking hands with every sanitation worker in the New York City Department of Sanitation (Gablik, 2002). Robert Morgan (2002) wrote:

Although a simple action of handshaking—pressing flesh—might not be interpreted as dramatic in a theatrical sense, the handshake carries a powerful feeling of mutual interest and support among workers. It comes to signify a sense of trust, an instilment of a feeling about the social nature of work. (Online resource)

Ukeles observed the daily work of janitors and found that people call these sanitation workers derogatory names despite the value of their work. She used her conversations with janitors as the basis for another performance art, *Cleansing the Bad Names* (1984). She wrote derogatory

references made about sanitation workers on the windows of the gallery and engaged city officials and the sanitation workers in a ritual that cleansed the bad names from the windows (Gablik, 2002). This artwork utilized a ritual involving the haptic, and its haptic elements created an empathic bond between participants and sanitation workers, who might otherwise have remained as ‘others’ to the participants.

Female empowerment also renewed the value of domestic crafts, whose characteristics are essentially haptic. Kristin Congdon (1991) wrote that modernist fine arts are created by male artists and supported by institutions that possess authority. She wrote that the value of modernist fine art is determined solely through visual analysis, whereas crafts are created by women within the boundaries of a domestic space, and such projects are often meant to be tactile as well as functional. She contended that crafts offer emotional engagement because they satisfy haptic perception, meaning that haptic materials are ‘felt’ rather than ‘seen,’ and the contexts of crafts frequently involve interpersonal relationships, such as mothers and daughters or local quilt groups (Congdon, 1991).

Since the 1970s, many women artists have adopted tactile materials used in women’s crafts, such as fabrics, stitch marks, and wrapping, in order to embody women’s lived experiences as learned through their bodies (Duncum, 2007; Duncum, & Springgay, 2007; Korsmeyer, 2004; Lippard, 1995). Alexandra Novina (2005) argued that emotional engagement through the use of haptic elements has become a significant trend in contemporary visual culture. For example, she cited the artist group, *Pretty Sweet* (2005), which makes use of haptic crafting materials, including toys, jewelry, and needlework, to express positive emotions, memories, and nostalgia.

The range of haptic elements used in feminist art continues to expand. Carolyn Koresmeyer (2004) cited Janine Antoni's haptic sculpture series, *Gnaw* (1992-1994), that is made of food and objects from everyday life— huge chunks of chocolate, lard, and soap— shaped and imprinted by her teeth and tongue. Koresmeyer (2004) further discusses her work:

Hardly appealing to [the] gustatory sense, this work nonetheless arouses a somatic response at the same time that it invites rumination on the venerable hierarchy of the senses that puts the distance senses of sight and hearing above the bodily senses of touch, smell, and taste .... The use of food on the part of female artists is particularly significant, given the traditional association of women with the body, with feeding and nurturance, and with transience and mortality. (Online resource)

Many feminist artists have conceptualized the haptic as being a uniquely feminine perception that strives to overcome the limitations of visual perception. They have conceptualized the haptic as a meaningful embodiment of anti-ocularcentric paradigms, as well as a conduit for the expression of the life experiences of women and their meanings through the practice of visual arts. Feminist ideas of the haptic have directly influenced contemporary visual arts education.

## **2.4 The Haptic in Contemporary Visual Arts Education**

I begin this section with a critical assessment of the ocularcentrism that is embedded in contemporary visual arts education. I will address the reasons why we need a form of visual arts education that includes a broader range of perceptual systems. My discussion will also examine the possible benefits of incorporating the haptic into visual arts education.

### **2.4.1 Ocularcentrism in Contemporary Visual Arts Education**

Ocularcentric hegemony is not something that can be relegated to the past because it continues to influence visual arts education in the present day. Formalist curricula remain pervasive in art classes on all levels and fortify a certain set of ocularcentric criteria regarding style, taste, and sensibility as bedrock conventions of the art world (Fisher, 1997). This occurs

because formalist curricula deal with visual forms as if they were manifestations of a universal “independent language,” regardless of the unique socio-cultural contexts of arts found in different cultures (Feldman, 1992, p. 122).

Visual cultural studies is currently criticized for its reliance on spectatorship. Although visual culture studies contributes to the development of critical thinking skills, Brodsky (2002) contended that the linguistic connection between images and language remains in "the domain of the purely visual, and, as a result, it is a simple matter to transform that image into a readable sign" (p. 107). She also argued that this over-reliance on linguistic connections has led us to overlook the multisensory and experiential aspects of visual culture. Garoian and Gaudelius (2004) criticized J. T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* (1994), an influential work in visual culture studies, because it implicitly positions viewers as being passive and disempowered, gazing at “the world-as-exhibition” (p. 298). They contended that given this assumption, interactions between viewers and visual culture become merely symbolic exchange.

Scholars have acknowledged the limitations of vision-centered approaches to visual culture studies and made an effort to incorporate a range of bodily experiences and different perceptual systems into their studies of cultural sites of everyday life. Brodsky (2002) and Belova (2006) both asserted that it is practically impossible for viewing to be a wholly mental and transcendent act, given the multisensory and interactive nature of contemporary visual culture. These scholars cited the interrelated nature of bodily perceptions and argued that visual perception itself should be re-conceptualized as viewing based on use of the body, which encompasses and interacts with other perceptual systems, rather than considering the act of seeing as being only visual.



Some scholars have suggested that aesthetics should be redefined as the study of our perceptions and their effects on us, which follows the original Greek meaning of aesthetics (Duncum, 2005; 2008; Eagleton, 1992; Spencer, 2006). Conceiving of aesthetics as the study of perceptual “attentiveness and responsiveness” to the sensuous features of visual culture would link “the conceptual with the sensual” aspects of visual culture (Spencer, 2006, p. 229). Duncum (2008) further argued that by doing so, we can eliminate confusing aesthetics with the morals, tastes, and conventions of particular cultures.

Bolin and Blandy (2003) suggested material culture studies as an alternative solution to the problems of visual culture studies that are caused by its attachment to vision-centric approach. They wrote that the subjects of material culture studies include various types of objects that are tactile, auditory, palatable, and olfactory, instead of being exclusively visual. The methodology of material culture studies tends to utilize various perceptual systems that go beyond simple analysis of visual elements. Garoian and Gaudelius (2004; 2008) argued that the body is the most experiential art medium that can actively deconstruct and reconstruct the experience of visual culture beyond the “objectifying gaze” (p. 303), and therefore performative art forms must be included in visual culture studies.

Formalist curricula and visual cultural studies have been criticized because their reliance on discursive and linguistic analysis tends to exclude non-discursive systems of knowledge involved in visual culture (Halsall, 2004; Maclagen, 2001). As a result, there has been a rising tide of advocacy regarding the need to explore non-discursive responses to art through various perceptual systems that cannot be fully experienced through rational and linguistic modes (Geahigan, 1999; Halsall, 2004; Hubard, 2007). These critiques of the formalist curriculum and visual culture studies suggested that what is missing in ocularcentric approaches is recognition

that conscious bodily engagement with visual culture can be accomplished through various perceptual systems. I argue that visual arts education should include a broader range of perception than is the case at present, and this would allow educators to expand the ways in which they examine, understand, and recreate our experiences of visual culture. I believe that including the haptic would generate changes that would make art education more relevant for students who are learning to negotiate their way through a constantly changing and evolving visual culture.

#### **2.4.2 Education of Perception<sup>3</sup>**

Before addressing the potential benefits to be derived from the inclusion of haptic perception in visual arts education, it is first necessary to consider why the education of perception is important. It is commonly acknowledged that our perception is selective and thus subtractive, in the sense that it fails to objectively capture the entirety of reality. Henri Bergson (1911/1988) explained that the subtractive nature of perception might be related to human needs (i.e., one selectively remembers the qualities of an object that are relevant to one's survival or which provide benefits). It has been also argued that perception is selective because it is shaped by personal and cultural experiences (Gibson, 1966; Schiffman, 1982).

Perception is largely an acquired response as opposed to consisting of unprocessed raw sensations, and education can greatly influence one's configuration of perceptual sensibility (Bergson, 1988; Delong, Wu, & Bao, 2007; Gibson, 1966; Marks, 2000; O'Neill, 2001; Springgay, 2004; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991; Weider, 1983; Wunderlich, 2008).

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Shusterman (2004) argued for *somasthetics*, which is concerned with "educating the bodily senses (including our kinaesthetic and proprioceptive senses) that are needed to properly direct the bodily powers we deploy ... [by exercising] reflective awareness and assessment of our sensory appreciation" (p. 55). I would like to clarify that Shusterman's emphasis differs from mine, although I do agree that reflective awareness of bodily perception must be critical in order to enrich perceptual sensibility. Shusterman's *somasthetics* focuses on physical education by stressing a healthy body as well as the balanced cultivation of body and mind, whereas I focus on the perceptual sensibility to understand and be engaged with art, rather than the state of a person's physical health.

Educating perceptions should begin with recognizing “the intelligence of the body” (Bergson, 1988, p. 112). Marks (2000) asked, “How can knowledge be embodied in senses other than the visual? ... How can one form of sense knowledge embody another?” (p. 110). She suggested that our memories register in both mental and bodily manners, and bodily memory is “a source of social knowledge” because our bodies encode memories in the senses, and the ways in which we encode memories are cultural as much as natural (p. 195).

Marks (2000) continued:

Our sensorium<sup>4</sup> is formed by culture: [first,] it produces a map of the “objective” world that reflects our cultural configuration of the senses. Second, our sensorium creates the world “subjectively” for us. Thus, one would expect that in an ocularcentric culture, people will experience and produce the world as a primarily visual world. And a person whose sensorium reflects the cultural importance of smell will produce a world in which smell matters. Third, given the plasticity of neural networks, it is possible to learn a new configuration of the senses. (p. 203)

Perceptual sensibility is shaped by personal and cultural experiences, and it can migrate and transform, as do cultures (Stoddart, 1990). Furthermore, “one sense modality can learn to respond to information normally headed for another modality” (Marks, 2000, p. 202). The education of perception can thus induce embodied learning and knowledge. It will “open up new ways of understanding our cultural history (/ies) and new realms .... This departure, in turn, may suggest novel perspectives and contexts for examining our tyrannical and fascinating visual culture (Classen, 1998, p. 160).

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<sup>4</sup> The term *sensorium* is “used in anthropology to delineate a culture’s field of sensory expectation and evaluation—e.g., which sights, sounds, smells, tastes or tactile encounters are usual/unusual, pleasant/unpleasant, valued/devalued, etc.” (Meskimmon, 2003, p. 202).

## Chapter 3

### Conclusions

The haptic encodes cultural and personal memories into the body, but the hierarchy of perceptual systems within Western culture privileges vision over other bodily perceptual systems and leaves “the potential of the non-visual ... largely unacknowledged” (Broderick, 1998, p. 10). Moreover, sensuous knowledge gained through proximal senses, such as taste, touch, and smell, have been exoticized as primitive and non-Western, or devalued as childish or feminine (Classen, 1998; Marks, 2000).

This hierarchy of perception directly influences the arts: mainstream arts privilege distanced vision, whereas arts that incline to proximal senses become marginalized (Classen, 1998; Marks, 2000). For example, *Rasquachismo*<sup>5</sup> and *Domesticana*<sup>6</sup>, are important Mexican-American art movements in which artworks are often made by assembling “discards, fragments, even recycled everyday materials such as tires, broken plates, [and] plastic containers, which are recombined with elaborate and bold display in yard shrines (*capillas*), domestic decor (*altares*), and even embellishment of the car” (Mesa-Bains, 2008, online resource). Mesa-Bains (2008) explained that these art forms display textural characteristics that are sometimes simple, quick, crude, and sexual in nature, which stand in opposition to the contemplative, distanced, and disembodied conventions of Anglo-American fine art forms (Mesa-Bains, 2008). The formalist

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<sup>5</sup> Amalia Mesa-Bains (2008) explained that a Chicano arts movement known as *Rasquachismo*, is “a combination of resistant and resilient attitudes devised to allow the Chicano to survive and persevere with a sense of dignity” (online resource).

<sup>6</sup> *Domesticana*, is a feminine version of *rasquache*. Similarly, the artistic tendency of *Domesticana* is defiant and banal: using ordinary materials found in women’s places, such as everyday objects found in a bedroom, kitchen, and home shrine, these artists consciously affirm the cultural value of working class Mexican American women, and at the same time resists the male-dominant Mexican culture (Mesa-Bains, 2008, online resource).

approach to art that heavily emphasizes visual analysis and transcendent experience would not be the proper framework for explaining the value and meaning of this style of art.

Candlin (2006) argued that “While the experiences of looking and touching can overlap, they can never be identical” (Candlin, 2006, p. 146). Springgay (2004) argued that the tactile sense is of critical importance particularly in the visual arts, because our sense of touch enables us to make sense of things through direct contact with the subject matter, “challenging the mechanisms of visual perception” (p. 63). Moreover, it has been argued that attending to haptic perception can expand our sensorium from monolithic to diverse sensibilities by helping us understand visual culture drawn from different cultures (Classen, 1998; Marks, 2000). The ocularcentric culture of modernism has reduced our perceptual experience of art to the visual and linear, so we must expand or reconfigure our perceptual map.

The haptic also offers a way in which we can engage with the world of others in visual culture using an empathetic and relational approach. Susan Stewart (1999) described that the sense of touch involved while experiencing art is not merely the perception of contour or texture, but the interconnection of our inner world with the outside world because “the pressure involved in touch is a pressure on ourselves as well as upon objects” (p. 31). Springgay (2004) proposed that “Touch...is not only a physical materialization of skin on matter but attends to an awareness of our body in relation to other bodies and objects” (p. 24). She (2003; 2004; 2008) asserted that while sight maintains a distance between the viewer and the viewed using a fixed gaze, touch is the sense through which the boundary between the self and others becomes blurred, fluid, and temporal. Springgay (2003) continued:

The act of touching inverts the subject-object relationship [by] conflating the boundaries between self and other. Touching engages the object in perception ... but so too touching invites an interrogation of the self and the other .... Inverting relations of proximity, animation, and reference, touch must touch to be touched. Thus, the material-body and

the self-body fold and morph into each other in an intercorporeal relationship. (Online resource)

Accordingly, the nature of haptic perception offers a means of understanding visual culture in relationship to ourselves (Springgay, 2003; 2004; 2008; Stewart, 1999).

Paying attention to tactile, kinesthetic, and spatial perception enables an appreciation of the physical roots of viewing and creating art, which can lead to a knowledge of art that is immanent and experiential as opposed to distanced (Davison, 2004; Fisher, 1997; Haworth, 1997). Springgay (2003) wrote that “Art becomes a synthesis of imagined and material experience” when various sensory stimulations are woven (online resource). Thus, the experience of art should include "a more embodied kind of sensing, engaging directly with a work's material properties" (MacLagen, 2001, p. 38).

Jennifer Fisher (1997) proposed the concept of “haptic aesthetics” and argued that there existed a need to redeem aesthetics from its transcendental implications and shift its emphasis to the “corporeal and immanent nature” of the experience of art (p. 169). While traditional aesthetics focuses on “artistic intentions and the search for ideas and truths as the main driving force in art,” giving attention to haptic engagement in visual arts practice transforms the artwork; it becomes “an enriched being in its own right, as distinct from an analogue for an external truth or essence” (Haworth, 1997, p. 137).

Olafur Eliasson is a Danish-Icelandic installation artist. In June 2008, he opened his latest project, *The New York City Waterfalls*, and said of his art:

I am interested in how we engage the world. How do we use our skin as our eyes? ... If you read a cityscape or a landscape with just your mind, and not your body, it becomes like a picture or representation, not something you really engage with. I think the potential of this particular space lies in getting your body into it. (As interviewed by Calvin Tomkins, 2008, p. 26)

Installation<sup>7</sup> and performative art<sup>8</sup> forms that utilize multi-sensory media are becoming common, and numerous artists are engaging in extensive explorations of the bodily aspects of contemporary visual culture. However, it appears that art educators are unsure how they should respond to this growing trend. The haptic can help art educators find ways to overcome the limitations of experiencing visual culture that was previously mediated only through visual perception. Including the haptic in visual arts education will help diversify and enrich the theories and practice of arts education.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* (n.d.), installation is an art form that is "an assemblage or environment specifically created for a particular interior (very often a gallery). The term came into common use in the 1970s but it was only in the 1980s that artists regularly specialized in this particular art form. Whereas early Installations were viewed as temporary, many are now intended to be permanent and are viewed as collectable."

<sup>8</sup> Performative art, also known as Happening, is defined as "an event or entertainment presented by an artist or group of artists which combines elements of theatre and the visual arts[,] and [it] often involves spectator participation .... Happenings implied a rejection of the traditional concepts of both craftsmanship and permanence, furthermore they were not restricted to the confines of an art gallery" (The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, n.d.).

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