

Cultural Studies of Youth Culture Aesthetics as Critical Aesthetic Education

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Introduction

Instead of choosing between instilling youth with an appreciation of artistic culture (art history) or training youth for professional life in art production (performance), youth art educators might choose *conscientização* through critical aesthetic education. Paulo Freire's *conscientização* "can be literally translated as the process used to raise somebody's awareness" (Cruz, 2013, p. 171) but is richer than this. It is

the process in which men [and women], not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality. (Freire, 1970, p. 519)

From Plato, to Matthew Arnold, to Theodor Adorno, it has been understood that youth are molded by cultural education. Plato encouraged art education that would influence the development of youth taste in ways that would support the state. Arnold worried about the loss of culture with the rise of cultural industries. Adorno, relatedly, worried about cultural industries transforming people into empty-headed consumers powerless to tell good art from bad. Thinkers in this school all champion aesthetic education by way of cultural appreciation. It is thought that youth taught to appreciate the masterworks of European culture will come into possession of *culture*. I am going to suggest a different approach: that youth are already fully engaged in culture, and that in a democracy, we do not need to instill culture from positions of power, but instead to provide teachers and youth opportunities and capacities to make decisions about their participation in the formation of their culture. Instead of making aesthetic decisions for youth, we might develop an approach to art education that is a 'critical' study of aesthetic. I believe this will lead to what we really want, *conscientização*, and there is good reason for this hunch.

Since at least the 1950s, but perhaps since the jazz age of the 1930s, progressive youth art cultures have been engines of individual and social transformation. At the center of these transformations (think jazz, counter-culture, festival culture, DIY, Punk, Riot Grrrl, HipHop Kulture, EDM) are processes of consciousness-raising related to art production, aesthetic *conscientização*. To understand how this occurs, we need to develop a *cultural studies of aesthetics*.

But why do this? What is wrong with the current form of aesthetic education? First, there is little in the way of aesthetic education actually being offered. Nearly all art education is either art production (doing it) or art history (what has been done), and little time is placed on the hows and whys of art practice. Practices that are little studied are seldom taught. This means, in the North American context, that youth are surrounded by generations of popular music forms, many of them historically significant, that are still not taught in school. There is no point waiting for school curriculum and school text books to catch up. Instead, I propose teaching students to do cultural studies of aesthetics, to transform art appreciation classes into cultural studies of aesthetics classes.

In the first part of this chapter, through a discussion of aesthetics, I will illustrate the way that cultural studies of aesthetics reframes what we currently have, a colonial aesthetic education. Traditional art educators should not read this as an attack on European Fine-Art Culture (EFA); I am not proposing that we elevate popular practices over fine-arts practices, but that we level the playing field by developing a cultural approach to the study of all forms of art culture. Cultural studies of aesthetics begins by recognizing fine-art culture as one culturally informed aesthetic approach among many. To expand on this point, a short history of aesthetics is necessary to appreciate the hurdle that we are about to collectively jump.

The next step is to see youth culture as important sites of informal learning from which formal education can learn. To do this, I will do a cultural study of HipHop Kulture aesthetics. I will conclude with a call for doing cultural studies of aesthetics work together with students, teachers, and community arts practitioners, as a practice of critical aesthetic education. I think that this is our best chance to develop *conscientização* in aesthetic education, to build bridges with youth and the cultures that they bring with them to school, and is a model of art education that educators, policymakers, communities, and administrators can get behind.

Aesthetics

bell hooks (1990) told us that “many underclass black people who do not know conventional academic theoretical language are thinking critically about aesthetics. The richness of their thoughts is rarely documented in books” (p. 112). I want to expand on this and say that many *people* are thinking critically about aesthetics, but do not have access to Aesthetics, an elite philosophical practice of writing about art. But aesthetics does not need to be something only philosophers are permitted to do. Quite the contrary: philosophical aesthetics is not the only discourse on aesthetics.

In fact, an exhaustive study of all academic aesthetics may still not prepare you to understand the HipHop Kulture concept of *flow*, or the jazz concept of *swing*. If you wish to study fine-arts culture, then you may delight in reading philosophical aesthetics. But if you delight in the deep throb of an electronic kick drum, those books may not be the place for you. Much popular music culture is not related to European notions of creativity or expressiveness. These cultural forms developed in North American urban contexts and are distinct. So, if, as Plato and Adorno noted, aesthetic education informs consciousness, what is at stake by not recognizing that popular culture is aesthetically distinct from Fine-Art Culture? To answer this question, we need to have a definition of aesthetics.

In his question about understanding reason’s role in the Enlightenment, 18th-century philosopher Alexander Baumgarten began to puzzle over a complex relationship between intellect and perception. Baumgarten noted that the senses work to acquire information from the environment, fed to the brain by way of perception. The senses provide complex information that the mind works to sort out. The mind sorts sense information into meaning.

Baumgarten recognized that art meaning emerged from the crossroads of conceptual, emotional, historical, and physical information. He and others recognized this as a new and interesting subject area that he called Aesthetics, the science of how things are cognized by means of the senses. Unfortunately, this tidy definition would not last long. By 1790, Immanuel Kant redefined aesthetics as the study of the beautiful, a definition that has exerted far greater impact and limited the subjects practitioners might be equipped to survey. Perhaps if aesthetics had remained a scientific study of the relationship between perception and meaning in relation to art, it may have become a cross-cultural study of expressive practices. But this was not to be so.

A Cultural Definition of Aesthetics

In recent years, there have been some signs of a return to Baumgarten's ideas. German complexity sociologist Niklas Luhmann (2000) has suggested a redefinition of aesthetics: the study of perception and communication in relation to art. Luhmann began with the premise that the inner world of each human is separated from other inner worlds. Within each inner world, a constant flood of information is registered by the nervous system. These data are registered by the brain and understood by the mind. The mind, what Luhmann called the psychic system, deals with information by treating it as communication resources. For Luhmann, human experience is made possible by communication. We understand the world by first internalizing a communication system; only then can we 'understand' the world. Learning, therefore, the acquisition of communication resources, opens up ways of knowing the world. Further, he argued that social groups are formed by and through communication. From here it can be said that aesthetics is the study of art as a *special form of communication* that plays with familiar or unfamiliar communication resources in familiar or unfamiliar ways; that meddles with the links that bind perception to meaning.

Separate from Luhmann, but similar in important ways, Gayatri Spivak, in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012), suggested that aesthetic education is the preparation of the imagination for epistemological work. 'Epistemological work' is the meaning process, and 'preparing the imagination' is the teaching and learning process that works with learners, often youth, to become 'aware' of the processes of imagination behind, or underneath, meaning.

In his 2009 book, *Framing Consciousness in Art*, Gregory Minissale suggested two processes of consciousness at work in art: a lower and higher order. In everyday life, the lower order is concerned with perception, while the higher order is interested in the meaning of the perceptions and of acting upon them. Minissale argued, much like Luhmann, that art frames these processes so that the viewer (in visual art) becomes aware of the act of perception, a process called reflexivity. Reflexivity occurs when a viewer recognizes that the viewer has recognized a frame that surrounds and separates 'a thing' from everyday life. This separation draws the viewer into a self-consciousness about the viewer's perception-meaning process.¹ Perception as a lower-order consciousness usually just functions routinely in the basement of experience, then enters into higher-order consciousness. Suddenly and surprisingly, perception emerges from the shadows into the full light of consciousness. Consciousness and perception in an engagement with art get locked in a recursive process where consciousness reflects on the act of perception, and perception feeds consciousness, consciousness reflects on this new information, and perception feeds these to consciousness. John Dewey called this the aesthetic experience, and Arnold Berleant, the aesthetic field. Why do humans do this? Why do we enjoy it? In what ways does this occur in other cultural groups? These are exciting questions, certainly. So it is a source of great disappointment that aesthetic education is limited to art appreciation.

Aesthetic Education as Art Appreciation

A great deal of aesthetic education in formal schooling, when it contends with aesthetics at all, continues to rely upon the disciplinary model. Sometimes this begins with an outright dismissal of aesthetic

education in favor of art education. Many young people's first introduction to music education is a teacher writing symbols on a white board saying, "ta-ta-tete-ta, this is music." But of course this is not music, it is a form of literacy developed in the Western Art Music tradition as a social technology to communicate and store musical ideas. In this literary tradition, youth were trained to listen, to read, to perform, to dance to, and ultimately, to appreciate the beautiful. When this cultural group began to expand their sphere of influence, they brought with them art and aesthetic education. The problem is not aesthetics necessarily; in fact this is quite an important discovery. The problem is that Enlightenment-era Europeans mistook a cultural aesthetics for universal aesthetics. The study of the beautiful was not understood to be one expression of aesthetics, but the only approach to the study of perception-meaning. Europeans have art, and everyone else has generalized culture. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Walter D. Mignolo (2011) explained:

That foundation was crucial in the sixteenth century, when European men and institutions began to populate the Americas, founding universities and establishing a system of knowledge, training Indians to paint churches and to legitimize artistic principles and practices that were connected with the symbolic in the control of authority and with the economic in the mutual complicity between economic wealth and the splendor of the arts. From the seventeenth century, European colonies provided the raw material for the foundation of museums of curiosities (Kunstkamera), which later on divided pieces from the non-European world (museums of natural history, of anthropology) from museums of art (primarily European, from the Renaissance on). (pp. 20–21)

This framework gets applied in all colonial situations. Authorities make it their mission to intercede into indigenous symbolic processes.² Aesthetics and aesthetic education play a role in this, and continue to do so. From my perspective, that of a European Canadian male, I can see the continuation of cultural colonization at work in the century-long use of residential school education to "kill the Indian in the child."³ A photographic record of residential school musical bands shows generations of aboriginal youth playing concert band and wind band instruments, symbols of their cultural possession.⁴ Plato's observations on aesthetic education as discipline take a sinister turn. The pedagogy of Music appreciation, for instance, works to create young listeners who *appreciate* the masterworks of the dominator culture—youth willing to be disciplined as the "mark of an aesthetically prepared and culturally elevated individual" (Dell'Antonio, 2004, p. 3). Terry Eagleton and Luc Ferry have pointed out that aesthetics is really about an Enlightenment conception of individual and/or personal development and bourgeoisie morality (as cited in Guyer, 2005, p. 30), and less about an inquiry into human practices of expression and reception. Walter D. Mignolo (2011) has argued that the very notion of Art, upon which Kant's aesthetics is based, is itself a social construction, used as a tool to establish hierarchies of expression that allowed European bourgeois expression to dominate the rest. This strategy elevated European cultural output and defined it as art, which thereby cast aspersions on the expressive practices of other cultural groups, terming them folklore, craft, popular culture, etc. Mignolo termed this technique colonial difference.

Cultural Studies of Aesthetics: Black Arts Movement and HipHop Kulture

For the better part of the last century, we have been living through what might be called a struggle for the democratization of aesthetics. I mark this period at the advent of audio recording and the rise of jazz and popular music industries. Aesthetic education was no longer reserved for formal educational institutions. Networks of artists engaged with youth culture and formed informal learning processes that fed into cultural industries. Although little understood and little researched, informal learning practices provided the educational basis for culturally located processes of art education rich enough to power the emergence of popular culture. This was not a product of disciplined youth listeners, but rebellious cultural creators. Youth culture, supported by cultural industries, successfully toppled the cultural

dominance of European Fine-Arts culture everywhere except perhaps in state-sponsored institutions. It seems sensible that a transformed aesthetic education in formal educational institutions would begin by learning more about the informal learning practiced in youth culture.

The beginning of this process is going to be difficult, because the colonial difference is so deeply engrained in our social fabric that its existence often has the feel of 'common sense.' Take Hip Hop for instance: even jazz musicians enact the colonial difference in discussion of HipHop Culture:

Formally trained musicians criticize rap music DJs' assumed lack of knowledge of basic Western music theory, which, for some is the sine qua non of a composer. The musician-composer and Pulitzer Prize winner Wynton Marsalis summarizes this popular opinion: 'When you get to rap music, you can't reduce anymore. When you get past that, it's not music anymore'. (Keyes, 2002, p. 5)

As Hip Hop emerged into popularity in the 1980s, the response to it by the dominant classes was framed along the colonial difference, and used similar moral concerns that would have been familiar to Matthew Arnold in the late 19th century. Ronald Reagan's conservatism was a return to "old fashioned Republicanism" (Dallek, 1984, p. vii) that "functioned as the cultural and historical sign, for many whites, of the 'real' America" (Gray, 1995, p. 16). Few outside of HipHop Culture could see the rising popular success of Hip Hop as a challenge to colonial difference, an aesthetic emerging from the lived urban realities of its practitioners.

HipHop Culture challenges the colonial difference. In a 2004 Temple University lecture, KRS-ONE remarked that dominator culture tries to convince you that "everything that you have has no value." The only way to get validated is to buy into the commodities, practices, and institutions of dominator culture. But as he explained, these same institutions have created frameworks designed to exclude, thus making cultural validation impossible.

Gregory Bateson (1972) called this impossible situation a double bind (pp. 271–278). He explained that it is a technique of domination without its outward appearance. It works when a social actor, as a functionary of a system, makes two contradictory demands. This strategy is powerful because, as KRS-ONE illustrated, there is no way to solve the dilemma of the double bind within the system. Inside the system you will forever remain trapped in its double pincers.

KRS-ONE explained that Hip Hop was a movement to "create an entirely different community." In this sense, HipHop Culture is the emergence of a postcolonial aesthetic culture. The emergence and success of HipHop Culture are proof of cultural aesthetics. As long as the system of dominator culture refuses to validate cultural aesthetics, it remains possible to live in the fiction of a universal aesthetics. But this fiction is being deconstructed. While bell hooks argued that black people's aesthetics ideas were not documented in books, this is not exactly the case.

Inspired by Civil Rights and Black Power discourses of the 1960s, the Black Arts Movement was radically opposed to any concept of the artist that "alienates him from his community," (Neal, 1968), and was "the period extending somewhat beyond the defining decade of 1964 (the year of Malcolm X's rupture with the Nation of Islam) to 1974 (the year of Amiri Baraka's renunciation of absolute Black nationalism), during which the category of 'Blackness' served as the dominant sign of African American cultural activity (Benston, 2000, p. 3). Black Arts built on Alain Locke's 1925 publication, *The New Negro*, and upon the Harlem Renaissance concept of 'Blackness.' Kimberly Benston (2000) observed:

Blackness ... a term of multiple, often conflicting, implications which, taken together, signal black America's effort to articulate its own conditions of possibility. At one moment, blackness may signify a reified essence posited at the end of a revolutionary 'meta-language' projecting the community toward 'something not included here'; at another moment, blackness may indicate a self-interpreting process which simultaneously 'makes and unmakes' black identity in the ceaseless flux of historical change. (pp. 3–4)

By encouraging African American artists to seek inspiration from an ancestral heritage as well as from the ghetto community, Locke believed a unique art “would emerge” (Fine, 1971, p. 374). Black Arts joined with Black Power for political and cultural empowerment within ghetto communities:

The Black Art Movement artists are linked to Black separatist politics and Black Nationalism. The social, political and economic conditions of the country during the 1960's gave birth to the latter group of young, militant artists, who, disdaining the traditions of Western art, seek to communicate with their brothers and sisters in the ghetto. (Fine, 1971, p. 374)

This was the emergence of a powerful cultural aesthetics, and its success depended on creating an alternative, what Spivak (2012) has called, doing aesthetics ‘from below.’ This occurs with the cultural and sometimes militant elevation of “African-derived American Culture” (Caponi, 1999, pp. 17–31) that should be understood as an emerging into consciousness of a new paradigm. The Black Arts Movement was postcolonial cultural aesthetics education designed to liberate oppressed Black youth. Black Arts mentors supported young and mostly African American artists to look for inspiration in their home communities; to recognize their unique perspective, their unique imagination; and to use their arts to help rejuvenate their community culture. Often this would take the shape of “boldly patterned murals painted on the decaying walls of ghetto buildings” (Fine, 1971, p. 374), community theatre, or literature based on street art and inner-city life, emerging from place-based imagination, that does not require acceptance from (colonial) fine-art institutions.

As the political elements of the Black Power Movement were finding their aesthetic expression in Black Arts, they found new expression “in the aesthetics of Afro-American dramatists, poets, choreographers, musicians, and novelists” who were defining “the world in their own terms” (Neal, 1968, p. 39). These elements, championed by a Black, inner-city avant-garde, posed a challenge to aesthetics, stripping it of any illusion that it could claim universality:

In critical theory, Baraka was instrumental in the creation of what became the ‘black aesthetic’ of the 1970s, as well as the ‘vernacularism’ of the 1980s, demanding that African American literature and music be examined in the context of the culture that gave rise to it, with particular focus on the oral traditions of storytelling, sermonizing, and music of all sorts—sacred and secular. (Caponi, 1999, p. 21)

Black Arts works to undo the aesthetics double bind, and creates a new aesthetic order rooted in local expressive practices that lead to critical awareness and liberation: *conscientização*. We see this in the words of Baraka, writing about Black Arts aesthetics in a language that would resonate with Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal (2006):

Our theatre will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims, and that they themselves are blood brothers. And what we show must cause the blood to rush, so that pre-revolutionary temperaments will be bathed in this blood, and it will cause their deepest souls to move, and they will find themselves tensed and clenched, even ready to die, at what the soul has been taught. We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved, moved to actual life understanding of what the world is, and what it ought to be. (in Baraka & Harris, 1991, p. 76)

Baraka’s lifelong interest in showing “what the world is” is echoed in the street logic of HipHop Kulture. Marvin Gladney (1995) characterized this heritage:

Black art has always been rooted in the anger felt by Afrikan-Americans, and hiphop culture has remained true to many of the convictions and aesthetic criteria that evolved out of the Black Arts Movement of the ‘60s, including calls for social relevance, originality, and a focused dedication to produce art that challenges American mainstream artistic expression.... Public Enemy’s Chuck D refers to hiphop as the “CNN” of the Black community. (p. 291)

The Black Arts movement helped to prepare a political “movement poetics” (Smethurst, 2003, p. 268) that helped create a symbolic politicization of the HipHop Kulture voice that as Rachel Sullivan (2003) pointed out, has subjective impact: “African American rap fans are not arguing that rap leads them into social protest, they seem to be indicating that it offers a counter-dominant message that they use as an affirmation of their experience” (p. 616). It is precisely this self-affirmation that characterizes critical aesthetic education, and why I think the study of cultural aesthetics like HipHop Kulture is an important basis for developing a culturally informed approach to music education that I call Critical Aesthetic Education.

Cultural Studies of Aesthetics as Critical Aesthetic Education

A critical aesthetic education begins with the cultural studies of aesthetics. This requires that you and your students (or teachers) develop relationships with local arts practitioners ‘to do’ cultural studies together. I follow Handel Wright’s (2003) assertion that cultural studies is more than theorizing, it is “the idea of articulating theory, empirical research, and service learning as interrelated elements of cultural studies work ... cultural studies as social justice praxis” (p. 807). Wright suggested that we begin by “taking cultural studies personally” (p. 809), as an epistemological mission of sorts, dedicated to understanding our lives within our cultures, and our societies.

The work of documenting cultural aesthetics and then of building critical aesthetic education is only going to happen with a variety of partnerships. Moreover, it is through the developing of these partnerships—between professors, teachers, students, cultural aesthetic community members, government agencies, boards of education—that we begin to re-write and undo colonial difference. Critical Aesthetic Education, because of our colonial history, necessarily begins with recognizing the impact of colonization upon our imaginations. This is a personal commitment to decolonization that will help us develop the epistemological curiosity (Freire, 2001, p. 35) necessary for this difficult intellectual work. Taking cultural studies personally will help to build the type of imagination and/or consciousness necessary for rigorous critical work. As Freire (2001) wrote:

To think correctly demands profundity and not superficiality in the comprehension and interpretation of the facts. It presupposes an openness that allows for the revision of conclusions; it recognizes not only the possibility of making a new choice or a new evaluation but also the right to do so. (p. 39)

I have suggested above that a place to begin is the deconstruction of the colonial difference, a starting point Freire (2001) would approve: “it is equally part of right thinking to reject decidedly any and every form of discrimination. Preconceptions of race, class, or sex offend the essence of human dignity and constitute a radical negation of democracy” (p. 41). And it is with this concern for the development of epistemological curiosity that I conclude with three concerns that you might take up in your cultural studies of aesthetics.

Conclusion: Three Topics for Cultural Studies of Aesthetics

The first is a concern about the reification of culture. Even as I wrote about the Black Arts Movement foundations of HipHop Kulture, I am self-conscious about participating in the cementing of a fixed historical narrative for a culture. HipHop Kulture is constantly informed and constantly in flux. In the HipHop Kulture community in Edmonton, Canada, where I live and work, there are a variety of histories, and a variety of starting points, that weave a richly textured and complex culture together. It is not homogeneous, nor even a single community. When I use the word, *culture*, I mean a symbolic learning network of individuals connected by shared communication. Culture is a learning system, and a system that learns, changes. When culture stops being a learning system it becomes a fixed form, a commodity, and stops being an engine of human development. Black culture in the Black Arts

Movement is therefore different from the Black culture that Mark Anthony Neal (2002) discussed as the post-soul aesthetic:

In the post-soul aesthetic I am surmising that there is an aesthetic centre within contemporary black popular culture that at various moments considers issues like deindustrialization, desegregation, the corporate annexation of black popular expression, cybernization in the workforce, the globalization of finance and communication, the general commodification of black life and culture, and the proliferation of black “meta-identities,” while continuously collapsing on modern concepts of blackness and reanimating “Premodern” (African?) concepts of blackness. I am also suggesting that this aesthetic ultimately renders many ‘traditional’ tropes of blackness dated and even meaningless; in its borrowing from black modern traditions, it is so consumed with its contemporary existential concerns that such traditions are not just called into question but obliterated. (pp. 2–3)

A cultural studies of youth aesthetics will have to maintain a focus on the dynamic qualities of culture and resist the reification of youth culture, and of race, of sex.

The second concern is what Tim Wise (2010) called post-racial liberalism, that he defined as a “rhetoric of racial transcendence and a public policy agenda of colorblind universalism” with

adherents dating back at least forty years, and which emerged after the civil rights revolution had largely accomplished its immediate goals ... and following several years of violent uprisings in urban centers thanks to frustration at the slow pace of change—especially with regard to economic opportunity—some of the nation’s scholars and public intellectuals began to turn against race-specific remedies for lingering social inequalities. Beginning in the late 1970s ... and extending through to the Obama campaign for presidency, post-racial liberalism has advocated a de-emphasis of racial discrimination and race-based remedies for inequality, in favor of class-based or “universal” programs of uplift: from job creation politics to better education funding to health care reform. (p. 16)

Post-racial liberalism threatens to return us, perhaps ironically (but not humorously), to the very same Enlightenment values that Walter Dignolo identified as the basis of colonial difference. As I have tried to show, universalism is a cover for cultural hegemony. Colourblind universalism is the dismissal of cultural diversity, the turning back of the gains we have made. What is left after post-racial liberalism is not an absence of culture, but a false cultural universalism, a singular identity by which to dismiss all others. A cultural studies of aesthetics will need to grapple with communities of difference; how people can be together in community and in culture *and* also recognize their diversity.

Finally, my third concern, one already well documented in cultural studies, is the impact of neoliberal cultural production on local culture. Henry Giroux (2009) warned that, “in the society of consumers no one can become a subject without first turning into a commodity” (p. 31). The production of a cultural commodity transforms culture from a learning system into a thing. Cultural appreciation is based upon this fixed view of culture. Neoliberal cultural production changes the framework of cultural appreciation because of cultural value to cultural appreciation based on commodity success. Central to the concern about neoliberal cultural production is the impact that it has on individual consciousness. It has been shown, time and again, that these cultural commodities, produced for sale by the popular music industry, target young people to “deal with their lack of self-confidence, powerlessness, and the endless indignities heaped upon them in a consumer society” (Giroux, 2009, p. 59) by buying products produced by corporations “which use magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to map brain patterns and reveal how consumers respond to advertisements or products” (Giroux, 2009, p. 59). This process is called neuromarketing, and it attests to precisely what Plato, Baumgarten, Arnold, and Adorno have suggested, a connection between aesthetics and consciousness.

Instead of working to elevate consciousness in prosocial ways, corporations tend to target and exploit weaknesses, often using ploys that tend towards the anti-social and anti-cultural. It is not their fault; their job is to produce consumers. Youth need critical aesthetic education, not in order to dismiss

cultural production, but to ‘critically’ engage it. Educators need to make it our mission to provide youth the necessary skills to resist a very prepared and equipped sales machine working to create better consumers, not better people. Educators play a frontline role in working with youth to develop *conscientização*, the critical awareness necessary to simultaneously disempower mass marketing and support local cultural production. It is my contention that this cultural resistance is currently being practiced in youth cultures in your community. Instead of ‘educated’ adults telling youth how to resist, I would suggest making it an educational commitment to work with youth to document existing youth culture resistance movements happening right now in your community. This is cultural studies of aesthetics as aesthetics education.

Notes

1. This draws upon a history of work in phenomenology.
2. Aesthetics is an expression of culture understood as a possession until as late as the 1950s and 1960s. This is now changing. Culture is now more likely to be understood as “The ideas and values, the cosmology, morality, and aesthetics, [that] are expressed in symbols, and so—if the medium is the message—culture could be described as a symbolic system” (Kuper, 2003, p. 227). In the colonial system, the possession of culture was to hold membership in White supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy (hooks, 2003, p. 11).
3. ‘About the Commission.’ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, accessible at <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=39>
4. I would like to thank musicologist, Professor David Gramit, at the University of Alberta, who shared these photographs at a 2012 conference on Intersensory Approaches to the Study of Music in Canada.

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