Aesthetics, Popular Visual Culture, and Designer Capitalism

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Abstract

While rejecting modernist philosophical aesthetics, the author argues for the use in art education of a current, ordinary-language definition of aesthetics as visual appearance and effect, and its widespread use in many diverse cultural sites is demonstrated. Employing such a site-specific use of aesthetics enables art education to more clearly address the realities of everyday life under designer capitalism, a socio-economy based on the drive to create evermore desire. Aesthetic manipulation is viewed as a primary means to facilitate the smooth operation of this system. The recent craze for Bratz dolls is used to illustrate the centrality of aesthetics to designer capitalism. Finally, the author offers suggestions as to how art education can view consumer products like Bratz as pedagogic opportunities.

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The kind of aesthetics considered in this article is quite different from the modernist aesthetics that was so influential in art education throughout most of the twentieth century. Modernist aesthetics, as derived principally from Kant and his predecessors, was typically characterized as separate from life, universal, self-sufficient, focused mainly on art and entirely uplifting. It effectively separated fine art from popular culture, seeing the former as quasi spiritual, the later as base [1]. By contrast, this article draws upon how aesthetics is employed outside the specialised areas of art, literature and art education [2]. Aesthetics is viewed in site-specific and social terms – in what has become an ordinary language sense of the word as applied to everyday experience as diverse as sport, consumer goods, plastic surgery, television and so on. I argue that adopting this use of aesthetics is particularly useful for those advancing a visual culture approach to art education [3]. It allows art educators better to deal with the increasing aestheticisation of everyday life under conditions associated with the current development of consumerist capitalism, often called late capitalism [4], or what jagodzinski calls 'designer capitalism' [5] where the economy is no longer thought to be based on desire so much as on the drive to continually create evermore desire. I will discuss Bratz dolls as an example. Bratz appeal to their preteen girl market as 'so cool' by offering what is arguabley a 'hooker chic' aesthetic, and at the same time they offer an empowering identity in part by becoming a consumer [6]. Nevertheless, I will suggest that like all other consumer products, they offer pedagogic opportunities to art educators who take seriously the visual culture of their students.

Aesthetics as problematic

As a branch of philosophy focused on beauty, especially with regard to just the fine arts, and indebted heavily to Kant's idealism, aesthetics has been roundly dismissed, for example, as 'an old patriarchal do-dah about transandental formal values' [7]. For many outside the specialized areas of art, literature and art education, aesthetics appears to be a forbidden subject, the bad child they do not want to talk about, and it is not hard to grasp their reasoning [8]. Focused narrowly on issues to do with a very limited range of cultural forms, and refusing to consider its own deeply ideological nature, the discipline of philosophical aesthetics has preferred to see its subject as above social valuation [9]. In this context it has seemed preferable to many to avoid aesthetics altogether and deal instead in the language of representation. Imagery is mined for its political and social messages about class, race, gender and other social issues. How are dominant classes, races and males represented so that their privilege is made, literally, to look natural? What representational tactics are employed to de-legitimize subordinate groups? Whose voices are silenced altogether by their complete absence from representation? And always, whose interests are served by visual representations? Influenced by Communications Theory, Deconstruction, Semiotics and Discourse Analysis, among other approaches, these are the typical kinds of questions asked by scholars in a wide variety of fields [10], and given the specialization of aesthetics to questions about the appreciation of art it is hardly surprising that some have little time for what they see as obfuscating and irrelevant.

By contrast the present article is based on a twofold position: to acknowledge that modernist philosophical aesthetics is a historical artefact of particular political and economic circumstances; and to extend an understanding of aesthetic experience from elite, high art to the popular arts. I am following here what I take to be an approach adopted by Cultural Studies [11]. In this view, aesthetic experience is not dismissed; it is viewed as intimately tied to issues of power, politics and the efficient workings of the economy. As Raymond Williams, one of the founders of Cultural Studies in Britain, argued, ideology is always infused with an interest in how aesthetic experience delivers ideology and, further, remains irreducible to ideology [12]. And as Richard Hoggart, another foundational member of Cultural Studies, writes, 'Unless you know how these things work as art… what you say about them will not cut very deep' [13]. In short, what is important is curiosity not only about *what* things mean, but also about *how* things mean. As Felksi

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puts it: 'Can anyone sit through a Hollywood blockbuster that is orchestrated and marketed around the spectacular nature of its special effects and still believe that popular culture is primarily about content? [14]' This multiple or pluralistic aesthetics is recognisable in the work of North American art educators, notably Laura Chapman, Vincent Lanier and Graeme Chalmers [15], as well as strikingly apparent among those proposing a visual culture approach in North America [16], Britain [17] and Europe [18].

Defining aesthetics

A pluralistic aesthetic agenda is effectively founded on how aesthetics is used in common parlance. In 1976, Williams wrote that 'nowadays' aesthetics is most commonly defined beyond the specialized areas of art and literature, as 'questions of visual appearance and effect' [19]. In 1991, Regan similarly wrote: ' In the past twenty or thirty years, especially "aesthetics" has become a short hand term for distinguishing one set of stylistic and structural principles from another' [20]. This view rescues from specialized use the meaning of the Greek term *aesthesis* from which the word *aesthetics* is derived. *Aesthesis* meant sense data in general. It meant all perceptual experience, and it was used to discriminate between material things that could be seen and those that could only be imagined. Aesthetics as *aesthesis* allows us to address agreeable experience but also disagreeable experience, the pleasant but also the unpleasant. Williams' examples are the 'lulling, the dulling, the chiming, the overbearing' [21]. Furthermore, a polyaesthetics allows us to speak of sense perception in terms of specific situations rather than abstract generalisations, to consider the actual variation in intentions and response that exist within the contexts of particular cultural sites.

The vernacular use of aesthetics

A site-specific definition of aesthetics in terms of visual appearance and effect, of stylistic and structural principles, is clearly evident in many recent studies. Areas of life never before considered aesthetic have undergone, in an oft-used term, a process of 'aestheticization' [22]. This is partly because many areas were never before intended to be aesthetic and so were not fashioned as such, and partly because under modernism many of the cultural forms previously excluded from aesthetic consideration have now had such consideration extended to them. Taken together, the examples below – and they are only examples – represent recognition that aesthetic experience has become critical for understanding the conditions of designer capitalism, and that while some are life-enhancing, others are not, and while some are pleasant, others are anything but.

Harris [23] and Henry [24] are both deeply ambiguous about 'the aesthetics of consumerism'. While acknowledging the pleasures it offers, Harris finds it morally unworthy and Henry finds it visually deficient. Others are equally ambivalent about aesthetics, referring to 'the masochistic aesthetic' of certain Hollywood films [25]; 'the anorexic aesthetic' [26] that others call 'heroin chic' [27], and the 'trash aesthetics' of low budget horror films [28]. Emphasizing such ambiguity, the term beauty is now often recast as 'dangerous, transgressive, subversive. It can be grotesque or even ugly', a development referred to by Brand as 'the dark side of beauty' [29].

Similarly, Leddy and Kupfer separately describe the 'aesthetics of the everyday' in terms of both agreeable and negative qualities [30]. Leddy is principally concerned with how ordinary, visually untrained people arrange their living and working spaces by employing the products of consumer society, the results of which can be joyous, charming and fun, but also bombastic, dull and banal. Kupfer discusses media violence and media sexuality, both of which are visceral as they appeal directly to the spinal cord rather than the mind. Kupfer describes ultra violence as 'the sights and sounds of human destruction; the tearing of flesh, mashing of bone, letting of blood', the purpose of which is 'an appreciation of its sensational content, its *aesthesis'* [31]. He also describes a society saturated by media sexuality that is perverse because it almost always involves voyeurism.

Others discuss athletic, muscular male bodies in advertisements as having become an aesthetic norm widely available for aesthetic admiration [32]. Others still discuss 'female bodily aesthet-

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ics' [33] to which I will turn later in discussing Bratz dolls. The use of aesthetics to describe plastic surgery and reconstructive dentistry clearly draw upon the pleasing associations of the term [34], as do the many ways in which commodities are marketed to the public, including even the selection and presentation of fruit and vegetables [35]. Yet others describe aesthetics as a prime factor in identity construction, specifically in terms of an adopted persona [36], hair styles [37] and what it means to be cool [38].

The aestheticisation of everyday life involves our extensive exposure to the media, the consumer products we buy, the way people without formal training in the visual arts organise their environments, and how we all construct our appearance for ourselves and for others. While each of these developments has precedents, their extent is as new as their cross-fertilisation is marked. For example, the mass arts fuel body consciousness in real life, while ordinary living is conducted by arranging and rearranging already existing artfully created and marketed consumer products.

There are numerous other examples of this ordinary language, site-specific use of aesthetics to describe visual appearance and how it makes people feel, far too many to enumerate here. But it is now time to consider why all of this matters.

The power of aesthetics

It matters because aesthetic experience is powerful irrespective of whether it is agreeable or not. That pleasurable aesthetic experience has the power to seduce the rational mind enjoys the most impressive pedigree. Plato famously thought beauty to be closely allied to the good, though he seriously feared its power to do harm. Similarly, John Adams, the second US President, wrote that in all societies 'Beauty… can at any time, overbear' what he called 'Genius and Virtues' [39].

Nothing has changed. Higgins writes, 'beauty is coercive and manipulative', and in describing the relationship between beauty and sexuality, she writes, 'Beauty compels'; it is the means to power, 'the irresistible weapon, the spiritual equivalent of the nuclear bomb' [40]. Beauty subverts dogma by activating the realm of fantasy and imagination… [it] knits the mind and body together' so that our attitudes towards it are ambiguous: 'We both long for and fear its seductions' [41].

But we are not only seduced; we are also simultaneously lulled and kept anxious. With television often droning on as a backdrop to everyday home life, television programmes and advertisements flow from one to another in a constant state of agitation, every moment a highlight, so that ironically nothing is highlighted and everything is the same [42]. An endless flood of images simultaneously calms and agitates, worries and comforts.

And also we are bludgeoned. The highly visceral is now used to cut through sensory overload from so many media sources as well as our cynicism about the media [43]. Appealing directly to the primal, to the nervous system, media producers compete fiercely to outdo their rivals. Visceral explorations of the body in television programs like the United States CSI series, the tamer but still gut wrenching British *Silent Witness*, the movie film genre of splatter films, or anorexic models that seem to defy death, shock, horrify and repulse.

Whether it is through seduction, lulling, anxiety, visceral shock or any other felt experience, aesthetics wraps ideas and beliefs that help engender consent. Aesthetics and ideology work hand in hand, the one folding into the other. Eaton suggests that there may be no pure aesthetic terms for they invariably involve ideas and beliefs which are always bound to be in contention. She writes, 'I would wager most aesthetic terms are "impure"– they reflect, even require, beliefs and values: sincere, suspenseful, sentimental, shallow, subtle, sexy, sensual, salacious, sordid, sobering, sustainable, skillful… and that, of course, only scratches the surface of the s words' [44].

This position flies in the face of the Kantian tradition, which seeks to separate out aesthetics from ethics. For Kant aesthetics was self-sufficient, and one was meant always to adopt towards aesthetic objects an utterly disinterested stance. But few who followed Kant in other ways followed him in this. Most have taken their cue from Plato's deep suspicion of beauty and applied it to all other aesthetic qualities [45]. Aesthetics has the power to offer ideas, values and beliefs in

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such a way that even those that are not in one's best interests are made to seem both attractive and in the order of things, to seem natural. Rejecting ideology is made all the more complicated when offered in attractive, pleasurable forms by not wishing to reject the accompanying pleasure. And when we experience the offering of ideology bodily, whether it is pleasurable or not, when the experience is literally embodied, subjecting ideology to critical scrutiny is difficult. This is precisely because the mind/body split is only a figment in the minds of rationalist philosophers like Kant and does not compute with actual experience.

Aesthetics have been used to support any number of political regimes, social causes and economic systems. It is the particular characteristic of our own time that aesthetics is used to support the consumerist aesthetics of designer capitalism. In the styling and marketing of services and goods there is now what Postrel calls 'an aesthetic imperative' [46]. Where the price and quality of goods are equal, it is aesthetics that distinguishes products and makes the difference between a product's success or failure. The aesthetics of our commodity, entertainment culture is not an afterthought; it is a deeply inherent part of the designer capitalist ideology of continual, full-throttle consumption.

Bratz dolls as a case in point

Numerous examples can be provided, but Bratz dolls offer a convenient example, particularly because Bratz are aimed at one of the main demographics we teach. Carey's study shows that since their introduction in 1991, Bratz dolls have revolutionised the US doll market, forcing Barbie to the sidelines of every child market except for the very youngest of children [47]. Bratz now dominate the tween market (7–10 year olds) to whom they are principally marketed. Bratz are an especially rich intersection of colliding values and beliefs, pitting children and adults against one another, crossing and converging both traditional class and ethnic divides, and raising in an especially acute fashion the issue of marketing manipulation verses consumer agency. Equally, Bratz present the difficulty of reconciling their obvious appeal to tween girls as models of empowerment with the market message that empowerment is to be had through consumption. This is a tension played out in numerous studies that celebrate the agency of girls [48] where it has been necessary to counter the idea of girls as merely passive victims of the media [49] yet to acknowledge the limits of agency within consumer society.

To many an adult eye the Bratz doll's large mouths are pouty, sultry, even collagen-injected; their huge eyes are indolent, think-lined, heavy-lidded and glazed. Their tight fitting, revealing midriffs and skimpy skirts ensure they are scantily clad and thus trashy, even slutty. Their ensemble of features could be called 'hooker chic'. Sexual morality is thereby foregrounded, but Carey shows that class and race are also in play. Of the 30 different dolls on the market, skin colours include dark, tan, deep tan or olive, and all the dolls have ethnic names like Fianna, Nevra, Kumi and May Lin. The sexual cool of Bratz is interpreted by many middle-class parents as belonging to the working class with their alleged lack of protective care against the evils of the world. Bratz are exotic – multicultural, multi-ethnic – and also erotic.

At a time when many middle-class parents feel there now exist significantly more dangers than in previous generations from which their children need protection, such parents tend to valorise their children as innocents. By combining what appears overt sexuality with minority ethnicity and low class associations, the dolls offer a street-wise, ghetto aesthetic that alarms parents as much as it appeals to their children as cool. Bratz manifestly contest the idea that children are innocent. Innocent children have dolls for companionship, for mothering and nurture, or with Barbie for looking and dressing like adults. By contrast, Bratz represent preteens symbolically playing out the rebellion of the adolescents they are yet to become. Carey argues that while Bratz represent innocence corrupted, parents feel powerless in the face of the marketing giants and peer pressure [50]. Parents see the marketing of Bratz dolls as manipulation of their vulnerable charges, but despite lingering doubts they are persuaded to allow the dolls to lie just this

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side of acceptability. Walking this line, the brand name Bratz always appears with a hallo above it. Bratz are little devils, but also angels.

Meanwhile, marketers stress children's agency, claiming that what parents see as sexual promiscuity, children see as simply having attitude. Cross sees this as clash between an aesthetic of *cute* verses an aesthetic of *cool* [51]. If parents want their children to act cute, meaning to be dependent upon them, children want to be cool, to have the right to indulge their own tastes in ways that define them as separate from their parents. Parents find *cute* wholly acceptable for cute children are lively and, while wilful, never less than charming; for children, Bratz are *cool* partly because they create anxiety for their parents.

For girls, shopping has become one of the markers of growing maturity [52], and the manufactures of Bratz encourage such thoughts by producing a seemingly infinite number of well-made and fashionable accessories. As their homepage states, Bratz have a 'Passion for fashion' [53], and with a new line of up-to-the-minute Bratz fashions and accessories released every three months, their tween consumers are encouraged to think likewise. The Bratz manufacturer – MGA Entertainment – employs leading designers to match the actual market for teen clothes so that by buying the latest line of clothes and accessories girls learn what is trendy and how to consume it through their Bratz.

Here then is a classic clash between aesthetics and ideology, yet also an example of just how neatly they are interwoven. A ghetto-cool aesthetic that helps tween girls realize in fantasy who they are in the process of becoming plays its seductive role in perpetuating the market ideology of constructing an empowered identify through consumption. Girls are offered the potential opportunity of endlessly constructing and reconstructing their identity through endless bouts of consumption. As Godrey argues, the media promote a sense of girls' agency but, in conflating feminism with femininity, it actually sponsors attention to fashion and appearance [54]. While stressing girls' agency is appropriate to counter the traditional view of inherent feminine passivity, it is equally necessary to consider their agency as curtailed by market conditions [55]. As Taft argues, girl power is now a market strategy, which undercuts the authority of mass-produced products to deliver real autonomy [56]. Until they grow out of their tween years, girls have the chance of unlimited identity construction through unlimited consumption. But will they grow out of this ideology, or will it become a fundamental part of their ongoing construction of themselves as adults?

Designer capital

jagodzinski makes the point that whereas once capitalism was founded on desire for goods that were for the most part out of one's reach, and, therefore, always remained the object of desire, today, with hugely increased disposable income, it is easy to realize one's desire [57]. He calls this 'designer capitalism', an economic system based not so much on desire but the drive to satisfy ever more desire. Meeting one desire immediately sets up additional desire, and always now there are new, improved, or just more, goods to further evoke desire. Thus designer capitalism is based on the drive to create desire rather than desire itself.

Aesthetics is central to this shift in the nature of capital. No longer is it an optional extra to be indulged in once everything really important is dealt with. Whereas once capitalism operated primarily in terms of production, nowadays it functions much more in terms of consumption. Similarly, where people once identified themselves as producers, or workers, today they are more likely to identify themselves as consumers [58]. Production requires sobriety, thrift and hard work – the Protestant virtues – while consumption requires the activation of desire and a concomitant loosening of strict moral codes. As Brown remarks, 'Products, life and capitalism itself become aestheticized as the manufacture of desire becomes indispensable in the marketing and selling of things… Thus, it is precisely in the production of desire that aesthetics, body/selves, and economics converge [59].

Sport provides a clear example. No one would deny the aesthetic pleasure, as Novitz says, of the runner or swimmer in terms of 'smooth, fluid

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motion that suggests effortlessness' [60]. Yet Welsch argues that whereas sport was once associated with ethics – sport was thought to build character and discipline the body – now it is part of 'today's aestheticization' where sport has 'become a show for the amusement of the entertainment society'. With 'the erotic of perfect bodies foregrounded, performing and exhibiting have become inseparable' [61]. For Brown, Welsch's observation that sport has moved 'from the subjugation to the celebration of the body' [62] is part of the larger movement from 'an ascetic orientation to inner bodily desires' to the 'pursuit of one's personal pleasures in the realization of a self defined through consumption' [63]. Consumer society encourages self-indulgence, not self-discipline; desire, not denial; hedonism, not abstinence – aesthetics, not ascetics.

Following Foucault, Peters makes a similar point [64]. He notes that in considering how a society ensures its citizens are kept under control it was standard during earlier phases of capitalism to invest in the regulatory regimes imposed by hospitals, factories and schools. Each of these regimes developed internalised as well as external ways to ensure bodily control. However, these controls were 'heavy, ponderous, meticulous and constant' and from the 1960s on such a 'cumbersome form of power was no longer indispensable' [65]. Instead, what developed was the body as a site of desire, the object of narcissism, and the constant replay of commodity fetish that one finds in contemporary fashion, in various forms of the consumption of the body, and in the seemingly endless forms of self-fashioning promised through diet, exercise, sport and medical procedures that all have come to mark neoliberal forms of body subjectivity under late capitalism [66].

With this shift of emphasis in the capitalist cycle of production to consumption comes the need for new ways to understand what is happening. In emphasizing production, Marx had focused on the tendency to fetishise commodities; where products are consumed under conditions divorced from their manufacture, they are, with the help of advertising and promotion, associated with beliefs and values they do not inherently have. Brown argues that it is now necessary to turn this formulation on its head and to see the dreamworlds that now dazzle us in terms of a commodification of fetishes, that is, where something that is already cut off from the conditions of its production is consumed purely for the pleasure of consuming it. Now consuming has become an end in itself. No longer justified by use value or exchange value, not even by sign value, consumerism is self-justifying. Moreover, as Welsch observers, many products are sold through 'aesthetic ennoblement' so that the 'aesthetic aura is then the consumer's primary acquisition, with the article merely incidental' [67].

One consequence is that people buy more than they need even to help establish their identity – other than as consumers that is. Thus, one of the fastest growing industries in the United States is the selling of storage space for all those items people have bought but have no space for in their homes [68]. People have bought into an identity that requires continual consumption, and always it is aesthetics that is partly motivating, and sometimes wholly so. Aesthetics stimulates desire, and like the Bratz dolls that have a passion for fashion, children are now taught from an early age to consume.

In a landscape filled with signs and images that constantly flow uninterrupted and morph seemingly overnight, the economic and the aesthetic have become so intertwined it is difficult to say which determines the other. For classical Marxism the issue was simple: aesthetic considerations were determined by what the economy would allow. Today, the economy is driven as much by aesthetic considerations as anything else. With the packing and styling of products, along with a host of cross-media promotional images all intended to stimulate desire, aesthetics has become indispensable to the capitalist cycle. If in an earlier period of capitalism, aesthetics was a last thought, the icing on the cake, the decorative but non-essential cheery on top, it is now central to the entire capitalist enterprise. So influential has consumerism become that both advocacy of social policies and political campaigns have become aestheticized [69], causing, for example, Welsch to complain of 'sugar coating the real with aesthetic flair' where 'the cosmetics

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of reality' have become a central element in 'an expanding culture of festivals and fun' [70].

The centrality of aesthetics is seen in many of the examples provided earlier, in the identities telegraphed through hairstyle, in the display of male as well as female bodies, and in the routine use of surgery to enhance the bodies nature provided us. When sport has become a display of ideal bodies, when our cynicism and sensory overload is penetrated by the visceral, when we organise our personal environments with the numerous already aesthetically fashioned products now available, when even vegetables are aesthetised in supermarkets, there can be no doubt that we have taken an aesthetic turn. When children are seduced by an edgy, exotic aesthetic to construct their identity through continual consumption, who can doubt that aesthetics is central to life?

Consumer aesthetics and art education

A culture of consumer aesthetics and a view of art education as a civil or moral responsibility are invariably at odds. In understanding this Connor usefully distinguishes between a hedonist verses a moralist approach to culture [71]. Where hedonists equate value with aesthetic pleasure, a moralistic position equates value with an emphasis on ideas, beliefs and values. Those who see art education as a vehicle for social reconstruction will tend to adopt a moralist position, but I suggest they should never forget the hedonistic means by which all visual culture operate. Those who tend toward a hedonistic position equally need to remember that all visual imagery inherently embodies ideas, beliefs and values about which we might at times wish to object. A holistic or balanced approach will concede the legitimacy of both positions – hedonism and morality, aesthetics and ideology – where pleasure is viewed as self-justifying, but also a primary means of inculcating ideology. In words Plato might have approved – ever the moralist he could also appreciate beauty –Williams writes that aesthetics offers

at times an intense and irreplaceable experience in which fundamental human process[es] are directly stimulated, reinforced or extended; at times at a different extreme, an evasion of [the] immediate situation, or a privileged indifference to the human process as a whole [72].

Under the influence of Modernist aesthetics, art educators have for too long ignored the immediate situations of their students. I recommend that an understanding of aesthetics as site-specific visual appearance and effects can lead art educators to ask important questions. What Carey did provides a starting point [73]. When she asked both her students and their parents about Bratz dolls, she discovered far more complex and nuanced views than were available to her alone. Yet as educators we need to go further. Understanding the complexity of the issues is only a first step; as educators we have the responsibility to intervene, and like the numerous products of designer capital Bratz offer pedagogic opportunities.

I recommend beginning by asking questions of the girls who own or desire to own Bratz dolls, not to shame them, but to open up the possibility of the girls working through the dilemmas of designer capital at the subjective level they are experienced. Questions could include: What do the dolls mean to you? What is their appeal? Do you know anyone who looks like this? Do you want to look like this? Why do you think the makers of Bratz dolls made them look like this? Are they cool? What makes them seem cool? What words would you use to describe them other than cool? Does looking like they do mean that you play with the dolls in a certain way? Is there Bratz doll behaviour? Should younger children be allowed to play with them? Are some people like the dolls or are Bratz just dolls? Does anyone look like the Bratz in the media? Such questions could animate activities such as looking through magazines to find celebrities that echo the dolls as well as searching through images from the past – including the Masters – that were considered fashionable at the time. And then I would recommend addressing the issues of designer capital directly. While acknowledge that collecting and playing with Bratz provides pleasure – is fun – ask whether the value of a person is really a matter of what they appear like on the outside – their makeup, their clothes,

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they way they position their bodies – or what they have inside? And do the girls think being happy, being fulfilled, is mainly a matter of possessing things, particularly lots of things, or primarily a matter of how they feel about themselves? Is self-worth a matter of possessing goods, or what one can achieve, or qualities like kindness, generosity and love? Without denying children the opportunity to find pleasure in constructing identities for themselves through the visual appeal of consumer goods, it is central to the art educational task to offer alternatives.

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