DISRUPTING THE DISCOURSE OF THE OTHER:
A TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING STUDY OF AFRICAN ART

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The primary question of this study is: How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics? This inquiry developed from previous studies on the exclusion of modern and contemporary African art in Western art museums. Through the theoretical lens of Postcolonial Theory and Critical Multiculturalism, this research conceptualizes the dominance of traditional African art in art museums, art history, and art education as a Western hegemonic discourse that normalizes perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the fixed primitive Other. Thus, this research applied Action Research (AR) methodology coupled with Transformative Learning Theory (TL) to disrupt the discourse of African art; with the purpose of affecting positive changes in perceptions of African aesthetics. The participants for this study were 10 students in a course (Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation) I instructed at the University of North Texas in the fall (September–December) 2013 semester. Data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted from participants’ assignments and my research journal. This study comprised a dual enquiry on: 1. Discourse and Meaning-making; and 2. Disruption and Transformation. First, the study analyzed students’ perceptions of African aesthetics from their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum. The findings affirmed traditional African art at the museum as a discourse of Africa as the Other of the West. Secondly, the study analyzed how students’ perceptions were influenced from their experience (in my classroom) of learning histories of modern and contemporary African art that disrupt the authenticity of traditional African art. The findings revealed that 80% of participants developed positive transformations.
demonstrates how art education grounded in critical theory and transformative learning subverted African art as the discourse of the Other, developed students’ understandings of the multiple realities of Africa and African aesthetics, and encouraged positive transformations in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

To this day, the study of African art remains largely a Western discipline, the product of Western sensibility and an expression of Western aesthetic responses to African visual culture. This partially explains the disparity between African art as it is presented in written texts and African art in reality. (Hassan, 1999, p. 215)

It was the second semester, spring 2008 of my Master of Fine Arts (MFA) study in New York City when I sat in my studio and was suddenly confronted by my paintings. They gazed at me, provoking questions about their authenticity. I gazed back at them, scribbling my thoughts as my frustrations crawled down my eyes. I was suddenly facing an artist identity crisis triggered primarily by comments from faculty during studio critiques. I became aware of the preconceived notions and expectations others had about my artworks. My paintings were expected to exude an “African” essence or to evoke social issues related to my race and culture. These narrow expectations were associated with the knowledge of my Cameroonian, West/Central African heritage; which apparently required my paintings to reflect my “African culture.” My sentiments were similar to that of Kasfir (1999) who bluntly asked, “Is the public really incapable of understanding that African cultures, and the arts they produce, are not monolithic?” (p. 95).

The underlying criticism was that my paintings were too Western and not authentically African, hence the implication that I was simply copying Western aesthetic forms. I wondered if the French student in my MFA program who had relocated from France was expected to make his art look “French.” Presumably not; he fits into the Western dominant paradigm; therefore,
neither he nor his art is expected to represent his “French” culture. Oguibe (1999) explains that the modernist notion of the artist as an “individual genius” was intended for Western artists, while non-Western artists are “identified with the collective, anonymous production pattern that inscribes primitivism” (p. 21). Scholars (Kasfir, 1999; Hassan, 1999; Okeke-Agulu, 2013; Meier 2010) who critique African art discourse have addressed the issue of “authenticity” in African art. Hassan (1999) and Okeke-Agulu (2013) attribute the neglect of modern and contemporary African art on Western misconstrued notions that modern and contemporary African art and culture are imitations of the West, thereby lacking authenticity. In other words, “authentic” African art is defined by Western taste (Kasfir, 1999).

My narrative is comparable to other contemporary African artists who approach their creative process as individuals, and not as Africans making art about their heritage or culture. Hassan (1999) explains that African artists have claimed their rights to use any art media or process; in doing so, their artworks subvert expectations of having a prescribed aesthetic. Sudanese contemporary artist Amir Nour proclaims this right in stating, “Cultures have always developed by being fertilized by new elements from other cultures…the whole modern art movement came about because some (European) artists saw African art. And yet Moore, Picasso, Modigliani are never labeled Africanist, as I am labeled Western” (Hassan, 1999, p. 222). Amir Nour explains that cultures are interchangeable, and artists should not be limited to using materials or styles specific to their culture. Moreover, he emphasizes the paradox; when a Western artist is influenced by African forms, their artworks are not labeled “African,” but he has been labeled “Western” because his art looks “Western” and not “African.” The labeling of “Western” indicates that the artist is mimicking a style that is not of his creation; therefore his artwork lacks originality. The concept of mimicry signals some of the disparities in the critique
of modern and contemporary non-Western artworks relative to Western artworks. Amir Nour’s acclamation conveys his rejection of the monolithic African aesthetic, and his right to his artistic autonomy. While I was disappointed by the shallow expectations of what my artworks should entail, I was more troubled by the normalcy of such prescribed aesthetics of African art. I became aware of how Western scholarship on African art portrays fallacious representations of Africa, Africans, and African aesthetics. Hassan (1999) attributes this flawed representation as a result of African art education being approached from the lens of Western sensibilities and Western aesthetic reactions to African visual culture. Clarke (2002) affirms that such misrepresentations in art education are not accidental, but rather structured intentionally.

My MFA study ended in 2009 and I was left with many unanswered questions about my studio practice in relation to my identity as a Cameroonian and an American artist. Moreover, I was dissatisfied with my Western art education, which I believed did not reflect the reality of modern and contemporary African art. These experiences provoked my curiosity and my desire to do research on modern and contemporary African art. Thus, I decided to pursue a Ph.D. in art education. I had questions that needed to be addressed: Does modern and contemporary African art exist? Who are modern and contemporary African artists, and what kinds of artworks do they make? Why is modern and contemporary African art excluded from art history, classroom art education, and permanent museum exhibitions of African art in the Unites States?

In the spring of 2011, I started my Ph.D. education at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. During my second semester, fall 2011, I did a preliminary historical research to understand the exclusions of modern African art histories and to develop my knowledge on the scope of modern and contemporary African art. My approach for that research was not focused on historical chronology, rather on themes, narratives, artists, artistic communities, global
relations, political influences, and the multiplicities of artistic practices in Africa. I was particularly interested in accessing modern and contemporary African art from the perspectives of African scholars, African artists, and non-African scholars and art professionals who acknowledge the history and authenticity of modern and contemporary African art. My findings were overwhelmingly exciting, yet burdened with the history of imperialism. I learned that modern and contemporary African art does not simply exist, but is far removed from the “primitive” aesthetic of African art. The most fascinating part about this research was learning about the multiplicities of artistic media, styles, content, and the overall diverse artistic practices of modern and contemporary African artists. Despite my disappointment that these African artistic realities were excluded from art history, I felt validated as an African artist. My paintings are indeed contemporary African art, as there is no one aesthetic that represents African art. As I developed my knowledge of modern and contemporary African art, I gained a sense of relief and excitement. However, this thrilling new knowledge was accompanied with haunting histories that I could not ignore. Finding the answers to my questions and concerns about African art became urgent.

Definition of Terms

For this research, I am adhering to the following definitions:


2. Discourse: “A discourse represents the ways in which reality is perceived through and shaped by historically and socially constructed ways of making sense, that is, language, complex signs, and practices that order and sustain particular forms of social existence. These systems of communication, which are constructions informed by particular
ideologies, play a significant role in shaping human subjectivities and social reality, and can work to either confirm or deny the life histories and experiences of the people who use them” (Leistyna, Sherblom, & Woodrum, 1996, p. 336).


5. Contemporary art: Art produced after modern art until now (Gompertz, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

African art is prominent in major art museum collections in the United States of America. Art museums function as monumental art and cultural institutions that construct, negotiate, and represent knowledge of people and places to museum visitors. Desai (2000) declares that art museums normalize the knowledge they present as unquestionable truths. Therefore, art museums with African art collections communicate knowledge about Africa to their audience. More significantly, this knowledge constructs normalized understandings of unquestionable truths about Africa, Africans, and African aesthetics (Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Mudimbe, 1988). While it is important and necessary to learn and engage in global arts and cultures, it becomes problematic when “forms of cultural re-presentations” are misappropriated or used in a method that misrepresents and devalues particular social groups (Ballengee-Morris, & Stuhr, 2001). Hence, the problem arises with African art; it is a misrepresentation.

The African ethnographic objects, or rather, objects of “colonial constructions of African subjectivity” Okeke-Agulu (2010b, p. 525), visible in art museums are problematic for several reasons; (a) they are predominantly from “black” Africa—Sub-Saharan West and Central Africa,
therefore not reflective of the entire continent (Hassan, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013); (b) the artists are unknown because the objects are not idiosyncratic creations by artists, rather done by craftsmen as commodity (Kasfir, 1999); (c) they are monolithic; limited to masks, woodcarving, exotic patterns, and crafts (Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999); (d) there are no accounts of historical progression (Hassan, 1999; Nicodemus, 2013); (e) modern and contemporary African art are excluded (Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Okeke-Agulu, 2013); (f) the objects represent Africa as the homogeneous primitive exotic Other (Araeen, 2010; Chanda, 1992; Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013); (g) and such representations are essentialist and racist (Meier, 2010). The ultimate problem with African art is that it is a Western hegemonic discourse of Africa (Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013).

While parts Africa have histories and cultures that include the African objects in art museums, it is irrational for the art history of a continent with over 50 different countries with different customs, languages, ethnicities, races, governments, religion, economies, and so forth, to be branded by a homogeneous aesthetic representation. Hassan (1999) explains that Western education of African art focuses on describing the function and uses of objects in regional settings without consideration of history or progression in Africa. This method of education has led to what Sidney Kasfir calls the “one tribe/one style” paradigm of African art, and it presents Africa as being trapped in time (Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1984; Nicodemus, 2013). This approach to African art, evident in exhibitions of traditional masks and wooden sculptures in art history textbooks and art museums, is a conception of the Western gaze (Chin, 2011), and communicates an unprogressive unimportant African civilization (Hassan, 1999). African art, as presented in
Western art museums is largely a misrepresentation of people, cultures, aesthetics, histories, ideologies, and an overall fallacy of Africa’s reality.

Modern and contemporary African and African diaspora art has been discounted and largely excluded from Western art education and museum exhibitions throughout art history (Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Okeke-Agulu, 2013). While some scholars have gravitated toward modern and contemporary African aesthetics (Vogel, 2005), exhibitions of stereotypical traditional African art remain prominent in art museums (Harney, 2007). Harney (2010) explains that average “museum audiences arrive with few or no tools with which to understand either contemporary arts or the histories of discourse framing Africa’s arts” (Harney, 2010, p. 95). Therefore, museum audiences largely accept and understand African aesthetics as presented in art museums as the reality of Africa.

Research Questions

The histories and characteristics of traditional African art are dominant in many Western art museums containing an African art gallery. Through the African art gallery, knowledge of Africa is communicated in many ways including; exhibited objects, gallery wall texts, publications, exhibition catalogs, docent gallery tours, websites, and scholarly writings. Largely excluded from the African art gallery are the histories and displays of modern and contemporary African art. Hassan (1999) and Meier (2010) declare that the inclusion of modern and contemporary African art in art museums is a disruption to Western hegemonic art history. Scholars (Araeen, 2010; Chanda, 1992; Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013) affirm that traditional African art communicates Western hegemonic ideologies—a primitive, exotic monolithic Africa. However, very little is known about the
understandings of Africa and African aesthetics that audiences acquire and retain from their
learning experience of traditional African art in art museums. Moreover, not much is known
about the influences that modern and contemporary African art can have on the perceptions of
audiences. My research therefore addresses this gap by studying a group of university students’
perceptions of African aesthetics as informed by their learning experience of African art in a
Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum. In turn, to study changes or lack of in their perceptions once
exposed to modern and contemporary African art and histories that problematize the authenticity
of African art at the museum. My research question is: How does the disruption of African art
discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics? To help
answer this question my research addresses the following sub-questions:

1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art
   in an art museum communicate to a group of university students?

2. What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students
   retain from their learning experience in an art museum?

3. How does a group of university students respond to a disruption of their learning
   experience of traditional African art in an art museum?

Significance of the Study

While there have been occasional exhibitions of modern and contemporary African art in
Europe, North America, and Africa since the 1960s, modern and contemporary African artists
are still marginalized and mostly excluded from Western art education (Mauchan, 2009). The
works of these artists and other non-Western artists are mostly discounted by many art museums
in the United States as “second-rate” (Hassan, 1999). Although scholars have challenged the
discourse of traditional African art, most Western museums are resistant to collect and exhibit modern and contemporary African art, as it does not fit into the stereotypical authentic African art (Hassan, 1999; Meier, 2010). Meier (2010) affirms that the Western “authentic” discourse of African art is a deterrent to the scholarship of modern and contemporary African art. Moreover, the acceptance of modern and contemporary African art into Western art museums is disruptive to ideologies of Western constructed art history (Hassan, 1999). Therefore, such disruptions are necessary, and should persist until Western hegemony is subverted, and the scholarship of African art is reconstructed to reflect the real history of modern and contemporary African art (Meier, 2010). The purpose of this research is to disrupt Western constructed African art discourse with the goal of positively influencing perceptions of African aesthetics and advancing the scholarship of modern and contemporary African art.

As prominent cultural sites, art museums provide art collections and exhibitions that influence audiences’ perceptions and inform art history and art education practices. This study is relevant to museum education, classroom art education, and art education publications. Implications of this study should be of interest to art historians, museum educators and curators, and art educators as they are participants in the coordination and presentation of African art discourse to audiences. This study is an ambition of what scholars of critical multicultural education have deemed necessary for social reconstruction (Ballengee-Morris, & Stuhr, 2001) and transformative knowledge (Jay, 2003) in art education. The study aims to contribute to advancements in re-conceptualizing and re-constructing the dominant art history. This study strives to provide “investigations of multiple perspectives,” which is a responsibility of scholars and educators (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001). The study discourages stereotypical notions of cultures and encourages cultural sensitivity in multicultural education (Milner, L. Flowers, E.
Moore, J. Moore, & T. Flowers, 2003). This study is particularly relevant in contributing to the developing scholarship on modern and contemporary African art, which is a field that is slowly manifesting (Enwezor, 2010; Okeke-Agulu, 2010a). This study is further significant in subverting hegemonic stereotypical perspectives of Africa that are informed by African art in museums and in art history textbooks. Such “authentic” stereotypes have been pervasive impediments to the establishment of scholarship on modern and contemporary African art (Jegede, 2010; Meier, 2010).

Ultimately, this research is significant in highlighting the canon of African art as a discourse of the Other, and in providing art educational practices that counter and subvert the singular tribal African art aesthetic. Moreover, the research demonstrates how knowledge and understandings of Africa and African aesthetics can be positively transformed through restructuring art exhibitions, art history text, and art education—relative to African art—to reflect the multiple realities of Africa, African artists, and artistic practices in Africa. My hope is that my research and many more after will contribute to re-constructing the scholarship of African art, and encourage museum exhibitions, art education publications, and classroom education on African art that is equitably inclusive and counter-hegemonic.

Limitations

This study was limited to students taking art education courses at the University of North Texas, in Denton TX, and also limited to an art museum in Dallas-Fort Worth, TX. The study does not account for other art education students in the region, nor other museums’ exhibitions of African art. While participants in this study were students in my course, their participation, engagement, and duration in this research was completely voluntary.
CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW

African Art: The Discourse of the Other

My research is structured to disrupt African art discourse with the intention of transforming perceptions of African aesthetics. Scholars (Araeen, 2010; Chanda, 1992; Chin, 2011; Harney, 2007; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1984, 1999; Meier, 2010; Mudimbe, Nicodemus, 2013; Okeke-Agulu, 2013) affirm that African art in Western museums and in art education is a misrepresentation, and communicates Western hegemonic ideologies; a primitive, exotic monolithic Africa. The problem of misrepresentation and hegemony in African art guides my approach in undertaking postcolonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism as my theoretical frameworks. For this study, my research question is: How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics?

Postcolonial theory is concerned with challenging and subverting Eurocentric/Western hegemonic constructions and re-presentations of non-Western cultures (McEwan, 2009; Spivak, 2003). My research critiques African art as a product of Western hegemony and a continuation of neocolonialism (Mudimbe, 1988). Furthermore, my research disrupts and subverts African art as a hegemonic discourse of Africa. Postcolonial theorists (Bhabha, 1984; Dotson, 2011, Mazrui, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988; Spivak, 1994, 2008, 2012) have analyzed structures of power, otherness, re-presentation, authenticity, stereotypes, subordination, and other strategies whereby Western hegemonic discourse is fulfilled historically via colonization, and contemporarily via neocolonialism. The problems associated with African art attests to postcolonial concerns of how partial and stereotypical representations of non-Western cultures
inform and validate hegemonic fabricated truths. Postcolonial theories are therefore fundamental to my research on African art; thus, my literature review expands on this relevancy.

Theories in critical multiculturalism frame my secondary theoretical framework, and link postcolonial theory with the art education. Desai (2000) states that multicultural education needs to address issues of power, politics of representation, and reexamine how cultures are authentically represented. Chin (2011) explains that many accessible multicultural educational resources represent non-Western cultures in stereotypical ways. These concepts of power, politics, representation, authenticity, and stereotypes are fundamental to critical multicultural studies and postcolonial theories. The combination of postcolonial theory and critical multicultural theories therefore provides an enriched theoretical framework for my research.

My literature review is organized to investigate African art discourse within the lens of post-colonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism. I begin with postcolonial theory as an overarching framework to elaborate on discourse and the canon of African art history and African art in art museums. I proceed with theories in critical multiculturalism to elaborate on current practices of African art education and museum exhibitions.

Historical Background

Identifying African Art

African art is displayed in art history textbooks and in art museums with African art collections, including an art museum in Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW), TX. Gardner’s *Art Through the Ages* art history textbooks have been an influential source in art education (Chin, 2011; Kader, 2000). Kader (2000) praises Gardner’s *Art Through the Ages* as “The Bible of Art History”—an outstanding educational resource for students across the world. In the fourteen
edition of Gardner’s *Art Through the Ages*, chapter 37—the last chapter of the book—is titled “AFRICA, 1800 TO 1980” (Kleiner, 2013, p. 1062). The African art in this chapter includes art mostly from the West and Central regions of Africa; with the dates generally indicated by broad eras—(1871-1900, 19th, 20th century). The artworks are identified by regions, descriptions, materials, scale, and by the associated museum collection. The artists are mostly unlisted and unknown, and the artworks are organized by traditions of tribal groups such as: Yoruba, Chokwe, Baule, Senufo, Igbo, Mende, Kuba, and Samburu. The artworks include shrines, masks, wooden figures, pictures of masquerades, and pictures of people in rural areas of Africa. Similar to Gardner’s *Art Through the Ages*, many art history books with African art chapters exhibit the discourse of African art.

A Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Art Museum’s African art gallery exhibits a range of Africa’s traditional cultures, visual arts, and ancient cultures. Exhibitions of African art at this museum have included: *African, Oceanic and Pacific Primitive Artifacts* (1954), *The Sculpture of Negro Africa* (1961), *Art of the Congo* (1968), *Primitive Art Masterworks* (1975), “*Primitivism*” in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern (1985-89), *Animals in African Art: From the Familiar to the Marvelous* (1997) (Walker, 2009). This museum is one of the many art museums in the United States with collections of African art that are influential to art history textbooks and art education publications on African art. The African art in Gardner’s *Art Through the Ages* and in other publications are usually from museum and gallery collections. Art history textbooks and art museums are sites of knowledge that present African art as sources of authentic educative insights into Africa and African culture. These sites advocate for the presentation, education, and appreciation of global cultures; which is an equitable and honorable
practice. However, the question of whose discourse defines art history and African art cannot be overlooked.

What is known as “African art” is what is usually exhibited in art museums and in art education publications; textbooks, journals, exhibition catalogs. African art is the normalized discourse of the aesthetics of Africa. Granted the canon of African art in art museums and art education, scholars (Araeen, 2010; Cain, 2011; Chanda, 1992; Chin, 2011; Enwezor, & Okeke-Agulu, 2009; Fall, & Pivin, 2002; Harney, 2007, 2010; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999, 2002; Meier, 2010; Mudimbe, 1988; Nicodemus, 2013; Okeke-Agulu, 2013) have challenged this discourse as a Western fabrication that misrepresents the history, people, cultures, and aesthetics of Africa.

The documentation of art history has been and is still predominantly from the Western perspective (Clarke, 2002), and the scholarship of African art is primarily a product of Western hegemonic ideologies of African cultures (Hassan, 1999, Kasfir, 1999, Meier, 2010). What is known as “African art” are cultural artifacts of sub-Sahara Africa, or as Meier (2010) identifies, “black” Africa, and in particular, from West and Central Africa (Hassan, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013). The visual “arts” of these regions have been collected, exhibited, and validated as authentic African art by the West (Kasfir, 1999). Therefore, what is represented in art museums and art history textbooks as African art are usually objects created to be used for traditional religious practices, worn during cultural festivals, or for other utilitarian purposes (Kasfir, 1999). The identity of the artist is usually unknown because African art objects are not individual creations by fine artists, but rather created by local community craftsmen for specific purposes (Kasfir, 1999). This therefore problematizes their identification as “art,” and their placement in fine art museums (Vogel, 2005). Meier (2010) states, “‘Art’… is not an expression of a fixed history or a cultural identity, but of an artist’s self-reflexive contemplation of form” (p.
Considering Meier’s definition of art further complicates the presence of African art in art museums.

Kasfir (1999) poses “Who creates meaning for African art?” and the polls declare the West; Western museums, historians, anthropologists, curators, collectors, critics, schools, and ideologies (Clark, 2002; Chin, 2011; Meier, 2010; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Okeke-Agulu, 2010b). For the most part, the “Western lens” has been, and is still used in defining the arts of non-Western cultures (Chin 2011), which explains the “primitive,” “exotic” and unprogressive authentic African art dominant in Western art education (Hassan, 1999; Meier, 2010).

Kasfir’s (1999) question—“Who creates meaning for African art?”—is the underlying concern of my research. Therefore, the question of truth and the maker of truth is essential to my research. How did African art become normalized as art? How is the scholarship of African art constructed and validated, and what truths are excluded from this knowledge? For the most part, my interest is to understand the discourse of African art. I use the term discourse particularly to imply my position that African art is an ideological construction. Given my position, it is necessary that I closely examine how discourse operates in the construction truth.

**Discourse and the Construction of Truth**

‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth. (Foucault, 1980, p. 133)

Truth is basically a construction of power (Foucault 1980). Power constructs knowledge, and knowledge validates, reproduces, distributes, and normalizes its powers (Foucault, 1980).
Foucault’s philosophy centers on the concept of power and knowledge as equivalent in theory and in their systematic processes. This theory of power and knowledge being inseparable is what Foucault (1980) coins as discourse. Discourse—knowledge as power (Foucault, 1980)—is a concept that post-colonial theorists (Bhabha, 1983, 1984; Dotson, 2011; Césaire, 1994; Fanon, 1994; Hall, 1994; Hooks, 1994; Mazrui, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1994, 2008, 2012) ascribe to, with the purpose of subverting the dominating discourses of the imperial West (McEwan, 2009). My approach in analyzing African art is thereby informed by Foucault’s concept of discourse, but more specifically framed with a post-colonial lens.

The structures and functions of discourse are at the core of my research. Discourse is involved in every form of truth making in every society, and discourse constructs the production of any and all forms of truths of which the society’s citizens are subjected to (Foucault, 1980). Said (1994) explains that “ideas, culture and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configuration of power, also being studied” (p. 133). Thus, knowledge is always political, partial, and constructed by the power of the dominating society (Foucault, 1980; McEwan, 2009; Said, 1994). For my study and understanding on African art discourse, it is necessary for me to study the structures of power, and more specifically how power constructs and validates knowledge. I am therefore inclined to consider: where knowledge is generated from, what comprises as knowledge, who constructs knowledge, for whom is the knowledge is created for, and how power is involved in this entire process (McEwan, 2009).

Notions of “power” are usually associated with the obvious physical or visible forms of power such as government power. This form of power is what Foucault (1980) refers to as
“juridical sovereignty and State institutions” (p. 102), and Gramsci (2005) refers to as “political society” or “the State” (p. 54). The powers of the law, government, and political society which manifests by “direct domination” (Gramsci, 2005 p.54) are indeed significant in discourse, however, this form of power does not encompass the full workings of power (Foucault, 1980; Gramsci, 1999, 2005). Foucault (1980) states that power goes “beyond the limit of the state” (p. 122), and “We must escape from the limited field of juridical sovereignty and State institutions, and instead base our analysis of power on the study of the techniques and tactics of domination” (p. 102). In other words, the state’s dominating power is the obvious perception of power, but it is not at the core of the process of power—how power is constructed and reproduced. Foucault (1980) directs the understanding of power to be focused on observing and learning “the techniques and tactics of domination” (p. 102). This is where the true power exists; not in the results of power, but in the ‘how’ power is brought into existence (Foucault, 1980, 1982).

Simply addressing power as motivated only by military and economic gain, or limiting the understanding of power to law and state powers, subordinates the “mechanics of power”—power as knowledge—discourse (Foucault, 1980). This other side of power—“mechanics of power”—resides in Gramsci’s (1999, 2005) theory of “cultural hegemony,” what Foucault (1980) refers to as “non-sovereign power”—“disciplinary power” (p.105), and considers as one of the greatest inventions of the dominant class (Foucault, 1980).

Discourse—knowledge as power—is involved in the control of people, their bodies, territory, histories, cultures, aesthetics, minds, and ultimately the domination of their overall truth (Foucault, 1980; Gramsci, 1999, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1994). The type of power relevant to my research is the power of discourse; how it manifests in art history, art education, and in art museums. The existing power relations in the knowledge of African art are not those
of the state/law/judicial powers, rather, it is that of cultural hegemony. Therefore, more specific to my research on discourse is cultural hegemonic discourse.

*Cultural Hegemony: Dominant Discourse as Universal Truth*

It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that ‘knowledge’ not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm. (Hall, 1994, p. 395)

In a general sense, hegemony explains how particular groups are able to organize and control other groups (Woodrum, & Sherblom 1996). The theory of hegemony explains that humans are not only ruled by force, but also by ideology, and that leadership/domination occurs when the masses are persuaded to accept the principles of the ruling class as the interest of everyone (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1998; Bates, 1975; Gramsci, 1999). The dominating group is able to successfully attain consent from the masses by presenting themselves as the “moral and intellectual leadership in society” (McEwan, 2009, p. 16).

Gramsci’s theory on hegemony is credited as one of the most noteworthy contributions the understandings of “hegemony” (Bates, 1975). Gramsci (1999) explains that “political society” or “the State” exercises hegemonic power by “direct domination,” while the “civil society” or “private” sectors such as schools and churches, [and art museums] exercise hegemonic power through leadership—the cultural leadership of the ruling class. This form of cultural leadership by the ruling class is what Gramsci (1999) elaborates as “cultural hegemony.” Said (1994) acknowledges Gramsci’s notion of cultural hegemony as an explanation how some
ideas, particularly those of the West are dominant over others. Gramsci, (1999) and Said (1994) identify the West as the ruling class that exercises cultural hegemony over the rest of the world.

Foucault (1980) acknowledges cultural hegemony as a “discourse of discipline” (p. 106) in which the rule of power is implemented not by forces of law, but by codification of knowledge that produces ‘mental normalization of individuals” (p. 116). This is the type of power that is able to control the masses without their consciousness of the fact that they are functioning under the discourse of the ruling class. The genius in this form of power, which Foucault (1980) alluded to in stating that it was a great invention, is that it is an invisible power. Its strength lies in its invisibility, which allows its discourse to progressively retain the normalization of its truths. Foucault (1980) explains that direct domination does not necessarily create discourses of truths; rather, disciplinary discourse—cultural hegemony—is able to “permeate, characterize and constitute the social body” (p. 93). This is the form of power which postcolonial theory identifies as the hegemonic discourses involved in the formation of the “Other” of the West. Moreover, it is the form of power that centralizes Western ideology as the norm. This is the type of power that constitutes the history and current conditions of African art discourse in art museums and art education.

In short, cultural hegemony is a manifestation of the power in discourse. Discourse only functions in the hands of the dominant group. The dominant group has access to discourse, because they construct discourse and provide for the masses to internalize—to consent. This is their way of disciplining the masses and maintaining their role as the ruling class. The notion of consent in hegemony is crucial to postcolonial theory and to my research on African art discourse in art museums. Consent explains how hegemonic discourses are able to proceed without real disruptions. For the purpose of my research, my use of the term hegemony is in
reference to cultural hegemony/disciplinary power. An underlying concern of my research is the question of how and why “African art” was constructed, validated and normalized as truth. It is therefore necessary to grasp an understanding of the “mechanics of power” in knowledge formations (Foucault, 1980).

Acknowledging that truth is created by discourse (knowledge as power), and discourse is owned by the ruling class, cultural hegemony is therefore the scheme in which the ruling class exercises its discourse. The truth of Africa and African art is entrenched in the discourse of the West. How Africa is defined, understood, and authenticated is constructed by the dominant society—the West (Mudimbe, 1988). Thus, African art is a representation of Western cultural hegemony over Africa (Meier, 2010; Mudimbe, 1988).

Possessors of Power: The Leaders and their Intellectuals

Civil society is the marketplace of ideas, where intellectuals enter as “salesmen” of contending cultures. The intellectuals succeed in creating hegemony to the extent that they extend the world view of the rulers to the ruled, and thereby secure the “free” consent of the masses to the law and order of the land. (Bates, 1975, p. 353)

While all societies participate in the “unification of world civilisation,” they have done so only in the capacity of being contributors to Western culture (Gramsci, 1999, p. 725). Post-colonial scholars (Bhabha, 1984, 1983; Dotson, 2011; Césaire, 1994; Fanon, Hall, 1994; Hooks, 1994; Mazrui, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1994) have identified and critiqued Western cultural hegemony for dominating and disciplining the world. The West is therefore the primary possessor of discourse; they are the ruling society—the leaders; but they do not work alone. Through the process of cultural hegemony, the leaders create “intellectuals”
to carry out their interest on the masses (Bates, 1975; Foucault, 1980; Gramsci, 2005; Spivak, 1994). The intellectuals are the “deputies” of the dominant group (Gramsci, 2005), and they function as “salesmen” who go out to the masses to “extend the world view of the rulers to the ruled, and thereby secure the “free” consent” (Bates, 1975, p. 353).

While every society may have its own intellectuals, the intellectuals of the ruling society (the West) overpowers the intellectuals of other societies through cultural hegemony—securing consent (Bates, 1975). Therefore the participation of non-ruling societies or subaltern societies in intellectual production is not derived from their natural native intellectual ideologies, rather from that of the ruling society (Gramsci, 2005). The intellectuals of the subaltern society are members of the subaltern society, but they have been culturally hegemonized to internalize and re-produce the discourse of the ruling class (Araeen, 2010; Spivak, 1994, Gramsci, 2005). This subaltern class of intellectuals is what Spivak (1994) identifies as a class of sub-oppressors—the elites of third world counties—who function to promote the “epistemic violence” of the ruling society.

The Colonial Intellectual

Spivak (1994) expands on epistemic violence and the class of sub-oppressors in relation to colonial power in India, by quoting Thomas Babington Macaulay’s “Minute on Indian Education” (1835):

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed
from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (Macauley, 1835, as quoted in Spivak, 1994, p. 77)

The history of Western colonization is a history of not only of the domination of people and territory, but also that of cultural hegemony. Colonization was guised as a form of civilization, in which the colonizer presented themselves as superior and virtuous; a strategy to win the consent of the colonized (Césaire, 1994; McEwan, 2009). In Africa, Western imperialism purposed to erase the native’s history and further distort the native’s discourse by convincing them that their culture and physicality was inferior; hence “colonialism came to lighten their darkness,” through enlightenment and civilization (Fanon, 1994, p. 37). Western colonization, a scheme of cultural hegemony was not an innocent or ethical enterprise (Césaire, 1994), for it is “responsible for producing marginal societies, cultures, and human beings” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 1). The quote by Macauley (1835) captures the invisible mechanics of hegemony, but more precisely, it reveals how the ruling society cultivates its deputies to organize its mission. In the context of colonization, the colonizers created a system in which the colonized societies could self-regulate, or rather self-oppress under the colonizer’s rule (Araeen, 2010; Campbell, 2011, Spivak, 1994). Bhabha (1984) alludes to the same statement by Macauley, in his explanation of the “mimic man”—a class of local elites created by the colonizers to function as the sub-oppressors—deputies/intellectuals.

For the most part, cultural hegemony functions such that the ruled/colonized society consents to self-oppression. Colonialism is therefore an enterprise of cultural hegemony, exercised by the ruling society to attain and retain discourse—power/knowledge, in order to possess invisible progressive control of the world. The colonial intellectuals are both the
intellectuals from the ruling society and also the elites of the colonized society. These local elites (usually political leaders)—sub-oppressors/mimic men—are prime examples of how cultural hegemony guises the real oppressors—the ruling society—the West. Gramsci (1999, 2005) explains that the intellectual must have the capacity to organize the masses and society. Mudimbe (1988) defines colonialism as “organization and arrangements” motivated by capitalism to transform “non-European areas into fundamentally Europeans constructs” (p. 1). The colonial intellectual is therefore a “capitalist entrepreneur” able to create and manage cultures and governing policies that can seamlessly regulate the masses (Gramsci, 1999).

Western colonizers ingrained their ideologies into the local elites by hegemonizing them to consent and maintain self-oppression (Araeen, 2010). This method of self-oppression is exemplary of what Spivak (1994) coins as “epistemic violence”—silencing the voice of the subaltern. The subaltern elite therefore become the face of the oppressor by performing the duties of the colonizers. This is a form of neocolonialism and it is alive and functioning in many post-colonial societies.

As a native of Cameroon, I can attest to the notion of the sub-oppressors as deputies of the West. While Cameroon and other previously colonized African countries may be “free” from Western political/judicial/military power—“direct domination” they are still functioning under Western cultural hegemonization—neocolonialism. The elites (political leaders) of many African countries are deputies functioning for the West; consciously or sub-consciously, they mask the Western oppressor and shield the consciousness of the masses. Hence the masses continue to exist within Western hegemonized truths and are less likely to question and fight to subvert hegemonic discourses such as African art. Africa’s history, identity, cultures, and arts are therefore confined within the hegemony of the West.
Earlier I mentioned that “power” is the central theme of Foucault’s philosophy, and it certainly is; however, more central to his work is the “subject,” particularly the power in the “objectivizing of the subject” (Foucault, 1982, p. 778). Objectivizing is the process of transforming the human into a subject; this process “categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). Foucault (1982) affirms that in order to examine the formation and normalization of the subject, it is necessary to understand the extensive magnitude of techniques of power. Likewise, Bhabha (1983) insists that understanding the efficiency of colonial power should go beyond identification of its representations, and rather focus on understanding its “process of subjectification” (p. 18).

Power is therefore a system of re-constructing man into a subject, or more appropriately, into an “objective”—a purpose. The re-constructed subject therefore becomes an existence of an idea, and only functions within the parameters of that idea. The subject’s agency manifests only in compliance with the discourse of the ruling class; the subject is objectivized—hegemonized as the Other—a design of colonial discourse (Bhabha, 1984; Dotson, 2011; Césaire, 1994; Fanon, 1994; Hall, 1994; Mazrui, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1994).

The dual notion of the “subject” as being controlled [the colonized] or as independent in self-awareness [the colonizer] is always implicative of power (Foucault, 1982). Power therefore functions as a relationship of the powerful and powerless, where the powerless is the Other—“the one over whom power is exercised” (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). In the context of Western colonial power, in order to maintain and validate its power, it fabricates and normalizes the
knowledge of the colonized subject—the Other (Bhabha, 1984; Dotson, 2011; Césaire, 1994; Fanon, Hall, 1994; Mazrui, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1994).

The colonial “Other” is the inferior epistemic opposition of the West. The “Other” as the non-West is: the Orient, the African, the Asian, the Latin American, the third world, the subaltern, the feminine, and the minority group (Bhabha, 1984; Clark, 2002; Coffey & Tejada, 2013; Dotson, 2011; Césaire, 1994; Fanon 1994; Hall, 1994; Hooks, 1994; Kapur, 2013; Mazrui, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1994; Taylor, 2011). Thus, Africa, Africans, and African art is the Other of the West, Westerners, and Western art.

**Constructing and Validating the Other**

“For Europe, Africa has always been, and still is, its Other, its suppressed unconscious, the land of savages and primitives frozen in a state of blissful innocence” (Araeen, 2010, p. 284). Bhabha (1983) and Foucault (1982) emphasize that the focus of studying power should go beyond its results and examine its process of creating the subject—the Other, the powerless. While Foucault (1982) does not directly address the colonial subject, his study of the “objectivizing of the subject” as a form of “dividing practices” (p. 778) is pertinent to the colonized subject. Foucault 1982 states “The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him. Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the ‘good boys’” (pp. 777-778). This concept parallels with what postcolonial theorists have identified as the opposing binaries in the creation of the Other.

“The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference” (Bhabha, 1983, p. 19). The Other as the colonial subject is created by the West through the process of othering; by
establishing dichotomous knowledge of the West (colonizer) and non-West (colonized) in which
Western discourse prevails as the normative world view (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1998,
Bhabha, 1984; Césaire, 1994; Fanon, 1994; Hall, 1994; McEwan, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988; Said,
1994; Spivak, 1994). This process of othering is authenticated within the guise of
anthropological and scientific studies of humans to create racial and cultural classifications
(Cain, 2011; Hook, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988). Post-colonial scholars (Ashcroft et al., 1998,
Bhabha, 1984; Césaire, 1994; Fanon, 1994; Hall, 1994; Mazrui, 2005; McEwan, 2009;
Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1994) have explained that Western colonial discourse
creates binaries of the West and the Other to validate Western domination and superiority. These
scholars have identified the following opposing binaries as forms of “othering”—creating the
colonial subject:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>West</th>
<th>Other</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colonizer</td>
<td>Colonized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Non-Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilized</td>
<td>Primitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Undemocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Colored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Evil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Margin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occident</td>
<td>Orient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beautiful</td>
<td>Ugly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Us</td>
<td>Them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First world</td>
<td>Third World</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Mudimbe (1988) draws attention to the fact that these oppositional binaries of West and Other do not account for the effects of Western colonization of the Other, nor acknowledge the colonizer’s role in the construction of the Other. This form of self-impunity in Western discourse is “a silent but powerful epistemological configuration” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 8), and it signals Western cultural hegemony of the Other—the Orient (Said, 1994). Bhabha (1984) identifies the process of othering as “colonial mimicry”—“the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (p. 126). Bhabha further explains that the irony in the creation of the Other is that the Other is simultaneously “an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (p. 19). What this means is that the colonizer desires the colonized to be similar—to mimic the colonizer, but to not to the point where the colonized is regarded as equal to the colonizer; if this happens, then the colonizer will not be able to defend their superiority (McEwan, 2009). This concept of “similar but different” is what Mudimbe (1988) alludes to as the “similitude” of Africa. Basically, modern Africa is regarded as an
imitation/copy of the West, but its identity is defined by otherness—its difference from the West (Mudimbe, 1988). As the colonial subject, Africa is therefore objectivized to whatever identity the West inscribes. This objectification of Africa is an example of cultural hegemony; it explains how power over the powerless subject is normalized.

In his study of cultural hegemony, Said (1994) defines “Orientalism” as the process of the West in constructing the “Orient.” Orientalism is a discourse of power, a conception of the West to validate Western supremacy over the East—the Orient, and ultimately the world (Said, 1994). Orientalism is not simply an idea; it is a constructed discourse that exists in theory through academia and in practice through real life stereotypes of the East (Said, 1994). Said (1994) explains that Orientalism goes beyond the East; is about the discourse of the world being “made up of two unequal halves,” (p. 138) the West and the Others. Similar to Said’s (1994) theory on “Orientalism,” Mudimbe’s (1988) concept of “Africanism” attest to the invention of Africa as the Other of the West. Western discourse has constructed Africa as the ultimate exotic primitive Other, the objectivized colonial subject—the shadow of the West, the dark continent (Araeen 2010; Hall, 1994; Mudimbe, 1988). Bhabha’s (1984) theory of “mimicry,” Said (1994) elaboration of “Orientalism,” and Mudimbe (1988) articulation of “similitude,” and “Africanism” all reveal strategies in which Western cultural hegemony constructs and validates difference despite the commonalities of humans.

*Maintaining the Other: Stereotypes and Essentialism*

The discourse of the Other is a cultural hegemonic discourse which is distributed, maintained and validated through Western academia, media, publications and art museums (Chin, 2011; Mudimbe 1988; Said, 1994). The fixed homogeneous other is a stereotype (Bhabha
1983). The Other is maintained through re-productions and repetitions of re-presentations of stereotypes of the Other as truth (Cain, 2011; Chin, 2011; Bhabha, 1983; Said, 1994). To be clear, the Other is a stereotype; therefore repetitions of the Other equates repetition of stereotypes, which is a strategy to maintain the normative acceptance of the Other.

Essentialism is a form of stereotyping the Other. Fanon (1994) states that the black man, the Negro, the African is essentialized by the West as having a Negro/African culture, rather than being identified as an individual within their national culture. What Fanon (1994) means, is that an African is essentialized to represent the stereotype of Africa, instead of being recognized as an individual. For example, although I am Cameroonian, I am perceived by the West as an African expected to represent or exude “African culture,” but not my individual experience as an upper middle class Cameroonian who grew up in the capital city of Cameroon. I am essentialized as an African, I am othered, and so are my artworks. This experience is not unique to Africans; it is a narrative that is relatable to hegmonized groups. Hooks (1994) challenges Western imperial discourse in how it presents African American identity “one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy” (p. 425). Clark (2002), Taylor (2011), and Kapur (2013) address issues of how “Asian culture” and “Asian art” have been essentialized as the Other of the West. Coffey and Tejada (2013), and Giunta (2013) similarly allude to the notions of othering and essentialism of Latin American culture and art by the West.

Stereotypes and essentialisms become normalized as truth when they are successfully signified and validated by repetitions of other stereotypes; this gives the stereotype its “fixity”—it remains permanent and unchanging (Bhabha, 1983, Hooks, 1994; Hook, 2005). African art, as the Other of Western art was conceived and configured by its difference; its re-conception and re-contextualization transforms it into otherness—stereotype. The repetition of African art
(stereotype) and the essentialism of Africa, normalize African art discourse and validate its truths. Although scholars have addressed the issues of stereotyping and essentialism of African art, the canon of African art still prevails in academia and in museums (Harney, 2007).

The Voice of the Other

The knowledge of the making of the Other is not accessible to the colonial subject because the Other is constructed within the power constraints of their “otherness,”—their difference (Bhabha, 1983; Spivak, 1994). The Other/the powerless/the subaltern therefore does not have access to their social mobility—their ability to exercise agency (Spivak, 1994, 2008, 2012). Spivak’s essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is acclaimed as radically influential in post-colonial studies. In this essay Spivak (1994) adopts Foucault’s theory of discourse, however, she focuses on how Western hegemonic discourse silences by disregarding the individuality of the subaltern. Foucault (1983) identifies the Other (the subaltern) as the powerless in a power relationship. He further states;

In effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future. A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities. (Foucault, 1983, p. 798)

While Spivak (1994) tributes Foucault as a “brilliant thinker of power-in-spacing” (p. 85), she criticizes his Western intellectual impunity that restricts his awareness and acknowledgement of Western imperial power over the subaltern colonized subject. Spivak
(1994) explains that the contradiction of Foucault’s theory of power is that while it addresses oppression, it fails to address the Western intellectual’s role in oppressing the Other. Thus, Foucault does not account for his positionality as a Western intellectual, thereby participating in epistemic violence (Spivak, 1994).

“Epistemic violence” is the process of silencing the voice of the subaltern (Spivak, 1984), and hence closing “the door of all possibilities” (Foucault, 1983, p.798). The constitution of “the colonial subject as Other” is a real example of epistemic violence (Spivak, 1994, p. 76). The subaltern subject is not merely the oppressed Other; the subaltern is the most oppressed of oppressed groups—the lowest level of oppression (Campbell, 2011; Spivak, 1994). The “true” subaltern is the colonized Other of the West—the one whose “identity is their difference” (Spivak, 1994, p. 80).

Spivak (1994) identifies the subaltern as the third-world woman—the subject of exploitation in the global capitalist labor market (Spivak, 1994). Spivak (1994) analyses the implicit and explicit results of epistemic violence, by narrating on the Hindu widow sacrifice tradition known as Sati. While the British abolished this practice, neither the Indian Sati tradition nor the British abolishment acknowledged the voice of the subaltern Indian woman (Spivak, 1994). In other words, the subaltern Indian women’s individual voices were not acknowledged in either situation. The Indian women were essentialized and spoken for by the Indian elites and the British. The actual problem of “epistemic violence” is not that the subaltern cannot speak or does not have a voice; it is, rather, that the dominant group refuses to listen by not providing agency for the subaltern (Spivak, 1988).

The subalternity (the intrinsic construction of difference) of the subaltern does not permit a platform for the subaltern’s voice; the oppressor has no interest in the subaltern’s voice because
there is nothing about the subaltern that the oppressor considers important (Campbell, 2011; Dotson, 2011; Spivak, 1994, 2008). For the subaltern to be heard, the subaltern’s individual agency must receive acknowledgement from the oppressor; only then could they move up from subaltern to oppressed (Campbell, 2011; Spivak, 1994). Foucault’s obliviousness to Western colonial epistemic violence informs his claims that the oppressed are aware of their situation and are therefore able to “speak” for themselves (Spivak, 1994). To this, Spivak (1994) states:

It is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe. It is not only that everything they read, critical or uncritical, is caught within the debate of the production of that Other, supporting or critiquing the constitution of the Subject as Europe. It is also that, in the constitution of that Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy its itinerary - not only by ideological and scientific production, but also by the institution of the law.

(Spivak, 1994, p. 75)

Spivak (1994) identifies hegemonic power as masculine; therefore, the West is masculine, and the Other is feminine. Spivak (1994) further identifies the real subaltern as the third world woman. Africa is therefore the third world woman of the West, the lowest level of oppression. Africa’s voice is muted in the construction of its history and its present conditions. The subaltern does not speak for themselves; they are spoken for by the West or by their deputies (Spivak, 1994). The African intellectuals/deputies hegemonized by the West therefore participate in maintaining epistemic violence. Likewise, African art is the subaltern of Art history; the dark chapter of art history books, the dark gallery space in the art museum. African art is a re-presentation and validation of Africa’s subalternity—voicelessness. It displays
European conquest of Africa, it essentializes Africans as having a homogeneous culture, it illuminates Africa’s primitivism, and its fixity as the Other. African art in Western art education and museums is an example of epistemic violence. As Spivak (1994) explained, the problem is not that Africans do not have individual voices, the issue is that the ruling society (the West) is not willing to acknowledge Africa’s voice—the social mobility of its individuals—because Africa is perceived as a “non-knowe” (Dotson, 2011). Campbell (2012) explains that the risk in acknowledging the voice of the subaltern is that it legitimizes their voice, and this prompts them to believe that they have the power to negotiate and improve their condition. The subaltern can only be given a voice by being acknowledged to speak by the ruling society (Campbell, 2012; Spivak, 1994).

Representations of the Other in the Art Museum

The Other is maintained and validated as truth through repetitive re-presentations of stereotypes, essentialism, and by epistemic violence (Bhabha, 1983; Fanon, 1994; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1994). The art museum, as institution of cultural representations participates in the discourse of representing and normalizing the exotic Other (Cain, 2011; Chin, 2011; Desai, 2000; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999). Foucault (1980) states that “Power never ceases…its registration of truth: it institutionalizes, professionalizes and rewards its pursuit (p. 94). The art museum is an institutionalized site of power that represents formation of truth (Crowley, & Matthews, 2006) primarily from the construction of the dominant class (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Desai, 2000; Cain, 2011). Western art museum exhibitions are structured in a manner conveys the dichotomies of West/Other, civilized/primitive, progressive/fixed (Cain, 2011; Desai, 2000). This is evident in observing gallery spaces in art museums that maintain the unchanging
monolithic “arts” of the Other, while the arts of the West are heterogeneous and time-
progressive. African art in art museum are monolithic, unchanging, and fixed in “primitive”
aesthetics, with no representation of the multiplicities of modern and contemporary African art

Hall (1994) and Desai (2000) declare that power is involved in all forms of
representation, and representations of people and cultures inform our understandings of others.
Representation is a “meaning-producing process” (Desai, 2000, p. 114) in which the ruling class
produces and authenticates the “cultural identity” (Hall, 1994) of the subaltern. Foucault (1980)
explains that when power is applied through subtle methods as in education, [art museum
education] power is able to evolve and circulate its discourse. African art is a Western
construction and authentication of Africa’s “cultural identity” which circulates through museum
exhibitions and art education. The repetition of this discourse in these sites legitimatizes and
normalizes it as truth. In this process, Africa—the subaltern is silenced and objectivized into the
fixed re-presentation of its cultural identity.

The Western art museum is therefore not only a site of arts and cultural histories, but also
a site that represents and normalizes cultural hegemonic discourses of the Other (Desai, 2000). It
is a site configured by the dominant society; hence it exhibits and normalizes their discourse as
the universal truth. The re-presentation of non-Western cultures in Western museums guised as
celebrations of global cultures, sustains “Western hegemonic power relations within a global
context” (Desai, 2005, p. 296), and portrays “hierarchy of racial and cultural ‘types’” (Meier,
2010, p. 23).

_African Art: The Journey into the Art Museum_
The power mechanics involved in the journey of African artifacts into the art museum attest to hegemony. African artifacts were initially acquired during European colonization of Africa as objects for “scientific” classifications of cultures, and as proof of colonial conquest over the inferior Other (Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Mudimbe, 1988). Many of the African artifacts were seized and stolen from the natives and re-conceptualized as art by Europeans (Cain, 2011; Kasfir, 1999). These African artifacts in their original context are not art, and were not created for the purpose of being art (Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Mudimbe, 1988). These artifacts, acquired from European colonies in west and central Africa, were used in rituals in African villages (Gompertz, 2012), and they still function as such today. Western discourse ascribed primitivism and savagery in characterizing the formal elements of the artifacts comparative to Western art (Mudimbe, 1988). Western artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Paul Klee and Maurice de Vlaminck who encountered African artifacts, were influenced and appropriated the forms into their art, thereby initiating a pivotal development in Western modern art (Gompertz, 2012; Meier, 2010).

In the mid-20th century more African artifacts were collected by Western tourists and private collectors who admired African artifacts (Vogel, 2005). Nowadays many of the African artifacts are created not for specific functions; rather for the outsider tourist with a desire for the exotic other (Kasfir, 1999; Mudimbe, 1988). African traders understand that the storytelling epic of the artifact is important to the Western tourist (Kasfir, 1999). These objects become commoditized cheap mass-produced artifacts for tourist, thereby contradicting the classical concept of art (Kasfir, 1999, Mudimbe, 1988). The artifacts become African “cultures for sale,” reinforcing stereotypes of the Other, and authorizing the outsider to determine the authenticity of the insider (Ballengee-Morris, 2002). In this context, the local African markets, similar to
Western museums, reinvent and reframe the “authentic” meaning of African art, however, with different objectives; the locals with the aim to profit, and the tourists eager for the “exotic.” The histories of acquiring and constructing meanings of African art testify to the functioning of cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony requires the consent of the oppressed masses; hence, the authentication of African art similarly involves the production and sale of African culture by the African craftsmen.

Current Practice

*Exhibiting Hegemony: African Art in the Art Museum*

Installing African masks in museums is an erasure of its meaning, and a redefinition of its meaning. It does not account for the ‘extraneous’ facts – like how the mask functions within its original context. The mask therefore becomes a display of sculptural form. (Kasfir, 1999, p. 98)

The average museum attendant is socialized to believe what they encounter in a museum is the truth; they therefore accept what is displayed in the African art gallery as art (Kasfir, 1999). The “art” in many African gallery spaces in museums do not encompass the entire continent; they are primarily from sub-Sahara west and central Africa (Meier, 2010). They are grouped by tribal regions and displayed with no specific date, rather by centuries (mid- 19th century), and the artists are “unknown,” but what is certainly known are the “peoples” of the region or county of origin. The “unknown” artists of African art communicates that the art represents an entire homogeneous culture, and it validates a tribal pre-colonial African culture with no “power to resist change;” (Kasfir, 1999). The “unknown” African artist is symbolic of
the silenced voice of the subaltern African subject. It is exemplary of institutionalized epistemic violence, as it testifies to the inferiority of the Other as a “non-knower” (Dotson, 2011).

Although African artifacts in Western museums are not considered as art by African perspectives (Kasfir, 1999, Mudimbe, 1988), the reality is that Western museum collections are constructed by Western discourses and not by what Africans consider as their art (Meier, 2010). Western discourse therefore informs curators, who are involved, not only in the organizing of exhibitions, but also in the education programming associated with exhibitions. Curators, Africanist scholars, and art educators function consciously or unconsciously as deputies of African art discourse. As deputies, they reproduce, rebrand, normalize, and distribute this discourse in various ways: exhibitions, museum education programming, tours, text labels, art collection books, art making toolkits for children, art history textbooks, journal publication for art teachers, lectures, etc. They function as the dominant outsider; “experts and judges, who then redefine the culture and the arts (of the insider) through institutional policies that determine who and what will be a part of the institution” (Ballengee-Morris, 2002, p. 242).

Whenever I experience African art exhibition spaces in art museums, I am usually conflicted by humor and contempt. Humor implies my awareness of the fallacious representations, as I ask myself, “Is this the stuff Americans consider as our art?”—the masks, the head wares, wood carved motifs commonly used in villages, and more elaborately used during cultural festivals and dance performances. Is this art? If it is, then no one refers to it as such in Cameroon, unless in event of marketing to Western s, which I am sure epic tribal narratives could be constructed to entice the tourist. My sentiment of contempt comes from the fact that African art in a museum is presented to represent me and all the other Africans, which is

As a native of Cameroon, Africa I am familiar with the African artifacts in the museums, however my experience of their existence and purpose is far removed from artistic and aesthetic appreciation. Not once have I thought to admire their formal elements. Many of these objects, especially the masks become activated when worn during festivals for performances. They are then stored in no special manner until there is a need for them. Some artifacts are used as decorations, and others are created for spiritual and cultural rituals in some villages. The artifacts are mostly not created by educated or uneducated artists with idiosyncratic creative, aesthetic or conceptual ambitions. This explains why most of the African objects in art museums have no titles and no identified artists; but rather describes cultural traditions of “peoples.”

The physical structure and intellectual institution of the Western art museum is inherently constituted within Western cultural hegemony. It is therefore natural for the museum institution to automatically authenticate and normalize the discourse of the Other. African art is a discourse of the inferior Other—the Orient—the Subaltern, detached from agency and hegemonized into art by the Western gaze.

Primitivism: The Authentic

A few years ago, my paintings confronted me about their authenticity. “Express some of your African roots,” they said, and I replied, “What exactly does that mean?” Fast-forward to the present, as I reflect on that moment, I recognize the disguise of Western hegemonic discourse; a discourse that socialized my instructors and classmates to expect “Otherness” in my art. Moreover, a discourse that propelled me to gaze at my paintings in search of “Africaness.”
The primary justification of representing the Other in art museums is the notion of authenticity (Desai, 2000). Most often, objects designated as “authentic cultural forms are made by those not of the culture” (Ballengee-Morris, 2002, p. 242). Authenticity is about the power in representing and validating the Other as primitive, thereby serving the interest of the dominant group (Desai, 2000, Hooks, 1994, Meier, 2010). “Authentic” African art is determined by Western taste (Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010) and not by the multiple artistic communities in African countries. The Western neglect of modern and contemporary African art is justified by the misconception that “contemporary African culture is a distorted copy, a mere imitation, of Western culture, and therefore lacks authenticity. Contact with Western culture is seen as a source of the decay and, indeed, the extinction, of Africa’s great traditional arts” (Hassan, 1999, p. 216). Therefore, for African art to be “authentic,” it has to be “unspoiled”—uncorrupted by the colonial encounter (Meier, 2010). The presence of African art in museums acclaims this African authenticity; however, the irony with the “unspoiled,” “authentic” African art is that many of them were made during and after the colonial encounter. Kasfir (1999) States:

“Authentic” African art usually means ‘anonymous’—the artist is unknown, and an unknown artist of an artwork conveys the lack of individual creativity. When the artist name is known, the work is no longer considered primitive…the act of ascribing identity simultaneously erases mystery. And for art to be “primitive” it must possess, or be seen to possess, a certain opacity of both origin and intention. When those conditions prevail, it is possible for the Western collector to reinvent a mask or figure as an object of connoisseurship. (p. 94)

Meier (2010) affirms that “the colonial encounter inaugurated a cross-cultural exchange across boundaries, which in the case of the “colonizer” begat originality while for the
“colonized” it signaled a loss of originality and authenticity” (p. 30). When European artist Pablo Picasso was influenced by African forms through “cross-cultural” colonial encounter, his new artistic expression meant the start of originality—modernism, the break-away from tradition. Yet for the colonized African artists, this cross cultural exchange meant that they lost their originality/authenticity. Western discourse validates its appropriation of non-Western forms, and remains authentic; yet such allowance is inapplicable or is deemed unoriginal and unimportant when African artists are influenced by “Western” forms.

The paradox of authenticity in African art are not merely in claims of pre-colonial encounter, but also in its re-conceptualization as art, and also in its Otherness—its stereotype—its difference. These absurdities are indicative of Bhabha’s (1983) theory of ambivalence—“a similar fantasy and defence—the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture” (p. 26). For Africa, the authentic is the fetishistic “myth of historical origination—racial purity, cultural priority—produced in relation to the colonial stereotype [which] functions to ‘normalise’ the multiple beliefs and split subjects that constitute colonial discourse as a consequence of its process of disavowal” (Bhabha, p. 25). In other words, “authenticity” = purity fixed in difference—stereotype—otherness. In this sense authenticity is an ambivalent construction of the colonizer that satisfies the fetish of the original “unspoiled” primitive naïve Other, and at the same time a negation of the Other. The practice of anthropological studies of the “indigenous” is an example of this ambivalence. The study of “indigenous” “primitive” cultures is an act of fanciful curiosity, and simultaneously an act of exercising power over the Other; the “studying” of the Other implies the superiority over the Other. Likewise, the act of creating meaning by re-representing Africa through African art is simultaneously a curiosity of the primal African, and an exercise of power—cultural hegemony.
It is simply a form of neocolonialism, the continuous exploitation and domination of the post-colonial subaltern (McEwan, 2009).

_African Art and Multicultural Art Education_

…it is only by continually emphasizing the relationship between power and representation in multiculturalism that we art educators can begin to reduce the epistemic violence to the “other.” This direction is particularly crucial now that multiculturalism has become institutionalized and many states mandate including diversity in their art curricula. (Desai, 2000, p. 128)

The concept of multicultural education emerged during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s as a process to eliminate racial discriminations, and provide fair educational, social, and political distributions of opportunities for marginalized groups (Ballengee-Morris, & Stuhr, 2001). The aim was to restructure schools by providing “students with an education that was more responsive to the social, political, and economic conditions of the times and to issues of ethnic student diversity” (Stuhr, 1994, p. 117). While this theory was initiated to increase opportunities for minority groups, multicultural education theorists affirm that the movement is aimed at encouraging all students to become more knowledgeable, skillful, and to acquire the insights equipped to function in cultural diverse societies (Banks, 1993).

Over its years, however, multicultural education has been troubled by misconceptions of being solely about the education for and of the Other, thereby marginalizing the theory (Banks, 1993). Scholars (Adejumo, 2002; Alfredson, & Desai, 2012; Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Banks, 1993; Chin, 2011; Desai, 2005; Gay, 2002; Jay, 2003; Milner et al., 2003; Stuhr, 1994) have critically evaluated multicultural praxis, underscoring its hegemonic re-contextualization,
and advocating for educational approaches that foster equitable social change in curricula, in educational institutions, and in society as a whole.

In examining a historical account of hegemony in U.S. art education, Desai (1996) states; “Equality was viewed in the context of the Anglo American culture, with an implicit assumption that only by assimilating to the dominant Anglo American culture could the minority groups achieve economic and political power” (p. 23). The notion of “assimilating to the dominant Anglo American culture” (Desai, 1996, p. 23) is synonymous to Gramsci’s (1999) theory of consent in cultural hegemony, Foucault’s (1980) theory of disciplinary power, and Spivak’s (1994) epistemic violence—silencing the voice of the subaltern.

While multiculturalism is celebrated and accepted by students and teachers as being important, many teachers are not properly informed, and therefore resistant, or are simply uncomfortable with incorporating equitable multicultural principles in their curriculum (Milner et al., 2003). Gay (2002) advocates for cultural responsive teaching, encouraging teachers to acquire knowledge of historic contributions of diverse cultural groups to include in their curricula, and further create a classroom atmosphere that contextualizes “issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender; and [include] multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives” (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Milner et al. (2003) propose that most courses being offered in teacher education programs should incorporate elements of multicultural and diversity learning. Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr (2001) encourage a social reconstruction approach in which “teachers, students, staff members, and communities are all enabled and expected to practice democratic action for the benefit of disenfranchised social and cultural groups identified and investigated as a result of enlightened curriculum” (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001, p. 9).
Clarke (2002) affirms that the ignorance in the education of non-Western art is not accidental, but rather intentionally structured. I further add that the ignorance of modern and contemporary African art in Western art education is a hegemonic tool used in perpetuating the hidden curriculum (Jay, 2003). The hidden curriculum is “the unspoken agenda in schools that socializes students into the dominant ideology and discourse in which they become uncritical tools of the work force” (Leistyna, Sherblom, & Woodrum, 1996, p. 338). The hidden curriculum is basically a form of cultural hegemony—gaining consent of the masses. Jay (2003) explains that the hidden curriculum prevents multicultural art education from being realized. Others may argue that the inclusion of African art in Western art education is a reflection of multicultural education, as it provides opportunities for students to experience the arts and cultures of Africa. Contrary to this perspective is that multicultural education has become a victim of hegemony, devalued to “ideological safe harbors” and simply emerging as curricula “add-ons” and holiday celebrations with no real transformative agenda, thereby allowing the dominant agenda to prevail (Jay, 2003). This is the condition of African art education in which African art is a cultural “add-on” to art history with no real contextual theory, thus perpetuating Western ideologies of a primitive Africa. “A major outcome of that hidden curriculum [in African art] is the re-inscription of essentialized notions of [African] culture and essentialized representations of the members of [Africa’s] cultural groups” (Jay, 2003, p. 8).

The concept of the hidden curriculum is crucial in detecting how African art discourse is disguised to benefit Western ideologies. Any teachings of African art that does not reflect the canon of African art disrupts and threatens Western discourse by acknowledging the validity of non-Western (African) perspectives; hence subverting the supremacy of Western philosophy as universal. Western ideologies, institutions, museums, schools, policies, media, will naturally
resist the teachings of “threatening” discourses. Such resistance is not overt, rather subtle and
disguised, it manifest as epistemic violence; it is an exercise of cultural hegemony.

The overwhelming criticism of multicultural art education is that it has lost sight of its
purpose, and instead has developed into a strategy of racial “othering” (Chin, 2011; Desai, 2005;
Jay, 2003). Jay, (2003) explains that the dominant discourse does not dismiss multiculturalism,
but rather adapts it in a manner that secures their position as the cultural leaders. This re-
contextualization of multiculturalism as a study of the Other is a form of othering; it is how the
dominant group disciplines the masses. Jay (2003) argues that multicultural praxis will continue
to be hegemonic, unless there are invested examinations of the hidden curriculum within
academia. Desai (2000) encourages art educators to critically examine the power relations
involved in representations in multicultural art education. I further add that in order to examine
power relations in art education, art educators need to willfully research art histories that have
largely been excluded, and also engage in researching theories of power. Art educators at all
levels (K-12 and higher education) should be more attentive to how their course materials
function in presenting, normalizing, and communicating knowledge of othering is to their
students. Moreover, they should consistently pursue opportunities to expand art education to be
equitably inclusive art histories from of multiple and diverse perspectives.

Summary

Throughout this literature review, I have established an argument of how the constitution
of African art is a Western hegemonic discourse of Africa as the Other. African art history,
education, and exhibitions are structured through discourse to maintain, normalize,
communicate, and authenticate knowledge of Africa, Africans, and African aesthetics as the
primitive unchanging Other of the West. Given the dominance of African art discourse, the objective of my research is to disrupt this discourse through my classroom teaching strategies with the goal of fostering positive transformations in perceptions of African aesthetics. Moreover, this research aims to contribute to developments in re-constructing the scholarship of African art.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

My literature review in Chapter 2 expanded on the problem of African art as a Western
hegemonic discourse that normalizes and maintains perceptions of Africa and Africans as the
inferior, primitive, and unchanging Other of the West. In this chapter, I provide an outline of my
research process including the research sites, the participants, and the timeline. I expand on the
methodology of action research coupled with transformative learning theory, and conclude with
data collection and data analysis methods.

Research Questions

My research studies a group of university students’ perceptions of African art aesthetics
as informed by their learning experience at a Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Art Museum. In turn, to
study how my classroom disruption of their museum learning experience of African art could
influence transformations in their perceptions. My primary research question for this study is:
How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’
perceptions of African aesthetics? To help answer this question my research addresses the
following sub-questions:

1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art
   in an art museum communicate to a group of university students?

2. What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students
   retain from their learning experience in an art museum?
3. How does a group of university students respond to a disruption of their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum?

Context of the Study

The two sites for my research included my fall 2013 classroom at The University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton, Texas, and an Art Museum in Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW), Texas.

Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation

My research occurred through the Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation (non-majors) course I taught in the fall 2013 semester (September to December) at UNT. The course included 25 students: 20 females, and 4 males of diverse academic majors. Their grade levels ranged: 5 freshmen, 12 sophomores, 7 juniors, and 1 senior. The course met once a week on Thursdays from 5:00 PM to 7:50 PM. Gramsci (2005) identifies schools as instruments of cultural hegemony “through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated” (p. 50). UNT is therefore an appropriate site for my research, given that the participants of my research are UNT students. Moreover, as a university, UNT participates in constructing knowledge for learners to internalize.

Art Museum in Dallas-Fort Worth

Early in the fall 2013 semester, my class visited a DFW Art Museum; where participants engaged with African art as exhibited in the museum’s African art gallery. The museum’s collection, exhibition, and education of African art is prominent in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and nationally. I worked as an intern at this museum from the summer of 2011 to the summer of 2012. During that time, I visited the African art gallery several times and observed how African art is used in outreach education teaching programs. Desai (2000) identifies the art
museum as a site of multicultural education but one in which non-Western cultures are misrepresented. The African art gallery at this DFW Art Museum is therefore an ideal site to study how African art is presented, authenticated, normalized, and the messages it communicates to audiences about Africa and African aesthetics.

Research Participants

The participants in this research were students in the Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation course I instructed at UNT in the fall 2013 semester. In planning the course, I structured selected assignments for my research, of which participating students volunteered their assignments to be used for the study. To recruit participants for this research, I sent an email to all students in the class soliciting their participation. In my email, I explained that participation in the research was voluntary with absolutely no effects on students’ grades. I further explained that participants’ privacy will be protected as I will use coded names. In class, students read my research consent form which provided more information about my research. 10 students signed the consent form, volunteering their assignments to be used for this research. The consent form explained that students’ participation involved volunteering their assignments for the research, with no anticipated risk or compensation. Additionally, students’ identity will remain confidential, will not be published, and coded names will used in the research. The benefit of participation was the opportunity to engage in a learning experience that will contribute to advancements in the field of art education.
Research Outline

I structured my research within my classroom to study how disrupting African art discourse through transformative learning strategies could influence my students’ perceptions of African art aesthetics. To attend to my research questions, my investigation in this study was designed in three phases. Phase I studied students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as informed by their learning experience at a DFW Art Museum’s African art gallery. Phase II disrupted the African art aesthetics at the museum through my classroom transformative learning strategies, and Phase III analyzed the influence of the disruption. The success of the influence of the disruption was evaluated based on participants’ transformations or lack of in their perceptions of African aesthetics. Given that my research occurred in the setting of my classroom, selected class activities and assignments were structured to attend to my research questions. Throughout the three phases, I took notes in my journal of classroom activities, my classroom observations, and my reflections on the research process. Participants’ assignments in each phase, along with classroom activities and my research journal notes contributed to the data I analyzed and interpreted to answer my research questions.

Phase I: The Visit to a Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum

Early in the fall semester on September 19, 2013, my class visited a DFW Art Museum. Students visited the Asian and African art gallery, and selected one gallery for their assignment which was due on September 26, 2013. Out of 25 students, 12 students selected the African art gallery; of which 10 accepted to be participants in my research. The assignments (Specific to the African art gallery) in Phase I included:
• Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum

This assignment instructed students to curate an exhibition of 4 artworks along with an exhibition narrative that reflects their personal learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery.

• Questionnaire I: Posed questions about students’ prior understandings of African art and their learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery.

Phase II: The Disruption

The disruption of African art discourse occurred in my classroom, during the mid-semester (fall 2013) in the span of 2 weeks of class; October 3, and October 10. At that time, students read and responded to the following essays respectively: “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Everlyn Nicodemus (2013), and “Modern African Art,” by Chika Okeke-Agulu (2013). The essays by Nicodemus (2013) and Okeke-Agulu (2013) challenge Eurocentric modern art history by discounting the traditional African art aesthetic dominant in art history and in art museums. The essays raise questions about constructions and validations of knowledge, hegemonic power, and oppression through visual representation and in society as a whole. The essays further present histories of modern and contemporary African art that are largely excluded from art history and museum collections. The corresponding classroom activities and discussions encouraged students to think more critically about the concepts from the readings, and to self-evaluate their learning experience of African art at the museum. The disruption aimed for my students to critically analyze African art at the museum as a problematic frame of reference that informed their perceptions of African aesthetics; thereby willfully make positive changes of their perceptions.
Phase III: The Transformation

Phase III occurred later in the fall 2013 semester on November 14 and 21, when students submitted and presented their assignments. The assignments in Phase III were structured to examine the success of the disruption in Phase II. The assignments prompted students to revisit their assignment in Phase I, and evaluate their overall learning experience of African art throughout the semester.

The assignments (Specific to the African art gallery) in Phase III included:

• Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum
  This assignment instructed students to consider their semester-long learning of African art and prepare an exhibition (with 6 artworks) proposal for the museum’s African art gallery.

• Questionnaire II: Posed questions about students’ understandings of African aesthetics considering their overall semester-long learning experience.

I organized my research in three phases to attend to my research questions. Phase I

provides data to answer Sub-Questions 1 and 2. Phase II provides data to answer Sub-Question 3 and Phase III provides data to evaluate the success of the disruption in Phase II. Data collected from all 3 phases is pertinent to answering my primary research question: How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics? This research intended to disrupt African art discourse with the goal of influencing positive transformations of perceptions of African aesthetics. I therefore employed action research (Lewin, 1946) coupled with transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) as the methodology of my research.
Research Framework

Qualitative Research

Research is a process of learning and understanding through an organized inquiry that applies quantitative, qualitative or mixed methodology (Mertens, 2010). Quantitative research analyzes data in a quantifiable manner; qualitative research provides a comprehensive understanding of a specific practice, event or setting; and mixed methods involves a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Mertens, 2010). “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Mertens, 2010, p. 225). Thus, I chose to conduct a qualitative research to study a group of university students’ perceptions and understandings of African aesthetics through their learning experience at a DFW Art Museum and in my classroom.

My research is concerned with power structures that create and normalize perceptions of Otherness through African art in art museums, art education, and in art history. A qualitative approach is suitable for my research, as it provides methods for critical examination of power structures by emphasizing multiple and alternative perspectives and epistemologies (Mertens, 2010). My theoretical framework for this research is guided by postcolonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism; both established within the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2010). The transformative paradigm affirms that knowledge is socially and historically constructed by power structures, and should therefore be critically examined in research (Mertens, 2010). The transformative paradigm attends to social and philosophical issues relating to structures of power, oppression, discrimination, and inequalities in society as a whole (Mertens, 2010; Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005; van Dijk, 2001).
“Transformative researchers are pluralistic and evolving in their methodologies.” (Mertens, 2010, p. 33). While the paradigm includes diverse theorists including; feminist, critical theorist, Marxist, participatory action researchers, and others, it upholds common principles (Mertens, 2010). Mertens (2010, p. 21) presents the 4 primary values of the transformative paradigm as follows:

- It places central importance on the lives and experiences of the diverse groups that traditionally, have been marginalized (i.e., women, minorities, and persons with disabilities. [Researchers should further] study the way oppression is structured and reproduced. Researchers must focus on how members of oppressed groups’ lives are constrained, by actions of oppressors, individually and collectively, and on the strategies that oppressed groups use to resist, challenge, and subvert.
- It analyzes how and why inequalities based on gender, race or ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic classes are reflected in asymmetric power relationships.
- It examines how results of social inquiry on inequalities are linked to political and social action.
- It uses transformative theory to develop the program theory and research approach.

Ultimately, transformative research examines and confronts power structures and oppression with the aim for social justice and social transformation (Mertens, 2010; Rogers et al., 2005). Within the transformative paradigm, my research is framed by the principles of critical theory. Critical theories (postcolonial theory and critical multiculturalism) are concerned with how discourse not only creates inequality, but reproduces and normalizes it, thereby victimizing subjects (Desai, 2000; McEwan, 2009; Rogers et al., 2005; van Dijk, 2001). In this study, I investigate how discourse in the form of African art at a DFW Art Museum
communicates and normalizes otherness, and inequality. With the aim of social transformation, the objective of my research is to disrupt the discourse of African art through transformative learning strategies (Mezirow, 1997; Nemec, 2012) in order to examine changes in students’ understandings and perceptions of African aesthetics. To achieve this objective I applied action research (Lewin, 1946) methodology guided by transformative learning Theory (Mezirow, 2000; Nemec, 2012). Action research methods correspond with the goals of transformative learning by studying how positive changes can be facilitated through learning (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012; Kim & Merriam, 2012; Taylor, 2007; Watkins, Marsick, & Faller, 2012). Moreover, transformative learning (TL) and action research (AR) parallel principles of my theoretical frameworks (postcolonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism) in aiming for positive social change. Grounded in transformative learning theory, my action research was structured to disrupt African art discourse with the goal of positively transforming a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics.

Action Research

Action research is “a comprehensive research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action” (Lewin, 1946, p. 35). Action research studies actions and the effects of actions within a specific context (Riel, 2010). “Action research is site-specific, designed to address a specific problem or issue within a specific setting, such as a classroom, a workplace, a program, or an organization” (Kim & Merriam, 2012, p. 67). Action research diagnoses a problem, and further takes on experimental problem-solving actions with the goal of facilitating democratic changes and outcomes (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison; 2007; Gravett, 2004; Lewin, 1946; Riel, 2010). AR aims to improve educational practices by
effecting changes and analyzing the effectiveness of the changes (Cohen et al., 2007). With its democratic principles, action research aligns with critical theory in addressing issues of power structures (Cohen et al., 2007). AR takes on a critical approach in examining problems of ideological power systems, and plans a practical problem-solving intervention to foster changes with the goal to improving practices in education (Cohen et al., 2007).

Action research poses questions that analyze problems, actions, and the outcomes of the actions (Cohen et al., 2007; Riel, 2010). Therefore, AR organizes in phases of examining change in the order of: diagnosis/problem analysis, action/intervention to problem-solve, and reflection/evaluation of the outcome (Cohen, et al., 2007; Gravett, 2004; Riel, 2010). Action research procedures are generally systematic as follows:

*The Diagnosis*

Lewin (1946) explains that the process of AR begins with close examination of the problem through “fact-finding” on the problem. During the diagnosis/fact-finding phase, the problem is identified, analyzed and hypothesized for a problem-solving action (Cohen et al., 2007; Gravett, 2004). The research therefore begins with studying the problem as a necessary precursor to implementing a problem-solving intervention. The diagnosis phase is intended for participants to explore their assumptions relative to the problem (Cohen et al., 2007; Gravett, 2005). For my research, Phase I (The Visit to a DFW Art Museum) is the diagnosis phase, which was structured for analyzing the problem of African art discourse at the museum, and for students to explore their assumptions of African art.

*The Intervention*

Following the diagnosis of the problem, the problem-solving hypothesis is tested through the implementation of intervention actions (Cohen et al., 2007; Gravett, 2004). During the
intervention actions, the researcher should observe occurrences and document the process (Lewin 1946; Gravett, 2004). The intervention is enacted as a problem-solving action to foster positive changes and outcomes (Cohen et al., 2007). For my research, Phase II (The Disruption) is the intervention phase structured to disrupt African art discourse through my transformative learning classroom.

The Evaluation

This phase involves the analysis and evaluation of the outcome of the intervention (Gravett, 2004). At this phase the researcher needs to identify the “success criteria” of evaluating the solution relative to the problem (Cohen et al., 2007). Moreover, the evaluation attends to implications for changes and improvements of practice (Gravett, 2004). For my research, Phase III (The Transformation) is the evaluation phase structured to analyze the success of the disruption/intervention, and provide implications for changes and improvements.

Action research largely centers on practitioners’ practice, however, in adapting its methods with transformative learning theory, the action and evaluation for change becomes centered on the learner. Action research and transformative learning theory are grounded in principles of affecting social change through actions/interventions that encourage participants’ critical self-reflection of their normalized biases in a manner that impels active changes in their perceptions and actions (Cohen et al., 2007; Taylor 2007). AR and TL correspond in their methods of collective critical inquiry to facilitate social changes; and both emphasize the significance of critical reflection to the success of the action and transformation (Cohen et al., 2007; Gravett, 2004; Riel, 2010; Taylor, 2007). Action research is therefore an effective methodology for facilitating transformative learning and changes in learners’ perceptions
Transformative Learning Theory

Teaching is a change-making process in which the learner gains new knowledge, new skills and more awareness (Nemec, 2012). A transformative learning approach to teaching centers on the learner having a transformed perspective in which they critically evaluate their normalized beliefs, assumptions, and values, and further examine the social systems in which they are part of (Mezirow, 1997; Nemec, 2012; Taylor, 2008). Transformative learning theory is a study of adult education that focuses on how adult learners’ perceptions are transformed through learning (Mezirow, 1997, 2000, 2003; Taylor, 2008).

The process of developing into adulthood involves acquiring life experiences—“associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses”—that shape adults’ perceptions (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). These experiences are the frames of reference that construct and confine the perceptions and actions of adults (Mezirow, 1997, 2000; Taylor 2008). Transformative learning is thus a “process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). A learner’s frame of reference derives from “cultural assimilation,” which structures their consciousness—their assumptions, meaning-making, beliefs, habits, and mentality (Mezirow, 1997). In other words, how adults create and understand meaning is conditioned by their individual experiences within the broader social context in which they function. Therefore, a transformation of perception requires a disruption in a learner’s frame of reference (Nemec, 2012).

Transformative learning is particularly concerned with changing “problematic frames of reference” that inform and maintain perceptions (Mezirow, 2003). “Taken-for-granted frames of
reference include fixed interpersonal relationships, political orientations, cultural bias, ideologies, schemata, stereotyped attitudes and practices, occupational habits of mind, religious doctrine, moral-ethical norms” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). I attribute Mezirow’s description of “problematic frames of reference” to discourse—as discourse naturally constructs problematic frames of reference. A critical theory perspective of TL identifies Western ideologies as the dominant ideology that is uncritically internalized as normal and universal (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Therefore, in practicing TL, critical theorists challenge and subvert Western hegemony by inciting learner’s recognition of the oppressive nature of their adopted beliefs (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton & Taylor, 2012). A critical theory approach to TL is a strategic act of activism that raises awareness in a learning environment, thereby encouraging individual and social transformations (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Taylor, 2007). Transformative learning aims to encourage cross-cultural understanding, and promote equity by “giving voice to the historically silenced” (Taylor, 2008, p. 9). Likewise, my research gives voice to marginalized histories of modern and contemporary African art and artists.

Transformative learning is an approach to solving problems through learning; with the aim to disrupt and change problematic perceptions constructed and normalized by a frame of references (Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning encourages a classroom in which the educator strategically structures the curriculum for disruptions and critical reflections that foster positive changes in learners’ perceptions (Cranton, 2006; Nemec, 2012). For a transformation to occur, a learner needs to critically evaluate and reflect on their problematic habitual perceptions, consequently changing those perceptions (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Davis-Manigaulte, Yorks & Kasl, 2006; Ettling, 2006; Mezirow, 2003, 2012). Transformation develops as learners begin to self-reflect, question the beliefs they had not previously questioned,
and shift their perceptions in a positive way (Cranton & Hogan; Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2003, 2012).

Mezirow (2000, p. 22) provides a guide of the transformative learning process as follows:

Transformations often follow some variation of the following phases of meaning becoming clarified:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective

While Mezirow (2000) outlines stages of change in the transformative learning process, the process of transformation is complex and varies by individual learners (Merriam & Kim, 2012). For my research, African art is a frame of reference that informs problematic perceptions of Africa, Africans and African aesthetics. To create a positive solution to this problem, my teaching strategies disrupted African art at a DFW Art Museum as a frame of reference, by providing modern and contemporary African art histories as new frames of reference for my students’ learning. Mezirow (2000) explains that transformative learning is “a movement
through time of reformulating reified structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives” (p. 19). The three phases of my action research were structured for my students’ transformative learning to occur in the sequence of Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III. In Phase I, students experienced the dominant narrative of African art at a DFW Art Museum and documented their perceptions of African aesthetics through their assignments. In Phase II, students experienced my classroom disruption of the dominant narrative of African art they experienced at the Museum. Correlating with Mezirow’s (2000) transformative process, Phase II was the phase for students to experience stage 1-4 of the transformative learning process. Phase III was the phase for students to critically reflect, self-evaluate, and re-present their overall learning experience and perceptions of African aesthetics. Correlating with Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning process, Phase III was the phase for students to experience stages 5-10 of transformation. The research assignments, questionnaires, readings, and my classroom disruption activities, were my educational strategies to facilitate a transformative learning experience for my students.

Transformative Educator

I claim not to have the power to transform people but to provide opportunities for people to understand their frames of reference and use that knowledge for their own transformation (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006, p. 52).

Transformative learning begins with the educator. As I planned for my transformative learning classroom experience, I related to the sentiment above by Mary Alfred (2006). Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, (2006) explain that while most educators claim to practice values of social justice and equity in their classroom, there is a disconnect between what they say and what they practice. It is therefore necessary for educators to critically self-reflect and transform their
perceptions to be able to teach transformation (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Mezirow, 2000). To be a transformative educator, the educator needs to be aware of their frames of reference, and critically evaluate how it structures their perceptions (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006).

Moreover, the educator needs to be aware of their perceptions that are “in oppositions to the larger dominant society” (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006, p. 55). A further step is for the educator to transform their general perceptions of students by having an open mind and approach students as individual learners (Cranton, 2006). This approach is necessary for the educator to authentically relate to their students and create a space that fosters transformative learning (Cranton, 2006). Moreover, the process of effective transformative learning requires the educator to be equally engaged with students as co-learners (Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006).

With a co-learner approach, the educator functions as a facilitator of the course, rather than the authoritative provider of knowledge (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Mezirow, 1997; Nemec 2012). A co-learning classroom creates an environment of trust in which students recognize their need to learn from the teacher and from one another, and the teacher accepts learning from students (Cranton, 2006; Nemec, 2012; Mezirow 1997, 2000). Furthermore, a co-learner approach acknowledges that students have the ability to learn by teaching themselves (Nemec, 2012).

The structure of a classroom usually positions the teacher as the power figure; however, with a transformative co-learning classroom, power is shifted from the teacher to the group (Mezirow, 2000). As the transformative educator for my research, I structured my course (Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation) as a collaborative inquiry seminar in which students’ learning occurred through; encouragement, challenges, questionings, reflexivity, critical thinking, problem solving, group discussion, debates, and interactive presentations. I functioned primarily
as a co-learner, mediating the course activities and encouraging learning through group discussions. I approached and evaluated my students as individual learners, and was open to learning from my students. Throughout the research process, I maintained a research journal in which I reflected on the process and my role as the transformative educator.

**Transformative Student**

“Fostering transformative learning in the classroom depends to a large extent on establishing meaningful, genuine relationships with students” (Cranton, 2006, p. 5). A major factor in transformative learning is the willingness and interest of the learner to learn (Mezirow, 1997, 2000). Students’ openness to transformative learning depends on the learning environment created by the teacher. Students are less likely to engage in a classroom where the teacher is perceived as the authoritative presenter of knowledge (Cranton, 2006). A classroom structured for group participation wherein the teacher functions as a mediator encourages students to engage in sharing their experiences and perspectives (Cranton, 2006; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Mezirow, 1997, 2000). With this approach, students are empowered; they gain a sense of belonging and take ownership of their transformative learning experience (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). Granted the adult student learner is the focus of transformative learning, the teacher should encourage students to express themselves, help students become more aware of their perceptions, and help students develop their critical thinking abilities (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Mezirow, 1997, 2000; Nemec, 2012). This process is twofold; it involves building a collegial relationship of trust and respect (Carton, 2006; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006), while at the same time positioning students in experiences that disrupts their problematic frames of reference (Mezirow, 2003; Nemec, 2012).
“Learners will only participate in a “disruptive” experimental activity and subsequently dialogue if they have some motivation to learn, a sense of safety, trust in the educator and adequate time for the transformation process to occur” (Nemec, 2012, p. 478). A transformative learning classroom should ultimately be a respectful safe space where students “can openly express their doubts, confront the unknown, and carve out and claim their own intellectual space” (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006, p. 52). Nemec (2012) reminds transformative educators to be mindful that most learners are accustomed to learning by receiving information, and not by critically questioning their perceptions. Keeping this in mind, while the teacher could in fact structure a classroom with activities that facilitate transformative learning, not all learners will be accepting of change, and some could express resistance (Nemec, 2012).

Critical Reflection

Critical reflection is essential to the success of disruption through transformative learning (Cranton, 2006; Ettling, 2012; Kreber, 2012; Mezirow, 2000; 2003; Nemec, 2012). “The disruption must be accompanied by critical reflection where learners examine their abilities, beliefs, assumptions, and values in ways that change them in some significant way” (Nemec, 2012, p. 478). The disruption in my research occurred in Phase II, through course readings and problem solving classroom activities that evoked critical reflections on assumptions of African aesthetics. My goal in Phase II was for students to critically self-evaluate their individual assumptions and perceptions of African aesthetics in a manner that encouraged them to change their perceptions. “Becoming critically reflective of one’s own assumptions is the key to transforming one’s taken-for granted frame of reference, an indispensable dimension of learning for adapting to change” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 9). Complete transformations take time; however, when a learner becomes more critically reflective in their meaning-making process they are
transforming their perspectives (Taylor, 2008). Critical reflection fosters a learner’s self-induced change during their transformative learning process. Learners’ self-evaluation and self-transformation is the goal of transformative learning and the ultimate goal of my research. Essential in achieving transformation, is the learner’s self-reflection on the problematic frames of reference that informs their perceptions, and their willingness and choice to change those perceptions (Cranton, 2006; Kreber, 2012; Mezirow, 2003; Nemec, 2012; Taylor, 2008). Thus, while my goal is to positively transform perceptions of African aesthetics, I can do so to the extent of intentionally creating opportunities that motivate learners to critically self-reflect and willfully transform their perceptions of African aesthetics.

**Method of Data Collection**

Qualitative research methods “allow a researcher to get a richer and more complex picture of a phenomenon under study than do quantitative methods” (Mertens, 265). Data collection methods usually applied in qualitative research include; observation notes, interviews and questionnaires, video recording, document, image and artifact review (Mertens, 2010). The methods used by a researcher depend on their theoretical framework and the practicality of the methods (Mertens, 2010). With action research, data can be collected through various methods including: observation notes, questionnaires, interviews, journal notes, document review, video recordings, and more (Cohen, et al., 2007). Moreover, with action research, data is collected for analysis during the phases of diagnosis, intervention, and reflection (Cohen, et al., 2007; Riel, 2010). Granted the participants of my action research were students in the Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation course I instructed, my research data was collected from participants’ assignments and from my research journal.
Students’ Assignments

Data was collected from participants’ assignments in the following phases:

- Phase I: The Visit to a Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum
  Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I.

- Phase II: The Disruption

- Phase III: The Transformation
  Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II.

The assignment and questionnaire in Phase I were structured to provide data to analyze students’ perceptions of African aesthetics from their learning experience at a DFW Art Museum. Phase II was structured to disrupt Phase I through course readings and transformative learning classroom activities. Data in Phase II consists of students’ reading responses, classroom activities, and my classroom observation notes. Phase III was structured to analyze the success of the disruption and transformation. The assignment and questionnaire in Phase III provide data to analyze transformations in students’ perceptions. Students’ assignments were submitted online via Blackboard Learn. I thereby collected the assignments of the 10 research participants from Blackboard Learn.
Structuring class activities with a disruptive and transformative agenda can be a challenging process that requires the researcher as the instructor to be self-critically reflective during the process (Cranton, 2006; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). Being self-critical required that I examine myself as the mediating tool of the disruption, the transformative learning, and the overall research. Cranton (2006) encourages transformative educators to maintain a journal in which they examine their classroom occurrences, dialog with the students, and their personal reflections. I therefore maintained a research journal throughout the research process in which I documented the narrative of the research phases, the classroom disruption activities and discussions, interactions with my students, and my experience as the researcher/teacher. I also documented my challenges, learnings, and personal transformations through the process. In Chapter 4, I elaborate on each phase as was documented in my journal.

Method of Data Analysis

In qualitative data analysis, the selected approach depends on the type of research, the research methodology, and the type of data collected (Mertens, 2010). With qualitative analysis, the researcher can begin the analysis during the research process by documenting in their research journal (Mertens, 2010). Once data is collected, the first step is to organize the data for analysis; whereby the researcher overviews and reflects on the collected data (Mertens, 2010). This is followed by exploring and reducing the data; whereby the researcher takes notes while examining the data and making necessary reductions (Mertens, 2010). The data reduction process involves the researcher coding and categorizing selected data that thematically “hang together” (Mertens, 2010).
My data analysis was ongoing during the research process, as I documented the activities and my observations from class, as well as my feelings in my research journal. After collecting participants’ assignments, I did a first review of their assignments and organized it for data analysis. I then moved to the exploring and reductive phase, where I looked for emerging themes, thereby creating codes and categories. The categories and codes were guided by my research questions and my frameworks in analyzing the data.

Data Analysis Frameworks

My primary question required a dual analysis of: 1. Discourse and Meaning-making, and 2. Disruption and Transformation. My action research was designed to disrupt the dominant African art aesthetics through transformative learning strategies in order to analyze affecting changes or lack of in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. My primary research question is: How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics? To answer this question, my analysis in this study is twofold. First, to examine African art discourse at a DFW Art Museum by analyzing the knowledge that was communicated to my students, and the understandings of African aesthetics my students’ retained. Secondly, to examine the process and success of disrupting the dominant African art aesthetic at the museum through my classroom transformative learning strategies. My method of analysis in this research is guided by multimodal social semiotic critical discourse analysis in Phase I, and transformative learning theory in Phase II and III. Both methods center on affecting positive social change through meaning-making/learning. As elaborated earlier, action research methods and transformative learning theory provides the structure and tools for analyzing transformations in learners’ understandings and perceptions (Gravett, 2004; Kasworm & Bowles, 2012; Kim & Merriam, 2012; Taylor, 2007). A multimodal social semiotic approach to critical
discourse analysis provides the tools for analyzing and interpreting the functioning of discourse in learners’ meaning-making process (Kress, 2011).

Multimodal Social Semiotic Critical Discourse Analysis

“Discourse analysis focuses on understanding the meaning of participants’ language” (Mertens, 2010, p. 427). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) centers on examining how power through language (written and spoken) dominates social practices (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 2001). A multimodal CDA goes beyond language and examines the different modes (image, text, action) that are involved in real-life meaning-making experiences (Kress, 2011; Norris, 2006; Wohlwend, 2011). Multimodal CDA adopts social semiotic theory to analyze the involvement of power in structuring available modes of meaning-making (Wohlwend, 2011). “Social semiotics is a theory about meaning-making in processes of interaction as communication” (Kress, 2011, p. 209). Social semiotic analysis is concerned with “how meaning gets designed and re-designed as people interact with representational systems in different times and places” (Rogers, 2011, p. 14). Social semiotics theory affirms that learners make meaning through “sign-making” using discursive materials resources (modes) available to them (Jewitt, Kress, Ogborn & Tsatsarelis, 2001; Kress, 2011). The sign created by the sign-maker is a representation of the sign-maker’s interest and perception at a given time and context, and is inevitably “linked to practices shaped by relations of power” (Kress, 2011, p. 209). A sign is the material evidence of a learner’s interest and understanding of discourse (Kress, 2010, 2011). Discourses in the form of learning modes are made available as signifiers of knowledge (Kress, 2010). The learner who accesses these modes, makes meaning (learns) by creating a sign of their learning (Kress, 2010). The sign is informed by the mode (discourse), but more
specifically by the learner’s interest and interpretation of the mode at a given time and context (Kress, 2011; Wohlwend, 2011).

Social semiotic theory allows for analyzing connections between the interest of the sign-maker/learner and “their perspective on the world in the moment of making a sign” (Kress, 2011, p. 9). The researcher is therefore able to assess the learner’s sign as evidence of their perception (Kress, 2011). A multimodal social semiotic approach to critical discourse analysis provides the tools for me to examine how students’ perceptions of African aesthetics are linked to the various discursive modes available to them during their meaning-making/learning process. With this approach, I was able to analyze participants’ assignments in Phase I, as evidence of their perceptions informed by the learning resources on African art at a DFW Art Museum, and further analyze the function of discourse in students’ meaning-making process.

*Analysis of Phase I: The Visit to a Dallas-Fort Art Museum*

The assignments in Phase I, Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I were analyzed to answer sub-questions:

1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in an art museum communicate to a group of university students?

2. What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience in an art museum?

Phase I of my action research is the diagnosis phase, in which analysis was centered on fact-finding and closely examining the problem. Phase I analyzes how African art discourse at a DFW Art Museum communicates knowledge, and informs perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics. Thus, my analysis of students’ assignments in Phase I was guided by multimodal
social semiotic critical discourse analysis (Kress, 2011; Norris, 2006; Wohlwend, 2011). In examining students’ assignments in Phase I, I noted recurring words, phrases, and ideas that provided information about their learnings and understandings of African art at the Museum. I coded and categorized words, phrases, and ideas relative to emergent themes. I did another review to reduce and select relevant data based on repetition of occurrence in participants’ assignments. I thereby created categories of the prominent emergent themes, along with the overarching summaries.

**Analysis of Phase II: The Disruption**

As the intervention phase, Phase II provides data to analyze how students were being influenced by my classroom disruptions of the museum’s African art. My analysis in Phase II attends to sub Questions 3. How does a group of university students respond to a disruption of their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum? Phase II of the research was structured to disrupt students’ perceptions of African aesthetics at the museum through my classroom transformative learning strategies. My analysis in Phase II was therefore guided by transformative learning theory. To evaluate the process of transformation, the educator can analyze learners’ “self-report” through their writings, and observe learners’ actions (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012). My data analysis in Phase II included my research journal notes and students’ reading responses to “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Everlyn Nicodemus, and “Modern African Art,” by Chika Okeke-Agulu. My narrative analysis of Phase II occurred while the research was in process; I documented classroom activities, discussions and occurrences in my journal during and after class. In analyzing participants’ reading responses, I observed for words, phrases and themes that showed how they were being influenced by the disruption. I thereby created categories and codes based on analyzing their responses for signs of early
transformations. To provide more insight about each participant as an individual learner, I analyzed their classroom participation based on my observations.

Analysis of Phase III: The Transformation

As the reflection phase, Phase III was structured to examine the success of the disruption in Phase II and to attend to my primary question. The assignment in this phase, Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II were analyzed to examine transformations in students’ understandings and perceptions of African aesthetics. Thus, my analysis in Phase III was guided by transformative learning theory. Effective strategies in evaluating transformative learning include: analyzing learners self-report through their writings; interviews, surveys, open-ended questionnaires; observing learners’ actions; creating a checklist for signs of change; analyzing learners’ level of critical reflection (Cranton & Hoggam, 2012). My evaluation in Phase III included analyzing students’ self-report from their assignments, their questionnaires, and my observation of their classroom participation throughout the 3 phases. Learners’ transformations develop as learners begin to self-reflect, question the beliefs they had not previously questioned, and transform their perceptions in a positive way (Cranton & Hogan; Cranton, 2006; Ettling, 2012; Mezirow, 2003, 2012). In examining students’ assignments in Phase III, I noted recurring words, phrases, and ideas that provided information about changes or lack of in their understandings and perceptions of African aesthetics. I coded and categorized words, phrases, and ideas relative to emergent themes. I did another review to reduce and select relevant data based on repetition of occurrence in participants’ assignments. I thereby created categories of the prominent emergent themes, along with the overarching summaries. Nemec (2012) explains that a successful disruption yields transformation—a “dramatic change,” a “shift
in perspective.” Therefore, in analyzing the success of the disruption, I compared and contrasted students’ assignments in Phase I and Phase III to examine their collective and individual levels of transformations in their perceptions of African aesthetics.

Summary

This action research was an opportunity for me to problem-solve normalized perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the Other maintained through African art discourse. I thereby structured collaborative disruptions of African art through my transformative learning classroom in order to analyze affecting changes in my students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. In planning this study, I aimed for my students and I to challenge ourselves by critically self-reflecting on our normalized problematic frames of reference that inform our taken for granted perceptions. My classroom transformative learning experience aimed to encourage positive transformations in my students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics. This action research demonstrates how art education with a critical theory framework and transformative learning strategies can facilitate disruptions of African art as the discourse of the Other, and foster positive transformations in learners’ perceptions of African aesthetics. Moreover, the study illuminates how othering knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics can be subverted and transformed through restructuring art education practices, art history resources, and museum exhibitions to reflect the multiple realities of Africa, Africans, and African artistic practices.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION of DATA

Introduction

My research studies a group of university students’ perceptions of African art aesthetics as informed by their learning experience at a Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Art Museum. In turn, to study how my classroom disruption of their museum learning experience of African art could influence transformations in their perceptions. My research question for this study is: How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics? To help answer this question my research addresses the following sub-questions:

1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in an art museum communicate to a group of university students?

2. What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience in an art museum?

3. How does a group of university students respond to a disruption of their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum?

Chapter 3 expanded on action research coupled with transformative learning as the methodology of my research. My research occurred in my fall 2013 classroom; in which teaching and learning were the research activities, and my participants were students in my classroom. My research occurred in 3 phases, of which data was collected from participants’ assignments in each phase as follows:
• Phase I: The Visit to a Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum, September 19 –26, 2013
  Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I

• Phase II: The Disruption, October 3 –10, 2013

• Phase III: The Transformation, November 14 and 21, 2013
  Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II

In this chapter, I present data collected from Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III of my research. I present findings from participants’ assignments in each phase, along with a narrative of the process, activities, and occurrences as documented in my research journal. Phase I presents data on students’ interpretations and understandings of African aesthetics as informed by their learning experience at a DFW Art Museum’s African art gallery. In Phase II students experience my transformative learning classroom readings and activities that disrupt their learning experience from the museum’s African art gallery. Phase II presents data from students’ reading responses, my journal notes on the disruption classes, and my observational notes of students’ classroom participation. Phase III presents data to examine the success of the disruption and transformations of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics.

My research journal provides data on my classroom activities, discussions, and occurrences. Moreover, it provides data on my classroom observations, and my reflections on my role and experience as the educator and researcher. My journal allowed me to do real time assessment of the research in process. Through the notes from my journal, I narrate each phase
separately to provide a comprehensive account of the contexts of the research process. The narrative of my research process is significant in understanding participants’, as well as my own, learning journey throughout the research phases.

To begin my data presentation, I provide information about my research class and my research participants. I then expand on my approach in structuring a transformative learning classroom for my action research. Lastly, I present the narrative and findings of each phase.

*Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation*

My research occurred in the Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation (non-majors) course I taught in the fall 2013 semester at the University of North Texas. This course included 25 students; 20 females and 4 males of diverse academic majors. Their grade levels ranged: 5 freshmen, 12 sophomores, 7 juniors, and 1 senior. The course met once a week on Thursdays from 5:00 PM to 7:50 PM. The course description, textbooks, and objectives as reflected in the syllabus were as follows:

- **Course Description:** History and analysis of Western art with reference to non-Western cultures.
- **Required Textbooks:**
  

Course Objectives: To develop understandings of the global history of modern art; To acknowledge and understand multi-modernisms in Art History; To experience various expressions of the arts via gallery exhibitions, museums, discussions, and lectures; To critically analyze descriptions, interpretations, and judgments of modern art; To appreciate art as expressions of human values and human experiences within historical and social contexts.

Research Participants

To recruit participants for my research, I sent an email to all students in the class soliciting their participation. The class consisted of 25 students of which 12 students selected the African art gallery (in a DFW Art Museum) for their semester assignments. Of those 12 students, 10 signed my research consent form, volunteering for their assignments to be used for my research. The following chart profiles all 10 participants attending to: name, nationality, age, ethnicity, academic major, and grade level. To protect participants’ privacy, I used coded names. As the instructor, I already had information on participants’ major and grade level. To get participants’ background information, I emailed all the participants separately to provide their nationality, age, and ethnicity. Two participants did not respond to this request. The following Table 4.1 represents how participants chose to identify themselves. To provide more information on each participant, the chart indicates participants’ level of participation in class activities and their completion of the research assignments. All participants were in attendance during the disruption classes: September 26, October 3, and October 10, 2013.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Academic Major</th>
<th>Participation Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Texas, USA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Public Affairs &amp; Community Service Speech-Language Pathology</td>
<td>Moderate participation • Completed all assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Texas, USA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black/White</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Arts and Science - Biochemistry</td>
<td>Low participation • Did not complete Questionnaire I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>Texas, USA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>Visual Arts Communications Design</td>
<td>High participation • Completed all assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>New York, USA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Public Affairs &amp; Community Service Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology</td>
<td>Low participation • Did not complete Questionnaire I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>California, USA</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino/2 or more races</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Business - Organizational Behavior &amp; Human Resource Management; Decision Science</td>
<td>High participation • Completed all assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Texas, USA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>Visual Arts - Communication Design</td>
<td>Low participation • Completed all assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>Visual Arts - Pre-Communication Design</td>
<td>Moderate participation • Completed all assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Texas, USA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Arts and Science - kinesiology and biology</td>
<td>High participation • Completed all assignments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Academic Major</th>
<th>Participation Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Texas, USA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Visual Arts - Pre-Studio Art</td>
<td>Moderate participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Arts and Science - Biology</td>
<td>Low participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Data

*Transformative Learning Classroom*

Transformative learning is achieved in a classroom structured for discovery learning, group participation, and critical discussions (Cranton, 2006; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Mezirow, 1997; Nemec 2012). The structure and beginning practices of the classroom sets the foundations for transformative learning (Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006). The teacher therefore sets the stage for transformation from the start of the course. It is important for the transformative learning facilitator to create a respectful learning space that encourages collaborative learning and critical group discussions (Mezirow, 1997, 2000). I therefore structured my classroom for collaborative-learning; where I performed as the facilitator, encouraging students to self-direct their learning (Mezirow, 1997, 2000). I structured my course as an inquiry-based seminar in which students’ learning occurred through group dialog, encouragement, challenges, questionings, reflexivity, critical thinking, problem solving, interactive lectures, and presentations. As a co-learner, I was attentive to building trust with my
students so they were comfortable to express their understandings and challenges with course concepts.

Building Trust

Building trust with students is essential to the transformative learning process (Ettling, 2012). To set the foundation of my transformative classroom, my class had an art critique on the first day of class, August 29th 2013. Students viewed projected artworks and exchanged descriptions, interpretations, and assessments of the works. The purpose of this activity was to encourage students to become comfortable expressing and exchanging their ideas. During the critique, I asked students open-ended questions such as: Why do you think so? Why does that matter? How is this idea relevant to contemporary society or to you? What do others think? In posing these questions, my goal was not to generate specific answers, but to encourage students to think more critically and have meaningful discussions in class. Moreover, the art critique was an ice-breaker activity for my students to gain a sense of trust in my collaborative classroom. I emphasized to my students the importance of their individual learning, and encouraged them not to simply represent course concepts; rather to analyze, interpret, and make personal relevance of the concepts. Furthermore, I encouraged my students to be comfortable with expressing their perspectives that differ from their peers, and from mine.

Expressive Learning

A further step in creating a transformative classroom is creating “expressive ways of knowing” through activities that activate and engage students in critical discussions (Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006). Classroom activities such as role-play, action research, group projects, and critical group deliberations are great for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). Transformative learning activities should foster group interactions, deliberations, individual
thinking, and critical reflection (Mezirow, 1997). Davis-Manigaulte et al. (2006) encourage teachers to create expressive activities for “collaborative inquiry,” where the teacher and students collaborate in the learning process. With this approach, the class is able to have better group connections, share their experiences, and learn from one another (Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006). Instead of asking students to talk about their experiences, this approach creates an environment of trust and comfort for students to freely share their experiences and insights; thereby creating as space favorable for transformative learning. To facilitate transformative learning in my classroom, I structured group debates and group discussions on course readings and concepts.

*Group Debates*

On the second day of class, September 5, 2013; I structured group debates to engage students in expressive active learning, and critical group deliberations. I divided students into 4 groups, and assigned each group an artwork to defend against another group. Debating groups were setup as follows:


I gave each group a sheet of paper with the image of their artwork to defend along with the image of the oppositional artwork. The following prompt was provided on their paper:

*Defend this creation as art. What makes it relevant as art? Make a case for why your artwork is more artistic than the other.* I instructed students to prepare 4-5 persuasive points to defend their artwork. I encouraged students to think critically about the ideas related to their image and to consider why it is credited as a work of art. In their individual groups, students prepared
statements to defend their artwork and arguments against their opposing group. Afterwards, opposing groups debated for 20 minutes; presenting their opening statement, questioning one another, and respectfully discounting their opponents’ assertions. The observing groups participated by asking questions to the debating groups and expressing their support or discount of ideas. I observed that students were invested in defending their position and expressing their arguments. This debate approach engaged students in critical thinking as they responded to their peers’ ideas and questions, and their learning occurred through exchanges of their ideas. As the co-learner, I participated by mediating discussions, sharing ideas, posing questions, and learning from students as well. The group discussions and questions that emerged during the debate encouraged critical thinking, which is essential to the transformative learning process (Cranton, 2006, Taylor, 2008; Nemec, 2012). In my research journal I noted the following observation and analysis of this process:

I was impressed with students’ commitment in making a strong case for their artwork.

The group that defended Carl Andre’s bricks seemed frustrated at first, but after exchanging ideas in their group and defending the piece, they expressed a greater appreciation for the work. This debate approach sparked intense dialog among the students, and encouraged them to reflect on the relevance of the ideas conveyed by the artworks. Students were actively involved in the activity and they posed challenging questions to their oppositional group—which showed signs of critical thinking.

Reading Response Discussions

Another approach in encouraging critical thinking was through group discussions of students’ reading responses. For my course, students wrote a weekly reading response to each chapter. For each response, students provided: 1. A quote from the chapter, or an image (one
that is not in the book) of a referenced artwork / the artwork of a referenced artist; 2. A brief response to: How does your selected quote or image relate to the major theme(s) of the chapter? What is your personal response to the theme(s)? In class, students got into small groups (4-5 students per group) to discuss the readings and their written responses. I provided each group with a guiding question or statement to encourage critical thinking and deeper discussions on the concepts addressed in the readings. I visited each group to listen, expand on concepts, and pose more questions. Afterwards, each group presented their topic to the class, and their peers were able to ask questions and exchange ideas on the topic. To culminate, I summarized the day’s topic, highlighting the major themes and posing big idea reflective questions.

I observed that the combination of these collaborative classroom activities; art critiques, group debates, small and big discussions, and interactive presentations motivated my students to actively engage in meaningful problem solving and analysis of course concepts. Moreover, such activities, particularly the debates in which I continuously prompted student to consider their assumptions are effective strategies for transformative learning. Through these activities, I observed that my students became more invested in expressing their opinions on discussion topics. Students were able to respond to their peers, and as a class we examined complex concepts through close reading and exchanges of our individual interpretations.

As the researcher, teacher, and co-learner, I remained conscious of my role as the mediator of the transformative learning process in my classroom. I focused on asking questions for my students to consider different approaches to constructing interpretations. It was crucial for me to initiate a critical inquiry classroom structure and immerse my students into critical thinking early in the semester prior to the disruption phase. With this approach, students were accustomed to critically responding and analyzing the themes of the readings before
encountering the readings on modern African art. Moreover, students became more comfortable expressing their perceptions; agreeing and disagreeing with their peers and with me as their co-learner.

I have expanded on my general transformative learning classroom strategies; what follows is a continuation of my classroom transformative learning activities specific to Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III of my research. For each phase, I present the research assignments, results of participants’ assignments, a narrative of my classroom activities and occurrences.

**Phase I: The Visit to a Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum**

Phase I of my action research is the diagnosis phase in which data was collected to closely examining the problem of African art discourse in a museum. The class assignments in Phase I include: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I. The assignment, Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum provides data to analyze participants’ prior knowledge of African art and their perceptions informed by their learning experience at a DFW Art Museum. Questionnaire I was structured for students to critically reflect on their museum learning experience and how they represented their understandings in their assignment. The assignments in Phase I present data for analysis in answering the sub-questions:

1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in an art museum communicate to a group of university students?
2. What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience in an art museum?
Data in this section is presented in the following order:

- Narrative of the visit to a Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum
- Assignment Outline: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I
- Students’ Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum.
- Students’ Response to Questionnaire I
- Post Museum Visit Narrative: September 26, 2013

**Narrative of the visit to a Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum, September 19, 2013**

On Thursday September 19, 2013, my class visited an art museum in Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW), TX. This trip was the first visit to this museum for about half of the class, and for a few students, it was their first time in an art museum. At the museum, my class visited the African art gallery and the Asian art gallery, and students individually explored each gallery space. I instructed students to choose between these galleries for their semester assignments. It was important to give students a choice, as that allowed them to choose the gallery they were interested in. Students worked individually, taking pictures, reading labels, and closely observing artworks; they seemed interested in learning about the artworks they were encountering. I encouraged students to explore their selected gallery and to pay attention to how the exhibition communicates to them about people and places. Students spent the first hour in their selected gallery, and then visited other gallery spaces at the museum. 12 students selected the African art gallery of which 10 students accepted to be participants in my dissertation research on African art.

The assignment (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum) and the Questionnaire I were due on September 26, 2013, a week after the museum visit. Students
started working on their assignment for a couple of days, before access to Questionnaire I. The assignment (Exhibiting Learning at the Museum) was outlined in the course syllabus indicating that it includes a qualitative questionnaire; however, students did not access the questionnaire until I uploaded it on Blackboard on September 21, 2013; two days after the museum visit. I did so intentionally, as I did not want the questions to influence students’ experiences prior to the museum visit. Below I provide the assignment (Exhibiting Learning at the Museum) for students who chose the African art gallery as their site of inquiry. The same assignment was used for students who chose the Asian art gallery, but with the appropriate name changes. Since my dissertation focuses strictly on African art, I have only included the African art example of the assignment. Below is the assignment and questionnaire for the museum visit, as it was provided to students.

Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum

For this assignment, students will role-play as curatorial interns at the museum’s African art gallery. As a curatorial intern, your goal is to curate an exhibition that reflects your learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery. While at the museum, you should document what you learn, make decisions on art selections, and consider ideas for your exhibition. Choose 4 artworks from your selected gallery to prepare an exhibition guide of your learning experience.

Outline:

- Take time to experience the artworks in the African art gallery.
- Take notes and collect any available brochures for more information.
- Choose artworks from the gallery that you intend to use in your exhibition. Think about themes or narratives to guide your selections. You can select as many artworks as needed.
to help in planning your exhibition. However, you will need to choose 4 artworks to use in your exhibition guide.

- Take pictures (with no flash) of your selected artworks, or record the titles and search the museum’s collection online for images.
- Think about how you are able to learn about the represented regions through the gallery exhibition and information.
- Similar to the exhibition summary in the gallery, prepare a 1-2 page narrative of your exhibition that captures your learning experience. Approach this as a personal response of your individual learning experience. In other words, how will your audience learn about African art from your museum experience?

Address the following questions in your exhibition narrative:

1. What did you learn about the Africa based on your experience in the gallery?
2. How does your exhibition of your selected artworks reflect your learning experience?
3. What will you like for museum visitors to learn and experience about Africa based on your exhibition?

Format

- Prepare a 2-3 page exhibition guide.
- Page 1: Your name, selected gallery, title of your exhibition, and images of 4 artworks.
- All artworks should be labeled as in the gallery.
- Pages 2-3: Your exhibition narrative.
- Submit assignment on Blackboard and bring a printed copy to class for group discussions.
**Questionnaire I**

1. Prior to the museum trip, what understandings did you have about African art?
2. Did your museum experience confirm or disprove your understandings? If so how?
3. What did the exhibited artworks and information (wall text, brochures, and handouts) in the gallery inform you about the region?
4. What descriptive words will you use to express the exhibition in the gallery?
6. What do you think were the criteria for curating the museum’s African art gallery?
7. What were the major themes in the gallery?
8. What, if any concerns or problems did you observe in the museum’s African art gallery?
9. How would you describe the people and places represented in the museum’s African exhibition and in your exhibition guide?
10. Do you think that the museum’s African art gallery appropriately represents the region? Why?
11. Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How? Why?
12. From your overall learning experience in the African art gallery, what understandings do you have about the represented region?

**Students’ Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum.**

My analysis of this assignment focuses on students’ exhibition narratives of their learning experience of African art at the museum. I did not analyze the artworks students selected, as they all selected from the museum’s African art gallery. Table 4.2 presents data on what students learned and understood about Africa, Africans, and African aesthetics at the museum’s
African art gallery. The table presents major themes, keywords, and pattern summaries that reflect students’ learning and understandings as expressed in their exhibition narrative of the African art gallery. The major themes emerged from analyzing, coding and categorizing students’ exhibition narratives. To begin my analysis, I reviewed each participant’s narrative and highlighted terms and words that indicated their learning and understandings of African aesthetics. I particularly noted statements such as; “I learned that…,” “I now understand that…” and “I would like museum visitors to learn…” My attention was focused on what students wrote about their personal learnings and understandings of African art. After reviewing each participant’s narrative separately, I did a collective analysis all participants’ narratives. I looked for patterns through repetitions of words, phrases, and ideas. I noted the frequency of words and phrases, and grouped them into themes based on similarities. I then did another review to identify the reoccurrence of themes in each participant’s exhibition narrative. The major themes below are thereby presented sequentially by importance based on their recurrence and repetition in students’ exhibition narratives.

Table 4.2

Emergent Themes from Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Pattern Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
<td>The overarching learning theme in students’ exhibition narratives is African culture and tradition. In their narratives, students expressed learning that African art is strongly rooted in African cultural values and traditions. Students used terms such as; tribe, tribal, traditional, historical, cultural values, pride, and customs; when referring to African culture and tradition. Sub-themes that emerged relative to African culture and tradition included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Students</td>
<td>• Community Ceremonials: festivity, ceremonial, dances, costumes, community support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social Status: masculinity, chiefdom, royalty, respect, power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mystery: superstitious, mysterious, strange, and unusual.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Pattern Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same Diversity</td>
<td>Students alluded to understandings of diversity and variety in African art, the people, and the cultures. Students identified the similarities and sameness of the different tribes represented. Students indicated that while different regions are represented, they all have similar themes, customs, and art styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality and Ancestry</td>
<td>Students expressed learning that spirituality and ancestry are important to Africans and in African culture. Keywords that emerged related to spirituality included: spirits, religion, rituals, gods, evil spirits, and beliefs. With regards to ancestry, students alluded to; ancestors, death, sacrifice, funeral, and guardian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art for Utility</td>
<td>Students identified the utilitarian purposes of the artworks in the museum’s African art gallery. Some students indicated that African art is not simply for admiration, but has function and meaning; the objects are used in the daily lives of Africans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Materials</td>
<td>In describing African art, students largely indicated the use of natural materials including; feathers, wood, beads and fabric. Additional descriptions included: artifacts, masks, sculptures, crafted, naked figures, and the human figure – men, women, and children. Students expressed appreciation of the craftsmanship of the objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Lives</td>
<td>Students expressed gaining a better understanding of the environment and daily lives of Africans based on their learning experience at the African art gallery. The utilitarian purposes of the objects gave students a sense of how the objects are used daily by Africans, and provided narratives of the different tribes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Feminine</td>
<td>Students expressed learning the importance of women in African culture. Frequently used terms included: maternity, child bearing, pregnancy, feminine beauty, and power. Students expressed appreciating the beauty and power of women and their role as the child-bearer and caretaker of the family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 presents the 7 major themes (culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine) that emerged from my analysis of students’ exhibition narrative. The pattern summary in Table 4.2 elaborates on what students collectively expressed relative to each major theme. The 7 major themes reflect students’ learnings, understandings, and perceptions of African aesthetics from their experience.
at the museum’s African art gallery. In the following Table 4.3, I present excerpts from each student’s exhibition narrative that reflects their individual learning and understandings of African aesthetics. The Related Themes column indicates students’ additional learnings and understandings related to the major themes. This column also indicates the frequency of the major themes, and hence my ranking of their order in Table 4.2.

Table 4.3

*Excerpts from Students’ Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Students’ Learning and Understandings</th>
<th>Related Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>• Personally I believe many of the artworks conveyed a culture that truly displays substantial support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The art here has a sense of prideful drive to uphold one another.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• This shows me that although there are different regions of this continent, there are still similarities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>African Art Exhibit</td>
<td>• The sculpture <em>Standing female figure</em> is a tall, slender women with a protruding abdomen. The figure suggests a female ancestor responsible for protecting her lineage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Not only does the African culture respect women for their roles as mothers, they also value their beauty.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Although the figures are created by different cultures they all praise women.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>Power in Africa</td>
<td>• By observing the purposes of all the artifacts in the exhibit I can see the major themes of power and social rank, religion and rituals, and gods and ancestors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• I also have an understanding of their physical environment because of what they made their tools, statues, relics, and clothing out of.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• When observing the artifacts…the cultures of the region often combined functional items with those of significance. For example, certain bowls were made to look like men and women but still functioned as bowls.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*

90
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Related Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td><em>Remembering Africa</em></td>
<td><em>Culture and Tradition</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• One thing that really stood out to me was the sense of tradition running throughout the entire exhibit.</td>
<td><em>Same Diversity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Whether the piece is used for a specific ceremony or represents something in the culture, it all has something to do with the way the region celebrated or simply existed.</td>
<td><em>Spirituality and Ancestry</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Not only are sculptures and artifacts a three-dimensional piece to examine and experience, it also gives you a better understanding of how the traditional piece may have been used or worn.</td>
<td><em>Art for Utility</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Daily Lives</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td><em>Ancestral Ties of Africa</em></td>
<td><em>Culture and Tradition</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I learned that Africa - no matter what region - is steeped in cultural traditions.</td>
<td><em>Same Diversity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• They seem to identify deeply with the people who were here on this earth before them and as such, promote a great respect to their ancestors. Things such as ritual and ceremonial masks and guardian pieces really convey this point to the observer.</td>
<td><em>Spirituality and Ancestry</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It is art that has significance and importance in the everyday lives of the people it represents, and it tells a story.</td>
<td><em>Art for Utility</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Daily Lives</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td><em>The Spirituality Behind African Art</em></td>
<td><em>Culture and Tradition</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The African exhibit is a beautiful display of culture that shows the tradition, beliefs and daily lives of a variety of African peoples.</td>
<td><em>Same Diversity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The pieces were all very earthy, and the materials that went into them consisted of an array of metals, beads, feathers, fabrics and numerous other items. The people of Africa are very spiritual – there’s no doubt about that.</td>
<td><em>Spirituality and Ancestry</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The ancestors observably hold a place of high value in the African culture, worthy of worship and remembrance.</td>
<td><em>Art for Utility</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Natural Materials</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Daily Lives</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Feminine</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td><em>Form and Function</em></td>
<td><em>Culture and Tradition</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• There is an abundance of ritual masks, figures, and amulets all with some manner of purpose and assigned role.</td>
<td><em>Same Diversity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I’ve learned that African art as a whole relies on a deep respect for spiritual tradition, as well as varying levels of functionality.</td>
<td><em>Spirituality and Ancestry</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It’s such a remarkable statement from each culture-how African art is so based around functionality that it’s almost a polar opposite to the “art for enjoyment” of the European painters.</td>
<td><em>Art for Utility</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Natural Materials</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Daily Lives</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Feminine</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 4.3 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Students’ Learning and Understandings</th>
<th>Related Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Randy        | *African Women*  | • Ceremonial significance and beauty are important characteristics of women in African culture.  
• Seated Female Figure with Child shows the importance of a woman’s role as a child-bearer.  
• In addition to bearing children, a significant role of the mother is raising the child. I learned that African people acknowledged this and respected women highly for this reason. | Culture and Tradition  
Same Diversity  
The Feminine |
| Sarah        | *Diversity*      | • When I think of Africa, what comes to mind is strange dances and costumes with the beat of different drums and rhythms.  
• I also never thought of Africa as being so diverse.  
• A commonality the entire region shares, however, is a proximity to religion. African art is purposeful, no work is made for only appeal or the vain. | Culture and Tradition  
Same Diversity  
Spirituality and Ancestry  
Art for Utility  
Natural Materials |
| Sonia        | *Importance of Feminism* | • Women in the many different African regions represent the foundation of a family.  
• Women and their ability to bear a child and raise a family are seen as an important aspect in many of the different regions of Africa.  
• In the piece “Standing female power figure (nkishi)” nkishi is a container for potent medicines that protects families or individuals from “malevolent spirits” and diseases. | Culture and Tradition  
Same Diversity  
Spirituality and Ancestry  
Art for Utility  
The Feminine |

**Summary**

In analyzing students’ assignments, my objective was to learn what the museum’s African art gallery communicated to my students and what my students understood about Africa, Africans and African aesthetics from their learning experience. Prior to analyzing student’s assignments, I expected to encounter terms such as: primitive, tribal, village, chief, traditional, spiritual, kingdom, African culture, traditional practices, and ancestors. Moreover, I expected phrases that generalize Africa as a singular culture. My expectations were met as I analyzed
students’ assignments. I was therefore not surprised by most of the emergent themes. I was surprised to learn that students largely understood the African art gallery as reflective of a diverse Africa. I had several “Are you kidding me?” expressions at the frequency of students’ use of “diverse” and “diversity” in describing the gallery. I was amazed that my students saw diversity in the gallery, because all I see is a singular tribal aesthetic. Interestingly, students indicated that while there are different regions represented in the gallery, they all have similar cultures and art styles; hence, the major theme of same diversity. The theme of same diversity worried me the most because it suggested that my students understood that the different regions in Africa are all similar. The theme, art for utility, was an interesting emergent theme, as it indicates one of the problems my research identifies with African art. I was surprised at students’ realization that many of the artworks in the African art gallery were in fact objects with functional purposes and not so much art for art sake. I wondered if this realization prompted students to question the contextually of the objects in an art museum as artworks. From my analysis of their assignments, students did not identify any concerns in this regard. Overall, the themes that emerged from my analysis of students’ assignments (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum) provide data for me to answer my Sub-Questions 1 and 2 in Chapter 5.

*Students’ Response to Questionnaire I*

Students completed Questionnaire I along with their assignment; Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum. Questionnaire I was completed by all participants except by Andrea and Denise. In analyzing participants’ responses to Questionnaire I, the same major themes emerged as those from their assignment (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum). Table 4.2 elaborates on the major themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity,
spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine. In this section, I present students’ complete response to the questions that are most relevant to answering my research Sub-Questions: 1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in an art museum communicate to a group of university students? 2. What understandings of African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience in an art museum?

Following each question, I summarize students’ responses and indicate the relevant major themes (Table 4.2) based on their responses.

Q 1. Prior to the museum trip, what understandings did you have about African art?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Prior to the trip I only understood what was mentioned in the book, when primitivism was discussed. In general though I like art that is simple yet attractive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>I didn’t really know much at all. I knew some of the types of materials they used in their art, such as wood, and that because of their religious practices they made many religious tools and artifacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>None. I had no expectations of what I would be seeing in terms of art from this gallery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I knew very little going in. I knew the art was hand-crafted for the most part, but I didn't know the history behind it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>I had a relative understanding of African art – it’s steeped in tradition with roots in functionality and purpose. I’ve come in contact with it before; therefore expecting the wide array of human figures, elaborate headwear, and ceremonial pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>I didn’t understand African art. It seemed to foreign to be relevant to my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>I assumed much of it was clothing/jewelry and instruments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>Only a little. I had somewhat imagined what the exhibit would consist of and what it would be like, but was shocked to see differently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses to Question 1 shows that most of the students had little to no understandings of African art, while a few had some prior understandings and assumptions based on past experiences. In explaining their understandings of African art, students used terms such as: religious practices, wood, artifacts, hand-crafted, tradition, headwear, ceremonial pieces, and instruments. I expected these responses, as they fit descriptions of the traditional African art.
Students’ response to Question 1 reflects the major themes of: culture and tradition, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, and natural materials.

Q 2. Did your museum experience confirm or disprove your understandings? If so how?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Both confirmation and disproving took place with my experience. There were many pieces of art in the African collection that displayed &amp; quoted primitivism but there were also very elaborate sculptures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>My museum experience confirmed my understanding. I saw many woodcarvings and sculptures in the collection and many religious relics. I was interested to see all the different purposes of the woodcarvings since there were so many.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>I didn’t really have any understanding of it, so for me it introduced me to African Art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>It confirmed my understanding. I got to personally see the detail in the pieces and read about what materials had been used to make them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>It pretty much confirmed my understanding of African art; I saw what I expected to see. Not that it was a bad thing - overall I’ve always been fond of African art, and it was nice to see the exhibit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>It disproved my understandings. It showed the universal themes which were used throughout art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>My experience definitely changed my understanding. African art has a lot more variety and depth than I had originally thought. Yes, a lot of the art is the clothing, but the museum didn’t really have much pertaining to music. I don't know if that is because instruments weren’t as important or if the museum just didn’t have a supply for that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>It did both. Although I was more taken back by the exhibit and all it had to offer, I was also enlightened.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a follow-up to Question 1, Question 2 conveys that the museum’s African art gallery confirmed Clarissa’s, Jenny’s, and Melissa’s prior understandings of African art. For Hannah, the African art gallery was her introduction to African art. For Randy, the African art gallery disproved his prior understandings; and for Amy and Sonia, the gallery confirmed some and disproved some of their understandings. Sarah indicted that the gallery changed her understanding of African art.
Q 3. What did the exhibited artworks and information (wall text, brochures, and handouts) in the gallery inform you about the region?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Most of the artworks and information informed me of many historical factors and overall showed me that this region was one that is very connected with everyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>I didn’t find any brochures or handouts but the wall text helped me understand the different tribes geographically. There was a large map on the back wall that showed where each tribe was from and it was interesting to see that even though they were from different regions, many groups had overlapping artifacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>How different each region is in terms of art from each other, and how each region expresses themselves differently through their art. It is interesting to be able to see a piece and compare it to a different region. If you look you can see the contrasts within each area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>They gave me insight into the culture of the area (religion, rituals, and the daily lives of the people).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>There is a very notable reliance on the functionality of objects. Most every piece could be used as a storage pipe, a historical record, or had a part to play in ceremony. Despite the large area, these were the common threads between the separate regions within Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>It explained pieces I didn’t understand as well as giving me new knowledge I wouldn’t have thought to ask about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>The exhibit/information informed me that the region was very earth based, meaning materials. Unlike Asian and European culture with paintings and such, this is mostly sculpture made out of mostly raw materials, hinting at, if I didn't already know, a “less civilized” region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>It gave me certain insight on the importance of men and women and each ones takes and place and story. The exhibit allowed me to understand the role each gender played in the culture of the region.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The exhibited art and information in the museum’s African art gallery informed students of: the history of Africa, various tribes in different regions of Africa, the similarities of the artifacts and cultures from different tribes in Africa, the importance of religion, the daily lives of Africans, African rituals, the functionality of the artworks, Africa as “less civilized,” gender roles in Africa, and the use of natural materials in the artworks. Students’ response to Question 3 is critical to my analysis of what the African art gallery communicates about Africa and African aesthetics. I was not surprised by students’ responses as they largely reflect the problems of
traditional African art in art museums. Students’ responses to Question 3 reflect the major themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine.

Q 4. What descriptive words will you use to express the exhibition in the gallery?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Words such as supportive come to mind to express the exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Serious. Extremely traditional in terms of rituals/ceremonies and previous generations of ancestors. Fearful/full of worry of the future. On the flip side of that I also saw community. I would also use the term static to describe this gallery. It seems like it is a snapshot of multiple regions in one period of time. The museum was not concerned with showing other forms of art either from different time periods or different people throughout the regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Beautiful, bold, ritualistic, earthy, tribal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Probably something along the lines of eerie, for some pieces, with an overall sense of well-worn and often used. A few can even be described as creepy or off-putting, but I attribute that to more of an unfamiliarity with the culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Powerful. Universal. Strong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Earthy, natural, simplistic (for some regions), religious, useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>Interesting enlighten, shocking unusual unique.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students described the African art gallery with words such as: supportive, primitive, meaningful, beautiful, traditional, community, ritualistic, tribal, eerie, off-putting, unfamiliarity, powerful, earthy, natural, simplistic, static, religious, and unusual. I was not surprised with students’ use of these descriptive words, as they are reflective of what the dominant African art aesthetic largely communicates about African aesthetics. I was surprised by descriptive words as: universal and enlightened, as I did not expect nor attribute such terms to the African art gallery at the museum. I was pleasantly surprised by Hannah’s response; “I would also use the term static to describe this gallery. It seems like it is a snapshot of multiple regions in one period of time. The museum was not concerned with showing other forms of art either from different time periods or different people throughout the regions.” Hannah’s response showed me that she identified a critical problem that is usually unnoticed in the museum’s African art gallery; it
presents a singular unchanging Africa. Students’ responses to Question 4 reflect the major themes of: culture and tradition, spirituality and ancestry, and natural materials.

Q 6. *What do you think were the criteria for curating the museum’s African art gallery?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>The criteria most likely had to do with expressing the African culture, had to be aesthetically pleasing, and show interconnectivity with the people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>I think the curator of the African Art exhibit chose pieces that revealed important cultural facts about each tribe. I didn’t see any piece in the exhibit that didn’t shed some light on aspects of the tribe they were from. I did notice that some of the pieces seemed repetitive, such as the wood carved female and male figures. So I think the curator tried to keep some continuity in the story of the exhibit instead of having a plethora of random meaningful pieces. I also noticed that all of the themes I observed were tied together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>I think that most of the pieces seem to be from 1800-early 1900. Additionally, it looks as though the museum focused on one group of people from each specific area rather than getting multiple pieces of art from multiple groups of people from different regions. It also looks as though most of the artwork is from tribal settings or historical in nature; most of the items were used in day-to-day life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I believe the curators were looking for a wide variety of art that truly represented the culture of its people. I also think that they made it a point to repeat specific themes throughout the exhibition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>I’d assume extensive knowledge of the numerous cultures; including their traditions, rituals, and everyday routines in order to better understand where and how the individual pieces would come into play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Choose pieces that represent all aspects of African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Knowledge of African culture and ideals. An eye for design i.e. set up. Knowledge of the pieces relation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>I do not understand the question, but if I am thinking in the right direction. I think one criteria to be in the exhibit would be to focus on gender and important aspects of the region.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In posing Question 6, my intention was to learn what students thought about the curatorial process of the African art gallery. I wondered if students would express any concerns about the selection of artworks, the display, or the information presented in the African art gallery. Students largely expressed that the criteria for curating the African gallery was primarily to convey African culture and the similarities of art and customs of different African tribes. Hannah once more surprised me in stating, “Additionally, it looks as though the museum
focused on one group of people from each specific area rather than getting multiple pieces of art from multiple groups of people from different regions.” While the other students did not express concerns, Hannah identified the problem of the limited tribal aesthetic. Students’ responses to Question 6 reflected the major themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, daily lives.

Q 8. What, if any concerns or problems did you observe in the museum’s African art gallery?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>I did not observe and problems or concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>I didn’t have any problems with the actual gallery but I was confused by the ones around it. Sometimes it was difficult to differentiate some of the other rooms and I found myself asking “is this part of the gallery or not?” multiple times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>I feel as though the exhibit itself is small, and not very representative of the African continent. The continent itself is huge, and it seems as though the sample of art is very specific in each region observed. I would have loved to see multiple types of art conveyed in the exhibition. There are not only tribes in Africa. There are urban areas, and I feel as though the museum has boxed in the continent of Africa into a very specific niche. I also would have loved to see the African gallery move from a time when tribal art was the main art form to a more contemporary current way art is completed. The exhibit seemed very static.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I would have liked to see a bit more variety. Most of what I saw was masks or sculptures. It would have been interesting to see jewelry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>There wasn’t a lot of it! I know that’s not something the museum can necessarily control, but I kept accidentally drifting into the Indonesian / Pacific Islands gallery under the assumption that there’d just be more African art. Otherwise I would’ve loved a more diverse gallery, but again, I don’t think the museum really has a big say in the range of their pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>I found the pieces misleading. Many of them were not made by African people, but replicas of the style. I understand that the museum survives mostly off donations, but it is still a concern. Also, most of them were very modern, when they were made/donated anyway. Again, understandable, but still concerning. The only African culture I’m getting out of this is the kind that has been influenced by invading countries. I know that a lot of that art and history has degraded due to material, but it is still concerning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From their response, Amy, Clarissa, Randy, and Sonia did not observe any concerns or problems with the museum’s African art gallery. Jenny and Melissa indicated the problem of the
lack of variety and diversity in the gallery. I was surprised with Sarah’s response in indicating that the artworks were problematic for being made in the modern era. I am not sure if she meant that the dates of the works were misleading based on the style. Sarah also indicated that some of the artworks were replicas; this was revealing to me, as I did not notice this during the museum visit. I was impressed with Hannah’s response as she identified several problems with the African art gallery at the museum. Hannah’s response was indicative of many problems of African art that go unnoticed. Her classmates did not identify the problems of misrepresentation, the static unchanging aesthetic, and the lack of contemporary art. Hannah’s response was a happy surprise, as she was able to notice normalized problems with African art.

Q 9. How would you describe the people and places represented in the museum’s African exhibition and in your exhibition guide?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>I would describe the people and places as dependent on each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>The people and places may vary based on each artifact but they all follow the same basic themes. Each of the tribes held importance in rank, power, social standing, rituals, religion, their gods, and ancestors. The people often created functional items, such as bowls or stools that also held some significance to their culture. For example, certain bowls were made to look like men and women but still functioned as bowls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Solely based on the museum’s exhibit, I would represent them as people who have great respect and pride in their traditions, specifically in terms of rituals and ceremonies. These traditions seem to be based on communicating with their ancestors more often than not, gaining strength from them, or simply paying their respects. I want people to see the many ways they identify with their ancestors and how their identities are linked to the previous generations of people that lived before them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I feel like they are hard-working with great craftsmanship and diverse spirituality. I think they’re planted in their different beliefs and traditions which is what makes their culture so interesting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Very spiritual people, following custom and tradition in both the usage and creation of these pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>They are very symbolic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>The people are religious and devoted. They share a strong cultural identity and their traditions are beautiful and engaging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>Describing each one and how it related to the overall theme I saw and how it connected with me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I posed Question 9 to learn what the museum’s African art gallery communicated to my students about the people and places in Africa. Students described Africans and Africa as; community dependent, similar in themes and aesthetics, prideful of their traditions and culture, spiritual and symbolic. Students’ responses reflect that the gallery communicated understandings relative to the major themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, and daily lives.

**Q 10. Do you think that the museum’s African art gallery appropriately represents the region?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>I do because knowing some people from this region many of the qualities portrayed in the gallery match up with them. For instance I work with a woman from the region and she really emphasis some of the maternity aspects I saw.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>I think there was a good spread of tribes and cultures while still keeping the exhibit cohesive. I also thought the curator did a good job of showing pieces from different eras. Since different tribes have existed at different times or have changed over time I think it is important that the gallery wasn’t limited to one specific time period. I felt like after visiting the exhibit I had a good grasp of the cultures in the region and the tribes that were represented so I would say that the museum’s African art gallery appropriately represented the region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>I think the gallery appropriately represents the region for some, but I do not think it is reflective or represents all who live in those regions of Africa. As I stated above, I think Africa is a big melting pot of people, and has gained influences from other cultures since 1800. It would have been nice had the museum shown this progression throughout the exhibit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Yes. When I walked in it was almost exactly what I expected. The fabrics and masks are what really completed the exhibition for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>I think it did—there was a wide range of objects with varied uses, as well as an overall similarity that implies that although many different cultures existed under the African label, there were still some similarities between them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>I do. It shows many aspects of the African society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>I would, but the fact that most of the pieces are replicas concerns me. I would like to see more pieces made by the people themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>Yes, because it showed the important aspects of each region through the stories of the figures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From their response to Question 10, Amy, Clarissa, Jenny, Melisa, Randy, and Sonia believed that the museum’s African art gallery appropriately represents Africa. Their response reflects the major themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity, art for utility, daily lives, and
the feminine. Sarah expressed her concerns about the replicas of some of the artworks in the
gallery. Hannah indicated that the gallery represents some parts of Africa, but not the entire
continent. Students’ overall response to Question 10 shows that students mostly believed that
the museum’s African art gallery appropriately represents Africa.

Q 11. Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>The artists of this region is the perspective the gallery represents because they are the ones that created the art and portrayed exactly what they might have wanted to say. The history behind many of the artworks says a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>I think the gallery represented the perspective of the curator. By reading the descriptions of each piece and observing the way the artifacts were organized, I felt like the curator was leading me through. My first thought was “obviously the gallery represents the perspective of the tribes because their things are on display,” however as I thought about it more I realized that while at the exhibit I didn’t feel like the tribes were leading me through or teaching me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>I think the perspective of the museum’s gallery is one of history. I think they intentionally pieced together that gallery to display the many differences for regions in Africa for comparison about a specific period in time, and a specific group of people. Most of it looks historical. This is not art made for looking at. This is art that was used by the people of the region and held importance to each group it represents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I feel that the outsider’s perspective is mostly represented. I think it’s hard to truly understand the perspective of the people from that region or any region without having been there and experiencing it. I don’t think they would display their pieces like we do in a museum; they would just be ordinary objects in everyday life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>I’d like to think it represented the people—even among the ceremonial face masks and the priest’s staff were bowls, doors, and figures made to hold water. It wasn’t a display of wealth nor of high-ranking individuals, it really seemed like something from the people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>I think it was from the perspective of men because of all the sculptures and honors paid to women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>I think the museum presents the perspective of a non-native. The wall information is vague and broad rather than as intricate as it could be, limited space may be a reason for this however.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>I think the African exhibit falls into the perspective of modernism and expressionism, because each figure represents a part of the culture and tradition in that region, yet the representation is created in a modernistic and different way.</td>
</tr>
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Student’s responses to Question 11 varied. Students indicated that the gallery
represented the perspective of; artists from the regions, the museum curator, history, the outsider,
the people of the region, men, the non-native, modernism and expressionism. I was pleasantly surprised by Jenny’s response “I feel that the outsider's perspective is mostly represented. I think it's hard to truly understand the perspective of the people from that region or any region without having been there and experiencing it. I don’t think they would display their pieces like we do in a museum, they would just be ordinary objects in everyday life.” I was glad to see that a student expressed the issue of an outsider’s perceptive in representing people and places. Jenny further raised a good point about the objects displayed in a museum context relative to their purpose and uses in their original context.

Q 12. *From your overall learning experience in the African art gallery, what understandings do you have about the represented region?*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>I have a better understanding of the culture of this region especially the central and Western portions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>From my experience at the gallery, I now understand the social priorities of the people in that region. By observing the purposes of all the artifacts in the exhibit I can see the major themes of power/rank, religion/ritual/coming of age, and gods/ancestors and understand that these are the ideals that they held in high esteem. If these themes weren’t as important, there wouldn’t have been such an abundance of artifacts dedicated to them. I also have an understanding of their physical environment because of what they made their tools, statues, relics, and clothing out of. Along with that, I understand that they used everything in their surrounding and wasted almost nothing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>That each region has their own individual identity. Each region has something that they hold dear, and important, yet at the same time, the common threads throughout the regions are steeped in tradition. I learned a lot in terms of a historical context. This is not a gallery where the art has no meaning, or people do not know why something was made. Each piece has a story and a purpose - a place in history. I wish the gallery had not just looked at African art from a historical perspective, however. It would have been nice to see the transition from art that was created out of a necessity into art that was created because someone just had the drive to showcase a piece for enjoyment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I know that the represented people express themselves through their many rituals, and that ceremonies and festivities are an important part of the African culture. I also saw the theme of maternity being repeated in many pieces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Q 12. (continued).

| Melissa | I probably sound like a broken record by now, but overall I see cultures fond of their craft, yet bearing a functional use in each that marks them as remarkably different from other cultures represented in the museum. |
| Randy | They have a great respect for women. They are very superstitious and create a deeper meaning for everything around them. |
| Sarah | I understand that the region is very diverse with very different styles and media. Each one is indicative of their sub-region. It's obvious that religion is an important factor and that function is also important. Practically all of the pieces had a purpose from every day, to social casts, to rituals, nothing was simply there to look intriguing or pretty. |
| Sonia | African art is about its people and their ancestors and the stories and meaning they hold. |

Students’ overall learning of experience at the museum’s African art gallery provided them with understandings of Africa relative to the major themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine.

Summary

In analyzing students’ responses to the Questionnaire I, there were direct correlations with the themes that emerged from their assignment (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the museum). The combination of analyzing data from students’ assignments and Questionnaire I provides sufficient results to develop interpretations to answer sub-questions: 1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in art museums communicate to a group of university students? 2. What understandings of African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience in an art museum?

Post Museum Visit: September 26, 2013

Thursday, September 26, 2013 was the following class after the visit to a DFW Art Museum. Students’ assignment, Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum
and Questionnaire I were due on September 26, 2013. I documented the occurrences relevant to my research on this day in my journal. Below is a description as recorded in my research journal of the activities of the September 26 class.

*September 26, 2013*

In class, I instructed students to divide into 6 groups, with 3 groups per selected gallery; 3 groups for those who selected the Asian art gallery and 3 for those who selected the African art gallery. Each group was given 2 questions from the Questionnaire I—relevant to their gallery—to discuss in their group and subsequently share with the class. In their groups, students discussed for about 15 minutes without my input; because I wanted students to freely exchange their responses to the questions. After group discussions, each group shared their discussion points on each question with the class, and other groups provided feedback. Discussing the questions in class prompted critical thinking, as students debated their peers’ responses and posed further questions. Nemec (2012) explains that group discussions that focus on examining problems is an important part of transformative learning (Nemec, 2012). The transformative process is enhanced by the teacher prompting critical questions for deep effective group dialog (Nemec, 2012; Mezirow, 1997). During class discussions, I participated by posing more questions rather that providing explanations. I wanted students to problem-solve and closely examine the concepts their questions raised. Whenever a student posed a question to me, I redirected the question to the class. For example I would respond by saying, “You bring up an interesting point, what others think about it?” Or “What could be the possible explanations to this issue?” My response prompted other students to think more about the question and exchange their ideas. With this approach, I got the sense of being a co-learner, as I was not the authoritative voice of the ideas being discussed.
I was pleasantly surprised at some of the group responses to their group questions. For example, in discussing the question: Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How? Why? Students overwhelmingly said the museum represents the perspective of the West for Western audiences. I followed by asking why they believed the museum presents a Western perspective. Some students explained that the artworks in the African gallery fit what they expect to see of African art. Students expressed that they expected to see masks and tribal objects. Some students indicated that they noticed that the African art gallery did not show progression in comparison to some of the other gallery spaces; the African art gallery seemed static. I responded by stating, “That is an interesting observation, why do you think that is the case?” A student responded, “Maybe it is because the museum is interested in ancient African art.” Others agreed. As we further discussed the questions, student expressed that they wished they had received the questionnaire before the museum visit. I explained to them that it was important for them to experience the African art gallery without the questions to influence their learning experience.

Towards the end of class, I gave a short introductory presentation on Modern African art to further encourage critical thinking as students prepared for upcoming readings. The first slide displayed two African artworks from the museum’s collection: *Ngoin helmet crest*, date: mid-20th century, Cameroon and *Helmet mask (kifwebe) and costume*, date: late 19th to early 20th century, Africa, Democratic. I displayed the images without the dates and asked students to guess the production date for each work. Students gave broad ranges from 18–19th century. I revealed the dates, and proceeded with the following images: Aina Onabolu’s *Lawyer*, 1920s and *Portrait of a Man*, 1955. I displayed the paintings without the dates and asked students to guess their dates of production. Several students said mid–20th century, and one student said
early 20th century. I followed by asking students why such artworks are not visible in art history textbooks and in art museums with African art collections. One student explained that such artworks may not be included because of the time period in which they were made; in the sense that the museum’s collection could be focused on ancient African art. I then directed students’ attention to the Ngoin helmet crest—which was created in the mid-20th century (1940s–1960), and asked if that period is considered ancient. There was a moment of silence in class as students seemed to be perplexed; followed by statements like, “That is true!,” “I did not think of it in that sense,” “I really did not pay attention to the dates.” I proceeded by asking students if they noticed any artists listed in the African art gallery. This prompted more thinking and a realization that most of the artworks did not have an artist listed. To add to this, another student stated, “I now realize that most of the titles were descriptions of the objects, like woman holding a pot.”

I returned to Aina Onabolu’s paintings, revealing the dates; Layer, 1920s and Portrait of a Man, 1954. I asked students if they could rationalize why Onabolu’s painting Layer, which was done earlier than the Ngoin helmet crest is largely excluded from African art history. This question seemed to perplex students as they gazed at me not sure what to say. In response to the question, one student gave a justification stating that Onabolu’s painting style looked more Western and less African. The student hypothesized that maybe that is why Onabolu’s paintings are not included as African art, since they seem Western influenced. I was happy with this response, as it prompted me to ask about previous class readings on the Western primitivism art movement. I asked about Pablo Picasso, whose work was influenced by African masks, yet his artworks are not discounted. I showed a few more images of modern African art with the dates, the names and countries of the artists. I encouraged students to think more critically about the
ideas and questions that were discussed in class as they prepared to read the upcoming chapters on modern African art. I encouraged students to be thoughtful in how they respond to the readings; to express their concerns or interest on any of themes and concepts of the chapter. Additionally, I asked students to consider their learning experience at the museum in comparison to what they encounter in the readings.

Summary

This class was the initiation of the disruption process, as students were beginning to reflect and question their museum learning experience. The activities of this class afforded students with concepts to analyze and consider their personal assumptions of African aesthetics. Students were able to exchange their ideas as they discussed the questions from Questionnaire I. Through this exchange, some students were able to realize what they may have overlooked or considered as normal at the museum’s African art gallery. I noted the following keywords and phrases that students uttered during this class discussion: objects of Western curiosities, power and wealth, perspective of the West for the West, limited/narrow representation, stereotypes. The word “power” was uttered by a student when explaining that the wealthy have power and their ideas and interest are more influential in society. This came about as students discussed their observations of family collections at the museum. Hence, the collection of wealthy families infers the influence of power at the museum. I was excited that ideas about power emerged during class discussions. My hope was that the readings and activities in the subsequent couple of weeks on modern and contemporary African art will expand students’ understandings of how power is exercised through representations of people and places; particularly representations of Africa and Africans in art museums. I believe this class was an effective introduction to disrupting African art discourse. The class discussions and evaluations of student’s museum
learning experience prepared students to consider their perceptions as they read the first disruptive reading, “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Everlyn Nicodemus, the following week.

Phase II: The Disruption

Introduction

My motivation for disrupting African art discourse was initiated when I—as an African artist—was continuously confronted with problematic expectations of my “African” identity and my art aesthetics. I was resistant to accepting what others defined as my identity; yet mostly unaware of the sources of their expectations of my artworks. My resistance obligated me to search for alternative non-dominant African art histories.

A problem is unlikely to be resolved without comprehensive understanding and analysis of the multiple complex variables that structure and stabilize the problem. While my research concentrates on the problem of African art, the overarching problem is situated within discourse—power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) in constructing and normalizing hegemonic truths. My research does not intend to solely examine how the discourse of African art informs understandings and perceptions; my research aims to disrupt African art discourse with the intention and aspiration of transforming othering perceptions of African aesthetics. I approach the concept of disruption with a critical agenda; critical in the sense of identifying a problem with the purpose of creating positive solutions and improvements (Fairclough et al., 2004; Rogers; 2011 Wodak, 2001).

Nemec (2012) explains that, “The theory and practice of transformative learning is based on a recognition that growth comes from discomfort” (p. 487). Moreover, transformations
cannot be made if what is being learned comfortably fits into normalized frames of reference (Mezirow, 1997). For transformative learning to occur, learners need to be removed from their comfort zone by being challenged intellectually and expressively (Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006; Ettling, 2012; Nemec, 2012). The teacher facilitates disruptions of frames of reference by carefully presenting disruptive learning activities, while maintaining a balance of criticality and trust (Davis-Manigaulte et al, 2006; Ettling, 2012; Nemec, 2012). I therefore approached disruption in my research as a means of constructively disrupting African art as a frame of reference by implementing transformative learning strategies in my classroom.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the guiding tool of the study (Mertens, 2010; Powers, 2007); therefore, it is crucial for me to have a grounded concept of discourse (power/knowledge) in order to critically analyze discourse (Powers, 2007). Likewise, it is necessary for me to “be aware of the conceptualizations of power and resistance in order to be able to recognize them within discourse” (Powers, 2007, p. 32). A resistance of discourse is in fact a disruption of discourse. On the other hand, discourse is naturally resistant to disruptions that threaten its power. Powers (2007) advises discourse analysts to be mindful of this power-resistance relationship. Powers (2007) states:

Discourse may, therefore, be both an instrument and an effect of both power and resistance. It transmits and produces power, but also can undermine and expose it. Similarly, positions of silence can enact power, but can also loosen the hold of power and provide obscure areas of tolerance for resistance. The most important level of analysis for power relations is at the level of micropractices, the everyday activities of life, the terminal points of the grid or web. (Powers, 2007, p. 30)
Practices of museum exhibition and education of African art, and classroom education on African art are exemplary of micro–practices of discourse. Thus, my research is resistant to these micro–practices. Powers (2007) further explains that actions of resistance can significantly disrupt discourse; nonetheless, the complexities, invisibilities, and reproductive abilities of discourse does not easily allow for complete transformative disruptions. Foucault (1982) and Powers (2007) affirm that power is exercised relationally to its opposition—the marginalized, the Other, the subaltern, the powerless. Therefore, any disruption of power arises only from the position of its opposition. My theoretical framework in conducting this research is from the marginalized opposition of power.

The Disruption Experience

As the intervention phase of this action research, in Phase II, my students experienced my transformative learning classroom readings and activities that disrupted their learning experience from the museum’s African art gallery. This section provides data on students’ reading responses, my journal notes on the disruption classes, and my observational notes of students’ classroom participation. Phase II presents data for analysis in answering Sub-Question 3. How does a group of university students respond to a disruption of their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum?

Data in this section is presented in the following order:

- Disruption Objective
- Disruption Text
- October 3, 2013: First disruption reading class narrative
- October 10, 2013: Second disruption reading class narrative
• Students’ reading responses to: “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Everlyn Nicodemus, and “Modern African Art,” by Chika Okeke-Agulu

Disruption Objective

Experience works better as a “disruption” than mere exposure to Knowledge (Nemec, 2012, p. 479).

In my literature review I established that what is known and authenticated as African art is a Western hegemonic construction; therefore African art belongs to the dominant Western discourse of art history. As a Western hegemonic discourse, African art is the frame of reference my research disrupts on a micro level—within the context of my classroom. On a macro level, my research is a disruption of discourse (knowledge/power). Granted transformative learning aims to transform problematic frames of reference, a disruption is therefore necessary (Mezirow, 2000, 2003; Nemec, 2012). My disruption of African art occurred in Phase II, after the class visit to the art museum, and the completion of the assignment—Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I. Students’ learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery in Phase I was crucial to my classroom disruption. Students’ assignments in Phase I (Curatorial Intern Part A and Questionnaire I) was a necessary initiation to the disruption because it provided evidence of students’ perceptions based on their experience of African art at the museum. The assignment gave students a record of their perceptions in Phase I, which was later disrupted in Phase II. The disruption therefore became a disruption of the African art discourse at the museum, and also a disruption of students’ learning experience and their perceptions of African aesthetics at the museum. The disruption aimed for my students to critically analyze African art at the museum as problematic frame of reference that informed their perceptions of African aesthetics; thereby willfully make positive changes of those
perceptions.

My objectives of the disruption in Phase II were:

• To challenge and trouble the authenticity of African art at the museum.

• To provide students with histories of African art excluded from dominant art histories.

• To prompt critical discussions and debates on the concepts presented by course readings on modern African art.

• To encourage critical thinking and dialog about normalized representations of power and inequality.

• To help students become aware of subtle problematic frames of references, such as African art that inform perceptions and assumptions of Africa and African aesthetics.

• To encourage students to critically reflect on their perceptions and assumptions of people and places, especially on Africa and Africans.

• To ultimately encourage positive transformations of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics.

Meier (2010) affirms that the Western “authentic” discourse of African art is a deterrent to the scholarship of modern and contemporary African art. Moreover, the acceptance of modern and contemporary African art into the international art scene is disruptive to hegemonic Western art history (Harney, 2007; Hassan, 1999; Okeke-Agulu, 2010b). For that reason, such disruptions need to persist until Western hegemony is subverted and the scholarship of African art is re-epitomized and reconstructed to reflect the real histories of modern and contemporary African art (Meier, 2010). My research aims to contribute to the re-construction of African art history to comprise of modern and contemporary African art histories. Hence, my disruption of African art was through my classroom teachings on modern and contemporary African art, and
on histories that discount the dominant African aesthetic by presenting excluded African art histories.

_Disruption Text_

Kress (2011) explains that text [a textbook] is a powerful material resource in which discourse is realized. Text in an educational institution such as a university and an art museum is a means by which discourse is communicated, reproduced, and normalized. My theoretical position in conduction this research identifies the West as the dominant society, and hence the makers of discourse. Therefore art history as represented in art history text is a Western discourse reflective of Western perspectives of the arts and cultures of the art history. Art history is a product of discourse not only because it is Western dominated, but more because it is structurally hegemonic in its representation of non-Western art histories. Therefore, any teachings and learning of art histories that are excluded from the dominant art history is disruptive to discourse. The normalized aesthetics of traditional African art prevalent in art history, in art museums, and in art education is a product of Western discourse. Thus, my classroom teaching of modern and contemporary African art was disruptive to the discourse of “authentic” traditional African art.

For this research, the course readings on modern African art, along with the related classroom discussions and activities on modern and contemporary African art were structured as disruptions of African art discourse. Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, (2006) explain that analyzing course readings gives students a chance to not only internalize the text, but to further “trouble” it by critically responding and reflecting on their perspective in comparison to those presented by the reading. This process is enhanced by the teacher prompting critical questions for deep effective group dialog (Nemec, 2012; Mezirow, 1997). Through these discussions, the teacher
and students as co-learners are challenged to critically exchange insights and examine their problematic assumptions (Mezirow, 1997). The aim of the disruption text and activities is to encourage the students to critically reflect on their assumed perceptions, and learn to adopt new perspectives (Nemec, 2012).

The textbooks for my fall 2013 Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation course were:


  This book basically covers Western modern art history; it is exemplary of dominant art histories.


  This book is not part of the canon of modern art history; it is resistant to discourse, and therefore a necessary tool for my classroom disruption and transformative learning.

The combination of these textbooks for my course exemplifies principles of equitable approaches in multicultural education. Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, (2001) emphasize that multicultural education should provide knowledge sources from diverse perspectives, to encourage students’ cognizance of multiple viewpoints when critically analyzing an issue. “In this approach, teachers stress the unique contributions of individuals drawn from diverse groups. Students are encouraged to investigate the complexity, ambiguity, and multiple perspectives within diverse groups from the points of view of the members of the groups” (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001, p. 9). For my course, it was important for me to provide inclusive knowledge from dominant and non-dominant modern art histories for my students’ learnings of modern art.
history. My course encouraged students’ understandings of multiple modernisms from multiple contextual perspectives. It was challenging for me to find a textbook that reflected non-Western modern art histories from non-Western perspectives because most art history texts are Western centered. A “non-Western” perspective here does not refer to geographical location; rather it refers to non-dominant perspectives that have largely been silenced. Moreover, it alludes to a non-hegemonic perspective, given that hegemony is an enterprise of the dominant discourse. Therefore, it was important for me to provide a textbook (*Modern Art in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms*) that reflected non-hegemonic diverse perspectives of multiple scholars for my course.

Selecting *Modern Art in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms* as a textbook for my course was disruptive to Western dominant art history. The book provides histories of modern African, Asian, and Latin American art that are largely excluded from the dominant art history textbooks and art education. The book critically addresses the marginalization of these excluded histories by the West, and makes connections to colonial and post-colonial histories in the various regions. The essays in the book introduce artists and their artworks, situating them in their respective local scenes and their global cross-cultural connections and influences. The essays address the political and cultural movements, conflicts that shaped the regions, and the creative responses of the local artists. Specific to my research, the essays on modern African art are essential to the disruption of African art discourse. For the course we studied “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Everlyn Nicodemus, and “Modern African Art,” by Chika Okeke-Agulu in the span of two weeks. These essays function as material resources for the disruption and transformative learning of African art histories and African aesthetics. The essays by Nicodemus (2013), and Okeke-Agulu (2013)
challenge Eurocentric modern art history. They raise questions about constructions and validations of knowledge, invisible power, and oppressive practices in art history and in society as a whole. In presenting the names and artworks of the many unacknowledged modern and contemporary African artists, these essays give voice to these silenced histories. The artworks presented in the essays go further in disrupting the dominant African mask tribal aesthetic in art history, by showing multiple art mediums, such as paintings, sculptures, installations, photography, etc. This multiplicity in African art disrupts the unitary monolithic African art in art museums, art education and art history.

In the following section, I present the narratives of the disruption class days; October 3 and October 10, 2013. I summarize the essay for each day, and expand on the corresponding classroom activities. I also present my analysis of the disruption activities as I noted in my research journal during the process. This is followed by data analysis of participants’ reading responses and analysis of their classroom participation.

October 3, 2013: First disruption reading class narrative


In “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” Nicodemus (2013) introduces modern African art with the narrative of Aina Onabolu (1882-1963). Onabolu is credited as the first Nigerian modern artist and as a pioneer of African modern art. As a child Onabolu taught himself how to paint portraits by copying academic European portrait paintings (Nicodemus, 2013). “In the African context, the young artist’s appropriation was a revolution: “modern” in that it was a clear break with the past” (Nicodemus, 2013, p. 17). Onabolu’s decision of painting in Western academic realism style was also a political gesture to disprove Western “science” which claimed that Africans “were not intellectually capable of producing fine art in a Western
sense; they were fit only for craft” (Nicodemus, 2010, p. 17). The essay proceeds by situating histories of Western colonization in Africa, and the cross-cultural exchanges and influences that resulted. The essay also introduces other modern African artists including; Ernest Mancoba, Erhabor Emokpae, Gladys Mgudlandlu, Helen Sebidi, Mama Casset, and Seydou Keita (Nicodemus, 2013).

Classroom Activities, October 3, 2013

Students came to class having read the chapter and prepared a written response attending to the major themes, and also their personal opinion of the concepts of the essay. My objective for this class was for students to critically reflect on their learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery in relation to concepts from the essay. I structured the activities to prompt students to analyze the essay, discuss their museum experience, and address their assumptions about African aesthetics. My goal was to examine how students were making sense of the histories presented in the essay, in comparison to their assumptions and their museum experience.

Activity 1: Art Critique

The first class activity was a group critique of Yinka Shonibare’s *Scramble for Africa*, 2003. Students approached the projected image; some standing, others seated on the floor. The title of the work was not displayed on the slide. I encouraged students to closely observe of the work and express as many descriptions as possible. Students gave descriptions of what they saw; they indicated colors, the male mannequins, the table, chairs... etc. Students identified the fabric style as related to African or Asian cultures. We then proceeded to interpreting the work. I asked students: *What is the narrative here? What is the artist conveying in this piece?* Students expressed their interpretations, agreeing and disagreeing with their peers. Some students
interpreted the mannequins as representing African nations having a discussion, and other students identified the mannequins as European nations trying to help organize Africa. A few students identified the mannequins as European nations planning on colonizing Africa, and arguing about the distribution of land. I did not provide a narrative about the work, as to allow students to discuss and debate their interpretations. To encourage students to do a critical analysis of the work, I asked open-ended questions such as: How does the work communicate that idea to you? What is the significance of that interpretation? What do others think? For example, when a student said, “I think the mannequins represent European countries,” I responded by asking; “Why do you think so? If that is the case, what narrative does that imply?” I asked students, “Imagine being in the same space as the work, what sorts or conversations do you think you would hear?” I observed that the more questions I asked, students became more thoughtful in their responses. Students exchanged ideas about power, control, masculinity, colonization, unity, land distribution, and much more. After interpretations, students assessed the work. Overall, most students thought the piece was successful in representing its narrative and intriguing their interest. I thereby navigated to the next slide that displayed the title and a close-up view of the work. The slide also included an excerpt from the Fort Worth Modern Art Museum’s website about the work:

In Scramble for Africa, 2003, fourteen headless, mixed-race mannequins are seated at a sixteen-foot-long table. They symbolize the European figureheads who came together at the Berlin Conference, 1884–1885, to annex territories of trade in Africa for each of their countries. With regard to colonialism, the absence of heads implies loss of identity and, moreover, loss of humanity. Of this work, Shonibare explains, “I wanted to represent these European leaders as mindless in their hunger for what the Belgian King Leopold II

I paused and allowed students to read the statement. I informed students that the installation was exhibited at the Fort Worth Modern Art Museum in spring 2013, and I was able to experience being in that space. I read the excerpt out loud, and encouraged students to reflect on it, and to consider how art can function as an analysis of histories and ideologies. I selected the installation by Shonibare for the critique because the 1884-85 Berlin Conference is referenced in the essay, “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Nicodemus. Critiquing Shonibare’s Scramble for Africa was an entry point to discussing the concepts of the essay, at the same time, a way to introduce students to Yinka Shonibare, a contemporary renowned African artist.

Activity II: What is Culture?

We proceeded by briefly discussing the term culture, attending to the following questions:

- What is your definition of culture?
- What informs us about people’s cultures?
- Do we ask others, to learn about their culture, or do we have assumptions?
- What informs our assumptions and ideas about cultures?
- How can we change our ideas and assumptions?

I was pleased to learn that my students—at least those who responded—had a broader, more complex definition of culture. Their definitions were not limited to ethnicity, language, religion, and nationality. A student expressed that “the values people have and share is part of their cultural identity.” Students exchanged ideas about macro-cultures as in American culture,
and micro-cultures, as in individual values, activities, education...etc. I presented the following definition of personal culture by Christine Ballengee-Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr (2001):

The aspects of one’s personal cultural identity include: age; gender and sexuality; social and economic class (education, job, family position); exceptionality (giftedness, differently abled, health); geographic location (rural, suburban, urban, as well as north, south, east, west, or central); religion; political status; language: ethnicity (the aspect most people concentrate on when they think about culture); and racial designation…These aspects of our personal cultural identity are shared with different social groups and are often greatly influenced by the national culture(s) in which the group exists. (Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr, 2001, p. 7)

I decided to discuss ideas related to culture to prompt student to consider how they use the term. Also, I noticed, when grading the assignment (Curatorial Intern Part A and Questionnaire I) in Phase I, that there were several references to “African culture” and “Asian culture.” Hence, the classroom discussion on culture prompted critical thinking on generalizing groups into a unitary culture and art aesthetic. I was glad to learn that my students’ mostly recognized the multifarious nature of cultures; however I wondered if they are mindful of this when referring to non-Western cultures. During the discussion on culture I asked; “If cultures have multiple components and interrelations, can one art aesthetic represent a continent?” Students shook their heads indicting “No.” I followed by asking how concepts of culture and representation of cultures function at the museum we visited. A student responded by stating that she noticed more diversity in the Western art galleries compared to the other non-Western galleries. Other students agreed.

Activity III: Group discussion on “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project”
I divided students into 6 groups, and gave each group a paper with one question to guide their discussion. Students were instructed to discuss their question and write down their discussion points on the paper. The group questions included:

1. What was “political” about Aina Onabolu’s paintings?
2. “Less attention has been paid to what this revolution meant than to the simultaneous change in European modernism inspired by premodern African art” (Nicodemus, 2013, p. 17). Is this true? Why and How?
3. “…in Africa, modern art responds to the colonial relations from the opposite side, the side of the colonized” (Nicodemus, 2013, 18). What is the relevance of this statement?
4. Consider your learning experience at the museum in discussing the following statement:
   “Western anthropologists and ethnological Africanists, who long functioned as the dominant authorities on African cultures, preferred to treat African cultures as if they existed in an unchangeable “present past,” preserving some mythical primeval origin. The order of the day was the West’s passion for the ‘primitive’” (Nicodemus, 2013, p. 18).
5. What was the paradoxical double impact of the Euro-American transatlantic slave trade?
6. When did modern art production peak in Africa? Why?

Students had 15 minutes to attend to their question in their groups and later present to the class. I visited each group, paying attention to their exchanges and encouraging them to think deeper about the concepts. I asked questions such as: Why do you think the author is addressing this issue? How does this concept relate to your learning experience at the museum? I emphasized to students that I did not want them to simply read the answers from the book; rather, for them to analyze the text and discuss their individual perspectives of the concepts
relative to their question. I encouraged students to ask each other questions and debate on the concepts; expanding on why they agree, disagree, or are indifferent. Below are some examples of groups’ discussions points, as was written on their paper.

“Less attention has been paid to what this revolution meant than to the simultaneous change in Europe modernism inspired by premodern African art.” 17
Is this true? Why and How?

* Willful ignorance of Europeans to African modernist movement because they didn’t want to give it power by acknowledging it.

* The modern movement in Africa occurred at the tail end of the European modern movement therefore the African ascent to modernism was not novel or different.

* The Western story of modern art is perpetuated as the global ascent to modernism and disregards the modern movements of Africa & other countries.
“...in Africa, modern art responds to the colonial relations from the opposite side, the side of the colonized.” 18

What does this mean?

As a group, we decided that the African art was a response to European art and its "superiority." We also agreed that African modern art was the Africans' way of saying that "yes, we are modern; yes, we have history and were not just a primitive culture."
What was the paradoxical double impact of the Euro-American transatlantic slave trade?

African slaves in Western culture

African-American artists "revolutionized" Western art through ancestral heritage

culture exchange (both sides)

Brutalizing/daining many parts of the continent of human resources, but also globalizing African culture

African culture was growing & shrinking at the same time.
To discuss and answer their question, students reread sections of the chapters relevant to their questions. Their written points reflect their learnings from the chapter and their group discussions on the concepts raised by their question. I wanted groups to take more ownership of the concepts raised by their question, so I encouraged each group to present their question and discussion points as a form of teaching the class. I instructed students not to read what they
wrote down, but to teach the class about the issues raised by their question, their findings in the chapter, and their discussions points. After small group discussions, each group read their question and shared their ideas with the class. Other students responded by providing their input and asking questions. There were instances of profound disagreements and agreements, and several moments when there seemed to be discomfort. The discussions that emerged for the questions were effective in challenging students, and taking them out of their comfort zone. Such challenges and discomfort through learning plays a significant role in the transformative learning experience (Davis-Manigaulte et al.; Nemec, 2012).

During class, I functioned as the moderator and allowed students to disrupt African art through their group discussions. I encouraged students’ critical thinking further by asking follow-up questions for them to consider how they represented their learning experience at the museum. I noted one student’s assertion “Defining Africans as primitive was a form of justifying colonization.” This statement prompted more questions from students about the African art at the museum. A student mentioned that the objects in the African art gallery are mostly artifacts that were used for a purpose. Another student countered by saying, “… maybe in Africa those objects are more valued as art.” To provoke more disruptions, I divided the class into two groups for a 15 minute debate on the issue of the objects represented in the African art gallery. One group had to come up with convincing statements defending the art in the museum’s African art gallery, while the other group had to discount the museum’s African art and make a case for the modern African art presented in the essay. Groups had 5 minutes to prepare their speaking points and 10 minutes to debate each other. The debate was intense and effective because students had to embrace a position and defend its validity. As I observed, I sensed the friction of the opposing ideas and I wondered how students were internalizing their
ideas and those of their peers. Through debating on ideas on African art, students were able to come up with constructive arguments about the problems of African art. Nemec (2012) explains that dialogue that focuses on examining a problem is important to learners’ transformative learning. The activities of this class engaged students in analyzing the problems of African art as presented in the essay. Overall, I believe the class discussions and activities were effective in disrupting concepts of African aesthetics that are prevalent at the museum. The structure of the group discussions and the group questions prompted students to participate in disrupting their assumptions. Students expressed that they had not noticed the problems we discussed and admitted to their assumptions about African art.

I believe my approach of not providing interpretations for students, rather allowing them to self-reflect and hopefully recognize their position within the themes that emerged from the essay was effective. This approach allowed me to learn how my students were meaning-making; moreover, to observe how they considered their assumptions and their museum experience. At the end of class, I asked students about their overall thoughts about the ideas we discussed. Several students expressed that the essay and the discussions raised issues that they had not noticed nor considered before. Such assertions are beginning signs of transformation, as learners begin to self-reflect and question the beliefs they had not previously questioned (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2003).

October 10, 2013: Second disruption reading class

Reading response due: “Modern African Art,” by Chika Okeke-Agulu

In this essay, Okeke-Agulu (2013) provides a compelling overview of modern African art, expressing its challenges, diversities in artistic practices, and the cross-cultural influences. The essay disrupts Eurocentric art history by presenting its inconsistencies, contradictions, and
partialities. Okeke-Agulu (2013) begins by explaining that modern African art has been in existence from the beginnings of modernity, however, it has been rejected and excluded from histories of modern art. The exclusion of modern African art is one of the many problems Okeke-Agulu highlights in this essay. Okeke-Agulu (2013) presents the paradox of Western modernism’s incorporation formal elements from African objects, as in the case of Pablo Picasso. However, African artists such as Aina Onabolu who incorporated Western art styles are not validated in modern art history (Okeke-Agulu, 2013). Okeke-Agulu provides narratives of modern African artists from different countries including; Ibrahim El-Salahi from Sudan, Mahmoud Muktar, and Gazbia Sirry form Egypt, Ben Enwonwo from Nigeria, and Gerard Sekoto from South Africa. The author further expands on how histories of colonialism and struggles for independence impeded the progress of modernism and hence modern art in Africa. The essay ultimately challenges Western hegemonic constructions of modern art history, by giving the rightful voice to modern African art.

Class Activities, October 10, 2013

The October 10th class was a continuation of the disruption from the October 3rd class. Students came to class with a written response to Okeke-Agulu’s “Modern African Art.” To begin the class, I asked students what their overall thoughts were about the chapter on “Modern African Art.” Students expressed that the chapter was challenging and complex to understand because they were not accustomed to some of the concepts and terms in the essay. I gave an overview of the previous week’s reading and discussions, and encouraged students to consider the ideas discussed in the previous class in addition to those presented in the chapter on “Modern African Art.” I also encouraged students to consider their learning experience at the museum and how it relates to the topics on African modern art in the essay.
Activity I: Group Discussion on “Modern African Art”

Students got into 4 groups to discuss the reading. To guide their discussion, I provided each group a paper with a question and the name of an artist from the reading. I instructed students to discuss their question and artist, and write down their discussion points on the paper. Questions 2 and 3 below are excerpts from the abstract of the essay. The group questions and artists included:

1. “[The essay] reverses the hegemonic Eurocentric viewpoint of art historiography and offers an authoritative history of African modern art from an African perspective” (Okeke-Agulu, 2013, p. 26). How does the essay do this?
   Artist: Gazbia Sirry

2. How does Okeke-Agulu explain the debates around critical modernist concepts?
   Artist: Ernest Mancoba

3. According to the author, what is the fundamental paradox of modern art history?
   Artist: Mahmoud Mukhtar

4. Explain the concept of “mimicry” in relation to African art. What are your thought about this notion?
   Artist: Ibrahim El-Salahi

I instructed students to focus on the narrative of their artist, and provide information on the artist’s date of birth, nationality, education, influences, and their cross-cultural experiences. Additionally, groups needed to discuss and note 2-3 points on how their artist’s art practice and life experience relates to modernism art movements. The narratives of these artists were provided in the essay, along with images of some of their artworks. I also provided each group
with a printed image of one artwork by their artist. Below are some examples of groups’ discussions points, as was written on their paper.

1. “[The essay] reverses the hegemonic Eurocentric viewpoint of art historiography and offers an authoritative history of African modern art from an African perspective.” (26) How does the essay do this?
   1. Written by African Author
   2. Focuses on African Modern art developed without talking about Western art.
   3. African perspective from multiple parts of Africa
   4. Argued that westernization did not include fine art education, those that learned made a choice to do that.
   5. Art development due to political expression as they gained more freedom at Western suppression.
   6. European - primitivism vs African being influenced by Western art

**ARTIST: Gazbia Sirry**

+ Started in Cairo, then went abroad
+ Left group of modern art (favored Western style), to join group of contemporary art (favored Egyptian style) - political move
2. How does Okeke explain the debates around critical modernist concepts?

- African art institutions wanted by Africans
- European critics call African art product of white colonialism
- European artists appropriate African art forms
- Africans can appropriate European techniques
- *No one modernism in Africa*
- Socially & politically liberated to express their own modernities
- He makes art political
- This is why African can have right to expand on European styles

**ARTIST: Ernest Mancoba**

- One of South Africa’s pioneering black artists
- Forced to emigrate to Europe - Paris then Denmark
- 1948 participated in Høst exhibition → show of emergent COBRA group brought the group into contact with African ethnographic materials
- People he influenced greatly: Joan Øjler Bille, Ferlof & Erik Thommesen
4. Explain the concept of “Mimicry” in relation to African art. What are your thoughts about this notion?

- Taking from European tradition to be critical towards the West -- for a reason, political agenda.
- Idea of mimicry being inevitable because cultures always influence each other, techniques, etc.

- Mimicry doesn’t mean lack of originality.
  → Post-impression built off previous work
- Just because they’ve picked techniques doesn’t mean the art can’t be authentic.
  → Artists possess possible agency in regards to their art, which implies originality.

ARTIST: Ibrahim El-Salahi, Sudanese
- Studied Islamic calligraphy to reestablish links to Sudanese identity
- Trained in both Africa & Europe
- Inspired by Sudanese & Ethiopian art
- Produced symbolic, lyrical drawings

* Early art is hallucinatory, seemingly interpreted as an African manifestation of surrealism
I was aware that the group questions were challenging, so I allowed groups to analyze the purpose of their question before I visited each group. To encourage students to examine the ideas and issues of their question, I prompted them by stating: *As you discuss your questions, do not simply restate phrases from the essay; expand on your understandings of the major issues. What is the author commenting on, and does it matter? If so, why, if not, why? I am not expecting you to simply agree with the author, rather to analyze the concepts presented; to exchange your personal interpretations and pose questions to your group members. Zoom out of art history, and consider the bigger ideas that your question addresses. Consider the relevance of those ideas to your individual perceptions and to contemporary society.*

About 5-10 minutes into group discussions, I visited each group to listen to their exchanges, and focus their attention to key issues by asking more questions. The questions I asked were in response to what students said, and to motivate them to think more critically; considering involvements of power in the representations of people and places.

My visit with Group 1 is an example:

- Group question: [The essay] reverses the hegemonic Eurocentric viewpoint of art historiography and offers an authoritative history of African modern art from an African perspective” (Okeke-Agulu, 2013, p. 26). How does the essay do this?

When I visited the Group 1, I asked students if they understood the term “hegemonic.” One student said, “…it has to do with power over things and everything.” I agreed and further explained, “Hegemony is not the type of power that is visible – as in police or judicial power. It is the type of power that structures and controls what is considered as the norm and what we have access to in learning.” I did not overtly expand on hegemony; instead I asked the group, “Considering this idea of power and control, how is it relevant to your question? Why does
authority and perspective matter in art history? How do these ideas relate to the African art
gallery at the museum?” As I asked these questions, I observed students’ responsiveness and
reflections on the questions. I encouraged students to discuss the questions I posed, and later
share their responses with the class.

After the small group discussions, each group gave a presentation about their artist and
discussions in front of the class. As groups presented, the image of their artist’s artwork was
projected on the screen. Students began by presenting their artist to the class; informing us about
the artist date of birth, nationality, education, influences, their cross-cultural experiences, and
their relativeness to modernism. Students shared the ideas they discussed on their question, and
other students participated by asking questions and sharing their input. The responses and
questions that emerged during group presentations provoked intense debates; as students
disagreed and agreed on ideas. Through this back and forth process, students were
problematizing and disrupting each other’s perceptions. Some students showed interest in the
concepts of the chapter and critically engaged in questioning the tribal aesthetic at the museum’s
African art gallery. Moreover, they admitted to not noticing the problems highlighted in the
chapter. Those students were expressive in group discussions; some of them admitted to their
assumptions of Africa and African art. On the other hand, I observed resistance from a few
students. In reference to the African art at the museum, as one student said, “This is what I
prefer to see when I look at African art.” I responded by asking, “Why do you think you have
this preference?” She said, “Well, that is what I have, or we in the West are trained and expected
to see of African art.” I followed by stating, “That is a good point, what do others think?” A few
students responded expressing ideas about stereotypes and how they did not realize art could be a
form of stereotyping. One student said that the readings, the artworks, and class discussions
prompted her to question why modern African art is not represented in the museum’s African art gallery. Another student responded, “Maybe it is because the works at the museum were the ones that were collected and not the modern artworks.” I then asked, “Why do you think the modern artworks were not collected?” A different student explained that the collectors were most likely tourists who wanted to collect things that were very different from what they had seen before. The exchanges continued with more discussions on concepts related to the chapter including:

- Western colonization in Africa
- Modernity and cross-cultural influences
- African artists and art groups promoting art education and art schools in Africa
- The delay of African modernism due to colonization
- The idea of reconstructing knowledge about modern art
- Concepts on mimicry and authenticity in African art
- Hegemony and control of knowledge
- Material resources that inform our perceptions
- Dominant histories and perspectives

As we examined these ideas in small and big group discussions, we were collectively disrupting African art discourse by highlighting excluded African art histories. Moreover, students were identifying African art as a problematic frame of reference and considering how it informed their perceptions at the museum.

My objective with this activity was for students to zoom in on modern African artists; to recognize their identities, and give voice to their individual histories. The histories of these modern African artists provide evidence that disrupts the “unknown” African artists at the
museum. The “unknown” artists of African art at the museum convey that the art represents an entire homogeneous culture, and it validates a tribal pre-colonial African culture with no “power to resist change,” (Kasfir, 1999). The “unknown” African artist is symbolic of the silenced voice of the subaltern African subject. It is exemplary of institutionalized epistemic violence, as it testifies to the inferiority of the Other as a “non-knower” (Dotson, 2011). It was important for my students to learn about modern African artists and see the diversity of their artworks. This activity was aimed at disproving the “unknown” African artists and the “authentic” primitive aesthetic of African art. Kasfir (1999) explains, “‘Authentic’ African art usually means ‘anonymous’—the artist is unknown, and an unknown artist of an artwork conveys the lack of individual creativity. When the artist name is known, the work is no longer considered primitive…the act of ascribing identity simultaneously erases mystery” (p. 94). My hope was that this activity, was subverting the “primitivism” of African art; and that students were able to question their learning experience at the museum, and reconsider their assumptions about African aesthetics.

To add to the disruption, I provided a book on modern and contemporary African art as a source for students to see more artworks from different African countries. The book was passed around class during group discussions. The book functioned as additional evidence of African art histories that have largely been excluded from art museums and art education. As students looked through the book, I asked if they expected to see such works as African art. Most of them expressed being surprised at the different styles. One student said she was surprised to see so many paintings, because she associated African art with crafts such as those at the museum. I hoped that these resources motivated my students to recognize the diversities of African modern
and contemporary artists and their individual creativity. Moreover, I hoped that such exposure will foster a transformation of their perceptions of African art and African aesthetics.

The class activities and the exchanges that emerged during discussions are indicative of transformative learning. Mezirow (2003) explains that transformative learning is concerned with changing the problematic—taken-for-granted frames of reference that inform and maintain perceptions. In my classroom, I encouraged transformative learning by strategically structuring activities for disruptions and critical reflections that foster positive changes in learners’ perceptions (Cranton, 2006; Nemec, 2012). I was aware that the questions I provided for group discussions were challenging and required critical thinking, close reading and analysis of the text. The questions were intended to challenge students out of their comfort by provoking them to disrupt and rethink their taken for granted assumptions. Davis-Manigaulte et al., (2006) and Nemec (2012) emphasize that discomfort and challenge in the learning process, incited by the teacher is imperative in a transformative learning process. However, the teacher needs to structure a learning space that balances analytical discomfort with the learners’ comfort and trust in the learning process (Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006; Nemec, 2012). As I facilitated my disruptive learning activities, I was cognizant of maintaining this balance by primarily functioning as the co-learner and not the authoritative voice. I answered students’ questions by posing other questions for them to consider possible answers, and for their peers to respond to their questions. This encouraged students’ to listen and learn from their classmates.

Activity II: Presentation on Modern and Contemporary African Art

After group discussions, I presented an overview on modern and contemporary African art. I started with the 2 artworks from the museum’s African art gallery that were discussed in class on September 26 (the class after the museum visit). The museum’s Ngoin helmet crest,
mid-20th century, Cameroon, and Helmet mask (kifwebe) and costume, late 19th to early 20th century, Africa, Democratic. I asked students, “Is this African art? Is it fine art?” Some students said yes, others said no. One student said, “Yes, because if it was made in Africa, it is African art.” Another student said, “No, because they are artifacts… the objects were made for utility purposes, not to be fine art.” Another student said “No they are not art; they were selected to show that Africans can only make craft.” Students’ responses varied and were profound. I allowed students to freely share their thoughts, without providing direct responses; rather, I gave comparative examples. Being in Texas allowed for a great comparison. I used the “cowboy” stereotype of Texas, and I asked students, “Does an image of people with cowboy hats represent the entire Texas?” They all said no. I followed by asking; “Do the Texans living in the big cities also represent Texas?” They all said yes. I then followed, “If there are multiple representations in one state, it is normal that there is one artistic aesthetic to represent a continent of over 50 countries?” The class was silent for a few seconds, as students seemed to make the connection and reflect on what should seem obvious. Some of students explained that they had not considered that perspective, and agreed that it is not normal for one aesthetic to represent a continent, a country, or state. I then explained to students that part of the problem with African art, as presented at the museum, is that it tells a single story; it generalizes Africa as a singular primitive unchanging aesthetic.

I proceeded with the slides; displaying images of modern and contemporary African artists and their artworks including. Some of the artists in my presentation included: Georges Lilanga Di Nyama from Tanzania; Wangechi Mutu from Kenya, Odili Donald Odita, and Ucche Okeke-Agulu from Nigeria, Jane Alexander and Santu Mofokeng from South Africa, Julie Mehretu from Ethiopia, Meschac Gaba from Benin, Lalla Essaydi, from Morocco, El Anatsui
from Ghana, and Samuel Fosso from Cameroon. These artists’ artworks ranged from paintings, collage, photography, installation, sculpture, and mixed media. Showing the images of these artists, and their artworks, and indicating their countries and the dates of their artworks was significant in further disrupting the primitive African art aesthetic at the museum. As I presented on the artists, I asked students questions such as: Is this African art? If you saw this work without background knowledge, would you consider it as African art? Why are such artworks usually not included in many art museums? Imagine if you encountered such works at the museum, how would that inform your understanding of African art? I put forth these questions to encourage students to think more critically about how the resources at the museum informed their learning and perceptions of African art. In displaying modern and contemporary artworks along with the questions, my hope was that students were recognizing what was excluded at the museum. I shared links to websites such as, universes-in-universe.org, where students could learn more about global contemporary practices, including modern and contemporary African art and. Universes-in-universe was a great resource to share with students, as it highlights contemporary global art exhibitions as the Dak’Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art. To encourage their transformative learning, it was important for my students to see multiple sources of African artistic practices.

The last slide displayed one of my abstract paintings (The Ultimate Leap, 2010), with my name and country of birth (Cameroon). I asked students if they knew the artist; they giggled. I shared my personal narrative about my MFA experience, and how my paintings were expected to look more “African.” I explained how troubled I was about such expectations, and how I found myself googling African art; which was ironic, as I was raised in Cameroon, West/Central Africa. I explained to students that the African “art” at the museum are objects that I am familiar
with; given that many of them are from West and Central Africa. The objects are not commonly used in the cities, except during events with traditional performances; the head-wears are activated when worn during dance performances. Moreover, many of the objects are more common in villages, where they are mostly used in houses or during traditional ceremonies. The objects are usually not admired for their aesthetic qualities as fine art, which is why the artists and dates of production are mostly unknown. The objects are usually created for utility purposes, however, over time; they have become objects to sell to tourists with a desire for “African” aesthetics. I displayed my website and talked about my artworks. I explained to my students that I pursued a PhD in Art Education because I wanted to know why the primitive African aesthetic was dominant in art museums, art history, and art education. While I did not intend to open up about my work or personal experience, I was glad I did. I believe my personal narrative gave my students a better understanding of the problems of misrepresenting people and places in subtle ways through art exhibitions, art history, and art education. I further explained to students that my approach in teaching modern art history emphasizes multiple perspectives rather than a singular dominant perspective.

Summary

I believe the activities of this class were successful in disrupting African art discourse. I say this because after class, about 5 students waited to chat with me. They had many more questions, and they expressed their learning experience in the class so far. I was happy about this because it showed that students were concerned about the ideas we discussed, and hopefully were willing to reconsider and change their perceptions. One student (Hannah) in particular, who was a participant in my research, expressed being troubled by the many African artworks that are left out of the museum’s African art gallery. She explained that she understood that
there are developed cities in African countries, and it makes sense that African art should be more diverse, but she had not considered how power could be involved in representing people places. In discussing with her, I expanded on how power works in ways that are not easily visible, and how discourse normalizes knowledge. This student gave me hope, as she expressed signs of changes in her perception. Another student (Sarah), also a participant in my research visited me after class and expressed being uncomfortable with classroom discussions. I asked her why she felt uncomfortable with the discussions. She explained that the discussions were making her question things she had not thought of before. She, however, expressed that while she was uncomfortable; she was also interested in the new information. While I was not thinking about disrupting African art when chatting with students after class, I later realized that those one-on-one dialogs were significant to my disruption. In those moments students were able to further express their perspectives and ask more questions that they did not assert during class. This gave me the opportunity to expand by providing more examples of them to consider. Initially, I did not anticipate the after class discussions as part of my research process; they emerged from the classroom disruptions and played a key role in possible transformations of students’ perceptions.

The October 10th class was the last official class focused on disrupting African art; however, the course as a whole disrupts modern art history by presenting the modern art histories from Africa, Asia and Latin America, along with the dominant Western modern art history. In subsequent classes, while the readings were on modern art in Asia and Latin America, the narratives of misrepresentation, stereotyped aesthetics, and excluded art histories corresponded with the problems of African art. As we discussed other readings, references were made to similar narratives from the chapters on African art. My transformative learning approach did not
end after the chapters on African art, I maintained rigor in discussing the chapters on Asian and Latin American modernism. Students critically analyzed the readings, engaged in debates and made connections with different narratives. Students were able to examine the complexities of knowledge construction, and consider how their perceptions are largely informed by the learning resources made accessible to them. I say so, because some students asserted that they did not realize there was modern art in Africa and Asia. I asked why, and they said they had not seen any African or Asian modern artworks, or maybe they did not recognize them as such. Some students explained that the non-Western art at the museum is what they have been accustomed to knowing and expecting as the art of the regions. For the most part, my classroom disruptions persisted throughout the semester, and I hoped that it encouraged transformations in students’ perceptions as they prepared for the assignment: Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum.

*Students’ reading responses to: “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Everlyn Nicodemus, and “Modern African Art,” by Chika Okeke-Agulu*

Students’ reading response on “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project” was due on October 3, 2013 (the first disruption class). Their response on *Modern African Art* was due on October 10, 2013 (the second disruption class), at the start of class, before they experienced the classroom disruption activities of October 10. For each response, students’ provided: 1. A quote from the chapter, or an image (one that is not in the book) of a referenced artwork / the artwork of a referenced artist; 2. A brief response to: How does your selected quote or image relate to the major theme(s) of the chapter? What is your personal response to the theme(s)?

Table 4.4 below is an analysis of participants’ reading responses based on my examination of how they engaged with the disruptive essays. I created categories based on how
participants’ critically addressed the issues raised in the essay, and how they made connections to their personal perceptions. The categories are guided by Mezirow’s (2000) first four order of transformation: “1. A disorienting dilemma, 2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame, 3. A critical assessment of assumptions, 4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared” (p. 22). The categories in Table 4.4 presents 3 levels of signs of being influenced by the disruption and the related patterns from students’ reading responses.

Table 4.4

*Students’ Reading Responses: Signs of Disruption Effects*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs of Disruption Effect</th>
<th>Pattern Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Disruption Clear Effect (DCE) | • Addressed the primary concepts of the essays.  
• Connected the concepts with their personal perceptions.  
• Expressed personal concern about the issues raised in the essays.  
• Admitted to their taken for granted assumptions and preconceived notions about African art.  
• Contrasted the museum’s African art gallery with concepts in the essays.  
• Indicated what they have learned or were learning from the readings and classroom activities.  
• Indicated reconsidering or changing their perceptions of African art. |
| Disruption Some Effect (DSE) | • Addressed the primary concepts of the essays.  
• Connected the concepts with their personal perceptions  
• Expressed personal concern about the issues raised in the essays.  
• Did not admit to their taken for granted assumptions and preconceived notions about African art.  
• Did not contrast the museum’s African art gallery with concepts in the essays.  
• Did not indicate what they have learned or were learning from the readings and classroom activities.  
• Did not indicate willingness to reconsider their perceptions of African art. |

*(table continues)*
Table 4.4 (continued).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs of Disruption Effect</th>
<th>Pattern Summary</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disruption Low Effect (DLE)</td>
<td>• Addressed the primary concepts of the essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not connect the concepts with their personal perceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not express personal concern about the issues raised in the chapters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not admit to their taken for granted assumptions and preconceived notions about African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not contrast the museum’s African art gallery with concepts in the essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not indicate what they have learned or were learning from the readings and classroom activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not indicate willingness to reconsider their perceptions of African art.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following Table 4.5 presents students’ signs of disruption effect and their participation during the disruption classes (September 26, October 3, and October 10). For class participation, I assessed students’ participation and engagement during the disruptive class activities; group discussions, presentations, and debates.

Table 4.5

*Students’ Individual Signs of Disruption Effect and Class Participation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Signs of Disruption Effect</th>
<th>Class Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>DCE</td>
<td>Moderate participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Amy was usually engaged in class activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She asked questions sometimes, but was not overt in her assertions during discussions and debates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She visited me after class, and expressed interest in the concepts of the essays and class discussions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Signs of Disruption Effect</th>
<th>Class Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>DCE</td>
<td>High participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Clarissa was always engaged in class activities. She was clear about her opinions and understandings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• I noticed she was resistant during the first disruption class. She discounted some of the ideas in the essay, with explanations to justify the African art at the museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She was active during group debates, and I could sense her frustration with the ideas being discussed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She expressed some resistance through body gestures – by shaking her head in disagreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She questioned the concepts in the chapters and her peers’ perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>DCE</td>
<td>High participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hannah was always engaged in class activities. She took the lead in group presentations and debates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She showed early signs of interest in the concepts of the chapters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She recounted her museum experience and expressed concerns about the absence of modern and contemporary African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hannah visited me after class and expressed keen interest in the readings and class discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She indicated that it made sense that there would be modern African art; but she had not considered it during her museum visits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She was interested in knowing more about modern and contemporary African art. She also asked questions about issues of power relative to art and representation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>DCE</td>
<td>Low participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Jenny was usually not engaged in class activities. She was a silent group member and rarely expressed her opinions on the concepts discussed in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She seemed indifferent during the disruptive classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>DCE</td>
<td>Moderate participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Sarah was mostly engaged in class activities. She seemed conflicted about her feelings of concepts discussed in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She visited me after class and expressed being uncomfortable with classroom discussions. I asked her why she felt uncomfortable with the discussions. She explained that the discussions were making her question things she had not thought of before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She, however, expressed that while she was uncomfortable; she was also interested in the new information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 4.5 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Signs of Disruption Effect</th>
<th>Class Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>DSE</td>
<td>Low participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Andrea was not engaged in class activities. She participated sometimes, but was usually a silent group member and rarely expressed her opinions on the concepts discussed in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She seemed indifferent during the disruptive classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>DSE</td>
<td>Low participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Denise was not engaged in class activities. She was usually a silent group member and rarely expressed her opinions on the concepts discussed in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She seemed indifferent during the disruptive classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>DSE</td>
<td>Moderate participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Melissa was usually engaged in class activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She asked questions sometimes, but was not overt in her assertions during discussions and debates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>DLE</td>
<td>High participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Randy was always engaged in class activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• He seemed open to the concepts of the chapter, and he overtly asserted the issues raised in the essays during discussions and debates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• However, he did not express personal concerns about the issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>DLE</td>
<td>Low participation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Sonia participated sometimes, but was mostly disengaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• She seemed interested in the concepts being discussed, however, was not an active participant in discussions and debates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 are indicative of how students were responding to experiencing “a disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000)—the disruptive essays and classroom discussions and activities related to the essays. Students reading response to “Modern African Art” was due on October 10, 2013 (the second disruption class), at the start of class. Therefore the analysis of their reading responses is not reflective of their experience of the October 10 class. From my analysis of their reading responses, Amy, Clarissa, Hannah, Jenny, and Sarah exuded clear signs of being affected by the disruption experience. From this group, Clarissa and Hannah were active participants in class, Amy and Sarah were moderate participants and Jenny was a low
participant in class. Andrea’s, Denise’s, and Melissa’s reading responses conveyed some signs that they were affected by the disruption experience. From this group, Andrea and Denise were low participants in class, and Melissa was a moderate participant. The reading response of Randy, a high classroom participant and Sonia, a low classroom participant both conveyed low signs of any effects of the disruption experience on them. The data does not provide a direct correlation of students’ level of classroom participation and their level of being affected by the disruption experience. I was surprised to see that Jenny, who rarely participated in class showed clear signs of being affected through her reading responses. I was also surprised to see that while Randy was outspoken in class and raised several of the issues in the essays during discussions, he did not address them in his reading responses, nor provide his personal response to the essays. Overall the data in Table 4.4 and 4.5 provides insights of students experience in Phase II, and allows for analyzing their transition through Phases I, II and III.

**Summary**

Fairclough et al, (2004) explain that discourses are created by humans, and can be changed by human “intervention” in which the researcher creates practical ways to resolve and subvert hegemonic discourses. As a transformative educator, my goal for this research was to transcend the problems of African art by creating practical opportunities for constructive positive change. Structuring a course that challenged the canon and encouraged positive changes in students’ perspectives was my way of putting post-colonial and critical multicultural theories into practice. It was a disruptive agenda that aimed for positive transformative results. Nevertheless, it was a challenging process as it required me as the researcher and the instructor to be self-critically reflective during the process (van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough et al., 2004). Being
self-critical involved me examining myself as the mediating tool of the disruption and
transformation. I documented my challenges, learnings, and possible transformation through the
research process.

I structured Phase II of my research to be a negotiating process of inquiry for my students
and I to collaborate as co-learners through the transformative learning process. In planning
Phase II, my hope was that the transformative learning experience will propel my students to
think more critically about their taken for granted normative truths; for them to learn by
questioning their previously unquestioned perceptions of African aesthetics. Overall, I believe
my transformative classroom activities generally motivated my students and I to critically reflect
on the problematic resources that inform our perceptions of others, and encouraged us to
reconsider and change such perceptions. The ultimate goal of Phase II was for a transformative
learning experience in which my students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics are
positively changed. Participants’ assignments in Phase III provide data to evaluate the success of
the disruption in Phase II.

*Phase III: The Transformation*

*Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II*

The disruption must be accompanied by critical reflection where learners examine their
abilities, beliefs, assumptions, and values in ways that change them in some significant
way. (Nemec, 2012, p. 478)

As the reflection phase of my action research, Phase III presents data for analysis in
comparison with data in Phase I and II, to answer the primary research question. The assignment
in Phase III (Curatorial Intern Part B and Questionnaire II) presents data to analyze the success
of the disruption in Phase II. The assignment was structured to examine transformations or lack of in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. The assignment, Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum, instructed students to review their assignment in Phase I, and curate the African gallery at the museum based on their personal semester learning experience. Questionnaire II was structured to examine students’ perceptions of African aesthetics considering their overall semester learning experience. Mezirow (1997) and Nemec (2012) explain that the exercise of critical self-reflection by adult learners is crucial to the success of the disruption and transformative learning. Questionnaire II prompted students to self-evaluate by reflecting on their perceptions, and assumptions of African aesthetics in Phase I. Moreover, the assignment in Phase III, Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II, were structured for students to recognize and assert any transformations in their perceptions of African aesthetics. The assignment (Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum) was due on November 14 and 21, 2013, depending on the date students signed up for presentations. I provided access to Questionnaire II on Nov 22, after all assignments were submitted and presentations were completed. I did so intentionally, to avoid the questions influencing students approach in their assignment.

Upon arriving at Phase III of the research, students had experienced learning about African art at the museum, and experienced my classroom disruption of their learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery. With the assignment in Phase III, students made decisions on how to represent and communicate knowledge about African art. Taylor 2008 explains that “it is important for educators to create opportunities for learners within and outside the classroom to act on new insights in the process of transformative learning. Without experiences to test and explore new perspectives, it is unlikely learners will fully transform” (p. 11). The assignment in
Phase III was the opportunity for my students to act on their new perceptions of African aesthetics. I was careful not to specify which resources students should use for their assignment. I instructed students to make decisions based on their individual learning of African art, and for their assignment to reflect their understandings of African art. This allowed me to examine the choices students made in representing their perceptions of African aesthetics.

Data in this section is presented in the following order:

- Assignment outline: Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II
- Journal notes on students’ presentations of Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum
- Students’ assignment: Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum
- Students’ responses to Questionnaire II

Below, I present the assignment and questionnaire in Phase III as it was provided to students in the course. The same assignment was used for students who chose the Asian art gallery, but with the appropriate name changes. Since my dissertation focuses strictly on African art, I have only included the African art example of the assignment.

Assignments Outline: Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum

This assignment is a progression of Curatorial Intern Part A. As curatorial interns, students have had a chance to curate an exhibition based on their experience at the museum. The next step is for students to prepare an exhibition proposal for their selected gallery at the museum. The aim of this assignment is for students, as curatorial interns, to consider their learning experience during the semester, and prepare an exhibition proposal for the museum’s African art gallery. For this assignment, students will prepare an exhibition proposal and a
presentation. Students will present their proposal as curatorial interns and the class will play the role of the selection committee.

Outline:

• Approach this assignment as a real opportunity to share your proposal with the museum.
• How will you curate the African gallery at the museum?
• Revisit your exhibition guide from Part A. Consider how you represented your museum experience and what you have learned from the course readings and class discussions.
• Prepare an exhibition proposal for the gallery you selected in Part A.
• You have encountered many artworks during the semester; choose 6 artworks to represent your proposed exhibition.

Format: Virtual presentation and paper

Paper: Prepare a 3-4 page persuasive proposal in the format below:

Cover page: Your name, selected gallery, and the title of your exhibition.

Exhibition Narrative

• Begin with an overview of your exhibition.
• What is the story, message or theme(s) of your exhibition?
• How does your exhibition capture the arts and cultures of the represented region?
• What will you like for museum visitors to learn and experience about Africa based on your exhibition?

Artworks

• Present the 6 artworks that represent your exhibition. Provide images and labels of all artworks.
• How does your art selection represent the region? For each artwork, briefly explain why the work was selected and how it represents the region.

Proposal

• In this section, defend the choices you made in curating this exhibition.
• Why is your exhibition proposal suitable for the African art gallery?
• Why is the message of your exhibition important for museum visitors to learn?
• Provide reasons to support your exhibition as a good reflection of your selected region.
• Conclude: Why should the museum accept your proposal for curating the African art gallery?

Presentation

You will present your proposal in class as if presenting to the museum’s selection committee.

Your presentation is basically a summary of the sections of your paper.

• Prepare a virtual presentation of your proposed exhibition.
• Indicate your name, selected gallery, and the title of your exhibition.
• Exhibition Narrative: Begin with an overview of your proposed gallery exhibition. What are the theme(s), message(s), and objective(s) of your exhibition?
• Artworks: Display the 6 artworks and briefly explain why you selected them for the gallery. All artworks should be labeled.
• What will you like for museum visitors to learn and experience about Africa based on your exhibition?
• Proposal: Defend your proposal. Convince the selection committee why your proposal should be accepted to curate the African art gallery at the museum.
Questionnaire II

1. What has been your learning experience of African art over the semester?
2. What has been the most challenging and fulfilling aspects of your learning experience?
3. Has your perspective on African aesthetics changed throughout the semester? If so, how?
4. How does your proposed exhibition reflect your learning experience throughout the semester?
5. Compare and contrast your exhibition proposal to the exhibition at the museum. Did you make any changes? If so how and why?
6. Compare and contrast your exhibition in Part A and Part B. How do they represent your learning experiences similarly or differently?
7. What assumptions did you have in part A that are similar or different from part B?
9. What were your criteria in curating the African art gallery in part B?
10. What descriptive words will you use to express your proposed exhibition in part B?
11. What are the major themes in your proposed exhibition?
12. What, if any concerns or problems have you observed in your semester-long learning experience of African art?
13. How will you describe the people and places represented in your proposed exhibition?
14. Do you think that the African gallery at the museum appropriately represents the region? Why?
15. Do you think that your proposed exhibition for the museum’s African gallery space appropriately represents the region? Why?
16. Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How? Why?

17. From your overall learning experience of African art what understandings do you have about the region?

**Journal notes on students’ presentations of Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum**

The assignment, Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum included a 5 minutes presentation in class. Students presented their exhibition proposal in class on November 14th and 21st, 2013. I had not seen students’ assignments prior to their presentations. Therefore, their presentation was my first encounter with their assignments. During presentations, I took notes in my journal attentive to signs of changes or lack of in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics.

Before presentations I noted the following in my journal:

- I am mostly looking for students to assert a change in their perceptions of African art.
- To identify the involvement of power in subtle representations as art.
- Identify the problems of African art in art museums.
- To admit to their prior misunderstandings and assumptions of African art.
- To indicate a change of perspective based on their semester learning.
- To indicate how they are able to transcend their learnings beyond art and into the everyday society.

Table 4.6 below presents my journal notes during participants’ presentations and my reflections after their presentations. Table 4.6 also indicates the date of students’ presentations and the title of their assignment.
### Table 4.6

**Journal Notes on Students’ Presentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Journal Notes on Students’ Presentation of Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Presented on November 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Title: Lusty Ladies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some signs of transformations in her perceptions of African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focused on the strength and beauty of women and motherhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Selected modern and contemporary art from different countries in Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Amy expressed the problem of the limited aesthetics in the museum’s African art gallery, and explained that her exhibition will expand the gallery to be more reflective of Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Amy’s presentation suggested changes in her perception of African art, although she did not clearly assert that her perceptions have changed. She did, however, explain that through the course she learned more about African aesthetics and has a better understanding of African art.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Andrea     | Presented on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013                                                   |
|            | • Title: Harlem Renaissance                                                                      |
|            | • No clear signs of transformations in her perceptions of African art.                            |
|            | • During her presentation, Andrea did not express any signs of changes in her perceptions of African art. I was surprised with her theme of Harlem Renaissance for the African art gallery. I asked her if a Harlem Renaissance exhibition belonged to the American art gallery or the African art gallery. She explained that her choice of the Harlem Renaissance was to make a connection of African American art history and African art. |
|            | • Andrea was not very engaged during class discussions. I wondered if she was not attentive to the discussions during the disruption classes. |
|            | • With her presentation, I was not sure about her understandings of African art.                 |

| Clarissa   | Presented on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013                                                   |
|            | • Title: Reflect                                                                                 |
|            | • Clear signs of transformations in her perceptions of African art.                               |
|            | • Clarissa juxtaposed modern and contemporary African art with the art at the museum’s African art gallery with the aim of changing people’s perceptions of African art. |
|            | • Clarissa explained that she wants museum visitors to encounter her exhibition and be challenged to reflect on their misconceptions and stereotypes of African art. She stated that she “wants people to change their perceptions of African art.” |

*(table continues)*
Table 4.6 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Journal Notes on Students’ Presentation of Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Clarissa    | • I asked her, “How will you prompt a dialog of your exhibition that can challenge people’s perceptions of African art?” Clarissa responded by directing our attention to one of the artworks in her exhibition: *Double Dutch* by Yinka Shonibare. On that slide, she explained that Shonibare’s artworks “examine the construction of identity and tangled interrelationship between Africa and Europe and their respective economic and political histories.” Therefore, his work encourages dialog and experiences that audiences will not expect to encounter in an African art gallery.  
• Clarissa admitted that through the course, she realized that her perceptions of African aesthetics were stereotypical and misguided based on what she has been exposed to. Therefore, she intentionally structured her exhibition with the goal of changing stereotypic perceptions of African art.  
• I was impressed with Clarissa’s presentation primarily because she was one of the most resistant students during the first disruption class. I was excited to see clear signs of transformation in her perceptions. |
| Denise      | Presented on November 14th, 2013  
• Title: Remembering Africa  
• No clear signs of transformation in her perceptions of African art.  
• Denise selected all artworks from the museum’s African art gallery.  
• Denise expressed her appreciation for African artifacts; she explained that they are more appealing than paintings for her.  
• She indicated that she was surprised there were no paintings in the museum’s African art gallery; however she chose not to incorporate paintings in her exhibition.  
• Denise was the only participant who selected all artworks for her exhibition from the museum’s collection. Denise was not engaged in class discussions, and I wondered if she was not attentive to the concepts raised in the essays on modern African art. Maybe the concepts were not relevant enough, or maybe she simply resisted.  
• I expressed my frustration in my journal while she presented in noting down; “I am disappointed. What have I been teaching all semester long! She is still holding on traditional African art.” |
| Hannah      | Presented on November 14th, 2013  
• Title: Abstract Expression of Diversity  
• Clear signs of transformation in her perceptions of African art.  
• Selected modern and contemporary African art from across the continent: North, South, East and West Africa.  
• Hannah expressed the problems of misrepresentation and stereotyping in African art in many art museums. She indicated the issue of Western power in maintaining a tribal perception of Africa.  

*table continues*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Journal Notes on Students’ Presentation of Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Hannah     | • She expressed the importance of the African art gallery to be more diverse and reflective of Africa’s different art forms.  
• Hannah expressed her assumption about African art in Phase I, and clearly stated that her understandings and perceptions have changed in a positive way.  
• Hannah, has given me hope! She has been very engaged during class discussions and during the disruption phase. Hannah was inquisitive about the issues raised in class about African art. She met with me several times after class to discuss more about the lack of modern and contemporary African art in many museums. Initially, I did not think much about my dialog with her, but over time, I realized that our after class discussions had a greater impact on her perceptions of African art. During her presentation, I felt a sense of accomplishment; as she was sincere in advocating for changes in the museum’s African art gallery. |
| Jenny      | Presented on November 21st, 2013  
• Title: Moving on: Variety in African Art  
• Some signs of transformations in her perceptions of African art.  
• Jenny began her presentation with the following statement: “There is more variety in African art than what is on mass display to the Western audience.”  
• She proceeded by displaying 3 African art works from the museum’s African art gallery. She explained the problems of stereotype, and the limited tribal African aesthetic at the museum. Thereby making a case for her exhibition as more reflective of African art.  
• Jenny did not clearly state that her perceptions have changed. She admitted to her previous assumptions of African art as tribal, based on the type of art she has encountered. She explained that through the class, she has learned that there is more to African art.  
• Jenny’s presentation was hopeful and suggestive of transformation. I was pleased to see how she structured her presentation by addressing the problem and presenting her solutions. |
| Melissa    | Presented on November 14th, 2013  
• Title: Form and Function  
• No clear signs of transformations in her perceptions of African art.  
• Melissa’s presentation focused on the traditional African art at the museum.  
• Melissa included one modern and one contemporary African art in her exhibition assignment, but they were excluded in her presentation slides. Her presentation was centered on the functionality of the traditional African art.  
• She explained that the artworks she presented were made at different times, and showed the importance of functionality in African art.  
• Melissa used the same theme of Form and Function in Phase I and Phase III. From her presentation, I did not get a sense of any change in her perceptions. |

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Journal Notes on Students’ Presentation of Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Presented on November 21st, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Title: Hidden Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clear signs of transformations in his perceptions of African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Randy explained that the aim of this exhibition was to challenge and disprove the Western perception of African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In his presentation, Randy referenced the essays we discussed in class on African modern art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Randy raised the issue of the “unknown” artists of the artworks in the museum’s African art gallery. He explained that the unknown artists of the objects communicate primitivism. He further explained that he juxtaposed the museum’s African art with the modern African art he selected to highlight the misrepresentation of African art in Western art museums.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I was very pleased when he declared that his exhibition is “showing what has been hidden from audiences” Moreover he mentioned the problem of “unseen power” that is exercised in representing cultures in art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I was very excited with Randy’s presentation because he specifically addressed the issue of power, and his exhibition was focused on disrupting the normalized understanding of African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Randy explained that he saw exactly was he expected to see at the museum’s African art gallery, but the class discussions and the readings on modern African have “opened [his] eyes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Presented on November 21st, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Title: People Pleasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some signs of transformations in her perceptions of African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sarah juxtaposed contemporary African art with art from the museum’s African art gallery with the aim of pleasing museum visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sarah explained that she did not want to make audiences uncomfortable by “shocking them with new, or what they don’t expect to see at the African art gallery.” I asked her, “Whose comfort should matter, the people being represented or the outsider audience viewing the art?” She thought about my question for a few seconds and then explained that she comes from a family that easily gets uncomfortable with things or ideas that are different from what they already know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sarah expressed that she was initially impressed with the museum’s collection of African art, but through her learnings in the class, she was no longer impressed because of the misrepresentation of African art at the museum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 4.6 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Journal Notes on Students’ Presentation of Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sonia      | Presented on November 21st, 2013  
• Title: Culture and Tradition Through Art  
• No clear signs of transformations in her perceptions of African art.  
• While Sonia included 2 modern African art in her exhibition, her presentation was centered on traditional African art at the museum. During her presentation, she generalized Africans and African culture as one singular culture. This was disappointing to me, because we discussed problems of generalizations of people in class.  
• Sonia mentioned that she would like to see modern and contemporary African art in the museum’s African art gallery. However, she did not critique the gallery for its limited aesthetic.  
• She admitted that over the semester, she has learned that there is more to African art beyond what is displayed at the museum’s African art gallery. |

At the end of each student’s presentation, I asked; “What is your overall semester learning experience and takeaway of African art?” Students generally said that they have a better understanding of the diversities of African art. Some students clearly indicated that they have changed their perceptions, while others did not specify changes in their perceptions. My sentiments during students’ presentations varied from excitement to disappointment. I was disappointed to see lack of changes in some students approach in representing African art primarily with traditional African art. I kept asking myself “What have we been discussing in class if some students are still upholding tribal African art?” While, I felt disappointed at a few presentations, there were more presentations that conveyed hopes of transformations. I was pleasantly surprised to see that some students not only expressed changes in their perceptions, but structured their exhibition to highlight the problems of African art, and challenge museum audiences to change their perceptions. I was glad to see that students did independent research on modern and contemporary African artists for their assignment. Many of the artists they used were not covered in class. This showed me that they were interested in discovering and learning
more about their new perspectives on African art. Some of students introduced artists that I had not encountered; I was happy to learn about African artist from my students.

*Students’ Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum*

The following Table 4.7 presents data on students’ perceptions of Africa, and African aesthetics based on their overall semester learning. The table presents major themes, key terms, and statements that reflect students’ learning and understandings as expressed in their exhibition proposal narrative. The major themes emerged from analyzing, coding and categorizing students’ assignments. To begin my analysis, I reviewed each participant’s exhibition narrative and highlighted key terms and words that indicated their learnings and understandings of African aesthetics. My attention was focused on what students wrote about their personal learning and understanding of African art throughout the semesters. Moreover, what they intended to communicate to audiences through their exhibition proposal about African aesthetics. After reviewing each participant’s narrative separately, I did a collective analysis all participants’ narrative, looking for patterns and repetition of words, phrases and ideas. I noted the frequency of words and phrases, and grouped them into themes based on similarity. I then did another review to identify the reoccurrence of themes in each participant’s exhibition narrative. The major themes below (Table 4.7) are presented sequentially by importance based on their recurrence and repetition in students’ exhibition narrative.
Table 4.7

*Emergent Themes from Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Pattern Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modern and Contemporary</td>
<td>9 Students</td>
<td>This theme was prominent in students’ exhibition narratives, as students acknowledged the existence of modern and contemporary African art. Students indicated that African art was not limited to the tribal aesthetic at the museum’s African art gallery. Hence, most students selected modern and contemporary African artworks for their exhibition. In their exhibition narratives, students used terms such as: modern, postmodern, contemporary, abstract expressionism, and expression of political issues through art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for Modernity</td>
<td>8 Students</td>
<td>Students expressed concerns about the static and limited aesthetic in the museum’s African art gallery. Students advocated for the museum’s African art gallery to expand its collection; to be more diverse and include multiple forms of African art that have been excluded. Students juxtaposed modern and contemporary African art with the works at the museum’s African art gallery, as a way of highlighting stereotypes and educating visitors of Africa’s modern and contemporary art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity and Diversity</td>
<td>7 Students</td>
<td>Students expressed an understanding of the diversity in African art and identified specific modern and contemporary African artists. Students indicated various forms of art making in African art including; oil painting, watercolor, photography, installation, and sculpture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misrepresentation</td>
<td>5 Students</td>
<td>Students identified problems of misconceptions of Africa and African art at the museum’s African art gallery. Students discounted the gallery for its misrepresentations and stereotyping of Africa as one culture, one aesthetic; primitive and tribal. Students indicated that the African art gallery at the museum is reflective of a Western perception of Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Perspectives</td>
<td>4 Students</td>
<td>Students admitted to the faults of their prior perceptions of African art and indicated new perspectives of African art for themselves and for museum audiences. Students encouraged new understandings of African art beyond the limited tribal artifacts. Moreover, students explained that their exhibition proposal aims to challenge misconceptions of museum visitors and encouraging them to view African art differently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 4.7 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes Number of Students</th>
<th>Pattern Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture and Tradition 4 Students</td>
<td>Students maintained the museum’s traditional aesthetic of African art. Students expressed the importance of tradition and cultural rituals in African art, and structured their exhibition for their audience to gain an understanding of African traditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort and Discomfort 2 Students</td>
<td>Students expressed their decision to maintain the museum’s traditional African art in their exhibition as a form of comfort to audiences; for audiences not to be uncomfortable by a drastic change with modern and contemporary African art.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7 reflects the 7 major themes (modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and tradition, comfort and discomfort) that emerged from students’ assignment, Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum. The major themes show signs of changes in students’ perceptions, as well as resistance to change. I was mostly surprised by the ideas that emerged relative to the theme of comfort and discomfort. I had not considered the idea that traditional African art was more comforting than modern and contemporary African art to some audiences. Although, it seems traditional art is generally more comfortable to some people than modern and contemporary art. While the other themes generally suggest changes in students’ perceptions, the theme of culture and tradition, and comfort and discomfort suggest resistance of change.

In the following Table 4.8, I present excerpts from students’ assignments (Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum) that reflect their individual major learnings and understandings. These excerpts are students’ own words from their exhibition narrative. The related major themes column indicates students’ additional learnings and understandings based on the major themes. In Phase I, I did not analyze students’ selected art, as they all selected from the museum’s African art gallery. Here, in Table 4.8, I included 4 out of the 6
artworks students selected for their exhibition to show their choices in their selected artworks to represent African art.

Table 4.8

Excerpts from Students’ Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Selected Artworks</th>
<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Students’ Learnings and Understandings</th>
<th>Related Major Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Museum’s African art gallery: 0 Modern and Contemporary African art: 6 Artworks included: Bou-Saada K’hol, by Farid Benyaa Un Vieil Enfant, 2010, by Cheri Samba If Not Now Then When? 2011, by Billie Zangewa Martha: My Ouma, 1984, by Marlene Dumas</td>
<td>Lesty Ladies</td>
<td>• Included here would be modern and postmodern artworks that are both aesthetically pleasing as well as mentally stimulating.</td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>                                                             |                                  |                                      | • It [exhibition proposal] is well suited for the African gallery of the museum because it closes the enormous gap presented between the modern galleries.                                                                 | Advocate for Modernity        |
                                                             |                                  |                                      | • Moreover it is more realistic and shows the individualism yet similarities are presented as well.                                                                                                                                 | Identity and Diversity        |
</code></pre>
<p>| Andrea      | Museum’s African art gallery: 0 Selected artworks by African American artists. Artworks included: Idylls of the Deep South, 1934, by Aaron Douglas | Harlem Renaissance             | • The museum needs a change from the mundane, somber atmosphere it currently brings in the African Art Exhibit. It needs vibrancy and color, and something modern.                                               | Modern and Contemporary      |
|                                  |                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Advocate for Modernity        |</p>

(table continues)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Selected Artworks</th>
<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Related Major Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Andrea      | Builders- Men on Ladders, 1998, by Jacob Lawrence  
Ascent of Ethiopia, 1932, by Lois Mailous Jones  
Jeunesse, 1927, by Palmer Hayden | • The museum needs to see an art exhibit focusing on the Harlem Renaissance because it will make African art more relatable because this was a movement that occurred in America.  
• The Harlem Renaissance is important to be shown in the African Exhibit instead of an American Exhibit because the Harlem Renaissance focuses on their roots. |  |
| Clarissa    | Museum’s African art gallery: 3  
Modern and Contemporary African art: 3  
Artworks included: Mask (lukwakongo), Lega peoples in the Democratic Republic of the Congo  
Prestige Hat (kayleem), Kuba peoples in the Democratic Republic of the Congo  
Double Dutch, 1994, by Yinka Shonibare  
The Butcher Boys, 1985/86, by Jane Alexander | *Reflect*  
• The main purpose of my exhibit is to change the way people think about African art.  
• I decided that it was important to retain some of the "artifacts" originally shown by the museum to really get the point across that yes they are there but there is also so much more.  
• I want the audiences to reflect on their misconceptions by viewing the stereotype they have in their mind right across from pieces that challenge their expectations.  
• My biggest goal is to educate visitors and create an appreciation for all African art, not just the artifacts we picture when someone mentions African art. I want to spread understanding and the knowledge that African art is not simply one thing or one category. | Modern and Contemporary Advocate for modernity Identity and Diversity Misrepresentation New Perspectives |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Selected Artworks</th>
<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Related Major Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Museum’s African art gallery: 6 Modern and Contemporary African art: 0 Artworks included: The Nwenka Mask, Mali, Saharan Africa Processional Cross, Ethiopia, East Africa Cut-pile and embroidered textile, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central Africa Woman’s marriage or ceremonial veil, Morocco, North Africa</td>
<td>Remembering Africa • With tradition being so important to the way we live our lives, I thought it would be interesting to showcase a few pieces of African art to represent some traditions that take place in the six major regions of Africa. • I would like for museum visitors to have a better understanding of African tradition based on my exhibit. • When learning about another region's traditions, hopefully it will spark an interest to examine their own regional/cultural/or familial traditions in a new way.</td>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Museum’s African art gallery: 0 Modern and Contemporary African art: 6 Artworks included: Talisman No 3, 1966, by Ahmed Cherkaoui Spring Sounds, Late Twentieth Century, by Rashid Diab Masai II, 2009, by Maria Onyegbule</td>
<td>Africa: An Abstract Expression of Diversity • What I would like people to gain from viewing this exhibit is that Africa cannot be contained to just one way of interpretation - mainly the &quot;Western ized&quot; perception of its people and art. • When looking at this exhibit from a Western perspective, I hope to make the observers uncomfortable with the “status quo” of African art that they have been subjected to for so long by the big museums. It is here in this exhibit that they will learn the difference between Westernized modern art and modern art for Africa.</td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary Advocate for Modernity Misrepresentation Identity and Diversity New Perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Selected Artworks</th>
<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Students’ Learnings and Understandings</th>
<th>Related Major Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>2005, by, Angu Walters</td>
<td></td>
<td>• And furthermore, that the modern art movement cannot be contained to one viewpoint of that art; each country and its people see things differently, as should the viewer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• This new display of artworks is meant to provide visitors with a revelation. It's meant to do away with the idea that African art is still trapped in an age of primitiveness.  
• Visitors should walk away with a new perspective on African art, enlightened and understanding of the progress that African artists have made. Artistic styles, politics, and ideas happening in Africa right now. | Modern and Contemporary Advocate for Modernity Identity and Diversity Misrepresentation New Perspectives |
| Melissa     | Museum’s African art gallery: 4 Modern and Contemporary African art: 2 | Form and Function | • I sought to create an inclusive exhibit that shows off more of Africa's rich variety. | Modern and Contemporary Advocate for Modernity |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Selected Artworks</th>
<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Students’ Learnings and Understandings</th>
<th>Related Major Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Artworks included: Memorial Head, 17\textsuperscript{th} century Ghana Cup: Head with Headdress, 19-20\textsuperscript{th} century, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kuba peoples Friends, 1976, by Malick Sidibe Little Kadogo, I am for Peace, That is Why I Like Weapons, 2004, by Cheri Samba</td>
<td>• What I want people to leave with is the realization that, regardless of time period, there is a tendency in African art to lean towards the functionality of numerous pieces while still retaining their form—whether it be physical, or a commentary of a current state of affairs. • I feel that <em>Form and Function</em> is different from a typical African art gallery, and worthy of selection in the sense that it contains both the &quot;comfort zone&quot; of the typically seen African artwork already present in the museum, while rounding it out with some modern pieces that have yet to be seen in such a gallery.</td>
<td>Identity and Diversity Culture and Tradition Comfort and Discomfort</td>
<td>Identity and Diversity Culture and Tradition Comfort and Discomfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Museum’s African art gallery: 3 Modern and Contemporary African art: 3 Artworks included: Pipe bowl in the form of a seated female, 1900-1950 Helmet Mask, 1940-1960</td>
<td><em>Hidden Africa</em> • Hopefully, viewers will see the true, modernized Africa, and not the tribal, unsophisticated illusion presented to the general public. • Like <em>Pipe bowl in the farm of a seated female</em>, this piece illustrates the misrepresentation of African artists in most American museums because of its tribal nature and seeming insignificance because of its lack of artist, name, or specific date of creation.</td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary Advocate for Modernity Identity and Diversity Misrepresentation New Perspectives</td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary Advocate for Modernity Identity and Diversity Misrepresentation New Perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 4.8 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Related Major Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Portrait of a Man, 1955, by Aina Onabolu</td>
<td>• Visitors will finally be able to see the unpopular, yet magnificent art created by modern African artists. They will also see the false continuation of a stereotype presented in other museums. Because of this new view of African art, as well as exposing the false representations of Africa seen in other museums.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Inevitable, 1984-1985, by Ibrahim El-Salahi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Museum’s African art gallery: 3</td>
<td>People Pleasing</td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary African art: 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for Modernity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artworks included: Kneeling Female Figure with bowl (olumeye), Nigeria</td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity and Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rhythm Strikers, Western Sudan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Misrepresentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sleeping Heads (4 of 8), 2006, by Wangechi Mutu</td>
<td></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Blow up Two Heads at Once, 2006, by Yinka Shonibare</td>
<td></td>
<td>Comfort and Discomfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 4.8 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Selected Artworks</th>
<th>Assignment Title</th>
<th>Related Major Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 4.8 conveys how each student responded to their conflicting learnings of African art from the museum and in my classroom. Some students did not address the problem of misrepresentation in African art; however, they advocated for modern and contemporary African art to be represented in art museums. Other students highlighted the problem of misrepresentation and specifically structured their exhibition proposal to address issues of stereotype and misconceptions of African art. I was surprised at Andrea’s choice of selecting the Harlem Renaissance as a theme for the African art gallery. During her in class presentation, I asked her if a Harlem Renaissance exhibition belonged to the American art gallery or the African art gallery. She provided an explanation that her aim was to connect African American art with
African art. I was also surprised to see how students approached juxtaposing the museum’s African art with modern and contemporary African art. Clarissa and Ryan’s approach aimed to highlight the misrepresentations and stereotype of African art in museums. While Melissa’s and Sarah’s approach aimed to maintain audience comfort with the inclusion of traditional African art. I was mostly troubled by the idea of comforting an audience by maintaining traditional African art. During Sarah’s presentation, I asked her; “Whose comfort should matter the most in representing people; the people being represented or the outsider audience viewing the art?” Sarah explained that she comes from a family that easily gets uncomfortable with new ideas that are out of their comfort zone. She further explained that she did not want her exhibition to make audiences uncomfortable by shocking them with what they did not expect to see in an African art gallery.

Overall, in analyzing students’ exhibition narratives and their selected artworks, I had moments of excitement when I encountered signs of changes in a student’s perceptions of African art. For example, in her assignment, Clarissa stated, “The main purpose of my exhibit is to change the way people think about African art…I want to spread understanding and the knowledge that African art is not simply one thing or one category.” This assertion shows signs of transformation in her perceptions of African aesthetics. I also had moments when I sensed subtle resistance to change, and felt challenged, as I wondered if my transformative teaching strategies were ineffective. I felt this way when analyzing Denise’s assignment, in which she maintained the traditional African art aesthetic at the museum. Generally, I was pleased so see signs of changes in most students’ assignment.
Students’ Responses to Questionnaire II

Questionnaire II was made accessible for students to complete after they submitted and presented their assignment (Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum) in class. I did so intentionally so that the questions did not influence students’ approach in their exhibition proposal for the museum. The questions were structured to provoke students to think more critically about their assignment, their decisions, and their perceptions of African aesthetics. Questionnaire II was completed by all participants. In analyzing participants’ responses to Questionnaire II, the same major themes (Table 4.7) emerged as those from their assignment (Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum). Table 4.7 elaborates on the major themes of: modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and tradition, and comfort and discomfort. In this section, I present students’ complete response to the questions that are most relevant to answering my primary research question. I summarize students’ responses to each question and indicate the relevant major themes (Table 4.7) based on their responses.

Q 1. What has been your learning experience of African art over the semester?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Overall, my learning experience of African art has been a journey. Now compared to the beginning of the semester I have come a long way. My first visit to the museum, I was a bit naive. I saw artworks but I looked at it with apathy. I thought they were nice but my thoughts stopped there. Up to this point in the semester I now see that many aesthetics were missing and now begin to question things more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>I was unaware of how artistic Africa is. I relied on museums to show me that Africans focused on sculptures and mostly tribal art pieces, but after this class I learned that Africa paints, and does so much more. I learned that Africa also had significant cultural movements, just like the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>I have learned a lot about how many types of African art and that “African art” doesn’t just mean one thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>I feel as though I went from knowing almost nothing about African art to having some basic knowledge about it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
### Q 1. (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Hannah  | My learning experience over the course of this semester has taught me two things. First, that there really is more to art than just pretty colors and objects (most of the time) and secondly, that a lot of different cultures use it to express how they are feeling about a time, circumstance, or their heritage.  

In the case of African art, I was really surprised to learn that there was more depth to African Art than what was being shown to the masses in the West. Going into a museum some may have this assumption that the museums have the education of the audience at the heart of their exhibitions, and this is usually not the case – this was very surprising for me to hear and understand. Additionally I was surprised that while the West assumes that they set the standards for what is considered “good” modern art, Africa has its own set of standards and in order to really appreciate and view Africa and her art correctly, you need to take off those Western “blinders” and experience the art through the motivations of the artists and the past of Africa. Modern art in Africa has a different background and history, and therefore cannot be contained to a Western perspective. |
| Jenny   | I’ve learned over the past few months that African art as I had first envisioned it is not the only African art that exists. The artifacts that I saw in the museum were exactly what I expected when I went there for the first time, but at that point I didn’t really define those things as art. I didn’t have a definition for what African art really was. Now I consider it to be those artifacts as well the more recent, unexpected pieces that I discovered while preparing my curatorial exhibition. I’ve learned bits of African history and it’s led me to more understanding of what makes African art recognizable and meaningful. |
| Melissa | That the Western world has really sheltered its citizens, if we’re raised to think that this is African art—tribal pieces depicting a life of savages. When, in reality, quite the opposite is true. Africa went through its own modernism movement, and has artists just as capable as Westerners, as well as a slew of pieces of varying mediums—not just carvings and headdresses. |
| Randy   | I have learned that Africa is not the continent I thought it was. It has many artists which I have never heard of because we only see the tribal artwork that Africa produces as Westerners. |
| Sarah   | Over the semester I have learned many things. I began without ever having given a thought to African art or any other foreign art at that. Then, I was pleasantly surprised by the carvings. Then, as the semester progressed, I was less surprised and more disappointed until my opinion changed entirely and I felt sort of slighted by the museum. My eyes have begun to open. |
| Sonia   | Throughout the semester my perception of African art has and was changed. From the beginning to the semester I learned about the struggle and the strive for the ability to do art. Art for Africans is and was a way to express themselves and be heard. |
With Question 1, students generally admitted that their assumptions of African art were based on the limited resources they had been exposed to. Students indicated that their semester learning has broadened their awareness and understandings of African art. Students’ response to Question 1 reflects the major themes of: modern and contemporary, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, and new perspectives.

Q 2. What has been the most challenging and fulfilling aspects of your learning experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>As far as challenging experiences go, a personal struggle for me has been trying to stay engaged and comprehend the many art movements (Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Conceptual Art, etc.). The most fulfilling aspects of my learning has come from simply listening to my peers perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>The most challenging aspect of my learning experience was completely the readings of Modern Art in Africa. However, it was essential to my learning experience and it helped me to understand African art in further detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>The most challenging thing was not already knowing a lot about art. The most fulfilling thing is feeling like I know more than I did before this class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>I think the most challenging and fulfilling aspect of my learning experience was actually having to take the time to learn about the pieces I picked. If I’m going to look at art, I would just rather look at it instead of knowing a lot about it, but it was interesting to get to know about the pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Perhaps the most challenging (and the most fulfilling) aspect of this process was really being able to refrain from looking at African Art through the Western lens. It is really hard to appreciate what went into making art or what it means, when your own expectations and background comes into play. Are you really being honest when looking at the piece, or are you being clouded by the Western perspective and your own experiences? This for me can be very difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>The most challenging part of this semester was learning to understand and appreciate movements and styles of art that I wasn’t particularly fond of, or pieces that I failed to see meaning in before. The most fulfilling aspect is knowing that I’ve been able to change my perspective and open my mind to unfamiliar ideas in the artwork, and that I’ll be able to apply this to the rest of my schooling and career in art down the road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>What was really fulfilling was breaking out of this stereotype that I’d, unknowingly, been living under. This was also the most challenging—admitting to myself that I’d willingly embraced this stereotype as fact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>The most challenging and interesting part was learning to appreciate all forms of artwork. I came in to the class expecting to get little out of it, but, to my own surprise, I truly have learned to see the idea behind many artists' work and come to appreciate their talent or at least the artist's message.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q 2. (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Thinking. Trying to figure out fact from opinion. Every single time I was asked, “Why?” it was the most frustrating thing to answer. However, when something finally clicked, it was like I won something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>The most challenging aspect of the course was questioning my perception and asking solving the issues which arouse in my head while reading or sitting in class. The question that still bothers me is what is considered art?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ challenges included: learning course materials, critical thinking on course concepts and self-reflection on assumptions and perceptions. Students were generally fulfilled by learning new knowledge, and attaining new perspectives. Students’ response to Question 2 mostly reflects the major theme of new perspectives.

Q 3. Has your perspective on African aesthetics changed throughout the semester? If so, how?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Certainly. I actually have one now, before-hand I did not. I look for many aesthetics thanks to my eye opening experience from my learning journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>At the museum, the only African aesthetics I saw were woodwork and tribal headdresses. Then upon reading on the subject, I realized that there was beadwork, sculpting, and painting all with different aesthetics and not just wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>Yes. Before I thought of African art exactly the way the museum portrayed it but now I know that like any other culture in the world, African art cannot be described as one genre or by one piece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>I have learned that not only does Africa have a lot of beautiful pieces that come from there, but also many of them have a function as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Absolutely; I would categorize my early perspective as being very narrow and stereotyping Africa and African Art. Having read so much about the modern art movement in Africa and the origins of that movement has made me complete a 180 degree turn from my early perceptions. I now realize that Africa has a very diverse grouping of people, all of which have different backgrounds, speak different languages, and most go through different life experiences. To lump all of African art into one type of art, or to say one type of art is more African than another is to short change anyone wanting to learn about African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I think when “African art” is mentioned my mind automatically pictures a more tribal style of work. Statues, patterned fabrics, beads, feathers and more earthy materials come to mind most of the time. I’m aware that this isn’t the entirety of what African art is, but these pieces are a predominant section in the pie chart. Though I’m more knowledgeable about other style in African art now, this area of their art seems to be aesthetically dominant to me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
**Q 3. (continued).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>I mean, it has a little, but despite the varying mediums there still seems to be an overall reverence present in African artworks. Whether for the figure, the craft, or the message it contains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>I no longer picture Africa as a bunch of tribes. I see it as a more modern country. I see the modern art that exists there, that I did not see before taking this class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>I would say so. I went from not even thinking about it, to marveling at how talented some of them are. However, I can honestly say my perspective on WORLD aesthetics has changed as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>My perspective was continuously being challenged. When I first thought about African art and learning about it I thought about the crafts, handmade objects, and mostly tribal items, but as we studied and learned more I learned there was more to it than that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In their response to Question 3, Amy, Clarissa, Hannah, Randy, and Sarah expressed a clear change in their perspective of African aesthetics. Melissa expressed minor changes in her perspective. Andrea, Denise, Jenny, and Sonia expressed being more knowledgeable about African art, but they do not infer a clear change in their perspective. Students’ response to Question 3 reflects the major themes of: modern and contemporary, identity and diversity, new perspectives, culture and tradition.

**Q 6. Compare and contrast your exhibition in Part A (Phase I) and Part B (Phase III). How do they represent your learning experiences similarly or differently?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Part A and Part B are completely different. Part A shows how I basically accepted what the museum showed versus Part B where all the artworks chosen are completely different after my own reflection. I went a completely different route in Part B because I noticed not many aesthetics were displayed in the “African Art Gallery”. There is a complete misrepresentation. This is why I went with aesthetics that were not shown.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>My exhibition part A focused on the fertility and motherhood themes in Africa. My part B focused on the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance forced me to look deeper into African art and see where African-Americans drew their inspiration from. This showed me that the museum is a poor representation of African art. The differences in my papers shows a strong learning experience. While I kept the major theme of family, I talked more about how the artwork depicted it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>For my first exhibition I was still under my original assumption of what African art was. I honestly didn’t even look at the dates of most of the pieces because I was seeing what I expected. When we got back to class and started discussing what we had seen and questioning it, I felt rather foolish for so blindly accepting what I was being presented with. Therefore, for part B I tried really hard to think about my own learning experience at the beginning and how to counteract that. My second exhibit shows my evolution of knowledge in regards to African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>I think they represent my experiences in a similar. I tried to fix what I didn’t understand about the exhibit in my own proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>My Part A presentation was based really on what I observed at the museum. There was no influence other than the Western perspective of the museum curator. Once I began reading and conversing in class, I began to realize that it was so poorly represented, that it kind of defeats the purpose to have an African gallery at all if stereotypes are all that can be displayed. I would like to think that my Part B presentation was coming from a more understanding and knowledgeable viewpoint than from before. By this point I had learned that Western modern art cannot really define other cultures’ art movements, and I tried to convey that in my presentation/exhibit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>In my first exhibition, I was very open to the ideas that came from the pieces currently in the museum. I think I was blissfully unaware that was not all that African art consisted of. It was a good thing though because it allowed me to put some research into those pieces rather them writing them off and moving on. But the two exhibitions represent my learning experiences differently. My first one accepted the artifacts as the entirety of African art, and my second exhibition was an attempt to discover whether or not there was more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>One part, part A, had only pieces that supported the stereotype. 19th-20th century carvings, masks and figures as far as the eye could see. Part B, however, saw the inclusion of modern artwork—most notably a painting and a photograph. The first part is myself still under the stereotype, however part B is me moving against it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>In the beginning of the year, I chose pieces based on the characters in the piece. After I learned more about art throughout the year, I chose pieces based on their meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Students generally expressed that Part A reflected their acceptance of the museum’s African art, and reflected their assumptions and stereotypes of African art. For Part B, students indicated that the museum does not properly represent African art; their Part B showed more diversity in African art and their development in their understandings and new perspectives of African art. Denise expressed similarity in her learning experience in both Part A and B.

Students’ response to Question 6 reflects the major themes of: modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, and new perspectives.

Q 8. Using short phrases, describe African art based on your overall learning experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>African art to me can be described as culturally-rich, diverse, and vibrant because of its history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Similar to American art, multi-aesthetic, multi-themed, modern, not entirely tribal, beautiful, multi-colored, different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>African art is emotional. It is powerful. It comes in many styles, shapes, and sizes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Tradition, family, useful, meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Bold, diverse, eclectic, passionate, determined, traditional, multi-dimensional, urban, colorful, proud; feelings of: joy, relief, triumph, hard-work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Artifacts can be art, earthy and tribal, unexpectedly diverse, somewhat objectified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Steeped in history, whether that history is in the form of a carved stone head, or a black and white photo of a dance. Most work has some functionality to accompany its form, a seemingly signature trademark of African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Influenced by the West. Hidden from the masses. Misrepresented globally.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Q 8. (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Africa is diverse. Africa is colorful. Africa is progressing. Africa is not just traditionalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>African art is traditions and cultural. Art is a form of representation for the people. Art encompasses many styles and forms. Art tells their stories and portrays their lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ description of African art included: culturally-rich, diverse, multi-aesthetic, modern, traditional, misrepresented globally, progressing, colorful, meaningful, not entirely tribal, and multi-dimensional. Students’ overarching descriptions convey the major theme of modern and contemporary, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, and culture and tradition.

Q 12. What, if any concerns or problems have you observed in your semester-long learning experience of African art?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>One thing I noticed that concerns me is how Western exhibitions are composed. Many individuals are not educated in dealing with African art and make many assumptions. These assumptions then continue to manifest as the wealthy make sure the aesthetics shown are limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>My only concern about African art is that so few people realize that the art of Africa is not all tribal. Which, in retrospect, should have been obvious, but to many it is not. People will never stop looking at Africa as an underprivileged country while we continue to portray it as such.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>I have come to question the things that are presented to me and the way they are presented. I am more aware of what biases may underlay things and who got to make decisions and why they made those choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Going into the exhibit the first time, I was really confused as to why only artifacts were used to represent the region instead of having paintings throughout, but after learning about the culture, I have realized that sculptures and artifacts have many uses and meaning for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>That I have never heard this dialogue about Africa before. This worries me. I am a frequent museum goer not just in DFW but across the country, and I have never been challenged to think about African art other than as African masks and tribal wear.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Q 12. (continued).

| Jenny | One thing that I've noticed after reading our book about Modern art is an idea that was repeated multiple times. The idea was that the art of a country was hardly considered “modern” unless it was up to European standards. I think that most of my peers touched on that subject with their exhibitions with a point of view similar to mine – that our respective regions have caught up with the rest of the art world. |
| Melissa | Why did I reach collegiate level education before I was introduced to this “other side” of African art? To me it’s frankly worrisome that, having gone through numerous art and art history related classes, I had no idea of this other half of African art until this far along in my life. |
| Randy | The book on African art is very dry and difficult to get through. However, if you focus you pick up a lot of uncommon information. |
| Sarah | That people do not question things enough. This has made me apply that thought not only to African art, which no one knows enough about to feel troubled, to everything around me. |
| Sonia | A problem I faced was after visiting the museum and then reading. The two portrayed Africa in a totally different manner. This led me to question which prospection was true. |

Students’ general response to Question 12 shows their critical thinking in how they question what is presented as knowledge of African art. Students questioned representations of truths, and identified the stereotyping in how African art is presented at the museum. Students’ concerns and identified problems mostly included: questioning structures of Western museum exhibitions, misconceptions of African aesthetics, and concerns about the lack of common knowledge about diverse African art forms. Students’ response to Question 12 reflects the major themes of: modern and contemporary, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and tradition.
Q 14. Do you think that the African gallery at the museum appropriately represents the region?

*Why?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Not at all. The current gallery is very limited in their aesthetics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>I do not think the African gallery at the Museum appropriately represents the region because there is no modern art and not all the regions of Africa art represented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>No, I think it only shows people what they think they should be seeing and doesn’t challenge anyone’s viewpoint. I think it is greatly limited in what it has to show despite the large number of artifacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>With the way it is currently curated, I don’t think that it does. It is hard to tell what pieces are from what region since they were all so scattered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>No, it does not. It has no variety in types of art, the literature is antiquated and the art itself comes from a very small category of locations. Additionally the art itself seems to be more artifact than fine art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I think the museum appropriately represents a portion of the region. The museum definitely did a fantastic job at covering the tribal aspect of the African people. However; I think that they did a poor job at showing other types of African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Definitely not—while the pieces may have come from all over Africa, typically all were based in the 19th-20th century and propagated the stereotype that primitivism was all the continent had and ever did stand for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>No. I think it represents a Western view of Africa. It only shows the primitive tribal work of African artists. It doesn't show any of the murals or sculptures that have been produced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>I believe it appropriately represents the Western idea of the region. It is all very earthy and all of the items are artifacts. As a legitimate representation of Africa though? Then No. There is no actual Art. No proof of the strides the African culture has made. And that makes it incorrect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>No it did not, because although it did represent the people and their representations from different regions of Africa, it did not encompass an overall ideal of the region and its people. More works with different styles representing different aspects of life in Africa would have been more precise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In answering Question 14, 8 students (Amy, Andrea, Clarissa, Hannah, Melissa, Randy, Sarah, and Sonia) affirmed that the museum’s African art gallery does not appropriately represent Africa. Their reasons included; the limited tribal aesthetic, the lack of modern and contemporary art, the limited regions of the artworks, the portrayed stereotype and primitivism, and the represented Western perspective of Africa. Jenny stated that the museum’s African art gallery properly represents the tribal regions of Africa, but not the other parts. Denise expressed
concerns about the organization of the artworks in relation to their regions. Students’ response to

Question 14 reflects the major themes of: modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity,
identity and diversity, misrepresentation, culture and tradition.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>The Western point of view is represented and only shows one side. The representation shows the majority of what people presume to be African art. This happens as an on-going cycle because the generalizations are taught, learned, and re-enforced. The re-enforcements come from individuals who have the money to buy art pieces. Since the wealthy purchase and donate funds for museums, they play a large role. Dictations are made therefore the cycle continues, no one questions this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>I think the museum’s African art gallery represents a Western view. The majority of us do not think twice about the artwork shown in a museum, and we base many assumptions on stereotypes. I believe that we are shown exactly what we want to see because the majority of us have not learned what is and is not appropriate in art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>I think the gallery shows a classic American perspective of what we think of as primitive Africa. This seems like the easiest way to represent Africa because it is what everyone expects and no one asks questions about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>I think that it represents a Western point of view because Westerners curated the exhibit and it is hard to be something you’re. Which in this case was African.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>It represents a Western perspective, most likely the perspective of the curator and the donors to the museum. I also almost feel as though there was little thought and/or work that went into curating the space. Almost as though the gallery itself was an afterthought when they realized they had some space left and some items left in the vault. There is nothing thought provoking about the gallery – and from what I’ve learned, African art is very thought provoking; having been inspired by so much happening regionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I think the museum’s African art gallery represents the general Western perspective – exactly what most people would expect to see when they walk in. It shows exactly what people would automatically expect Africa to be, because that’s what we are taught. The museum’s current gallery just feeds those beliefs and doesn’t offer anything surprising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>The museum’s African art gallery represents a very, very Westernized perspective. Considering it only tailors to the “primitive” side of the continent, it overlooks the modern work that is startlingly lacking from most African art galleries. This is a result of a strange, nationwide stereotyped mindset—to assume savages beget savage work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>The museum’s view shows Africa through European and American eyes. The West does not want its population to see the development Africa has made, so Africa’s modern works are kept hidden.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
All 10 students affirmed that the museum’s African art gallery represents a Western perspective of Africa. Students largely explain that the gallery presents what Westerners expect to see in African art; tribal and primitive aesthetic of Africa. They explain that the gallery maintains the stereotype of an uncivilized Africa. Students’ response to Question 16 primarily reflects the major theme of misrepresentation. I was surprised that all students indicated that the museum’s African art gallery represented a Western perspective. I mostly surprised with the responses of Melissa, Sarah, and Sonia, because in their assignment, they upheld traditional African art. Yet in their response to Question 16, they identify the museum’s African art gallery as a Western perspective of a primitive Africa. They go further to affirm the problems of the normalized stereotyped understanding of Africa. While I was glad that they identified these problems, I wondered why they chose not to address them in their assignment. Students’ response to Question 16 reflects the major theme of misrepresentation.
A big thing I have come to know is diversity truly shows its head here. With over 50 countries, on top of many tribes, on top of a great and grave history, Africa is very diverse. This concept is shown in artworks. Many artists from all over the continent bring something different to the table. Although there is a difference, common ground can be found. This holds true for Africa itself as well as in relation to other cultures.

I have learned that African art is modern and beautiful instead of traditional and primitive. I think it was important for me to learn that they have modern art. I do not know why I never considered the possibility of them not. I learned that many of the art pieces share common themes, but each piece is very different especially as time goes on.

I didn’t learn much of anything from the gallery at the museum. It was class time and research that made me realize what African art really is.

That it is mainly represented by sculptures and artifacts rather than paintings. There are many different ways to represent a region than representing it in a way that we see it as, and I hope that the museum will take that into consideration when curating the next cultural exhibit.

I think I have a more realistic understanding of African art than before taking this class. This course was able to get me to think “outside the box,” and to really attempt to see things from a non-Western point of view. While the Western perspective colors my experiences, it certainly does not define what artists in other cultures do, and that is something that I will be taking into account in my future visits to museums. As a member of an art audience, I think this experience has shifted me in thinking more about similarities than differences in art/cultures – even though the motivations behind the movements may be different.

I understand some of the themes present in the art currently displayed in the gallery- motherhood, tradition, and ritual for example. I understand more about Africa’s struggle to become modernized, and that they were successful. By doing research and finding pieces for my exhibition, I was able to read a lot of biographies and stories behind artworks that gave me an insight into the lives of the more tribal, rural artists and the artists who went through school to develop their skills. African artists are like artists from any other region of the world; they take their ideas and their view of the world and they make them tangible for the audience to see and interpret. The art keeps changing from region to region, from artist to artist.

It’s far from the accepted “savage” mindset! The region actually has an entire spread of artworks and artists, as is true for any other continent or country. As obvious as it sounds, having grown up under this Western umbrella, it’s a real eye-opener to recognize this.

(table continues)
| **Randy** | Africa is no different than America. It has older looking more tribal pieces produced by the original natives of the country and then reproduced by the modern population. But they also have modern pieces where the structure of the art does not play nearly as big a role as the meaning of it. |
| **Sarah** | Africa is underrated and underrepresented and Western civilization doesn’t engage its youth in modern information on other countries well enough to raise completely plausible concerns on Africa's misrepresentations not only in the art world, but also in movies, articles, and organizations for the well fare of other countries. While much of Africa still has progress to make, as a whole the country is as thoughtful and creative as any other country, filled with talented people who do not get enough recognition due to the countries misrepresentation. Africa has a lot to offer, not only in the art world, and this needs to be realized to Western, and possibly others, culture. |
| **Sonia** | Although there is much more to learn, I have a general fundamental of the region. Africa is a region, whom can be portrayed in many ways, but when one breaks it down to its core that is when you know what the region is. The core of the regions the one that defines it and creates it is its people and their lives and traditions and culture. I understand that Africa and African art has more to it than meets the eye. |

Students largely expressed having understandings of the vast diversity of Africa and African art. Students explained that African art is not limited to tribal artifacts; African art includes modern African art. Students expressed having more realistic perceptions of African aesthetics, and understandings of the individuality of African artists. Students’ response to Question 17 reflects the major themes of: modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, and culture and tradition.

**Summary**

In analyzing students’ responses to Questionnaire II, there were direct correlations with the themes that emerged from their assignment (Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum). The combination of analyzing data from students’ assignments and questionnaire provides sufficient results to develop interpretations of students’ transformations in their perceptions of African aesthetics.
Summary of Data

My research was conducted in 3 phases through my fall 2013 semester course Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation. In this chapter I presented data of the research phases, as documented in my journal and data from students’ assignments in the 3 phases as follows:

• Phase I: The Visit to a Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum, September 19 – September 26, 2013
  Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I

• Phase II: The Disruption, October 3 – October 10, 2013

• Phase III: The Transformation, November 14 and 21, 2013
  Assignment: Curatorial Intern part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II

My journal notes and students’ assignments in the 3 phases provide data to guide my interpretations in answering my research questions. Data in Phase I conveys students’ perceptions of African aesthetics as informed by their learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery. Data in Phase II conveys how students were being influenced by my classroom disruption of traditional African art through transformative learning strategies. Data in Phase III conveys the results of my classroom disruption and transformative learning strategies. The following Table 4.9 provides a summary of participants’ journey through the 3 phases.
Table 4.9

*Summary of Students’ Learning: Phase I, Phase II and Phase III*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participation</th>
<th>Phase I Assignment Title</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Phase II Signs of Disruption Effect</th>
<th>Phase III Assignment Title</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amy</strong> Moderate</td>
<td><em>Support</em></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
<td>DCE Conveyed clear signs of being affected by the disruption experience</td>
<td><em>Lusty Ladies</em></td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary Advocate for Modernity Identity and Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Same Diversity Art for Utility Natural Materials</td>
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<td><em>Culture and Tradition</em></td>
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<td>Same Diversity Art for Utility Natural Materials</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spirituality and Ancestry</td>
<td><em>Spirituality and Ancestry</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Natural Materials</td>
<td><em>Natural Materials</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Feminine</td>
<td><em>The Feminine</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Andrea Low</strong></td>
<td><em>African Art Exhibit</em></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
<td>DSE Conveyed some signs of being affected by the disruption experience</td>
<td><em>Harlem Renaissance</em></td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary Advocate for Modernity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Same Diversity Spirituality and Ancestry Art for Utility Natural Materials</td>
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<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Same Diversity Spirituality and Ancestry Art for Utility Natural Materials</td>
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Table 4.9 shows a progression of students’ individual learnings and perceptions of African aesthetics through Phase I, II and III. The table reflects the major themes that were indicative of students’ perceptions and my analysis of their signs of transformations. In Phase I, the themes that reflected students’ perceptions included: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine. In Phase II, students responded to the disruption by conveying: clear signs of being affected (DCE), some
signs of being affected (DSE), and Low signs of being affected (DLE). In Phase III, the themes that reflected students’ perceptions included: modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, misrepresentation, identity and diversity, new perspectives, culture and tradition, comfort and discomfort. During students’ presentations in phase III, some students demonstrated clear transformations, others some transformations and others no transformations.

In the following chapter, I provide interpretations of students’ perceptions as presented by the data in Phase I, II and III. I provide interpretations of data in Phase I in answering my sub questions: 1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in art museums communicate to a group of university students? 2. What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience in an art museum? I provide interpretations of data in Phase II in answering Sub-Question 3. How does a group of university students respond to a disruption of their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum? For Phase III, I analyze and interpret the data relative to Phase I and Phase II in providing conclusions of the success of the disruption and transformations of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. My interpretation in Phase III, therefore attends to my primary question: How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics? I conclude each phase with considerable implications for art education in classrooms and in art museums.
CHAPTER 5
DATA INTERPRETATIONS and CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The two areas of investigation in my research, and in my analysis and interpretations are: 1. discourse and meaning-making, and 2. disruption and transformation. My research identifies the problem of African art as a Western hegemonic discourse that normalizes and maintains perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the inferior, primitive, and unchanging Other (Araeen, 2010; Chanda, 1992; Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013). To address this problem, I conducted action research to disrupt African art through transformative learning strategies in order to analyze affecting changes or lack of in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. My primary research question is: How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics? To help answer this question, my research addresses the following sub-questions:

1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in an art museum communicate to a group of university students?
2. What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience in an art museum?
3. How does a group of university students respond to a disruption of their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum?

To answer these questions, my analysis and interpretations in this chapter are twofold. First, I analyze African art discourse at a Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Art Museum to study the knowledge that was communicated to my students, and the understandings of African aesthetics my students retained. Secondly, I evaluate the process and success of disrupting the dominant
African art aesthetics at the museum through my transformative learning teaching strategies. My data analysis, interpretations, and conclusions are guided by multimodal social semiotic critical discourse analysis and transformative learning theory. A multimodal social semiotic approach to critical discourse analysis provides the tools for analyzing and interpreting the function of discourse in the meaning-making process of learners (Kress, 2011). Transformative learning theory provides the structure and tools for analyzing transformations in learners’ understandings and perceptions (Nemec, 2012). Both methods center on affecting positive social change through meaning-making/learning; which is the ultimate goal of my research. My research aimed to positively transform a group of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics through my transformative learning classroom.

My research occurred in my fall 2013 classroom (Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation); in which teaching and learning were the research activities, and my participants were students in my classroom. My research was structured in 3 phases, of which data was collected from participants’ assignments in each phase. Chapter 4 presented the narratives of the three research phases, and data from students’ assignments in each phase as follows:

- **Phase I:** The Visit to a Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum, September 19 –26, 2013
  Assignment: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I

- **Phase II:** The Disruption, October 3 –10, 2013
• Phase III: The Transformation, November 14 and 21, 2013

Assignment: Curatorial Intern part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II

In this chapter, I provide interpretations and conclusions from the data in Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III as presented in Chapter 4. Phase I of this action research was the diagnosis phase in which my analysis was centered on fact-finding and closely examining the problems of African art. In Phase I, I analyze and interpret what the museum’s African art gallery communicated to my students about Africa and African aesthetics, and what my students understood and retained. My interpretations in Phase I provide answers to my research Sub-Questions 1 and 2. As the intervention phase, Phase II provides analysis and interpretations of how my students were being influenced by my classroom disruptions of the museum’s African art. My interpretations in Phase II provide answers to my research Sub-Question 3. As the reflection phase, Phase III provides analysis and interpretations of the success of the disruption in Phase II. Moreover, Phase III examines the interpretations of all 3 phases in providing answers to my primary research question.

Phase I: The Visit to a Dallas-Fort Worth Art Museum

Introduction

The Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Museum my class visited is one of many art museums in the United States with a permanent collection of African art. As a prominent museum in DFW, this museum is a monumental institution that constructs, negotiates, and represents knowledge of people and places to museum visitors. Desai (2002) declares that art museums normalize the knowledge they present as unquestionable truths. The African art gallery at this museum
communicates knowledge about Africa and African aesthetics to their audiences. Moreover, this knowledge constructs normalized understandings of unquestionable truths about Africa and African aesthetics (Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Mudimbe, 1988). Scholars (Araeen, 2010; Chanda, 1992; Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013) have elaborated on the problem of African art in art museums as a Western hegemonic discourse that communicates and normalizes ideologies of a primitive, exotic unchanging Africa. Therefore, as a Western institution, this DFW Art Museum’s African art gallery is exemplary of what is normalized and understood as African art; the gallery basically reflects African art discourse.

Granted my research aimed to subvert Western hegemonic perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics enabled by African art, the necessary first step of this study was to validate such perceptions. The process of action research begins with a fact-finding investigation of the problem; whereby the problem is identified, analyzed and hypothesized for a problem-solving action (Cohen et al., 2007; Gravett, 2004; Lewin, 1946). To diagnose and substantiate the problems of African art, Phase I of my research was designed to analyze how hegemonic power in the form of African art at the museum communicates understandings and perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics. Therefore, my analysis and interpretations in Phase I investigates discourse and meaning-making. I analyze and interpret what discourse in the form of African art at the museum communicated to my students about Africa and African aesthetics, and what my students understood and retained. My analysis and interpretations in Phase I provide answers for sub-questions:

1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in an art museum communicate to a group of university students?
2. What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience in an art museum?

Gravett (2004) explains that a necessary initial step in transformative learning is to encourage the learner to explore their ideas and assumptions relative to the issue of investigation. The purpose of my classroom trip to the museum was to allow my students to learn and experience the museum’s African art gallery. Moreover, the intention of the experience was for my students to engage with African art and to document, through their assignment, what knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics they received and retained from the African art gallery. Students’ assignments (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I) in Phase I provided the data for my analysis and interpretation of their perceptions of African aesthetics. To analyze and interpret students’ perceptions of African aesthetics from their learning experience at the museum, I adopted a multimodal social semiotic approach to critical discourse analysis (Kress, 2011; Norris, 2006; Wohlwend, 2011). In the following section, I elaborate on a multimodal social semiotic approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) as my method of analyzing and interpreting students’ perceptions of African art in Phase I of my research.

Interpretation Framework: Multimodal Social Semiotic Critical Discourse Analysis

A multimodal social semiotic critical discourse analysis allows for interpretations of how learner’s perceptions are linked to the various discursive modes available to them during their meaning–making/learning process (Kress, 2011; Wohlwend, 2011). Moreover, this method analyzes the involvement of power in structuring the available modes of meaning-making for learners (Wohlwend, 2011). Social semiotics theory affirms that learners make meaning through
“sign-making” of the discursive modes available to them (Jewitt et al., 2001; Kress, 2011).

Discourses in the form of learning modes are made available as signifiers of knowledge (Kress, 2010). In encountering these modes, learners make meaning by creating a sign of their learning (Kress, 2010). The sign is informed by the mode, but more specifically by the learner’s interest and interpretation of the mode (Kress, 2011; Wohlwend, 2011). The sign created by the learner is a representation of their interest and perception at a given time and context, and is inevitably “linked to practices shaped by relations of power” (Kress, 2011, p. 209). The researcher is therefore able to assess learners’ signs as evidence of their perceptions informed by discursive modes (Kress, 2011). Multimodal social semiotic CDA conceptualizes the components of the mode, the sign-maker, the sign-making, and the sign, in the process of meaning-making.

Mode. Modes are the various ways and resources used in learning including: images, music, speech, texts, gestures, and actions (Kress, 2011; Wohlwend, 2011). Modes are socially constructed mundane resources that represent and communicate knowledge (Kress, 2010, 2011; Wohlwend, 2011). Art as a visual mode represents and communicates socially constructed meaning to learners (Kress, 2010, 2011). Language in the form of text accompanies the visuals of art, and goes further in providing socially constructed meanings (Kress, 2010, 2011). In Phase I of this study, the art and text at the museum’s African art gallery are the modes that communicated knowledge about Africa and African aesthetics to my students.

Sign-maker. Social semiotics emphasizes “the interest of the sign-maker” in the learning process (Kress, 2011, p. 209). The sign-makers in my research were my students in my class. Kress (2011) explains “that signs are always newly made out of the sign-maker’s assessment of the environment of communication, the resources available for making signs, and the interest of the sign-maker at the moment of making the sign” (Kress, 2011, p. 209). This means that the
Signs produced by my students do not solely represent what they were interested in learning but also represent the knowledge that the exhibition at museum’s African art gallery communicated to them on September 19, 2013.

**Sign-making.** “To make a sign is to *make* knowledge” (Kress, 2011, p. 211). In making knowledge, the sign-maker represents their perceptions at a given time through their sign (Kress, 2011). Sign-making is basically learning through experiencing modes at a given time and context, and further representing the interested experience and interpretation of the modes (Kress, 2011). The representation of the made-knowledge could be in the form of a drawing, a discussion, a journal, or a visual presentation (Kress, 2011). In Phase I, students’ sign-making of African art occurred during their learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery, and in their process of working on their assignment (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire 1).

**The Sign.** A sign is the material evidence of a learner’s interest and understanding; it is the learner’s reproduced knowledge from learning; it represents what was learned (Kress, 2010, 2011; Wohlwend, 2011). Signs are inspired by available modes that influence the learner’s meaning-making within structural boundaries of power relations (Wohlwend, 2011). Kress (2010) explains that a sign-makers’ sign is a reflection of their social history, social position, and their understandings of their social context. The sign provides evidence of a learner’s perceptions, understandings, assumptions, biases, and worldview (Kress, 2010, 2011). A learner’s sign—evidence of what they learned—is therefore reflective of their perceptions of available modes at a given time and context (Kress, 2011; Wohlwend, 2011). Therefore, learning is influenced by the context and available modes (discourses), and a learner’s sign is reflective of their meaning-making of discourse.
Students’ assignments in Phase I, function as students’ signs—evidence of what they learned at the museum’s African art gallery. The assignment is evidence of students’ interest and understanding of the modes (African art) at the museum’s African art gallery. Students’ assignments represent their understandings and perceptions of African aesthetics at a given time (Phase I, September 2013) influenced by their meaning-making context (the museum’s African art gallery). Moreover, students’ assignments, as evidence of their perceptions are linked to the discursive modes that were available to them at the museum. Students’ perceptions are therefore reflective of the involvement of discourse in their meaning-making. Thus, in Phase I, I analyze and interpret students’ assignments as evidence of what African art discourse at the museum communicated to their understandings and perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics.

*Interpretations and Conclusions of Sub-Questions 1 and 2*

In this section, I present interpretations and conclusions that I have drawn from the data in Chapter 4 from students’ assignments in Phase I (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I). In employing a multimodal social semiotic CDA, I analyze and interpret students’ assignments in Phase I as material evidence of their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as informed by their meaning-making at the museum’s African art gallery. Then, I interpret students’ perceptions as revealing of the involvement of discourse in structuring the knowledge for their meaning-making at the museum. My interpretations and conclusions in this section provide answers to sub-questions:

1. What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in an art museum communicate to a group of university students?
2. What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum?

Analysis and Interpretations: Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum

In analyzing students’ assignments (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum) in Chapter 4, the emergent themes included: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine. These themes provide knowledge of what the museum’s African art gallery primarily communicated to my students, and what my students understood and retained from their learning experience.

Below, I provide interpretations of the themes attending to Sub-Questions 1 and 2.

Culture and Tradition. Desai (2000) explains that representation is a “meaning-producing process” in which the ruling class produces and authenticates the “cultural identity” of the Other (Hall, 1994). Art exhibitions are ways in which people, places, ideas, and histories are represented in art museums. The theme of culture and tradition is suggestive of Africa’s “cultural identity” as presented by the museum’s African art gallery. The museum’s African art gallery provided my students with knowledge about the culture and tradition of Africa. Through interpreting my students’ learnings and understandings, I found that the museum’s African art gallery represents Africa as a homogeneous tribal culture fixed in the past. In their assignments, all 10 participants indicated that they learned about African culture and traditional practices.

Within this theme, the museum’s African art gallery largely communicated to students:

- That African culture is tribal, historical, and a culture of pride.
- That African traditions and customs involve community ceremonials, festivals, and dances with costumes.
• The importance of social status in Africa: masculinity, chiefdom, royalty, respect, and power.

• That African culture and traditions are superstitious, mysterious, strange, and unusual.

Within the theme of culture and tradition, all 10 students expressed their understandings that African art is strongly engrained and reflective of African cultural values and traditions. For example, Denise stated, “One thing that really stood out to me was the sense of tradition running throughout the entire exhibit.” Likewise, Jenny stated, “The African exhibit is a beautiful display of culture that shows the tradition, beliefs and daily lives of a variety of African peoples.” Generally, from their museum experience of African art, students mostly understood African culture and tradition as historical, tribal, community oriented, ceremonial, of social status, and mysterious. Hassan (1999) explains that Western education of African art focuses on describing the function and uses of objects in regional settings without consideration of history or progression in Africa. Students’ learnings of a tribal historical African culture is indicative of the problem of the “one tribe,” fixed cultural paradigm of African art that presents Africa as trapped in the past (Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1984, Nicodemus, 2013). Students’ learnings and understandings of African culture as superstitious, mysterious, strange, and unusual, attest to forms of othering. Cain (2011) and Desai (2000) explain that Western art museum exhibitions are structured in a manner that conveys the dichotomies of West/Other, civilized/primitive, progressive/fixed. The theme of culture and tradition suggest dichotomies of modern/traditional, normal/abnormal, and progressive/fixed. These dichotomies are ways in which Western discourse validates Western domination and superiority (Bhabha, 1984; Césaire, 1994; Fanon, 1994; Hall, 1994; Mazrui, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1994).
Same Diversity. The theme of same diversity reveals that the museum’s African art gallery informed my students of different tribes in Africa with similar art forms, art styles, and tribal traditions. Within this theme, 9 students expressed that they gained understandings of the diversity of African art, the people, and the cultures through the different tribes represented. Students identified the similarities and sameness of the different tribes, and understood that while different tribes from different regions are represented in the gallery, they are all unified in their cultures, traditions, and art styles. Examples of students’ assertions include: “This shows me that although there are different regions of this continent, there are still similarities” (Amy); “I learned that Africa—no matter what region—is steeped in cultural traditions,” (Hannah); “Although the figures are created by different cultures they all praise women” (Andrea). These examples of students’ understandings are revealing of how traditional African art communicates ideas of Africa as having a unitary traditional culture and tribal aesthetics. The theme of same diversity attests to the problem of the one style/one tribe paradigm of African art that represents Africa as a homogeneous primitive culture (Araeen, 2010; Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1984, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013). Granted the African art gallery centers on tribal regions in Africa, students understood these regions as reflective of different parts of Africa with similar cultures, aesthetics and practices. The African art gallery did not communicate the individualism of the people or regions; rather, it showed a collective, singularized tribal African culture. Fanon (1994) explains that the black man, the Negro, the African is essentialized by the West as having a Negro/African culture, rather than being identified as an individual within their national culture. The theme of same diversity demonstrates how African art essentializes Africans into a singular African culture. Moreover, the theme of same diversity is revealing of how African art as a hegemonic discourse normalizes stereotypes through repetitions and
essentialism. Scholars (Cain, 2011; Chin, 2011; Bhabha, 1983; Said, 1994) explain that the Other is maintained through re-productions and repetitions of representations of stereotypes of the Other as truth. The repetitions of tribal regions, tribal artifacts, and the sameness of the people and practices at the museum’s African art gallery communicated othering perceptions of Africa as truthful to my students. This is evident in how students expressed understanding that the different regions and their arts are all similar. My students’ understanding of the sameness of Africa is revealing of how stereotypes and essentialism become successfully normalized as truth, thereby authenticating the Other (Bhabha, 1983). The repetition of the one tribe aesthetics of Africa at the museum’s African art gallery normalizes hegemonic truths of Africa as the Other; the repetitions validate the stereotype’s “fixity”—it remains permanent and unchanging (Bhabha, 1983; Hooks, 1994; Hook, 2005).

**Spirituality and Ancestry.** The museum’s African art gallery communicated knowledge to my students of the importance of spirituality and ancestry in African culture. Granted that many of the African art in Western art museums are objects that were used for traditional rituals and ceremonial practices (Kasfir, 1999), the theme of spirituality and ancestry is apparent in the museum’s African art gallery. Within this theme, 8 students expressed gaining understandings of spirituality, spirits, religion, rituals, gods, evil spirits, and different beliefs in African cultures. With regards to ancestry, students alluded to; ancestors, death, funeral, guardian, and sacrifice. Students understood the importance of the reverence of ancestors for guidance, protection from evil spirits, and sacrificial ceremonies in African culture. For example in Hannah’s assignment, titled *Ancestral Ties in Africa,* Hannah explains that objects “such as ritual and ceremonial masks and guardian pieces” express the significance and respect for ancestors in African culture. She further elaborates on her learnings of the functions of African masks to “imitate a man into a
tribal status…and protection from evil spirits—protection that came from their previous ancestor’s spirits.” Examples of other students’ assertions included: “By observing the purposes of all the artifacts in the exhibit I can see the major themes of power and social rank, religion and rituals, and gods and ancestors” (Clarissa); “The ancestors observably hold a place of high value in the African culture, worthy of worship and remembrance” (Jenny). Students’ understandings of spirituality and ancestry indicate that the African art gallery mostly presented spirituality in Africa relative to the mystery of death. This is evident in students’ reference of evil spirits, funerals, ancestors, and sacrifice. These descriptive terms suggest othering and attest to the West/Other dichotomies of Christian/non-Christian, and good/evil.

Art for Utility. The museum’s African art gallery informed students about the utilitarian purposes of African art. 8 students expressed their understandings that African art is not simply for admiration, but has function and meaning. Students identified and understood functional objects such as bowls, charms, stools, water pipes, headwear, and ritual masks in the African art gallery as objects used in the daily lives of Africans. For example, Clarissa indicated that “certain bowls were made to look like men and women but still functioned as bowls,” and Denise explained that the objects provide a “better understanding of how the traditional piece may have been used or worn.” Likewise, in Melissa’s assignment, titled Form and Function, she explains her understandings of the functions of African art objects such as “ritual masks, figures, and amulets.” Moreover, she contrasts African art with European paintings in stating; “It’s such a remarkable statement from each culture—how African art is so based around functionality that it’s almost a polar opposite to the ‘art for enjoyment’ of the European painters.” Students’ learnings and understandings of the utilitarian functions of the objects attest to problems of traditional African art in the context of an art museum. Kasfir (1999) explains that installations
of “African masks in museums is an erasure of its meaning, and a redefinition of its meaning. It
does not account for the ‘extraneous’ facts–like how the mask functions within its original
context. The mask therefore becomes a display of sculptural form” (Kasfir, 1999, p. 98).
African artifacts in their original context are not art and were not created for the purpose of being
art (Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Mudimbe, 1988). This explains why the artists are unknown
because the objects are not idiosyncratic creations by artists, rather done by craftsmen as
commodity (Kasfir, 1999). While my students recognized that many of the African art at the
museum were objects of utility, they mostly accepted the objects as African art and did not
question their placement in an art museum. Students’ uncritical acceptance is indicative of how
discourse has normalized African aesthetics; such that my students’ indicated a problem, yet
were mostly unable to comprehend the problem. Without an alternative frame of reference of
African art, my students could not recognize the problematic nature of the functional artifacts
exhibited as African art in an art museum.

**Natural Materials.** Within this theme, the museum’s African art gallery informed 6 of
my students of the use of natural materials in African art including; feathers, wood, beads, and
fabric. For example Jenny stated, “The pieces were all very earthy, and the materials that went
into them consisted of an array of metals, beads, feathers, fabrics and numerous other items.”
Students expressed their appreciation of the craftsmanship of the African art objects and
described African art as artifacts, masks, sculptures, crafted, naked figures, and human figures
made out of natural materials. Students’ learnings and understandings of the natural materials of
African art attests to the problem of the one style African aesthetics; limited to masks,
explains that “Indigenous Africans, according to the ‘science’ of Europe at this time [colonial
period], were not intellectually capable of producing fine art in the Western sense; they were only fit for craft” (Nicodemus, 2012, p. 17). Therefore, African crafted objects were re-contextualized as art while paintings by modern African artists were disregarded (Nicodemus, 2012). The prominence of crafted objects made from natural materials at the museum’s African art gallery demonstrates a history of Western superiority which represents Africa as inferior and only capable of making craft art.

*Daily Lives.* The museum’s African art gallery communicated knowledge of the daily lives of Africans to my students. 5 students expressed gaining a better understanding of the environments in Africa and the daily lives of Africans based on what they learned at the African art gallery. The utilitarian purposes of the objects provided students with an understanding of how the objects are used daily by Africans and provided narratives of the different tribes. For example, Clarissa explained that from her experience at the African art gallery, she has an “understanding of their physical environment because of what they made their tools, statues, relics, and clothing out of” (Clarissa). This means that the objects at the museum’s African art gallery provided Clarissa with a visual perspective of the environments in Africa; a perspective of tribal environments. With the theme of daily lives, students’ general understandings convey that they understood the African art gallery as a representation of the current daily lives of Africans. Therefore, my students retained understandings of Africa as tribal because the African art gallery only exhibits African tribes and villages. My students’ understandings of the daily lives of Africans attest to the problem of African art communicating a primitive, unchanging Africa (Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013). The theme of the daily lives demonstrates how African art in art museums present “African cultures as if they
existed in an unchanging ‘present past,’ preserving some mythical primeval origin” (Nicodemus, 2013, p. 18).

*The Feminine.* The museum’s African art gallery informed students of the importance of women and motherhood in African culture. Through observing sculptures of women figures and mother with child figures, 5 students gained understandings of the importance of women in African culture. Students identified sculptures with titles such as *Seated Female with Child,* and *Standing Female Figure with Child* that expressed women’s roles as child-bearers and caretakers. Students identified sculptures such as the *Standing Female Figure (Rhythm Pounder)* that expressed women’s important roles in traditional ceremonies. Sculptures such as *Standing Female Figure* conveyed women as beautiful and powerful and *Stool Supported by a Kneeling Female Figure (Kipona)* conveyed the female figure as the backbone of the African family. Within the theme of the feminine, students learned about the roles of women in African tribes and expressed appreciating the beauty and power of women and their roles as the child-bearer and caretaker of the family. For example, Randy expressed learning that Africans respected women for their important role of “bearing children” and “raising the child.” Likewise, Sonia expressed that, “Women in the many different African regions represent the foundation of a family.” While the theme of the feminine may not seem to infer a specific problem, it is suggestive of the West/Other dichotomy of masculine/feminine. Spivak (1994) identifies hegemonic power as masculine, whereby the West is masculine, and the Other is feminine. Spivak (1994) further identifies the real subaltern Other as the third world woman. Therefore, the theme of the feminine in the museum’s African art gallery implies Africa as the third world woman, the subaltern Other of the masculine West.
Summary

My analysis and interpretations of the 7 emergent themes (culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine) from students’ assignments in Phase I (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning) provide answers to my Sub-Questions 1 and 2. These themes express students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as informed by their learnings and understandings of African art at the museum. My interpretations of these themes reveal that what was largely communicated to students and what they understood was knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics as the primitive unchanging Other. Moreover, students’ perceptions, as reflected through the 7 emergent themes, demonstrate how the African art—as a mode of discourse—at the museum perpetuates hegemony by communicating and normalizing knowledge of Africa as the inferior Other of the West. These findings are not surprising to me, as they validate many of the problems scholars have associated to the canon of African art. The 7 emergent themes speak volumes about how a single narrative of a group of people communicates their fixity in Otherness.

Analysis and Interpretations: Questionnaire I

In Chapter 4, Phase I provides students’ complete response to selected questions from Questionnaire I. In this section, I divide the questions into three groups to analyze and interpret students’ overall responses. Students’ responses to Questionnaire I provide answers to Sub-Questions 1 and 2, and further support the 7 major emergent themes from their assignments (Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning). Of the 10 research participants, 8 students
completed Questionnaire I; therefore, my interpretations of Questionnaire I reflects 8 participants (Amy, Clarissa, Hannah, Jenny, Melissa, Randy, Sarah and Sonia).

The following group of questions from Questionnaire I provide answers to Sub-Question 1: What knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics do exhibitions of traditional African art in an art museum communicate to a group of university students?

Q 3. What did the exhibited artworks and information (wall text, brochures, and handouts) in the gallery inform you about the region?

Q 4. What descriptive words will you use to express the exhibition in the gallery?

Q 9. How would you describe the people and places represented in the museum’s African exhibition and in your exhibition guide?

Students’ responses to these questions clearly express the knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics that the museum’s African art gallery communicated to them. In response to Question 3, the exhibited art and information in the museum’s African art gallery informed students of: the history of Africa, various tribes in different regions of Africa, the similarities of the artifacts and cultures from different tribes in Africa, the importance of religion, the daily lives of Africans, African rituals, the functionality of the artworks, Africa as less civilized, gender roles in Africa, and the use of natural materials in the artworks. Students’ overall responses demonstrate that the exhibition at the museum’s African art gallery communicated knowledge of Africa the Other. For example, Sarah response stated, “The exhibit/information informed me that the region was very earth based, meaning materials. Unlike Asian and European culture with paintings and such, this is mostly sculpture made out of mostly raw materials, hinting at, if I didn’t already know, a ‘less civilized’ region.” Sarah’s response attests to the theme of natural materials, wherein African art reflects Africans as interior and only able
to make crafts and not fine art. Moreover, Sarah’s contrast of European paintings with African art attests to West/Other dichotomy of civilized/primitive and modern/traditional.

In responding to Question 4, students described the African art gallery with words such as: supportive, primitive, meaningful, beautiful, traditional, community, ritualistic, tribal, eerie, off-putting, unfamiliarity, powerful, earthy, natural, simplistic, static, religious, and unusual. These descriptive words largely exemplify the othering messages of African art discourse. For example, in her response Melissa attributes her description of African art as “eerie,” “creepy or off-putting” based on her unfamiliarity with African culture. What is more telling is that African art, a mode of discourse in the context of the museum signified her meaning-making of the unfamiliar (Africa) as “creepy.” On the contrast, Hannah recognized the fixity in the African art gallery in stating, “I would also use the term static to describe this gallery. It seems like it is a snapshot of multiple regions in one period of time.” While the other students did not notice this as a problem, Hannah understood that the African art gallery reflected a fixed singular aesthetic.

In responding to Question 9, students described Africans and Africa as community dependent, similar in themes and aesthetics, prideful of their traditions and culture, spiritual and symbolic. For example, Melissa described Africans as, “Very spiritual people, following custom and tradition in both the usage and creation of these pieces.” Similarly, Jenny stated, “The people are religious and devoted.” They share a strong cultural identity and their traditions are beautiful and engaging. Students’ responses to Question 9 mostly conveyed that the museum’s African art gallery communicated understandings a unitary African culture. Students’ overall responses to Questions 3, 4, and 9 reflect the themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine. Students’
responses suggest that the museum’s African art gallery largely communicated knowledge of Africa as the Other.

The following questions from Questionnaire I provide answers to Sub-Question 2: What understandings of Africa and African aesthetics does a group of university students retain from their learning experience in an art museum?

Q 1. Prior to the museum trip, what understandings did you have about African art?
Q 2. Did your museum experience confirm or disprove your understandings? If so how?
Q 6. What do you think were the criteria for curating the museum’s African art gallery?
Q 12. From your overall learning experience in the African art gallery, what understandings do you have about the represented region?

Harney (2010) explains that average museum visitors have little to no background to understand the discourses and histories that frame Africa’s arts (Harney, 2010). Museum visitors therefore accept and understand the arts of Africa as presented in art museums. This was true for my students, as most of them had little to no understandings of African art prior to the museum visit. Some students expressed their prior understandings of African art with descriptive terms such as: religious practices, woodcarvings, artifacts, hand-crafted, tradition, headwear, ceremonial pieces, and instruments. For some students, the museum’s African art gallery confirmed their assumptions, and for others it disproved their assumptions. I structured Question 6 to learn what students thought about the selection process of African art in the museum’s African art gallery. In their responses, students largely expressed that the criteria for curating the African gallery was primarily to convey African culture and the similarities of art and customs of different African tribes. For example, Amy explained that the criteria likely “had to do with expressing the African culture, had to be aesthetically pleasing, and show interconnectivity with
the people.” Likewise, Jenny stated, “I believe the curators were looking for a wide variety of art that truly represented the culture of its people. I also think that they made it a point to repeat specific themes throughout the exhibition.” Students’ responses demonstrate that they generally believed that the African art gallery was curated to reflect African arts and cultures. Hannah was the outlier, in stating. “Additionally, it looks as though the museum focused on one group of people from each specific area rather than getting multiple pieces of art from multiple groups of people from different regions.” Hannah was the only student who raised a concern about the curating of African art at the museum. This suggests that most of the students simply accepted the museum’s African art gallery as truthful.

In responding to Question 12, students’ overall learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery provided them with understandings of Africa relative to the major themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine. Clarissa’s response is exemplary of these themes, where she states, “By observing the purposes of all the artifacts in the exhibit I can see the major themes of power/rank, religion/ritual/coming of age, and gods/ancestors and understand that these are the ideals that they held in high esteem.” With is response, the themes of culture and tradition, art for utility, and spirituality and ancestry are expressed. Clarissa further states, “I also have an understanding of their physical environment because of what they made their tools, statues, relics, and clothing out of.” Here, the themes of art for utility, natural materials, and daily lives are expressed. Students’ overall responses to Questions 1, 2, 6, and 12 demonstrate that they mostly accepted the knowledge at the museum’s African art gallery and largely retained understandings of Africa as the Other.
The following questions attend to students’ critical reflection of their experience at the museum’s African art gallery. Moreover, students’ responses to these questions are indicative of the role of discourse in structuring normalized understandings of Africa and African aesthetics as the Other.

Q 8. What, if any concerns or problems did you observe in the museum’s African art gallery?

Q 10. Do you think that the museum’s African art gallery appropriately represents the region?

Q 11. Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How?

In responding to Question 8, four students (Amy, Clarissa, Randy, and Sonia) did not observe any concerns or problems with the museum’s African art gallery. This suggests that they accepted the knowledge of Africa in the gallery as normal and truthful. Two students (Jenny and Melissa) noticed the lack of diversity of the artworks, and one student (Sarah) remarked on the issue of replicas of some of the objects. This shows some criticality in their observations. One student (Hannah) highlighted the issue of misrepresenting Africa with one static tribal aesthetic. Hannah was the outlier in how she clearly explained the problems she identified with the African art gallery. In responding to Question 10, Sarah raised concerns about the about replicas of some of the artworks as a false representation, and Hannah indicated that the gallery represents some parts of Africa, but not the entire continent. On the other hand, Amy, Clarissa, Jenny, Melissa, Randy, and Sonia believed that the museum’s African art gallery appropriately represents Africa. Examples of their responses include: “Yes, because it showed the important aspects of each region through the stories of the figures” (Sonia); “I do. It shows many aspects of the African society” (Randy); “Yes. When I walked in it was almost exactly
what I expected. The fabrics and masks are what really completed the exhibition for me” (Jenny). Students’ overall response suggests that they considered the knowledge at the African art gallery a truthful representation of Africa.

Students’ responses to Question 11 varied. Students’ indicated that the gallery represented the perspective of artists from the regions, the museum curators, art history, the outsider, the people of the region, men, the non-native, modernism and expressionism. Jenny and Hannah were critical in expressing concerns about of the artifacts in the context of the art museum. They explained that the objects in their original context would not be on display in an art museum, rather used for different everyday purposes. Jenny and Sarah indicated that the African art gallery represented the non-native /outsider’s perspective. While Jenny, Hannah and Sarah indicated problems with the perspective of the African art gallery, the other students did not identify any concerns. This demonstrates that most of the students did not recognize the problem of the Western perspective in the African art gallery.

In analyzing and interpreting students’ responses to Questions 8, 10, and 11, most students accepted the othering knowledge of Africa presented by the museum’s African art gallery as truth. With the exception of 2-3 students, there was a general lack of criticism or identification of the problems with the gallery. Most of the students did not notice the problems of misrepresentation, stereotyping, the singular tribal aesthetics, and the lack of modern and contemporary African art. Students’ overall responses to Questions 8, 10, and 11 attest to the subtle invisible nature of cultural hegemony in constructing and normalizing knowledge of Africa as Other. Foucault (1980) elaborates on cultural hegemony as a “discourse of discipline” in which the rule of power is implemented not by forces of law, but by codification of knowledge that produces “mental normalization of individuals” (p. 116). My interpretations of my students’
responses to Questionnaire I evidences African art, as a hegemonic discourse that codifies knowledge to normalize and maintain perceptions of Africa as the Other. The discourse of African art at the museum structured normalized understandings for my students, whereby they largely accepted the knowledge they received as normal and truthful. Foucault (1980) further explains that the genius of cultural hegemony is its invisible nature. The invisibility of the cultural hegemony of African art allows its discourse of Africa as the Other to proceed unnoticed and maintain its truths.

Conclusion

Students’ assignment, Curatorial Intern Part A: Exhibiting Learning at the Museum and Questionnaire I convey students’ meaning-making at the museum’s African art gallery and provide evidence of students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics. My analysis and interpretations of students’ learnings and understandings of Africa and African aesthetics at the museum’s African art gallery largely attest to African art as a hegemonic discourse that communicates Africa as the primitive unchanging Other of the West. As a hegemonic discourse, African art at the museum was the learning mode that signified knowledge about Africa and African aesthetics to my students in Phase I. Through experiencing African art as a learning mode, my students constructed meanings and represented their perceptions through their assignments and Questionnaire I. The seven major themes (culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine) that emerged from students’ assignments convey the knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics that was communicated to students, and the understandings that students retained from the museum’s African art gallery. These themes and students’ responses to Questionnaire I convey their
perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as informed by the museum’s African art gallery. The 7 major themes (as stated above) largely testify to the problem of African art as a hegemonic discourse of Africa as the primitive Other (Araeen, 2010; Chanda, 1992; Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013). Therefore, I draw the conclusion that African art at the museum largely communicated knowledge and understandings of Africa as the primitive unchanging Other to my students. The dominant knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics that was communicated to students was that African culture and tradition is tribal, historical, mysterious, and similar in different tribal regions. The dominant understanding of Africa and African aesthetics that students retained was that African art is reflective of African culture and tradition, and reflective of the daily lives of Africans. Generally, the knowledge that was communicated to my students, and what they understood, and retained attest to how African art as hegemonic discourse functions in communicating, normalizing, and maintaining Africa and African aesthetics as the subaltern Other of the West. From my findings in Phase I, I can reaffirm that discourse in the form of African art at the museum represents and communicates Africa as having one culture, one aesthetic, and one story fixed in primitivism (Kasfir, 1999, Hassan, 1999, Nicodemus, 2013).

Implications

…it is only by continually emphasizing the relationship between power and representation in multiculturalism that we art educators can begin to reduce the epistemic violence to the “other” (Desai, 2000, p. 128).

The discourse of the Other is a cultural hegemonic discourse which is distributed, maintained and validated through representations in Western academia, media, publications, and
art museums (Chin, 2011; Mudimbe 1988; Said, 1994). Phase I of this action research was essentially a diagnosis study of discourse in constructing othering knowledge and perceptions through African art. My analysis and interpretations of students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as informed by the museum’s African art gallery, validates African art a hegemonic discourse of Africa as the Other of the West. The museum is therefore a site where knowledge of Africa as the Other is validated, maintained, and distributed. This othering knowledge of Africa expands from the art museum into classrooms and publications; thereby repeating and further validating Africa as the Other. The repetitions of this discourse in these sites legitimatize and normalize its knowledge as unquestionable truths. Through this continuous process, Africa—the subaltern is silenced and objectivized into the fixed re-presentation of its cultural identity as the Other. Therefore, art history, art education, and exhibitions on African art that is limited to traditional African art is a perpetuation of Africa as the subaltern Other of the West. The implications of the findings in Phase I are significant to the fields of art history, art museums, and art education in K-12, and higher education. The practitioners in these fields are participants in the coordination and distribution of the knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics that derives from traditional African art.

My analysis and interpretation of students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as informed by the canon of African art is critical to progressions of equitable multicultural art education in art museums and in classrooms. Scholars (Adejumo, 2002; Alfredson, & Desai, 2012; Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Banks, 1993; Chin, 2011; Desai, 2005; Gay, 2002; Jay, 2003; Milner et al., 2003; Stuhr, 1994) have critically evaluated multicultural praxis, underscoring its hegemonic re-contextualization and advocating for educational approaches that foster equitable social change in curricula, in educational institutions, and in society as a whole.
The overwhelming criticism of multicultural art education is that it has lost sight of its purpose, and instead has developed into a strategy of racial othering (Chin, 2011; Desai, 2005; Jay, 2003). My students’ perceptions from their learning experience of African art at the museum exemplify how multicultural art education operates as a form of cultural othering. While art educators may not intentionally aim to teach othering through art; in teaching African art without critical evaluation of how people and places are represented respective to the dominant Western art history, the art educator is maintaining and normalizing hegemonic discourses. Likewise, museum educators and curators of African art need to evaluate the knowledge their exhibitions of African art communicates to their audiences about Africa and Africans.

To foster equitable multiculturalism, practitioners in art history, art museums, and art education should continuously assess the role of power in representing and communicating knowledge of multiple cultural groups. Practitioners should evaluate how the learning modes they make available to learners/audiences communicate knowledge about people and places. This evaluation requires studying how learners’ understand and interpret exhibitions or course material on the arts of cultural groups. More importantly, this evaluation begins with the practitioner’s awareness and open-mindedness to engaging with non-dominant histories and critical theories (post-colonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism) that address forms of epistemic violence, othering, and cultural hegemony. Practitioners’ acknowledgement and understandings of the “relationship between power and representation in multiculturalism” (Desai, 2000, p. 128) is essential to subverting hegemonic discourses as African art, and progressing towards more equitable practices in multiculturalism.
Phase II: The Disruption

Introduction

Phase I provided interpretations and conclusions of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics as informed by their learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery. My analysis and interpretations in Phase I was guided by multimodal social semiotic critical discourse analysis. In Phase I, the 7 emergent themes (culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine) from students’ assignments and their responses to Questionnaire I reflects their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics from the museum’s African art gallery. My findings convey that students’ perceptions as reflected in Phase I, largely attest to the problem of African art as a hegemonic discourse of Africa as the primitive unchanging Other of the West. Therefore, Phase II of this action research was my problem-solving intervention where I attempted to disrupt African art discourse through transformative learning strategies. In this section, I analyze and interpret the disruption and transformative learning process of Phase II.

As the intervention phase, Phase II was structured through my classroom teachings to disrupt students’ perceptions of African aesthetics from what they learned at the museum’s African art gallery. My classroom disruption of African art discourse occurred in Phase II (October 3, and October 10, 2013), after the visit to the museum, and the completion of Phase I assignment—Curatorial Intern Part A and Questionnaire I. Students’ assignments in Phase I was a necessary precursor to the disruption because it provided evidence of students’ perceptions based on their experience of African art at the museum. The assignment in Phase I gave students a record of their understandings, which was later disrupted in Phase II. The disruption, therefore, became a disruption of African art discourse at the museum, and also a disruption of students’
learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery. The disruption aimed for my students to have a transformative learning experience in which they critically analyze African art at the museum as a problematic frame of reference that informed their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics; thereby willfully making positive changes of their perceptions.

Chapter 4 presented data of my classroom disruption narrative from my research journal, and data from students’ assignments in Phase II: reading response to “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Everlyn Nicodemus, and “Modern African Art,” by Chika Okeke-Agulu. This section provides my interpretations of the data in Phase II in answering Sub-Question 3: How does a group of university students respond to a disruption of their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum? Below, I present an evaluation of my classroom narratives; the occurrences, discussions, and students’ general critical reflection. I then analyze students’ classroom participation and their self-report from their written responses on the essays on modern African art.

**Interpretation Framework: Transformative Learning Theory**

Phase II of my research centers on disrupting African art discourse through transformative learning. Therefore, my analysis and interpretation of the data in Phase II is guided by transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory provides the structure and tools for analyzing transformations in learners’ understandings and perceptions (Cranton & Hogan, 2012; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Mezirow, 2000, 2012; Nemec, 2012; Taylor, 2008). Transformative learning is an approach to solving problems through learning; with the aim to disrupt and change problematic perceptions constructed and normalized by dominant ideology (Brookfield, 2012; Mezirow, 2000, 2012; Nemec, 2012). Transformative learning is particularly
concerned with changing “problematic frames of reference” that inform and maintain perceptions (Mezirow, 2003). A critical theory perspective of TL identifies Western ideologies as the dominant ideology that is uncritically internalized as normal and universal (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Therefore, in practicing TL, critical theorists challenge and subvert Western hegemony by encouraging learners’ recognition of the oppressive nature of their adopted beliefs (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Kreber, 2012). For transformations to occur, learners need to critically evaluate and reflect on their problematic habitual perceptions, consequently changing those perceptions (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006; Ettling, 2006; Mezirow, 2003, 2012). Transformations develop as learners begin to self-reflect, question the beliefs they had not previously questioned, and shift their perceptions in a positive way (Cranton & Hogan; Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2003, 2012). Mezirow (2000) provides 10 stages of the transformative learning process in the order of:

1. A disorienting dilemma, 2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame, 3. A critical assessment of assumptions, 4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared, 5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, 6. Planning a course of action, 7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans, 8. Provisional trying of new roles, 9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, 10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22).

While Mezirow (2000) outlines 10 stages of change in the transformative learning process, the process of transformation is complex and varies by individual learners (Merriam & Kim, 2012). To evaluate the process of transformation, the educator can analyze learners’
subjective response to questions or statements, and also evaluate learners by observing their actions (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012). The educator can also evaluate students’ critical reflection from their self-report through their writings (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012). Furthermore, the educator can evaluate the transformative learning process by analyzing how students are critically reflecting on their assumptions and shifting their perspectives during classroom discussions (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012).

Transformative Learning Classroom

For my research, African art at the museum is a problematic frame of reference that informed my students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the Other. To create a positive solution to this problem, I structured my transformative learning classroom with a critical theory framework to disrupt African art discourse and encourage positive changes in my students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics. A critical theory approach to TL is a political act that aims to counter-hegemony and create structures that provide access to equitable democratic resources in education (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton & Tyalor, 2012; Kreber, 2012). A critical approach to TL centers on learners’ awareness of the influence of dominant ideology in the formation of their normalized perceptions and actions (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton & Tyalor, 2012; O’ Sullivan, 2012). Phase II was structured for students to critically analyze the influences of power structures in their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics from their learnings at the museum’s African art gallery. Brookfield (2012) explains that in order to change normalized perceptions stabilized by discourse, the structures that produce and maintain those perceptions must be changed. Therefore, in disrupting African art discourse through my classroom, I changed the frames of reference (African art at the museum) that informed students’ perceptions.
of Africa and African aesthetics as the Other by providing modern and contemporary African art histories as new frames of reference for my students’ learning.

In Phase II, during the disruption, students engaged with readings of African art histories and classroom activities that countered the dominant African aesthetics at the museum. Students read, wrote written responses, and critically discussed the essays: “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Everlyn Nicodemus, and “Modern African Art,” by Chika Okeke-Agulu. The essays by Nicodemus (2013) and Okeke-Agulu (2013) challenge Eurocentric modern art history by discounting the singular African art aesthetics dominant in art history and in art museums. In discussing these essays in class, questions and ideas were exchanged about constructions and validations of knowledge, hegemonic power, and oppression through visual representations and in society as a whole. Through these essays and my class lectures, students were introduced to histories of modern and contemporary African art that are largely excluded from art history and art museums. During the disruption classes, classroom activities and discussions challenged students to think more critically about the concepts from the essays and to reevaluate their learning experience of African art at the museum.

Interpretations and Conclusion of Sub-Question 3

How does a group of university students respond to a disruption of their learning experience of traditional African art in an art museum?

Sub-Question 3 (above) aims to provide understandings of how my students were responding to my classroom disruptions of their learning experience at the museum. Correlating with Mezirow’s (2000) transformative stages, Phase II pertains to the first four orders of transformation: “1. A disorienting dilemma, 2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger,
guilt, or shame, 3. A critical assessment of assumptions, 4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared” (p. 22). In Chapter 4, Phase II, I provided the narrative of my process of disputing African art through my classroom transformative learning strategies. To begin interpretations of students’ process of transformation, I interpret the general experiences of my disruption classes (October 3, and October 10) correlating with Mezirow’s first four order of transformation. This is followed by my interpretations of students’ written responses to the essays on modern African art.

Classroom Disruption Narrative Interpretations

Stage 1: A disorienting dilemma

A necessary start to the transformative learning process requires learners to be taken out of their comfort zone by experiencing a disorienting dilemma (Brookfield, 2012; Ettling, 2012; Mezriow, 2000). A disorienting dilemma is an unexpected experience that prompts learners to question their previously unquestioned assumptions (Brookfield, 2012; Kreber, 2012). The experience can be provoked by the educator intentionally structuring disruptions that challenge learners to critically self-reflect on their normalized perceptions and assumptions (Ettling, 2012; Nemec, 2012). Moreover, to enhance the dilemma, the educator should structure problem-solving group discussions on critical text, and on concepts that challenge dominant ideologies (Ettling, 2012; Kreber, 2012; Nemec, 2012).

For this study, students’ experience of “a disorienting dilemma” was activated during the September 26, 2013 class; the class after the visit to the museum’s African art gallery. On that class day, students submitted their assignment (Curatorial Intern Part A and Questionnaire I) at the start of class. In class, students discussed in small groups; they examined their learning experience of African art at the museum by problem-solving the questions from Questionnaire I.
I prompted students’ critical thinking by posing more questions for further discussions. The discussions and my presentation on modern and contemporary African art on that class day (September 26th, 2013) triggered the start of the disruption and the start of the disorienting dilemma. Through the activities of that class, students started to self-reflect on their perceptions of African aesthetics and they started recognizing problems they had not noticed before. For example, during my presentation, students expressed that they had not noticed the unspecified dates and the unknown artists of the African artworks at the museum. To add to this, a student stated, “I now realize that most of the titles were descriptions of the objects like woman holding a pot.” For subsequent classes (October 3 and October 10), students read, wrote responses, and debated on the concepts of the disruptive essays, which further enhanced their disorientation. The knowledge of African aesthetics presented in the essays and in my presentations on modern and contemporary African art significantly countered students’ learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery. Therefore, students’ learnings of African art in my classroom were unexpected and disorienting to their learnings of African art the museum and their prior assumptions of African art.

Stage 2: Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame

My classroom teachings of African art disrupted students’ understandings of African art from their museum experience. During the class days of September 26, October 3 and 10, there were discussions and passionate debates amongst students, as they compared and contrasted the concepts raised by the essays in relation to their learning experience at the museum. In the course of those class days, students expressed their sentiments in different ways; some expressed feelings of guilt and revelation, some expressed feelings of resistance, and some expressed feelings of discomfort. While I could sense some discomfort during discussions, it was more
apparent when one student met with me after class and expressed being uncomfortable with classroom discussions. I asked her why she felt uncomfortable with the discussions, and she explained that the discussions were making her question things she had not thought of before. She, however, expressed that while she was uncomfortable, she was also interested in the new information. There were other moments of guilt and revelations when students admitted to not noticing the stereotypes of African art at the museum. Students acknowledged that the essays and classroom discussions raised issues they had not considered before. Other students showed resistance by shaking their heads in disagreement during discussions. One student showed resistance by stating that the African art at the museum is what she prefers to see when looking at African art. Resistance is a response I expected since most learners are accustomed to learning by receiving information, and not by critically questioning their perceptions (Nemec, 2012). Thus, while the teacher could effectively structure a classroom that facilitates transformative learning, not all learners will be accepting of change and some could express resistance (Nemec, 2012). My students’ feelings of guilt, resistance, and discomfort were revealing of their self-examination, which is significant to their transformative learning experience (Davis-Manigaulte et al.; Ettling, 2012; Nemec, 2012).

**Stage 3: A critical assessment of assumptions**

In the course of the disruption classes, several students expressed that the essays on modern African art and the discussions raised issues that they had not noticed, nor considered before. Some students explained that the artworks in the museum’s African gallery fit their assumptions of African art; wood crafted masks and tribal objects. One student said she was surprised to see many paintings in the book on modern African art (the book I shared in class) because she associated African art with craftworks such as those at the museum. Several
students expressed that they had not noticed the problems of African art that were discussed in
class and admitted to their assumptions of African art as limited to the art at the museum. These
assertions were beginning signs of transformation, as students were self-reflecting and
questioning the beliefs they had not previously questioned (Cranton & Hogan, 2012; Cranton,

Stage 4: Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared

Critical dialogue in small groups encourages students to share their perceptions, and
further enhances their transformative learning process (Schapiro, Wasserman, & Gallegos,
2012). Through my classroom group discussions, activities, and debates, students shared their
perspectives on the essays on modern African art in contrast to what they learned art
the museum’s African art gallery. Students exchanged questions and answers, and, in the process,
they were actively participating in disrupting their assumptions and understandings of African
art. During group discussions, students shared their individual beliefs, and as a group they wrote
their collective discussions points and presented them to the class for further discussions. When
questions were directed to me, as the instructor, I redirected the questions to students, and
encouraged them to critically analyze the issues raised in the essays on modern African art.
Overall, the classroom group activities encouraged a collective transformative learning process,
as students shared their discontent and learned from one another. My classroom process of
collaborative learning, where I, as the teacher functioned as a co-learner and encouraged my
students to learn from one another is essential to fostering transformative learning (Ettling,
2012).
Summary

The general experience of the students in my classroom during the disruption phase conveys how students were responding to the disruption experience. Moreover, students’ general experience largely reflects experiences of Mezirow’s (2000) first four orders of transformative learning. However, the process of transformative learning is not particularly linear; it can be chaotic and it varies based on students’ personal comfort, emotions, and their choices (MacKeracher, 2012; Merriam & Kim, 2012). My interpretations of the general classroom experiences were not limited to the participants in my research; it is reflective of the overall class of students. Therefore, I analyzed participants’ written reading responses and classroom participation during the disruptive phase to study how they were individually responding to the disruption experience. In the following section, I interpret students’ reading responses as their self-report on how they were responding to the disruption experience.

Students’ Reading Responses

In Phase II students wrote reading responses to “African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project,” by Everlyn Nicodemus, and “Modern African Art,” by Chika Okeke-Agulu. Chapter 4, Table 4.4 and 4.5 presents data (guided by Mezirow’s first four order of transformation) that suggest how the disruption essays and classroom discussions of September 26, and October 3 were having an effect on each student. The class discussions of October 10 occurred after students submitted their written responses to both essays. Therefore, my analysis of students’ reading responses does not reflect their experience of the October 10th class. Table 4.4 below, from Chapter 4 reflects the categories of students’ level of being influenced by the disruption
experience. The pattern summary demonstrates students’ critical reflection through their self-report from their reading responses.

Table 4.4

*Students’ Reading Responses: Signs of Disruption Effects*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs of Disruption Effect</th>
<th>Pattern Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disruption Clear Effect (DCE)</td>
<td>• Addressed the primary concepts of the essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Connected the concepts with their personal perceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expressed personal concern about the issues raised in the essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Admitted to their taken for granted assumptions and preconceived notions about African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contrasted the museum’s African art gallery with concepts in the essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Indicated what they have learned or were learning from the readings and classroom activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Indicated reconsidering or changing their perceptions of African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruption Some Effect (DSE)</td>
<td>• Addressed the primary concepts of the essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Connected the concepts with their personal perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expressed personal concern about the issues raised in the essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not admit to their taken for granted assumptions and preconceived notions about African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not contrast the museum’s African art gallery with concepts in the essays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not indicate what they have learned or were learning from the readings and classroom activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Did not indicate willingness to reconsider their perceptions of African art.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
My data analysis of students’ written responses to the essays on modern African art suggest that 5 students (Amy, Clarissa, Hannah, Jenny, and Sarah) showed clear signs of being affected by the disruption experience (DCE). From this group, Clarissa and Hannah were active participants in class, Amy and Sarah were moderate participants, and Jenny was a low participant in class. At the second level (DSE) 3 students (Andrea, Denise, and Melissa) showed some signs of being affected by the disruption experience. From this group, Andrea and Denise were low participants in class and Melissa was a moderate participant. At the third level (DLE) 2 students (Randy, an active classroom participant and Sonia, a low classroom participant) showed low signs of being affected by the disruption experience. From the data, I cannot infer a direct correlation between students’ level of classroom participation and their level of being affected by the disruption experience. Of the 5 students who showed clear signs of being affected, 2 were high participants, 2 were moderate participants, and 1 was a low participant. For those who showed some signs of being affected, 1 was a moderate participant and 2 were low participants.
Lastly, of the two students that showed low signs of being affected, 1 was a high participant and the other a low participant.

Summary

The data from students’ reading responses in Phase II provides answers to how students were responding to the disruption of their learning experience of African art the museum. Data analysis from students’ reading responses suggests that during my classroom disruptions of African art discourse, 8 out of the 10 participants indicated signs of potential transformations in their perceptions of African art. This could mean that the 5 students who showed clear signs of being affected by the disruption experience were advancing through the Mezirow’s (2000) first four stages of transformation. For the 3 students who showed some signs of being affected, this could mean that they advanced through Mezirow’s (2000) first two stages of transformation. The 2 students who showed low signs of transformation could suggest a form of resistance or a lack of interest. Overall, half of the participants showed clear signs of advancing towards a transformation of their perceptions of African aesthetics. The data could also suggest the effectiveness of my transformative learning strategies; as it showed to be effective for 5 students, partially effective for 3 students, and not effective for 2 students. Keeping in mind that the process of transformation is unique for each learner, my interpretations of students’ levels of being affected by the disruption is limited to their individual critical reflections from their written responses to the essays on modern African art.

Conclusion

A transformative learning approach to teaching encourages a classroom in which the educator strategically structures the curriculum for disruptions and critical reflections that foster
positive changes in learners’ perceptions (Cranton, 2006; Ettling, 2012; Nemec, 2012). With a critical theory approach, my transformative learning strategies disrupted African art as Western hegemonic discourse of Africa as the Other. In adhering to the objectives of the disruption, my classroom activities:

- Challenged and troubled the authenticity of African art at the museum.
- Provided students with histories of African art excluded from dominant art histories.
- Prompted critical discussions and debates on the concepts presented by course readings on modern African art.
- Encouraged critical thinking and dialog about normalized representations of power and inequality.
- Helped students become aware of subtle problematic frames of references, such as African art that inform perceptions and assumptions of Africa and African aesthetics.
- Encouraged students to critically reflect on their perceptions and assumptions of people and places, especially on Africa and Africans.
- Encouraged positive transformations of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics.

My analysis and interpretations of my students’ general responses during the disruption phase and participants’ reading responses of the disruption essays are indicative of transformative learning in progress. My interpretation of the 10 participants’ reading responses suggests that 8 out of 10 students were developing transformations, while 2 students conveyed resistance to transformation. Nemec (2012) reminds transformative educators to be mindful that most learners are accustomed to learning by receiving information, and not by critically questioning their perceptions. Thus, while I structured a classroom environment with activities
that facilitate transformative learning, not all learners were accepting of change, and some expressed resistance.

Implications

The implications of Phase II are relevant to art historians, art museum educators and curators, K-12 and higher education art educators. Phase II of this research demonstrates how these practitioners can structure learning strategies in a manner that encourages learners to critically self-evaluate and make positive changes of their perceptions. My analysis and interpretations of Phase II demonstrate that a critical theory framework with transformative learning strategies that disrupt students’ problematic frame of reference, encourages most students to self-reflect and become more aware of their normalized othering assumptions of people and places. Through my classroom disruptions of African art discourse, my students were able to recognize some of the problems they considered as normal. Students expressed that the class discussions and readings encouraged them to questions things and consider new ideas they had not thought of before. These assertions were positive signs of students’ critical thinking with promising hopes towards their transformation.

Scholars have elaborated on effective strategies for fostering transformative learning in a classroom including: collaborative/co-learning, building an environment of trust and comfort, structuring disruptions/disorienting dilemmas to provoke critical reflection, addressing power and dominant ideologies, group critical inquiry, role play, debates, open-ended questionnaires, sharing personal stories, and building relationships with students (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton & Hoggam, 2012; Ettling, 2012; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Mezirow, 1997, 2000; Nemec,
2012; Taylor, 2008). My data analysis and interpretations show that these strategies are effective in fostering critical reflection that could develop transformations in students’ perceptions.

Phase III: The Transformation

Introduction

Phase I provided interpretations and conclusions of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics as informed by their learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery. The seven emergent themes (culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine) from students’ assignments in Phase I reflects their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics from the museum’s African art gallery. My interpretations of these themes affirm that students’ perceptions in Phase I largely attest to African art as a hegemonic discourse of Africa as the Other. In Phase II students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics from their learnings at the museum’s African art gallery were disrupted through my classroom transformative learning strategies. My interpretations in Phase II suggest that during my classroom disruption of African art, 8 out of the 10 participants indicated signs of potential transformations in their perceptions of African art.

As the evaluation phase of this action research, Phase III was structured to analyze the success of the disruption in Phase II. Chapter 4 presented data from students’ assignments (Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II) in Phase III to analyze and interpret transformations or lack of in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. In this section, my analysis and interpretation of students’ assignments in Phase III provides results of the success of transformations of their individual perceptions of African aesthetics. I analyze and interpret the data in Phase III relative to Phase I and Phase II to provide conclusions
of the success of the disruption and transformations of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. My interpretation in Phase III therefore attends to my primary question: How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics?

**Interpretation Framework: Transformative Learning Theory**

Phase II of my research centered on disrupting African art discourse through my classroom transformative learning strategies. Phase III was structured to analyze the success of the disruption and transformative learning in Phase II. Thus, my analysis and interpretation of the data of Phase II and Phase III is guided by transformative learning theory as a framework for analyzing transformations in learners’ understandings and perceptions (Mezirow, 2000; Nemec, 2012). Nemec 2012 affirms, “The disruption must be accompanied by critical reflection where learners examine their abilities, beliefs, assumptions, and values in ways that change them in some significant way” (p. 478). A successful disruption, therefore, yields transformation, a dramatic change—a major shift in perspective (Cranton & Hoggam, 2012; Mezirow, 2000, 2012; Nemec, 2012; O’ Sullivan, 2012; Taylor, 2008).

While educators can structure their classroom in a manner that fosters transformative learning, they cannot make transformations to occur (Cranton & Hoggam, 2012). Therefore, in evaluating transformative learning, the educator can simply evaluate the process of changes in learners’ perceptions (Cranton & Hoggam, 2012). Effective strategies in evaluating transformative learning include: analyzing learners self-report through their writings; interviews, surveys, open-ended questionnaires; observing learners’ actions; creating a checklist for signs of change; and analyzing learners’ level of critical reflection (Cranton & Hoggam, 2012). For my research, my evaluation included analyzing students’ self-report from their assignments, their
questionnaires, and my observations of their classroom participation. In Phase III, I analyze students’ transformative learning process from their assignments and responses to the Questionnaire I and II. I analyze students’ level of critical thinking based on my checklist for levels of transformations of their perceptions of African aesthetics. Students’ assignments and questionnaire responses in Phase III are not necessarily a product of their transformation, but function as evidence of their process of transformative learning. Therefore, in evaluating students’ perceptions in Phase III, I examine drastic changes and shifts in their perceptions as evidence of their transformation. For example, if a student in Phase I did not recognize any problems with the African art gallery and accepted the gallery’s knowledge as truth; however, in Phase III the student identifies the problems and asserts changes in their perspective, this could suggest a transformation. Cranton and Hoggam (2012) explain that educators can structure questionnaires for learners to self-evaluate their learnings and perceptions. Questionnaire II was designed for students to evaluate their perceptions in Phase I and consider their semester–long learnings of African art. Moreover, Questionnaire II prompted students to critically reflect on their perceptions and indicate any changes or shifts in their perceptions. Therefore, in analyzing and interpreting the success of the disruption in Phase II, I compared and contrasted data from students’ assignments in Phase I and Phase III for clear changes in their understandings and perceptions.

To analyze learners’ transformation, the educator needs to be clear about what they are evaluating as a transformation of perceptions (Cranton & Hoggam, 2012). With a criterial theory framework, learners’ transformative learning requires their recognition of the influence of dominant ideology in informing their perceptions and normalizing its truths (Brookfield, 2012; O’ Sullivan, 2012). Moreover, transformations require the learner to challenge and subvert
dominant ideologies (Brookfield, 2012). In Phase III, I am evaluating changes in my students’ perceptions of African aesthetics from Phase I to Phase III. Granted the critical theory framework of my research, an essential part of evaluating changes in students’ perceptions is evaluating their awareness of the problems of African art, and particularly their awareness of the ideologies that normalize and maintain the problems. Moreover, my evaluation in Phase III attends to how students challenged and subverted African art discourse through their Phase III assignment and responses to Questionnaire II.

To begin, I interpret the overall findings of the major themes that emerged from students’ assignments in Phase III and students’ responses to Questionnaire II. I contrast the major themes in Phase III with those in Phase I to analyze general changes in students’ perceptions. Likewise, I contrast students’ general responses in Questionnaire II relative to their responses in Questionnaire I. Finally, I evaluate students’ transformative learning process in groups of their level of transformation.

*Interpretations and Conclusions of Phase III*

*Interpretations and Conclusions: Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum*

In analyzing students’ assignments (Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum) in Chapter 4, the emergent themes included: modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and tradition, comfort and discomfort. These 7 themes suggest significant changes in students’ perceptions as compared to Phase I, as well as some resistance to change. In this section I provide interpretations of these themes, comparing and contrasting them with the emergent themes from Phase I.
Modern and Contemporary. This theme was prominent in students’ assignments, as 9 students acknowledged the existence of modern and contemporary African art. Students indicated that African art was not limited to the tribal aesthetic at the museum’s African art gallery. Therefore, most students selected modern and contemporary African artworks for their exhibition proposal for the museum’s African art gallery. For example in her exhibition proposal, titled, *Africa: An Abstract Expression of Diversity*, Hannah selected artworks by modern and contemporary African artists relative to the theme of abstract expressionism. Hannah explained, “the modern art movement cannot be contained to one viewpoint of that art; each country and its people see things differently, as should the viewer.” Hannah makes the point that modern art history should not be limited to a Western perspective; rather, it should represent modernity from different regional perspectives. Another example is Randy’s proposal, titled, *Hidden Africa*, where he states, “Hopefully, viewers will see the true, modernized Africa, and not the tribal, unsophisticated illusion presented to the general public.” Randy makes the point that his exhibition proposal, which included modern and contemporary African art, should provide museum visitors with understandings of African aesthetics beyond the dominant tribal African aesthetics. With the theme of modern and contemporary, students’ generally accepted and incorporated modern and contemporary African art histories and African artists in their exhibition proposal for the museum’s African art gallery.

Hassan (1999) explains that the acceptance of modern and contemporary African artists into Western art museums is disruptive to ideologies of the superior Western constructed art history. Likewise, my students’ acknowledgment and acceptance of modern and contemporary African art is disruptive to Western hegemonic ideologies of African aesthetics. Moreover, students’ assertion that African art is not limited to the tribal aesthetic at the museum is a
subversion of the dominant traditional African art. As the prominent theme in Phase III, the theme of modern and contemporary conveys a general change of students’ perceptions, contrasted with the prominent theme of culture and tradition in Phase I. In Phase I, the theme of culture and tradition conveyed students’ perception of African aesthetics as tribal, historic and mysterious. Students described African art with terms such as tribal, traditional, historical, pride, chiefdom, ceremonial, superstitious, and strange. In Phase III, within the theme of modern and contemporary, students described African art with terms such as modern, postmodern, contemporary, abstract expressionism, and expression of political issues through art. The theme of modern and contemporary demonstrates how students disrupted the singular African tribal aesthetic and subverted the West/Other dichotomy of modern/traditional. Meier (2010) affirms that disrupting African art discourse with knowledge and inclusion of modern and contemporary African art history should persist until Western hegemony is subverted, and the scholarship of African art is reconstructed to reflect the real history of modern and contemporary African art.

Advocate for Modernity. Within this theme, 8 students expressed concerns about the static and limited aesthetic in the museum’s African art gallery. Students advocated for the museum’s African art gallery to expand its collection to be more diverse and include multiple forms of African art that have been excluded. Some students juxtaposed modern and contemporary African art with the traditional African art at the museum as a way of highlighting the stereotypes and educating visitors about Africa’s modern and contemporary art. For example, in Clarissa’s exhibition proposal, she explains, “I decided that it was important to retain some of the “artifacts” originally shown by the museum to really get the point across that yes they are there but there is also so much more. I want the audiences to reflect on their misconceptions by viewing the stereotype they have in their mind right across from pieces that
challenge their expectations.” In Amy’s proposal, she used modern and contemporary African art and explained that her exhibition proposal “closes the enormous gap presented between the modern galleries.” Here, Amy refers to the fact that the museum’s African art gallery should represent modern and contemporary African art, similar to the Western art galleries in the museum.

Scholars (Araeen, 2010; 1992; Chin, 2011; Fall, & Pivin, 2002; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999, 2002; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013) have raised concerns about African art in museum as monolithic, unchanging, and fixed in primitive aesthetics with no representation of modern and contemporary African art. In Phase I, students largely accepted the singular tribal aesthetic of African art at the museum. In Phase III, the theme of advocate for modernity conveys changes in students’ perceptions as they expressed concerns about the limited tribal African art aesthetic, and further advocated for the museum’s African art gallery to reflect the multiple forms of artistic practice in Africa. Some students went further by highlighting the stereotype of the traditional African at the museum, with the goal of transforming museum visitors’ perceptions of a singular tribal African art. Jegede (2010) and Meier (2010) explain that traditional African art, as an “authentic” stereotype, has been a pervasive impediment to the progress of scholarship on modern and contemporary African art. With the theme of advocate for modernity, my students were disrupting the authentic stereotype of traditional African art. They were further subverting the West/Other dichotomy of progressive/fixed, and promoting the scholarship of modern and contemporary African art. Mezirow (2003) explains that transformative learning aims change problematic frames of reference including “stereotyped attitudes and practices” (p. 59) that inform and maintain perceptions. The theme of advocate for modernity demonstrates that my students recognized the problem of African art as a problematic
frame of reference that informed their stereotype perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics. Some students thereby expressed changes in their perceptions by structuring their exhibition with the aim of changing the perceptions of others.

*Identity and Diversity.* Within this theme, 7 students expressed understanding the diversities in African art and identified specific modern and contemporary African artists. Students indicated various forms of art making in African art including; oil painting, watercolor, photography, installation, and sculpture. In their proposals, students included African artists such as Cheri Samba, Marlene Dumas, Yinka Shonibare, Jane Alexander, Ahmed Cherkaoui, Rashid Diab, Esther Mahlangu, Meschac Gaba, Ibrahim El Salahi, Aina Onabolu, Wangechi Mutu, and Chidi Okoye. Many of the African artists students used in their proposals, were artists that were not discussed in class; students decided to research African artists to use in their proposals. Some of the artists students used were new to me, and I was able to learn from my students through their assignments and class presentations.

Students’ understandings of the diversity of African art styles demonstrate transformations in their perceptions of African art from Phase I. In Phase I, the theme of same diversity conveyed that students understood African art styles from different regions as similar and unitary. Additionally, with the themes of art for utility and natural materials in Phase I, students identified the arts of the various tribal regions as similar in their uses of natural materials (wood, beads, feathers) in crafting objects for utilitarian purposes. In Phase III, the theme of identity and diversity reveals students’ changed understandings in how they acknowledge the diversities of African art styles, artists, and practices. Students’ research, identification, and use of modern and contemporary African artists in their exhibition in Phase III not only disrupted the singular African tribal aesthetic; this also disrupted the “unknown”
African artists at the museum’s African art gallery. The “unknown” artists of African art communicates that the art represents an entire homogeneous culture, and it validates a tribal pre-colonial African culture with no “power to resist change” (Kasfir, 1999). The “unknown” African artist is symbolic of the silenced voice of the subaltern African subject. It is exemplary of institutionalized epistemic violence, as it testifies to the inferiority of the Other as a “non-knower” (Dotson, 2011). Taylor (2008) explains that transformative learning is a strategic act of activism that raises awareness in a learning environment. Transformative learning aims to encourage cross-cultural understanding and promote equity by “giving voice to the historically silenced” (Taylor, 2008, p. 9). My students’ use of modern and contemporary African artists in their exhibition proposal gave voice to the artists and the excluded African art histories. Moreover, in using multiple artists from different countries with different artistic styles, students subverted the West/Other dichotomy of heterogeneous/homogeneous, modern/traditional and civilized/primitive.

Kasfir (1999) states:

“Authentic” African art usually means ‘anonymous’—the artist is unknown, and an unknown artist of an artwork conveys the lack of individual creativity. When the artist name is known, the work is no longer considered primitive…the act of ascribing identity simultaneously erases mystery. (p. 94).

With the theme of identity and diversity, students acknowledged the diversity of African art and the individuality of African artists. In identifying and labeling the names of the African artists, students were making known the unknown; switching the “non-knower” into a knower; the homogeneous into heterogeneous; the primitive to civilized. Ultimately, students’ act of
recognizing and ascribing the individuality and identity of the African artists was essentially a removal of the mystery—a removal of the authentic fixed primitivism of African aesthetics.

Misrepresentation. Scholars (Araeen, 2010; Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Meier, 2010; Nicodemus, 2013; Okeke-Agulu, 2013) affirm that African art in Western museums, in art history, and in art education is a misrepresentation, and communicates Western hegemonic ideologies of a primitive Africa. Within the theme of misrepresentation, 5 students identified problems of misconceptions of Africa and African art at the museum’s African art gallery. Students discounted the gallery for its misrepresentations and stereotyping of Africa as a primitive culture with tribal aesthetics. For example, Randy stated, “Visitors will finally be able to see the unpopular, yet magnificent art created by modern African artists. They will also see the false continuation of a stereotype presented in other museums. Because of this new view of African art, as well as exposing the false representations of Africa seen in other museums.” Similarly, Hannah stated, “What I would like people to gain from viewing this exhibit is that Africa cannot be contained to just one way of interpretation—mainly the “Westernized” perception of its people and art.” With the theme of misrepresentation, students generally understood and acknowledged the problem of African art as a Western perspective that misrepresents Africa and African aesthetics.

The theme of misrepresentation shows significant changes in students’ perceptions in Phase I where students largely accepted the museum’s African art gallery as an appropriate representation of the Africa. In Phase I, the theme of same diversity reveals students acceptance of a singular tribal African culture. Likewise, the theme of spirituality and ancestry in Phase I conveyed students’ acceptance of a similar spiritual practice and ancestral reverence in African culture. Moreover, the theme of daily lives in Phase I expressed students’ understanding of the
daily lives of Africans. These themes in Phase I express students’ unawareness, and their general acceptance of the misrepresentations of Africa at the museum. In Phase III, students express changes in their perceptions by recognizing and indicating the problems of misrepresentation and stereotyping. Mezirow (1997) explains, “Becoming critically reflective of one’s own assumptions is the key to transforming one’s taken-for granted frame of reference” (p. 9). Within the theme of misrepresentation, students indicated that the museum’s African art gallery represents a Western perception of Africa, and does not appropriately represent Africa. This acknowledgment conveys students’ recognition of Western ideology in structuring fallacious knowledge of Africa and Africans. Brookfield (2012) affirms that such recognitions of dominant ideology’s influence are critical to learners’ transformation. The theme of misrepresentation demonstrates that students were recognizing problems of Western ideology. Moreover, the theme shows students’ self-critical reflection on their taken for granted assumptions of African aesthetics as informed by their museum experience.

New Perspectives. With this theme, 4 students admitted to the faults of their prior perceptions of African art and indicated new perspectives of African art for themselves and for museum audiences. Students encouraged new understandings of African art beyond the limited tribal artifacts. Moreover, students explained that their exhibition proposals aimed to challenge misconceptions of museum visitors and encourage them to view African art differently. For example, Clarissa stated, “My biggest goal is to educate visitors and create an appreciation for all African art, not just the artifacts we picture when someone mentions African art. I want to spread understanding and the knowledge that African art is not simply one thing or one category.” Likewise, Jenny stated, “Visitors should walk away with a new perspective on African art, enlightened and understanding of the progress that African artists have made. Artistic styles,
politics, and ideas happening in Africa right now.” With the theme of new perspectives, students expressed their new perspectives and advocated for new perspectives on African art for others.

The emergence of the theme of new perspectives shows students’ critical self-reflection as they admitted to their stereotyped misconceptions of African aesthetics. Furthermore, students indicated a change in their perceptions of African aesthetics and structured their exhibition to foster changes in others’ perceptions of African aesthetics. Scholars explain that for transformations to occur, learners needs to critically evaluate and reflect on their problematic perceptions, question the beliefs they had not previously questioned, and consequently transform their perceptions in a positive way (Brookfield, 2012; Cranton, 2006; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006; Ettling, 2012, 2006; Mezirow, 2003). The theme of new perspectives particularly conveys some successes of my classroom transformative learning strategies, as it reveals that my students were challenged to critically self-examine their problematic assumptions of Africa and African aesthetics in a manner that encouraged them to make significant positive changes.

Culture and Tradition. With this theme, 4 students maintained the museum’s traditional aesthetic of African art. Students expressed the importance of tradition and cultural rituals in African art, and structured their exhibition for audiences to gain understandings of African traditions. For example, in Denise’s proposal titled, Remembering Africa, she explains that she “would like for museum visitors to have a better understanding of African tradition” from her exhibition proposal. Likewise, Sonia explains, “This exhibition will allow the viewers to see the different aspects of the African culture/tradition as a whole…” This emergent theme is a recurrence of the prominent theme of culture and tradition in Phase I. In Phase I, students expressed understanding African aesthetics as tribal and reflective of African traditions and
culture. In Phase III, while some students acknowledge modern and contemporary African art, they upheld the importance of traditional African art. The emergence of the theme of culture and tradition in Phase III suggest a resistance of transformation in some students’ perceptions of African aesthetics.

*Comfort and Discomfort.* With this theme, 2 students expressed their decision to maintain some of the museum’s traditional African art in their exhibition as a form of maintaining the comfort of audiences. Students explained that they did not want museum audiences to be uncomfortable by a drastic change of modern and contemporary African art. For example Sarah explained, “The first three pieces listed are each already located at the museum. I chose these pieces because I don’t want to make people too uncomfortable. When people are thrown too far out of their comfort zone they shut down and it is like trying to talk to a brick wall. I feel that by including these pieces that it is a gradual enough change to really spark some thought in viewers.” Likewise, Melissa explained that her exhibition proposal “contains both the ‘comfort zone’ of the typically seen African artwork already present in the museum, while rounding it out with some modern pieces that have yet to be seen in such a gallery.” The theme of comfort and discomfort reflects students’ ambivalence; as they accept modern and contemporary African art, acknowledge the misrepresentation of traditional African art, but choose to maintain traditional African art in their exhibition to appease audiences who expect to see traditional African art. The theme of comfort and discomfort suggest resistance, which is a probable response in transformative learning experiences (Cranton & Hoggam, 2012; Nemec, 2012). While some students maintained the traditional African art in their exhibition proposal with the aim of confronting stereotypes, other students maintained it to comfort visitors. The theme of comfort
and discomfort is revealing of how discourse has normalized tribal African art as the comfortable and normal aesthetics of African art.

**Conclusion**

My analysis and interpretation of the 7 major themes (modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and tradition, comfort and discomfort) in Phase III largely demonstrate the success of my classroom disruption of African art discourse in Phase II. I assess the success of the disruption from transformations in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. The themes of modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, and new perspectives, clearly indicate general changes of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics as compared to their perceptions in Phase I. These themes suggest the effectiveness of my classroom disruption of African art discourse in fostering positive changes in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. On the contrary, the themes of culture and tradition, and comfort and discomfort suggest resistance of change in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. Overall, the major themes in Phase III largely demonstrate positive changes in students’ overall perceptions of African aesthetics from Phase I.

**Interpretations and Conclusions: Questionnaire II**

Along with their assignment in Phase III, students’ responses to the Questionnaire II conveys their transformations, or lack of, and further supports the 7 major themes (modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and tradition, comfort and discomfort). Cranton and Hoggam (2012)
explain that questionnaires allow learners to express their learnings and perceptions; therefore, the educator can evaluate changes in learners’ perceptions over time through questionnaires. I structured Questionnaire II to evaluate students’ critical self-reflection and changes in their perceptions of African aesthetics throughout the semester. Questionnaire II prompted students to self-evaluate by reflecting on their perceptions and assumptions of African aesthetics in Phase I, and their overall semester learning experience. To analyze students’ responses to Questionnaire II, I grouped selected questions based on what they reveal about students’ perceptions in Phase III.

**Students’ Overall Learning**

The following questions from Questionnaire II and their subsequent answers demonstrate students’ comprehensive understandings of African art throughout their semester-long learning.

- Q 1. What has been your learning experience of African art over the semester?
- Q 2. What has been the most challenging and fulfilling aspects of your learning experience?
- Q 17. From your overall learning experience of African art what understandings do you have about the region?

Students’ responses to these questions express their recognition of the limited aesthetics of African art at the museum and their new understandings of the diversities of African art, African artists, and their art practices. In response to Question 1, students generally admitted that their assumptions of African art were based on the limited resources they were exposed to. Moreover, students expressed that their semester learning broadened their awareness and understandings of African art. Examples of students’ response to Question 1 include:
• “That the Western world has really sheltered its citizens, if we’re raised to think that this is African art—tribal pieces depicting a life of savages. When, in reality, quite the opposite is true. Africa went through its own modernism movement, and has artists just as capable as Westerners, as well as a slew of pieces of varying mediums—not just carvings and headdresses” (Melissa).

• “I have learned that Africa is not the continent I thought it was. It has many artists which I have never heard of because we only see the tribal artwork that Africa produces as Westerners” (Randy).

• “In the case of African art, I was really surprised to learn that there was more depth to African Art than what was being shown to the masses in the West. Going into a museum some may have this assumption that the museums have the education of the audience at the heart of their exhibitions, and this is usually not the case—this was very surprising for me to hear and understand. Additionally I was surprise that while the West assumes that they set the standards for what is considered “good” modern art, Africa has its own set of standards and in order to really appreciate and view Africa and her art correctly, you need to take of those Western “blinders” and experience the art through the motivations of the artists and the past of Africa. Modern art in Africa has a different background and history, and therefore cannot be contained to a Western perspective” (Hannah).

In their responses, students not only shared their changed understandings of African art, they further admitted to the problem of their Western frame of reference on African art. Hannah’s response was the most profound, as she critiqued the integrity of the museum as an educational site that excludes diverse histories of African art. Hannah recognized that art museums should be equitable in their representations of people and places. Moreover, Hannah addressed the issue
of the West prescribing its standards and perspective on African art history. Students’ overall response demonstrates that through their learning experience in my classroom, they were able to acknowledge their problematic frame of reference and make positive changes to their perceptions of African aesthetics.

In responding to Question 2, students explained that they were challenged by learning the course materials, critical thinking on course concepts, and self-reflection on their assumptions and perceptions. However, students generally expressed that they were fulfilled through learning new histories, and attaining new perspectives. For example, Andrea explained, “The most challenging aspect of my learning experience was completely the readings of Modern Art in Africa. However, it was essential to my learning experience and it helped me to understand African art in further detail.” Andrea understood that while the readings on modern African art (framed in post-colonial theory) were challenging, they were necessary for her to gain improved understandings of African art. Sarah expressed her frustration of being challenged, as well as her excitement in learning; she stated, “Trying to figure out fact from opinion. Every single time I was asked, “Why?” it was the most frustrating thing to answer. However, when something finally clicked, it was like I won something.” Melissa reflected on her othering perceptions of African art in stating, “What was really fulfilling was breaking out of this stereotype that I’d, unknowingly, been living under. This was also the most challenging—admitting to myself that I’d willingly embraced this stereotype as fact.” Students’ overall response demonstrated their self-evaluation and their understandings of the value of being challenged through engaging with critical theory histories, critical thinking, and problem-solving through classroom discussions.

In response to Question 8, students’ description of African art included: culturally-rich, diverse, multi-aesthetic, modern, traditional, misrepresented globally, progressing, colorful,
meaningful, not entirely tribal, and multi-dimensional. Students’ descriptions in Phase III largely differ from their descriptions in Phase I, which included: supportive, primitive, meaningful, traditional, community, ritualistic, tribal, eerie, off-putting, unfamiliarity, powerful, earthy, natural, simplistic, religious, and unusual. In Phase III, students demonstrate that they understood that African art is not limited to tribal aesthetics; African art has multiple aesthetics. In response to Question 17, students expressed their overall understandings of the vast diversity of Africa and African art. Students mostly admitted to their limited perceptions in Phase I and expressed having more realistic perceptions of African aesthetics, and understandings of the individuality of African artists. Examples of students’ responses include: “I have learned that African art is modern and beautiful instead of traditional and primitive. I think it was important for me to learn that they have modern art. I do not know why I never considered the possibility of them not” (Andrea); “It’s far from the accepted “savage” mindset! The region actually has an entire spread of artwork and artists, as is true for any other continent or country. As obvious as it sounds, having grown up under this Western umbrella, it’s a real eye-opener to recognize this” (Melissa). Students’ responses generally convey their self-reflection on their semester-long learning of African aesthetics at the museum in contrast to their learning experience in my classroom.

Students’ overall response to Questions 1, 2, 8 and 17 demonstrate changes from their responses in Questionnaire I in Phase I. From their responses in Questionnaire I, students’ overall learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery provided them with understandings of Africa relative to the major themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine. In Phase I, students’ responses to Questionnaire I demonstrate that they understood Africa as the primitive
unchanging Other of the West. In Phase III, with Questionnaire II, students responses to Questions 1, 2, 8 and 17 reflects their understanding of African aesthetics relative to the themes of; modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, and culture and tradition. In Phase III students largely expressed having understandings of the vast diversities in Africa and in African art.

Students’ Critical Reflection

The following questions from Questionnaire II convey students’ critical reflection of their semester-long learnings of African art. These questions are similar to questions used in Questionnaire I. Therefore, I interpret students’ responses to these questions contrasted with their responses to similar questions in Phase I.

Q 12. What, if any concerns or problems have you observed in your semester-long learning experience of African art?

In Phase I, 4 out of 8 students did not identify any problems with the African art at the museum. Two students raised concerns about the lack of diversity; one student was concerned about the replicas of some of the artworks, and the other student highlighted the issue of misrepresenting Africa with a tribal aesthetic. In Phase III, students raised concerns about the compositions of Western museum exhibitions, misconceptions of African aesthetics, and the lack of common knowledge about diverse African art forms. 8 out of 10 students expressed concerns about the difference in what they learned about African art at the museum contrasted with what they learned in my classroom. Some students expressed being surprised that they were just then (in my class) learning about different forms of African art. For example, Melissa stated, “Why did I reach collegiate level education before I was introduced to this “other side” of African art? To me it’s frankly worrisome that, having gone through numerous art and art history related
classes, I had no idea of this other half of African art until this far along in my life.” Likewise, Hannah stated, “That I have never heard this dialogue about Africa before. This worries me. I am a frequent museum goer not just in DFW but across the country, and I have never been challenged to think about African art other than as African masks and tribal wear.” Melissa’s, and Hannah’s sentiments reflect the general lack of modern and contemporary African art history in art education courses and in art museum; as they had not accessed these histories prior to my course. Other students expressed that through their learning experience, they have learned to question things that seem normal. For example, Clarissa stated, “I have come to question the things that are presented to me and the way they are presented. I am more aware of what biases may underlay things and who got to make decisions and why they made those choices.” Also, Sara stated, “That people do not question things enough. This has made me apply that thought not only to African art, which no one knows enough about to feel troubled, to everything around me.” Students’ overall response demonstrates that through their experience in my classroom, they were able to recognize the gaps in their art education, and in their experience of African art at the museum. Moreover, students were able to expand their critical thinking beyond my classroom and reflect on, and question their normalized frames of reference that inform their perceptions.

Q 14. Do you think that the African gallery at the museum appropriately represents the region? Why?

In Phase I, 6 out of 8 students believed that the museum’s African art gallery appropriately represents Africa, and 2 students believed that the gallery did not appropriately represent Africa. In Phase III, 8 out of 10 students affirmed that the museum’s African art gallery does not appropriately represent Africa. Their reasons included; the limited tribal
African aesthetics, the lack of modern and contemporary art, the limited regions of the artworks, the portrayed stereotype and primitivism, and the represented Western perspective of Africa.

One student explained that the museum’s African art gallery properly represents the tribal regions of Africa, but not the other parts. Another student expressed concerns about the organization of the artworks in relation to the regions. Overall, there are major changes from Phase I to Phase III in students’ beliefs about proper representations of Africa at the museum’s African art gallery. For example, in Phase I, Melissa and Sonia believed that the museum’s African art gallery represented Africa appropriately, but in Phase III they acknowledge that Africa is not properly represented in the museum. Melissa stated, “Definitely not—while the pieces may have come from all over Africa, typically all were based in the 19th-20th century and propagated the stereotype that primitivism was all the continent had and ever did stand for.” Likewise, Sonia stated, “No it did not, because although it did represent the people and their representations from different regions of Africa, it did not encompass an overall ideal of the region and its people. More works with different styles representing different aspects of life in Africa would have been more precise.” Students’ overall response demonstrates significant changes from their perceptions in Phase I.

Q 16. Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How? Why?

In Phase I, students’ indicated that the gallery represented the perspective of; artists from the regions, the museum curator, history, the outsider, the people of the region, men, the non-native, modernism and expressionism. In Phase III, all 10 students affirmed that the museum’s African art gallery represents a Western perspective of Africa. Students largely explained that the gallery presents what Westerners expect to see in African art—tribal and primitive aesthetic of Africa. Example of students’ profound assertions in their responses to question 16 include:
• “The Western point of view is represented and only shows one side. The representation shows the majority of what people presume to be African art. This happens as an ongoing cycle because the generalizations are taught, learned, and re-enforced” (Amy).

• “I think the gallery shows a classic American perspective of what we think of as primitive Africa. This seems like the easiest way to represent Africa because it is what everyone expects and no one asks questions about it” (Clarissa).

• “It shows exactly what people would automatically expect Africa to be, because that’s what we are taught. The museum’s current gallery just feeds those beliefs and doesn’t offer anything surprising” (Jenny).

• “The West does not want its population to see the development Africa has made, so Africa’s modern works are kept hidden” (Randy).

• “It plays to the less civilized third world view that many people I know share an opinion on” (Sarah).

In their response to Question 16, students understood that the museum’s African Art gallery is reflective of a Western perception of Africa as the Other. Students highlighted the problems of the singular primitive African aesthetic, and the problem of normalizing and maintaining the primitive stereotype of Africa through repetitions of primitive stereotypes. Students’ responses are indicative of their recognition of the West/Other dichotomies of knower/non-knower, modern/traditional, and civilized/uncivilized. These recognitions are significant to students’ transformation learning because students were acknowledging African art a problematic frame of reference that informed their perceptions of a primitive Africa and African aesthetic.

Students overall response to Questions 12, 14 and 16 convey drastic changes in their perceptions. In their responses, students critically reflected on their overall semester experience
and examined the museum as a social system that informed their perceptions of African aesthetics. Taylor (2008) explains that learners transform their perspective by critically evaluating their normalized beliefs, assumptions, and values, and further examining the social systems of which they are a part. In Phase I, students’ responses to Questionnaire I demonstrated that students largely accepted the African art discourse they experienced at the museum’s African art gallery. In Phase III, students identified problems that seemed normal in Phase I, and further raised concerns about misrepresentation, truths, and Western perspectives of Africa as represented in the museum’s African art gallery. Students’ responses to Questions 12, 14 and 16 in Phase III are counter-hegemonic; students largely attributed the problems of misrepresentation and stereotyping of Africa at museum’s African art gallery as a result of the museum representing a Western perspective of a primitive Africa. Students’ responses to Questions 12, 14 and 16 reflect the major themes of: modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and tradition.

Students’ Assertion of Change

The following questions from Questionnaire II convey students’ indication and assertion of transformations, or lack of, in their perceptions of African art.

Q 6. Compare and contrast your exhibition in Part A (Phase I) and Part B (Phase III). How do they represent your learning experiences similarly or differently?

Students generally expressed that their exhibition in Part A (Phase I) reflected their acceptance of the museum’s African art and reflected their assumptions of African art. For their exhibition in Part B (Phase III), students critiqued the museum’s African art gallery for not properly representing Africa. Students expressed that their exhibition in Part B showed more diversity in African art and showed their development in their understandings and new
perspectives of African art. For example, Amy stated, “Part A and Part B are completely different. Part A shows how I basically accepted what the museum showed versus Part B where all the artworks chosen are completely different after my own reflection. I went a completely different route in Part B because I noticed not many aesthetics were displayed in the ‘African Art Gallery.’ There is a complete misrepresentation. This is why I went with aesthetics that were not shown.” On the other hand, Denise expressed similarity in her learning experience in both Part A and B in stating, “I think they represent my experiences in a similar.” Denise’s response suggests no changes in her approach of representing African art in Phase III, which could point to a lack of transformation in her perceptions of African aesthetics. Overall, students’ responses mostly demonstrate changes in their approach of representing African art in Phase III, which could suggest transformations in their perceptions of African aesthetics.

Q 3. Has your perspective on African aesthetics changed throughout the semester? If so, how?

Amy, Clarissa, Hannah, Randy, and Sarah affirmed a clear change in their perspective of African aesthetics. For example, Clarissa stated, “Yes. Before I thought of African art exactly the way the museum portrayed it but now I know that like any other culture in the world, African art cannot be described as one genre or by one piece.” Melissa expressed minor changes in her perspective in stating, “I mean, it has a little, but despite the varying mediums there still seems to be an overall reverence present in African artworks. Whether for the figure, the craft, or the message it contains.” Andrea, Denise, Jenny, and Sonia expressed being more knowledgeable about African art but did not infer a clear change in perspective. For example, Denise stated, “I have learned that not only does Africa have a lot of beautiful pieces that come from there, but also many of them have a function as well.” Students’ responses could mean that 5 students’ (Amy, Clarissa, Hannah, Randy and Sarah) perceptions of African aesthetics were successfully
transformed through my transformative learning classroom disruption of African art discourse. For the other 5 students, their response could mean that their perceptions of African aesthetics were partially transformed or not transformed.

**Conclusion**

Phase III of this action research was structured to evaluate the success of the disruption in fostering transformations in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. My analysis and interpretations of students’ assignments in Phase III and their responses to Questionnaire II largely demonstrate significant changes in students’ overall perceptions of African aesthetics. The 7 major themes in Phase III included: modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and tradition, comfort and discomfort. These emergent themes mostly convey changes in students’ perceptions as well as some resistance to change. Students’ responses to Questionnaire II coincide with the 7 major themes and convey their critical self-reflection of their semester-long learnings of African art. My general evaluation of data in Phase III demonstrates significant transformations in students’ collective perceptions. However, while transformative learning is a collective learning experience, the process of developing changes in perceptions is unique to each learner. Therefore, in the next section I evaluate students’ individual transformation and group students into three levels of transformations.

*Interpretations and Conclusions of the Primary Question*

*Students’ Transformation*

In this section I interpret my 10 participants’ transformations into 3 levels: Most Transformed, Partially Transformed, and Least Transformed. I interpret participants’
perceptions in Phase I, Phase II and Phase III to draw conclusions on their level of transformation. My interpretation is guided by transformative learning theory (TL) and by Mezirow’s (2000) 10 stages of the transformative learning process coupled with a checklist specific to my research. Mezirow (2000) explains that transformative learning is “a movement through time of reformulating reified structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives” (p. 19). In Phase I, students experienced the dominant narrative of African art at the museum and documented their perceptions through their assignments. In Phase II, students experienced a disruption of the dominant narrative of African art at the museum. I interpreted students’ assignments in Phase II in correlation with Mezirow (2000) first 4 stages of the transformative learning process. In Phase III, students had the opportunity to reconstruct the dominant narrative of African aesthetics through their assignment. In Phase III, I interpret students’ critical reflection, and self-evaluation in how they represent their overall learning experience and perceptions of African aesthetics. Correlating with Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning process, Phase III was the phase for students to experience stages 5-10:

- Stage 5: Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- Stage 6: Planning a course of action
- Stage 7: Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
- Stage 8: Provisional trying of new roles
- Stage 9: Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- Stage 10: A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective

Table 4.9 in Chapter 4 summarizes all participants’ perceptions of African art from their assignments in Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III. My analysis of data throughout the 3 phases
indicates that 5 students expressed clear transformations in their perceptions of African aesthetics, 3 students expressed some transformations, and 2 students showed little to no transformations. I thereby interpret and draw conclusions on students’ transformations in the order of; Most Transformed, Partially Transformed, and Least Transformed.

**Most Transformed Students**

In analyzing students’ learnings throughout the 3 phases, Clarissa, Hannah, Randy, Amy, and Sarah demonstrated the most transformation in their perceptions of African aesthetics. The following Table 5.1 provides a summary of data in Phase I, Phase II and Phase III of these 5 most transformed students.

Table 5.1

**Most Transformed Students: Summary of Data**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participation</th>
<th>Phase I Assignment title</th>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
<th>Phase II Signs of disruption effect</th>
<th>Phase III Assignment title</th>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
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<th>Phase II Signs of disruption effect</th>
<th>Phase III Assignment title</th>
<th>Phase III Emergent themes</th>
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<td>DLE</td>
<td><em>Hidden Africa</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comfort and Discomfort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Moderate</td>
<td><em>Diversity</em></td>
<td>DCE</td>
<td><em>People</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
<td>Conveyed clear signs of being</td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Same Diversity</td>
<td>affected by the disruption</td>
<td>Advocate for Modernity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spirituality and Ancestry</td>
<td>experience</td>
<td>Identity and Diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art for Utility</td>
<td></td>
<td>Misrepresentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natural Materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comfort and Discomfort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this group of the 5 most transformed students, 3 students (Clarissa, Hannah, and Randy) had high participation and 2 students (Amy and Sarah) had moderate participation during the disruption classes. These 5 students were mostly active during group discussions, debates, and classroom activities. Of these 5 students, Amy, Hannah, and Sarah chatted with me after class about their feelings on the classroom discussions of African art. I believe our informal conversations about African art encouraged their changes in their perceptions. The emergent
themes from the 5 most transformed students’ assignments in Phase I indicates that their experience of African art at the museum informed their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the primitive Other. In Phase II, Amy, Clarissa, Hannah, and Sarah showed clear signs of being affected by the disruption experience, while Randy showed low signs of being affected. Although Randy did not express any signs of being affected by the disruption in Phase II, his assignment in Phase III and responses to questionnaire III clearly affirm his transformed perspective of African art. In Phase III during student presentations, Clarissa, Hannah, and Randy expressed clear changes in their perceptions of African aesthetics. Amy and Sarah conveyed some changes in their perceptions of African aesthetics.

The emergent themes from the 5 most transformed students’ assignments in Phase III largely demonstrate transformations of their perceptions from Phase I. In Phase III, Clarissa, Hannah, and Randy shared the same emergent themes of; modern and contemporary, advocacy for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, and new perspectives. These themes reflect significant transformations of their perceptions of African aesthetics from Phase I. Amy’s emergent themes included modern and contemporary, advocacy for modernity, identity and diversity; these themes convey changes in her perspectives of African aesthetics from Phase I. Sarah’s emergent themes of; modern and contemporary, advocacy for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, culture and tradition, and comfort and discomfort, reflect her transformations, at the same time, her ambivalence.

Table 5.1 ultimately conveys the 5 most transformed students’ transformative learning journey. For Clarissa, Hannah, and Randy, the data clearly suggest transformations in their perceptions. For Amy and Sarah, the data suggest some transformations in their perceptions.
My grouping of these 5 students as the most transformed students was informed by the data summarized in Table 5.1 coupled with their responses in Questionnaire II, particularly their responses to Question 3. The following Table 5.2 reflects students’ complete responses to Question 3 in Questionnaire II.

Table 5.2

Most Transformed Students: Response to Question 3, Questionnaire II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Q 3. Has your perspective on African aesthetics changed throughout the semester? If so, how?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>Yes. Before I thought of African art exactly the way the museum portrayed it but now I know that like any other culture in the world, African art cannot be described as one genre or by one piece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Absolutely; I would categorize my early perspective as being very narrow and stereotyping Africa and African Art. Having read so much about the modern art movement in Africa and the origins of that movement has made me complete a 180 degree turn from my early perceptions. I now realize that Africa has a very diverse grouping of people, all of which have different backgrounds, speak different languages, and most go through different life experiences. To lump all of African art into one type of art, or to say one type of art is more African than another is to short change anyone wanting to learn about African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>I no longer picture Africa as a bunch of tribes. I see it as a more modern country. I see the modern art that exists there, that I did not see before taking this class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Certainly. I actually have one now, before-hand I did not. I look for many aesthetics thanks to my eye opening experience from my learning journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>I would say so. I went from not even thinking about it, to marveling at how talented some of them are. However, I can honestly say my perspective on WORLD aesthetics has changed as well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 demonstrates that all 5 students affirmed positive changes in their perceptions of African aesthetics; hence, my inclusion of Amy and Sarah in the group of most transformed students. While Amy and Sarah showed some signs of transformations in their Phase III assignment and class presentation, their transformation was not as obvious as Clarissa, Hannah, and Randy. However, in their response to Question 3, Amy and Sarah declared a change in their perceptions’ of African aesthetics. While, Sarah showed some resistance in her assignment in
Phase III with themes of culture and tradition, and comfort and discomfort, her responses to Questionnaire II (which was completed after submitting the assignment) conveyed transformations without resistance. I took this into consideration in including Sarah in the group of most transformed students. The overall data in Chapter 4, Phase III, relative to these 5 most transformed students suggest that they progressed through stages 5-10 of Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning process. I interpret their experiences of stages 5-10 as follows:

- **Stage 5: Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions**
  Students explored their new knowledge and made decisions on how to represent their transformed perceptions of African art in Phase III.

- **Stage 6: Planning a course of action**
  Students planned their exhibition to reflect their transformed perceptions of African aesthetics.

- **Stage 7: Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans**
  Students did additional research on modern and contemporary African art and gained more knowledge on their new perspective to implement in their assignment.

- **Stage 8: Provisional trying of new roles**
  In completing their assignments and presenting it in class, students expressed changes in their perceptions of African aesthetics and played the role of advocating for transformations for others.

- **Stage 9: Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships**
  Students comfortably defended their exhibition proposal which reflected their transformed perceptions of African aesthetics.
Stage 10: A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective

Students reflected on their learning experience beyond African art and evaluated how frames of reference influence their perceptions of people, places, and ideas.

Scholars explain that transformations occur as learners critically self-reflect on their problematic perceptions, question the beliefs they had not previously questioned, and consequently make changes to their perceptions (Cranton, 2006; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Davis-Manigaulte et al.; Ettling, 2006, 2012; Mezirow, 2000, 2003). In experiencing the 3 Phases of my research, the 5 most transformed students (Clarissa, Hannah, Randy, Amy, and Sarah) critically self-reflected on their problematic perceptions of African aesthetics; they questioned their assumptions and their museum learning experience, and consequently changed their perceptions of African aesthetics. The following Table 5.3 presents the 5 most transformed students’ profound assertions from their Phase III assignment and Questionnaire II. These assertions are students’ own words that demonstrate students’ critical self-reflection and their changes in their perceptions.
Table 5.3

5 Most Transformed Students: Assertions from Phase III Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assertions from Phase III assignment: Curatorial Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I want the audiences to reflect on their misconceptions by viewing the stereotype they have in their mind right across from pieces that challenge their expectations. I want to spread understanding and the knowledge that African art is not simply one thing or one category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire II:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q 6. Compare and contrast your exhibition in Part A (Phase I) and Part B (Phase III). How do they represent your learning experiences similarly or differently?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For my first exhibition I was still under my original assumption of what African art was. I honestly didn’t even look at the dates of most of the pieces because I was seeing what I expected. When we got back to class and started discussing what we had seen and questioning it, I felt rather foolish for so blindly accepting what I was being presented with. Therefore, for part B I tried really hard to think about my own learning experience at the beginning and how to counteract that. My second exhibit shows my evolution of knowledge in regards to African art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q 12. What, if any concerns or problems have you observed in your semester-long learning experience of African art?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have come to question the things that are presented to me and the way they are presented. I am more aware of what biases may underlay things and who got to make decision and why they made those choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• When looking at this exhibit from a Western perspective, I hope to make the observers uncomfortable with the “status quo” of African art that they have been subjected to for so long by the big museums.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire II:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q 1. What has been your learning experience of African art over the semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the case of African art, I was really surprised to learn that there was more depth to African Art than what was being shown to the masses in the West...Additionally I was surprise that while the West assumes that they set the standards for what is considered “good” modern art, Africa has its own set of standards and in order to really appreciate and view Africa and her art correctly, you need to take of those Western “blinders” and experience the art through the motivations of the artists and the past of Africa. Modern art in Africa has a different background and history, and therefore cannot be contained to a Western perspective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assertions from Phase III assignment: Curatorial Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Visitors will finally be able to see the unpopular, yet magnificent art created by modern African artists. They will also see the false continuation of a stereotype presented in other museums. Because of this new view of African art, as well as exposing the false representations of Africa seen in other museums.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire II:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Q 16. Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How? Why?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The museum’s view shows Africa through European and American eyes. The West does not want its population to see the development Africa has made, so Africa’s modern works are kept hidden.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It [exhibition proposal] is well suited for the African gallery of the museum because it closes the enormous gap presented between the modern galleries. Moreover it is more realistic and shows the individualism yet similarities are presented as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire II:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Q 1. What has been your learning experience of African art over the semester?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, my learning experience of African art has been a journey. Now compared to the beginning of the semester I have come a long way. My first visit to the museum, I was a bit naive. I saw artworks but I looked at it with apathy. I thought they were nice but my thoughts stopped there. Up to this point in the semester I now see that many aesthetics were missing and now begin to question things more.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Q 16. Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How? Why?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Western point of view is represented and only shows one side. The representation shows the majority of what people presume to be African art. This happens as an on-going cycle because the generalizations are taught, learned, and re-enforced. The re-enforcements come from individuals who have the money to buy art pieces. Since the wealthy purchase and donate funds for museums, they play a large role. Dictations are made therefore the cycle continues, no one questions this.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 5.3 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assertions from Phase III assignment: Curatorial Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• An Exhibit over such a broad topic as AFRICA in and of itself has an awful lot of ground to cover. Its job is to give the public a glimpse of what that culture is like in reality, not the skewed Western view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire II:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q 12. <em>What, if any concerns or problems have you observed in your semester-long learning experience of African art?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That people do not question things enough. This has made me apply that thought not only to African art, which no one knows enough about to feel troubled, to everything around me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think the museum represents the view of the Western people. It depicts a constructive view of African people and art. It only shows one specifics and traditional style and encompasses a narrow variation of themes. It is a closed mined view of Africa, African Art, and African people, and that is why it represents the West. We tend to imagine and then trust in that imagination to be representative and true, but when the truth does reveal and educate we do not accept it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3 along with the overall data in Phase III on the 5 most transformed students demonstrates significant changes in their perceptions. Additionally, I evaluated the 5 most transformed students according to the following checklist. These students demonstrated their transformations in Phase III by:

a) Recognizing African art as a problematic frame of reference that misrepresents Africa as a singular culture with tribal aesthetics.

b) Recognizing African art as a reflection of Western ideology of Africa as the primitive Other.
c) Positioning themselves within the problem by admitting to their assumptions of African art and questioning normalized knowledge of African aesthetics at the museum and beyond.

d) Self-reflecting on their othering perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics in Phase I, thereby making significant positive changes in Phase III.

e) Taking action, through their assignments, by disrupting African art at the museum with the inclusion modern and contemporary African art. Moreover, subverting the hegemonic discourse of African art by structuring their exhibition to highlight the problems of African art at the museum, with the goal of transforming audience’s perceptions of African aesthetics.

f) Ultimately by affirming that their perceptions of African aesthetics were positively changed through their semester-long learning experience.

A successful disruption yields transformation, a dramatic change—a major shift in perspective (Cranton & Hoggam, 2012; Mezirow, 2000, 2012; Nemec, 2012; O’ Sullivan, 2012). My data analysis and interpretation demonstrate that Clarissa, Hannah, Randy, Amy, and Sarah were the most transformed students in my group of 10 participants. These 5 students had the most drastic change/shift in their perspectives of African aesthetics. Their transformation was evident in their Phase III assignments, their presentations, their responses to Questionnaire III, and in their clear assertion of their change in perceptions. Given that these 5 students represent 50% of my participants, their transformation demonstrates the substantial success of my Phase II disruption of their Phase I perceptions of African aesthetics as the primitive unchanging Other. Moreover, their positive change in their perceptions of African aesthetics demonstrates the success of my classroom disruption and subversion of the hegemonic discourse of African art.
Partially Transformed Students

In analyzing students’ learning throughout the 3 phases, Jenny, Melissa, and Andrea demonstrated partial transformation in their perceptions of African aesthetics. The following Table 5.4 provides a summary of data in Phase I, Phase II and Phase III of these 3 partially transformed students.

Table 5.4

Partially Transformed Students: Summary of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participation</th>
<th>Phase I Assignment title</th>
<th>Phase II Signs of disruption effect</th>
<th>Phase III Assignment title</th>
<th>Phase III Assignment title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jenny Low</td>
<td><em>The Spirituality Behind African Art</em></td>
<td>DCE Conveyed clear signs of being affected by the disruption experience</td>
<td><em>Moving On: Variety in African art</em></td>
<td>Christmas in Contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition Same Diversity Spirituality and Ancestry Art for Utility Natural Materials Daily Lives The Feminine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for Modernity Identity and Diversity Misrepresentation New Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa Moderate</td>
<td><em>Form and Function</em></td>
<td>DSE Conveyed some signs of being affected by the disruption experience</td>
<td><em>Form and Function</em></td>
<td>Harlem Renaissance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition Same Diversity Spirituality and Ancestry Art for Utility Natural Materials Daily Lives The Feminine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary Advocate for Modernity Identity and Diversity Culture and Tradition Comfort and Discomfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea Low</td>
<td><em>African Art Exhibit</em></td>
<td>DSE Conveyed some signs of being affected by the disruption experience</td>
<td><em>Harlem Renaissance</em></td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary Advocate for Modernity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition Same Diversity Spirituality and Ancestry Natural Materials The Feminine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In this group of partially transformed students, Jenny and Andrea had low participation during the disruption classes, while Melissa had moderate participation. While Jenny and Andrea were mostly inactive during group discussions, debates, and classroom activities, Melissa was generally an active participant. The emergent themes from these 3 students’ assignments in Phase I indicates that their experience of African art at the museum informed their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the primitive Other. In Phase II, Jenny showed clear signs of being affected by the disruption experience, while Melissa and Andrea showed some signs of being affected. In Phase III during student presentations, Jenny expressed some changes in her perceptions of African aesthetics. Melissa and Andrea did not express changes in their perceptions of African aesthetics. In Phase III, the emergent themes from Jenny’s assignment indicate clear transformations in her perceptions. The emergent themes from Andrea’s assignment indicate some transformations, and those from Melissa’s assignment indicate some transformations as well as resistance.

Table 5.4 ultimately conveys the 3 partially transformed students’ transformative learning journey. For Jenny, the data clearly suggest transformations of her perceptions. For Melissa and Andrea, the data suggest partial transformations. My grouping of these 3 students as partially transformed was informed by the data summarized in Table 5.4 coupled with their responses in Questionnaire II, particularly their response to Question 3. The following Table 5.5 reflects students’ complete response to Question 3 from Questionnaire II.
Table 5.5

Partially Transformed Students: Response to Question 3, Questionnaire II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Q 3. Has your perspective on African aesthetics changed throughout the semester? If so, how?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>I think when “African art” is mentioned my mind automatically pictures a more tribal style of work. Statues, patterned fabrics, beads, feathers and more earthy materials come to mind most of the time. I’m aware that this isn’t the entirety of what African art is, but these pieces are a predominant section in the pie chart. Though I’m more knowledgeable about other styles in African art now, this area of their art seems to be aesthetically dominant to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>At the museum, the only African aesthetics I saw were woodwork and tribal headdresses. Then upon reading on the subject, I realized that there was beadwork, sculpting, and painting all with different aesthetics and not just wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>I mean, it has a little, but despite the varying mediums there still seems to be an overall reverence present in African artworks. Whether for the figure, the craft, or the message it contains.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In responding to Question 3, Jenny, Andrea, and Melissa did not affirmatively declare a clear change in their perceptions of African aesthetics. Their response to Question 3 distinguishes them from the group of most transformed students. Jenny’s response to Question 3 particularly excluded her from the group of most transformed students. Jenny showed some signs of transformation during her presentation in Phase III, and the emergent themes from her assignment in Phase III clearly indicate her transformation. However, in responding to Question 3, Jenny explained that while she was more knowledgeable of different styles of African art beyond the tribal aesthetics, the tribal African art remained dominant to her. Jenny’s response could suggest resistance, as she does not declare changes in her perceptions of African aesthetics. As a result, Jenny’s response along with her assignment in Phase III places her in the group of partially transformed students. Similar to Jenny, Andrea does not declare changes in her perceptions; rather, she explains that she is more informed about the diversities of art styles of African art. With Melissa, while her assignment and presentation in Phase III indicate low signs
of transformation, in responding to Question 3, she admits to minor changes in her perceptions, however, with some resistance. Although these 3 students’ assignments in Phase III mostly indicates some transformations, their response to Question 3 indicates a lack of confidence and uncertainly of their transformed perspective. Their lack of confidence is apparent in how they acknowledge their new understandings of African art, yet do not completely affirm a change in their perspective. Their responses could infer that they were experiencing some resistance in their transformative learning process of African art. Since Jenny, Melissa, and Andrea did not declare a definite change in their perceptions, I categorized them as partially transformed. The overall data in Chapter 4, Phase III, relative to these partially transformed students suggest that Andrea and Melissa generally progressed through stages 5-7; while Jenny progressed through stages 5-8 of Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning process. I interpret their experiences as follows:

- **Stage 5: Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions**
  Students explored their new knowledge made decisions on how to represent their partially transformed perceptions of African art in Phase III.

- **Stage 6: Planning a course of action**
  Students planned their exhibition to reflect their partially transformed perceptions of African aesthetics.

- **Stage 7: Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans**
  Students did additional research on modern and contemporary African art and gained more knowledge on their new perspective to implement in their assignment.

- **Stage 8: Provisional trying of new roles**
  In completing her assignments and presenting in class, Jenny expressed changes in her
perceptions of African aesthetics, and played the role of advocating for transformations for others.

In this group of partially transformed students, Jenny experienced stage 8 during her presentation in Phase III, where she indicated some signs of changes in her perceptions. Andrea and Melissa did not indicate changes in their perceptions during their presentations, suggesting that they did not experience stage 8. Collectively, these 3 partially transformed students’ response to Question 3 does not indicate the certainty of changes in their perceptions. Therefore, a lack of affirmed change in perceptions implies a lack of integrating new perspectives into their lives. Hence, my exclusion of the 3 partially transformed students from the experience of stages 9 and 10 of Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning process.

Taylor (2008) explains that complete transformations take time; however, when a learner becomes more critically reflective in their meaning-making process they are transforming their perspectives. Although Jenny, Andrea, and Melissa did not declare definite changes in their perceptions, their assignments and responses to Questionnaire II in Phase III indicate developments of their transformative learning. Similar to the 5 most transformed students, the 3 partially transformed students critically self-reflected on their problematic perceptions of African and questioned their assumptions and their museum learning experience. The following Table 5.6 presents the 3 partially transformed students’ profound assertions from their Phase III assignment and Questionnaire II. These assertions are students’ own words that demonstrate students’ critical self-reflection, some transformations and some resistance.
Table 5.6

*Partially Transformed Students: Assertions from Phase III Assignments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assertions from Phase III assignment: Curatorial Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Visitors should walk away with a new perspective on African art, enlightened and understanding of the progress that African artists have made. Artistic styles, politics, and ideas happening in Africa right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire II:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Q 16. Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How? Why?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think the museum’s African art gallery represents the general Western perspective – exactly what most people would expect to see when they walk in. It shows exactly what people would automatically expect Africa to be, because that’s what we are taught. The museum’s current gallery just feeds those beliefs and doesn’t offer anything surprising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The museum needs a change from the mundane, somber atmosphere it currently brings in the African Art Exhibit. It needs vibrancy and color, and something modern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire II:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Q 12. What, if any concerns or problems have you observed in your semester-long learning experience of African art?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My only concern about African art is that so few people realize that the art of Africa is not all tribal. Which, in retrospect, should have been obvious, but to many it is not. People will never stop looking at Africa as an underprivileged country while we continue to portray it as such.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 5.6 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assertions from Phase III assignment: Curatorial Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I feel that <em>Form and Function</em> is different from a typical African art gallery, and worthy of selection in the sense that it contains both the “comfort zone” of the typically seen African artwork already present in the museum, while rounding it out with some modern pieces that have yet to be seen in such a gallery.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questionnaire II:

*Q 2. What has been the most challenging and fulfilling aspects of your learning experience?*

What was really fulfilling was breaking out of this stereotype that I’d, unknowingly, been living under. This was also the most challenging—admitting to myself that I’d willingly embraced this stereotype as fact.

*Q 12. What, if any concerns or problems have you observed in your semester-long learning experience of African art?*

Why did I reach collegiate level education before I was introduced to this “other side” of African art? To me it’s frankly worrisome that, having gone through numerous art and art history related classes, I had no idea of this other half of African art until this far along in my life.

Table 5.6 along with the overall data in Phase III on the 3 partially transformed students demonstrates some changes in their perceptions. Additionally, I evaluated the 3 partially transformed students according to the following checklist. These students demonstrated their transformation in Phase III by:

a) Recognizing African art as a problematic frame of reference that misrepresents Africa as a singular culture with tribal aesthetics.

b) Recognizing African art as a reflection of Western ideology of Africa as the primitive Other.

c) Positioning themselves within the problem by admitting to their assumptions of African art and questioning normalized knowledge of African aesthetics at the museum and beyond.
d) Self-reflecting on their othering perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics in Phase I, thereby making significant positive changes in Phase III.

e) Taking action, through their assignments, by disrupting African art at the museum with the inclusion modern and contemporary African art

My data analysis and interpretations demonstrate that Jenny, Andrea, and Melissa were the 3 partially transformed students in my group of 10 participants. Their partial transformation was evident in their Phase III assignment, their presentation, their responses to Questionnaire II, and in their lack of affirming definite changes of their perceptions. Given that they represent 30% of my participants, their partial transformation demonstrates some success of my Phase II disruption of their Phase I perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the primitive unchanging Other. Moreover, their partial change in their perceptions of African aesthetics demonstrates moderate success in my classroom disruption and subversion of the hegemonic discourse of African art.

**Least Transformed Students**

In analyzing students’ learning throughout the 3 phases, Denise and Sonia demonstrated the least transformation in their perceptions of African aesthetics. The following Table 5.7 provides a summary of data in Phase I, Phase II and Phase III of the 2 least transformed students.
Table 5.7

Least Transformed Students: Summary of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participation</th>
<th>Phase I Assignment title</th>
<th>Phase II Signs of disruption effect</th>
<th>Phase III Assignment title</th>
<th>Phase III Emergent themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denise Low</td>
<td><em>Remembering Africa</em></td>
<td>DSE</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Remembering Africa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
<td>Conveyed some signs of being affected by the disruption experience</td>
<td>No signs of transformations in her perceptions of African art.</td>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Same Diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spirituality and Ancestry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art for Utility Daily Lives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia Low</td>
<td><em>Importance of Feminism</em></td>
<td>DLE</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Culture and Tradition Through Art</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture and Tradition</td>
<td>Conveyed low signs of being affected by the disruption experience</td>
<td>No clear signs of transformations in her perceptions of African art.</td>
<td>Modern and Contemporary Culture and Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Same Diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spirituality and Ancestry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art for Utility The Feminine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of all the 10 participants in my research, Denise and Sonia conveyed the least transformation of their perceptions of African aesthetics. Both students were low participants in class; they were mostly inactive during group discussions, debates, and classroom activities. The emergent themes from these 2 students’ assignments in Phase I indicates that their experience of African art at the museum informed their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the primitive Other. In Phase II, Denise showed some signs of being affected by the disruption experience, while Sonia showed low signs of being affected. In Phase III during student presentations, Denise and Sonia did not express changes in their perceptions of African aesthetics. In Phase III, the emergent theme of culture and tradition was the only theme in Denise’s assignment. The theme of culture and tradition was the dominant theme in Phase I; the
reemergence of this theme as the only theme in Denise’s Phase III assignment clearly demonstrates a lack of transformation in her perceptions of African aesthetics. The theme of culture and tradition demonstrates that Denise’s perceptions of African aesthetics in Phase III were unchanged and the same as her perceptions in Phase I. Sonia’s emergent themes included modern and contemporary, and culture and tradition. While Sonia acknowledged modern and contemporary African art in Phase III, her assignment centered on traditional African art, mostly reflecting the theme of culture and tradition.

Table 5.7 ultimately conveys the transformative learning journey of the least transformed students. My grouping of these 2 students as the least transformed was informed by the data summarized in Table 5.7 coupled with their responses in Questionnaire II, particularly their response to Question 3. The following Table 5.8 reflects these students’ complete response to Question 3 from Questionnaire II.

Table 5.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Q 3. Has your perspective on African aesthetics changed throughout the semester? If so, how?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>I have learned that not only does Africa have a lot of beautiful pieces that come from there, but also many of them have a function as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>My perspective was continuously being challenged. When I first thought about African art and learning about it I thought about the crafts, handmade objects, and mostly tribal items, but as we studied and learned more I learned there was more to it than that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In their response to Question 3, Denise and Sonia did not state any changes in their perceptions of African aesthetics. Denise mentioned her understandings of African art as beautiful and functional, but she does not refer to any changes in her perceptions. Sonia explained that her perspectives were challenged, and she learned that African art was not limited
to tribal objects; however, she did not affirm a change in her perceptions. The overall data in
Chapter 4, Phase III, relative to the 2 least transformed students suggest that they mostly did not
progress through stages 5-10 of Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning process. I interpret
their lack of progression as follows:

- **Stage 5: Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions**
  The emergent theme of modern and contemporary reflected in Sonia’s Phase III
  assignment suggest her openness to a new perspective on African art. However, the
  theme of culture and tradition was dominant in her assignment. In Denise’s Phase III
  assignment, the single emergent theme of culture and tradition confirms that she did not
  explore any new perspectives; she maintained the same perspective she had in Phase I.

- **Stage 6: Planning a course of action**
  Neither Denise nor Sonia planned their exhibition in Phase III to reflect changes in their
  perceptions of African aesthetics. Denise’s exhibition affirmed a lack of transformation
  and Sonia’s exhibition conveyed her inclusion of her new learnings of African art.

- **Stage 7: Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans**
  Both students generally did not acquire new knowledge to implement in their assignment.
  Sonia barely researched modern and contemporary African art, while Denise did not.

- **Stage 8: Provisional trying of new roles**
  In completing their assignments and presenting it in class, Denise and Sonia did not
  express any new perspectives of African aesthetics.

  Given that Denise and Sonia experience of stages 5-8 were largely minimal, stages 9 and
  10 were thereby irrelevant to their experience. They did not affirm any changes in their
  perceptions, therefore implying a lack of integrating any new perspectives into their life. Denise
and Sonia, as the least transformed students did not critically self-reflect on their problematic perceptions of African aesthetics. They did not question their assumptions or their museum learning experience, and therefore, did not make changes to their perceptions. The following Table 5.9 presents these 2 least transformed students’ profound assertions from their Phase III assignment and Questionnaire II. These assertions are students’ own words that demonstrate their resistance and lack of transformation.

Table 5.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assertions from Phase III assignment: Curatorial Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• With tradition being so important to the way we live our lives, I thought it would be interesting to showcase a few pieces of African art to represent some traditions that take place in the six major regions of Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I would like for museum visitors to have a better understanding of African tradition based on my exhibit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire II:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q 6. Compare and contrast your exhibition in Part A (Phase I) and Part B (Phase III). How do they represent your learning experiences similarly or differently? I think they represent my experiences in a similar. I tried to fix what I didn’t understand about the exhibit in my own proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q 12. What, if any concerns or problems have you observed in your semester-long learning experience of African art? Going into the exhibit the first time, I was really confused as to why only artifacts were used to represent the region instead of having paintings throughout, but after learning about the culture, I have realized that sculptures and artifacts have many uses and meaning for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q 17. From your overall learning experience of African art what understandings do you have about the region? That it is mainly represented by sculptures and artifacts rather than paintings. There are many different ways to represent a region than representing it in a way that we see it as, and I hope that the museum will take that into consideration when curating the next cultural exhibit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table continues)
Table 5.9 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Assertions from Phase III assignment: Curatorial Part B: Exhibition Proposal for the Museum and Questionnaire II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>Assignment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Providing the two different masks allows you to see the two different styles that can occur due to each mask coming from two different regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• This exhibition will allow the viewers to see the different aspects of the African culture/tradition as a whole, it allows the viewer to see the differences which occur in style, ideal, and form within one region, or many different regions of Africa, and finally it allows the viewer to interpret the art and take away part of the African culture/tradition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questionnaire II:

Q 1. What has been your learning experience of African art over the semester?
Throughout the semester my perception of African art has and was changed. From the beginning to the semester I learned about the struggle and the strive for the ability to do art. Art for Africans is and was a way to express themselves and be heard.

Q 12. What, if any concerns or problems have you observed in your semester-long learning experience of African art?
A problem I faced was after visiting the museum and then reading. The two portrayed Africa in a totally different manner. This led me to question which prospection was true.

Q 16. Whose perspective do you think the museum’s African art gallery represents? How? Why?
I think the museum represents the view of the Western people. It depicts a constructive view of African people and art. It only shows one specifics and traditional style and encompasses a narrow variation of themes. It is a closed mined view of Africa, African Art, and African people, and that is why is represents the West. We tend to imagine and then trust in that imagination to be representative and true, but when the truth does reveal and educate we do not accept it.

Sonia’s Phase III assignment and responses to Questionnaire II convey her struggle with transforming her perceptions of African aesthetics. She acknowledges modern and contemporary African art, yet upholds traditional African art as reflective of African culture. In responding to Question 1, she indicates that her perceptions of African art were changed through her semester-long learning. Her response to Question 12 demonstrates that she was uncertain
about her position on the conflicting knowledge of African art from her semester-long learning. However, her response to Question 17 was bold and critical of the singular tribal African aesthetic at the museum, and suggestive of a transformed perspective. Nonetheless, the combination of Sonia’s assignment and her response to Questionnaire II, particularly Question 3 (Has your perspective on African aesthetics changed throughout the semester? If so, how?) demonstrate low transformation and resistance.

My data analysis and interpretation of all 10 participants in Phase I, II and III, reveals that Denise was the least transformed and the most resistant during the transformative learning process. In Phase II, Denise showed some signs of being influenced by the disruption experience, however in Phase III, it was evident that she made no changes to her perceptions. In responding to Question 6 (Compare and contrast your exhibition in Part A (Phase I) and Part B (Phase III). How do they represent your learning experiences similarly or differently?), Denise clearly affirms the similarity of her Phase I and Phase III assignment; indicating that she made no changes. In Phase III, Denise did not acknowledge the problems of African art at the museum; she did not self-reflect on her assumptions and did not make any changes to her perceptions. The combination of Denise’s Phase III presentation, assignment, and response to Questionnaire II clearly demonstrates a clear lack of transformation in her perceptions of African aesthetics.

My data analysis and interpretations demonstrate that Denise and Sonia were the least transformed students in my group of 10 participants. Their lack of and low transformation is evident in their Phase III assignment, their presentation, their responses to Questionnaire II, and in their lack of affirming a change of their perceptions. Given that they represent 20% of my participants, their lack of transformation demonstrates some ineffectiveness of my Phase II disruption of their Phase I perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the primitive
unchanging Other. Moreover, their lack of change in their perceptions of African aesthetics suggests some ineffectiveness of my classroom disruption of African art discourse. Taylor (2008) explains that a learner’s lack of transformation could result from the learners’ preference in how they learn. Most learners are not accustomed to learning by challenging their assumptions, and could express resistance during a transformative learning experience (Nemec, 2012). Moreover, a learner’s lack of transformation could also result from their nonparticipation in critical group discussions and critical reflections (Taylor 2008). To address learners’ lack of transformations, Taylor (2008) advice educators of the importance of taking time “to know students as individuals, recognizing their preferences, and engaging a variety of approaches in fostering transformative learning” (p. 12).

**Conclusion of Students’ Transformation**

The emergent themes in Phase III (modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and tradition, comfort and discomfort) contrasted with the emergent themes in Phase I (culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine) demonstrate substantial changes in participants’ overall perceptions of African aesthetics. My data analysis and interpretations demonstrate that through my transformative learning classroom disruptions of African art discourse, 50% of the participants successfully transformed their perceptions of African aesthetics; 30% of the participants partially transformed their perceptions of African aesthetics, and 20% of the participants were least transformed. Ultimately, 80% of the participants were developing and developed positive transformations of their perceptions of African aesthetics. While my research centers on the transformative learning experience of a
group of university students, their individual transformation is relative to social transformations (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Whereas some scholars distinguish between individual and social transformation, a unified approach compliments both social and individual transformations (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Ettling, 2012). With a critical theory framework of transformative learning, my research functioned to subvert African art as an oppressive discourse, through transforming my students’ perceptions; thereby attending to both social and individual transformations.

Summary of Findings

My research was structured to disrupt African art discourse through my transformative learning classroom with the goal of positively transforming my students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. This transformative learning action research was conducted in the fall 2013 semester through the Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation course I taught in at the University of North Texas, in Denton, Texas. The participants in this study were 10 students in my classroom who volunteered their assignments for my research. The research was designed in 3 phases, of which participants’ assignments in each phase, along with classroom activities, and my research journal notes contributed to the data I analyzed and interpreted in answering my sub-questions. My interpretations and conclusions from my 3 sub-questions, along with my interpretations of participants’ transformations in Phase III provided answers to my primary question.

The primary question of this research is: How does the disruption of African art discourse influence a group of university students’ perceptions of African aesthetics? This question required a dual enquiry on: 1. discourse and meaning-making in Phase I; and 2. disruption and transformation in Phase II and Phase III. To answer my primary question, my analysis was
therefore twofold. First, in Phase I (the diagnosis), I analyzed African art discourse at the museum’s African art gallery; interpreting the knowledge it communicated to my students, and the understandings of Africa and African aesthetics my students retained. I employed a multimodal social semiotic approach to critical discourse analysis to analyze and interpret the function of discourse in constructing my students’ meaning-making of their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics at the museum. My diagnosis of African art discourse in Phase I revealed themes of: culture and tradition, same diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine. These themes and my overall findings affirm that students’ perceptions in Phase I largely attest to African art as a hegemonic discourse that communicates and normalizes knowledge of Africa as the primitive unchanging Other. Secondly, in Phase II and III, I analyzed the process and success of disrupting the dominant African art aesthetics at the museum through my classroom transformative learning strategies. I employed transformative learning theory as the framework for my data analysis in Phase II and III. In Phase II (the intervention), I analyzed and interpreted how students were responding to my classroom disruption of African art and disruption of their perceptions from their museum learning experience. My findings showed that 8 out of the 10 participants indicated signs of being influenced by the disruption experience, and signs of potential transformations in their perceptions of African aesthetics. In Phase III (the evaluation), I evaluated the success of the disruption in Phase II, by analyzing and interpreting the levels of transformation of students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. My findings showed that 5 students’ perceptions were most transformed, 3 students’ perceptions were partially transformed and 2 students perceptions were least transformed. My evaluation in Phase III revealed the themes of: modern and contemporary, advocate for modernity, identity and diversity, misrepresentation, new perspectives, culture and
tradition, comfort and discomfort. These themes and my overall findings demonstrate that most students were developing and developed positive transformations of their perceptions of African aesthetics.

My overall data analysis and interpretations demonstrate that my transformative learning classroom disruption of African art discourse influenced 10 university students as follows: 50% of the students successfully transformed their perceptions of African aesthetics; 30% of the students partially transformed their perceptions of African aesthetics; and 20% of the students perceptions of African aesthetics were least transformed. Ultimately, through experiencing a disruption of African art discourse, 80% of a group of university students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the Other—fixed in tribal aesthetics, were positively transformed into understandings of Africa and African aesthetics as diverse with multiple aesthetics inclusive of modern and contemporary African art.

Perspective of the Transformative Educator

The success of a transformative learning process begins with the transformative educator’s self-evaluation and awareness of how their frame of reference structures their perceptions (Johnson-Bailey, 2012; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). Therefore, prior to teaching for transformation, it is important for the educator to experience and understand their personal transformative learning process (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). My experience of transformation came through realizing that my perceptions of African art were in opposition to the dominant perspective. My dilemma was initiated when I was constantly confronted with misconstrued understandings of my identity, or rather confronted by the identity Western ideology constructed for me; the identity of the “exotic,” the “primitive,” the “Other,” the
subaltern African woman. Was I to simply accept this identity? I resisted. My resistance led to multiple questions about African art, which compelled me to search for answers. Doing research on discourse through the lens of post-colonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism has been an enlightening transformative learning experience for me. Transformative, in the sense, that these theories gave me the gift of awareness of discourse—cultural hegemony—in normalizing its ideology. While I was able to recognize problematic perceptions before, I was unaware of the complexities involved in structuring and maintaining problematic frames of reference such as African art. My dilemma of being Othered and my transformative learning experience motivated my approach in structuring my dissertation and my transformative learning classroom. I believe my transformative learning experience was necessary for me to effectively teach with the objective of transformation. Throughout the research phases, I remained cognizant of my perceptions of African art at the museum and my theoretical position of African art discourse.

*My Transformative Classroom*

A transformative learning approach to teaching encourages a classroom in which the educator strategically structures the curriculum for disruptions and critical reflections that foster positive changes in learners’ perceptions (Cranton, 2006; Nemec, 2012). To foster a transformative learning classroom, the educator needs to function as a facilitator, equally engaged with students as co-learners, and structure a classroom for group problem-solving inquiry and dialog (Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006; Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 1997). With this approach, students are empowered; they gain a sense of belonging, they share their experiences and perspectives, and take ownership of their transformative learning experience (Cranton, 2006; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Mezirow, 1997, 2000). In facilitating my transformative
learning classroom, I was mindful not to perform as the authoritative provider of knowledge for my students’ understandings. I therefore structured my course (Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation) as a collaborative inquiry-based seminar, in which I functioned as a facilitator and co-learner. I structured group discussions, debates, and presentations as prompts to evoke dialogue about issues of power and representations, misrepresentations in museums, dominant ideology, stereotypes and essentialism, and paradoxes in art history. I observed the success of this structure in how my students were comfortable in expressing their perspectives during group debates and discussions. With a co-learning structure and the activities of my classroom, students actively participated in self-disrupting their perceptions of African aesthetics from their learning experience at the museum’s African art gallery.

Mezirow (2003) explains that transformative learning is particularly concerned with changing “problematic frames of reference” that inform and maintain perceptions. A transformation of perceptions, therefore, requires a disruption in a learner’s frame of reference (Nemec, 2012). In Phase II, my transformative learning teaching strategies disrupted African art at the museum as frames of reference by presenting modern and contemporary African art histories that are largely excluded from African art history as new frames of reference for my students. Through my classroom, my students engaged in a transformative learning process in which they critically evaluated African art at the museum as a problematic frame of reference that informed their normalized—taken for granted perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics. This transformative learning process encouraged students to critically self-reflect on their perceptions, and as a result, make positive changes.

As the co-learner educator, it was important for me to build trust with my students and structure my classroom activities for students to be comfortable and actively participate in the
disruption process. While the co-learner approach shifts the authority from teacher to the group, the teacher still retains a level of authority. I was mindful of my authority throughout the research process. For example, in Phase I, I allowed students to experience and learn African art at the museum without providing my opinion. It was important for students to engage with the African art gallery without any influences of my theoretical position of African art. During the disruption in Phase II, there were moments when I wanted to provide explanations; rather, I prompted critical discussions by provoking students to notice problems that seem normal. I mostly answered students’ questions by redirecting the questions to the class. I had to refrain from highlighting the many problems of African art at the museum, as I wanted students to discover the problems through group discussions in class. In Phase III, as students were preparing for their assignment, students asked me which artworks they could use for their assignment. I empathized that it was up to them to choose how to represent African aesthetics based on their overall semester learnings.

Relating to My Students

Ettling (2012) explains that an effective strategy in building trust and facilitating transformative learning is through sharing narratives of personal stories. Moreover, when the teacher reveals their personal story, it helps in creating a classroom where students are free to express themselves and self-reflect on their perceptions (Ettling, 2012). In concluding the October 10th disruption class, I shared my personal story with my students about my experience of being Othered as an African artist. I showed students my artworks and expressed my dilemma in trying to identify as a contemporary African and American artist. While I was not doing so as a strategy, but more intuitively, I later realized the impact of sharing my story, when several students met with me after class. The students who met with me after class expressed their
personal concerns about concepts discussed during class, and also shared their personal learning experiences. In discussing with students after class, I expanded on the concepts from class, shared more of my personal experiences, and posed questions for them to consider. I believe my one-on-one discussions with students after class were effective in fostering their transformative learning. Of the students who met with me after class, 3 students (Amy, Hannah, and Sarah) were participants in my research, and these 3 students were in the group of the 5 most transformed students. Taylor (2008) encourages educators to get to know their students and be attentive to occurrences relative to their class. While I did not consider my after class discussions as part of the disruption, I realized that they were effective in encouraging students to reflect on their assumptions and open up to a different perspective. I believe that one of my shortcomings was that I was not attentive to engage the students who were least active in participating in class. Of my 10 participants, the 2 students who were least transformed both had low participation during the disruption classes. Given that my one-on-one discussions were effective in encouraging students’ transformations, I could have been more attentive to meeting with students individually, particularly the students who were least engaged during class.

Implications and Best Practices

Art History

The implications of this research are crucial to art history as the system that constructs and confines the knowledge that is normalized as African art. Art history has been predominantly documented from a Western perspective (Clarke, 2002), and the history and education of African art is a product of Western hegemonic ideologies of African cultures (Hassan, 1999, Kasfir, 1999, Meier, 2010; Nicodemus; 2013). The findings of my students’
perceptions of African art in Phase I reveal that the canon of African art history communicates knowledge of Africa as the Other; fixed in a singular tribal culture. My research demonstrates that African art history is still predominantly a narrative fixed in primitivism; communicating Africa as one tribe, one people, one culture, with one aesthetic. Therefore, the persistence of art history that solely represents tribal African aesthetics is a continuation of hegemony in the discipline of art history.

The implication for art history to be more equitably inclusive in appropriately representing art histories from multiple perspectives cannot be overstated. Brookfield (2012) affirms that in order to subvert dominant ideologies, the structures and schemes that maintain discourse need to be changed; and such change can only result from collective pressure. I therefore emphasize that the dominant history of African art in the discipline of art history requires major disruptions and transformations. The transformation of African art history is contingent on the critical self-evaluation and transformation of African art historians whose practices maintain the discourse of African art. I understand that such transformations, however, will not be naturally self-induced; it will require persistent significant provocations of counter-hegemonic actions. African art history, as a Western discourse functions to always maintain its ideology, and is naturally resistant to changes. Therefore, collective disruptions of African art history, such as the one in my research are necessary to persist until the scholarship of African art is reconstructed to reflect the multiple realities of Africa’s art histories.

_Best Practices_

To counter the hegemony in African art history, art historians need to take an active role in reconstructing the scholarship of African art to be more inclusive and reflective of the reality of Africa’s art histories and contemporary practices. For his process to begin, African art
historians will need to first self-evaluate their practice and acknowledge the role of hegemony in structuring the knowledge that has been normalized as the history of African art. For this to occur, African art historians will need to adopt the theoretical lens of post-colonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism. These theories are not only critical to studies on African art; they are necessary to conceptualize the invisible functioning of hegemony in the knowledge production of Africa as the Other. If African art historians do not adopt post-colonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism into their practice, they will largely be unable to diagnose the hegemony of African art; thereby they will not facilitate interventions for positive change.

A further step towards reconstructing African art history requires African art historians to do research beyond the canon of art history for resources that present diverse and multiple perspectives from respective sociocultural contexts. I encourage art historians to access resources that reflect African art histories that have been excluded from the canon of art history. These African art histories can be accessed through critical journal such as Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art and Third Text. In addition, textbooks that document African art histories include:


While these resources are not common in the canon of art history, they do exist, and the knowledge they present is critical to subverting the hegemony in African art history and expanding the scholarship on African art. These texts largely take on a post-colonial and critical multicultural perspective in attending to the scholarship of African art. The texts not only present diverse histories of African art and African artists; they address the issues of how and why these art histories have been largely excluded from the canon of African art history. These texts are resources that should be incorporated into the canon of art history and art education relative African art. The diverse African art histories and African artists that these texts present are reflective of the multiple realities of the social, cultural, and political histories, and contemporary conditions of Africa. The continent of Africa is multifaceted, and so are its histories, arts, cultures, politics, and citizens. Therefore, African art history should not be a single narrative, but one that reflects the multiple truths of Africa. I encourage African art historians and art history educators to access diverse histories on African art, such as the ones
above and implement into their practice. The Smithsonian Libraries’ reading list on Modern African Art is an additional resource for art historians to access histories on African art.

As an art educator, when structuring my courses, I intentionally look for resources that provide multiple perspectives on art histories and contemporary practices. For example, when I taught Art 1301 Honors Art Appreciation (spring 2013 and fall 2013 at the University of North Texas), my curriculum focused on modern art and I provided resources on modern art history from diverse perspectives as it occurred respective to different regions. The textbooks for the class included:


The text, What Are You Looking At? The Surprising Shocking, and Sometimes Strange Story of 150 Years of Modern Art provides modern art history from a Western perspective. Whereas Modern Art in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms provides multiple perspectives of modern art histories from Africa, Asia, and Latin America that have largely been excluded from art history. My class studied both texts simultaneously, instead of one before the other. This was intentional, in order to equalize the relevance of the histories, and for my students and I to analyze the social, political, and cultural interrelations, and the differences of the movements within these histories. I believe this approach provides students with understandings of the relevance of multiple of art histories, theories, and contemporary
global art practices. While I am not an expert on modern art history in all the regions, in
teaching modern art history, it is important that I provide my students with resources that attend
to the multiple histories of modern art. When planning my courses, I search for the writings of
scholars that attend to histories that are largely absent from major art history textbooks. Many
times I find resources from journal articles and include in my curriculum. Through the process
of engaging with these histories in class, I am able to learn more, and my students gain
understandings of multiple narratives in art history. Similar to my approach, I encourage art
historians to look for art histories that are excluded from the dominant art history textbooks, and
incorporate into their curriculum; thereby providing their students with more equitable
multicultural understandings of Art History.

Art Museums

Scholars (Araeen, 2010; Chanda, 1992; Chin, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Kasfir, 1999; Meier,
2010; Nicodemus, 2013) have elaborated on the problem of African art in art museums as a
Western hegemonic discourse that communicates and normalizes ideologies of a primitive
unchanging Africa. Although scholars have challenged the discourse of traditional African art,
most Western museums are resistant to collect and exhibit modern and contemporary African art,
as it does not fit into the stereotypical authentic African art (Hassan, 1999; Harney, 2007; Meier,
2010). In Phase I of this study, the seven emergent themes of culture and tradition, same
diversity, spirituality and ancestry, art for utility, natural materials, daily lives, and the feminine,
reflect students’ perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics from their learning experience at a
DFW museum’s African art gallery. My interpretation of these themes affirms that students’
perceptions in Phase I largely attest to African art as a hegemonic discourse that communicates
and normalizes knowledge of Africa as the primitive unchanging Other. Therefore, African art exhibitions and museum education programs relative to African art that solely present traditional African art is a continuation of communicating Africa as the Other.

While it is valuable for museums to represent global arts and cultures, it is problematic when cultural re-presentations are used in a method that devalues particular groups (Ballengee-Morris, & Stuhr, 2001). Art museums should not subject Africa into a singular tribal narrative; rather, present the multiple forms of artistic practices and art histories of Africa. The African art gallery in art museums represents Africa; therefore, it should be a space where audiences can engage with traditional, modern, and contemporary African art histories. It should be a space where visitors gain a sense of the diverse realities of political, social, and cultural expressions from the perspective of the respective nations represented. The African art gallery should be a space that tells stories of the multiple realities from North, South, East and West Africa.

Therefore, similar to my implication for art history’s transformation, art museums with African art galleries that only exhibit traditional African art requires disruptions and transformations. Such museums require self-evaluations on how they participate in normalizing and distributing perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics as the primitive unchanging Other. This implication is relevant to museum curators and museum educators, as they participate in presenting and distributing knowledge of Africa through African art.

Best Practices

Art museums are cultural spaces accessible to the general public that provide knowledge on the arts, cultures, and histories of groups of people. Therefore, as a knowledge producing institution, it is the responsibility of art museums to provide equitable representations and knowledge of people, places, and ideas. Museum educators and curators of African art should be
more attentive to how knowledge of othering is presented, normalized, and communicated to visitors through African art. These practitioners should structure studies that aim to provide understandings of what audiences learn about Africa and Africans from their experience at the museum’s African art gallery. Such studies can only be successfully conducted through the frameworks of post-colonial theory and critical multiculturalism. Additionally, museum educators and curators should pursue opportunities to expand the African art gallery to be more reflective of the truths of Africa’s aesthetic histories and contemporary practices. An exemplary expansion of the African art gallery is the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art (NMAFA). While most museum collections and exhibitions of African art continue to center on traditional African art, the Smithsonian’s NMAFA incorporates modern and contemporary African art (Kasfir, 2002). The exhibitions at the NMAFA present traditional, modern, and contemporary African art; thereby disrupting the one tribe aesthetic of African art. The NMAFA is distinctive in its practice of stimulating and expanding the discourse of African aesthetics beyond the traditional canon. Such progressive practices by the NMAFA should be a model to other art museums with collections of traditional African art.

My research demonstrates that providing knowledge on modern and contemporary African art largely subverts perceptions of African aesthetics as fixed in primitivism and expands understanding of the multiplicities of African aesthetics. In Phase III of my research, 8 out of 10 of participants demonstrated positive changes in their perceptions of African aesthetics after engaging with histories of modern and contemporary African art in my transformative learning classroom. As a result, with their Phase III assignments, these students proposed exhibitions for a DFW museum’s African art gallery that disrupted traditional African art. Through their
exhibitions, students incorporated modern and contemporary African art with the goal fostering positive changes in museum visitors’ perceptions of African aesthetics.

My students’ approach in disrupting the African art gallery can be adopted by museum curators and educators. Museum curators and educators can create opportunities to foster positive social transformations through exhibitions and education programs. I encourage museum curators and educators to expand the dialogue on African aesthetics by accessing learning resources such as the journals and textbooks (mentioned earlier) that attend to African art histories. Through these resources, museum curators and educators can find ways to structure African art exhibitions and programs that convey multiple narratives of Africa. Furthermore, art museums can collaborate with members of the countries represented to plan exhibitions and related programs, and also collaborate with contemporary African artists for exhibitions. I envision installations such as; *Scramble for Africa*, 2003 by Yinka Shonibare (Nigeria) or *United Nations–Souvenir Palace*, 2010 by Meschac Gaba (Ghana) at the center of a museum’s African art gallery juxtaposed with the current traditional exhibition. I envision paintings such as; *Lawyer*, 1920s, by Aina Onabolu (Nigeria), *In the Classroom*, 1955 by Gazbia Sirry (Egypt), *Self-Portrait of Suffering*, 1961 by Ibrahim El-Salahi (Sudan), *Landscape*, 1963 by Gladys Mguulandlu (South Africa), and *Backlash Blues*, 2004 by Wangechi Mutu (Kenya) incorporated within a museum’s African art gallery. I consider such juxtapositions as disruptions to the tribal fixity of African aesthetics, and I wonder what new experiences could emerge from museum visitors’ encounters. I encourage museum curators and educators to structure disruption exhibitions on African art for their audiences, and enquire: What types of discussions could emerge as museum visitors engage with such exhibitions? How could such exhibitions challenge visitors to reconsider and expand their perceptions of Africa and African aesthetics? Ultimately,
I encourage museum curators and educators to evaluate the African art gallery, considering how to transcend the singular narrative of Africa as the Other; and activate a space that fosters meaningful dialog and inquiry on the multiple social, political, cultural, aesthetic histories, and the contemporary realities of Africa.

Art Education

Perhaps the most important principle that the contemporary Left can glean from the theory of hegemony is that an old order cannot be made to vanish simply by pointing out its evils, any more than a new order can be brought into existence by pointing out its virtues… It is not enough for workers to gripe about the boss. They must make themselves better than the boss, not only in their moral conduct, but also in their technical know-how (Bates, 1975, p. 365).

When I first encountered this statement during my literature review research, I felt defeated. I wondered how I could possibly fight against discourse. I asked myself, “What exactly could I do to change perspectives of African aesthetics, given that art history and Western art museums are dominated by Western discourse? Do I have the ability to foster real positive changes in people’s perceptions?” These questions mattered to me because the objective of my research was not to simply “point out the evils” of African art discourse, but to problem-solve perceptions of the Other communicated through African art. Therefore, through my research, I analyzed how disrupting the canon of African art through transformative learning could influence students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. My findings demonstrated that through my transformative learning classroom 80% of my participants’ perceptions of African aesthetics progressed towards positive transformations. As an art educator in an art education classroom setting, I was able to successfully structure my course to create opportunities for my
students to positively change their perceptions of African aesthetics. The implications of my research are therefore central to the field of Art Education and to art educators.

Assuming my theoretical frameworks (post-colonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism), education is a discursive practice whereby power is reproduced (Powers, 2007; Wodak 2001) and schools are sites where intellectuals (deputies of hegemony) are developed (Gramsci, 2005). Education is not free of discourse; it is an instrument in which power is subtly enacted, reproduced and normalized (Foucault, 1980; Powers, 2007). The obscured functioning of discourse in art education authenticates the hegemonic knowledge it produces. Multicultural art education therefore loses sight of its purpose, and instead develops into a strategy of racial othering (Chin, 2011; Desai, 2005; Jay, 2003). Granted that African art history and art museum exhibitions of African art inform art education on African art, teachings of African art are basically teachings about Africa and African aesthetics as the Other. Therefore, collective disruptions in art education practices, such as the one in my research are necessary to persist until the scholarship of African art is reconstructed to reflect the multiple realities of Africa’s art histories.

Best Practices

While I believe that education is structured by discourse to maintain discourse, education can also provide opportunities for critical exploration and re-contextualization of discourse (Burdick, & Sandlin, 2010). Scholars (Adejumo, 2002; Alfredson, & Desai, 2012; Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Banks, 1993; Chin, 2011; Desai, 2005; Gay, 2002; Jay, 2003; Milner et al., 2003; Stuhr, 1994) have advocated for educational approaches that foster equitable social change in curricula, in educational institutions, and in society as a whole. Art educators at all levels (K-12 and higher education) should self-evaluate on how othering knowledge is presented,
normalized, and communicated to their students through the African art they teach, and through their course material as a whole. In evaluating our art education practice we should seek to answer: Does the African art we make available to our students reflect the multiple realities of Africa, or does it tell a single narrative of Africa as fixed in one tribal culture? Does our practice present Africa and other non-Western regions as the Other of the West? What understandings are our students retaining about the people and places represented by the art and art histories we teach? Additionally, art educators should pursue opportunities to expand African art to be more reflective of Africa’s art histories and contemporary practices. For these actions to meaningfully occur it is essential for art educators to adopt post-colonial theory and critical multiculturalism as frameworks in approaching African art. These critical theory frameworks are necessary for art educators’ awareness of the hegemony in African art; and also for art educators to understand the necessity of attending to histories of power structures in their education practices. Moreover, the adoption of these critical theories by art educators is fundamental for them to practice equitable multicultural art education.

K-12 Art Teachers

Art activities relative to African art should not be exclusive to tribal objects that tell a single narrative and misrepresents Africa. Exploration of African aesthetics should transcend masks, animals, and tribal objects; and rather engage students in identifying modern and contemporary African artists and their individual practices. I encourage K-12 art teachers to access the texts on modern and contemporary African art (mentioned earlier) as resources for their teachings and lesson plans on African art. These texts present narratives of many African artists and their artworks ranging from paintings, sculptures, installations, photography, mixed media, performance, and crafts. The texts: *African art now: Masterpieces from the Jean Pigozzi*
collection (Magnin, & Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2005), and Angaza Afrika: African art now (Spring, 2008) are accessible resources for art teachers to learn about the art practices of a variety of African artists. With these resources, art teachers can create art activities and art projects influenced by the themes and artworks of African artists; thereby moving beyond the typical “African Masks” and “African Animals” art projects. For example, an art activity relative to African art can be inspired by Ghanaian artist El Anatsui’s approach of recycling trashed metal objects into sculptural installations. Benin artist can inspire another art activity, Meschec Gaba’s sugar cities; whereby he constructs installations of imaginary cities that unite landmarks from different global cities using sugar. Depending on the grade level, lesson plans can expand to attend to the big themes and messages of the artist’s work, or simply focus on art-making activities inspired by the artist’s work. In any case, introducing students to African artists and their artworks is in fact actions that subvert the single narrative of African art as fixed in tribal aesthetics. I encourage K-12 art teachers to regularly search for learning resources beyond the canon of art history textbooks and expose their students to art histories and artworks from multiple global perspectives. It is important for students of all ages to experience the richness and multiplicities of art productions in different nations, and to explore the different and common themes of global artists. Moreover, providing resources on diverse artists allows for students of diverse backgrounds to identify with multiple artists and artworks.

Art Educations in Studio Art

The implication of my research is also critical to educators of studio art practice at the undergraduate and graduate level. While the focus in studio art is largely on art-making, the background knowledge of art history and contemporary art practice is equally relevant to students’ art-making process. During students’ studio practice education, the artworks and art
practices of modern and contemporary artists are regularly referenced in class and in studio critiques. Moreover, students engage with theories associated with art movements relative to social, political, and cultural histories. These practices are necessary for students’ understandings of historical progressions in art practice and their familiarity with current trends and theories in the contemporary art realm. However, given that art history is dominantly Western centered, the theories, art movements, and artists that are introduced to students are largely Western centered. I therefore encourage Fine Arts programs (BFA and MFA) to continuously expand beyond the canon and engage students in diverse art histories, and global modern and contemporary artists that are largely unknown.

It was during my MFA experience when I realized that I did not know of any modern African artist and I was only aware of a few contemporary African artists. My lack of knowledge was a result of the fact that non-Western modern and contemporary art history was largely missing from my Western art education. I believe my Western art education is similar to many other MFA art professionals with Western art education backgrounds. This gap in art education could explain why some of my MFA faculty, without background understandings of modern and contemporary African art, expected my artworks to look more “African.” Through the process of doing this research on African art discourse, I am better able to make sense of my MFA experience. Therefore, my suggestion for studio art educators who are not versed in global modernisms and global contemporary art is to search for resources that attend to these histories. Studio art educators do not need to be experts in the arts of all regions, but should have resources that they can refer to students based on the student’s conceptual interest and art practice. The resources can include textbooks, exhibition catalogs, journal articles, and websites. These resources can be shared with students, for them to explore and find influences from artists and art
histories they had not been previewed to. For example, an MFA student from India could be exploring a concept similar to an artist’s practice in Sudan, and could encounter the artist’s work from a textbook or website link shared by their instructor. In my case, I wish my MFA instructors, instead of having othering expectations of my work, could have directed me to resources on modern and contemporary African art, or directed me (as some of them did) to contemporary artists whose works may be of interest to me based on my practice. My main point is that studio educators should access and familiarize themselves with resources on global art histories and artists, and incorporate the resources into their students’ learning experience.

*Higher Education Art Educators*

I encourage art educators in higher education to approach art education as a practice of resistance and disruption of hegemonic discourses. Resistance and disruption of discourse involves exploring and exposing abusive practices of power in education. Such activism approach in education should transcend exposing oppression by creating avenues for social transformations. A transformative learning approach to teaching can be challenging, yet valuable in fostering positive social transformations (Ettling, 2012; Taylor, 2008). Taylor (2008) explains that transformative learning is a strategic act of activism that aims to encourage cross-cultural understandings and promote equity by “giving voice to the historically silenced” (p. 9). Likewise, my transformative learning action research gives voice to marginalized histories of modern and contemporary African art and African artists. My research demonstrates how art education grounded in critical theory and transformative learning subverted African art as the discourse of the Other, developed students’ understandings of the multiple realities of Africa and African aesthetics, and encouraged positive transformations in students’ perceptions of African aesthetics.
I believe my approach in conducting this research is transferable to other art educators in higher education who aim for more equitable multicultural art education in their classrooms. I encourage art educators to search for learning resources beyond the canon of art history textbooks and expose their students to art histories and critical theories from multiple cultural perspectives. Art educators should access articles on African art in critical journals such as: *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art*, and *Third Text*, and incorporate into their course readings. Moreover, art educators should access African art histories that have been excluded from art history through resources as the textbooks on modern and contemporary African art mentioned earlier. Additionally, art educators can find more resources from the Smithsonian Libraries’ reading list on [Modern African Art](#). Art educators should use these resources to introduce their students to African artists, their diverse practices, and African art histories and theories that are largely unknown. Students should understand that groups of people, cultures, or regions cannot be identified exclusively by a single aesthetic or narrative. Art educators should encourage students to re-examine their normalized assumptions, and adopt understandings of multiple truths respective to multiple cultural perspectives.

In my practice of teaching art education courses, I am attentive to providing art histories and artists from multiple cultural perspectives for my students’ learning. The structure of my fall 2012 Global Aesthetics course (at University of North Texas) for pre-service art teachers is exemplary of my teaching approach. The course explored concepts of art aesthetics in the global realm, considering how it functions in Asian, Latin American, African, Middle Eastern, and Western contexts. The textbook for the course was: Joo, E., Keehn, J., & Ham-Roberts, J. (Eds.). (2011) *Rethinking Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education*. New York: Routledge. This text is an excellent resource for learning about the artworks and practices of
artists from all over the world. The text features over 50 artists, essays from scholars, and art lesson plans inspired by social, cultural, and political concepts relative to artists’ practice. Through this text, my students and I were able to focus on multiple artists and discuss their practice relative to their background and the concepts they explore in their practice. I started the course by evaluating my students’ general understandings of global arts; given that they were art education majors with background knowledge of art history. On the first day of class, I asked students how many non-Western modern or contemporary artists they knew. Not surprisingly, students could not name any; aside from one student who mentioned Japanese artist Takashi Murakami. During that same class, I projected the artworks of a few international artists without listing their names; I prompted students to critique the artworks, and guess the country where the artist may be from. Two of the artworks we looked at included: a painting, Stadia II, 2004 by Ethiopian artist, Julie Mehretu; and a photograph from Indian artist, Shilpa Gupta’s 2009 performance series, Don’t See Don’t Hear Don’t Speak. After discussing these works, I revealed the names of the artists and their backgrounds. I then asked students if Gupta’s performance art is Asian art and if Mehretu’s painting is African art. This question ignited interesting discussions in which students mostly explained that these artworks are not what they would consider as African or Asian art based on their art education. I did this activity to begin the process of disrupting my students’ perceptions of non-Western aesthetics and encouraging them to rethink their understandings. I carried this approach throughout the semester as we studied the artworks of artists in the textbook, Rethinking Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education. In addition to this text, students read and led classroom presentations and discussion on the essays including:


These essays attend to different global perspectives and critical theories relative to global aesthetics. These are resources that I searched for to incorporate into my course curriculum. When I was assigned the course, I looked at the previous syllabus and realized that it reflected a Western perspective on global aesthetics. The textbooks were the usual art history textbooks that showed progression in Western art, while non-Western art remained fixed in traditional cultural artifacts. I therefore changed the textbook for the course and included articles that attend to histories and theories respective to global regions and not from a singular perspective. In the process of searching for these resources, I was able to expand my knowledge on global studies.
on aesthetics and the art practices of international artists. My emphasis here is that art educators
do not need to be experts in all global perspectives on aesthetics; nonetheless, they can access the
works of multiple scholars and incorporate into their art education courses.

Another approach I used to expand my students’ understandings of global aesthetics was
by structuring an assignment for students to research art museums and cultural centers in
different countries. One of the assignments for my Global Aesthetics course was titled Advocate
for an Art Institution. Student groups were assigned an art institution to research, study their
mission, programs, exhibitions, artists, and activities, and present to the class as representatives
of the institution. Some of the art institutions assigned to students included: New Museum,
United States; Malba: Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Argentina; Center for
Contemporary Art, Nigeria; National Gallery of Modern Art, India; Mori Art Museum, Japan;
Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar; The Centre Pompidou, France. I prompted
students to dress professional, present themselves as ambassadors for their institution, and
educate the class as to how their institution is important and relevant to global aesthetics. In
presenting as ambassadors, students had to take ownership; rather than presenting about others,
they presented about themselves in the role of others. I did so intentionally, as I have observed
through teaching, that role-play is an effective strategy to motivate students to actively engage in
learning and understanding different perspectives. My goal with this assignment was to
encourage my students, who were preserve art teachers, to expand their future teachings beyond
the dominant art textbooks, and find resources through websites that reflect global artists and
global aesthetics from multiple perspectives. Moreover, I wanted my students to see the modern
arts and contemporary art practices in different countries and understand that non-Western
cultures are not fixed in unchanging aesthetics as reflected in dominant art history textbooks and in art museums.

I structured the final assignment for the course to assess my students’ understandings of global aesthetics. The project for the final assignment instructed students to create a lesson plan, exhibition guide, art event program, or art blog inspired by global aesthetics. In addition, students wrote a 5 page paper about their project and answered the following questions: What is your philosophy of global aesthetics relative to K-12 art education? How will your understanding of global aesthetics influence your approach to teaching art? How and why is your project relevant to K-12 art education? How does your project relate to global aesthetics?

Students presented their project in class, and exchanged ideas with their peers. As I observed students’ presentations and graded their final assignments, I was pleased to learn how much they appreciated the new knowledge and resources they had not had before.

My goal in engaging my students with global art resources was for them to find ways to incorporate global resources into their future art classroom. I did not simply hope for this outcome, I addressed it in class. I encouraged students to be attentive to how they approach teaching about global arts and cultures. In discussing the readings along with the artworks of international artists, we exchanged ideas about stereotypes in art, marginalized art histories, power and representation in art and in museums, and equitable multicultural practices in art education. I believe this approach; in not only including diverse recourses, but also attending to the relative critical theories is effective in subverting hegemony and fostering equitable multicultural art education.

While I have expanded on my Global Aesthetics course, I approach every course and my praxis with the principle of disrupting the norms by expanding the resources and learnings in art
education to be more reflective of the multiple realities of art histories, theories, and art practices. The learning resources art educators provide to learners informs learners’ perceptions of people, places, ideas and histories. I believe that art educators have the moral and intellectual responsibility to counter normalized hegemonic practices in art education. Art educators can take immediate steps to change how they approach and share knowledge relative to African art, and global arts in general. I believe this can be done effectively by adopting the frameworks of post-colonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism to provide inclusive learning resources for a more equitable art education curriculum. I encourage art educators to continuously subvert hegemonic discourses in art education and create opportunities that foster positive transformative learning experiences for their students, and positive social changes in society.

Conclusion

My journey in conducting this research on African art discourse was initiated during my experience as a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) student specializing in painting from 2007-2009. At that time, I struggled with understanding my identity as a Cameroonian and an American artist. Many of the dialogues that emerged during studio critiques of my paintings largely centered on interpreting my artworks with ideas relative to my race as a black woman and my culture as African woman. While I was not surprised that such ideas could emerge, given that I am a black African woman; I was disappointed that at a graduate academic setting the dialogues mostly did not transcend beyond this. Especially since I was not making artworks about by race, gender or “African culture,” rather about by my personal narratives and ideas expressed through images and abstract forms. My voice on the intentions of my artworks was continuously silenced by
voices that prescribed what my artworks should look like, and the issues it should attend to. I experienced art critiques with faculty whereby direct and indirect suggestions were made for my paintings to be more reflective of my African culture and my race. Apparently that would have made my artworks more meaningful and relevant. I was mostly troubled by the notion that my artworks needed to relate to my race and culture, as this was not expected from the students in the program. The fact that I was the only black student in the program at that time (2007-2008 academic year) became more obvious to me. It was as though I, and my artworks had to represent my race and African culture; which was strange to me, as I could not possibly represent my immediate family, let alone an entire race and continent. As I struggled with these experiences, I became curious about contemporary African art. I realized that I could not list up to 5 African artists after many years of taking art history, studio art, and art education classes; but I had knowledge of an abundance of Western artists. I also started paying attention to the African art galleries in art museums and art history textbooks with chapters on African art. I questioned why the African art galleries in art museums and African art in art history textbooks only portrayed artifacts from African tribes, and did not show artworks by African artists. For the most part, my MFA experience incited my awareness that there was a major problem with the scholarship of African art.

I decided to pursue a PhD in art education to make sense of my identity as an African artist, to research the gaps in African art scholarship, investigate the problems I had identified and seek for solutions. Thus, my research studied the problem of African art discourse and facilitated a problem solving action with the aim to transform my students’ perceptions of African aesthetics. In conducting this research, I did not assume that my students had negative perceptions about African aesthetics. My claim was, and still is that African art, as evident in
many Western art museums’ African art gallery and in art history is an oppressive discourse that communicates knowledge of Africa and African aesthetics as the primitive Other of the West. Therefore, in diagnosing this problem, Phase I of this research investigated my students’ perceptions of African art at a DFW Art Museum, and the findings confirmed their perceptions of African aesthetics as the Other. As a problem-solving solution, Phase II of this research disrupted African art discourse at the museum through my transformative learning classroom. In doing the disruption, I was enquiring; if the frame of reference of African art were changed through teaching strategies, how could that influence students’ perceptions of African aesthetics? I wondered if my students would accept the validity of the African art histories I introduced in class, or discount it, given that it is not the dominant knowledge of African art. My concerns were in fact a power struggle between my transformative learning classroom as the oppositional instrument to the dominance of the art museum. Therefore, in Phase III, I analyzed how my transformative teaching strategies and the resources I made available for my students were effective in encouraging them to reconsider the dominant knowledge of African art at the museum. My goal was for my students to self-reflect on how the African art at the art museum informed their othering perceptions, in effect, make positive changes of those perceptions.

In planning my research and transformative learning classroom, I was aware that I could not make my students transform their perceptions. Nonetheless, I could intentionally create learning opportunities to foster students’ critical self-evaluation and transformation. While I was ambitious and hopeful about my transformative learning classroom, I expected to encounter resistance from students; I also did not expect complete transformations. I aimed to encourage students to question their perceptions and become more aware of the frames of reference that influence their normalized othering of African aesthetics. I hoped that through students’ learning
experience in my classroom they would positively transform their perceptions of African aesthetics. The results of my data interpretation of the 10 participants of this study demonstrate that through my transformative learning classroom disruption of African art discourse, 5 students were most transformed, 3 students were partially transformed, and 2 students were least transformed. I believe these results demonstrate significant success in disrupting African art discourse and subverting normalized perceptions African aesthetics as the primitive Other. Moreover it demonstrates that 80% of my participants, through their experience of my classroom, were able to question normalized dominant knowledge, consider marginalized knowledge, and make decisions in the direction of more equitable perceptions and actions. I consider any positive changes in my students’ perceptions through my teachings as a successful resistance to discourse—a successful subversion of hegemony.

This research process on African art discourse has been a life changing experience for me as an individual, as an artist, art educator, and researcher. I learned that the problems I had identified as an MFA student are complex and profoundly ingrained in histories of power structures that normalize our everyday perceptions of people, places, and ideas. This understanding, for me, was possible through my embrace of post-colonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism as my theoretical lens in doing this research. These critical theory frameworks are necessary in order to conceptualize the problems of African art, and essential to problem-solving studies relative to African art history and contemporary practices of African art in Western museums and Western art education.
Contribution of Research

Within the canon of Western art history, art museums, and art education, African art is represented dominantly by tribal African artifacts; whereas histories of modern and contemporary African art and African artists are largely excluded. This exclusion has been normalized such that the hegemony in the scholarship of African art is largely unrecognized by practitioners, and audiences. Therefore, if practitioners are oblivious to the hegemony in their practice, they are less likely to make meaningful changes; thus, they function in maintaining hegemonic discourses. This research provides critical contributions to the fields of art history, art museums, and art education (studio art, K-12 and higher education). This action research firstly diagnosis the hegemonic nature of African art dominant in art history, museum exhibitions, and art education. The study provides evidence of the othering knowledge that is communicated to an audience about Africa and Africans through African art. As a problem-solving solution, the research elaborates on a counter hegemonic disruption of African art discourse, and the resulting positive outcomes. The study provides implications for practitioners in art history, art museums, and art education to evaluate their practice relative to African art through the frameworks of post-colonial theory and critical multiculturalism, and foster more equitable multicultural art education.

The findings of Phase I of this research contribute by providing evidence of the knowledge that an audience (a group of university students) received and retained from their learning experience of African art in an art museum. The findings demonstrate that the canon of African art, as evident in art museums, art history, and art education communicate hegemonic knowledge of Africa the Other. By evidencing the hegemony in African art, this research provides practitioners the opportunity to evaluate forms of othering in their practice relative to
African aesthetics. I believe art historians, museum curators and educators, and art educators whose practice reference only tribal African aesthetics do not intend to perpetuate Western hegemony. Therefore, it is critical for these practitioners to understand how hegemony functions in their practice. This research emphasizes the necessity for these practitioners to adopt post-colonial theory and theories in critical multiculturalism as frameworks to re-conceptualize African art history, African art exhibitions and education on African art.

This research further contributes by providing practitioners with practical methods in which they can meaningfully break the boundaries of the canon, counter hegemony, and expand the scholarship of African art. Phase II of this research elaborates on my intervention approach of disrupting African art discourse through my transformative learning classroom. Phase II demonstrates practical ways in which art educators can introduce students to critical theories and art histories that have been excluded from the canon of art education. Moreover, Phase II conveys teaching strategies to engage students in critical thinking, group deliberations and strategies to invoke students’ self-reflection on the frames of reverence that inform their othering perceptions. Phase II provides excluded histories of African art and African artists that contribute to the gaps in African art history, African art museum exhibitions, art education on African art, and studio art knowledge of contemporary African artists. Phase II critically attends to the role of discourse in structuring and maintaining these exclusions in the scholarship of African art. The activities, occurrences, and revelations in Phase II demonstrate the importance of addressing histories of power structures in multicultural art education. This study emphasizes art education that addresses power in a manner that compels learners to position themselves with the theories and histories, and self-reflect by questioning their normalized perceptions informed by their frames of reference. Phase II ultimately provides activism approaches in art education.
that can subvert hegemony, provide voice to the silenced, and provide meaningful transformative learning. The value of this approach in art education transcends the classroom and into the community, hence, it is activism for a more equitable society.

The findings in Phase III of this research contribute by demonstrating the positive outcomes that resulted from my transformative learning classroom disruption of African art discourse. The findings convey positive transformations in 80% of participants’ perceptions of African aesthetics. Participants’ othering perceptions of African aesthetics were changed to understandings of the diversities of Africa and African aesthetics. This transformation is valuable to subverting the hegemony of African art, as it demonstrates that 80% of participants no longer identified African art as fixed in primitivism. Moreover, participants largely identified the power structures that informed their othering perceptions and were able to critically self-reflect and positively change their perceptions. For some participants, their experience transcended the classroom, and encouraged them to think more critically about concepts they readily accept as truth. The findings in Phase III demonstrate to practitioners the significant benefits of creating opportunities to subvert hegemony and foster positive social outcomes.

In successfully disrupting African art discourse, and fostering positive outcomes in perceptions of African aesthetics, my research contributes to advancements in re-conceptualizing and re-constructing art history, art museums, and art education to be more equitably inclusive of multicultural artists and art histories from multiple cultural perspectives. When I started this research, I was uncertain about my students attaining meaningful transformations in their perceptions. However, I approached the opportunity with the hope that in engaging my students in a transformative learning classroom; whereby we collectively problem-solve African art discourse, and self-identify within the problems; students would be encouraged take positive
actions. I was pleasantly surprised to see that not only did most of the participants make positive transformations; some of them went further through their Phase III assignment by advocating for others (museum visitors) to transform their perceptions of African aesthetics. I believe that one of the valuable messages of my research is that learners are mostly receptive to new concepts from multiple cultural perspectives; when they are given the opportunity and time to closely engage with, exchange inputs, and self-situate themselves within the concepts. I therefore encourage art historians, museum curators and educators, and art educators to actively create opportunities for their audience and learners to engage with new knowledge from multiple cultural perspectives. As practitioners of providing knowledge about people, places, and ideas through art, we are responsible to uphold the integrity of our practice by providing frames of reference that dismantle hegemony and cultivate a more equitable multicultural society.

Future Research Initiatives

The discourse of the Other is maintained through reproductions and repetitions of representations of the Other as truth (Cain, 2011; Chin, 2011; Bhabha, 1983; Said, 1994). Therefore, to subvert African art as the discourse of the Other, similar strategies must be applied; repetitions of disruptions of African art discourse are therefore imperative. Repetitions of excluded African art histories and representations of modern and contemporary African art are necessary for further research on African art. My future studies on African art will center on repetitions of counter hegemonic education and exhibitions of African art. I intend to conduct critical studies that aim to provide knowledge of modern and contemporary African art readily accessible to art educators. I believe art educators at all levels can certainly benefit from having
more access to resources on histories of African art that are excluded from the dominant art history books.

In the spring 2014 semester, I taught a course (at the University of North Texas) titled, *Centering on the Margins: Modern to Contemporary Art in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East*. The students in this art education course were all pre-service art teachers. One of their assignments involved researching a modern or contemporary African artist, and creating a lesson plan for a specific K-12 grade relative to the artist’s work. Students’ lesson plans were innovative and far removed from the usual African mask activity. Through this assignment, students learned about multiple African art forms, African artists, and African art histories that they had not encountered before in their art education. Moreover, through their assignment, students were able to approach African art through the artworks of different artists and not by one style. I believe this class assignment can be developed into future studies with practicing art educators. With this approach my inquiries will include: How does a disruption of African art discourse influence art teachers’ approach in teaching African art? What types of art lessons on African art can art teachers created from the artworks of modern and contemporary African artists? How can students learn about contemporary social, cultural, and political experiences in Africa through contemporary African art? These inquiries aim to transform perceptions of the single tribal African art aesthetics by normalizing the multiple forms of African aesthetics. Further research on these inquiries function as repetitions of disrupting the discourse of African art as the fixed Other, by providing access to the excluded histories of African art.

The art museum is another site where further research can be conducted to disrupt African discourse. In Phase III of this research, my students prepared a proposal for curating the museum’s African art gallery through their assignment (Curatorial Intern Part B: Exhibition
Proposal for the Museum). With this assignment, some students juxtaposed modern and contemporary African art with traditional African art, and some students included only modern and contemporary African art in their exhibition. These students’ proposed exhibitions were essentially disruptions to the dominant exhibition of African art in art museums. In disrupting the fixity of the African art gallery, students were challenging museum visitors and expanding the dialogue on African aesthetics. I believe this assignment can be furthered into research projects in the African art gallery in art museums. With this approach my inquiries will include:

How does a disruption of the African art gallery in an art museum influence the discourse of African art in the gallery space? How will museum audiences respond to encountering modern and contemporary African art in the African art gallery? How could such disruptive encounters influence museum visitors’ perceptions of African aesthetics? The aim of these inquiries is to disrupt the single tribal African art aesthetic through normalizing exhibitions of modern and contemporary African in the African art gallery. Moreover, these inquires aim to encourage museum visitors to reflect on their perceptions of African aesthetics, and expand their understandings of the multiplicities of African art.

My research objectives are essentially in opposition of hegemonic discourses in art education. Granted that African art discourse is maintained through repetitions and normalizations of Africa as the Other, in order to subvert such discourse, it is necessary to repeat counter hegemonic education of African art. The goal of my future research is to continuously disrupt African art as a problematic frame of reference that communicates Africa and African aesthetics as the primitive Other of the West. In my pursuit of this goal, it is necessity for me to continuously create learning opportunities that normalize modern and contemporary African art histories; making them readily accessible to art educators. Ultimately, the disruptions of African
art discourse must persist until the scholarship of African art reflects the reality of African art histories and contemporary practices.
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