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SUPERMARKET AS A SITE OF SPECTACUL-ART PEDAGOGY

A Dissertation in
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by

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ABSTRACT

In 1967, French cultural theorist and situationist Guy Debord published his work, *The Society of the Spectacle*, in which he asserted that spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images (Debord, 1994, p.12). Debord's prophetic assertion has been realized in today's society due to the improvement of technology and the instantaneity of Internet-based activities. No matter what the form of visual culture, we project our desires on it, withdraw fragments of desire from it, and even map our understandings of people and things through our readings of it. It is in our gazing, reading, interpreting, and even our bodily encounters such as touching, smelling, and tasting the texts of visual culture that the social relations of class, gender, race, and ethnicity are embodied.

The role of Wegmans Food Markets as embodied spectacle was almost equally important to me as that of the graduate school during my six years of graduate student life at State College, Pennsylvania. To paraphrase Austrian coffeehouse poet, Peter Altenberg's words, if I am not at home or on campus, I am at Wegmans or on my way to it. The supermarket, a *seemingly ordinary* place, is in fact a site where the complicated and subtle operations of the consumerism spectacle lurk. To borrow Debord's concepts of the spectacle, I deem that the contemporary spectacle of Wegmans sophisticatedly manipulates visual culture and corporeal experiences to embody a worldview which mediates our relationships with others. Knowledge within this worldview endorses the

authenticity of facts and realities re-presented in the spectacle. Situated in the nexus of visual culture and contemporary feminist studies, this research thus aims to comb the twisted roots and intricate gnarls of visual culture and to examine through a feminist methodological lens how knowledge and experience are structured in this supermarket spectacle.

The flâneuse, inspired by Walter Benjamin's flâneur, is the feminist methodological device of this research. Her perspective, which is a critical and gendered standpoint of a *cultural female Other*, is applied here in order to examine this specific everyday place. In addition, the flâneuse's corporeal experiences are brought into my field research which investigates the dynamic interactions between spectacul-art (pleasant/tasteful visual culture and spectacular/lived performances) and spectator-consumers. In so doing, this research aims to answer the following questions: How does the supermarket spectacle as embodied in Wegmans make spectators consumers? How are consumers tamed by the supermarket spectacle and urged to take actions? What kind of knowledge and experiences are constructed in the supermarket spectacle through visual culture? How does the supermarket spectacle deepen learning in accordance with its ideology through exhibition strategies?

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This is a research journey of boundary-crossing. By boundary-crossing, I meant to cross boundaries drawn by politics, geography, academic disciplines, fields of study, and theories. I came to the Pennsylvania State University in the fall of 2004. If not were this re-settlement, I would not be able to develop my criticality as a *cultural nomad*. Locating myself in a different cultural context enables me to see the familiar from the unfamiliar, and to encounter the unfamiliar with an open mind. And if not were this dual-title degree program, I would never be able to understand that duality could be a choice reflecting personal identity, research, scholarship and life style. Even though I used to identify myself as an interdisciplinary person whose academic background came from various fields of study, I had never done two fields of study simultaneously. I had been told that one could have only one identity. One is either an artist or an educator, an observer or a participant, a Taiwanese or an American. Rarely are we given the choice of holding dual or multiple identities. Conducting this research and being on this dual-title graduate program track certainly liberated myself from self-limiting thoughts.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Visual Culture Matters

The flow of signs and images, which saturate the fabric of everyday life, is now such that sociologists refer to the societal turn toward the cultural, which is simultaneously a turn towards the visual. Paradigms include shopping malls, theme parks, advertising in all its forms, tourism, the Internet, and television...ordinary, everyday aesthetic experiences are more significant than experiences of high art in forming and informing one's identity and view of the world...the dynamics driving the proliferation of everyday aesthetic experiences will only increase indeed, they are set to increase manifold. (Duncum, 1999)

In the past decade, the term *visual culture* has been intensely discussed across many disciplines and several fields of study. In a broad sense, visual culture is concerned with everything we see, have seen, or may visualize, or, it can be taken more specifically to refer to those items of culture whose visual appearance is an important feature of their being or their purpose (Jenks, 1995, p. 16). Visual culture thus refers to all aspects of culture that communicate through visual means (Visual Culture @ the UW-Madison, 2007).

Although the above definition may still be too far-reaching to define visual culture precisely, it is this inclusive scope that draws the attention of numerous academics and scholars into joining the debates on visual culture and accordingly makes visual culture a thriving field of study. Giving credence to visual culture shows that the analysis of discourses is no longer confined to written languages, but also comprises messages

conveyed through visual “texts” of culture such as images or visual spectacles. For instance, in introducing visual culture, Nicholas Mirzoeff (2002) argues that in a spectacular society, the connection between labor and capital is lost in the dazzle of the spectacle. Thus, we are now sold the sizzle rather than the steak, the image rather than the object. In another example, Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected the Governor of California, not because of his expertise of governance, but his image as the tough terminator in Hollywood action films. Schwarzenegger was known worldwide for his screen role and this fame, accumulated from visual culture, contributed to his transition from actor to politician in the recall election of 2003. When images now speak louder than words, visual culture becomes an instant medium for conveying ideas. This shift also suggests that in an age when seeing-comes-before-words, communication can be mostly accomplished through visual culture. To extend this point further, we are living in a society where visual culture can be commercially, politically, genderedly, and pedagogically manipulated to cultivate identities or form various communities.

Returning to the field of art education following two years of museological training, I was introduced to visual culture during my first year of doctoral study. That was the same year in which the National Art Education Association (NAEA) published the March issue of *Art Education*, entitled *Why Not Visual Culture?* In this issue, art educators such as Terry Barrett (2003), Paul Duncum (2003), Kerry Freedman (2003a), Karen Keifer-Boyd, Patricia M. Amburgy and Wanda B. Knight (2003) called on researchers and K-12 teachers to be aware of the pervasiveness of the visual culture we are situated within

(Villeneuve, 2003, p.5). Not until then did I realize that visual culture had become a common theme for investigation in the field of art education.

During the past decade, visual culture became a topic of interest to contemporary art educators (Duncum, 2001, Eisner, 2001, Gaudelius & Speirs, 2001, Duncum, 2002, & Freedman, 2003b). Many of them are now using the term visual culture, rather than art, to describe their central concern in the field of art education (Duncum, 2002). From fine art to popular culture, everything focusing on the aspect of culture and communicating through visual images can be inclusively located in this field of study. In addition, various theories and methodologies outside the field of art education, such as psycho-analytic, post-colonial, Marxist, and feminist theories as well as content and discourse analysis, semiology and so forth, are utilized to approach visual culture (Rose, 2001), making visual culture a thriving area of investigation. To borrow Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (2000) *rhizome*, which is the figuration used to visually describe theories and research that are anti-systemic, without center or any central organizing motif (O'Sullivan, 2007) and inviting multiplicities, the multiple entry and exit points of visual culture have made visual culture studies proliferate multi-dimensionally like the rhizome whose roots and shoots grow and entangle extensively, enabling individual nodal points to connect and to be connected to one another.

However, visual culture's attributes of openness, inclusiveness, and multiplicity are not always accepted by K-12 art educators, for it is not as structured as disciplined based art education. While many art educators are still questioning or concerned about the position, content, curriculum and side effects of visual culture inside the context of

school settings (Dorn, 2005; Hope, 2004), I want to take a step outside this context and approach visual culture from another viewpoint. That is to say, my visual culture research will be located in the context of non-school settings and reflect how certain knowledge of ideology is produced and acquired through the visual culture of the run-of-the-mill, ordinary experiences occurring on the go in everyday life.

Sociologist Mike Featherstone asserted in the early 1990s, that the aestheticization of everyday life referred to the rapid flow of signs and images that saturated the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society (Featherstone, 1991). This socio-cultural phenomenon has permeated all highly-industrialized societies. It is not just a part of everyday life; *it is everyday life* (Mirzoeff, 2002, p.1). We are immersed in visual culture such as advertising, apparel, artifacts, buildings, dance, furniture, landscape, movies, photographs, television, utensils, and websites, and our perceptions of ourselves and the external world are progressively constructed by visual culture. This overwhelming visual culture conveys messages which direct us how to act, what to desire, and suggests who we are to become. It is fair to argue that we are living in a society directed by visual culture and thus constantly negotiating with it.

A good lens to examine how visual culture ubiquitously exercises its impact on individuals is available in the visual culture of everyday life. Most Taiwanese people, for example, are able to access cable channels. About a hundred channels are available on television everyday, producing a heavy demand for programs, and food shows indicating *what to eat* and *where to eat* are usually rated among the most popular programs by audience. Audiences in Taiwan are thus provided with numerous food focused television

shows and are familiar with the storylines embedded in these shows. To make a show more authentic and persuasive, the producer usually includes footage that visually documents people consuming at a certain restaurant or eatery and having them critique the foods. An interesting point I have observed is that people being interviewed seem to be more and more familiar with the camera's gaze and know what and how to perform when they are situated in front of cameras. The way of speaking, the choice of descriptive words, the gesture of making recommendations, and so forth are repeatedly assimilated and then performed by these people in seemingly-impromptu vignettes on television. Therefore, no matter which food television show we are shown, we can certainly find interviewees in the show performing similarly to those featured in other food television shows. With the emergence of new media, people running into spot coverage or live shows on the streets fall into this protocol easily. Just as Andy Warhol asserted that everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes, people following the storyline embodied in everyday visual culture can thus pick up any default-setting roles preset by storyline writers and act as extras in every flashing moment.

From the Society of Spectacle to the Society of Extras

We live in a spectacular society, that is, our whole life is surrounded by an immense accumulation of spectacles. Things that were once directly lived are now lived by proxy. Once an experience is taken out of the real world it becomes a commodity. As a commodity the spectacular is developed to the detriment of the real. It becomes a substitute for experience (Law, 2001).

... after the consumer society, we can see the dawning of the society of extras where the individual develops as a part-time stand-in for freedom, singer and sealer of the public place (Bourriaud, 2002).

In 1967, French cultural theorist and situationist Guy Debord published his work, *The Society of the Spectacle*, in which he asserted that spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images (Debord, 1994, p.12). Debord's concepts of spectacle were deeply rooted in Karl Marx's idea of the commodity-form which was heavily analyzed in Marx's *Capital I*. Marx's original context stated that "capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things." Debord replaced the word "capital" with the word "spectacle," and subsequently developed his concepts based on those of Marx. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, he considered spectacle as the most highly developed form of a society based on commodity production and its corollary, the *fetishism of commodities*. For Debord, the rise of an image-dominated culture could be attributed to the fact that "the spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image." Capital accumulated beyond a certain threshold will be ultimately transformed into images¹.

To me, what we are seeing and experiencing today echoes Debord's concepts of the spectacle. Turning on televisions, we are able to watch world news encapsulated and compressed into one hour. In this specific hour, we *watch* news and do not *read* news. Watching images, photos and video clips of remote places transmitted from satellites makes us feel connected with certain events. We therefore first learn about the event from its fragmentary visual proxy, not from the whole event itself. These selected and edited

¹ Debord's 34th thesis, the spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image (1994, p.24) is believed to be inspired by Marx's *Capital I*, in which he wrote that "if, therefore, a certain degree of accumulation of capital appears as a condition of the specifically capitalist mode of production, the latter causes conversely an accelerated accumulation of capital (Marx & Engels, 2007, p.685)."

images, photos, and video clips carrying messages from some place or remote event materialize our relations with others in a short lived visual culture. More than that, we can update Debord's thesis as follows: *The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes visual culture*. For instance, Mirzoeff (2002) exemplifies the autonomous life of certain corporate logos like the Nike swoosh or McDonalds' Golden Arches which are inevitably legible in whatever context they are encountered. In the act of buying, we not only consider what we want but also the logo attached to the thing we buy². Therefore, we consume the essence of Starbucks rather than only the coffee just as we assume that we represent the Ralph Lauren lifestyle when we wear the Lauren clothing. The values of the visual culture (the logo) overlay the things we buy, and this has become a marketing strategy that we commonly encounter in everyday life. The moment we open our eyes, we are entering into a world which is constructed by accumulated visual culture. Browsing websites, doing e-transactions, reading newspapers in which images matter a lot, communicating via cellular phones, and walking into landmark buildings or flagship stores, we can hardly avoid invasions of visual culture. Even a clearly defined domain such as education is not outside of visual culture. Hence, we are able to access numerous videos, interactive games, edutainment software from the market, relating ourselves with visual culture as it mediates our connections with the external world. Additionally, visual culture constantly sends out messages which urgently instruct us about what to desire, what to do, and who to be. To borrow and alter a quote from cultural theorist Richard Leppert (1996), visual culture shows us *a* world but not *the*

² A more thorough description of how people consume logos in everyday consumption practice can be seen in Naomi Klein's *No Logo* published in 2000.

world itself. Visual culture is not the thing shown, but its representation thereof, representation (p. 3).

If, according to Debord and Leppert, the ultimate form of the spectacle is visual culture, then we are living in the spectacle in which our relationships with others are mediated by visual culture. That is to say, our preferences, judgments, and value systems are likely formed and developed by what we are seeing and what are shown to us in the everyday. We are not showing preferences, making judgments or developing value systems as individuals; rather, we are directed by visual culture to *perform* as ideal social beings as defined by the spectacle. In line with Debord and Leppert's viewpoints, I found myself to be pulled recently into green consumption. I have started replacing chemical cleaners used for kitchen and bathroom cleaning with those made of natural and organic ingredients. In doing so, I believe that I am bettering the environment and becoming a better global citizen even though this might not be proven in my lifetime. But why am I doing this and almost firmly believing that green consumption should be inserted into my consumption practice? I attribute this to the information I have garnered from everyday visual culture. Walking into a supermarket, turning on television, and surfing the Internet, I am constantly receiving information brought by visual culture, reminding me of the importance of environmental sustainability. It is fair to argue that I am living in a spectacle in which environmental sustainability is constructed as the most important ideology.

In the spectacle our lives are flooded with *facts* and *realities* constructed by visual culture. The spectacle skillfully uses facts to construct realities and then presents

ostensible realities to spectators. The ways we learn and the knowledge we acquire do not rely on our direct personal experiences of things or subject matter; rather, we learn things or acquire knowledge of certain subjects vicariously through in-direct experiences produced by visual culture. Visual culture thus creates dis-embodied ways of learning and knowing. Things that were once directly lived are now lived by proxy (Law, 2001), and our cognitive systems are repeatedly trained to *naturalize* these experiences. This type of learning process for knowledge acquisition is best described by Larry Law who stated that once an experience is taken out of the real world it becomes a commodity, and as a commodity the spectacular is developed to the detriment of the real. It becomes a substitute for experience (Law, 2001).

Debord was pessimistic about individual agency in a society dominated by the spectacle. He held that capitalism diverted and stifled creativity, dividing the social body into producers and consumers or actors and spectators. However, we may ask, do we, as spectators of visual culture (or participants in the spectacle), really function that passively today? Do not we at least have a chance to choose whether to participate or not? Does this passiveness simply differ by degree? Or, does this passiveness have anything to do with class, gender, race, or ethnicity? In his book *Relational Aesthetics*³, art critic Nicholas Bourriaud (2002, p.113) provides an alternative way to think about our agency in contemporary society. Bourriaud argues that since we have already entered into a further stage of spectacular development, in which we have shifted from a completely

³ According to Bourriaud (2002), relational aesthetics is an aesthetic theory probing into inter-human relations through art (p. 112). These inter-human relations, which are embodied in artistic practices, represent, produce, or prompt other relations between human beings and therefore reflect human relations and their social context. It is in this regard that Bourriaud argues relational art produces a model of sociability, transposing or conveying reality (p. 109).

passive and purely repetitive status to the minimum activity dictated to us by market forces (p. 113), we are seemingly “empowered” by market forces to act “actively.” For instance, we go to stadium based events with noise-makers, handmade posters or in costumes so that we might be photographed by the cameras on site. Or, we might be bloggers who share our diaries and post selected photographs on our blogs so that we can gain publicity and be famous in the domain of the Internet. Further, with today’s high-technology products such as camera phones or hidden recording devices, we can be walking into anyone’s media capture/photo op at any time, thus participating like minor actors or actresses in crowd scenes. All these exposures create windows of opportunity for ordinary people like us to experience celebrity-like fame, however transient. To grasp any available opportunity, one needs to be alert and well prepared in order to be familiar with and act in accordance with the possible storyline embedded within the opportunity. Therefore, we are summoned to embrace these opportunities and to perform as *extras*, submitting to the visual culture of the spectacle and having been regarded as its consumers. I side with Bourriaud and take his viewpoint on the activeness of spectators of visual culture. I will further deliberate my viewpoint in Chapter Five.

The Supermarket as Embodied Spectacle

I never make a trip to the United States without visiting a supermarket. To me they are more fascinating than any other fashion salon (Wallis Simpson, Duchess of Windsor, 1964).

With the supermarket as our temple and the singing commercial as our litany, are we likely to fire the world with an irresistible vision of America's exalted purpose and inspiring way of life? (Adlai Ewing Stevenson, 1960)

While the Duchess of Windsor was fascinated with twenty-first century supermarkets in the United States a few decades ago, I am fascinated with supermarkets such as Stew Leonard's, Wegmans Food Markets, or Whole Foods Market. For me, an outsider to American culture, those supermarkets serve not only as fashionable places for everyday grocery shopping, but also as multisensory places for me to experience the highly-developed consumer culture of the United States. It is through my embodied experiences inside supermarkets that I initially entered into the cultural life of the United States.

In conducting research about supermarkets and the visual, I have found myself not alone. Some pioneering artists in the 1960s had already located supermarkets in the context of visual arts, bringing American consumer culture into their artistic social practices. In 1964, artist Ben Birillo devised a Pop Art installation entitled *The American Supermarket* in which he turned a gallery space into a simulacrum of an ordinary supermarket of the time (Figure 1-1). In this exhibition, Pop Art artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, Robert Watts, and Tom Wesselman juxtaposed their works with real foods. Their appropriation of contemporary products and strategies of display and exchange were considered radical (Grunenberg, 2002) because the spatial boundary between an ordinary supermarket and a high end art gallery and the aesthetic boundary between everyday common objects and fine art works was broken. For instance, stacks of Campbell's soup cans signed by Andy Warhol were displayed next to Ballantine beer bottles (Figure 1-2); outside the supermarket-like gallery, was a hot-dog stand providing nourishment for viewers/shoppers; *Case of Eggs* (with Rainbow Wax

Eggs) by Robert Watts was displayed on an individual white pedestal that looked exactly like a showcase from a museum. This exhibition confused viewers/shoppers by blurring the line between art gallery and everyday supermarket. With the art dealer playing the role of grocer and art collectors playing the role of grocery shoppers, this happening-like event also converted everyday grocery shopping into a form of art and celebrated the spectacle of American consumption (Grunenberg, 2002).

From a historical point of view, the emergence of thriving and robust self-service supermarket chains in the 1950s and 1960s created huge demands for packaging. This was also the time in which advertisement on food packaging became bolder, using fewer words and larger, more colorful designs due to changes in advertising techniques and aesthetics. All these factors certainly made advertisements on food packaging into texts of visual culture to be read. They conveyed certain information or messages other than the food itself, thus making viewing or reading of packaging educational. Works of visual arts are social practices of contemporary artists; Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* can be read as one Pop artist's response to the frequent depictions of packaging and logos seen in the marketplace and the media, epitomizing the consumer society of the 1960s (Museum of Modern Art, 1999).

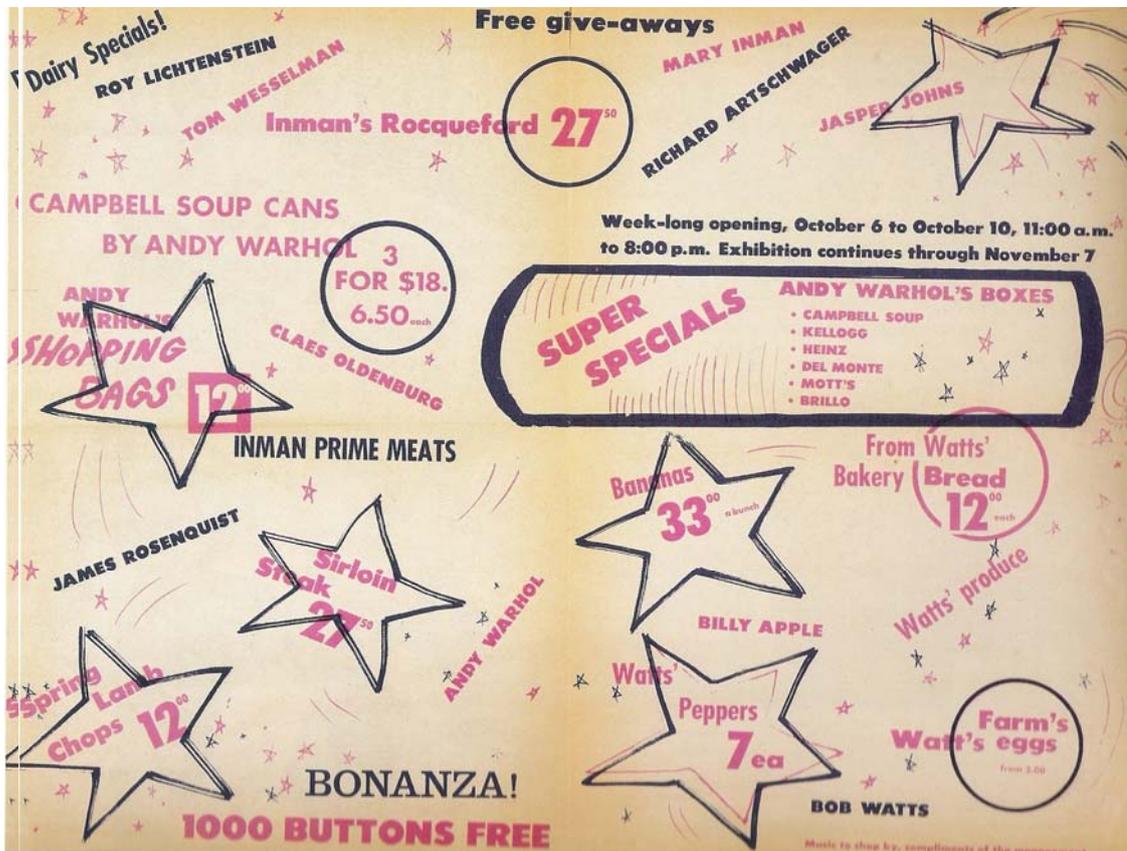


Figure 1-1 Invitation to Grand Opening of the American Supermarket New York, 1964



Figure 1-2
Andy Warhol at The American Supermarket Exhibition 1964 from *Life* magazine, 1964

In the art world, the Pop Art installation *The American Supermarket* celebrated consumer culture in ordinary supermarkets by utilizing massive ready-made objects which turned an art gallery into a representation of the everyday supermarket. In the everyday world we now have supermarkets endeavoring to cause themselves to be experienced as artistic spaces. Wegmans Food Markets in State College, Pennsylvania, is one of these environments. Walking into this Wegmans we immediately find ourselves immersed in overwhelming visual culture. Advertisements, billboards, flyers, signs and tags, along with produce and dairy foods, are so dominant that it is nearly impossible to ignore their existence. Those items once appropriated in *The American Supermarket* exhibition as Pop Art works now have replicas which are more accessible and affordable. From ceiling to floor, from the outside to the inside, Wegmans is filled with visual culture directing consumers' desires and lifestyles. This man-made everyday space is indeed a convergence of contemporary visual culture where Debord's concepts of the spectacle are realized. If by any chance Bourriaud visits Wegmans, he would have to consider it as a relational art work that represents, produces, or prompts human relations in everyday consumption practice. From my perspective, I argue that supermarkets like Wegmans are an *embodied spectacle* which constructs a worldview that has been actualized in the material form.

Debord (1994) wrote that the world held up by the spectacle is the world in which the commodity rules over all lived experience. It is better understood through the following example: strolling inside Wegmans we discover a corner of international foods where exotic ingredients from Asia, Europe, and Latin America can be found on shelves.

The foods are sorted according to their country of origin and are re-cased with English-friendly packaging. Sampling is sometimes available, and a taste of the foreign is often just a short distance away. In addition, the Market Café, located on the other side of the international foods corner, provides consumers with *Tastes of the Orient*. Consumers can easily access dishes such as Chinese General Tzao's chicken, Indian chicken masala, or Japanese sushi from the food bar, pay the cashier, and *discover the Orient*⁴. Through enlarging its international food collection and providing tasting opportunities, Wegmans materializes and embodies the ethnic and makes consumers familiar with distinctions between cuisines from various regions. That is to say, the understanding of "international food" is encapsulated and visualized in Wegmans' international foods corner. Through gazing at international foods, spectators gain the disembodied knowledge provided by Wegmans, through sampling international foods, spectators build an embodied relation with international foods, and the knowledge of foods they sample becomes embodied. Therefore, one may have never physically been to any country located in Latin America, Europe, or Asia, yet one may be able to identify the smell and name some *seemingly authentic* Mexican, Italian, Mediterranean, Chinese, Indian or Japanese dishes as defined by one's Wegmans' experience. This knowing, which is hard to describe verbally, is something that is constantly evolving with sense experiences and exists in an embodied relationship which lives between the customer and the food. It can also be defined as an *embodied knowledge* existing between the subject and the object in terms of phenomenology. This concept of embodied knowledge comes from Martin Heidegger's

⁴ *Discover the Orient* is an advertising slogan addressed to consumers at the Market Café in Wegmans, State College, Pennsylvania.

being-in-the-world, which emphasizes the consciousness produced through bodily encounters and is acquired through one's visual and sensory engagement and becomes part of cultural memories inscribed on the body.

A fitting example of acquiring embodied knowledge comes from art classrooms in which we do not sit still and learn visual art simply through watching and listening. To learn visual art, we need to physically engage with the process and *make* it. It is through the art-making process that we actually learn art and the knowledge acquired in this specific process is considered embodied knowledge. To further investigate what knowledge is produced and how it is gained through experiences inside the spectacle, I enter my research site, Wegmans in State College, Pennsylvania, as a *flâneuse* whose body is a site of knowing and meaning-making. The concept of the *flâneuse* as a methodological device is mainly inspired by the *flâneur* described by Walter Benjamin (1973, 1997). Although the original type of the *flâneur* can be dated back to Charles Pierre Baudelaire's work, which I will further explore in the following chapter, the figure has long been portrayed in literature as a masculine figure, a well-dressed man, a shopper who has no intention to buy, and an intellectual parasite of the arcade, strolling leisurely through the Parisian arcades of the nineteenth century. This *flâneur* strolls to pass the time that his wealth affords him, treating the people who pass and the objects he sees as texts for his own pleasure. Concealing himself in the crowd, the *flâneur* is free to probe into his surroundings for clues and hints to urban spectacles that may go unnoticed by others.

Whether in Baudelaire's or Benjamin's works, the flâneur portrayed in these writings is obviously gendered, leaving much room for feminist critiques. Women on the street in Baudelaire's or Benjamin's times usually appear in literature as prostitutes or working-class women and rarely do they enjoy the freedom of strolling and gazing as that owned by the flâneur. A more detailed literature review of the power exercised in public spaces by the flâneur and women respectively will be provided in the "Feminist Critiques on Experience and Gaze Embodied by the Flâneur" in the following chapter.

Nevertheless, the flâneur strolling with his cane still serves as a good narrator who is capable of seeing and telling urban spectacles intellectually. For instance, Susan Sontag (1977), in her book *On Photography*, depicts that a contemporary flâneur with a hand-held camera is able to reconnoiter, stalk, and cruise the urban inferno, to discover the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes, to be adept at the joys of watching and also a connoisseur of empathy. It is in this process that the contemporary flâneur finds the world 'picturesque' (p. 55). In this regard, a methodological device inspired by the flâneur enters into my research. One of my tasks in this dissertation is therefore to provide my critiques of the gendered, but creative and artistic flâneur, and accordingly to rework the notion of the flâneuse based on my cultural difference and my bodily experience. By means of elaborating the notion of the flâneuse, I will find for myself a researcher's position. Through my visual and bodily engagement with the spectacle and my encounters with others my flâneuse wanders around Wegmans, unpacking the desiring, the knowing, and the exercising of power inside the spectacle.

Knowledge and Experience Produced in the Embodied Spectacle

Knowledge, once it is defined, taught and used as a “thing made,” is dead. It has been forced to give up that which “really exists”: its nature when it is a thing in the making, continuously evolving through our understanding of the world and our own bodies’ experience of and participation in that world (Ellsworth, 2005. p.1).

Experience, of course, presupposes bodies —not inert bodies, but living bodies that take up and lay down space by their continuous, unfolding movement and that take up and lay down time as they go on being (Ellsworth, 2005, p.4).

In the previous sections, I briefly introduced how everyday spaces like supermarkets can embody Debord’s concepts of the spectacle and be read as texts of visual culture on which markers of the spectacle are inscribed in order to forge social relations between us and others, be they human beings or inanimate objects. In this sense, Wegmans at State College fits into my research scope and by definition serves as an embodied spectacle in this research. Before enacting the methodological position of the flâneuse and casting my critical gaze onto the embodied spectacle, I want to project the visual culture and visual spectacles I found inside Wegmans, unfolding what is implemented and how it is implemented and thus affects us as social beings in this spectacle.

Visual culture inside supermarkets is specifically made and staged for visual pleasure. Pleasing visualization in supermarkets such as Wegmans is used to embody the spectacle and functions as political and ideological propaganda. Visualization also works as the catalyst to urge spectators to buy. Every minute and from every viewpoint spectators are fed with visual culture, which is utilized to construct a so-called *reality*. Moreover, visual culture, accompanied by sensory stimuli of the spectacle, such as those

we experience through live performance, incessantly encourages spectators to buy more, which *seems* to achieve spectator satisfaction. The aim of visual culture inside supermarkets is to facilitate the embodiment of values and ideologies of the spectacle, directing spectators to dream of satisfaction and awaking the unknown desires of consumption.

However, the relationship between visual culture and its spectators remains a dynamic state, which suggests a possibility of alteration. As art critic John Berger (1972) asserts in *Ways of Seeing*, the relation between what we see and what we know remains unsettled (p. 7). This unsettledness is the interstice in which I see embodiment functioning as a force of subversion. For instance, each of us brings different embodied experience to gazing upon visual culture inside Wegmans and therefore each gaze produces diverse knowledge which can also be embodied in nature. The produced/embodied knowledge enables us to act differently. While we are acting like visual spectacles to others, our acting may serve as a subversive way to accept or resist the values and ideologies conveyed by the spectacle.

In addition, the spectacle makes particular use of *seeing*, for it is often times the most easily deceived means among our senses. For instance, most people use the verb “see” to ask others if they understand something. Seeing accordingly connects to the concepts of understanding, knowing, and believing. Since making the *invisible* ideologies visible is powerful in the shaping of what is considered knowledge, the spectacle skillfully visualizes attitudes, beliefs and values that accompany commodities for their spectators. Debord asserted that the spectacle does not realize philosophy, but

philosophizes reality for the sake of reification (Debord, 1994, p.17)⁵. What we see through visual culture or visual spectacle is a *reality* visualized by the spectacle. Through visual culture and visual spectacles, the spectacle constructs our worldview, makes us know and has us believe. Visual culture or visual spectacle is therefore a proxy for the spectacle.

However, in a highly-visual space of the spectacle such as Wegmans, one or even a few visualized discourses may not be compelling or persuasive enough to construct knowledge and ideologies. To make spectator-consumers firmly believe and acquire knowledge, prior experience plays a significant role. For instance, in his first volume of the *Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel Proust depicts in a short essay, “The Cookie”, his pondering over a precious essence through experiencing the tasting of tea and sponge cakes called petites madeleines offered by his mother. Recalling this specific experience, he writes about the very first sip and bite as the following:

An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me it was me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savors, could, no, indeed, be of the same nature. Whence did it come? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it (Proust, 1913-27)?

⁵ The spectacle inherits all the weaknesses of the Western philosophical project which undertook to comprehend activity in terms of the categories of seeing; furthermore, it is based on the incessant spread of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought. The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality. The concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a speculative universe (Debord, 1967/1994, thesis 19).

Rarely did Proust take tea. However, his decision to drink the tea and have a bite of the petites madeleine filled him with a precious essence or, as he recalled, made him realize his essence and further speculate how this fleeting sensation helped to reveal memory. In deconstructing this memory revealing process, he then conjectured that visual memory could be awakened by experiences brought by other senses such as taste or smell. To borrow this conjecture, a tiny bite, a fine smell, a little sip or a slight touch at Wegmans creates bodily experiences and therefore reinforces the information constantly passed by visual culture on to spectator-consumers. Any sense experience accompanying visual experience will multiply and enhance the effect of learning; the operation of our senses is complicated and subtle. Once our prior experiences are interconnected with sensory experiences, blocks of knowledge will build or be built systematically. Spectator-consumers may take awhile to *digest* the given information which may later turn into knowledge, but their prior bodily experiences definitely inscribe markers on their bodies. I argue that it is through this bodily encounter between spectator-consumers and visual culture that embodied knowledge is produced and internalized.

Following this thread, the manipulation of experience inside the spectacle thus suggests the significance of experiencing corporeal engagement in the shaping of knowledge. Whether experience is bodily, corporeal, embodied or lived, these different adjectives are used by various theorists to describe the experience that is gained through physical engagement. There are certainly slight differences between these adjectives, yet, the word choice just reflects each theorist' preference and I prefer using *embodied experience* to describe experiences that produce, construct,

and naturalize knowledge in the spectacle. This corporeal approach to experience resonates with phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2002) study of *lived experience* and perception and inspires the methodological flâneuse in examining how experiences furnished in the embodied spectacle are molded into the shaping of knowledge. However, in investigating experiences produced by/from the body, I have found most of the literature regards either associated experiences generated from the *metaphysical body*, or portrayed body experiences based on male bodies. Literature associated with the former leaves little room for the material body, while those associated with the latter can be referred to Michel Foucault's (1995) docile body. Besides, discourses of the material body are usually posited as opposing the mind, reinforcing the dualistic relationship between the body and the mind. These findings remind me to critically brace for male discourses and lead me to cast my eyes on feminist discourses on the body. My reflections regarding the body will add a different perspective on the body of the flâneuse and they will be further elaborated in Chapter Two.

Feminist scholarship has been valuing experiences among all fields of study. While most Western philosophers questioned "raw experience" and "brute facts" as constituting the building blocks of knowledge, feminist scholars in the 1960s and 1970s expressed their new interest in women's experiences. The first-person narratives of women were then designated as an approach to understanding women's experience, not only of their victimization, but also in their agency, creativity, and resistance to oppression (Jaggar, 2008, p. 269). The first-person

narrative point of view will be taken to recount experiences in addressing readers throughout this research—to shape the viewpoint of the methodological flâneuse in Chapter Two, to observe what is taught in Chapter Four, and in Chapter Five to understand how the pedagogy (of spectacul-art) is performed inside Wegmans.

Although building knowledge through women's experiences can be fruitful, it is not necessarily indisputable. Experiences told are sometimes affected by subjective factors such as mood, values, and expectations (Jaggar, 2008, p.270). Therefore, in constructing my methodological flâneuse, which will be further elaborated in Chapter Two, I draw on feminist academic Elizabeth Grosz's corporeal feminism that refigures the lived body as a site of investigating (woman's) psychical and social existence (Geller, 2005). According to Grosz (1994), experience can be taken neither as an unproblematic given, nor a position through which one can judge knowledges, for experience is, of course, implicated in and produced by various knowledges and social practices. More importantly, I read Grosz to mean that experience cannot be separated from corporeality. Experience is intensively intertwined with our corporeal bodies and furthers the construction of knowledge. In this regard, through producing visual culture and bodily encounters, the spectacle not only concretely performs ideologies imposed by capitalism, but also subsequently constructs knowledge of certain *seeming* truths and realities concerning issues of gender, class, race and ethnicity. Such produced and probably biased knowledges will be further examined in Chapters Four and Five through the visual narratives and bodily encounters of the flâneuse. One thing to keep in mind is

that some may question if these produced knowledges exist in the realm of academia. However, I consider that they do and that they live and are performed in our cultural practice of everyday life. As feminist educator Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) posits in her *Places of Learning*,

What has already happened was once very much alive: the *thinking-feeling*, the embodied sensation of *making sense*, the *lived experience* of our learning selves that make the thing we call knowledge. Thinking and feeling our selves as they *make sense* is more than merely the sensation of knowledge in the making (p.1).

This research concerns knowledge *in the making* and endeavors to reflect how knowledge is evolving and mediated—produced, acquired, reproducing, and reproduced—through visual and bodily encounters in contemporary spectacle taking place at the supermarket. It therefore leads me to refigure the methodological flâneuse inspired by Deleuzean feminists such as Rosi Braidotti (1994) and Elizabeth Grosz (1994), for their interpretations on difference and the volatile body enable me to refigure my cultural difference as a critical point of observation and my body as an open site for knowledge making. The following section will briefly introduce the gaze of the flâneuse, depicting how she casts her eyes critically over an everyday supermarket causing the familiar to appear strange in this research. As for the relevant concepts of Braidotti and Grosz, which are employed to conceptualize the methodological flâneuse, I will further elaborate them in the next chapter.

The Flâneuse's Gaze: A Methodological Lens to the Embodied Spectacle

The “gaze” has always been political in my life. Imagine the terror felt by the child who has come to understand through repeated punishments that one’s gaze can be dangerous. The child who has learned so well to look the other way when necessary. Yet, when punished, the child is told by parents, “Look at me when I talk to you.” Only, the child is afraid to look. Afraid to look, but fascinated by the gaze. There is power in looking. (hooks, 1992)

The body is both a mode of knowing and a field for inquiry in arts education. (Powell, 2008)

In this research, I argue that contemporary spectacle sophisticatedly utilizes/manipulates visual culture and consumer/spectators’ corporeal experiences to embody a worldview that mediates our relationships with others. Information and knowledge produced within this worldview endorses the *authenticity* of facts and realities re-presented in the spectacle. Situated in the nexus of visual culture and contemporary feminist studies, this research aims to comb the twisted roots and intricate gnarls of visual culture and to examine how knowledge and experience are structured in Wegmans, the embodied spectacle, through a feminist methodological lens.

Debord’s concepts of the spectacle have laid the foundation for me to theorize visual culture inside Wegmans, yet it is time to re-consider his concepts and to see how they open up a room for further interpretation. The writings of Bourriaud on relational aesthetics take a broader look at the nature of contemporary art in present day society, suggesting a possible way to think of Wegmans as a text of visual culture, which can also be considered as a piece of relational art, and to reconsider our relations with it. Further, to explore our relations with this piece of relational art means that I need to be positioned

in relation to this embodied spectacle and its visual culture. Namely, as a researcher, I am not a detached and objective observer separated from my research site, Wegmans in State College, Pennsylvania. This suggests that I need to situate myself within this embodied spectacle and accordingly be in/with it. And for me, looking is the very direct way to produce relations with this embodied spectacle.

As mentioned earlier, I rework Walter Benjamin's notion of the flâneur, previously a source of derision in English literature⁶ as well as a figure of constant critique. I attempt through a reflexive appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of this stance to resurrect the power and significance of the "urban spectator" as a possible way of apprehending the social (Jenks, 1995). To do this, I incorporate the idea of the flâneuse, with which I also aim to add a feminist perspective. This flâneuse no longer sets herself apart from the crowd; her methodological role in this research is both "intellectual and active." She is not an implicit observer who is completely distant from her research subject. Instead, she is more engaged and opens her body to all unexpected encounters with other beings. However, I want to point out that this flâneuse cannot be simplified as a woman stroller. What distinguishes the flâneuse from a woman stroller is that the former strolls with her unique standpoint, mostly emanating from her cultural difference, feminist awareness and consciousness, while the latter may simply stroll without any purpose or intent. It is this standpoint of a cultural female other that empowers the methodological flâneuse to gaze upon her surroundings, to critically cast her eyes over visual culture staged by the

⁶ Even though in *Oxford Dictionaries Online* defines the flâneur as "a man who saunters around observing society," other online dictionaries such as *Merriam-Webster Online* and *American Heritage* link the word with a figure that is idle, dawdling, and loafing away his time.

spectacle, to bodily engage with events, and to find out ideologies hidden behind visual culture, for she is re-searching the reciprocal relations between the embodied spectacle and herself.

Although Jacques Lacan (1978)⁷, Michel Foucault (1995), and Laura Mulvey (1975)⁸ are often linked with the concepts of gaze, medical gaze, and male gaze, I consider gaze in a more inclusive way which evolves from the concepts mentioned above. To my thinking, one is provided with information about one's relationship to subjects through gazing, or the relationships between the subjects upon whom one gazes, or the situation in which the subjects are doing the gazing. This understanding of the gaze empowers the flâneuse in this research to observe, read, and examine texts of visual culture inside the spectacle she is situated within Wegmans. Furthermore, I am fascinated by the *matrixial gaze* proposed by Bracha Ettinger (1995). For the matrixial gaze is neither opposite to the male gaze, nor to the other term created to concern the relations between subjects and their objects. Rather, according to Ettinger, the matrixial gaze is concerned more about "trans-subjectivity" and is more hybrid and floating. Since this notion of the matrixial gaze is in line with the characteristics of the flâneuse, while strolling around Wegmans she will embody the matrixial gaze while looking into visual culture and visual spectacles. Therefore, the gaze performed by the researching flâneuse serves as a methodological lens to the embodied spectacle. Her gaze upon the visual culture inside the embodied spectacle is a means to peruse the visible and the invisible

⁷ Lacan, J. (1978). *The Eye and the Gaze. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. trans. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Norton.

⁸ Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16 (3), Autumn.

unfolded inside Wegmans. As bell hooks posits that there is power in looking, the flâneuse's gaze embodies her agency in the spectacle, empowering her to further experience and investigate the relations represented, produced, or prompted by the spectacle.

Strolling around Wegmans and probing into her surroundings for clues and hints that may go unnoticed by others, the flâneuse is corporeally engaged within texts of visual culture. She observes while performing a transient and aloof autonomy with her "cool but curious eye;" she experiences while shuttling between aisles; she becomes a knowing subject while savoring, sampling, and sipping. Writing through her gaze and her corporeal engagements with visual culture or visual spectacles, I consequently make the analogy between capital and visual culture inside Wegmans, reporting my visual narratives and bodily encounters of the embodied spectacle. The conceptualization of her body as a site of knowledge-making and how her bodily encounters inside Wegmans facilitate her understanding of the ideologies hidden behind the visual culture and visual spectacle will be further provided in Chapters Two and Four.

Additionally, a pedagogical perspective will be taken into consideration in investigating how knowledge is acquired and how learning occurs forcibly. While the role of experience cannot be neglected in considering pedagogy, the flâneuse attempts to indicate "qualities and design elements" which constitute pedagogical force inside the embodied spectacle. In spectating visual culture and visual spectacle, her critical gaze, awareness and consciousness enable her to dredge up issues hidden behind the visual culture and visual spectacles that are superficially pleasant, tasteful and spectacular.

Through her visual and bodily engagement with the embodied spectacle, the flâneuse provides her narratives of the embodied spectacle and accordingly proposes the spectacul-art pedagogy to conceptualize the pedagogical forces performed within the spectacle. It is via these accounts that the researching flâneuse critically interweaves these perspectives into her gaze within her flânerie (act of strolling).

Research Questions and Chapter Layout

What we need is a critique of visual culture that is alert to the power of images for good and evil and that is capable of discriminating the variety and historical specificity of their uses (W.J.T. Mitchell, 1995).

Considering that the post-modern condition is pervasively mediated by visual culture, our awareness of its dominating assumptions, and our ability to expose, examine and critique its spectacle make the critical pedagogy of collage, montage, assemblage, installation and performance art all the more imperative (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2004).

As visual culture reflects beliefs, knowledge, and values constructed in our times, it can also be designedly exercised by the spectacle in order to attach people to the relationships it defines. Contemporary supermarkets like Wegmans State College represent a sophisticated text of visual culture and embody the spectacle of Debord's sense. To most people, supermarkets are so everyday, so familiar, and so routine that they do not even question the belief and value systems visualized inside such spaces and thus they unknowingly live up to these systems in everyday practices. Since the field of art education no longer serves exclusively to prepare students to be artists, it should enable students to critically examine and be aware of the influences of everyday visual culture. As an art educator, I side with the above viewpoint and deem that contemporary art

education should help students to trouble the taken-for-granted and to make the familiar strange. In doing so, students' critical thinking will be furthered; this research on supermarkets certainly serves as a good point of departure.

In light of concerns regarding the critiques of visual culture and pedagogies in the field of contemporary art education, this research attempts to address the following questions:

- How does the flâneuse's gaze perform as the analytical lens, and how do her embodied encounters function as the methodological framework to this research?
- How can the spectacle be understood as embodied?
- What kind of knowledge and experiences are produced in spaces such as Wegmans, State College, Pennsylvania?
- How will this contribute to an understanding of pedagogy in the field of art education?

Following these questions, the chapter layout of this dissertation will appear in successive order: Chapter One introduces the big picture of this research, research framework, research questions, chapter layout and use of language. The following chapter, *Re-fashioning the Flâneuse*, will lay the methodological foundation for the researching flâneuse, conceptualizing the flâneuse as the incarnation of the researcher with feminist theories and discourses inspiring this role. Chapter Three, *Being-in-the-Spectacle: Becoming the Spectacle of Extras*, will embed Debord's and Bourriaud's concepts of the

spectacle into the supermarket's environmental context, arguing how Wegmans can serve as a site for observing the cultural practice of everyday life. Chapter Four, *The Narratives of the Flâneuse*, will follow the flâneuse into Wegmans and unfold hidden issues related with class, gender, race, and ethnicity in the supermarket spectacle. Chapter Five, *The Spectacul-art Pedagogy*, will analyze how learning occurs in the supermarket spectacle in terms of pedagogy. The concluding chapter will respond to global Americanized consumerism by accentuating individual awareness, consciousness, and action as the best ways to critically resist and negotiate with the consumerism that permeates everyday ordinary spaces.

Use of Language

Flâneuse

A flâneuse cannot be simplified as a woman stroller. By flâneuse, I suggest a female figure strolling with her critical gaze, feminist awareness and consciousness. Her volatile body opens for meaning making and knowledge construction. Her openness to different cultures enables her to hold multiple stances simultaneously when probing into her research site. For instance, she is an observer and a participant, and she is an outsider and an insider. She jumps out of the dualistic framework and shuttles in-between. It is not either or, but both or neither nor.

Insider-outsider

The hyphen put between “insider” and “outsider” suggests a co-existence condition of the holder. That means the individual holding an insider-outsider position is both an insider and an outsider simultaneously. Instead of using *solidus*, which suggests an “either or” condition, the insider-outsider in this research emphasizes the duality of the holder.

Mediate (verb)

The verb “mediate” is mostly used to describe how the spectacle negotiates the relations between people or between people and objects. In the process of mediating, relations will be represented, producing, produced, prompting and prompted.

Spectacul-art

Spectacul-art can be included in the spectacle art. However, it is only concerned about visual culture and visual spectacles that are delightful, pleasant, tasteful, and lived. In this research, spectacul-art located in the supermarket context can be used to refer to edible food visual culture and live demonstrations.

Spectator/consumer

The punctuation mark *solidus* (/) put between spectator and consumer suggests a transformation from a spectator to a consumer. For instance, one can be a pure spectator of a visual culture; however, if s/he is driven by the visual culture and takes further action, one is transformed from a spectator to a consumer.

Visual spectacle

Visual spectacle differs from Debordian spectacle. It is used to refer to an elaborate and remarkable display or demonstration on a lavish scale. Visual spectacle can cause sensational engagement of spectators. A fitting example in this research is the live demonstrations taking place in the supermarket environmental context.

CHAPTER TWO

RE-FASHIONING THE FLÂNEUSE

The Creative, Artistic, Inquisitive, yet Gendered Flâneur

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world - such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define (Baudelaire, 1995).

The French noun *flâneur* is used to describe the wealthy, educated, and idle male city stroller who observes people and events with a view to record these observations in word or image. Although this particular figure has its root in pre-eighteenth-century thought, it is agreed that its prominence in the literature of modernity dates from Charles Baudelaire's works (Wolff, 2006). In his essay, "The Painter of Modern Life," Baudelaire characterizes the male stroller of the modern city as the flâneur whose passion and profession are to become part of the crowd in which he is situated. He frequents restaurants and cafes, engaging himself with urban events and spaces. His motives are brief encounters with people and with the city. He is the spectator and depicter of modern life especially as it relates to contemporary art and the sights of the city (Jenks, 1995, p.146; Baudelaire, 1995). According to Janet Wolff (2006), the experience of Baudelaire's flâneur epitomizes the fragmented and anonymous nature of life in nineteenth-century Paris. As a male who is granted access to public urban spaces, the

flâneur is ceaselessly observing the fleeting and ephemeral aspects of urban existence when he strolls through the streets. He is a passionate spectator, yet a remote observer simultaneously of both street people and events. While strolling inside or outside urban spaces, the flâneur is open to taking pleasure from experiencing and searching for modernity. His gaze upon people, events, and space is aimless, random and unplanned. It is through his gazing that the relationalities among people, events, and urban spectacles are embodied in his flânerie.

Baudelaire's flâneur serves as a metaphoric and artistic figure of understanding, participating in and then portraying the urban space and its rising consumer culture in nineteenth-century Paris. His concept of the flâneur also turns urban space into a research subject for sociology and makes individual experience critical in reading and examining the relationship between urban space and people. Inspired by Baudelaire's flâneur, sociologist Georg Simmel (2010) deems that sociologists should study the patterns, forms, and associations of interactions between and among individuals, rather than quest after social laws, for these interactions are what constitutes a society (Farganis, 1993, p.133). For Simmel, the flâneur in Baudelaire's context serves as an ideal analytical figure of urban culture.

Walter Benjamin was in sync with Simmel's appreciation of the flâneur when he thought about the nature of the modern city in the 1920s and 1930s (Hamilton, 2002). The flâneur is also a central figure in his works on Baudelaire and his engagement with

the *Arcades Project*⁹. In these works, Benjamin re-examined the figure of the flâneur and accordingly re-considered the relationship between individuals and urban spaces. His flâneur is believed to embody his own embracement of the aesthetic potential of mass culture and his aestheticized perceptions of the people strolling through urban spaces (Featherstone, 1991). The flâneur also plays with and celebrates the artificiality, randomness and superficiality of the fantastic mélange of fictions and strange values to be found exclusively in the fashions and popular cultures of cities (Calefato, 1988; Chambers, 1987). Unlike Baudelaire, who posited the flâneur as a modern artist similar to illustrator Constantin Guys who walked freely on the streets and performed his analytical gaze on street people and events without being personally involved, Benjamin considered the flâneur as a combination of artist and detective who does not let the unsuspected out of his sight. Impressionist scholar, Robert Herbert (1988), cites Benjamin's writing about his detective-like flâneur in his *Impressionism*:

...only seems to be indolent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant...He develops forms of reaction that are in keeping with the pace of a big city. He catches things in flights; this enables him to dream that he is like an artist. Everyone praises the swift crayon of the graphic artist. Balzac claims that artistry as such is tied to a quick grasp. Herbert argues that Benjamin's flâneur, a composite of the artist and the detective, comes from his absorption in the literature of the flâneur (p.43).

This interpretation makes Benjamin's artist/detective-like flâneur applicable for investigation of the urban spectacle and thus critically analytical of sociology.

⁹ The *Arcade Project* was Benjamin's lifelong project which was never finished. In this collection, Benjamin wrote his thoughts on Parisian life and put special emphasis on the arcades of nineteenth-century Paris-glass-roofed rows of shops that were early centers of consumerism. Benjamin linked the arcades to the city's distinctive street life and saw them as providing one of the habitats of the flâneur.

From Baudelaire to Benjamin, the flâneur has been continuously reinterpreted. The presumably passive flâneur has gradually faded away, and a more active and inquiring flâneur has morphed into being. Though Baudelaire and Benjamin might reject these post-interpretations of the activeness of the flâneur, generational reinterpretations keep on making meanings of the flâneur character, building up the dimensionality of the flâneur. For example, Herbert's interpretation clearly describes how active the flâneur is perceived in modern literature. He is not the only one who considers Benjamin's flâneur as an active investigator, rather than passive spectator. Sociologist David Frisby, also asserts that Benjamin and the flâneur exerted a reciprocal influence on each other (Werner, 2004). Through re-examining Benjamin's works, Frisby takes a step further, arguing that the figure of the flâneur in Benjamin's context functions not merely as an observer or even a decipherer; the flâneur can also be a producer—a producer of literary texts, of narratives and reports, of journalistic texts, and a producer of sociological texts (Frisby, 2001, p.29). Frisby's interpretation of the flâneur has turned this figure into a producer-like city stroller who not only sees but also constructs the meaning of the city. And this producer-like flâneur bears a resemblance to Herbert's artistic/detective-like flâneur, suggesting an observer-participant position held by the flâneur.

Whether as an artist, detective, or producer, the figure of the flâneur is granted multiple identities and access to the public. He goes about botanizing from the asphalt (Benjamin, 1983, p.36), walks at will, and even brings a pet and has the pet set the pace for him. He is everywhere, everyone, and everything. As Benjamin describes in his *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Ear of High Capitalism*, around 1840 it was

briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades. The flâneurs liked to have the turtles set the pace for them. If they had their way, progress would have been obliged to accommodate itself to this pace (Benjamin, 1983, p.54). Turtles served as pedometers, making the flâneurs comfortable taking a slow saunter on the street, in the arcades, and everywhere public. The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enameled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to the bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his note books; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafes are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done (Benjamin, 1983, p.37). The flâneur is so relaxed and unimpeded in public that the whole city can be seen as an extension of his home. He is the naturalist of this unnatural environment (Wilson, 1992), possessing the same power in public as he does in private. He is capable of probing into any phenomenon and absorbing the activities of the collective (Jenks, 1995, p.146). As readers of Baudelaire and Benjamin, we get a sense of the urban spectacle through walking with the flâneurs in their works. Through his experiencing of the complexity, disturbances and confusions of the streets with their shops, displays, images and variety of people, we are directed to the way in which the urban landscape has become an aesthetic spectacle (Barker, 2004, p.70). This figure of the flâneur provides us with both an aesthetic and analytical perception of his present time; his flânerie draws us a route through urban spectacle. While he enjoys watching and being watched, he becomes part of the urban spectacle. The creative flâneur himself and his experience are both crucial for our understanding of the urban spectacle. However, this clearly defined male figure

also brings up a question reflecting on the relationship between gender and flânerie. And this leads to my first critique of the gendered flâneur, namely, where is the *flâneuse*, the female stroller, in public? How is women's experience valued in understanding the urban spectacle?

Feminist Critiques on Experience and Gaze Embodied by the Flâneur

The experience of anonymity in the city; the fleeting, impersonal contact described by social commentators like Georg Simmel, the possibility of unmolested strolling and observation first seen by Baudelaire, and then analyzed by Walter Benjamin were entirely the experiences of men. By the late nineteenth century, middle-class women had been more or less consigned to the private sphere. The public world of work, city life, bars, and cafes was barred to the respectable woman. (Wolff, 1990, p.35)

The flâneur symbolizes the privilege or freedom to move about the public arenas of the city observing but never interacting, consuming the sights through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze, directed as much at other people as at the goods for sale. The flâneur embodies the gaze of modernity which is both covetous and erotic. (Pollock, 2003, p. 94)

Unlike the flâneur character, which can be traced back to pre-eighteenth-century literature, the figure of the flâneuse did not really exist until contemporary feminist literature. This denotes that the privilege of pursuing sensory experience outside the family suggested by the flâneur, be it visual or sexual, mental or physical, was only accessible to bourgeois men and accordingly made flânerie a gendered freedom that excluded women. Wolff (1985) and Griselda Pollock (1985) argue that bourgeois women were denied access to public space and the public gaze, both of which were coded as masculine (Andermahr, Lovell & Wolkowitz, 1997, p. 99). In reviewing women and public life, Wolff writes:

The public person of the eighteenth century and earlier, whose demise is charted, and who passed the time in coffee-houses, paraded in the streets and at the theatre, and addressed strangers freely in public places, was clearly male...In the nineteenth-century city, no longer the arena of that public life, the flâneur makes his appearance — to be watched, but not addressed. Men and women may have shared the privatization of personality, the careful anonymity and withdrawal in public life; but the line drawn increasingly sharply between the public and private was also one which confined women to the private, while men retained the freedom to move in the crowd or to frequent cafes and pubs. (Wolff, 1990, p.40)

Wolff notes that the experience of anonymity in the city, the fleeting, impersonal contacts described by social commentators like Georg Simmel, the possibility of unmolested strolling and observation first seen by Baudelaire, and then analyzed by Walter Benjamin were entirely the experiences of men (Wolff, 1990, p.35). She later discusses the invisibility of women in the literature of modernity and concludes that bourgeois men's experiences, as portrayed by the figure of the flâneur, are prioritized in public, while women's experience in public is either neglected or linked with prostitution. Wolff accordingly asserts that the literature of modernity, portrayed by the figure of the flâneur, is essentially bourgeois masculine.

Bourgeois women in the nineteenth century, by contrast, were confined to the domestic, to the private space and private sphere such as home and family. Rarely did women experience flânerie on the street because they had very limited knowledge of the public spaces and of the people they might have encountered (D'souza & McDonough, 2006, p. 7). In addition, as Wolff points out, it was considered dissolute in nineteenth century society for women to be unaccompanied in public spaces. Only prostitutes or women who were sufferers of mental troubles would appear in the public spaces without

concern about being noticed. Therefore, for Wolff, the figure of the flâneuse, a female version of the flâneur, did not exist in nineteenth century literature.

At almost the same time, Pollock (2003) claims:

For bourgeois women, going into town, mingling with crowds of mixed social composition was not only frightening, because it became increasingly unfamiliar, but because it was morally dangerous...The public space was officially the realm of and for men; for women to enter it entailed unforeseen risks...For women, the public spaces thus construed were where one risked losing one's virtue, dirtying oneself; going out in public and the idea of disgrace were closely allied. (p.97)

Pollock's reading of nineteenth century women is useful for understanding the ambience of the society and the situation in which women were situated. It also suggests the reason why a woman writer like Georges Sand, identified as a female stroller by Wolff, would stride the streets dressed like a man¹⁰. Bourgeois women were denied access to the public so they would need to disguise themselves as men in order to experience the urban spectacle. It is this gendered possession of spaces which are occupied predominantly by a single sex that creates what is referred to as the gendered space (Spain, 1992, 2008). And according to this spatial classification, the public space in nineteenth-century Paris was chiefly in favor of men, while the private space such as home space was considered feminine. Women like Sand accessing the public space were rarely seen in literature.

However, Sand was not the only female stroller in her time. As middle-class women, the female artists Rosa Bonheur and Berthe Morisot were also *strollers-in-drag*

¹⁰ In her writing on Sand, Wolff describes: The disguise made the life of the flâneur available to her; as she knew very well, she could not adopt the non-existent role of a flâneuse. Women could not stroll alone in the city (Wolff, 1990, p.41).

when they walked the streets as flâneurs (Andermahr, Lovell & Wolkowitz, 1997, p. 99; Parsons, 2000, p. 40). Bourgeois women in Bonheur and Morisot's time would conceal their femininity by cross-dressing so that they could share the freedom granted to bourgeois men without being noticed or identified in the public. To get a better understanding of bourgeois women's isolated situation back in the nineteenth century city, Pollock studied the painter and her works (Figure 2-1 & 2-2). Through citing the career of Morisot and representation of domestic scenes and interiors within her works, Pollock argues that even a successful painter like Morisot would still be restrained from the public space and public sphere. Morisot could only include scenes from the private sphere as her subject matter, while her male colleagues could have anywhere in the public arena as their subject matter (Pollock, 2003, p.74). In light of this gendered dichotomy between the public and the private, Pollock further points out that the gaze of the flâneur articulates and produces a masculine sexuality, which in the modern sexual economy enjoys the freedom to look, appraise and possess, in either reality or in fantasy (Pollock, 2003, p.112). For Pollock, the figure of the flâneur embodied the male gaze. This male gaze impeded women's participation in the public and thus positioned them as the object that the flâneur gazed upon in the nineteenth century city.



Figure 2-1 The Mother and Sister of the Artist (Reading), 1869-70.

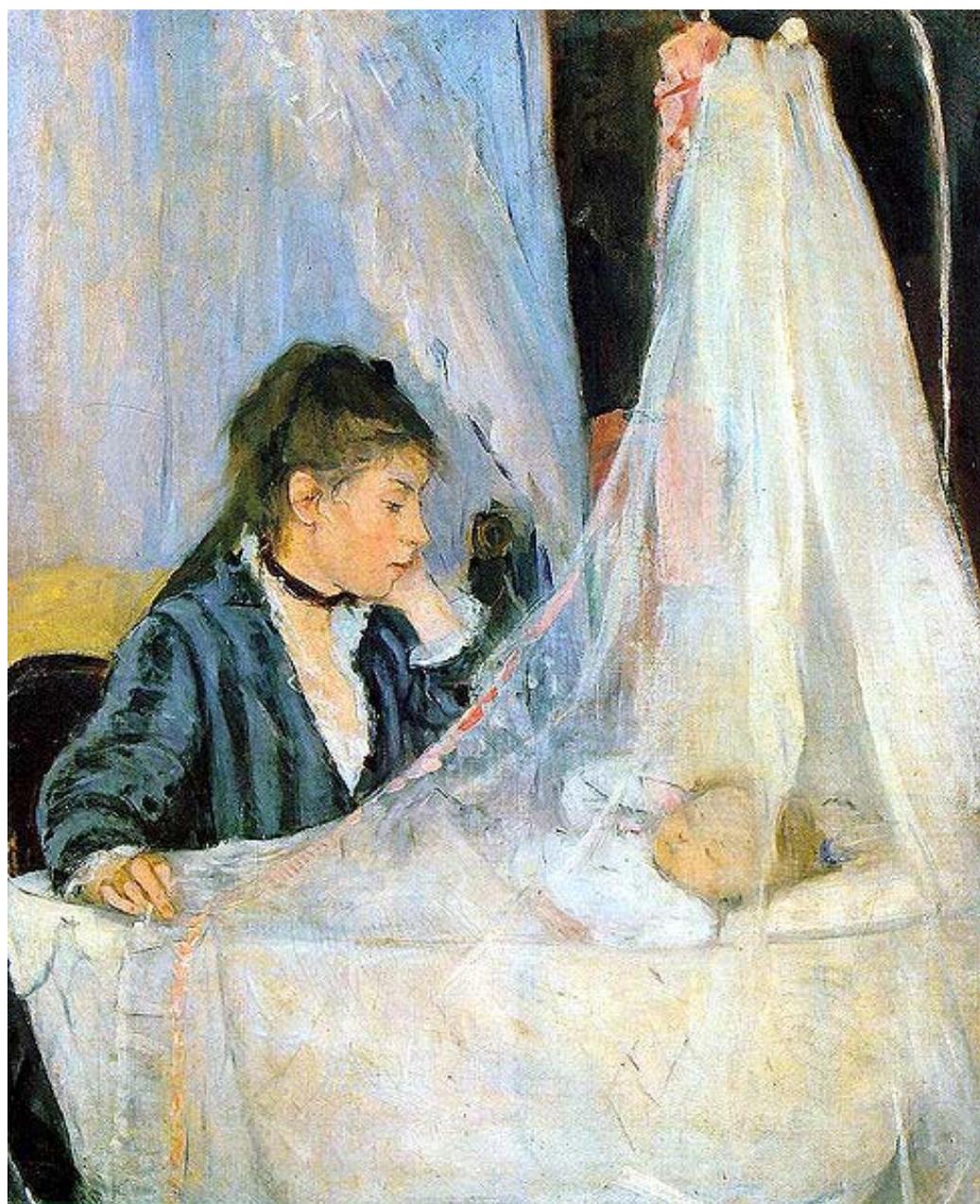


Figure 2-2 The Cradle, 1972.

Wolff and Pollock's critiques of male experience and male gaze, produced by the flâneur, open the debate of whether the position of the flâneur is available for women. The figure of the flâneur thus draws the attention of feminist critiques of hegemonic modernism in the late twentieth century (Parsons, 2000, p. 39). Like some feminists who question if Wolff and Pollock's arguments over-generalize women's experience, I also wonder if bourgeois women's experience as portrayed by Wolff and Pollock can be used to represent women's collective situation in the nineteenth century. If not, how then did women experience the urban spectacle?

In her essay, "The Invisible Flâneur," Elizabeth Wilson criticizes Wolff for describing the flâneur as a figure of authoritative observation — and thus male by definition — as well as for employing the dichotomous concept of separate private/public spheres as evidence for the exclusion of women from the city (Parsons, 2000, p.41). Wilson argues that we cannot automatically accept the nineteenth-century Victorian ideological division between public and private spheres on its own terms because it was characterized for convenience. That is to say, to Wilson, Wolff's inference about the nineteenth-century Parisian women, who were excluded from the public space and therefore excluded from the public sphere as well, might be arbitrary. Besides, according to Wilson, the Victorian private sphere functioned as a workplace for working-class women such as housemaids, and it was in this place that these women constantly received a male gaze which was often linked with bad intentions (Wilson, 1992, p. 99). Wilson therefore objects to Pollock's argument which imputes women's exclusion from the public space and thus to the male gaze.

Additionally, Wilson challenges Wolff's assertion of the non-existent flâneuse by suggesting that the prostitute might be seen as a possible metaphor for the flâneuse. By citing Baudelaire and Benjamin, Wilson points out that both writers view the metropolis as the site of the commodity and of commoditization above all else. Prostitution thus comes to symbolize commoditization, mass production and the rise of the masses, all of which phenomena are linked (Wilson, 1992, p.105). Still, the prostitutes did not fully enjoy the same freedom of strolling as that granted to the flâneur in the nineteenth century city. Wilson's suggestion of the flâneuse therefore fails to provide a theoretical framework of the female stroller who is capable of performing her aesthetic and analytical gaze upon the urban spectacle in the same way as the flâneur.

Also puzzling is the neglect of the flâneur in its transmutations from nineteenth to twentieth centuries within Wolff, Pollock, and Wilson's arguments. For them, the figure of the flâneur stands for an historical figure living in the period from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. And even within that specific time frame, the notion of the flâneur was repeatedly modified by subsequent adopters. For instance, in reworking Baudelaire's notion of the flâneur, Benjamin merged his Marxist standpoint and thus reinvented his own flâneur. Concerning the emergence of modernity with the advance of commodity capitalism and the "commodity fetishism" that drove it, he argued that the rationality of capitalism and, especially, commoditization and the circulation of commodities itself defined the meaning of existence in the city. In this regard, there remained no space of mystery for the flâneur to observe and detect. To Benjamin, capital imposed its own order on the metropolis as if from outside, like a natural force. Benjamin

therefore proposed that the hollowness of the commodity form and, indeed, the hollowness of the egoistic individuals of capitalism was reflected in the flâneur (Tester, 1994, p.13). Given this example, I argue that the concept and the characteristics of the flâneur or flâneuse would by no means remain fixed. Either the flâneur or the flâneuse of the post-modern age should be characterized as a figure which is more multifaceted, fluid and cross-boundaried. Furthermore, urbanization accompanied by consumer culture in the twentieth century has blurred the boundary between the public and private space, making the figure of the flâneuse possible in the streets from the twentieth century to the present day. Therefore, the position of the contemporary flâneur should be held not only by men but also by women. Through incorporating the experiences of and knowledge produced by the flâneuse, I argue that we will have a better understanding of the society of contemporary spectacle, accordingly taking part in the construction of knowledge. In the following section, I will elaborate on the theoretical framework of the contemporary flâneuse by incorporating corporeal feminist theories, articulating how her gaze and her flânerie serve in this research as a methodological way of understanding the urban spectacle.

Re-fashioning the Flâneuse

If we continue to speak this sameness, if we speak to each other as men have spoken for centuries, as they have taught us to speak, we will fail each other. Again...word will pass through our bodies, above our heads, disappear, make us disappear (Irigaray, 1980, p.69)

In previous sections, I discuss the creative, artistic, and inquisitive flâneur, explaining the reason why this figure can serve as a methodological device for

investigating the spectacle embodied in an everyday space. Yet, the concept of the flâneur and experiences generated in his strolls are not intact. For they embodied a gendered perception in viewing urban spectacles and thus excluded women's experiences and their accesses to knowledge production in examining our relations with everyday cultural practice. As a woman living and participating in the everyday practice of urban areas, I feel the need to bring my own experiences into this spatial context. Through actively engaging myself in this space and its cultural practice, I am able to negotiate with them. In the following, I identify three characteristics of the flâneuse in this research, articulating the duality of her stance, position, and the ways of knowing which embody her cultural differences and experiences.

Flâneuse, the observing and participating feminist stroller

Whether in Baudelaire's or Benjamin's works, the free and aimless flânerie performed by the flâneur has suggested that the flâneur strolls in places where he feels secure and in which he has some personal association. This familiarity of urban spaces secures his flânerie while enabling him to take in the fleeting beauty and vivid impressions of the crowds and to see everything anew in its immediacy, while remaining invisible. He must feel as comfortable as *being at home* so that the street becomes a dwelling for him (Benjamin, 1983, p.37). For the flâneur, the streets, the city, and the urban spectacle then become, in essence, extensions of his home space. However, even this male figure strolls around the streets serving as his home extensions, he only briefly encounters people, remaining distant from the crowd and observing in the distance. The

flâneur is unattached, unapproachable and disengaged from urban spectacles in which he is situated.

It is on account of this flâneur that I started developing my researcher's role as a flâneuse when I designated the supermarket as my research subject. While pursuing my doctoral study in the United States, I was physically absent from home for thousands of miles, leaving behind my family, friends, and entire culture. Relocating to start a new life in State College, I found myself situated in an unfamiliar rural college town where I had no prior experience. The *real* American life did not bear any resemblance to anything I had seen or observed — at least not like being in the United States that I had imagined. That was also the time I became aware of my own otherness while walking in the streets. Though I could read, there were not many things I knew very well, and even though I thought myself well-prepared for this new life, I still found myself negotiating with the environment every day. Initially, being in a new environment did not arouse my curiosity; I just sorely missed everything I used to have back home and I constantly dealt with the feelings associated with being a cultural misfit together with homelessness, and rootlessness. These miscellaneous feelings of estrangement made me hesitate to go out unless the outing was necessary. For me, relocation to State College began with constraining my personal life to school and home. I could not enjoy strolling in the streets as I used to do back home. My life and everything familiar seemed to be left behind at home in Taiwan.

A few days subsequent to my arrival, I experienced Wegmans supermarket where I was taken to do some routine grocery shopping by a woman graduate student who was

senior to me. Inside Wegmans I was given some time to complete my grocery shopping; I took a stroll around this bourgeois supermarket following the visually pleasing store aisle signs and looking at produce or food categorized into exotic sections. My encounter with items I had knowledge about excited me. Although their packaging did not seem to be familiar to me, the smell and the touch still comforted me. In that specific moment it seemed that I was finally able to locate something familiar and recognizable in my new life in State College. I began feeling associated with the environment, comfortable looking around and walking at a slower pace. I was delighted to find the familiar at Wegmans in this unfamiliar college town.

From that moment on, I tried to do my grocery shopping at Wegmans as frequently as possible. As a graduate student who is constantly engaged, nothing makes a better excuse for a getaway from the hectic schedule than grocery shopping. Also, supermarkets are conventionally gendered spaces where most women find themselves safe and comfortable to stroll about. Even though I was literally situated in an unfamiliar space with unfamiliar visible and edible texts of visual culture, I still felt secure about strolling around and gazing upon things unknown. The gender of this everyday space suddenly made the space easier for me to exist. And the more I visited Wegmans, the more familiar with and curious about this man-made environment I became. It functioned as a *home away from home* where I could secure my needs; it offered everything from basic to adventurous.

In addition, shuttling between school and home, I did not have too many opportunities to interact with people I did not know. As a doctoral student, my social

circle was confined to my classmates, students and my roommates. Wegmans thus functioned as a social and learning space where I was able to encounter local people and to learn about food that did not usually appear in my tiny social circle. For instance, the tasty cheese rolls were recommended by a retired woman who formerly was a university professor while we both stood in front of the roll section at the bakery area. This conversation took place naturally and caused me to sample something new which I would never have included as an item on my shopping list. I also enjoyed frequenting the Market Café where observing people through the glass windows or from the table booths is not considered inappropriate. I liked to observe what other people had in their shopping carts or on their dinner plates. From these observations I garnered different perspectives about the relations between different produce and food. As argued in Claude Levi-Strauss's (1964) "The Raw and the Cooked" in *Mythologiques* and Roland Barthes's (1972) *Mythologies*, food and ways of food process connote relations between food and society, civilization, religion, and so forth. To Levi-Strauss and Barthes, food as a code of culture cannot be understood in isolation, but in its cultural context. To me, it is through the relationship of people and the food they consume that I learn the everyday culture of the United States. People and food can be visual spectacles embodying the culture they live with and are situated within.

In this regard, I deem that the flâneuse in this research should not remain distant from the people and the visual culture she is gazing upon as is the case with the flâneur in Baudelaire's or Benjamin's works. Rather, she is more engaged in visual culture and visual spectacles in her surroundings. That is to say, the flâneuse not only observes, but

also participates in her surrounding, holding a stance of duality as both the observer and the participant. Therefore, in encountering people and visual culture inside Wegmans, she observes, gazes upon, interacts with, and opens up her body for meaning-making. Her stance of duality involves her as observer and participant, knower and learner. And this duality also merges into the development of her position as both insider and outsider. For she is a boundary-crosser, constantly going back and forth between positions.

The insider-outsider flâneuse

I am rooted, but I flow. (Woolf, 1977, p. 69)

As a woman I have no country, as a woman I want no country, as a woman my country is the whole world. (Woolf, 1943, p. 197)

The liminality of the flâneur is another account which influences my thoughts on the flâneuse. Most scholars agree that the demise of the flâneur and his artistic usefulness is precipitated when he can no longer maintain his liminality, can no longer remain both “inside” and “outside” the city and the society (Werner, 2004, p.19). The liminality of the flâneur thus serves as a point of departure in conceptualizing the position of the flâneuse, namely, her position as both insider and outsider simultaneously whenever she is situated in the supermarket spectacle. She is neither exclusively an insider, nor an outsider; the flâneuse should be able to hold both positions.

Feminist rejection of the supposedly “generic” knower requires that attention be paid to the characteristics and situation of the knower as an important part of the knowledge making process (Tuana, 2008). As an art educator and a museum professional,

I am conscious of my way of learning American everyday culture. As an artist, I am also cognizant of my way of knowing everyday aesthetics embodied in everyday culture. For instance, when entering a new space, I first note my geographic relation with it and then systematically locate myself in the space. I consider this act as a strategy to build a temporary familiarity with the space where I am situated so that I am able to stroll and to gaze upon my surroundings. This strategy is primarily utilized when visiting schools, museums, and even shopping malls and department stores. This temporary familiarity enables me to pay attention to details of the space, discovering aesthetic devices embodied in everyday practice. In addition, my identity as a cultural female “other” enables me to make comparisons along my stroll in a space. With my cultural lens as another I frequently find that what others may consider familiar or take for granted can be strange or unusual. These specific ways of learning and knowing, therefore, reposition me as a learner inside Wegmans.

Acknowledging this learning and knowing in everyday practice indicates that Wegmans can serve beyond a mere place for grocery shopping and function as a site of pedagogy. For this reason, as an allochthonous researcher who enjoys strolling, observing, and analyzing, I re-examine my role as a participating learner inside Wegmans. I have come to realize that the position I am occupying enables me to function as both a researcher and as a learner, as an outside observer and as an inside participant. This multi-identified position resembles that held by the observing and investigating flâneur, who – as mentioned earlier – can be a combination of an artist, detective, and producer

when he takes his flânerie into the streets, enabling me to play the role as both researcher and learner inside Wegmans.

This two-in-one researcher and learner position enables me to become a contemporary flâneuse. However, the flâneuse as a researcher should not be merely understood as a female version of the flâneur, but as a figure whose ways of learning are related with her insider-outsider liminality. As a woman brought up in a bourgeois Hakka¹¹ family in Taiwan, I was fortunate to have been treated with equality during most of my personal development. However, after entering the workplace of the elementary school, I started discerning the gender inequality permeated within my workplace where there were unequal expectations for women teachers and men teachers. I was told to be caring and to focus on my classroom teaching while my male colleagues were encouraged to pursue a higher position in school administration so that they would lead the school in the near future. In fighting this stereotype, I took every opportunity to push the boundaries and to form solidarity among my female colleagues. As a result, I was “othered” most of the time, and left this workplace feeling frustrated and marginalized.

¹¹ The term *Hakka*, pronounced as hak-ka, can refer to either a person of Hakka group of southeastern China (especially Hong Kong, Canton, and Taiwan) migrating from the north in the 12th century or the language Hakkas speak. Literally, the prefix “hak” means “guest” or “traveler” in Hakka. The suffix “ka” means “family” or “home” in Hakka. The combination of “hak” and “ka” therefore means “guest family” or “travelling home”.

The Hakkas are a unique ethnic group of “Han” Chinese originally active around the Yellow River area. Their ancestors migrated southwards several times because of social unrest, upheaval, and continued invasion by foreign forces since the Jin Dynasty (265-420). During the reign of Qing Emperor Kangxi (1654–1722), the coastal regions were evacuated by imperial edict for almost a decade, due to the dangers posed by the remnants of the Ming court who had fled to the island of Taiwan. When the threat was eliminated, the Kangxi Emperor issued an edict to re-populate the coastal regions. To aid the move, each family was given monetary incentives to begin their new lives; newcomers were registered as “guest families”.

The Hakkas are sometimes described as the *Jews of the Orient* to acknowledge their experiences of migration and courage of reclamation (Taipei Times, 2006).

However, it was also during that process that I became aware of my position as an outsider even inside a group of people in which I was supposed to belong. The neither-insider-nor-outsider position confused me because outside the school workplace, I was still considered as an insider of the school workplace.

Intriguingly, retracing the past, this was not the first time I found myself a misfit. Indeed, I grew up being culturally othered. As a Hakka, one of the ethnic minorities in Taiwan, I have a nomadic family history. My parents, grandparents, and great grandparents are/were very used to relocating and I was brought up in this family tradition. When settling into a new environment we immediately accustom ourselves to new language and culture. Making ourselves *invisible* in a new environment is considered the most harmless way of survival because we are constantly aware of our otherness. Migration is commonly seen in Hakka society. As outsiders in a new settlement, we are ceaselessly negotiating with others, be they the visible or the invisible. It is not difficult for Hakkas to take an outsider position (though one may prefer not to) for this position is an historical convention with which we are comfortable living.

My father and my young brother immigrated to the United States while I was a teenager. I was granted permanent residency status at that time even though it was arranged that I would reside with my mother most of the time in Taiwan. The dual-residency allowed me to shift between places and to experience different cultures in my early life. However, for an adolescent, being nomadic was not romantic at all. During the school semesters I needed to study as hard as my classmates in order to prepare for the college entrance examination in Taiwan because I did not see myself fitting into the

American school system in which my brother was placed. During school breaks, I flew to the United States because my parents wanted me to secure my residency and to experience American life. Not capable of driving, most of the time I would remain all day long at our home in Goldsboro, North Carolina, waiting for my brother, cousin, aunt, or uncle to come home so that I could go out with them and experience American life. There were a few times I tried to walk to the nearest bookstore and mall. However, once I got out of our house, even though it was located in the hometown of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, I noticed that it was very uncommon for a teenager of color to walk in the empty streets. I was also told by my aunt to stay away from “American properties” because my mindless walks could be seen as break-ins and get me into trouble. My personal mobility became limited by these perceptions and stereotypes; therefore, my life was mostly confined to our little house. I could not see what fun there might be to stay in a little rural town like Goldsboro and I wondered why there were people coming there for the American dream. I did not see the answers for my life in Goldsboro where the reality was just so not like my fantasies and thus *not American* from my perspective.

This migratory lifestyle forced me to become a person of passage. Once the school semester started I would fly back to Taiwan. While facing my classmates there, who had few opportunities to go abroad at that time, I tried to act as someone who had immersed herself in American culture. Inside of me, I knew I was struggling with my identities. I did not really believe that by acting as someone more Americanized I could really gain friendship and be considered as an insider among my classmates. I missed those opportunities to hang out with them during summer breaks and so we had no

collective experiences or memories to share and I was positioned as an outsider among my classmates yet again. They saw me as someone who would eventually become an American. Even though I was always taking part in a certain group, fitting in was never an easy issue for me to settle. I was always jumping between the inside and the outside positions.

The older I become, the more accepting I am with this insider-outsider position. This position as neither-insider-nor-outsider not only empowers me with a fluidity for boundary-crossing, but also equips me with a critical standpoint. From this standpoint I am able to challenge taken-for-granted perception, prejudice, and convention. With this standpoint, I do not have to worry about being cut off from any specific group because I am constantly in flux. Essentially, from this standpoint I can embrace my otherness and consider it as a justification that enables me to think and act outside the box.

Here, emphasizing marginal social locations in fact offers certain epistemic advantages; feminist standpoint theory (Jaggar, 2008, p.307) provides a useful framework for me to theorize the first characteristic of my methodological flâneuse – namely, the insider-outsider position held by the flâneuse. “Returning” to the United States for my doctoral study, I profoundly experienced an outsider-within position. Even though I was considered a legal resident of the States, as a woman of color and a returning graduate student from non-American culture, I was visually and knowingly reminded of my otherness in every aspect of my life. I barely understood student slang even though I was a graduate student handling academic English, and I felt stressed whenever I was in discussion classes even though I knew most professors and classmates were open and

willing to consider an outsider's perspective. The cultural and language barriers made me consistently aware that I was living a different life from that I was used to in Taiwan.

Returning to graduate school did not end my migratory life. In addition to traveling back and forth between Taiwan and the United States, I also began to attend conferences, workshops, and lectures and to adapt myself to an academically nomadic life. In this process, I needed to deal with frequent mobility and unfixity, accepting the condition that travel, even that of my own choice, was not always enjoyable. Waking up in the middle of night at my rented apartment in State College, I sometimes was confused about where I was and what I was about to do, even though it was literally my *home*. A sense of dislocation drove me to ruminate on the notion of home. What makes a place home? Where is the place I can put down roots and build a life? It seems to me that by making transitions between states, categories, and levels of experience as a nomadic subject, I come across boundaries as a free subject. Disruptive experiences gradually shape my worldview and I am constantly inside something and feeling outside.

As Braidotti (1994) posits in her *Nomadic Subject*, the nomadic subject is a theoretical and political stance in the current critical context. This figuration of the nomad is a political fiction as well as a critical consciousness, an attempt to "explore and legitimate political agency, while taking as historical evidence the decline of metaphysically fixed, steady identities" (p.5). Here, Braidotti's conceptualization of the nomadic subject is conducive to summing up the insider-outsider position held by the flâneuse. This nomadic subject symbolizes a discursive freedom from dominant narratives and is capable of surrendering all ideas, desires, or nostalgia for fixity. This

figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity (p.22), responding to my Hakka roots and entailing a constant state of “in-process” or “becoming”, which also associates with her practice of *as-if*¹².

The process of being nomadic and eventually embracing this insider-outsider position has never been an easy task. However, I find that I benefit from taking up this position. In his essay “Nomad Thought,” Gilles Deleuze (1985) also suggests nomadic counter-discourse as working to *deterritorialize* which is to unfix and mobilize cultural dynamism. Nomadic subjectivity in this sense represents a form of critical consciousness that resists settled, hegemonic patterns of thought and behavior (Andermahr, Lovell & Wolkowitz, 1997, p.184). Through reflecting my ethnic roots and acknowledging my position as a nomadic outsider, I develop my view from this standpoint and see my cultural difference as a critical viewpoint. I am free for thinking and acting. This feels like what Virginia Woolf described when she wrote “I am rooted, but I flow” (1977, p.69). I was granted a flexible position which allows me to flow.

I feel this way whenever I stroll around Wegmans. As a consumer participating in this supermarket spectacle, I can act like everyone else inside Wegmans. However, my roles as a non-American cultural outsider and as a graduate student doing research on supermarket spectacle have provided me with an outsider position from which to partake in this spectacle. With this insider-outsider flexibility, I am able to simultaneously jump

¹² The practice of “as-if”, for Braidotti (1994), is a “technique of strategic re-location in order to rescue what we need of the past in order to trace paths of transformation of our lives here and now (p.6).”

between the position of an inside experiencer/participant and that of an outside observer/researcher. The insider-outsider position enables the flâneuse in my research to participate and to observe freely.

Body matters: the flâneuse's body as a site of investigation

Women must write through their bodies (Minh-ha, 1989, p.36).

I am interested in exploring the ways in which the body is psychically, socially, sexually, and discursively or representationally produced, and the ways, in turn, bodies re-inscribe and project themselves onto their socio-cultural environment so that this environment both produces and reflects the form and interests of the body (Grosz, 1995, p.242).

Keep body and soul together = remain alive (Abramovic, 2003).

In addition to the insider-outsider position, the bodily experience of the flâneuse is the last critical methodological characteristic identified in investigating the knowledge produced inside the supermarket spectacle. In conducting this research, as the researcher I let myself flow into this supermarket spectacle and also write from the *self*. This personal involvement acknowledges the materiality of my own production, the resources and labor that enable my existence (Potts & Price, 1995, pp.102-103).

Like another insider-outsider position I identified earlier which suggests the class and ethnic aspects of the flâneuse, the inclusion of the self and the body recognizes the subjectivity of the researcher, foregrounding her body as a site of learning in this research. I am inspired by Iris Marion Young whose writings have been concerned about female body experiences. In her "Throwing Like a Girl" (1990 & 2005), Young questions the

Western tradition and culture for devaluing, stigmatizing, and relegating bodily experiences to the private sphere, bringing female body experiences to the forefront. She also points out the neglect of modes of embodiment, arguing that female embodiment has been restricted and codified through social norms. The essay, “Throwing Like a Girl,” therefore touches issues relating to how feminine motility and spatiality are constructed in inhibited and truncated ways (Al-Saji, 2005). Young’s writings have placed issues of the unrepresented female body and bodily experiences under the spotlight, embodying women’s subjectivities through their bodies and lived experiences.

By means of incorporating her embodied experiences and opening up her body as a site of experiencing and meaning-making, the flâneuse employs these bodily characteristics to explore the following questions: Why does body matter? Why do we consider body within the fields of art education and women’s studies? The saying, “seeing is believing,” suggests the epistemological role of vision in human culture, further prioritizing vision as the most prevailing among the models of knowledge. For example, I used to learn American culture from television shows and movies produced in the United States. Watching American visual culture made me associate with American culture and firmly believe that I did understand what American culture is, even though I was geographically far removed from the States. My knowledge construction was profoundly rooted in my vision. To me, as with most other people, vision represented the most neutral and intellectual sense, generating further mind activities.

Few people would question the validity of vision. It is nevertheless perceived as the most detached of the senses and employed in most cultures in such a way as to

conceal the action of the body (Tuana, 2008, p.262). As Cathryn Vasseleu argues that western thought has always privileged vision as the dominant sense, equating it with light, consciousness, and rationalization (Vasseleu, 1998, p. 15), art educators also address similar concerns such as the relationship between seeing and knowing. For instance, in their *Spectacle Pedagogy: Art, Politics, and Visual Culture*, art educators Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius argue that our awareness of the postmodern condition is pervasively mediated by the dominating assumptions of visual culture (2008, p.1). Everyday visual culture or spectacle in which we are situated governs our vision and accordingly dominates our ways of thinking and acting. It is fair to argue that our knowledge system is arguably constructed primarily through vision.

My visual understanding of American culture was deconstructed when I moved to State College in 2004. Being actually situated in the United States made me consider how bodily encounters would contribute to my understanding of American culture. I realized that vision no longer served as the only way to perceive the unknown. Rather, other senses such as touching, smelling and tasting became direct ways to perceive things, particularly those that do exist, but may not be visible (such as culture). Any attempt to separate vision from bodily senses would be like attempting to separate mind and body. It is inconceivable to separate the sensory body from our mind perception which is often presumably materialized through vision. For this reason, in re-fashioning the researching flâneuse, I deem it ineluctable to take her bodily experience into account, for body is the most responsive site of perception. By bodily experience, I am not referring to the experience of the theoretical body which often appears in language (Somerville, 2004,

p.48). Neither do I refer to the inscriptive body, which is identified in Grosz's *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (1995, p.33) as derived from Nietzsche, Kafka, Foucault, and Deleuze. Rather, I am speaking of the experience of the *real* body, the *lived* body, the *corporeal* body, or the material body that is able to experience the world and the foundation of self, meaning, and culture in the context of feminist scholarship.

Body is never an overlooked issue within feminism. Research on the body is exhaustive and comprehensive, covering a multitude of possibilities and directions (Springgay, 2008). Although body as a feminist focus has been widely explored and regarded as the source of women's oppression and as the locus of a specifically female power (Andermahr, Lovell & Wolkowitz, 1997), there is still room for further articulation in terms of the lived body. Vicki Kirby named the body problem in 1991, arguing that feminism could be described as a discourse that negotiates corporeality - what a body is and what a body can do. However, the specter of essentialism means that the biological or anatomical body, the body that is commonly understood to be the "real" body, is often excluded from this investigation (Kirby, 1991). Helen Marshall also expressed a concern that so much attention has been paid to the theoretical body and so little to lived experiences and data (Marshall, 1999). These utterances resonate with my concerns about the body. By indicating the absence of the corporeal body in epistemological exploration, I argue that the lived body and bodily experience of the flâneuse should be located in this research.

In theorizing the lived body and bodily experience with the character of the flâneuse, I turn to corporeal feminist theories which lead me to Elizabeth Grosz's writings. As a body theorist who has been working across the mind/body binary, Grosz's writings provide me with a methodological approach which concerns lived experience of the female body (Grosz, 1994). I have utilized her account of the body whose experience can be read as a reflection of the construction of socio-cultural meaning. In this regard, writing from/through the body has become epistemically important in understanding the knowledge production inside the supermarket spectacle. While I am writing from/through my body, I am incorporating the fact of and nature of embodiment. As Nancy Tuana asserts, the relevance of our bodily differences has been rejected by the model of the generic knower. Attention to the body thus calls attention to the specificities and partiality of human knowledge, as well as reminds us of the importance of acknowledging the body and its variations in the knowledge process. Once we admit the body into our theories of knowledge, we must also recognize its variations; we must, for example, examine the ways in which bodies are "sexed" (Tuana, 2008, p. 262).

Through bodily encounters with/in the spectacle, the flâneuse unwraps her body as a site of learning, experience and research investigation, unfolding the knowledge production inside the supermarket spectacle. Her gaze is the methodological lens on Wegmans; her body is the site of meaning-making. The flâneuse, inspired by the flâneur, is therefore reinvented toward a more fluid and corporeal researcher position and therefore contributes to my understanding of a possible pedagogy performed within the spectacle.

CHAPTER THREE

BEING-IN-THE-SPECTACLE: BECOMING THE SPECTACLE OF EXTRAS

Guy Debord and The Society of The Spectacle

The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images (Debord, 1994, p.12).

Late in 1967, a French text entitled *The Society of the Spectacle* was published in Paris. This text, together with 221 theses of Guy Debord's concepts relating to the gaze of modern culture and commodity fetishism, was later translated into English and became an influential treatise of cultural criticism. Debord considered this text an act of de-mystification (even as de-sanctification), as a statement of the modern form of the commodity and as an indictment of the hypocrisy of our lives (Merrifield, 2005).

Today, more than forty years after the publication of *The Society of the Spectacle*, these once indefinite theses appear to be a definitive prophecy about contemporary capitalist-based societies. Whether in developed countries such as the United States or in developing countries such as Taiwan, the society in which we are now situated is more visualized and commodity-oriented than prior societies. Images and commodities we see and consume not only symbolize our desires, but also illustrate our social, cultural and economic relations with the external world. For instance, the death of the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, when announced not long ago by TMZ and CNN, caused surges of

internet traffic. His unexpected death became top news during the following two weeks and dominated media's headline space. Following his memorial service, images and video clips of his young daughter speaking during the service were widely circulated. People learned stories about Jackson and his relationships with family and friends from those representations of visual culture and not especially from print media. His death became a global spectacle that numerous people participated in, creating a posthumous Michael Jackson economy in which his images and representations were continually consumed. This phenomenon is feasible for answering the question addressed by Debord, Jean Baudrillard and Neil Postman — whether or not Western society has become one big spectacle before proceeding to point out its destructive, inhuman side (Terreehorst, 2002, p.24).

Given that Debord's writing of the spectacle is indefinite; his concept of the spectacle is provocative and allows for manifold interpretations. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, he argues that the social order of the late twentieth-century global economy exerts its influence through representations¹³ (Debord, 1994, p.12). He also puts forth the idea of the spectacle as both an *instrument of unification* and a world vision that shapes a social relationship among people in which images and practices of gazing are central. Through multi-dimensionally theorizing his concepts of the spectacle, Debord questions the "spectacularizing" society which alienates people from their lives¹⁴ and forms their

¹³ The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation (thesis 1).

¹⁴ The spectator's alienation from and submission to the contemplated object (which is the outcome of his unthinking activity) works like this: the more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands

views of the external world. He also views the society of the spectacle as an invisible totalitarian regime which renders its spectators passive. Although I do not completely agree with his pessimistic viewpoint on spectators' agency in regard to the spectacle, his critical perspective towards the capitalist-based societies does lay the foundation for examining the relationships between the spectacle and spectators in contemporary literature, positing gazing as a dramatic yet somehow negative way that shapes people's understanding of the outside world. Gazing is accordingly significant in the Debordian context of the spectacle. As Debord (1994) posits in his eighteenth thesis:

Since the spectacle's job is to cause a world that is no longer directly perceptible to be seen via different specialized mediations, it is inevitable that it should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch; the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society's generalized abstraction (p.17).

Educational discourses generally do not consider Debordian spectacle or his passive spectators applicable for understanding the relationship between teachers and students. Most discourses concern the relationships in terms of the literal rather than the visual, prioritizing the driving force brought by words. Seldom do they analogize the spectacle as a pedagogical force which may contain potential elements such as assignments or multiple choice questions, engaging students as active participants (Sealey, 2006). However, as indicated in the first chapter, in the field of contemporary art education art educators who notice the rapid pervasion of images have used visual culture as a comprehensive term to discuss related issues. The shift from the literal to the visual thus

his own existence and his own desires. The spectacle's externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual's own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere (thesis 30).

suggests the pedagogical potential of visual culture, considering it as a trigger for possible active learning. Visual culture impacts its spectators and accordingly constructs social relations as a materialized force of the spectacle which is able to convey abstract ideologies, beliefs, and values through visualized materials. Museum exhibitions or commercial displays, which can be acknowledged as ideally appropriate examples here, materialize the invisible, enabling spectators to learn or to take further actions. Visual culture therefore functions as visualized discourse, providing us with an alternative understanding of pedagogy in visual-culture-dominant societies. Art education theorists, Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius, have addressed similar issues and conceptualized visual culture as *spectacle pedagogy* (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2004 · 2008), and have suggested art-making as a means to challenge commodity fetishism shaped by the spectacle. Kelvin Shawn Sealey, co-founder of the Film and Education Research Academy, also re-examined the literature of Debord's spectacle and designated it as a site of critical pedagogy. Sealey (2006) identifies elements of the spectacle from the discursive, affiliative, visual and affective conditions of the spectacle, proposing how these elements may trigger in spectators some degree of Freirean critical subjectivity and criticality. In doing so, he concludes that as *the power of global media forces continues to compress national populations into single markets for commercial and political purposes, it behooves members of the education sector worldwide to become cognizant of the ways in which the spectacle, and the concomitant power inherent in the use of spectacular modes of presentation, can be subverted for the benefit of intellectual advancement, teaching, and learning* (Sealey, 2006). These arguments, positioned from various disciplines, open room for discussing a new understanding of the relationship between

the spectacle and the spectators and an alternative interpretation of pedagogy in the spectacle within the context of contemporary education.

In this chapter, to investigate Wegmans supermarket where life and art are well entangled, I consider Debord's concepts of the spectacle as a perfect point of departure. By re-reading Debordian theses of the spectacle and including contemporary critiques on the spectacle, I will re-define the notion of the spectacle in this research and reveal the spectacle as parallel with the subtle visual culture of Wegmans in the following section. In addition, Debord's concepts of the spectacle will be further applied onto the Wegmans context to reason how this everyday space can function as an embodied spectacle and therefore mediate our interactions with one another as social beings. Relevant arguments will be unfolded in the section, Wegmans as Embodied Spectacle.

Lastly, is the writing of encounters in the embodied spectacle of the flâneuse. Through visual and bodily encounters, combined with her flânerie, the flâneuse simultaneously becomes a seen and experienced spectacle while she is seeing and experiencing the spectacle inside Wegmans. That is to say, the flâneuse is a learning self and a site of learning simultaneously. She learns from gazing and bodily engaging with encounters in the spectacle; her embodied experiences also make her a site of learning for others inside Wegmans. These epistemological encounters not only resonate with how Wegmans embodies the spectacle, but also portray how the body of the flâneuse has evolved beyond physical confinement and become a signifier for reading the space/spectacle. And I will accordingly propose the *spectacle of extras* which is an amalgam of Debord's concepts of the spectacle and Bourriaud's society of extras.

Re-defining the Spectacle

Spectacle is a term that generally refers to something that is striking or impressive in its visual display. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “spectacle” also encompasses “curiosity or contempt” and “marvel or admiration”. These definitions not only describe what spectacle is, but also suggest that it is something visual that is presented to the viewer, and that can elicit sensory engagement from the spectators.

In *Poetics*, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, provides an explanation for the origin of the dramatic art-form and deems that spectacle is one of the six elements of tragedy (Aristotle, 1992). He holds that spectacle, the visual display of the production of a play, can engender sensory affection and emotion. With proper arrangement of dramatic factors such as costumes and special effects of the spectacle, Aristotle believes that the emotions of those spectators present will be elicited. Spectacle is accordingly tied to the relationship between the object being seen and the subjects gazing upon it. To Aristotle, however, spectacle merely serves as a visually affective medium for the spectators and is considered the least artistic part of tragedy since it distances itself from the art of poetry.

Aristotle was not the only philosopher/theorist concerned with spectacle. With the improvement of recording technology, the notion of spectacle became intensive and elaborated upon by theorists in various fields of study since the 1960s. For example, in his study of media theory, Marshall McLuhan (1964) first pronounced that the medium is the message, distinguishing how spectacle has moved from present visual display to televised presentation. For McLuhan, the medium itself is the spectacle. It is temporally

and spatially aired in a doubling of mediation so that the individual's experience of the spectacle is actually experienced as a mediation of technological apparatus (Kan, 2004).

Unlike McLuhan, who considered technology to have taken spectacle to a new level which therefore resulted in alienation between spectacle and the spectators, Roland Barthes argues that spectacle functions as a mirror through which truth, that cannot be seen directly, may be seen reflected – although perhaps distorted (Daniels & Cosgrove, 1993, p. 58). By means of comparing both the spectacles of ancient Greek theater and popular wrestling, Barthes concluded that the meaning production of modern wrestling spectacle should include objects - the bodies of the wrestlers - with words and actions since they all serve as symbols in the process of meaning production (Johnson, 2003). A similar argument can be detected in Maurice Merleau Ponty's viewpoint of the lived body as the embodied subject in which the spectacle actualizes a form of subjectivity (Baldacchino, 2008). This viewpoint will be further elaborated in the section to follow.

In countering McLuhan's viewpoint of spectacle, Debord (1994) asserts that there exists no message but the spectacle and the show. For him, the mass media are but a "limited" aspect of the spectacle (Jappe, 1999). Debord complicates the notion of the spectacle by further declaring that it is used to describe how representations dominate contemporary culture, and also all social relations that are mediated by and through images. He writes in the fourth thesis, "Separation Perfected," which comprises the first chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994), that the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relationship between people that is mediated by images (p.12). As a result, the spectacle is not a superficial pageant like Aristotle's spectacle, dazzling the

masses; rather, Debord compares it to a process in which unceasingly accumulative and circulative images are manipulated to shape spectators' world views and to constitute a frozen and distorted version of actual social relations (Barker, 1999).

Debord's concepts of the spectacle are deeply rooted in Karl Marx's idea of the commodity-form, which is heavily addressed in Marx's *Capital I* (1995, 1999); specifically, Debord's fourth thesis, cited above, is adapted from this work. Marx's original context is written as, "capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things." Debord replaces the word "capital" with the word "spectacle," and subsequently elaborates his concepts based on those of Marx. He defines the spectacle as the most highly developed form of a society based on commodity production and its corollary, the fetishism of commodities. For Debord, the rise of an image-dominated culture is attributed to the fact that the spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image. It is in accordance with this pronouncement that capital accumulated beyond a certain threshold will be eventually transformed into images¹⁵. The spectacle is therefore a world view possessing a material reality (Debord, 1999). It cannot be understood as merely an illusory set of images and representations, but the materialization of ideology in the form of spectacle (Debord, 1999, p.150).

Debord developed his concepts of the spectacle in the late 1960s, a time when no one expected that the world would be transformed into a global village by mass media within merely a few decades. Nor did people anticipate that the extensive use of new

¹⁵ The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image (thesis 34).

media, particularly the computer and Internet, would lead to an all pervading phenomenon of visual culture. Just as Baudrillard (1988) observed that at the beginning of the twentieth century, people were just beginning to learn to adapt from *object-form* to *commodity-form*, within a century's passing, by the end of the twentieth century, our pervasive visual culture has brought on *sign-form*, which corresponds with the society of the spectacle (p. 59). Younger generations, such as digital natives who are growing up with computer and Internet, are now living within the spectacles. Digital natives obtain information and messages mostly from digital technology, which reinforce ideologies produced by the spectacle. They are trained to be consumers of the spectacles in which commodity rules over all lived experience. Through the global and technical practice of extensive distribution, visual culture – used as fragmentary information – is crafted into a seemingly coherent storyline which forms a context to which spectators can themselves relate. This storyline of visual culture becomes a convincing preacher, ministering to consumerism and thus embodies the relations produced by the spectacle.

The pervasiveness of visual culture has become more dominant than the accumulation of material commodities and thus results in a profound feeling of alienation in the present day. For example, many people are no longer familiar with etiquette developed from bodily encounters such as face to face communication. Social interactions today are easily made in the form of electronic commerce. Mails, banking transactions, bill payments can be received or sent online. Even friends can be found and connected through online chatting rooms or social networking sites. We are getting used to interacting with electronic visual culture representing a person, an act, a meaning, or

an event. A personal lifestyle of social alienation is becoming more the norm. The proliferation of visual culture also suggests that the Debordian spectacle has been progressively embodied in contemporary society. As mentioned previously, living in this society of the spectacle, we have become more and more disengaged from others. Social relations between/among people are mediated by visual culture rather than by literature. Who we are, who we ought to become, and how we should act, are more or less affected by the visual practice of everyday life. Our desires are alienated from what we really need, but driven by the spectacle toward what the spectacle dictates we should desire. We become only familiar with the world that is constructed mainly by the visual culture of the spectacle. In our everyday life, for example, most of us no longer shop for groceries in traditional open markets or grocery stores where people directly see, touch, smell, taste, and feel the ingredients they consume, interact and exchange information with farmers or other buyers, or even make our own choices in selecting produce or ingredients. Rather, we now shop for produce and ingredients in chain supermarkets, be they physical or virtual, with images of quality assurance and uniformity in terms of display; where “Do What Tastes Right,” “Eat Well, Live Well,” “Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet,” etc. are the values promised. The chances of having a direct and lived experience with food or people are becoming fewer. Life is no longer something to be lived, but a spectacle to be watched from a distance¹⁶. Visuality thus becomes a form of domination

¹⁶ According to *The China Post*, Dr. Ovid Tzeng, the former minister of Education in Taiwan, said his son led a life completely in front of a computer and, therefore, had ignored real life. Tzeng’s son and classmates once drew a chicken with six feet, but not in a creative way. They saw in supermarkets that six chicken legs were put in the same package, which led them to believe the six legs came from one chicken, said Tzeng (<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/national/national-news/2009/11/08/231880/Ministers-stress.htm>).

which dazzles and deceives, seducing or stunning the spectator into submission (Barker, 1999).

As Debord asserted in his nineteenth thesis, the spectacle did not realize philosophy, but philosophized reality and reduced everyone's concrete life into a universe of speculation. In other words, the concrete life of all is debased into being a speculative universe in the society of the spectacle. Even a conventionally violent or radical rebellion today, such as Banksy's graffiti art or protests held by the opposition parties in the United States and Taiwan, can be incorporated into the constant and consequently changing spectacle (Macey, 2000). This illustrates how the spectacle we attempt to resist sometimes inevitably incorporates us into the structure it establishes. Situated in the spectacle, we are impelled to rationalize what we have seen and take what we are seeing for granted. It is in this regard that Debord pessimistically deemed that people would be subsumed by the spectacle into a passive existence within mass consumer culture, aspiring only to acquire yet more products. For instance, in a capitalist-based society, labors and resources are governed by capitalism. Within this capitalist framework, individuals usually engage in the economy as consumers, laborers, or investors. As consumers, we influence production patterns through our decision to purchase; as laborers, we provide job market with our labor and produce something that meets consumers' expectations. Being paralyzed by consumerism, which is a crucial part of the spectacle, we are repeatedly driven to consume, and neglect to speculate. Spectacle thus dominates our perception of reality and is therefore a totalized condition in which consumption and production (of labor) are inseparable. The society of the spectacle

accordingly creates a singular commercial consciousness which naturalizes everything through visuality. To Debord, individual subjectivity is erased by this singular commercial consciousness. People can only desire or make decisions within the structure constructed and programmed by the spectacle.

As mentioned previously, the Debordian spectacle can best be understood within the Marxist context. To borrow Anselm Jappe's (1999) interpretation of Debord's spectacle, it is a visualization of the abstract link that represents exchanges between individuals, just as, for Marx, capital was the materialization of that link. Debord's writing criticized the spectacularizing capital of his contemporaries. Images in their turn assume a material form and exert a real influence on society. This is perhaps why Debord insists that ideological entities have never been mere fictions (Debord, 1994).¹⁷

Departing from Marxism and under the influence of Debord, Baudrillard (1988) is also concerned about the domination of images in consumer society. Like Debord, Baudrillard sees proliferating technology and media as means that technically mediate interpersonal relations. Technology and media boost the visual materialization of the spectacle and perpetually turn the spectators into subdued consumers (Best & Kellner, 1997). However, Baudrillard attempts to go beyond a Debordian argument by claiming that we no longer remain in the society of the spectacle. Instead, he argues that postmodern culture is constituted through a continual flow of images that establish no

¹⁷ "Ideology is the foundation of the thought of a class society within the conflictual course of history. Ideological entities have never been mere fictions—rather, they are a distorted consciousness of reality, and, as such, real factors retroactively producing real distorting effects. This is all the more reason why that materialization of ideology, in the form of the spectacle, which is precipitated by the concrete success of an autonomous economic system of production, results in the virtual identification with social reality itself of an ideology that manages to remold the whole of the real to its own specifications." (Debord, 1994, p. 150)

connotational hierarchy, but are one-dimensional and superficial (Baker, 2004, p. 13). It is in this one-dimensional and superficial modern spectacle that we are driven by consumerism, the main drive of capitalism, to desire the sign-value attached onto commodities. And commodities, in this context, become materialistic objects of commodity-sign. Here, Baudrillard's critical perspective enriches the notion of the Debordian spectacle.

From ancient Greece to our current society, the idea of the spectacle has been theoretically elaborated and become notionally complicated. It is no longer a simple theatrical visual display on stage which evokes emotional responses from the spectators. Rather, it has become a construct attaching itself to capitalism and mediating all human relations through images. Debord's concepts of the spectacle emphasize how two-dimensional images and representations mediate social relationships in the spectacle; while Baudrillard is concerned more with how three-dimensional objects signify commodity-signs and construct our world view. In terms of application to the discipline of art education, I argue that the spectacle can be understood as something which mediates social relations through subtle visual culture. Namely, in investigating Wegmans as an embodied spectacle, I will use visual culture — including images, representations, objects, and performances — as an inclusive term to examine how visual culture is designated and tied in with the environmental context to embody the spectacle. In the following section, Wegmans as Embodied Spectacle, I will first make an analogy between spectacle and Wegmans and then further argue how the physical space of Wegmans embodies an abstract spectacle.

Wegmans as Embodied Spectacle

Here we can observe the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by things whose qualities are, “at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.” This principle is absolutely fulfilled in the spectacle, where the perceptible world is replaced by a set of images that are superior to that world, yet at the same time impose themselves as eminently perceptible (Debord, 1994, p.26).

Perhaps the single most impressive difference between Wegmans and most supermarkets is its bulk foods section, which we couldn't do justice with even a wide-angle camera lens (Buffalo Chow, 2008).

The first citation above from *The Society of the Spectacle* is Debord's depiction of how capitalism has changed the relation between humans and things. As mentioned earlier, capitalism once aroused our desire for having things that came into being, yet, our desire for things has now been shifted to having them appear in our personal space. And this momentary fragmental appearance is what constitutes the spectacle. According to Jappe, Debord's analysis is based on the everyday experience of the impoverishment of life, its fragmentation into more and more widely separated spheres, and the disappearance of any unitary aspect from society. For Debord, the spectacle consists in the reunification of separate aspects at the level of the image. Everything life lacks is to be found within the spectacle, conceived of as an ensemble of independent representations (Jappe, 1999, p.6).

Supermarkets in the United States can be analogized as aspects of Debordian spectacle in contemporary society, as an example here. Whether Wal-Mart Supercenters or Whole Foods Markets, these nationwide retail stores represent a collective combination of human necessities and desires. These man-made spaces provide us with

not only things we need, those items on our shopping lists, but also things we may be tempted to place into our shopping carts. People frequently walk out of supermarkets having acquired things they are not even certain why they felt the impulse to buy. One reason that we purchase those items we initially had no intention to buy, may reflect our fear of emptiness, which is prompted by the spectacle. Separated from others at work or home, we can only rediscover our unity within the spectacle where images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream (Debord, 1994, p.12). Everyday supermarkets thus provide a heterogeneous space where images of “spectacularized capital” converge.

Additionally, according to Debord (1994), the spectacle divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world. The spectacle is simply the common language that bridges this division. Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center of the world that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but unites it only in its separateness (p.22). Debord deems that the spectacle cannot exist without the worlds’ loss of unity. He further posits that the massive expansion of loss in the modern period demonstrates how total this loss has been: the abstract nature of all individual work, as of production in general, finds perfect expression in the spectacle, whose very manner of being concrete is, precisely, abstraction. In supermarkets, consumers like us are simultaneously spectators strolling around, while visual culture of various kinds of products is everywhere in supermarkets and serves as incarnations of needs and desires; it is present in every corner in supermarkets and is ready to meet our

needs, to enhance our quality of life, and to entrap our desire. Such visual culture, carefully and purposefully inset into the supermarket context, can paralyze our alertness and trigger further actions such as buying. Facing so many choices of one single product displayed on shelves, our emptiness and loss of unity seem to be comforted. The unity with the world and completeness of the self seem to be fulfilled. We then do not choose a product by what it really is, but frequently by the visual culture it represents. Visual culture offers an illusion of seeming authenticity at the moment of choice making. To make seeing a way of believing, it thus plays a significant role in transforming the invisible discourse into the visible narrative. Visual culture is in tune with the spectacle, naturalizing ideology and causing spectators to react.

The Wegmans in State College, Pennsylvania, is an example among supermarkets that embodies Debord's spectacle. Located in a rural college town, this branch store of Wegmans is a stage set or scene in terms of visibility. When entering State College from U.S. Route 322 Business, visitors will find that Wegmans attracts the eye to the roadside. Viewed from the outside, it is obviously huge, upright, foursquare and spacious, symbolizing a masculine institutional architecture style. Yet, its historic-like brick façade, marking the signature iconic features of this regional supermarket chain, does convey a warm and sleek ambience to its spectators. Though the architecture of Wegmans State College is not completely in accordance with the countrified and bucolic landscape of the college town, it perhaps echoes that of the university's landmark, the Old Main. It is this visual discrepancy that sets Wegmans up as a spectacle at first glance. As the exterior of Wegmans illustrates an upscale and upmarket appearance, the color choice of the bricks

and the font of the nostalgic brand logo also suggest an inviting and quality-assured ambiance to its spectators (Figure 3-1). This ambiance has been brought into its interior space through paint colors and lightings and thus made Wegmans visually distinctive from other chain supermarkets in town.



Figure 3-1 The façade of the Wegmans State College store.

My first encounter with Wegmans impressed me positively. It was the summer of 2004 when I started my first long stay in the United States, far away from the familiar. Prior to my arrival, I thought of myself as culturally familiar with America; after all, I was brought up on American visual culture. However, physically living in a rural college town was not like what I had imagined. Without the touristic distance that allowed me to

deal with people or things in a superficial way, everything became so close, yet so distant for me. The perceived need to live and fit in concerned me. As an outsider, both physically and culturally, I had the urge to learn to live and act like a local, yet, I found myself unfamiliar with the local. This unfamiliarity was soon reflected in my diet—I had no access to food and ingredients that I knew well. Most supermarkets in town targeted in-state college students. Therefore, most international foods and ingredients were rarely available or in stock. Walking into a regular American supermarket in town such as McLanahan’s Downtown Market or Weis’s¹⁸ would be like walking into an unfamiliar environment with a new system of objects, which could be really adventurous. These American foods and ingredients were not anything familiar to me. Rather, they were unknown visual images located in a disoriented context and I needed to read them carefully so that I would not unpleasantly surprise myself at my table.

My encounter with Wegmans, however, shortly eased my momentary symptoms of homesickness. Its spectacular interior space drew my attention and fabricated a huge *cabinet of curiosities*¹⁹ for me. Unlike most American supermarkets in my experience, which did not attract me in or invite me to linger, Wegmans’ inviting and seemingly quality-assured ambiance portrayed by the façade materialized through its interior visual presentation and its sheer layout (Figure 3-2).

¹⁸The McLanahan's Downtown Market is a local grocery and pharmacy with two stores open in downtown State College. The Weis is a regional grocery chain headquartered in Pennsylvania, with three stores in State College area. Both are grocery stores frequented by residents and students in State College.

¹⁹ The “cabinet of curiosities” is a museological term, not referring to a piece of furniture, but a room with personal collection of things of wonder. These cabinets reached the peak of their popularity in the seventeenth century. They were the personal collections of rich and wealthy individuals and contained both natural and man-made objects.



Figure 3-2 A Cheese Shop at Wegmans

Walking through the tunnel-like entrance of Wegmans is like entering through a slender gate that directs you into a theme park of produce and groceries. A contrast of size and scope between the slender gate and the extensive interior space of Wegmans is the first overwhelming factor that catches the consumer's attention. Overhead pipes, wires, and electric power lines are visible, but painted to blend in. Lighting is well-planned to provide visual hierarchy that directs consumers to "must see" items and specials. For instance, consumers are usually directed by the brightest light to the central produce department, which models a countrified open market. By means of installing special light fixtures such as tinted lenses, the produce colors are accented and vivid, creating a warm and comfortable countrified ambience. At the produce department, fresh seasonal

produce is placed in wooden crates, carefully arranged by color and lightly misted to give the illusion of dew. Boxes of produce and crates of fruits are installed by design; handwritten boards and colorful signs promoting sales, food preparation solutions and nutritional principles are hung overhead from the ceiling. Elements and principles of art such as line, color, texture, emphasis, and variety are employed as visual rhetoric to express freshness and instantaneity, as if produce had just arrived from local farms. If one is visiting the produce department at the right time, an on-site chef will demonstrate how to make healthy dishes with seasonal ingredients. An opportunity for a sensational tasting experience will follow the visual pleasure and add an exclamation mark to the visit. A technique of museum display is used in this department as well. A box of French seasonal truffles, displayed on rice, serves as the landmark piece in this open area. I have seen quite a few consumers “worship” the truffles as if they were jewelry displayed in a locked glass box. Through staging its space by employing visual rhetoric, Wegmans provides its consumers with a sensational opening act whenever they embark on their journey of shopping.

Next to the produce department is another spectacular food section, the bakery. European breads, such as those from France and Italy, and exotic pastries with extravagant names are displayed behind glass counters (Asia, sadly, is excluded). Seasonal and holiday breads such as cranberry walnut bread and Jewish challah may also be available in addition to the usual variety of chocolates, exotic cakes and desserts sitting on the sleek marble counter. Consumers are welcome to ask questions if they have any. A designated chef-like staff person, taking care of the goods and the consumers, is

always available behind the counter. Wearing a white shirt and cap, this staff person's costume represents the professionalism of this section. This staff person provides advice or suggestions for any possible occasion. I was once offered an insider's tip and thus discovered Wegmans' limited edition dark chocolate cherry bread, which is only available upon request. I was told to try the bread with mascarpone cheese spread. It was my first pleasing bite of American food culture and my negative stereotypical impression of American food was thus surprisingly reversed. This encounter with the staff person prompted another unexpected encounter with the food. It is in these encounters that the exotic can be experienced through the sense of taste and the relationships between the human and the object can be initiated. To me, Wegmans is a space where the foreign and the exotic are embodied. Located inside the bakery section is the French-inspired Patisserie. Similarly, a chef-like woman staff is usually designated to oversee the cakes and pastries. I recognize this woman because of her distinctive red hair. In addition to her red hair, her neat and artistic black pastry hat also helps to materialize the French-inspired style highlighted in this Patisserie, visually distinguishing the differences between the Patisserie and the bakery.

Adjacent to the bakery section are the deli and the cheese shop. Never had I seen such a complete collection of hams and cheeses before visiting Wegmans. Although every American supermarket has its own cheese selection, which is marketed as a household must-have, the huge collection of cheeses in Wegmans is overwhelming to me. Various kinds of cheeses are exhibited according to their origin, softness, texture and content, suggesting that the United States is the top cheese producer in the world. If we

can barely make decisions, even after a few samplings, the knowledgeable staff working behind the counter can advise us on these dilemmas as well. Unsurprisingly, this attitude also applies to the meat department, representing another important industry in American economic development. I recall being given a booklet regarding meat when my goal was to make a comfort food dish from lamb legs. The handy booklet illustrated the culinary name of each meat part followed by a chart indicating the useful techniques of boiling and roasting different meats. This booklet was my survival book in which I could find corresponding names of the ingredients I needed for preparing specific meats. It was through this process of seeing, smelling, and tasting, together with developing cooking techniques, that I learned to deal with American ingredients and to incorporate them into my everyday diet. And it was also in this diet process that I started internalizing the American perception of food and its everyday culture.

In addition to the departments and sections mentioned above, the space of Wegmans incorporated other departments for frozen food, staple groceries and theme-based sections. In departmental areas, the aisles are so widely laid out that two shopping carts can easily pass by each other. Consumers can visually discover the location of their target goods and see the variety on offer without inconvenient searching. Sealed products displayed on shelves represent themselves with meticulously designed visual culture. They are presented in an odor free and non-edible condition, un-smelly and inedible, but are both visible and touchable to potential consumers. In the theme-based sections, such as the tea spot, tea leaves or tea bags from around the world are re-packaged and marketed in accordance with their perceived health benefits and the consumers' lifestyles.

Thus, consumers will find “get maternal”, “get wellness”, “get heart”, and “get happy” tea products on the shelves. By means of re-packaging and marketing, goods are transferred into products in the form of visual culture. Visual presentation in these departments or sections is thus important in re-defining the edible. This visual presentation reminds me of Andreas Gursky’s *99 Cent II* (Figure 3-3) in which fragmented visual culture on packages suggests how food can turn into cultural codes and be paired or mixed to create visual text. As a cultural outsider, this fragmented visual culture on packages usually serves as the point of departure for my experimental adventures. Through strolling inside Wegmans, I read the fragmented visual cultures as they are conceptualized and as coherent narratives directed at me. Many times, I came out from Wegmans with foods I did not really know well. This action usually resulted from my random interactions with others or in my watching how others were placing one product with another. The mantras for fitting into this American food culture (e.g. Eating is a moral act) and acting like a local (e.g. Strive for 5 cups of fruits and vegetables) drove me to put the things into my shopping cart. While we are all situated in the same spectacle, the things I consume seem to reflect the person I am. Even though shopping itself can be personal, I learned that this action certainly reveals one’s identity in a socio-cultural relational context. Who I consider I am is projected into the process of consumption. I also learned that the visual culture in my shopping cart not only denotes my taste and mastery of food, but also my moral values and beliefs in food. For instance, I would see some people linger around the international foods section, focusing their attention and searching for Asian rice or spices. I was once asked by a woman to suggest authentic sushi rice in this section for she was changing her diet and desired to live a

healthier “Asian” lifestyle. This encounter made me realize that what is familiar to me may be exotic visual culture to others. To be able to identify the visual culture and use the products these visual cultures represented made me feel that I was part of the consumer body in Wegmans and thus that I belonged. It is also a visualized social statement that I, as a consumer, responded to the spatial context.



Figure 3-3 99 Cent II, 2001

Debord's further elaborations of his concepts of spectacle appear in *The Comments on The Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1988. He claims that the modern spectacle has essentially existed in the autocratic reign of the market economy, which is currently part of an irresponsible sovereignty and the totality of new techniques of government that accompanied this reign (Debord, 1998). Accordingly, the spectacle has become the *integrated spectacle*, which is more dominant than before. It combines concentrated and diffuse forms in the fatalism of global capitalism, where resistance becomes futile (Best & Kellner, 1997, p.118). Additionally, other than the two features of the spectacle characterized by Debord — “incessant technological renewal” and the “integration of state and economy” — three other features were added by Debord in his most recent phase of the integrated spectacle: “generalized secrecy”, “unanswerable lies” and “an eternal present” (Debord, 1998). As stated by Debord, the integrated spectacle controls every aspect of *real* society. That is to say, through the skillful manipulation of visual culture, the integrated spectacle integrates itself into *reality*. Reality thus no longer confronts us as something alien, for the integrated spectacle has been able to reconstruct reality to suit itself (Debord, 1998).

In this regard, the spectacle is referred to as the integrity of social activity, appropriated by the spectacle itself for its own purposes (Jappe, 1999). The spectacle can be anywhere — from city planning to political parties of every tendency, from art to science, from everyday life to human passions and desires. In regards to art education, the spectacle exists everywhere we find reality replaced by visual culture. For instance, young people (6-18 years of age) today are targeted as highly competent consumers of a

visual market consisting not only of products, but also of ideas and values. Visual culture on advertisements, collector cards, food containers, computer games, and TV programs is designed to sell beliefs and values to young people not only as products, but as whole lifestyle packages (Sparman, 2005). The reason they are placed as one of the target markets is that they are easily influenced by everyday visual culture. Teen drama series or teen magazines can effortlessly trigger young people's consumption activities, making them believe that what is portrayed in the visual culture are realities of others. Young people thus construct their identities through circulating visual culture or consumption behaviors. Or in an example from another context, politicians in Taiwan usually speak in an affected manner during press conferences. The ways they address issues, the gestures they make, the physical expressions they show, and the visual aids they use repeatedly demonstrate that the spectacle does exercise its influences on mediating social relationships among people. Therefore, walking into an everyday supermarket, we immediately receive messages carrying beliefs and values that are conveyed by visual culture. Through artfully and skillfully manipulation, the spectacle has made visual culture become reality and reality transform into visual culture. For this reason, I agree that Wegmans, as instantiated above, embodies the spectacle and is considered embodied spectacle in this sense.

As embodied spectacle, Wegmans further supports the critical role of vision and visuality. Although the vision and visuality of the spectators are significant in the context of the spectacle, other senses of the body have gradually become equally important in the integrated spectacle, for they reinforce spectators' belief systems. With the presence of a

proper sensational catalyst such as an on-site demonstration, the spectacle can skillfully manipulate its spectators. Wegmans is such a space, in which the spectacle utilizes all the senses of smelling, touching, tasting, and hearing to fortify the construction of authenticity and credibility through vision. In the last section of this chapter, The Spectacle of Extras, I will argue how the body located in the spectacle can be figured as a signifier of the spectacle. The section is informed primarily by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2002) interpretation of the body and Bourriaud's "Society of Extras" (2002). Through proposing the society of the extras, I will examine the relationship between the spectacle and the flâneuse strolling through the spectacle. Accordingly, I will further elaborate how the flâneuse, as a postmodern subject, responds to the spectacle.

The Spectacle of Extras

An earlier stage in the economy's domination of social life entailed an obvious downgrading of being into having that left its stamp on all human endeavors. The present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy, entails a generalized shift from having to appearing: all effective "having" must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate *raison d'être* from appearances. At the same time, all individual reality, being directly dependent on social power and completely shaped by that power, has assumed a social character. Indeed, it is only inasmuch as individual reality is not that it is allowed to appear. (Debord, 1994, p. 16)

As mentioned above, in order to construct a world following its order, the spectacle needs to elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch. According to Debord, both vision and visuality are critical in the spectacle, with vision considered as the most direct sense and the most specific way of knowing. Debord's appreciation of vision and visuality reflects the causal relationship between seeing and

knowing rooted in Western philosophy. However, prioritizing vision and visuality neglects other senses of the body, which may provide for interrelated ways of perceiving. In addition, this appreciation of vision and visuality underestimates the body as a potential site of learning and knowing, positing seeing as the primary way of understanding our relations with the external world. And I argue that we should re-figure our body in considering our ways of knowing and our relationship with the world, regarding the body as a site for meaning-making.

To foreground the body as a potential site of learning, I draw on Merleau-Ponty's (2002) definition of phenomenology, which is primarily concerned with the relations between consciousness and nature, and between interiority and exteriority. Merleau-Ponty proposes the idea of the body-subject which re-figures the body as an inseparable part of the world it inhabits. This body does not exist as a container or a vessel in which organs are stored. Neither does it live as a thing separate from the mind or other senses. Rather, in Merleau-Ponty's words, the body is a perceptive being and is constantly entangled with consciousness and the world around. Following this thread, the body and the modes of sensual perception play a critical role in understanding the world as well as engaging with the world. Namely, the corporeal and sensory relations are the ways we relate to others and further understand our existence. This understanding of the body thus forms the theoretical argument for this section.

In questioning the dichotomy of self and meaning and the philosophical tradition of positing the body as a trifle, Merleau-Ponty addresses a new conception, the body as a center of meaning in the world (Fuller, 1990, p.67). He claims that the body is the

condition and context through which the self is able to relate to objects. It is the body as I live it, as I experience it, and as it shapes my experience on which Merleau-Ponty wishes to elaborate (Grosz, 1994, p.86). The lived body is thus a self capable of opening itself to experience all kinds of possible relations. It is immersed in relations and becomes part of those relations. Merleau-Ponty's revision of the body has been constantly adopted by feminist philosophers such as Elizabeth Grosz and Rosalyn Diprose. As stated in Grosz's re-reading of Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), a subject in Merleau-Ponty's sense is a *being-to-the-world* (viii), a subject committed to the world, a subject of perception and behavior as well as cognition and reflection (Grosz, 1994, p.86). For Merleau-Ponty, mind is always embodied, always based on corporeal and sensory relations.

Nevertheless, the non-object body is not a subject either. It is defined by its relations with objects and in turn re-defines these objects. It exists in a mutually definable state and therefore provides a space in which objects are to be situated and cultural forces are able to be inscribed. In this regard, in reading a space which embodies the spectacle, the body situated in this space can accordingly be seen as a representation or a signifier. Space is understood as a relation that is constantly produced by the reciprocal connectedness between the lived body and the space itself. In other words, the space is read through its relation with the body and the body can be read through its relation with the space. The dynamic relation between body and space is where meaning is produced. And this is what Merleau-Ponty calls the *flesh*. As interpreted in Diprose's (2002) book, *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas*, Merleau-Ponty's

becoming of the subject for one's self depends on being with other lived bodies. Other lived bodies thus serve as mirrors, informing subjects, acting as models of lived corporeality (Ziarek, 2003). Diprose further posits that *I live my body outside of myself through the mirror space of the other's body* (p. 89). Her interpreting of Merleau-Ponty's flesh and its relationships with the surrounding space suggests that a subject is able to become aware of its difference through bodily encounters with others. Because the differentiation of lived corporeality takes place in relation to other bodies, this relational bodily identity is never settled and is fundamentally ambiguous, escaping the subject/object distinction (Ziarek, 2003). And in this sense, a body located in a space is more or less in accordance with the space it inhabits. For it reciprocally receives and produces meanings with the surrounding world. This sense of self and the world are emergent phenomena in an ongoing process of becoming. It is in this regard that I read the space through the body. Namely, my body is a signifier which embodies the cultural marks of the space. It also leads me to speculate the concept of *extras* proposed in Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, which will be elaborated in the following pages.

Merleau-Ponty's exploration of the relationship between the body and the space has been noted in feminist scholarship. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir identified the importance of Merleau-Ponty's writings, asserting the body is a basis of existence and the meanings of embodiment cannot be reduced. She considered embodiment through its realization or inscription of gender, positing the body as a basis for becoming woman. She accordingly stated the following:

Woman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming, and it is in this becoming that she should be compared with man; that is to say, her possibilities should be defined...in the human species individual "possibilities" depend upon the economic and social situation.

It is only regarding the body as both a transcendent subject for me and an imminent object for others that Merleau-Ponty and de Beauvoir reached the consensus (Cataldi, 2001). Iris Marion Young, another feminist scholar influenced by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, describes the particular modalities of female bodies as they differ from that of men in her "Throwing Like a Girl" (Young, 1990) and its follow-up, "'Throwing Like a Girl': Twenty Years Later" (Young, 2005). In her observation, a man puts his whole body into the motion when throwing a ball, while a woman generally restricts her own movements as she executes them. She therefore concludes that women in general move in a more tentative and reactive way in the context of sports. Young's observation resonates what Merleau-Ponty argues, that we experience the world in terms of the "I can", which is oriented towards certain projects based on our capacity and habituality. For Young, this intentionality in women is inhibited and ambivalent, rather than confident, experienced as an "I cannot."

Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body opens room for debate. Although feminist critiques of Merleau-Ponty have never been settled (Butler, 1989; Sullivan, 1997; Young 1990), it is irrational to neglect Merleau-Ponty's work, for it creates a space for a corporeal feminist approach. As Elizabeth Grosz (1994) critiques in her *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Merleau-Ponty's avoidance of the sexual difference between men and women makes his corporeal phenomenology arbitrary in over-generalizing human experiences. She sides with Luce Irigaray by questioning Merleau-

Ponty's theorizing of the body, which prioritizes vision as the most privileged, dominant and even phallic-centered perceptual way of relating to the world. To unravel Irigaray's reworking of Merleau-Ponty's concepts of the *Chiasm*, the last unfinished piece in his work, *the Visible and the Invisible* (1969), Grosz (1994) concludes that vision requires the tactile, for it is not capable of existing autonomously from the tangible (p.106). To relate and to be related to in the world, the body cannot rely solely on vision, but also requires other perceptual senses.

Grosz's rereading of Irigaray is valuable in emphasizing the bodily experiences of the flâneuse, for it acknowledges the equal importance of her tactile perception as well as her vision. However, not satisfied with feminist theorizing solely about touch, I deem that other senses of the body should be included in reinventing an all-sensing flâneuse who fully articulates her embodiment of the spectacle. Therefore, I argue that the acoustic, the gustatory, and the olfactory should be taken into consideration in mapping the bodyscape of the all-sensing flâneuse, for this is how she relates and is related to the embodied spectacle. Her body is a corporeal scape on which knowledge and experiences as cultural forces etc.

In this regard, the flâneuse walking into Wegmans becomes an all-sensing signifier of the embodied spectacle. She strolls around different departments and sections, bodily encounters various groceries, dairy products, household goods and people, and immerses herself in relationships with things and people through seeing, touching, listening, tasting, smelling and conversing. She knows and learns through her bodily encounter with things and people. She learns from gazing upon objects and interacting with other lived bodies.

Her body thus functions as a mirror reflecting her embodied experiences to others. She learns from others as others learn from her. These encounters unfold her body, allowing the body to flow into events and spaces it encounters. With her blending into the embodied spectacle, her existence in these human and spatial relations enables her to be a visual spectacle or an extra in the embodied spectacle. The openness of her *self* and the *body* render learning possible. As curriculum theorist Madeleine Grumet (2007) reminds us, there should be no line drawn between subjectivity and what we know as we experience our bodies in the world and the world through our bodies (XV). While the all-sensing flâneuse is situated in Wegmans, the embodied spectacle, she is learning through bodily engaging herself with the spectacle. Her body conveys the spatiality of situation, which embodies the relations in the spectacle, and accordingly extends and serves as another visual spectacle which continuously encounters others and interacts with others. To borrow Bourriaud's words, the flâneuse serves as a spectacle of the extra, embodying her experiences and knowledge in a space where she can bodily encounter other lived bodies.

As the quote that begins this section states, all individual reality in contemporary society has assumed a social character; the spectacle has its spectators embody its ideology. This ideology becomes even more noticeable when spectators can relate themselves to the encounters in the spectacle. In *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), Bourriaud described how relational art relies on the inter-human relations which are represented, produced or prompted. This describes a set of contemporary artistic practices responding to the *society of the extras*. Bourriaud claims that Debord's society of the spectacle has

shifted to the *society of extras* in which individuals are deflected from a passive and purely repetitive status to the minimum activity dictated to them by market forces. An example of this is that more and more people are now taking part in reality shows and enjoying their fifteen minutes of fame. Capitalist economy drives market demand and the so-called reality shows become accomplices. Walking on the street or dining in a restaurant, one may encounter camera shooting and be asked to comment or critique based on one's experience. We are situated in a society where one can easily become an extra just by appearing on the scene. We follow the scripts written by the spectacle and embody the relations portrayed in the scripts. In Bourriaud's words, we are all extras manipulated by the spectacle. I argue that the flâneuse, whose body embodies the relationship between herself and the spectacle, is the spectacle of extras in this regard.

In the following chapter, *The Narratives of the Flâneuse*, I will read the knowledge and experience produced by the spectacle through the stroll or the bodily encounters of the flâneuse. Her being-in-the-spectacle and being-to-the-spectacle will provide us with an understanding of how the spectacle produces knowledge and experiences in terms of class, gender, and race.

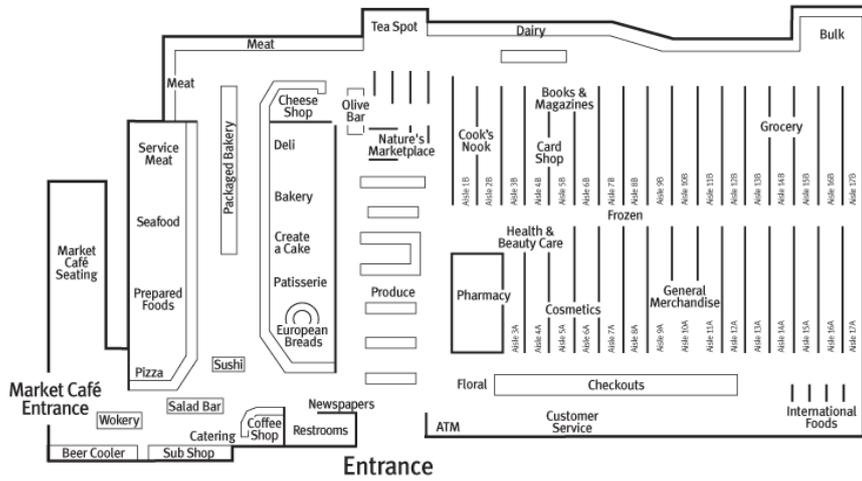
CHAPTER FOUR

THE NARRATIVES OF THE FLÂNEUSE

Map as Narrative: Pre-reading of the Spectacle-scape

We read the map when we are about to explore somewhere new; we carry the map against getting lost; we follow the map in order to be at a certain place on time. The map becomes an important reference when we are situated in places unfamiliar or unknown. That was how I discovered Wegmans' store map (Figure 4-1) when I first started my exploration of Wegmans.

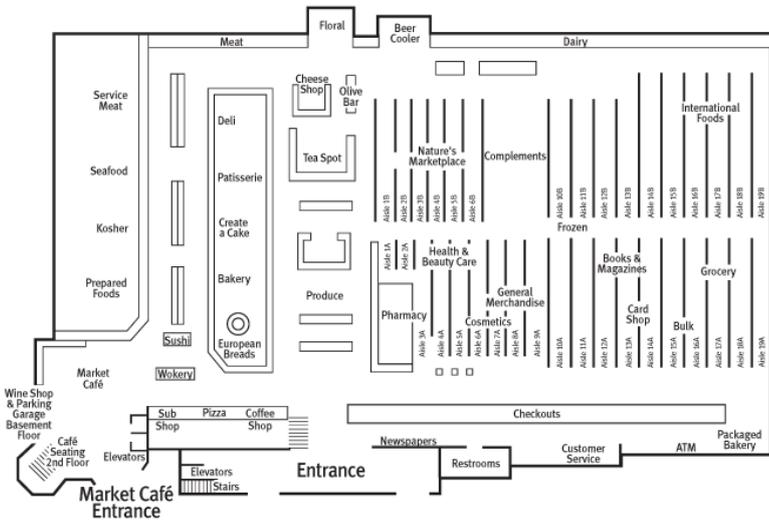
Usually, supermarkets do not provide customers with maps. The architectural narrative of this modern, everyday space seems to be so natural and taken-for-granted that consumers will automatically find their way and meet their needs inside this purpose designed environment. Maps are mostly available and obtained at locales such as museums, national parks, or scenic spots so that visitors may orient themselves to where they are located or where to head. At shopping sites, directories are available so that shoppers can be directed to areas or places of interest.. Maps are also critical in locating ourselves and understanding the geographical relationship between our position and the locale we inhabit. The store maps at Wegmans are similar to political maps which indicate artificial/man-made boundaries and locations of areas, divisions, and sections. By carefully reading different Wegmans store maps, one can infer how a store layout mirrors the community wherein it is located. For instance, by comparing two Wegmans



Wegmans State College • 345 Colonnade Blvd. • State College, PA 16803 • 814-278-9000 • wegmans.com

Bakery 814-278-9005	Pharmacy 814-278-9045	Seafood 814-278-9055	Pharmacy Hours Mon. - Fri.: 8:30AM - 9:00PM Sat.: 8:30AM - 6:00PM Sun.: 9:00AM - 4:00PM Smartfill 1-877-934-2479
Catering 814-278-9070	Pizza 814-278-9015	Service Meats 814-278-9060	
Deli 814-278-9010	Prepared Foods 814-278-9020	Sub Shop 814-278-9025	
Floral 814-278-9030	Produce 814-278-9050	Sushi 814-278-9065	
Patisserie 814-278-9040			

Figure 4-1 Wegmans State College store map



Wegmans Fairfax • 11620 Monument Drive • Fairfax, VA 22030 • 703-653-1600 • wegmans.com

Bakery 703-653-1605	Pharmacy 703-653-1645	Service Meat 703-653-1660	Pharmacy Hours Mon. - Fri.: 8:30AM - 9:00PM Sat.: 9:00AM - 7:00PM Sun.: 9:00AM - 6:00PM Smartfill 1-877-934-2479
Catering 703-653-1609	Pizza 703-653-1615	Sub Shop 703-653-1625	
Deli 703-653-1610	Prepared Foods 703-653-1620	Sushi 703-653-1665	
Floral 703-653-1630	Produce 703-653-1650	Wine & Spirits 703-653-1690	
Patisserie 703-653-1640	Seafood 703-653-1655		

Figure 4-2 Wegmans Fairfax store map

store maps — Wegmans State College, Pennsylvania, (my research site) and Wegmans Fairfax, Virginia (Figure 4-2) — we will find a separate and specific kosher department and a huge international foods corner at Wegmans Fairfax, suggesting the large Jewish and immigrant populations in the neighborhood. As geographers claim that a map can function as a graphic text (Harley & Woodward, 1987; Swanson, Siegel & Shryock, 2004), or, as Benedict Anderson writes in his *Imagined Communities* (1991), that the map can profoundly shape the way in which the colonial state imagined its domination, a map speaks for the community and visually unfolds the narrative of the community. A map does relate a specific narrative.

The narrative of the traffic route can be another focal point for reading Wegmans' store maps. A clock-wise direction of the traffic route is suggested by placing the main entrance and Market Café entrance at the center and the left, and the checkouts on the right. An invisible but compulsory route with a beginning in the center or on the left and an ending on the right is pre-destined for its spectators. Spectators are therefore induced to start their strolls from the center or the left so that they can walk through the whole spectacle without missing most departments or sections before reaching the checkouts. Along this main, yet invisible, traffic route, more corridors and passages for shopping or reverting are created by positioning sections such as thematic display islands or refrigerators with clear display windows and shelves. A passable network of routes is therefore unraveled in the spectacle.

Following this thread, I read three sections divided by the spectacle in terms of the traffic route: the produce section, located right in front of the main entrance; the food and bakery section on the left side near the Market Café entrance; and another section including the pharmacy, frozen food, grocery, and general merchandise area (across aisle 9A to 11A) near the checkouts. Within these three sections, various thematic areas are located in relevant positions respectively. For instance, in the food and bakery section, spectators will come across the Coffee Shop, Prepared Foods Department, Seafood and Meat Departments, Cheese Shop, Deli and Patisserie; in the general merchandise area, spectators will find cosmetics, cleaning and household supplies, packaged goods, and frozen foods; in the produce section fruits and vegetables are organized by type. Multiple thematic shops and divisions compose these three sections and these three sections dictate the traffic route and fill grocery shopping strolls with scenes and spectacles. Another interesting point to observe is the remote location of the international foods corner, which is hidden behind the checkouts and easily-overlooked. Although another area, bulk foods, is located at the diagonal position to the Market Café's entrance and neighbors the dairy fridges, I find it more distinct and accessible to Wegmans' spectators than the international section.

There are multiple narratives within Wegmans that can be produced through careful observation. What I described above is simply my preliminary reading of the map, a bodily sketch in the context of painting or fine art, or a thin description of the overall spectacle. In order to gain a better spatial understanding of the spectacle, I decided to practice a walk inside Wegmans with my map. Similar to a study in terms of painting or

fine art, my study of the stroll is a practice piece to capture the essence of the scene. It is my bodily study piece of Wegmans, providing me with understanding of the composition of the spatial, and further creating a space for the flesh to exist within. It not only gives me a whole geographical picture of the spectacle, but also enables me to physically, mentally and emotionally associate with the space within the spectacle, just like the strolling flâneur inside the arcade in Paris who would need to build a certain familiarity with the arcade so that he could stroll through that man-made covered passages without feeling unfit.

Moreover, this practicing walk is meaningful in securing my later strolls through this walk, for I forge a sense of belonging within this particular home away from home. It can be perceived as a study of ensuing strolls which delineate how visual culture is conducive to the actions of spectators. In the following section, *A Study of the Stroll*, I will direct my gaze at visual culture and visual spectacles in the departments and sections identified from my reading of the store map of Wegmans State College. This practicing walk will also inscribe some spatial markers on my body, building a relationship and creating an in-between space between my body and the space. Through this relationship and bonding, I will eventually visualize narratives that contribute to my understanding of the construction of knowledge and experience inside the embodied spectacle. This critical understanding and the issues brought up by my visual narratives and bodily encounters will be further explored in the third section, *The Wegmans Way: the Visual Narratives and Bodily Encounters Engendered through Flâneuse's Strolls*.

A Study of the Stroll

In order to establish familiarity with the space and to give myself a sense of belonging, I plan to follow the traffic route I read from the store map. Similar to artists' studies of their subjects before completing their works, I need to do some study before proceeding to stroll. I therefore consider the walk I am about to practice as a study in preparation for future strolls. Along this walk, I need to experience a holistic spatial picture of the space within the spectacle, confirming doubts or conjectures in my pre-reading of the narrative of the spectacle.

With my curious gaze and a Wegmans State College store map, I walk into Wegmans which functions as the embodied spectacle for me. Like the Parisian flâneur, strolling with a cane or a turtle, I secure a shopping cart at the main entrance so that I can set my own pace and blend in without appearing strange. This shopping cart is momentarily an extension of my body. A wooden board mounted on the wall states the following: "*We [Wegmans] are offering 140 varieties and organic produce today. Look for 'the organic sign' inside to identify organic items.*" Inside the tunnel-like entrance, products and goods celebrating Valentine's Day are well-displayed, suggesting the date, the most current special event and related sales in the spectacle. I look at flyers, posters, on-sale products around me, feeling dazzled. Various visual culture texts converge on my vision, all composing visual narratives, be they related to promotions or healthy diets. My heart is lifted up because of the visual adventure ahead of me, and I am anxious to start my study of the stroll in Wegmans.

I follow the pedestrian traffic to enter into the spectacle. A display stand stocked with discount items as advertised, is positioned in the middle of the passage to create stopovers. I therefore halt at the entrance and look over the scene in front of me. As mentioned in my pre-reading of the spectacle map, three landmark sections are strategically positioned within the spectacle. In order of access, they are: the central Produce Department; the Food Department; and a section across aisle 9A to 11A used to stage special in-store events which are often seasonal or related to upcoming holidays. These three essential areas build the invisible yet compulsory traffic route of the spectacle and induce spectators to follow and to gaze more. At this moment, they are a lively presence in my vision. I quickly look around at other spectators and observe how they act. They either go ahead to the central Produce Department or turn left to the Food Department. Perhaps the checkout area located on the right side suggests the end of the shopping route; I do not see anyone go directly to the right side.

I am driven towards the department in front of me, the central Produce Department which is directly ahead of the main entrance. Before proceeding to the Produce Department, I notice a Chef's Station spotlight on the left side. Clearly, some demonstration will take place at this station. The Produce Department is the observed landmark department in the first position of the spectacle and the way it is presented is visually delightful. I push my cart and walk around randomly in this department. The produce is positioned beautifully, as if each item is an art piece from nature. To me, one of Wegmans' core values, frequently seen on its weekly flyers – diversity – seems to be visually realized in having produce from both global and local venues. Colorful tropical

fruits, fresh seasonal vegetables, exotic herbs, and even some ingredients that are uncommon and usually unseen²⁰ all converge on this spectacle, performing a lived and pleasing display in this department. I also notice that this department, equipped with refrigerated display windows and vaporized water sprays, is carefully devised in order to exhibit thoroughly their collection of varied produce. Compared to other grocery stores or supermarkets in town, the use of space inside Wegmans is generous. For example, the width of aisles is huge enough to allow two shopping carts passing each other without being cramped. Giving space to consumers means shelf space can be reduced. Since shelf space is limited, but the diversity of produce needs to be focalized, Wegmans is very careful and calculating about its visual arrangements. A quick calculation on the quantity of each item finds that in order to give way to variety, the quantity of each item on a shelf is limited.

As a result, unlike other supermarkets or retailers in town that focus on either limited items or wholesaling within a spacious unit, Wegmans has a tendency towards providing multiple choices for each single product item. From a high-end option to its own-brand, from the organic to the commonly-seen, Wegmans utilizes the variety of products to create mini spectacles within a spatial unit and urges spectators to consume. In other words, these tiny spectacles speak for diversity of the spectacle embodied by Wegmans. In addition, most products displayed here are in accord with another value – sustainability – promoted by Wegmans. In this context, sustainability means to reduce, reuse, and recycle, and this is directly reflected in its sourcing and partnering with local

²⁰ In season Wegmans would have French truffles showcased in the central Produce Department.

growers who share its commitment. A handwritten chart indicating locally grown produce is mounted on the wall, thus introducing annual produce provided by local growers. Seasonal produce is juxtaposed with the imported. By reducing food miles involved in delivering produce to the consumer, Wegmans reinforces its company image of sustainability and supports local agri-business.

As claimed through its company slogan, *Every Day You Get Our Best*, which is seen everywhere inside, Wegmans utilizes “organic produce” as another buzzword in this department. At the main entrance, Wegmans daily updates the number of organic items available (for instance, the offer of 140 organic items on February 3rd, 2010) and makes an educational statement regarding how individuals can contribute to support environmental sustainability by consuming organic produce. One seems to be given the free choice of consuming either fresh or natural/organic produce. The customers’ decision-making will reflect different beliefs and values of an individual responding to the environment – a regular consumer or a consumer with environmental protection awareness. Through framing its company image in support of sustainability concerns, Wegmans targets consumers sharing similar values. Crates, stands, and thematic islands are thus positioned carefully to create circular routes inside this area. All passages and corridors extending from the traffic route not only juxtapose fresh, natural and organic produce, but also direct spectators to the best things staged for sustainable consumption.

When it relates to staging, visual presentation matters. As mentioned earlier, Wegmans is careful in all visual arrangements; it is even more sophisticated in blending elements and principles of art with produce sold inside, making its space a rich text of

visual culture and a pleasing food-scape to see. A good example in this Produce Department is the apple section where more than ten different kinds of apples are sorted by color, origin, natural or organic attributes on wood crates in order to stage a farm atmosphere. A simple and child-friendly apple chart is provided to inform spectators of the names, origins, tastes, and uses of nearly twenty kinds of commonly-seen apples on site. Vegetables and herbs are also displayed cross color (Figure 4-3) on refrigerated shelves, suggesting variety in a visually pleasing way. They are sprayed routinely with water mist in order to remain crisp without going bad and to enhance the idea of freshness. Labels of vegetables are very informative. Some Asian produce, such as various cabbages, even have their labels describing tastes respectively so that spectators can easily relate a certain type with another. Quite a few male staff are always busily picking away any flawed produce and unpacking and restocking as well as interacting with the customers. Through pleasing visual presentation and devotion of manpower, Wegmans deploys tactics along its traffic route, making spectators see and experience all through their grocery shopping.

From the Produce Department, I continue my walk to the next section. Following the traffic route I identified in advance is another department worth noticing, the Foods Department. This department is neighboring to the Produce Department and is adjacent to a Coffee Shop, Salad Bar, Prepared Foods Department, Seafood Department, Meat Department, Cheese Shop, Deli, Bakery, Patisserie, and a Sushi Bar. Any spectator walking into this department immediately inhales food aromas before seeing the spectacular presentations in each shop or division. I stop at the European breads corner,

looking on those delightful baskets containing bread. Each basket is labeled with the name of the bread, but I can hardly pronounce any of them as I find most of them exotic. A male employee, wearing a white cap, notices the confusion on my face and voluntarily asks if I would need any help or wish to sample some. He kindly introduces some popular European bread and invites me to sample the seasonal one. I take a small piece of the proffered cranberry orange bread and continue my walk in the Food Department.



Figure 4-3 A Produce Department at Wegmans²¹

Flanking the European breads corner is the Patisserie. This French inspired division is a dramatic eye opener in the spectacle (Figure 4-4). Delicate dessert cakes are lined up

²¹ Images showing scenes at Wegmans are downloaded from the “Media Room” of Wegmans official website. Spectators/consumers are not allowed to take photos inside Wegmans due to corporate policy (I have found quite a few supermarket chains prohibit photography in their stores and I was told once that they were concerned about industrial spies). Though none of these images reappear Wegmans State College exactly, they do function as visual reminders of Wegmans State College for most Wegmans’ stores are following a similar architecture layout.

on a reflective granite countertop. Behind the countertop is a female patisserie chef who stands at the Patisserie, facing the consumers passing through. A rectangular mirror with a golden frame is horizontally mounted on the back wall and directly reflects her back image as well as the scene ahead of her. This scene is reminiscent of the painting, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* by Edward Manet (Figure 4-5), suggesting the public gaze surrounding the woman.



Figure 4-4 A French-inspired Patisserie at Wegmans



Figure 4-5 *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882

The Food Department is not as quiet as the Produce Department. Surrounded by many shops and divisions, the Food Department is filled with lively events. Sushi chefs are busy preparing ingredients, making sushi rolls, and arranging sushi boxes displayed on bamboo mats; behind glass counters, staff at the prepared Foods Department are refilling empty bowls with ready-to-go meals, providing samples, and packing foods for spectators; staff working at the Seafood Department are netting lobsters and showcasing seafood; staff at the deli or cheese shop slice hams, bolognas or cheeses on demand to assure the freshness of foods. I can look on the ways foods are processed and packed. They are lively performances to a cultural outsider of American food culture like me.

After browsing through the Food Department, I load my cart with some gourmet prepared foods. I continue my walk, past the tea spot and enter the dairy section. While I

start feeling the cold temperature in this area, a siren from the ceiling catches my attention from a rolling miniature train! I follow the train and the track leads me to the bulk foods area. Various colorful candies and nuts are displayed in perpendicular rolls, as if these candies and nuts are colorful lines and dots composing a rainbow-like candy-scape. Even as an adult I fall in love with the sensational picture.

Reading the map in hand, I find myself located in the far diagonal corner of the spectacle. However, the spatial area for the bulk foods is wide open and visually adjoining to its neighboring sections. Pet foods are easily obtained here. The section arrangement is skillfully organized, which catches the spectators' attention. I turn around and shuttle between aisles. I pass through an aisle filled with pastas, pizza sauces, tomato pastes, and marinades; I go through another aisle in which I see various drink mixes, juices, and granola bars; I shift into a passage of "American snack foods" where I come across bagel chips, cookies, crackers, jellies, marshmallow crèmes, and peanut butters. Now I am situated in the last essential section of the spectacle—aisle 9A to 11A, which is usually the final section for spectators to linger in before moving toward the checkout counters. This section is encircled by the large grocery area I just passed through, and features a cosmetics division, a frozen food division, and an international foods corner, and is used as a special event venue.

At the moment, as advertised at the entrance, a sale event for the upcoming Valentine's Day is taking place here. Part of the aisle shelves are removed to make more room available for event staging. Valentine's heart shapes in the most popular colors of red, purple, pink and white are seen everywhere in this section. Balloons, chocolates,

napkins, plates and so forth are either made in heart shape or printed with messages such as “I Love You” to create atmosphere for certain occasions or on dining tables. The event is staged all through the Floral section which is next to the checkouts. Dozens of red roses are ready to be packed. The overall ambiance from the special event section to the checkouts is romantically accented. Even though I used to see thematic dining tables focusing on various holiday or seasonal events at Wegmans, I do not see one staged for Valentine’s this time. But I still see people delighted with what is romantically presented in the spectacle embodied by Wegmans.

Upon check-out, I realize that I spent nearly an hour and half at Wegmans. I review by drawing my stroll study path on my map (Figure 4-6), assuring my understanding of the spatiality of the spectacle. This study of the stroll has helped me to forge a spatial relationship with the spectacle and to build up a familiarity with the space. I also perceive multiple narratives which can be potentially unfolded of the space and they certainly reflect cultural markers left by the spectacle. In the following section, *The Wegmans Way: the Visual Narratives and Bodily Encounters Engendered through Flâneuse’s Strolls*, I will provide the critical reading of the spectacle by the strolling flâneuse. With her critical gaze and her narrating of experiencing the spectacle, the flâneuse will identify cultural markers related with class, gender and race issues in this embodied spectacle.

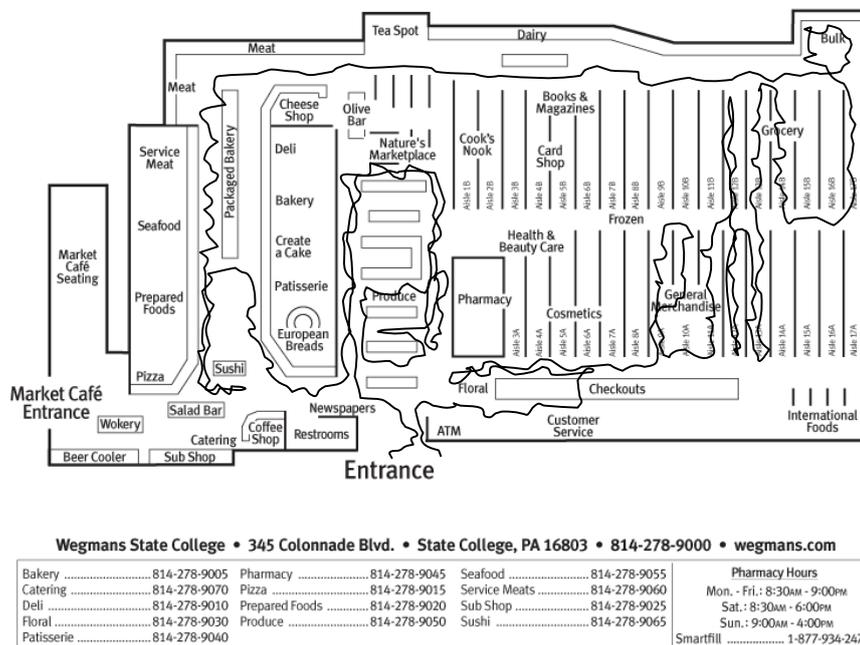


Figure 4-6 Store map marked with the path of my study of the stroll

The Wegmans Way: the Visual Narratives and Bodily Encounters Engendered through Flâneuse's Strolls

In studying the stroll, I forge a relationship with the space which enables me to further investigate issues forwarded by the spectacle, especially those related to social relations in contemporary American society. As an embodied spectacle, Wegmans unavoidably constitutes and naturalizes beliefs and values promoted by consumerism. Just Debord asserted in his *Society of the Spectacle* that all commodities are spectacles which exist actively around us and take complete control of our social life (Debord, 1994, p.29), I accordingly argue that the spectacle embodies social relationships through the visual culture deployed by the spectacle.

In this section, I return to the standpoint of the flâneuse. Over a period of three weeks, I repeatedly strolled around Wegmans, perceiving it with my body, critical gaze and feminist consciousness. Occasionally, I took part in events on site as an inside consumer, engaging corporeally with the embodied spectacle; other times, I strolled around, gazed upon people and scenes, and conversed with people as an outsider spectator. In doing so, I construct fluid bodily encounters and visual narratives, which feature visual spectacles and visual culture as lively discourses performed in this embodied spectacle, as they relate to a definition of the spectacle that is ideological. The visual narratives and bodily encounters embody the criticality of the flâneuse as she examines and resists the spectacle critically; they can also be located within the contemporary discourse of visual culture, informing our ways of seeing, sensing, and knowing in everyday life.

Who Shops at Wegmans? Taste as a Social/Cultural Classification

Where do you shop for your groceries? This was the warm-up activity to break the ice when my new roommate attended her first social in State College. Everyone was asked to write down the first letter on a scrap of paper indicating the place s/he usually went grocery shopping; later on, the host would collect the papers and read the letter written on each piece of paper. After being given the above information, all the guests needed to find out who was shopping at which place. Writing a big “W” on her notepaper, my roommate was conjectured to be a Wal-Mart person. When she replied “no” to the rest of the people in the house, everyone looked at her confusedly and with curiosity. “So where do you usually shop?” the question was asked again by another guest. “I shop at Wegmans with my roommate!” She replied elatedly. Then she began to hear whispers in undertones from the crowd...At the end, she was told by other graduate students that (graduate) students did not shop in Wegmans. Wegmans is too expensive to shop! *It is for professors!* (Wu, 2005, *Journal of Living with the Other*)

What causes my roommate and I to enjoy shopping at Wegmans? What makes different groups of people shop at different places? What prompts people to see Wegmans as a somewhat upscale place for grocery shopping? Even these questions do not seem to be difficult to answer; responses to these questions might still come from anywhere, reflecting the complexity of personal differences in shopping choice.

Shopping is a crucial step in the circulation of commodities. What interests most people in particular about this step is the pre-commitment process of browsing, strolling, selecting, and purchasing of products. This process brings us lots of wonders, enriching our visual experiences and understanding of things. For instance, I like to shop the Chef's Nook at Wegmans where I can look at the most up-to-date kitchen utensils which not only save time and add aesthetic entertainment in the kitchen, but also represent modern concepts of food preparation. Well-designed meat and vegetable knives, and a salt grinder are examples that help cooks professionally retain the cleanliness and freshness of ingredients; sometimes, neat designs can transform cooking into a piece of live performance art. Also, at the moment of purchase, the thing we buy goes through a magical transformation, just as Marx (2007) describes in his *Capital I*, turning a product into money. Without this act, the product remains inert and worthless.

In the chapter "Commodity Fetishism" in *Capital I*, Marx recognizes that the form of a commodity no longer has anything to do with the physical properties. He deems that the shift from "the concentration of the pure use or exchange value of a product" toward "the emerging commodity spectacle" has granted objects new and changeable meanings (p.95). That is to say, a product functions not only as a form of exchange but also as a

powerful and changeable form of representation which is full of metaphysical subtleties and theological whimsies. International car brands, for example, now connect their cars to invisible values via advertising campaigns. In doing so, similar products can be sold to various and diverse target markets. Therefore, “Engineered to move the human spirit” (Mercedes-Benz), “The power of dreams” (Honda), “Moving forward” (Toyota), or “Built for the road ahead” (Ford) are slogans that sell automotive products embodying abstract values to customers looking for philosophical whimsies in the context of driving. These sentiments on commodity help us to locate contemporary shopping/consumption in a broader cultural context and to examine the connotation of everyday grocery shopping.

In considering the commodity as a social hieroglyph, Marx elaborates on the particular social relation that human beings put on the semblance of a relation between things. As mentioned above, the commodity one purchases may reflect one’s personal choice in aesthetics, life style or taste. To carry this point further, I argue that shopping choices reflect issues such as class, gender, race, ethnicity and other forms of difference that are seamlessly realized in everyday consumption. To put this point into this research, the choices of place, products or commodities of everyday grocery shopping reflect spectator-consumers’ identities. Shopping transcends the mere satisfaction of mundane physical necessities and becomes an essential ritual of contemporary life through which identities are manifested, shaped and transformed (Tate Liverpool, 2002). In this section, I would like to begin my argument with class issues, which are factors like gender or race or ethnicity affecting people’s choice of place for their shopping.

As a social division, class remains hidden or unmentioned in American society because of the ideology that the United States is fundamentally egalitarian, meritocratic, and fair (Nealon & Giroux, 2003, p. 181). Under this presumption of equal opportunity, however, one cannot say that class issues do not exist in American society. Rather, from my perspective, these issues exist in other subtle forms which can be related to the idea of *cultural capital* articulated by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1987).

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied cultural capital, objectified cultural capital and institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987). Embodied cultural capital refers to an ability or competence that cannot be separated from its carrier. It can be gained through both passively inherited properties of one's self or properties consciously acquired through one's own efforts. As such, a person born into a well-educated family or one who makes investment in learning/training is very likely to have more embodied cultural capital than those who are/do not. Objectified cultural capital refers to cultural materials that are owned by people who have embodied cultural capital. In this sense, an art work serves as objectified cultural capital to its collector, who by association possesses the ability for either appreciation or consumption. Institutionalized cultural capital is the final product of an institutionalized individual's (embodied) cultural capital. For instance, if one comprehends art history through self-learning or family heritage, her/his knowledge of art can be considered embodied cultural capital. However, if this knowledge of art is recognized by formal institutions, such as schools or accredited institutions, it will be transferred into institutionalized cultural capital, which serves as economic capital and can be circulated in the market. To sum up,

people in possession of more cultural capital, be it ways of thinking or cultural materials, become upper class in Bourdieu's context. People in this class do not necessarily possess a lot of economic capital such as money, but the holding of cultural capital, such as intellectual knowledge, will help them obtain success in other ways. For example, following this thread, college professors and graduate students at Penn State University perfectly fit into the categorization of culturally upper class and therefore become target consumers of Wegmans State College.

In my five-years of graduate student life in State College, I usually ran into my professors at Wegmans. Strolling around Wegmans and doing grocery shopping seems to be a leisure activity for the intellectual community. Though one can still get most produce and everyday needs at other supermarkets in town, Wegmans does provide some alternatives or diversity, as claimed, for this rural college town. For instance, the Nature's Marketplace located directly behind the central Produce Department is a division deserving further investigation. The Nature's Marketplace is a tiny division inside Wegmans; in terms of proportion, its physical space does not even take up 1/10 of the whole. Every item sold here is not only natural, organic or fair-trade²² but also highly priced. A pack of natural pasta sold in this division is priced two to three times higher than that of a similar one which is self-branded. Without firm beliefs or thoughts, spectators make easy and rational choices and likely go with the lower-priced item in

²² Fair Trade is an organized social movement and market-based approach that aims to help producers in developing countries obtain better trading conditions and promote sustainability. The movement advocates the payment of a higher price to producers as well as social and environmental standards.

order to save some money. Therefore, in order to make spectators pay more to consume natural products, I assume that there must first exist something such as a belief, value, or ideology embedded within their exchange values.

One day, my shortage of face cream gave me a good reason to stroll the division I usually passed over, so I went inside Wegmans and strolled into Nature's Marketplace. I quickly located a face cream for sensitive skin and decided to take a closer look at the division. Interestingly, there were quite a few visual aspects which I did not usually see in other departments or sections. Signboards made of wood were hung from the ceiling stating the mission statement or body care philosophy behind the consumption of natural products. The hand-written style of the texts on these signboards, which is different from that used for other large departments, enhanced a natural touch for products in this division. Packaged in recycled paper boxes or materials, products displayed in this division visually support the sustainability values of Wegmans. In searching for products that might fit my skin type, I also found that earthy colors appear to be favored by most manufacturers in packaging natural and organic products. Even though color as an element of art on packaging cannot be controlled by Wegmans, I doubt if it is either a tension or a hidden rule in the organic and natural products business. In addition, the whole visual presentation in the Nature's Marketplace features colors, materials and symbols found in nature. A painted wooden signboard with a sunflower symbol on it, hung above each aisle, speaks all. Recycle, reuse and reduce principles are realized through recycle paper packaging and minimal design. All these elements compose a seeming natural and organic visual presentation, conveying a message of sustainable

living. Consuming the products promoted here is meant to make us feel we are making some effort on behalf of the environment or taking part in the fair-trade movement.

Products here are not priced per their pure use or use value, but by their exchange value which turns them into objectified cultural capital. For instance, in State College, one can spend less than a dollar on common new soap in a dollar store; or, one can walk into Wegmans and spend \$3.99 on natural or fair-trade soap. What makes the soap different is the exchange value embedded within. The former soap symbolizes a common product that is perhaps artificial and has chemicals added, while the latter symbolizes a quality product that is perhaps limited, hand-made and chemical-free or a lift for farmers and farm workers from poverty. Soap purchased from both sources can be used for the purpose of cleaning, but one can decide if s/he wants to spend extra money on environmental protection or supporting fair-trade movement. The price spread therefore marks the objectified cultural capital of the natural or fair-trade soap. Spectators who identify themselves with advantages and benefits of consuming natural or organic products thus become consumers of products in Nature's Marketplace. The spectacle therefore subtly creates objectified cultural capital for spectators with embodied cultural capital.

Marx's analysis of capitalistic potential forces predicts the emergence of commodity fetishism, which is often used negatively and associated with consumerism in contemporary discourse. Consumerism deals with one of the relationships between human beings and things or objects; the spectacle skillfully takes this relationship to another new level and convinces spectators that their relationship with others can be

realized in those products or goods. Therefore, at the moment of consuming, we are what we eat, supporting fair-trade, caring for environmental sustainability, or contributing to the benefits of laborers in the third world. Consumption is thus no longer a fixed relationship between human beings and products but a dynamic relationship between spectators with embodied cultural capital and products which function as objectified cultural capital. This relationship is made into a spectacle at the everyday level of human experience, further creating culturally an upper class or a certain community²³.

It is in this regard that while spectacle is manipulated by consumerism and becomes the invisible mode dominating our everyday experience, it is not surprising that an everyday space like Wegmans functions not only as a spectacle of consumption, but spectacle that creates and maintains social relations such as class, gender and race. In the following, my stroll and visual narratives will unfold how Wegmans, as an embodied spectacle, mediates gender relations in everyday practice.

Sketching Ms. /Mrs. Consumers: Gender Issues Embodied in the Spectacle

Free *Women's Journal*, published monthly, is placed on the newspaper rack by the main entrance. Can this service or installation suggest the majority of customers at Wegmans are women (Field notes from the *Flâneuse's Visual Narratives through Her Gaze*, Wu, 2010)?

Although supermarkets are accessible to everyone, they are traditionally considered gendered spaces, particularly for women. Tracey Deutsch (1999), an historian focusing

²³ My concept of the term class is similar to the term community used nowadays. This classification no longer divides classes by race or socio-economic status but taste or interest.

her scholarship on researching the relationships among grocery stores, supermarkets and social economy, finds that:

Chains emphasized the special attention they paid to women and to women's propriety in their stores. This, of course, was in line with their own sense that women were their most important customers. Kroger stores began hiring professional "homemakers" who demonstrated meals and products in stores and at women's club meetings (Laycock, 1983). National Tea began distributing recipes to femme shoppers (Hatfield, 1936). A&P began publishing *Woman's Day*, a magazine distributed free in its stores (News Highlights, 1937).

Deutsch's argument pretty much outlines the profile of consumers in supermarkets and explains why supermarkets are considered gendered spaces. For women, be they housewives²⁴ or working women, have always been the vast majority of consumers within supermarkets²⁵, and this profile of consumers deeply affects marketing strategies in supermarket business. As a spectacle embodying social relations, Wegmans serves as an everyday space where gender relations such as divisions of labor and social expectations of men and women can be unconsciously realized and reinforced. The spectacle suggests roles which men and women should play respectively, strengthening gender divisions of labor within the family and workplace in contemporary society. In the following discussion, my visual narratives, generated through my gaze in strolling through the embodied spectacle, will elicit some of the gender issues that exist in Wegmans.

²⁴ Women, along with the children who often accompany them, are the target supermarket consumers. Even though this profile of supermarket consumers has changed with the increasing participation of male consumers, supermarkets are still identified as a domain of female consumers.

²⁵ Reekie, G., 1993. *Temptations: sex, selling and the department store*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Strolling inside Wegmans, we will find that the most visible staff figures in motion are almost all men. The loading and restacking figures at the central Produce Department, the serving figures behind the Prepared Foods counter, the ready-to-serve figures at the Meat and Seafood Departments, the only demonstrating chef at the Chef Station and the shelf-stocking figures all over the Grocery and General Merchandise sections are predominantly male. It appears that the positions such as food service workers, butchers, chefs, managers seem to be granted to men at Wegmans, perhaps because they involve heavy labor. Contrary to these foreground figures, other figures which are relatively motionless, invisible, or standing passively in the background are those at the Patisserie, Deli, Checkouts and Customer Service. Yes, they are *women*, silent and still! This scenario reminds me of a sexist saying, *men make houses, women make homes*, suggesting gendered divisions of labor in terms of visibility. It also leads me to speculate on Laura Mulvey's (1975) "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in which she argues that pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. Women's figures are usually passive images blending into background in a scene while those of men are foregrounded and appear to be active figures. Although Mulvey's essay was published thirty-five years ago, the play of sexual imbalance seems to continue and seamlessly permeate the practice of contemporary everyday life.

Recalling my encounters with staff at Wegmans, I hardly ever spoke with women staff. Unless I purposely looked for a woman employee, workers and helpers available in the central Produce Department and Food Department, with whom I usually engaged, were commonly men. Usually, women staff did either light-labor work such as slicing

cheeses and hams, checking out, or decorating cakes. Certainly, some departments or sections had crossovers in this division of labor (men workers and women workers), yet, I still found some departments remaining gendered. For instance, a woman is rarely seen at the Meat Department. Recently, I looked for lamb for an experimental dish. Uncertain which part to purchase, I strolled around the department and expected to speak with a woman worker. However, I could only find a helper from another division and ended up buying lamb from a male employee behind the meat counter. Or, I randomly encounter store chefs in the morning time, but never have I found any of them female.

Another visually gendered scene is the French inspired Patisserie where the commonly seen figure serving cakes and pastries is a woman with red hair. Wearing a black chef's cap, she habitually stands behind the granite counter, looking at spectators passing through quietly. French style cakes and pastries displayed in an orderly manner on the reflecting granite counter in front of her are delicate, comestible visual culture. At her back, a mirror hung on the wall reflects the image of her back image and the scene in front of her. As mentioned previously, this scene reminds me of the famous *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* by Manet in which a barmaid is likewise surrounded by the public gaze. The mirrors in the back allow both women, the Patisserie woman worker and the barmaid at *the Folies-Bergère*, no concealment. Even though they are situated in a supermarket or bar where people repeatedly come and go, they keep themselves behind the counter or bar, distantly gazing on the scenes passing in front of them.

With this point in mind, I am prompted to think about women's situations in the workplace. I want to know more about how the image of working women is profiled

within this “best company to work for in America,” as evaluated by *Fortune* magazine. I focus on the women’s jobs at Wegmans and carefully watch what positions are granted to women. Unsurprisingly, most jobs occupied by women are relatively low-paying jobs such as cashiers, cake decorators, and sales clerks²⁶. These jobs correspond to my observation on role stereotyping, reinforcing the “gender nature” constructed by the spectacle. In an attempt to avoid being arbitrary, I do a quick online search of salaries at Wegmans with my laptop. An informal, but influential survey²⁷ from glassdoor.com quickly supports my thoughts and renders more detailed information, directing me to look at another low-paying division at Wegmans, the Customer Service Desk.

The Customer Service Desk is located behind the Checkouts. However, it is not all about returning goods, but handling concerns from customers during the process of their consuming. At the moment I observe, the representatives working at the Customer Service Desk are two women employees. They are apparently young and likely to be college students in town. In processing exchanges or returns, they ask customers if there is any further concern regarding their purchasing experiences. One of the two young women may be a novice. While dealing with customers, she keeps turning to a male employee working in the back room, asking details of protocol for processing returns. The conversation reveals the power structure between these two people, helping/man and helped/women, suggesting the male employee as the supervisor of the young woman. Their conversation raises my curiosity and I wonder if there is any specific information available concerning the gender ratio at the management level in Wegmans.

²⁶ http://www.payscale.com/research/US/Employer=Wegmans_Food_Markets/Salary

²⁷ <http://www.glassdoor.com/Salary/Wegmans-Salaries-E3042.htm>

My curiosity directs me to gaze upon the spectacle. Attempting to collect visual evidence/facts and detect cultural markers, I am mindful of the space and the texts of visual culture on the wall. I then find picture frames mounted on the wall above the main entrance that introduce the managers, in-store chef, and coordinators for each department or division. A total of nine picture frames are displayed. Among these nine, only the manager from Employee Representative is a woman. Men function as either chef or coordinator for the Produce (fresh and organic), Meat, Seafood, Pharmacy, and Grocery departments. This overwhelming ratio surprises me, leading me back to departments or divisions that are excluded from this display. Departments or divisions not shown are the Bakery, Deli and Cheese Shop. I stroll around seeking other visual facts and quickly notice a similar picture frame on a pillar, indicating a woman manager of the Bakery. I then check the Deli and the Cheese Shop; both divisions are overseen by women managers. My favorite, the Tea Spot, is also managed by a woman. I stroll back to the Meat and Seafood Departments; picture frames showing the photos and names of the managers are posted on the wall. Although women are able to access management level of Wegmans, it seems to me that the scale of the area managed by women is very different from that of men. At least, in terms of visibility, the Bakery, the Deli, the Cheese Shop and the Tea Spot are smaller. Some of these divisions or shops such as the Tea Spot can even be negligible because it is not a must-have in American diet. So it is interesting to further investigate who gets selected for the entrance display and who does not? I need more information to answer my questions!

Turning to my laptop again, I browse the official website for Wegmans. I enter the page of “Careers” and look for any tab relevant to leadership. Under the page marked “Career Path,” I find a tab directing me to “Store Leadership Opportunities,” which describes the work of store manager, employee representative, and department manager. In the description for a department manager, beside an image of a man (Figure 4-7), Wegmans states “*the position of department manager is created for the largest department. This person is responsible for the profitability and appearance of the department s/he manages while ensuring that employees are providing incredible customer service.*” This description connotes the large and small, major and minor, or important and less important departments within the spectacle. In addition, the image adjacent to the description suggests that the suitable candidate for this position is a male. And this connotation and the image together reinforce the gendered bias of this workplace, making me ruminate over the “nature” of shopping and women’s position as consumers/spectators in the spectacle.

As mentioned previously, shopping has been historically considered as a female activity.²⁸ Recent literature reveals that shopping is still an activity mostly engaging women consumers (Hoeger, 2009). This stereotypical impression is extensively materialized in the conceptualization and management of retail environments, which are mostly made possible and determined by men. Beliefs about who and where the female

²⁸ In *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows* published in 1900, American author L. Frank Baum wrote, “How can a window sell goods? By placing them before the public in such a manner that the observer has a desire for them and enters the store to make the purchase. Once in, the customer may see other things she wants, and no matter how much she purchases under these conditions, the credit of the sale belongs to the window.” Baum’s argument clearly postulates the consumer as a female and this speculation has been handed down since the nineteenth century.

consumer is, how she may act, how to draw her attention and so forth have been interwoven into a complicated network between commercialism, androcentrism, and the “knowledge of modernity” (Humphery, 1998). In the case of Wegmans State College, similar beliefs and operations can be observed in this spectacle, in which commercialism, consumerism, and capitalism not only subtly entangle, but also are embodied through visual culture and visual spectacles. In the following, I tie my observation of the spectacle and feminist critiques of consumerism together, projecting my feminist awareness, consciousness and resistance in negotiating with the spectacle.

Employee Representative

Employee Representatives serve as an invaluable resource for employees for a wide variety of areas including career development, problem-resolution, and employee benefits and services. They partner closely with managers to welcome employees, preserve our culture and maintain a compliant, safe, harassment-free environment where all employees realize equal success and opportunity.

Department Manager

At Wegmans, our largest departments have Department Managers. This person is responsible for the profitability and appearance of the department(s) they manage while ensuring employees are providing incredible customer service. Using strong managerial, leadership, merchandising and problem solving skills, Department Managers demonstrate profit and loss responsibility by managing product levels and making decisions that impact their department and the overall store.



Figure 4-7 A snapshot taken from Wegmans’ “Store Leadership Opportunities”

Some feminists positively link women and consumption in feminist scholarship, arguing that women have a particular relationship to the modern cultural ideal of the self-determining and autonomous individual realized in consumption. For instance, Rosemary Pringle (1983) indicates that women’s consumption has an economic, symbolic,

emotional and sexual complexity and is not necessarily tied to a process of materialism. This argument makes perfect sense to me when exploring the issue of how cultural politics of consumption and its relationships shape gendered self-identity. Nevertheless, most works in feminist scholarship still deem capitalism as a force which positions women as passive objects of retailing strategies rather than active social agents. Lesley Johnson (1993) invites readers to question if women are empowered by a form of agency embedded within a subjective fulfillment through narcissistic consumption.

I side with Johnson and doubt if women as consumers and spectators of the visual culture and visual spectacles at Wegmans State College can truly perform their wills or fulfill self-determination. My visual narrative has shown me that most selected products such as body care items and cosmetics at the Nature's Marketplace and even the packaging of goods within the Grocery section are designed to target women consumers. According to marketing research, women consumers are likely attracted to packaging that is simple, clear, and with ease of use (Holmes, 2004). If women consumers can relate themselves with products through texts or images on packages, chances of buying will be effortlessly increased. The color scheme, shape, composition and the whole visual presentation of text and image on packaging do help products to speak to their spectators. Thus, I have found that quite a few products are packaged in bright orange, clean blue, crisp white and other clean colors, not in pastel colors. Shapes and lines on package design are more organic with a lot of curves, not with sharp lines or forms. Texts are simple, and images in relation to family and nature frequently appear on different products. These strategies of package design are in accordance with marketing research,

positing women consumers as their target audience. However, while taking women's preferences into consideration in designing product packages, it reveals that women are still main buyers for households in general, leaving the domestic sphere a domain of women. Although the role of women suggested in the spectacle designates women as consumers for the domestic, they are given choices among selected choices provided by the spectacle. I also find that with the claim of the improvement of domestic technology, the household workload for women is not necessarily reduced. Rather, the improvement of household appliances or kitchen appliances increases other time such as on preparation and maintenance for women. These myths are coated in delightful visual culture and visual spectacle, manipulated mostly by men, helping mediate the relationship between exploited consumers and capitalism. Women consumers in such environments are repeatedly placed in an inferior position under the spectacle which embodies the alliance between commercialism and capitalism.

In addition, since supermarkets nowadays do not merely serve as the product of modern capitalism, but also as the spectacle of contemporary capitalism and then take one step further to transform them into a goliath of capitalism, the gendered management level at Wegmans State College brings on another relevant issue – the power relationship between producer and consumer in the spectacle worthy of observation. Namely, in a seemingly pleasing spectacle, who gets the power of choice in this so-called top 100 company in which to work?

Therefore, I return to my observation about a gendered management level at Wegmans State College, and find that most positions occupied by women are relatively

lower-paying than those held by men. Cashiers and customer representatives are the two lowest salary positions that I found during my online researching (Figure 4-8). Even though the “Store Leadership Opportunities” page at the official website of Wegmans portrays an equal opportunity for women employees by displaying a photo of a woman store manager, my visual narratives at Wegmans State College reveal that women are nevertheless excluded from this management network. This observation reinforces the impression that management levels in retailers, including everyday space like supermarkets, have generally been male dominated while repeatedly acknowledging women as their target “market” and constructing highly gendered images of the “lady” shopper, the housewife and “Ms. /Mrs. Consumer” (Humphery, 1998).

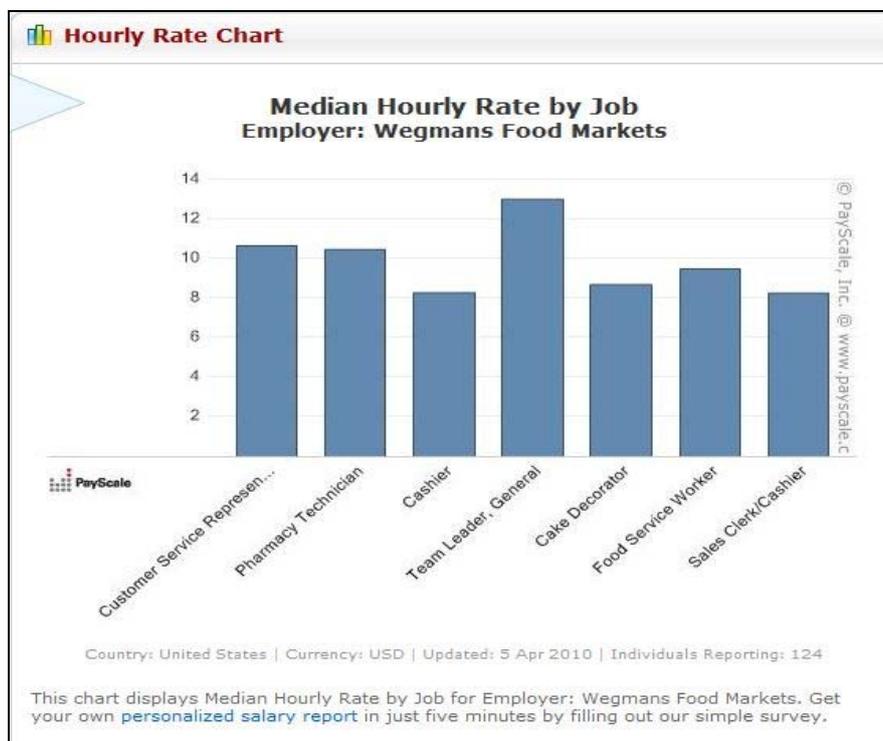


Figure 4-8 PayScale median hourly rate by job for employer Wegmans Food Markets

Man-made supermarkets provide a convenient place that invites the public to shop; yet, decisions such as what to display and how to display are made by a male-dominated management level. Women can still be managers, but only of those departments that are relatively small, minor, or less important. Wegmans State College may not intentionally go along with this stance. However, women, be they consumers or spectators of the spectacle, become chief recipients in their everyday consumption and progressively assume the roles the spectacle assigns them. It is not surprising to consider Wegmans State College as a seemingly sensational grocery shopping space in which gendered biases are embodied and which seamlessly supports gender division of labor at the most basic level.

Tasting/Performing/Seeing the Others: Race Issues Embodied in the Spectacle

As an Asian and a cultural outsider, I especially enjoy having fresh hand-made sushi from the Sushi Bar and strolling around the out-of-the-way International Foods corner at Wegmans. To me, consuming Asian food and shopping for Asian ingredients reminds me of my own cultural identity and therefore brings some familiarity back to my life away from home.

Viewing sushi chefs making sushi at Wegmans the first time, I was surprised at Wegmans' inclusion of Asian foods. I was even amazed at their hiring of a woman as the in-store sushi chef because women sushi chefs in Japan are still excluded in this field of male-dominated Japanese cuisine and this gendered threshold has been widely applied onto most neighboring countries such as Taiwan. Wegmans is the very first place I saw a

woman sushi chef. Even though sushi is freshly made on site and has equivalent translated labels, my first bite still signaled to me the difference between Americanized sushi and traditional Japanese-style sushi, which I have tasted and been familiar with in both Japan and Taiwan.

This is not to say that Americanized sushi is not tasty. Rather, it is tasted and presented in another delectable way, which is a re-interpretation in terms of gustation. My favorite California Roll, (a.k.a. Wegmans' California Classic Roll, Figure 4-9) is a good example of a typical Americanized Japanese-style sushi which is mainly made of cucumber, imitation crab and avocado. The sushi name carrying "California" acts as a marker of the Americanization. This colorful sushi roll is not commonly seen in Japan or Taiwan, for it does not fit into the category of traditional authentic Japanese-style sushi. As such, the California Roll is only available at some selected Japanese restaurants that are not known for adhering to traditional ways of making sushi, but for merging other creative



Figure 4-9 California Classic Roll

ways of reworking Japanese sushi. The California Roll is a creation based on the reworking of traditional Japanese sushi rolls. It is made inside-out, for most Americans are not used to seeing and chewing nori on the outside of the roll or sprinkles of colorful fish roe. By removing the roe and fishy ingredients and replacing them with American recognizable ingredients, the creator, who is believed to be a Japanese chef, Ichiro Mashita, made the California Roll more appealing and edible to American consumers in

the mid-1960s (McInerney, 2007). From the west to the east, from the coastal to the central, the whole nation has now been introduced to this edible cultural hybrid. Many of my American friends' first sushi experience was with the California Roll; to them, it is less scary and more hygienic. When they think of Japanese food, the sanitized and colorful California Roll comes into their mind first. It has gradually become a symbolic/iconic edible visual culture representing Japanese food.

The California Roll reminds me of Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures* (1997), in which she uses curry as a text of eating culture in re-figuring the relationships between colonizers and the colonized (p.161). Narayan's reading of philosophies of food questions how people connect what they eat to their personal, social and political identities, how they use what they eat to distinguish themselves from others within and outside specific social groups, the role "cuisine" plays in the scripts of "Nation" and "National identity," and to disclose "food for thought" in terms of social and political philosophies (p. 161). She argues that ethnic foods, as the Others, are materialized as desired objects in food colonialism and even fetishized as commodities for consumption in terms of culinary imperialism in contemporary Western Society. Her examination of ethnic foods, in her case the curry, inspired me to think about the social meaning of sushi and other ethnic food or ingredients at Wegmans.

Most ethnic foods imported to the United States are "re-created" in order to fabricate "Americanized ethnic foods." In Narayan's writing, curry powder as fabricated by the colonial British, serves as a good example for colonial British people to imagine the remote India. In my research, the California Classic Roll symbolizing Japanese food or

General Tso's Chicken symbolizing Chinese Food are accordingly considered as fitting examples embodying the American imagination and interpretation of the Orient at Wegmans. Under the big signboard, *Discover the Orient* we find the Sushi Bar where sushi chefs make fresh sushi every day. Most sushi on the menu meets Wegmans' criteria which are to be prepared fresh daily, ready to eat, and with nothing raw used. Although the last criterion does not necessarily meet Japanese definition of sushi, it acknowledges the public suspicion of raw ingredients in the United States.

Another American fabricated ethnic dish is General Tso's Chicken, frequently seen in the Asian Wokery Bar. This so-called Chinese dish was, in fact, customized for American taste by a Taiwanese chef in the 1970s and was never recognized as a famous Chinese dish either in China or Taiwan (Dunlop, 2007). However, like the California Roll, General Tso's Chicken is typically considered as a representative Chinese dish for most Americans. Frequently, American friends request that I bring this particular dish to potlucks, when actually I so far haven't figured out how to make this dish. Usually, I would just shop for it from Wegmans or some Chinese restaurants in town if I am assigned to bring General Tso's Chicken. I also so often overhear others describing all dishes at Wegmans Asian Wokery Bar as general Chinese cuisine, regardless if some of them may be Thai or Indian-inspired dishes.

These two notable examples of ethnic foods at Wegmans make me wonder what positions them as "authentic" from the viewpoint of Americans. I stroll around these two food bars every time I visit Wegmans and try to find out the factor that makes some fabricated ethnic foods seem authentic. My visual narratives presume that ethnic

identities play a significant role in building the image of authenticity. For instance, I have never seen non-Asian sushi chefs or preparation workers at the Sushi Bar or the Asian Wokery Bar. One time, I overheard the conversation between the woman sushi chef and a customer, confirming her ethnic identity as non-Japanese, but still Asian. However, spectators and consumers keep buying sushi from the Sushi Bar. Most ratings online highly recommend the Sushi Bar at Wegmans, reinforcing it as an authentic sushi place. At the Asian Wokery Bar, people who are in charge of preparing and re-filling foods for the bar are mostly Asian men. They look like the typical Chinese chef at any kitchen in a Chinese restaurant in the United States; yet, their clean black Wegmans uniforms visually remind spectators or consumers of the difference. Do chefs and workers at these two bars perform race or ethnicity in the spectacle? Does race or ethnicity reinforce the authenticity of edible visual culture such as the California Classic Roll or General Tso's Chicken at Wegmans? I cannot help questioning if the spectacle does perform Asia or the Orient by hiring Asian chefs or workers.

The other place in this embodied spectacle is the International Foods corner mentioned previously. At this hidden corner, foreign ingredients and spices are sorted in a very different way. For instance, spectators will see "British," "Goya," and "Asian" signs juxtaposed with each other, identifying the locations of ingredients and spices. The British aisle is clearly displaying ingredients imported from the United Kingdom. Mysteriously, Goya, the name of the famous Spanish painter, is used to spot the aisles where beans, rice, nectars, seasonings and Spanish, Mexican and Hispanic specialties are available. The Asian aisle, set at the back of the International Foods Corner, is stocked

with ingredients, sauces, and spices mainly from China, Taiwan, India, and Thailand. All items are jammed together at this tiny out-of-the-way corner with foreign visual culture embodying the American viewpoint of the Others, be they a nation, a painter representing Hispanic and Latino cultures, or a continent in this small world.

This visual spectacle reminds me of a conversation overheard between two students in my A ED 303 class who happened to discuss a summer study abroad course in Tanzania. Another student cut in and asked where Tanzania is. They laughed and said *it is in Africa!* One student even asked, *is Tanzania a state like Pennsylvania?* Similar conversations take place in my everyday life. We can replace Tanzania with Taiwan, Africa with Asia, and the scenario still makes seeming sense for most people I have encountered in State College. To most Americans, Africa or Asia exists as a vague continent/country. They are not interested in what or how many countries are located in these remote lands. Their understanding of other cultures, such as Asian culture, comes from their experiencing of Asian foods. The edible visual culture and spectacle at Wegmans fulfills the state's imagination of the Others, embodying the external attitude of the United States at the practice of everyday life.

Postscript of the Stroll

In my strolls, my visual narratives describe cultural markers left by the spectacle, unfolding the social relationships embodied at Wegmans. These cultural markers inform us about what is visually taught in the practice of everyday life, reinforcing some problematic issues of class, gender, race and ethnic demarcations. These are hidden

curricula constantly performed outside formal educational settings such as schools. Debord's concept of the spectacle has served as a good framework to observe how everyday supermarkets like Wegmans function as a space embodying social relations in the spectacle; it will be feasible to carry Debord's points further in investigating how the hidden curricula are skillfully taught in terms of pedagogy.

As an embodied spectacle, Wegmans, whether located in State College or another city, constitutes the visual convention and fixity of contemporary imagery in our everyday practice. They are an ideological form of pictorial power (Mitchell, 1995), seamlessly forcing spectators or consumers to believe in ideologies, beliefs, conventions, norms, or values which are politically correct. Usually, spectators or consumers do not examine the details of their everyday life; neither are they aware of the denotative phenomena behind representational aspects. These repeated representational aspects of phenomena therefore continually reinforce dominant ideology from the makers of consumerism (mostly in reference to capitalists) and consequently condition the ways of how we should think and act in the everyday.

While the spectacle cannot function without making use of images and representations, it is useful to engage the perspective of visual culture and examine how the spectacle provides us with an understanding of pedagogy in the field of art education. In contemporary society, in a culture in which we are bombarded with texts of visual culture on a daily basis, it is critical to discern how we are dominated by the spectacle and to negotiate with the visual culture deployed by it.

In Chapter Three, I cite Debord's thesis that the spectacle does not realize philosophy, but philosophizes reality in re-defining the spectacle. To borrow Debord's critiques of the spectacle, which deludes its spectators into believing fabricated realities through vision, Wegmans, as the embodied spectacle, does inherit this weakness of the Western philosophical project, undertaking to conspire with the sense of vision to reconstruct realities and to turn the material life of everyone into a universe of speculation (Debord, 1994, p.17). By ingeniously manipulating texts of visual culture, be they visible or edible, Wegmans concretely visualizes the ideologies imposed by consumerism in a seemingly apparent way and subsequently takes steps to construct and naturalize social relationships as defined by the spectacle.

Simultaneously, in the spectacle a moment arrives when the commodity has achieved the total occupation of social life. Not only are the relationships to the commodity visible, but it becomes all one sees—the world one sees is its world. On the other hand, the spectacle constructing realities constantly utilizes reformed technologies to make the so-called realities more authentic, realistic and normal. Spectators and consumers situated in a certain spectacle will, as a result, acquire assumptions about what reality is through ways of seeing and therefore take actions assigned by the spectacle. In the following chapter, *The Spectacul-art Pedagogy*, I will analyze the pedagogical steps of the spectacle, presenting how we as spectators and consumers are made to know and act in the spectacle.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SPECTACUL-ART PEDAGOGY

At the Cheese Shop at Wegmans Fairfax, I noticed a group of local elementary students accompanied by their teachers and parents. A woman employee in Wegmans' black uniform gave them a short talk regarding daily food nutrition. A food pyramid chart and various cheeses were explained and functioned as visual reinforcements, convincing students, teachers and parents that cheese was one of the critical sources of dairy nutrition. While the students were concentrating on this multi-sensory presentation, I also noticed some mothers nodding their heads and gathering up some cheeses for later check-out. This scenario could take place at any Wegmans store, reminding me of what Joel Spring (2003) refers to as the marriage of education and consumption in his *Educating the Consumer-citizen: A History of the Marriage of Schools, Advertising, and Media* (Wu, 2010).²⁹

Educating future consumers for the society is rooted in the history of American education. This politically correct ideology has been extended from in-school settings to out-of-school settings. Any space can serve as a pedagogical site, where ideology can be incorporated into curricular structures and also put into practice. In the previous chapter, I argue that there are hidden curricula of class, gender, and race performed through the spectacle in the form of visual culture and fragmentary visual spectacles at Wegmans. It is in this sense that the stereotypes of class, gender, ethnicity, race, etc., are materialized in commodified visual culture, which can be further circulated in the material world. In view of this, I argue that Wegmans, a site where the spectacle executes its ideologies, surely serves as a pedagogical site that is not formal, but informal.

²⁹ Personal field notes from the *Flâneuse's Visual Narratives through Her Gaze*. Notes of the researcher's visual experiences and bodily encounters were documented in this notebook.

However, why does an everyday site functioning pedagogically become meaningful in today's society? As Debord (1994) argues in his thesis 41, with the coming of the industrial revolution, the division of labor specific to that revolution's manufacturing system, and the mass production for a world market, the commodity emerged in its fully-fledged form as a force leading to the complete colonization of social life (p.29). Unlike the time before the industrial revolution in which commodities were few and remote from people's life experiences, today's commodities have gradually taken control of our life experiences and become more and more socially, economically, and culturally dominant. Wegmans, where visual culture converges and is embodied in this spectacle, therefore, is able to implement informal or hidden curricula, having the visual culture and visual spectacles within it exercise their pedagogical influences on spectators/consumers.

In this research, I have so far identified the hidden curricula related to class, gender, race and ethnicity in Wegmans. Through strolling around and becoming an extra in the spectacle, I argue that the implementation of these hidden curricula on spectator-consumers strengthens the power of the dominance of the spectacle by positioning spectators/consumers in an inferior situation in the power structure. Under this unequal power structure, I question if there is any cultural and pedagogical narrative that is spread out through visual culture at Wegmans. Or, as an embodied spectacle, does Wegmans speak for an ideology such as American-ness, which references the formation of what America/American is.

In denoting visual culture and its relevant issues coming to the foreground at Wegmans, my identity as an art educator and my knowledge of feminism enable me to be aware of the subtle pedagogy of the spectacle performing in the background. Through engaging my knowledge of both art education and feminism, I scrutinize these hidden curricula and problematic issues, examining how they are taught through visual culture in the spectacle. In terms of education, my previous chapter, *The Narratives of the Flâneuse*, emphasizes what is taught at Wegmans; while in this chapter, I shift the emphasis from *what is taught* to *how it is taught* in the spectacle, unfolding a pedagogical understanding of the spectacle which is implemented routinely outside formal school settings and which permeates through our everyday life. Questions that are part of my stroll include the following: How does the spectacle teach? How does it provide us with an understanding of pedagogy? Is there any pedagogical force performed on spectators so that they are transformed into consumers?

Given these questions, I devise what I term *Spectacul-art Pedagogy*, identifying the following three pedagogical forces performed by the spectacle—visual culture as a way of de-mystifying, visual culture as a way of constructing, and visual culture as a way of naturalizing. These three pedagogical forces operate seamlessly within visual culture, corresponding to the spectacle, which ultimately is in accord with American consumerism. In the following sections, I will further elucidate on these three pedagogical forces. Visual culture that is culturally familiar to me will be used to exemplify each of these forces. Through this, I will argue that the spectacul-art pedagogy performed by the spectacle reconfigures momentarily spectacular performance and

fragmentary visual culture for a particularly political use. This political use of visual spectacle and visual culture is intentionally realized in an apparent and shallow representation, resonating with what Debord contends, namely that the spectacle philosophizes reality and degrades our concrete life into a speculative universe. By performing the spectacul-art pedagogy, the spectacle turns everything into a conjectural, fragmentary, and shallow presentation of visual culture. It is in this process that the formation of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and subjectivity are accomplished.

Visual Culture as a Way of De-mystifying

Seeing is selling (Libbery-Owens-Ford Glass Company, 1941³⁰).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the centrally located Produce Department at Wegmans plays a significant role in drawing spectator-consumers' attention when they first enter the spectacle. In this department, various fresh, natural, and organic produce is displayed to visually accentuate one of Wegmans' core values – diversity. Among them, a section entitled *Asian Produce* exhibits selected produce, which is mostly seen in the context of Asian food visual culture. A point worth noticing in this section is that the price tags attached to this produce differ from those for other produce, having a few lines written to describe the textures and flavors of selected Asian produce. For instance, on the price tag for *Bok Choy*, the tag indicates that *stalks are crunchy, leaves are tender*; for *Nappa*, *a more delicate flavor than regular cabbage, also known as Chinese cabbage*; even for a commonly-seen *Savoy Cabbage*, it indicates *considered by many to be best for*

³⁰ Quote cited from Hardwick, M. J. (2004). *Mall maker: Victor Gruen, architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

cooking. These price tags serve both as labels and as texts for items in museum displays, pedagogically providing spectator-consumers with further information of the referring visual culture. Price tags that function the same way are also seen in the Fresh Herb section.

Why do Asian produce and some fresh herbs have museum-label-like price tags informing spectator-consumers of the textures and flavors? From my reading of the spectacle, this is the process of de-mystifying, in which visual culture such as the price tag or the produce itself is used to make *the unfamiliar* less *unfamiliar*. Asian produce and some exotic culinary herbs such as basil, garlic chives, cilantro, lemon grass, mustard, and thyme are not frequently seen or consumed in central Pennsylvania. Most people inhabiting this area do not envision Asian produce or exotic ingredients as something they would add into their daily cooking practice because they may have no clue about how to relate them into their culinary practices. In order to make people think and act in an uncommon way or become potential consumers of the unfamiliar, the spectacle needs to use some strategies to *make people see*. Through manipulating and staging visual culture, the spectacle endeavors to transform people shopping inside Wegmans into spectators or to transform spectators into possible consumers.

Another similar scenario takes place in the Seafood Department, where a huge *Seafood Made Simple* chart is hung on the wall. This chart describes the textures and flavors of commonly-seen fish such as codfish, salmon or tuna, instructing spectators about how to cook fish in the ways they desire. This chart does help reduce people's hesitations about seafood; I quite often hear from friends that neither do they consume

seafood frequently, nor do they have any clues about cooking it. For most people whose home is not near the seashore, their unfamiliarity with and possible hesitations toward seafood are not surprising, for seafood does not play a big part in their daily meals. It is perhaps in this regard that Wegmans' *Ready to Cook* prepared seafood dishes become alternatives for spectator-consumers. The *Ready to Cook* series claims that it offers freshly-made dishes at Wegmans with every dish clearly marked with ingredients and directions for cooking. By reducing preparation steps and attaching directions for cooking, dishes containing seafood are de-mystified by the spectacle. Labeling again succeeds!

However, attaching label-like price tags does not necessarily sell the commodity. In the process of de-mystifying the unfamiliar, the spectacle also deploys some tactics such as taste sampling so that spectators can experience the unfamiliar without any monetary cost to them. The taste sampling at Wegmans is intriguing, for it offers spectators an opportunity to bodily experience the unfamiliar, which they may not otherwise think of trying. I myself experienced tasting strong-flavored cheeses, previously unfamiliar to me, and those experiences did broaden my knowledge of cheeses and their usage in western cuisine. Although not every taste sampling may be pleasing, sampling does motivate spectators to go across any mental barriers existent between themselves and the unfamiliar, forging an embodied relationship between spectators and the unfamiliar.

A good example of this comes from the Chef Station located in the front of the Produce Department. At this station, designed for one person shows, the in-store chef regularly demonstrates how to cook Americanized Asian dishes by mixing unfamiliar ingredients with the familiar. Stir-fry, a typical Chinese cookery method combining the

Chinese bao technique³¹ with Western sautéing, is usually employed on these occasions. This unique cookery method requires a cook's control of time (usually very short), tools (such as Chinese wok), ingredients, and stove temperature, embodying a major cookery difference between Chinese cuisine and American cuisine. Spectators have the chance to see how a dish is prepared from the ingredients and to sample the results. Even though not everyone will create this same dish at home, the on-site demonstration at Wegmans does motivate spectators to explore the ingredients further. A recipe flyer is handily available at the station counter, encouraging spectators to search for ingredients—meats, vegetables, or herbs—on their own. This searching also enables spectators to see how the unfamiliar is juxtaposed with the familiar, driving them to browse more options provided by the spectacle. The spectacle subtly integrates the exotic China with visual culture, be it the object of food or the process of demonstration, functioning as a pedagogy that imparts knowledge embodied in Chinese food culture to spectator/consumers. The handout recipe flyer functions as reinforcement for the whole visual and embodied experience, encouraging spectator/consumers to explore Chinese cooking afterwards.

The other visual element employed by the spectacle to de-mystify the unfamiliar is the hand-written sign board positioned all over the venue. As analyzed in graphology, handwriting style can suggest quite a few personality traits of the writer

³¹ The wok is heated to a dull red glow. With the wok hot, the oil, seasonings, and meats are added in rapid succession with no pause in between. The food is continually tossed, stopping for several seconds only to add other ingredients such as various seasonings, broths, or vegetables. When the food is deemed to be cooked it is poured and ladled out of the wok. The wok must then be quickly rinsed to prevent food residues from charring and burning to the wok bottom because of residual heat. The main ingredients are usually cut to smaller pieces to aid in cooking. As well, a larger amount of cooking fat with a high smoke point, such as lard and/or peanut oil, is often used in bao (Wikipedia, n.d.).

(<http://www.businessballs.com/graphologyhandwritinganalysis.htm>), thus conveying information or feelings to spectators. In Wegmans' case, the utilization of handwriting style fonts on most sign boards attempts to accord with the company spirit³² implying warmth and personal attention to detail. Two years ago, when Wegmans switched its previous rigid and angular logo with the current signature-like logo designed in the 1930s, it stated that the re-use of this earlier logo is to reflect the inviting and friendly atmosphere created by this family-run business. The font of the signature-like logo is chosen to embody the human touch, reducing the distant and cold atmosphere commonly found in institutional contexts. Similarly, the handwriting style font seen inside Wegmans is employed to draw in its spectators, repeatedly conveying the warmth and personalized attention to detail in this physically abstract spectacle. Spectators are therefore prompted by the hand-written sign boards to read and then browse around. It is in this reading or browsing that the spectacle continually conveys messages to its spectators and morphs them into consumers.

Causing people who are shopping to become spectators and then drawing them in to see both details and context appears to be the first step in the process of de-mystification. It is also a process of embodiment, for this process enables spectators to highly engage in multiple sensory experiences. The next step is to cause spectators to seek more information from texts of visual culture so that the spectacle leads them to construct both values and ideologies. In the following section, Visual Culture as a Way of Constructing,

³² According to Wegmans' official website, the logo speaks for the company spirit in different decades. In the year of 2008, Wegmans switched its logo back to that originally designed in the 30s and 40s. This formerly designed logo is like a family signature, representing the deep roots of the company.

I will argue that visual culture is used as a way of constructing knowledge, reality, and values in the spectacle.

Visual Culture as a Way of Constructing

The world of consumption is in reality the world of the mutual spectacularization of everyone, the world of everyone's separation, estrangement and nonparticipation....the spectacle is the dominant mode through which people relate to each other. It is only through the spectacle that people acquire a (falsified) knowledge of certain general aspects of social life. It answers perfectly the needs of a reified and alienated culture: the spectacle-spectator is in itself a staunch bearer of the capitalist order (Debord, 1981).³³

The relationship between vision and knowledge construction has always been complicated. While we have all heard that *seeing is believing*, which suggests knowledge is mainly constructed through vision, theorists and educators question the validity of knowledge constructed through vision. Even though knowledge gained and constructed through vision remains a disputed issue, vision is mostly recognized as a direct way of knowing. Questions such as, what is seen and how spectators' knowledge is constructed in the spectacle, therefore, foreground the critical role of visual culture.

To borrow Debord's words, I argue that as an instrument of unification and a world vision, the spectacle not only forges social relationships among people, as argued in the previous chapter, but also reinforces these social relationships by producing "seemingly real" knowledge and reality through manipulating visual culture and practices of gazing. To further my argument, I center on two visual spectacles at Wegmans, the Nature's

³³ Debord, G. quoted in K. Knabb, (ed.), *Situationist International: Anthology* (trans. K. Knabb) (California: Bureau of Public Secrets 1981), p.50.

Marketplace, which is behind the Produce Department, and the Frozen Foods area, located by the special event section, and demonstrate how visual culture in these sites serve as a way of constructing knowledge and realities according to the spectacle. In this sense, goods, products, and frozen foods function as visual culture. In the following section, I describe how visual culture may govern knowledge and reality construction in the spectacle.

As one of the most profitable divisions and most representative of Wegmans' sustainability value, the Nature's Marketplace deploys visual culture which is not apparent in other departments or divisions. Within merely four aisles, this tiny division has installed quite a few well-designed sign boards, carefully directing spectator/consumers to Wegmans' values and beliefs. For instance, at first glance, we see the handwritten description on a horizontal wood sign board, stating the mission of the division and benefits of consuming the natural and the organic as the following:

- To partner with our customers in the *mission* for the best tasting wholesome food products, high quality health care items, and environmentally friendly products.
- We will strive to continually *educate* ourselves and our customers on the products we carry.
- Good health, good people and a healthy environment are important to us, and we will strive to share this interest with you.
- *Nature's Marketplace* is an area of natural food and health care products located in one area (free of any artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives).

The word "mission" reminds me of mission statements often displayed in museums. These are short, but formal statements, immediately causing spectators to be aware of the focus of an institution. When I see one, I say to myself, this division must have

something unique to sell. In addition to this sign board, a smaller, but also eye-catching wood sign board says, “Body Care Philosophy.” This reference to philosophy reinforces my surmise, reminding me how a museum exhibition crafts its discourse. This philosophical sign board offers spectators a convincing reason to spend more money by consuming the pricier natural and organic body care products, thus framing the act of consuming natural and organic products as preferred or taken-for-granted behavior. Other sign boards indicating the locations for referred goods and products are also wooden, adding a natural touch to the entire division.

Visual culture composed of natural or organic goods is sorted to mirror the remainder of the supermarket spectacle. The Nature’s Marketplace is a smaller-scale of the large Grocery area; only here the natural or organic versions of most items found in the Grocery area can be found. However, in this microcosm of the supermarket, all visual culture is carefully displayed to convey appropriate messages regarding healthy living built on the consumption of natural and organic products. Issues such as how to live a healthy life by consuming natural and organic foods, how to improve one’s health by a conditioning diet, and what are considered the whole foods that most benefit our bodies are addressed through visual presentation. For instance, the spectacle uses visual culture to provide alternatives for *better living*. Food visual culture is thus utilized as discourse about the healthy body, the natural body, and the organic body. Imposed visual elements, such as the color choice for packaging, are planned to resonate with earthy colors like green, brown, yellow, orange, and blue, reminding spectators of the natural colors from

trees, soil, sunshine, sunsets, and water. The visual designs seem to be minimal; yet, the minimal reflects the positive values of sustainability promoted by Wegmans.

In addition, the claim is that consuming the natural or the organic not only benefits the internal body, but also the external body of spectators-consumers. A sign board stating *Body Care Philosophy*³⁴ is hung noticeably above a neighboring aisle, building a consistent argument for consumption of natural products that enhance the whole body. As suggested, spectators learn that our bodies need to be sanitized and disciplined through diet change from the internal to the external. Shelves along the aisle display face and body care products made of natural ingredients, further suggesting the spectator-consumers are mostly women. Most face and body care goods are packaged in recycled materials. The simple, clean-look and earth-tone designs reinforce the core values assigned to this division - reduce, reuse and recycle - appealing to (women) spectators to believe that it is their participation and even responsibility to facilitate environmental sustainability.

Another striking point to observe is the word choice apparent on sign boards in Nature's Marketplace. As mentioned above, Wegmans employs educational words such as "mission," "statement," and "philosophy" to strengthen the ethical standpoint of the company itself and to strive for spectator-consumers' identification. Knowledge is

³⁴ Wegmans' Body Care Philosophy:

- Our body care products are proven effective and harmless and never tested on animals. All products are free of harsh chemicals and have only food grade preservatives and natural colors derived from plants.
- Earth friendly cleaning supplies safer for the earth, safer for you.
- Our earth friendly cleaning supplies are not tested on animals nor do they contain any animal ingredients. They are completely biodegradable and contain no harsh chemicals that could irritate sensitive skin. Best of all, our products really work!

reconfigured in this visual spectacle, just as Jean François Lyotard (1984) asserts in *The Postmodern Condition*; rather than being a body of accumulated truths, knowledge becomes a matter of information from which consumers select that which best suits their purposes. Through using visual culture as a way of conveying educative information and constructing knowledge communities, Wegmans sophisticatedly educates its spectators into potential consumers. This strategy is also observed at the Frozen Foods area.

At the ends of rows of huge supermarket freezers, Wegmans has positioned mounted penguin cardboard figures to address myths regarding frozen foods. Questions such as “Frozen prepared meals are more expensive than restaurant take-out meals?”, “All frozen foods contain preservatives?”, “Freezing preserves food indefinitely?”, or “Fresh vegetables are better for you than frozen vegetables?” are the myths answered here by the penguins, representing polar expertise. By means of addressing these myths regarding frozen foods, the spectacle attempts to construct realities and draw in more consumers than spectators. That is to say, through establishing discourses that eliminate concerns about frozen foods without contradicting the messages conveyed in the Produce Department, Wegmans wants its spectators to buy, not just to look.

Additionally, the penguin figure not only appears on the freezers, but also is used on aisle-signs to create a whimsical or child friendly atmosphere. Through proper positioning, young spectators can easily identify the location of frozen foods and look for ice creams or desserts. This strategy corresponds to the elevated miniature train running around the daily and bulk sections, thus directing young spectators to seek out and consume more in the spectacle. Candies and chocolates displayed at check-out counters

are purposefully placed where children will see them and respond as well as the impulse buyers.

In *Supermarket Science?* Sharon Macdonald (1998) provides her critique of museum exhibition-like supermarkets. In *Food for Thought* she argues how museum visitors are able to understand that knowledge is embodied in the exhibition. Inspired by Macdonald, I deem that the relationship between knowledge construction and spectator-consumers in Wegmans is also segmented and localized, transferring knowledge into fragmental experience, rather than theoretical or practical understanding of certain subject matter. By deliberately deploying visual culture, the spectacle crafts visual spectacles that support the construction of apparent knowledge and realities. It is within this spectacle that spectators are directed to become consumers, given the choices of class, gender, race, ethnical identities and life styles to live with.

However, not every visual culture or visual spectacle constructed by the spectacle is necessarily negative. In Chapter Four, one of flâneuse's visual narratives discloses a possible breaking away from the gendered stereotype existing within the traditional Japanese sushi world – the female sushi chef at Wegmans' Sushi Station. The female sushi chef as a visual spectacle is rarely seen even in Japan nowadays. According to Trevor Corson (2007), who for years has been studying philosophy in China and Buddhism in Japan as a cultural outsider, sushi is a male dominant world in real-life Japan. In *The Zen of Fish*, Corson writes the following portrayal:

Male sushi chefs in Japan use all kinds of excuses to defend their sushi bars against women who want to work there. Women cannot be sushi chefs, they say, because makeup, body lotion, and perfume would destroy the flavor of the fish and rice. Some claim that women do not have the expertise in using knives and they do not have the physical and mental energy to work a long period of time behind the bar. Among these arguments, the most common one against female sushi chefs imputes blame to women's hands for they are warmer than men's, which is in fact proved to be a false argument (p. 53).

Corson describes why it is impossible to work as a sushi chef in a public space for most women in contemporary Japan. This explains why certain Japanese women, looking forward to becoming sushi chefs, are motivated to go abroad for possible career development. In comparison with the conservatism in the Japanese sushi world, the culinary culture in the United States opens a door for those who strive to make careers in the culinary world of sushi. The visual break away from Japanese sushi world tradition, therefore, creates an opportunity for women to realize their careers. From high-end restaurants to everyday supermarkets, women working as sushi chefs are now more and more observable, re-constructing women's image in a traditionally male-dominated culinary world.

Beyond knowledge and reality construction, visual culture can also be utilized as a way of constructing values. Browsing Wegmans' official website, we see an icon stating "100 BEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR" as rated by *Fortune* magazine, located at the bottom of the main page. Under the tag of "Media Room," pictures of smiling employees and consumers convey the message that Wegmans is indeed one of the best companies to work for. Upon walking into Wegmans, we can find shopping carts equipped with different gadgets which can be either playful for children or functional for

special needs shoppers or senior citizens. These shopping carts indicate Wegmans' concern for its consumers, making consumers feel both cared for and respected. Or, as mentioned earlier, the use of space inside Wegmans also facilitates consumers' mobility, making consumers comfortable for both strolling and lingering. It is not overstating that Wegmans makes every effort to provide its consumers with positive experiences while shopping.

However, this is not to say that a comfortable operation like Wegmans, which celebrates the core values of "caring," "respect," "high standards," "making a difference," and "empowerment," has realized its goals and thus deserved the name of "best company to work for." It is within these careful deployments of visual culture and devices creating positive bodily encounters that issues of gender, race and ethnicity are concealed and naturalized constantly at Wegmans. How visual culture naturalizes knowledge, beliefs, and values will be examined in the following section.

Visual Culture as a Way of Naturalizing

The spectacle, as the present social organization of the paralysis of history and memory, of the abandonment of history built on the foundation of historical time, is the false consciousness of time (Debord, 1994, thesis 158; also consider thesis 153-157).

In the previous two sections, I argue how visual culture is used in ways to demystify the unfamiliar and to construct knowledge or reality in the spectacle. This illustrates how visual culture can be incorporated into pedagogical forces, turning spectators into consumers. However, to further encourage spectators to take part in

consumption activities, the spectacle needs to increase its influence on spectator-consumers. Therefore, how to naturalize its “selling points” and make spectators act to buy becomes a decisive issue for the spectacle.

There are numerous selling points at Wegmans. For instance, making the unfamiliar less unfamiliar, or registering the passage of time through a focus on holiday celebrations are some of Wegmans thriving marketing strategies. My on-site visual narrative reveals how the spectacle performs hidden curricula on issues of race and ethnicity, delegating visual culture as a vehicle to convey messages of imagined/fabricated truths. It is through the direct senses involving seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching that spectators are reassured about their fears toward the *Others*. To provide a concrete example, I will first return to something with which I am culturally familiar – Asian food visual culture in the spectacle. Through unfolding the process of naturalizing Asian food visual culture, I will discuss how Asian food visual culture becomes an exotic commodity to sell in the spectacle.

The other example presented will show how the spectacle naturalizes holiday consumerism in an annual timeframe. As an outsider to American consumerism culture, I have noticed that holiday celebrations become a unique selling point in the spectacle as well. Through staging a holiday atmosphere in the special event section or all throughout the store, the spectacle creates an inviting space in which spectator-consumers are encouraged to buy. Collectively, I reason that visual culture functions as a way of naturalizing in the spectacle.

As an Asian and a cultural outsider situated in the American supermarket spectacle, I am particularly interested in how Asian food visual culture, with which I am familiar, is presented in a different cultural context. As my primary grocery shopping place, Wegmans does provide me with different viewpoints for observing how Asian food visual culture is positioned in relation with others. Whether one would like to cook Asian dishes from scratch or to reheat frozen Asian meals in the microwave, there are multiple choices provided at Wegmans. At the central Produce Department, spectator-consumers can easily find Asian produce. Frozen Asian ingredients such as tofu and lo mein noodles can be procured from the frozen foods area. Typical Asian cooking sauces can be obtained at the International Foods corner. This is satisfactory for spectator-consumers who enjoy cooking as much as I do. For those who do not have time to cook, Wegmans provides an alternative entitled *Discover the Orient*. Under this Wegmans-brand line, spectator-consumers can find Asian foods such as the California Classic Roll at the sushi station or hot Asian dishes at the Asian Wokery Bar. Spectator-consumers can gaze upon sushi chefs restlessly performing the making of sushi rolls while taste sampling the Orient through food visual culture.

For those who miss spectating-consuming these alternatives, Wegmans offers spectator-consumers no worries by creating two other options by featuring frozen Asian meals labeled, *Travels of Asia* and *Travels of India*. Under these Wegmans-brand lines, spicy orange beef with brown rice and chicken korma can be served on the table within 10-12 minutes, giving an Asian touch to their dinner.

In almost every large department or section, Asian food visual culture is deployed by the spectacle. Spectators are able to see and gaze upon this exotic visual culture again and again while strolling around Wegmans. The abstract and geographically remote Asia is embodied in various forms of visual culture. It is not surprising to see some Asian food visual culture merging into American mainstream food culture (like Americanized Italian pizza) and being considered as American food in the near future.³⁵ Also, through bodily encounters of the flâneuse, I have found that some display techniques commonly seen in Asian culture are now employed at Wegmans. For example, the lobster tank showcases fresh live lobsters to spectators-consumers. Lobster tanks are not usually seen in conventional American supermarkets, for lobsters are not frequently consumed by Americans. Even in areas where people do eat lobsters, they generally come processed and seasoned in a frozen state. To display live seafood and therefore convey the idea of freshness, to my perception is an attribute of Asian food display. Whether in Asian supermarkets or restaurants (particularly Cantonese restaurants), it is considered essential to have water tanks displaying live seafood so consumers will be made to believe that all ingredients and seafood dishes they consume are fresh and authentic. For most Asians, the water tank embodies the freshness and authenticity of seafood. The spectacle, therefore, appropriates this display technique to naturalize spectators' gazes and to further fabricate the taste of the Asian, to exemplify Asianess.

The other case presented here is how the spectacle naturalizes holidays into everyday practice. Most Asian countries do not have as many holidays as the United

³⁵ I have noticed that some price tags along Asian produce are written *Produce of U.S.A.*, suggesting to spectators that they are locally or nationally grown produce and thus perhaps reassuring them.

States does. For instance, in Taiwan and Mainland China, people used to celebrate three major traditional holidays or festivals—Chinese New Year, the Dragon Boat Festival (a.k.a. Duanwu Festival), and the Mid-Autumn Festival (a.k.a. Moon Festival). These three traditional holiday and festivals have their roots in our cultural context and are considered the most important family gatherings during every year. Not until coming to the United States did I realize how many holidays American consumerism celebrates and creates to deliberately create marketing opportunities. I was confused about the holidays and could not relate them to those in my home culture. For instance, I misunderstood Memorial Day and Halloween and ironically considered them both as holidays in memory of the dead.

In observing the spectacle, I have discovered that holidays are another selling point at Wegmans. Or, to put it another way, Wegmans conforms to the spectacle and accomplishes American consumerism by positioning holidays as a marketing niche. The holiday theme marketing has been successfully performed by the spectacle at Wegmans. To me, there is no such thing as a *holiday season* but definitely a *holiday year* at Wegmans. The spectacle has highlighted holidays and events all during the year, making spectators take part in developed consumption activities. For instance, a heart-shaped cardboard cut-out hung from the ceiling suggests not only the arrival of Valentine's Day but also the cards, flowers, and chocolates that spectators should purchase for their loved ones. Similarly, a Thanksgiving turkey displayed on a sample dining table reminds spectators that it is time to have a gathering with family and therefore their holiday tables should have turkeys and probably hams as well. Not surprisingly, in the final days of

January, I started seeing green color to remind me of the approach of Saint Patrick's Day even though Valentine's Day would arrive first. As Saint Patrick's Day approached, and with dramatically increasing frequency, spectators would find texts of holiday visual culture such as tableware accessories, party supplies and even hats with shamrocks, displayed to suggestively urge them to act to consume. Similar scenarios and operations applied to Valentine's Day, Easter, graduation, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, and summer parties, etc. Wegmans advances visual culture reminders for each holiday and event, prompting spectators to plan their holiday or event budgets ahead of the actual celebration.

Debord reminds us that the society of the spectacle is a society in which the accumulation of visual culture has become more important than the accumulation of commodities. Rapid circulation of visual culture thus transforms spectators into acting consumers who play out artificial roles that suffocate their subjectivities (Macey, 2000). Through following and acting as others do in the spectacle, we feel that we are naturally bound together as a collective community, which is in fact an imagined community fabricated by the spectacle and by the shared consumption that the spectacle drives us to.

By naturalizing the celebration of holidays and events, the spectacle sophisticatedly transforms holiday and event celebrations into economic rituals, directing spectators to those consumption activities connected to it. As a result, consumerism is accentuated at the forefront of any celebration, degrading celebration to merely economic consumption. Therefore, instead of enjoying moments of holidays and events with beloved family and friends, other alternatives are provided in the spectacle for those who cannot physically

attend the holiday or event. Celebration of holidays and events becomes so materialistic that it is seemingly natural to take part in this collective consumption spectacle.

The Spectacul-art Pedagogy

You must make this window-shopper push your door open and make him take a step, the one step, which changes him from a window-shopper into a customer. A good store front tries to make his step as easy as possible for him, and tries not to let him even notice that he takes such an important step (Victor Gruen, 1941).³⁶

Take a day off...Go shopping (Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, asking New Yorkers not to go to their jobs in the Wall Street area on the day after terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center, September 11, 2001).³⁷

I encourage you all to go shopping more (President G. W. Bush, 2006).³⁸

In previous sections, I discussed how visual culture in the spectacle functions as de-mystification, construction and naturalization respectively, suggesting that in the course of de-mystifying, constructing or naturalizing, visual culture is designedly operated by the spectacle and performed as a pedagogical force. In order to implement visual culture in the everyday practice taking place in supermarkets such as Wegmans, the spectacle integrates fragmentary and fabricated information in individual seemingly-real and artistic visual spectacles. Therefore, we see visual elements extracted from various stereotypes and cultures, composing cohesive yet ostensible narratives that are in

³⁶ Quote cited from Hardwick, M. J. (2004). *Mall maker: Victor Gruen, architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

³⁷ Quote cited from Zukin, S. (2004). *Point of purchase: how shopping changed American culture*. London & New York: Routledge.

³⁸ Godec. (2007). *Shopping Brigades - Go Shop* [video]. Retrieved May 18, 2010 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ifs6wpjlu28>

accordance with mainstream ethics such as sustainable living and green consumption. Visual spectacles, engaging with live performances and fine visual culture, are also capable of being performed to facilitate the consumption of the visible and the invisible. As a result, spectators are directed to consumption activities, going through the transformation process from spectators to consumers. I therefore term this pedagogy through spectacular performance and fine visual culture as *spectacul-art pedagogy*.

As Victor Gruen, the architect influential in the design of American shopping malls, described a half-century ago, stores lead a double life. They are factories with machinery behind the scenes; machinery which must be well-oiled, invisible and inaudible. To the outside stores present the gayer side of the double life — they are show places and exhibits with the aim of arousing interest in the displayed merchandise (Gruen, 1947).³⁹ Gruen's depiction of the double life of stores better characterizes the role of the spectacle operating proficiently behind the observable at Wegmans. With the emergence of positioning commodities as representations in the service of publicity, promotion, and distribution, various forms of advertising visual culture have been invented and advanced to accompany commodities since the twentieth century. Today, we receive weekly flyers and catalogues from Wegmans⁴⁰, other supermarkets or retailers, informing us of current promotions, sales, or food and diet trends without physically visiting the supermarket or retail store beforehand. In addition, as argued previously, the way commodities are presented on publicity materials or at physical stores is carefully planned and combined

³⁹ Quote cited from Hardwick, M. J. (2004). *Mall maker: Victor Gruen, architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁴⁰ Other than weekly flyers, Wegmans publishes *Menu* magazine on a quarterly basis. This magazine is made to look like a cooking magazine, introducing recipes and corporate products available at Wegmans. Fine illustrated recipes and articles on food and food preparation are also included.

with sensational rubrics such as “get family favorites at low prices” and “helping you make great meals easy,” or via performances such as sample tasting events and live demonstrations. Therefore, in the event of visiting Wegmans, we may find ourselves immersed in overwhelming visual culture and live performances which embody cultural capital or consumerist meanings in the contemporary context. The whole presentation of consumable visual culture at Wegmans reinforces the ideology of consumption in the spectacle, bringing into being a particular system with its own iconography.

The spectacle also develops its own vocabularies and logic. By positioning visible bold vocabularies such as “lowest price,” “club member price,” “save 1/3,” “clearance,” “huge dollar signs” or “new item,” Wegmans arouses spectators’ interest in the displayed consumable visual culture, making spectators believe their impetuous consumption is likely rational – I buy, therefore I save. Additionally, the commoditized visual culture that generates the most profit is usually placed at eye-level height at each end of the shelves that face the highly frequented central aisles. Consumers will not see goods or products directly, but do see the display of packaged visual culture that represents the contents and consumption values for better living or easier living. Wegmans in this sense becomes a unifying and sophisticated spectacle which enforces likeness and sophisticates a dominant machinery of specifically capitalist representation (Richards, 1991). And what really counts in this process is the successful attraction of attention and awakening of unknown desires of spectators. Wegmans as an invisible and inaudible subtle mechanism, therefore, over-rules visual culture and visual spectacles in the foreground, making its physical space a crucial field where spectacul-art pedagogy comes about.

In order not to confuse the spectacul-art pedagogy with *Spectacle Pedagogy*, which is a term coined by pioneer art educators/theorists Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius (2008) and serves as an inspiration for this research, I deem it necessary to characterize the differences between these two pedagogies. In their collective work, *Spectacle Pedagogy: Art, Politics, and Visual Culture*, Garoian and Gaudelius conceptualize visual culture as spectacle pedagogy, investigating the complex interrelationships between art, politics, and visual culture. The following quotation clearly delineates how the spectacle pedagogy is perceived by these two art educators/theorists:

We characterize the spectacle pedagogy of visual culture in two opposing ways: First, as a ubiquitous form of representation, which constitutes the pedagogical objectives of mass mediated culture and corporate capitalism to manufacture our desires and determine our choices; the second, as a democratic form of practice that enables a critical examination of visual cultural codes and ideologies to resist social injustice. As the former spectacle pedagogy functions as an insidious, ever-present form of propaganda in the service of cultural imperialism, the latter represents critical citizenship, which aspires to cultural democracy (p. 24).

In line with the above quotation, I hold that spectacle pedagogy and spectacul-art pedagogy dwell on the politics of pervasive visual culture in the present moment. In a broader sense, both pedagogies support the view that visual culture and visual spectacle can be artistically and pedagogically investigated to connote values and ideologies embedded within. It is these characteristics that apply spectacle pedagogy and spectacul-art pedagogy to question how the spectacle teaches spectators of visual culture and visual spectacles to see, act, and think.

However, the scopes of these two pedagogies are different. Visual culture examined through the lens of spectacle pedagogy ranges from fine art all the way to that mediated by television, the Internet, films, and advertising, providing a wider scope in studying the politics of visual culture; while spectacul-art pedagogy is more concerned with visual culture which is seemingly pleasant or tasteful and visual spectacles which include live performances or demonstrations. That is to say, visual culture and visual spectacles that can be considered as spectacul-art must be visually or organoleptically pleasant and delightful. They are meant to be enjoyable and desirable in every encounter with spectators/consumers. Thus, by “visual culture which is seemingly pleasant or tasteful,” I refer to visual culture which produces desires urging spectators to buy, not just to look. And this definition applies to visual spectacles such as live performances and demonstrations taking place inside the supermarket context (or other environmental contexts requiring pleasing display of visual culture). This narrows the scope down to visual culture and visual spectacles that are attractive, delightful and tasteful, which are distinct from those examined by spectacle pedagogy, for they are staged in the supermarket context to arouse spectators’ desire.

Therefore, we notice quite a few visual aids accompanying food visual culture that is for sale. Visual aids such as price tags functioning as labels, signboards demonstrating usages and cooking methods, or on-site chefs providing samples and recipes can urge spectators to buy. And because the food visual culture we spectate is mostly for eating, the supermarket context needs to make it nicer, pleasing, and tasteful so it arouses the desires of the spectators (in most cases, people do not go to supermarkets for bizarre

foods or food causing fear factors; neither do people encounter offensive smells driving them away from smelling foods), transforming spectators into spectacle consumers. For that reason, visual culture or visual spectacles examined by spectacul-art pedagogy need to produce visual pleasure and sensational delight as side effects, for desire is the ultimate outcome to enable further actions such as buying. Spectacul-art pedagogy thus looks into visual culture and visual spectacles, which provide spectators with sensational bodily experiences, and discusses the pedagogical role played by visual culture and visual spectacles in the process of making the invisible visible. It is through this careful examination that we are able to realize how invisible ideologies and belief systems are embodied in visual culture, be it visible or edible, and are realized by spectacul-art pedagogy.

Furthermore, a significant observing point of spectacle pedagogy and spectacul-art pedagogy in terms of educational purpose is, whom do they serve? Garoian and Gaudelius argue that spectacle pedagogy fosters the development of critical citizenship. Therefore, it serves as a mechanism of cultural democracy, breaking the monopolization of cultural interpretation controlled by a handful of elites. Similarly, spectacul-art pedagogy also aims to develop critical citizenship through deconstructing meanings embedded behind visual culture and visual spectacles of spectacul-art; it attempts to enable spectators an awareness of everyday cultural practice and to produce further actions such as critical resistance. And even if it too carries spectacle pedagogy's negative notion, which is characterized by Garoian and Gaudelius as an insidious, ever-present form of propaganda in the service of American cultural imperialism, and

conforms to American consumerism spectacle which focuses on impulse shopping, from my point of view, it can be operated the other way around, empowering spectators to embody their criticality and furthering cultural democracy.

Therefore, I deem that spectacul-art pedagogy aims to advance the transformation of spectators of spectacul-art, turning them from receptive spectators into active consumers. By means of deconstructing the spectacul-art pedagogy, I uncover issues hidden behind the sophisticated operation of the spectacle. With the lens of the spectacul-art pedagogy, I aim to enable spectators of spectacul-art to have an awareness of those issues concealed in delightful but inciting visual culture and visual spectacles, to see through the spectacle, and to critically negotiate with visual culture and visual spectacles existent in everyday practice of American consumerism. In the last section of this chapter, I recur to the criticality of the flâneuse. Through engaging my visual experiences on contemporary visual culture and my bodily encounters with American consumerism, I provide my observations and critiques on American consumerism from the standpoint of a cultural female other.

I Shop Therefore I Am

He [the architect] decides to give the client not what he wants, but what he ought to want...pedestrian areas of attractive appearance with sun protection and landscaping and, yes, even art, because they will attract more shoppers, thus increasing the business of the lessors...in other words, that he ought to want good design because it spells good business (Victor Gruen, 1956).⁴¹

⁴¹ Quote cited from Hardwick, M. J. (2004). *Mall maker: Victor Gruen, architect of an American Dream*.

Buying is more American than thinking and I'm as American as they come. In Europe and the Orient people like to trade—buy and sell, sell and buy—they're basically merchants. Americans are not so interested in selling—in fact, they'd rather throw out than sell. What they really like to do is buy—people, money, countries (Andy Warhol, 1977).

In a highly capitalistic society, most people no longer work for their own sake but passively play a part in the process of producing and consuming. They crave products whose exchange values far exceed their wages; yet their patterns of consumption are closely bound to those defined by American consumerism. Even children living in economically and technologically disadvantaged areas and in humble circumstances such as western China, India or most countries in Africa, dream of the life style defined by the spectacle of American consumerism. Like the touristic scenario portrayed in the British film, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), even social gaps exists in most places. American consumerism is as powerful as its dollar, overruling areas outside the United States. The process of producing and consuming often makes people feel alienated from work, and thus consumption is discoursed to possibly make up for this separation. While most American people experience alienation from the rest of social interactions, an everyday place like Wegmans functions as the spectacle in which people look for visible and edible visual culture that mirrors their social relationship with others and comforts their souls. Concepts regarding diet such as *Comfort Foods* or *You Are What You Eat* also play a significant role in progressively influencing people's eating habits, motivating people to consume from specific grocery stores. By incorporating fragmentary knowledge and information into visual culture, Spectacul-art pedagogy therefore stages an apparently

coherent storyline that arouses spectators' desires. An imaginable and desirable social relationship can be projected on staged visual culture, causing actions on the part of the spectators. This phenomenon corresponds to Debord's argument that we are all situated in the spectacle in which social relations between us and others are mediated by visual culture.

Gazing on the visible, eating the edible, putting on the wearable, as such, we are driven by the spectacul-art pedagogy to be greedy for visual culture that is offered by the spectacle. The spectacle makes us believe that through participating in activities of consumption we are able to gain pleasure and thus find others who appreciate similar things or embody emotions into products as we do. In this manner, visual culture becomes the incarnation of abstract consumerist capital materially presented on shelves; the shopping cart becomes the metaphor for mobile vaults of capital; the more one puts into the cart, the more symbolic capital one seems to own. Consuming makes our existences seem real, leaving the sense of alienation behind us. Shopping is the best anesthetic for contemporary social beings, and this has been the mainstream voice spoken by the spectacle of American consumerism.

Casting her eyes over consumerism, artist Barbara Kruger invites spectators to question the ever-present consumerism in American society through her pithy work, *I Shop Therefore I am* (Figure 5-1). This work serves as an important reference in contemporary art, reflecting on issues of consumption in American everyday life. Consumerism as a compulsory force driving people's desires and actions is already rooted in the practice of American everyday life. It urges people to buy more, making

people believe that even impulse shopping can be a rational choice. For instance, the *buy one get one free* sales promotion convinces people that by paying just half of the original price, they will be able to get the double of what they want. Thus people participating in this sales promotion end up buying things in pairs rather than just one. To some of them, money is to buy today what they think will have value tomorrow. “GET IT CHEAP, they say” (Warhol, 1977, p.137).

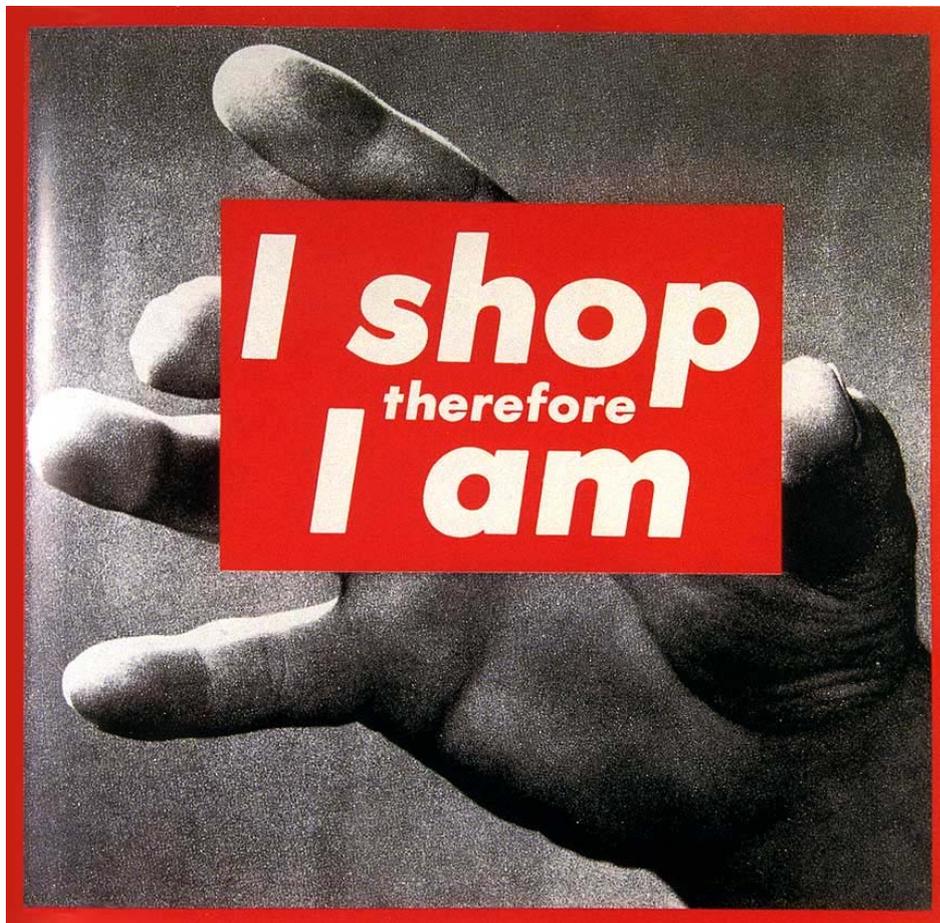


Figure 5-1 *I shop therefore I am*, 1987

The United States is well known as a *shop-until-you-drop* nation. A sales promotion such as “buy one, get one free” is just one of the many marketing techniques serving the ideology of the spectacle, which is in accordance with American consumerism. In order to carry out American consumerism and to transform receptive spectators of visual culture into active consumers of consumption activities, the spectacle performs the spectacul-art pedagogy by means of using visual culture and live performances on spectators. All spectacular visual culture and live performances that make great use of vision and the other senses of the body to familiarize the unfamiliar, to fabricate knowledge and reality, and to naturalize constructed values, as a result, turn spectators into consumers in the spectacle. The subtle spectacul-art pedagogy utilizing visual culture and live performances to instruct the public, therefore philosophizes the reality constructed by American consumerism.

When reflecting American consumerism, contemporary artistic practice can also be a way of providing subversive commentary, as Kruger’s did in 1987. Or, as stated by Bourriaud (2002), artwork can serve as social interstice which creates a space intervening between things (p.14). Here I consider Seattle-based artist Chris Jordan’s *Running the Numbers: An American Self-Portrait 2006-2009* series as a contemporary visual response to Kruger’s *I Shop Therefore I am*. This series of works shows that focusing on issues brought up by everyday consumption can begin in creative practice and do not necessarily require high artistic skill. Jordan was once a practicing lawyer who has become a full-time and active photographic artist during the past decade. In this series, Jordan visualizes some statistics related to everyday mass consumption that are often

heard, but not attended to by the public. For instance, in his work entitled *Cell Phones* (Figure 5-2, Figure 5-3, & Figure 5-4), he depicts 426,000 cell phones, equal to the number of cell phones retired in the United States every single day, to compose a large scale work. Usually, hearing a statistic does not likely make people emotive. We are likely to perform expressions such as “Oh, is it true?” or “Wow, this is surprising!” without being sensationally or seriously responsive. Through visualizing the numerical facts of the waste produced by American everyday consumption activities, Jordan reminds us how excessive American consumption activities are in a visually devastating manner, thus making an appeal to spectators to be introspective about the massive waste produced. As stated in Jordan’s website:

Running the Numbers looks at contemporary American culture through the austere lens of statistics. Each image portrays a specific quantity of something: fifteen million sheets of office paper (five minutes of paper use); 106,000 aluminum cans (thirty seconds of can consumption) and so on. My hope is that images representing these quantities might have a different effect than the raw numbers alone, such as we find daily in articles and books. Statistics can feel abstract and anesthetizing, making it difficult to connect with and make meaning of 3.6 million SUV sales in one year, for example, or 2.3 million Americans in prison, or 32,000 breast augmentation surgeries in the U.S. every month. This project visually examines these vast and bizarre measures of our society, in large intricately detailed prints assembled from thousands of smaller photographs. Employing themes such as the near versus the far, and the one versus the many, I hope to raise some questions about the roles and responsibilities we each play as individuals in a collective that is increasingly enormous, incomprehensible, and overwhelming (Chris, Jordan, 2008).

Similarly, *Paper Bags* (Figure 5-5, Figure 5-6, & Figure 5-7) and *Plastic Bags* (Figure 5-8, Figure 5-9, & Figure 5-10) are two other pieces I want to specifically mention here. The former visualizes 1.14 million brown paper supermarket bags, the number used in

the United States *every hour*; the later visualizes 60,000 plastic bags, the number used in the United States *every five seconds*. Both works raise critical issues experienced in our everyday consumption practices by using the most ordinary, yet habitually ignored objects as compositional elements to question environmental side effects brought about by everyday consumption in the United States.

Jordan's *Running the Numbers series* is thought-provoking. With "An American Self-Portrait" as the subheading, the artist motivates spectators to critically think about everyday consumption practices through viewing these visualized numerical facts and to take further actions. These works visually encourage us to ruminate about further questions such as how we can negotiate with everyday consumption activities or how we can reduce the unnecessary in our daily consumption practice, exemplifying the pedagogical effects possibly brought about by visual culture. It is in this regard that I argue contemporary artistic practice can be considered, not only as a creative way to examine the everyday and the habitual in our life, but also a radical way to critically resist the spectacle produced by American consumerism. For artistic practice provides us with an unfamiliar yet artistic way to gaze upon the visualized issues.



Figure 5-2 *Cell Phones, 2007*

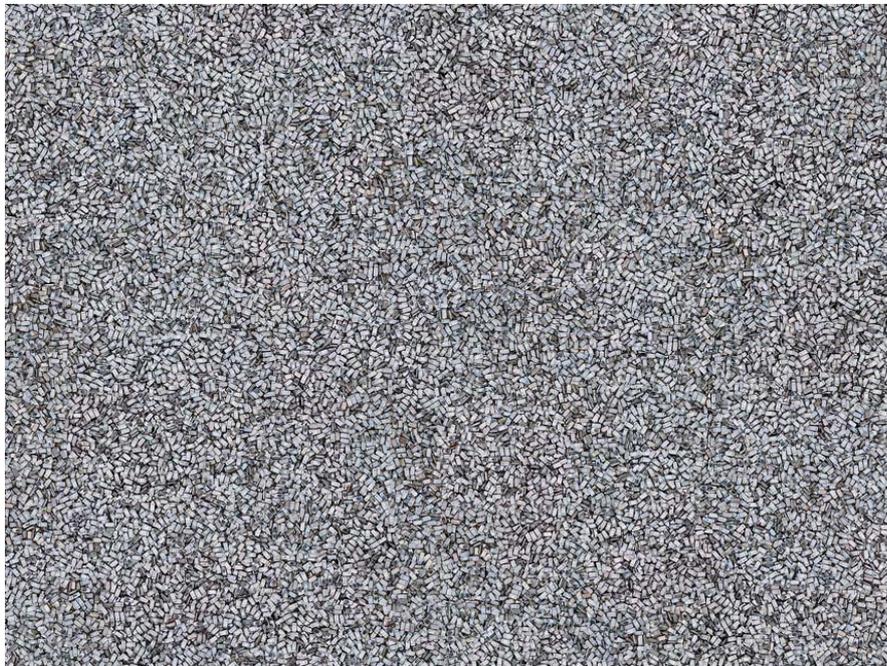


Figure 5-3 *Cell Phones, 2007 (partial zoom)*



Figure 5-4 *Cell Phones, 2007* (detail at actual size)



Figure 5-5 *Paper Bags, 2007*



Figure 5-6 *Paper Bags*, 2007 (partial zoom)



Figure 5-7 *Paper Bags*, 2007 (detail at actual size)

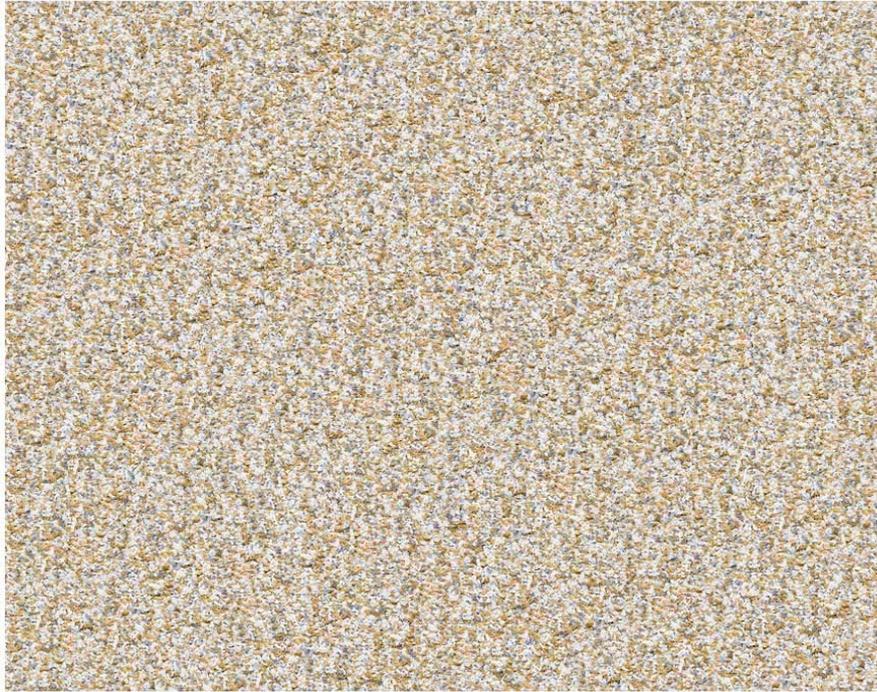


Figure 5-8 *Plastic Bags*, 2007

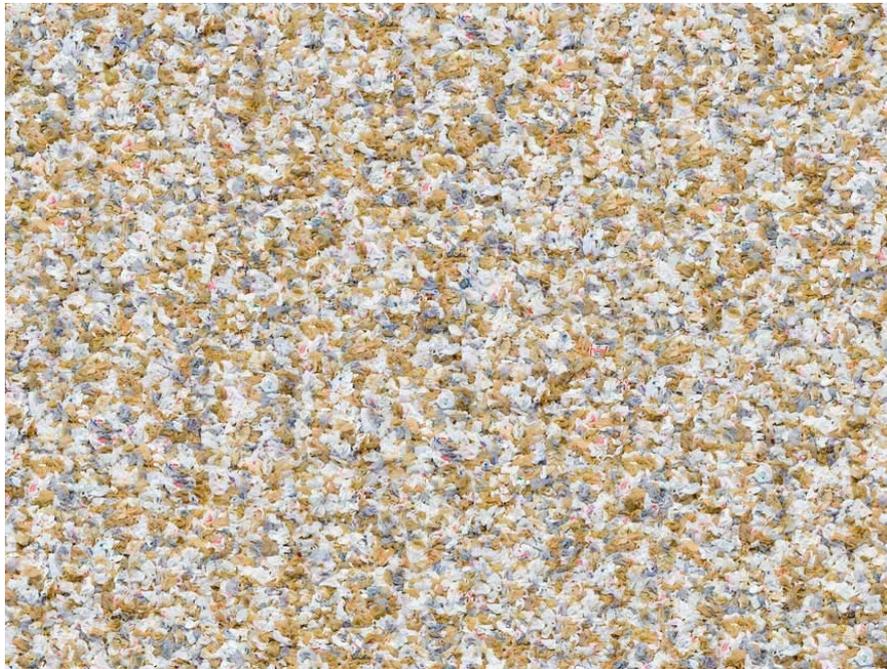


Figure 5-9 *Plastic Bags*, 2007 (partial zoom)



Figure 5-10 *Plastic Bags*, 2007 (detail at actual size)

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Okay! The Spectacul-art Pedagogy, So What?

Image (as a “dissociated transcript”) not only makes society, society continually remakes the image (Boulding, 1961).

The relationship of the image and culture is far more than merely a system of representing orders and ideologies and more embedded in a vast and complex set of agendas and relationships. This relationship therefore informs the use of the term “visual culture.” In other words, we see visual culture as denoting the complexities of image and culture, including this drive to render the image as significant, and the culturally significant as an image. A key component in this is the spectator. Because we see visual culture as a dynamic and ever-changing set of relations, it is important to note that the spectator is equally dynamic and constantly shifting (Fuery & Fuery, 2003).

With the enormous expansion of technology in support of the visual, it is not surprising that the leverage of visual culture is surpassing that of written culture in today’s society of the spectacle. In the practice of our everyday life, we can hardly escape the influence of visual culture. From desktop to mountaintop, visual culture continuously governs our beliefs, values, and ideologies, directing our actions. Food visual culture is even used to regulate our bodies and diets. However, the relationship between visual culture and its spectators is not necessarily monopolized by visual culture and can be altered by the participation of critical spectators. It is thus crucial to be fully aware of the existence of visual culture and its potential influences on our behaviors. More importantly, situated in a culture whose social relationships are overwhelmingly mediated

by the visual, we, as spectators/consumers, need to be mindful of dealing with visual culture which exercises its impacts on us. Being mindful of visual culture enables us to critically examine our relationship with visual culture, and further to respond to it in a deliberate manner. It is in this manner that a possible negotiation with and resistance to visual culture exist.

Hence, through performing her critical and gendered gaze and integrating her embodied experiences, the flâneuse (the incarnation of my researcher self) enters Wegmans, investigating the complicated social relationships embodied in delightful, pleasant, tasteful and live visual culture and visual spectacles while exercising methodological strolls in an everyday supermarket spatial context. Her feminist gazing enables her to see through the spectacle, hitting upon issues interwoven with class, gender, race, and ethnicity that are materialized in subtle visual culture. Her duality of positions and her bodily encounters allow her to embody her cultural differences, empowering her to take a cultural other's position and to experience the space from an alternative approach. She learns from her bodily encounters with both people and objects in the spectacle. In the meantime, she, herself, serves as a spectacle of extras, supporting or resisting visual narratives produced by the spectacle. To share an example, I sometimes purchase produce or products I do not even think of consuming, simply because I am given a chance for tasting or looking. My responsive actions, such as requesting further information or putting things into my shopping cart, may initiate chain reactions of noticing or buying. My bodily responding to the visual culture, therefore positions me as a visual spectacle of extras, supporting the messages conveyed by the

spectacle. Or, during meal times, I would stroll around the Asian Wokery located at the Market Café inside Wegmans, inquisitively checking to see if there is any dish authentically Asian by my standard. My Asian appearance and my hesitation about certain dishes sometimes result in the departure of other spectators, who might be interested in the same dish initially, yet end up leaving the dish behind. Thus, in participating in the spectacle, the ways I respond to visual culture and visual spectacles in Wegmans make me a spectacle of extras, delivering messages to spectators of me. And I am conscious of my learning from others in the spectacle. This learning through inter-embodiment or inter-corporeality (Weiss, 1999) facilitate my understanding of everyday culture in the United States, providing me with other organoleptic approaches of experiencing the United States.

Besides, through performing her critical and gendered gazes and her bodily encounters, the methodological flâneuse makes me mindful of issues informed through visual culture and ideologies possibly imposed by the spectacle. I thus recognize the pedagogical forces of visual culture and visual spectacles, accordingly proposing spectacul-art pedagogy which conceptualizes the utilization of delightful, pleasant, tasteful, and splendid visual culture and visual spectacles to de-mystify, construct, and naturalize invisible knowledge and ideologies conveyed by the cultural practice of the American consumerism spectacle. Attending to spectacul-art pedagogy that is widely employed in various everyday consumption spaces is what my role as an art educator aims to further explore. That is to say, I attempt to propose a possible way to negotiate

with spectacul-art pedagogy in terms of art education. And I will address this later in the section entitled “Implications: Artistic Practice as Social Interstice.”

To investigate the knowledge and ideologies realized in visual culture and visual spectacles at Wegmans, I distance myself from this much traveled everyday space and re-figure it as a “strange” and “unfamiliar” site where socio-cultural forces can inscribe on it varied meanings. This distant, yet safe space enables the flesh to exist and to bodily encounter hidden curricula and issues related to the negative notions of class, gender, race, and ethnicity concealed by pleasant visual culture and visual spectacles. To be more specific, the space for the flesh to exist is where the relationships of the methodological flâneuse produce and prompt. Therefore, what I have garnered from the gazing and bodily encounters of the flâneuse occurs in this in-between space. It comes from the reciprocal interactions between me and the space, lively present in the space extended from both me and Wegmans. This space can be produced by anyone who is mindful of visual culture in his/her surroundings. In addition, the relationships produced and prompted in this space can certainly be heterogeneous. And I deem that it is in this space that spectators/consumers are able to actively participate in the knowledge construction of the spectacle, bringing different embodied experiences to facilitate or subvert the meaning-making of the spectacle. For instance, dislocating visual culture in a new context creates cultural disruptions. Meanings and be re-made in these disruptions and thus creates other perceptions of visual culture. I constantly re-learn Asian produce at Wegmans for it is presented in an un-familiar (but museum-like) context to me.

Despite the negative notions hidden behind the visual culture and visual spectacles, the spectacul-art pedagogy can also cause alternative understanding of the visual culture and visual spectacles presented. As indicated in the first quote cited from Kenneth Boulding (1961), image and society mutually remake each other. Pleasant and tasteful visual culture can also be viewed as dissociated transcripts whose meanings are constantly layered by the socio-cultural practices of everyday life. With appropriate pedagogical use, visual culture and visual spectacles can certainly be employed to construct either positive or subversive notions. The female sushi chef described in Chapter Four is, in this regard, a fitting example that can be considered as a significant reference for visual spectacle. Her existence as a visual spectacle, or a spectacle of extras, may question and de-construct my prior understandings of sushi chefs. However, to others in the spectacle, this visual spectacle can be their first encounter with a sushi chef and therefore naturalize their gazes for this profession. Either way contributes to the construction of gender of the space. Also, given the circumstance that the official in-store male chef at Wegmans State College can only be occasionally seen and encountered, making the female sushi chef extensively visible, thus radically challenges the ingrained traditions still perpetuated not only in the male-dominated Japanese sushi world, but also in the entire male-dominated culinary world. This exemplifies the double-faced pedagogical operation of the spectacul-art pedagogy, suggesting the potentiality of how it can be performed in everyday cultural, social, and political practice.

Rather than providing a model or pedagogical solution for in-school teachers to follow, this research is more concerned with unfolding the social relations embodied and

taught in the American consumerism spectacle, making the *invisible* issues visible in everyday socio-cultural practice. This stance enables a critical and gendered gaze to be cast by the flâneuse and to be performed by spectator-consumers of the spectacle. It also invites spectator-consumers to bring their own embodied experiences into the relationships mediated by visual culture and visual spectacles in the everyday spectacle. Through being aware of the spectacul-art pedagogy seamlessly operated in the everyday spectacle, spectator-consumers are able to know about knowledge and ideologies constructed by pedagogical forces, recognizing that even a mundane place like a supermarket can involve issues of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and such, further identifying that a mundane place can speak a pedagogical language. This pedagogical language equips us with beliefs, values and ideologies through vocabularies embedded within visual culture and visual spectacles, directing us to act the ways it guides us to follow. Therefore, unfolding issues entangled with visual culture and visual spectacles we easily encounter in consumption practice of everyday life, this research attempts to enact a criticality of spectator-consumers. Through both denoting and connoting visual culture and visual spectacles encountered by the strolling flâneuse in Wegmans supermarket spectacle, I want to elucidate that even in a most everyday space and at the most individual level, our decision-making about food can still extensively involve politics in terms of consumption, desires, ethics and sexuality. It is also on that account that I consider spectacul-art pedagogy as one of the pedagogies encompassed in spectacle pedagogy, which fosters the development of critical citizenship in today's highly visual society.

What Can We as Spectator-consumers of the Spectacle Do?

A plurality of vision provides a framework for an inclusive democracy that has the possibility of yielding multiple perspectives, discourses, and understandings about cultural life (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008, p.24).

As described above, the flâneuse's visual narratives and bodily encounters help to depict *what is taught* and *how it is taught* in the supermarket spectacle, indicating that an everyday space can be not only gendered and political, but also pedagogical. The pedagogical forces, which operate behind the pleasant and tasteful visual culture and visual spectacles within the supermarket spatial context, thus perpetually impact spectators, further directing the ways spectators see and transforming them into consumers primed to act. Once spectators are situated in the spectacle, they are inevitably affected by visual culture and visual spectacles accompanied by pedagogical forces. These pedagogical forces inscribe cultural markers on spectators' bodies, rendering spectators consumers of American consumerism. For example, I have friends who are impulse buyers simply because they can barely resist visual spectacles such as on-site demonstrations in consumption spaces. Even though I constantly hear their self-blame for their own impulse purchases, I have never found them to cease from consuming. Their attitudes towards consumption make consumption itself a huge waste of resources, making them passive consumers of the consumption spectacle.

Still, being a spectator-consumer does not necessarily mean being that submissive. Although we may passively receive messages conveyed by the spectacle, we always have choices about how we participate in American consumerism activities. As suggested by Garoian and Gaudelius (2008) that a plurality of vision provides a framework which not

only invites multiple perspectives, discourses, and understandings about cultural life, our gazing can embody this plurality and thus help us to make better choice in participating in activities of consumption. I side with their viewpoint and argue that through acquiring the duality inspired by the flâneuse, it is as well moving “passive spectators” into “active consumers.” This duality may be realized in classroom teaching by dislocating visual culture in heterogeneous contexts.

Furthermore, countering Debord’s point of view, which holds that the apparent causal relationship between the spectacle and spectators has disabled the agency of spectators and caused them to be passive receivers of the spectacle, I hold that through embodying our awareness, consciousness, and criticality in gazing upon and encountering with others, we can choose to become active and autonomous consumers when participating in American consumerism activities instead of being deprived of our agency. That is to say, without radically escaping from consumerism, we need to learn how to critically negotiate with visual culture and visual spectacles embedded within the spectacle.

In this supermarket spectacle research, people visit supermarkets for the purchase of the needed commodity. The need to buy groceries, goods, and products drives them to enter this spectacle. In other words, they enter the supermarket spectacle with lists itemizing things because they really need to buy. The intriguing part in this buying process appears at impulse moments when spectators are strongly invited to see, smell, hear, taste, and even touch the unknown and the unfamiliar. Through engaging the senses of spectators, the spectacle not only inscribes pedagogical markers on spectators,

but also creates embodied experiences impressive for them. And it is in this impulsive encountering with the unknown and the unfamiliar that spectators are encouraged to actively learn about *the Others*, who by definition habitually remain invisible to spectators.

For instance, I am often-times encouraged by visual culture and visual spectacles at Wegmans to experience the unknown. As a spectator-consumer, I remember first learning how to re-locate both the tomato⁴² and avocado as found in an Aztec and Mexican culinary context after sampling the delightful and tasteful food visual culture of guacamole dip at Wegmans. After returning home with a cup full of guacamole, I started searching strenuously for on-line recipes to make it from scratch, and to practice its preparation. This practicing reminded me of the art-making process from which I had been absent for a long period of time. The more I practiced, the more the knowledge I acquired from the practicing became embodied – just like developing craftsmanship in the process of art-making enabled me to further explore and stretch relevant ideas and issues generated in this process. I am now a guacamole expert among my social circle, enjoying mixing different Asian additions with the guacamole base to create the delightful and tasteful edible visual culture which invites people to bodily experience the fusion of Aztec, Mexican and Asian cultures as embodied in guacamole.

My embodied experience shows that even as a spectator who is fascinated by the appearance of visual culture and visual spectacles, I am able to embody my own agency

⁴² Tomato is considered more as a kind of fruit rather than a vegetable in Taiwan. And most Taiwanese would consume their fruit after meals rather than with meals.

as the curious and conscious flâneuse, who actively participates in the spectacle and investigates unfamiliarity, strangeness, and the unusual with her critical gaze. Jacques Rancière asserts in *The Emancipated Spectator* that

An emancipated spectator must be proposed the spectacle of something strange, unusual, which stands as an enigma and demands that s/he investigates the reason for that strangeness. S/he must be pressed to switch from the status of the passive viewer to the status of the scientist who observes phenomena and looks for their cause...the spectator has to leave the status of a mere observer who remains still and untouched in front of a distant spectacle. S/he must be dragged away from her/his delusive mastery, drawn into the magic power of theatrical action where s/he will exchange the privilege of the rational viewer for the possession of its true vital energies (Rancière, 2004).

Rancière's emancipated spectator refers to the spectator who is released from the passive recipient position asserted by Debord. His proposition of providing spectators with the strange and the unusual in order to entail further investigation is in accordance with how I positively frame the unknown and the unfamiliar through seeing and encountering the spectacle. It informs through careful arrangements where visual culture and visual spectacles can serve as the unknown and the unfamiliar, empowering spectators to do further investigations and become consumers of knowledge. Wegmans sometimes locates its produce and merchandises to different categories so that spectator-consumers take extra time to search and to look around. In searching for what they need, spectator-consumers are presented the possibilities of how things they are looking for can be juxtaposed with others. It is also in this process that spectator-consumers are encouraged to investigate things that are initially unknown and unfamiliar to them. Also, Rancière's figuration of the emancipated spectator resonates the duality positions simultaneously

held by the flâneuse — both observer and participant and both insider and outsider. These dualities of position, therefore, foster the development of the criticality of the flâneuse in this research. In consenting to Rancière's viewpoint and differing from the passivity of spectators claimed by Debord, I argue that with awareness, consciousness and criticality, spectators can be active and autonomous learners searching for meanings in the spectacle.

In searching for meanings, spectators are also welcome to bring their embodied knowledge and experiences into the spectacle, adding layers of meanings to visual culture and visual spectacles embedded in the spectacle, and accordingly engendering their own cultural narratives. In some way, spectators are participating in the process of knowledge construction, becoming co-constructors of knowledge produced in the spectacle.

Therefore, I want to accentuate the importance of spectators' embodied experiences for they are the crucial aspect that moves spectators beyond knowledge consumers in the spectacle to become possible knowledge co-constructors. For the spectacle is where the praxis of looking, knowing and acting converge seamlessly. With our own embodied experiences, we can possibly screen/challenge the pedagogical narratives spoken through visual culture and visual spectacles, assenting to or subverting the voices in an embodied way. And by doing so, I envision a spectator/consumer who does not passively receive messages conveyed through visual culture, but as an active participant who embodies his/her agency in shaping knowledge produced within the spectacle.

Implications: Artistic Practice as Social Interstice

The function of art isn't to sanction any specific experience, except the state of being open to the multiplicity of experience (Sontag, 1969).

The possibility of a relational art (an art that takes as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an autonomous and private symbolic space) is testimony to the radical upheaval in aesthetic, cultural and political objectives brought about by modern art. To outline its sociology: this development stems essentially from the birth of a global urban culture and the extension of the urban model to almost all cultural phenomena (Bourriaud, 2002).

There are, however, a number of contemporary artists and art collectives that have defined their practice around the facilitation of dialogue among diverse communities. Parting from the traditions of object making, these artists have adopted a performative, process-based approach. They are "context providers" rather than "content providers," which involve the creative orchestration of collaborative encounters and conversations, well beyond the institutional confines of the gallery or museum (Kester, 2004).

As mentioned in this research, vision and visual culture may fool people. Biased stereotypes and ideologies are often coated with delightful and pleasant visual culture. In a supermarket's environmental context, visual culture can even be tasteful, making spectators less cautious while wallowing in visual and sensory pleasure. This is why we need to be more aware of and critically negotiate with visual culture permeating into the cultural practice of everyday life. Many of us do not walk into a consumption space like a supermarket mindful of the information and messages conveyed through visual culture. However, I do not mean to advocate radically resisting visual culture embedded in everyday practice. Neither do I have the intention of being against consumption activities at Wegmans or other consumption spaces where pleasant visual culture and visual spectacles are staged as inducements. Rather, I want to call for an understanding that we

need to be critically conscious about what fragmentary or incoherent messages are sent by visual culture in the spectacle. For these messages only re-present partial social relationships that exist in today's society. For example, not everyone would live a holiday-based lifestyle as portrayed in Wegmans' weekly flyers. Nor do we live the life presented on television drama series. Or, not consuming the natural or the organic defined by the spectacle does not mean that we do not care about environmental sustainability. Rather, every decision we make in consumption activities should be based on second thought – to think about the consequences brought about by our decisions.

As Michael Pollan (2006) claims in his book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, even produce from organic farming is not necessarily beneficial to the earth, for many producers nowadays have adopted methods and techniques of industrial agriculture in order to supply the growing organic market. Through growing industrially, the so-called organic produce has lost its environmentally friendly roots, destroying farms that should be planted for crop diversity. Therefore, consuming organic produce at supermarket chains is not necessarily beneficial to individual organic farmers, but to enterprises capable of industrially growing organic produce. For most organic produce available at supermarket chains today is now provided by large enterprises making big profits under the organic produce banner. Therefore, to consume eco-friendly foods and to support organic farming, consumers should probably decide to visit local farmers rather than supermarket chains because produce from local farms is more likely coming from individual farmers and not grown industrially.

Pollan's argument is an example of actively and critically resisting the *seemingly correct* discourses produced in the spectacle. His investigation of organic foods has shown us that any action based on our second thoughts can render our subjectivities possible, and can start from the individual level.⁴³ As spectators, we are frequently captivated by visual culture and visual spectacles of spectacul-art, embracing what the spectacul-art pedagogy has suggested for us to desire and to act upon. I want to point out that spectacul-art pedagogy has its cons and pros, and we need to be careful about how it is utilized to construct knowledge and ideologies in the spectacle.

Therefore, through acknowledging the invisible yet possible pedagogical forces operating in an everyday supermarket like Wegmans State College, I attempt to unfold the politics and social relations produced in the spectacle thereby arming spectators with the awareness and consciousness to recognize socio-cultural markers inscribed on our bodies through the practice of our everyday life. With this awareness and consciousness, I want readers to

1. Embrace the duality and the criticality of the flâneuse and understand that visual culture and visual spectacles performed in an ordinary place can pedagogically influence our ways of seeing, knowing, and acting.

Before developing feminist awareness and consciousness, I was an

⁴³ In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Pollan used ingredients only hunted, gathered, or grown by his own to make the fourth meal. He hunted feral pigs, gathered mushrooms, and grew vegetable in his own garden. By doing so, he concluded that the fast food meal and the hunter-gather meal are "equally unreal and equally unsustainable." He accordingly proposed that if we were more mindful of the source of the food we consume – what it was, where it came from, how it traveled to reach us, and its true cost – we would see that we "eat by the grace of nature, not industry." And I consider Pollan's hunter-gather meal as a creative and artistic practice responding to what he has observed from previous three meals.

elementary school teacher capable of noticing pedagogical potential in everyday practice. I could identify denotations of visual culture and incorporate it into my curricula, yet I was not aware of connotations of visual culture. Through feminist lens, I am able to see through hidden issues associated with biased ideologies interwoven in complicated social relations. And through embracing the duality and the criticality of the flâneuse, I am able to negotiate with these issues and take further action. The feminist gaze of the flâneuse embodies the duality and the criticality of a social being. And this is what I would like to share with fellow educators, whether they are teaching inside or outside formal school settings.

2. In addition, this research looks into an everyday consumption space and its potentials of being transformed into a pedagogical site. Therefore, outside formal school settings, learning still happens. Wegmans State College is just one of the exemplified spaces in which the spectacul-art pedagogy of the spectacle is performing. Further research can be done in other consumption or educational spaces to investigate how spectacul-art pedagogy is performed or converted to execute the ideologies of the spectacle.

3. Be able to negotiate with visual culture and visual spectacles in the practice of everyday life. Ways of negotiating include careful resistance through gazing or actively participating in the process of knowledge

construction. In so doing, spectators are able to create an in-between space where they can bring their embodied experiences and knowledge into the production of meaning-making and social relations, engendering their own cultural narratives while layering meanings in the spectacle. It also enables spectators to be co-constructors of Elizabeth Ellsworth's "knowledge in the making", becoming cultural producers rather than cultural consumers.

4. Last but not least, I argue that artistic practice can be seen as social interstice which creates an intervening space for thoughts, conversations and debates. By artistic practice, I refer to any practice that is creatively planned and carefully executed. This artistic practice can range from a cooking practice in the kitchen such as demonstrated by Pollan in his hunter-gather meal to a performing piece on the street such as Jay Koh's *Exchanging Thought*⁴⁴ done at open markets in Chiang Mai, Thailand (Figure 6-1). What counts is how this artistic practice serves as a social interstice and creates an intervening space inviting thoughts, conversations and debates on issues unfolded.

Bearing the above points in mind, I envision that these will lead to a pedagogical understanding that enhances the development of critical citizenship in a more culturally

⁴⁴ *Exchanging Thought* was held in several different public markets in Chiang Mai, Thailand over a two-month period and involved bringing objects and works produced by artists from seventeen countries to the market and offering to exchange them for other objects brought for trade by local residents. According to the *Exchanging Thought* catalog, these transactions "cross cultural and professional differences on the basis of respect and equality in a process where the spectator becomes a participant." Objects play a central role here as both symbols for and embodiments of a kind of equitable material dialogue intended to challenge the instrumentalizing logic of the art market (Kester, 2004).

democratic society. That is to say, the duality and criticality embodied by the flâneuse suggest a possible way to negotiate with visual culture embedded in our cultural practice.



Figure 6-1 *Exchanging Thought*, 1995-1996

Meanwhile, her positions as observer-participant, insider-outsider, spectator-consumer, Taiwanese-American, educator-learner and so forth render the duality of the flâneuse possible. These dualities enable the flâneuse to see and to experience beyond the visible, embodying the invisible issues entangled within the spectacle. Through introducing the methodological flâneuse and taking on her duality, I deem that we are able to embody our awareness and consciousness when negotiating the visual culture we encounter. Artistic practice is at the same time considered a more embodied and substantial means to critically deal with visual culture and to articulate our stances. It is a visible statement,

pronouncing personal beliefs, values, and ideologies that facilitate the co-constructing of knowledge-in-the-making.

As I began this research with a discussion of Warhol's artistic practice, which converted an art gallery into an everyday supermarket of contemporary art, I want to return to that field in which artists use metaphors to make visual statements. I am doing this because in most contemporary artists' visual statements, awareness and consciousness regarding issues or concerns provoked (by artists) are intentionally demanded (of spectators), thus casting a collective viewpoint on the problematic aspects in our present time. Again, I draw on the latest piece, *E Pluribus Unum*⁴⁵ (Figure 6-2), from Chris Jordan (2010) as a visual metaphor to end this concluding chapter, for this piece not only symbolizes human social relationships as examined in this research, but also calls upon networking on a global scale.

In this piece, the mandala-like circle is in fact composed of names representing one million organizations around the world devoted to peace, environmental stewardship, social justice, and the preservation of diverse and indigenous culture (Jordan, 2010). Through clicking on the online image of the piece to zoom in, spectators will be amazed at how this circle is constructed (Figure 6-3). Positive messages such as altruism,

⁴⁵ *E Pluribus Unum* (Out of Many, One) depicts the names of one million organizations around the world that are devoted to peace, environmental stewardship, social justice, and the preservation of diverse and indigenous culture. The actual number of such organizations is unknown, but estimates range between one and two million, and still growing. This mandala represents the vast network of altruistic human organizations spread out across the world, all working in parallel together. Despite their enormous diversity of size, focus, and geographic location, they are all united around a set of core values that places compassion and stewardship as highest priorities. The hundreds of millions of individuals who are creating and running these organizations bring a nourishing culture of passion, imagination, and citizenship to this process. In that way I think of this piece as being like a compass, pointing toward a true source of hope and inspiration for our times (Jordan, 2010).

collaboration, equality, and cultural diversity are incorporated into the networking and are conveyed through this work. And I am using this piece as the visual figuration of a better citizenship in a more culturally democratic global society.

As mentioned repeatedly, even the most commonplace sites such as supermarkets can entail social relations and politics produced by the spectacle. Spaces, as a result, can be gendered, political and pedagogical. The case revealed in Wegmans State College unfolds my role as an insider-outsider, both culturally and scholarly, in critically reading visual culture and visual spectacles within the American consumerism spectacle. In doing so, I anticipate that the critical lenses and embodied experiences I employed can be further applied onto far larger contexts.

Learning should not be perceived as only limited to formal school settings, it can take place anywhere in the practice of everyday life as long as pedagogical forces continuously emerge. Being aware and conscious about visual culture and those messages it conveys make us social beings with criticality in a more culturally democratic society. As art educators we should be positioned where pedagogies related with visual culture continuously emerge as forces of inscription. As Ellsworth (2005) posits in her *Places of Learning*, our awareness, consciousness and criticality as educators empower us to help learning selves to detect potential pedagogical forces operating on them. It is through this critical sensing of visual culture that we can transform learning selves from passive spectators into active consumers and constructors of knowledge in the making.

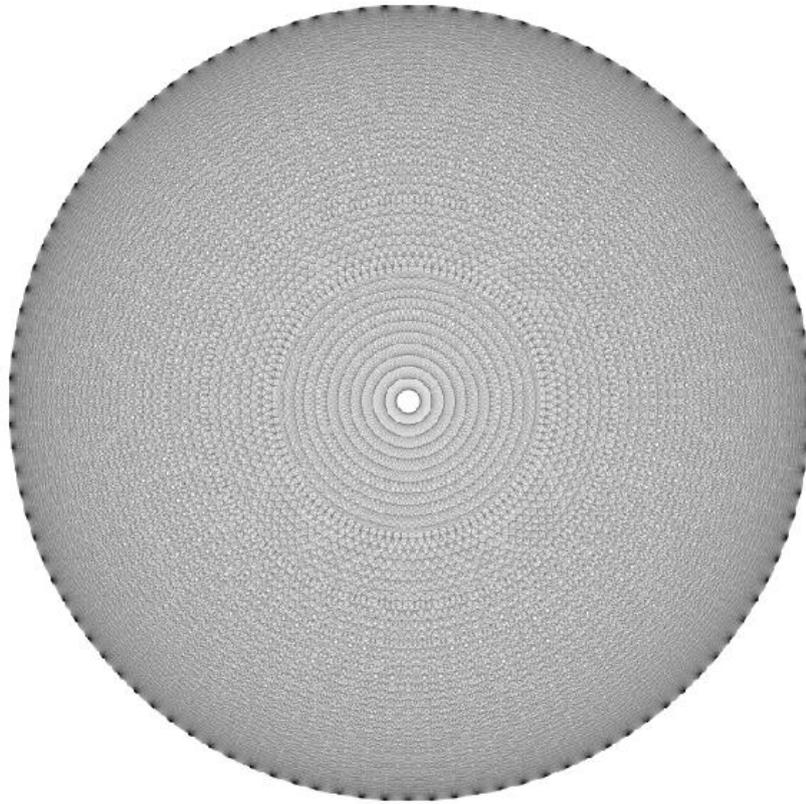


Figure 6-2 *E Pluribus Unum*, 2010

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Teaching Experience

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Selected Publications/Presentations

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