Model Text

This excerpt from an academic text illustrates the elements of academic writing highlighted in the UTS: HELPS Writing in Academic Style Workshop.

An integral force in the shaping of contemporary international interaction is globalisation. Globalisation, as defined by Leiber and Weisberg (2002), ‘the increasing global integration of economics, information technology, the spread of global popular culture, and other forms of human interaction’ and thus, has had a vehement impact on the deconstruction and refashioning of cultural identities, leading to the gradual manufacture of a universal monoculture. The consequences of this have raised much controversy in which elements of loss and gain within the sphere of power struggles and relations, and cultural dominance have been intensely debated. This essay will argue that these impacts of globalisation on the cultural zone of visual art have a detrimental effect through its relative correlation to ethnic identity.

Although art can be considered as an open concept and, according to Weitz (1956), ‘all open concepts are undefinable’, most forms of art do possess common base characteristics. One of the most significant of these can be identified as expression. Therefore, if as contemporary approaches deem, art is cemented in fundamental historically reliant cultural and trans-cultural attributes (Adajian 2005) and expression is considered as one of these attributes, globalisation imposes a universal language of expression which can tend to stifle the relevant cultural semantics of art through the homogenisation and universalisation of a model which absorbs cultural differences and therefore ultimately rejects them (Schöllhammer 1999). When the historical development of a culture is ascertained as a meme which harbours the molecules of cultural retention, cultural identity is constructed. As the civilisations of the developing world adopt the westernised constructs of the visual arts via the process and progress of the Western dominated asymmetrical power relations, this cultural identity is suppressed and often risks not only deterioration but even extinction. Seppä (2010) argues that remodelled old colonial power structures continue to underpin the frameworks of globalisation of the arts; that it echoes…

Kant’s theoretical premises of pure aesthetic contemplation and good taste (which) argued that so-called primitive societies were simply aesthetically retrograde in their taste, and could only develop their cultural acts and ideals by imitating the more civilised cultures

She further suggests that Kant proposed that aesthetic judgement is of a globally comprehensive nature and therefore, due to the concealed uniformity of human perception, beauty should be assessed equally and according to the same criteria by all. However, the problem with this view is that through its strong tendency to generalise, it fails to take into account the reality of the diverse ‘ways of seeing’ which form a significant measure of cultural identity. This criticism is supported by Foucault (1983).
Another area of the visual arts in which unfavourable impacts of globalisation are evident is the curatorial zone of the art industry in which the art object tends to be considered predominantly as a consumer good as suggested by the term ‘industry’ which is commonly associated with art practice. These impacts result from the imposition of Western values on traditional art forms, leading to a redirection of the traditional purposes of the construction of artworks and the cultural conceptualisation associated with them which activate the pulsations of cultural identity. This transition from cultural ritual and significance to commercial commodity in a globalised market can have the effect of undermining and displacing the core ethnic identity of an art practice. As Schöllhammer (1999) suggests, the question of the visibility of post-westernised local potential in the art industry arises. An example is provided by Seppa (2010) focuses on contemporary Australian Indigenous arts as an illustration of ‘modern hybrid world art that has sought to keep ancient traditions alive while at the same time transforming these old aesthetic forms to better fit the criteria and needs of the global art scene’. She notes, however, that in the process, colonial power structures continue to exist albeit in new configurations which McEvilley (1995) describes as an imperialist subterfuge to globally impose simulation of Western visual and emotional responsiveness. This reflects her view that Kant’s perception of the cultural other as inferior creates the notion that ‘improvement’ via assimilation necessitates education and domination. Seppa contrasts Kant’s view with that of Preston who in 1925 suggested that propagation of the colonialist belief that Indigenous art should emulate European art would do little to advance the development of the identity of Australian art, and that the transition from the personal to the universal by means of a transfiguration of ancient traditions to create a visual language which communicated globally would create a world art with a distinct Australian identity. This is evident in the work of Emily Kngwarreye who created her own artistic style based on personal variations of the traditional indigenous techniques and using Western materials whilst retaining the aboriginal essence and integrity.