

Life as Theater and Theater as Life:
Art Expressions of Information-Age Youthⁱ

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Among my collection of children's textbooks are several well-worn volumes dating from the early 20th century. Tokens of their former owners appear in margins of the texts as penciled sketches and doodles of popular characters such as Krazy Kat¹, Alfalfa², Mickey Mouse³, and Popeye⁴. The surreptitiously drawn images remind us that, over the past 100 years, media conveyed stories and characters of popular culture have attracted fans and served as subject matter for the spontaneous⁵ artwork of school-aged children (Thompson, 2003; Wilson & Wilson, 1977).

As we enter the 21st century, fascination with artifacts of visual popular culture continue to inspire youth to replicate, imitate, adapt and share these images with one another in informal contexts. However, adults are noticing that the "look" of many of these student-made images has shifted from the cute Disneyesque or muscle-bound superheroes characters of earlier decades to more androgynous looking figures with distinctive stylistic characteristics like triangular faces with enormous eyes and spiky neon-colored hair (Solomon, 2003). Due to the ephemeral nature of popular culture, adults might easily dismiss these changes as superficial in nature. In doing so, they could be overlooking significant changes occurring in the ways many contemporary youth are coming to appreciate and interact with favored exemplars of popular culture (Jenkins, 1992).

Experts from a variety of disciplines tell us that Information-Age⁶ youth are coming to new understandings of the social and cultural world. These understandings spawn from a convergence of 21st century technological media, sociological influences, cross-cultural exchanges of aesthetic traditions, and engagements in creative play (Rushkoff, 1999; Tapscott, 1998; Turkle, 1997). Youth who are fans of specific subjects of popular culture may now interact with the phenomena of their interests in ways that redefine them as culture producers rather than mere consumers or imitators of cultural artifacts (Jenkins, 1992). Advances in graphic and communication technologies permit youth to manipulate complex graphic image-making tools with great facility, communicate ideas about images, share the images they produce, and instruct and critique one another's work in real and cyberspaces (Lewis, 2000). Thus, changes in the visual characteristics demonstrated in the spontaneous drawings of contemporary young people and especially in those drawings which reflect their interests in specific exemplars of popular culture might signify a shift in the collective consciousness of youth and represent something more significant than mere fascination with and replication of popular culture artifacts. These youth-drawn images may be seen as indicative of an evolving aesthetic understanding that is authentic and worthy of the attention of art educators.

Methodology of Exploration

I first became interested in the spontaneous art expressions of children and adolescents through observing and talking with my own children and their friends about their engagement with a variety of popular media, including American comics and graphic novels, animated films, television programs, video and role-playing games, and neo-classical children's narratives such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954-1955) and Rowling's continuing *Harry Potter* (2004) saga. These young people also introduced me to the Japanese produced forms of visual narrative known as *manga*, or comics, and *animé*, or animations. Over the past two years, I have explored hundreds of websites created by fans or fan communities⁷ of specific popular-culture interests⁸,

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followed many forum threads⁹, read dozens of blogs¹⁰ written by young fans of varied exemplars of popular culture, and looked at examples of their artworks. I have participated in online discussion forums and exchanged personal e-mail conversations with more than forty young people, who were between the ages of 12 and 25, about their participation in fan related activities such as collaborative or independent art making, writing, and masquerade play as performance that involves dressing in costumes. Also, as a participant-observer, I attended various fan-conventions in North America, including the Anaheim based *AnimeExpo 2004* which drew an audience of more than 25,000 young fans of manga and animé media and *Convention Alley: A Harry Potter Fan Convention* held in Toronto, which drew a considerably smaller—although no less devoted—audience. Besides taking photographs and observational notes at these events, I engaged many attendees in on-site conversations and informal interviews. Follow-up interviews of a more formal nature were conducted through e-mail with twenty-four of the informants. All interview questions were designed to solicit open-ended responses about the young fan's art making experiences in public and private contexts and to elicit reflective explanations of the meanings these held for the participant.

In order to determine emergent themes and ideas, the collected data was downloaded from email, typed from notes, or perused as visual imagery and coded using open coding procedures. Conceptual categories were then organized into broad themes, compared, and refined through constant comparative analysis procedures (Glazer, 1978; Glazer & Strauss, 1967) and, finally, examined using content analysis procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In this paper, I will attempt to shed light on the forms and meanings certain fan-related activities might have for young participants by introducing two expressive forms of Information-Age youths' art making, describing several aesthetic characteristics shared by the forms, and offering an interpretation of the phenomena. In addition, I will suggest implications of these art forms, behaviors, and meanings for the field of art education.

Fan-Art

The interactive possibilities of the Internet and other 21st Century technologies awakened youth of the Information-Age to the possibility that they could do more than passively look at images or submissively read about their favorite characters. Fans could manipulate the appearance, content, and context of their favorite characters' lives by setting them in their own imagined stories and visual scenarios. They could share these adaptations with others in online fan-based communities made up of member participants from around the world. They also could engage globally in discussions about their favorite stories and characters, exchange examples of personal artwork and stories based on commercially produced sources, critique one another's work, and share tips or tutorials of drawing techniques and ideas about visual characterization (Jenkins, 1992). The resulting visual presentations became known as *fan-art* because they draw from commercial sources of popular culture.

Because fan-art reproduces or incorporates characters from well-known literary or imagic artifacts of popular culture, it challenges modernist notions that images created for public display must be the original invention of an artist. Art teachers who view copying of published works as intellectual property theft would likely discourage students from creating fan-art in formal classroom contexts. Yet, with a few exceptions¹¹ neither professional author-artists nor publishers discourage appropriation of their copyrighted characters by fans. Most commercial producers recognize that while individual fan-artists will scarcely make enough profit to challenge the profits of publishers or known author-artists, their appropriations serve as free sources of publicity (Drazen, 2003). Authors like J. K. Rowling, for example, openly acknowledge and support such fan activities as the highest form of flattery (Wikipedia, 2004). In an effort to maintain positive relationships between original artists and fan-artists, webmasters and



Figure 1.
Erithe in Hogwarts, by Erithe McChesney. Copyright 2003-2005 Erithe.
 Depicting an invented character in the context of J. K. Rowling's Hogwarts
 School for Wizards, from the *Harry Potter* series, is a characteristic of fan-art.
 Url: <http://www.deviantart.com/deviation/2069423/>.

moderators of various online fan communities establish rules regarding posting of fan-art on their sites¹² and require that the original artist or author be referenced. Reciprocally, several online sites, created and maintained by the publishers of original materials, actively encourage fan appropriations by posting tutorials that instruct fan artists regarding ‘how to draw’ favorite characters or create realistic special effects in digital animation¹³.

Copying is understood by the young fan-artist as a way of developing draftsmanship skills. They often described the process of copying favorite characters or narrative episodes as a means of seeking subtle interpretations that elucidate or are in accord with their own tacit understandings of the illustrated subjects. As young fan artists from Western cultures communicate with youth from Asian cultures, they become aware that the notion of copying as a vehicle for expressing the highest individual creativity is an Eastern art tradition. It is specifically demonstrated by canons of the Chinese Literati as a search for the deepest connection between self and the essence of that which is being portrayed. Young Western fan artists can appreciate this sensibility and recognize it in their own work.

Usually, however, only novice fans attempt to create exact copies. More experienced fan-artists will seek to express originality in their works by depicting characters in new settings or situations, or will insert new characters into existing storylines. Thirteen-year-old Genesis,¹⁴ for example, creates new characters and inserts them into X-Men stories and scenarios. She sees pre-existing X-Men characters as ‘prototypes’ and the stories as ‘backdrops’ for her inventive creations. Eventually, enterprising young people, like 20 year-old Utakata (see figure 5), might attain the skill, confidence, and desire to create altogether original characters and stories.

Yet, some fan-artists are not content to simply draw images of their favorite characters or situate them in two-dimensionally confined imaginary worlds. They wish to play the parts of adored characters and become themselves their own fictive realities.

Cosplay

In the late 20th century, the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* (Arneson & Gygax, 1974) appealed to a “sub-culture of youth”—many of whom felt socially marginalized—as a way of making sense of the world through imaginative story-play (Bebergal, 2004). This and more recently designed role-playing games provided inspiration for elaborate costumed role-play

or *cosplay* expressions of 21st century youth. The term *cosplay*, which derives from compression of two words—costume and play, aptly describes the nature of this activity. Public displays of cosplay occur most commonly at fan conventions, where a cosplayer will likely choose to portray a well-known character in order to be easily recognized by other fans. Through costume and gesture, the cosplayer attempts to reproduce the appearance of the character as described or visually presented by its original creator.



Figure 2.
Adolescent cosplayers attending AnimeExpo 2004 in Anaheim, California pose as their favorite characters. Gestured poses are important to conveying information about the personality and storied role of the character presented. Photo by M. C. Manifold.

The *AnimeExpo 2004*, a convention for fans of Japanese pop-culture held in Anaheim, California, was an example of a public forum where elaborately costumed youth gathered to mingle, pose, photograph one another, and generally admire one another's cosplay presentation. Most of the cosplaying attendees of *AnimeExpo 2004* also participated in at least one of the three featured masquerade events or competitions, where costume designs and constructions, presentations (i. e. posed, unspoken performances), and scripted skits were informally critiqued or formally judged based on criteria of craftsmanship of costume design and acting skill of individual and group ensembles. Competition rules were determined by organizers¹⁵ of the *AnimeExpo* and were conveyed to cosplayers through the online AnimeExpo website (AX, 2004). The rules designated, for example, that, although costumes should resemble their commercial sources as exactly as possible, the costumes had to be entirely constructed by the contestants without assistance from or reliance upon commercial patterns, professional seamstresses, tailors, costumers, or clothiers¹⁶ (AX, 2004).

Cosplaying youth also reinterpret favorite pre-existing characters or invent entirely new characters for private play among close, intimate friends. In private cosplay, the player may create a more intimate and altogether original persona for presentation. This creation, which serves as a fictive alter ego of self, is jealously protected from appropriation by others. Rules of cosplay etiquette, like rules of fan-art creation, are communicated among members of cosplaying communities through websites and include prohibitions against use of fan-created cosplay characters without explicit consent of their young fan creators (Cosplay.Com, 2005).

Seeking Archetypes of Self

Cosplaying youth, such as 18 year old Saara, describe the liberating pleasure of “becoming anyone or thing they wish to be” in their role-play. Many characters are drawn from the myths, legends, adventure stories and fantasy tales of the past, and socio-cultural anthropologist Bettelheim (1976) informs us, fairy tales and fantasy myths educate, support, and liberate emotions of children. Protagonists of stories serve as archetypes of human agency and these archetypes (Jung & McGuire, 1969) play a universally important role in fulfilling basic human needs of making sense of the world. Observations of and conversations with cosplayers around the world reveal that, some may engage in cosplay due to the pleasurable, distractive entertainment it provides, others are exploring aspects of self in the played character, and many are seeking self or self understanding through the ‘souls’ of their characters. Dreamrunner, a teenager who participates in fan-art making and cosplay, differentiates between the minor characters she invents for fun or in order to explore single archetypal aspects of herself and the more integrated creation that, over time she is carefully crafted as a projection of her psychological true self.

Some characters, like Panick—a timid . . . cat creature that I invented when I was having panic attacks, represent parts of me. But there is one that really IS me [*sic*]. Dreamrunner is a big grey/brown werewolf girl who wears my clothes, my glasses, and thinks, talks and acts like me. Dreamrunner is not a character. Dream is me [*sic*].

Awakened in the subconscious imagination, the adopted or invented character may serve as metaphor for life lessons that might be too intimidating or obtusely comprehended if communicated directly. By playing the part of the mythic protagonists, participants can virtually experiment with possible solutions to the most intense, complex, or tragic problems of real life (Turkle, 1997). Furthermore, performance gives each member of a group an opportunity to mark his or her self in relation to others, practice a particular attribute or skill, and explore effects and consequences of possessing that attribute or skill in interaction with others (Sennett, 1994, p. 321). In reflecting on her experiences as a writer, fan-artist, and cosplayer, twenty three year old Jade, said, “[Through improv performance] we could know if someone's character was acting in a way that was improbable. We could say, "That would never happen," realize a basic flaw . . . and adjust it.” In short, creative play with fantasy images, characters, and narratives of world cultures may be understood as a search for archetype-models as ways of being, being known, acting, and interacting in the changing landscape of the 21st century.

Aesthetic Characteristics of Adolescent Art of the 21st Century

Although the history of graphic storytelling reaches far back in time, media technologies of the modern era have made distribution of visual narratives to the masses possible¹⁷. In the late 19th century, Euro-American inventors and media moguls took the lead in producing and distributing visual narratives for the masses (Elasaesser & Barker, 1990; Nowell-Smith, 1999; Walker, 2004). Thus characters of popular culture narratives consumed and replicated by North American youth were Euro-American in origin and appearance (Solomon, 2003). By the late 20th century, however, the creative talents and technological developments of post-industrialized non-Western artists, authors and cinematographers were competing for the attention of global audiences (Drazen, 2003; Napier, 2000). Many American youth discovered and became ardent fans of visual styles and stories of Japanese comics (manga) and animations (animé)¹⁸.

As adolescents in local classrooms or global Internet communities share their popular culture interests and engage collaboratively in inventive manipulations of popular narratives and images, they develop and exchange ideas about aesthetic preferences (Thompson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1973, Wilson & Wilson, 1977). Thus, there is an increasingly distinctive ‘look’ to the art works being created by Information-Age youth, that combines traditional Western realism with Asian aesthetic influences (Solomon, 2003). The aesthetic peculiarities of the resulting global-culturally inspired and socio-aesthetically driven imagery might be understood as evidence of an authentic art style.

Specific characteristics of the style include features of *iconographism*, *realistic fantastica*, *emotional realism* or *soul truth*, and the presentation of *awful beauty*. *Iconographism* here means that formal conventions of gesture, color, use of space, framing, and use of motifs or decorations provide a kind of textual script that permits reading of an image or series of images (W. Eisner, 1996; Levi, 1996; McCloud, 1994; Toku, 2000). Specific *iconographic* elements serve as visual metaphors that are often culture-specific. For example, in Japanese iconography the presence of cherry blossoms may represent the fragility of life and inevitability of death (Levi, 1996), while, in Western iconography the presence of an owl may foretell death or suggest wisdom and longevity (Weinstein, 1988).

Due to the cross-cultural sharing that occurs within online fan-communities, youngsters from multiple cultures are becoming literate in the iconographies of the Other's culture. Furthermore, because formal conventions dictate placement of certain types of iconographic elements—albeit the presented elements may seem obscure—fans are acclimated to look for complex abstract narratives (Carrier, 2001; Levi, 1996). Fans know they must decipher culture-specific meanings in order to comprehend the works. Rather than being discouraged by this challenge, young people indicate it as one of the great appeals of the art works. They appreciate that difficult-to-read compositional elements and visual motifs respect and test the intellectual abilities of their audiences.

Realistic fantastica (Manifold, 2004) is the presentation of the imaginary with extreme realism. Historic Euro-American preferences for realistic imagery, along with 20th century advances in technology that permit cinematographers to create realistic-looking special effects of what is physically impossible, have resulted in audience appreciation for artworks that demonstrate characteristics of *realistic fantastica* or the illusion of reality.



Figure 3.
In the context of private cosplay, Nathalie Mineault's gestured portrayal of Professor Severus Snape presents a personalized *soul truth* interpretation of the J. K. Rowling character. Nathalie states, "I have taken the character and infused him with my own spirit-ual longings, thereby transforming him into an expression of renewal and forgiveness." Photo by Diane Blanchard.
url: <http://www.logospilgrim.com/>.

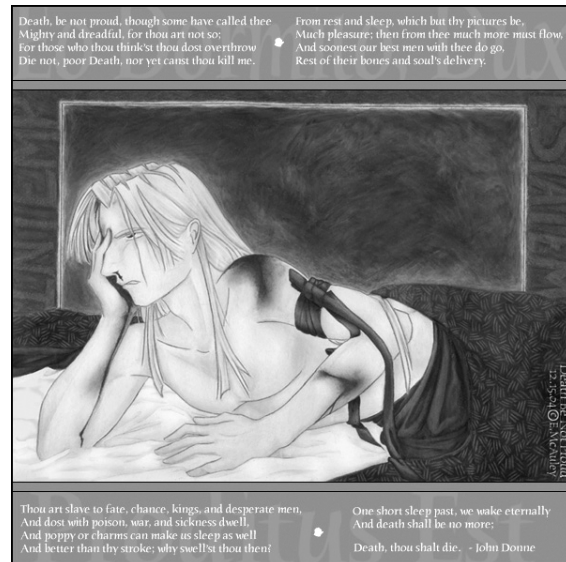


Figure 4.
Death be Not Proud, by Erin McAuley. Copyright 2004-2005 E. McAuley.
The title and image allude to a poem written by John Donne (1572-1631). Erin has searched beyond popular contemporary narratives and begun to draw thematic inspiration from classic literatures. Her entirely original interpretation of Donne's work distinguishes this work from fan-art. Image courtesy of the artist.

Emotional realism (Jenkins, 1992) or *soul truth* implies that the goal of particular images is not to reveal the appearance of a thing, but rather to reveal its tacit or inner truth. Although action scenes are necessary to advancement of narrative stories, illustrations of stories and presentation of characters often are carefully designed so as to encourage a perceiver to consider tacit meanings or predictive consequences of actions. Cosplayers, like Nathalie for example (see figure 3), may strike poses that freeze typical actions of their characters in ways that interpret the inner motivations and psychologies of the characters. Anke Eissman, a German fan-artist who has attained success as a professional illustrator, describes an attempt to convey this notion through her two-dimensional artwork; “I like to concentrate on scenes and characters that are often overlooked . . . , scenes not charged with great action or drama, but which for me contain the essence of the [story]” (Eissmann, 2004).

In a search for deeply meaningful and frequently tragic narrative content, youth from diverse cultures are being challenged or challenging themselves to re-examine classics of world literature that have been referenced or reframed in popular culture (see figure 4). Both Euro-American and Asian pop-culture artifacts make intricate and often subtly obscure references to their own respective literary traditions. So Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series and Tolkien’s *Lord of Rings* trilogies, for example, draw from rich archetypes of Biblical tales, Arthurian Legends, and European fairytales and folklore. Likewise, Japanese manga and animé exemplars like Takahashi’s *Urusei Yatsura*¹⁹ and Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke*²⁰ draw from the abundant romantic tragedies, samurai adventure tales, and ancient Shinto folktales of Asian origin. As young people from diverse cultures, who share similar interests, meet in online or real communities and communicate with one another, they learn about, come to appreciate, and begin to draw upon an expanded pantheon of narrative motifs and character archetypes as inspiration for their inventions.

A large portion of the stories these youth reference or create deal with themes of *awful beauty*, that is, dark psychodramas that are presented with great visual beauty. While depiction of violent or taboo themes by children and adolescence is by no means a new phenomenon (Dyson, 1998), presentation of violent themes through lush or subtly colored landscapes and beautiful male and female figures (see figures 4 and 5) is a distinctive Information-Age trend. Lyric visual beauty often is presented in direct proportion to the depth of tragedy presented by a story, so, the darker the characters or themes of the tale, the more lovely the imagery. Mason, a young Harry Potter fan-artist, explained: “When we see tragedy wrapped in beauty . . . we are compelled to look at it, reflect upon it, and come to understand. We are touched by its *awful beauty*.”

Neo-Theatrum Mundi, Discovering Self in Masquerade

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” This line from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* reflects the classic notion *Theatrum Mundi*—or life as theater and theater as life—which was particularly in mode from the Renaissance through Elizabethan eras. This view of life held that every person, in his or her everyday life, was merely an actor playing out a role assigned to him or her by divine design (Denton, 2000). The workings of mundane theatre went well as long as each person stayed in the character of his or her assigned role, with the pauper always playing the part of pauper and the highborn acting the aristocrat. Public dress, gestures and mannerisms, particularly of the higher classes (as the more significant cast members), were highly theatrical (Sennett, 1994). Eventually however, an assumption of natural order was disrupted when actors publicly began acting in other than expected ways, as, for example, when individuals born to lower classes rejected servile relationships to the elite and sought to determine more highly placed roles and destinies in society.



Figure 5.

Shorea robusta Roxb, by Utakata. Copyright (C) 2005 Utakata. All Rights Reserved. Utakata's painting of a character, created for an original story, presents an example of *awful beauty*. url:<http://wazan.jp/utakata/>.

As Information-Age youth maneuver through and plot terrain of the 21st century, they are coming to define who they are by marking themselves and the world with iconographic archetypes derived from globally diverse, cultural stories. Thus, their creative endeavors remain within the continuum of world traditions and resemble notions of a *Theatrum Mundi*. The public display versus private expressive nature of Information Age youths' creative activities further supports an understanding of a *Neo-Theatrum Mundi* in that the public face is a stereotypically known character, while the true self is expressed only in a close circle of caring, sheltering others as a familial community (Sennett, 1994). Because of the global appeal of certain richly-complex character archetypes made known via mass-produced and distributed literary modes, there are a myriad of recognizable personas, which one may adopt in order to be made known or familiar to others. The costumed identity a young person selects as a public presentation of self informs others of whom and how he or she wishes to be known. Reciprocally, this suggests to others what behaviors might or might not be appropriate when interacting with the costumed (and therefore 'known') Other (Goffman, 1959). Of course, an actor need not be limited to playing a single character's role—he or she may change, don new robes, play new possibilities as he or she wishes or needs in order to fit the demands of the moment. The play allows an actor to consider which parts of the enacted persona and which behaviors toward others are most appropriate to the tasks of integrating pieces of the inner self into a coherent whole and acting in harmonious accord with others.

The *Neo-Theatrum Mundi* differs from its historic referent in that it is not ordered in accordance with some externally designed plan. Just as the persona-roles chosen by players are drawn from a collective multi-cultural consciousness, the order of this new play arises from the consciousness of the players. It is an improvisation and it is theater born of *chaos theory*—that is, born of a theory that recognizes that self-organizing order arises out of chaos (Briggs & Peat, 1999) The order of the *Neo-Theatrum Mundi* script is evolving out of a self-organizing cast of many thousands of Information-Age youth (Rushkoff, 1999).

Implication for Art Education

Many Information-Age youth do not feel that they need permission of art teachers or other adults to become competent artists. They are making their own rules regarding what might be considered art. They have at their disposal specialized image-manipulating software and easy to use digital devices that allow them to compose polished looking works with relative ease. More importantly, within communities of like-interest peers around the world, they are sharing ideas about art; teaching one another techniques; critiquing one another's work; exploring the work of artists, art styles, philosophies, and histories of multi-cultural aesthetic traditions; and becoming connoisseurs of the art they produce. What do these new art behaviors imply about the role of the art teacher in the 21st century Information-Age?

First, teachers must understand that the *Neo-Theatrum Mundi* is a shadow play. The goal of becoming an authentic self, would be daunting for most young people if they were to find themselves on stage, revealed without costume, and utterly exposed to the audience. The copy, mask, or role of the known character serves to shield the nascent self like a chrysalis in a cocoon until the whole self can develop. Although this socio-aesthetic activity has an appearance of play, a playful appearance often masks private and deeply personal functions that might not be best achieved in a formal classroom environment. Therefore, although many of the expressive products of these activities are publicly visible, art teachers should recognize the highly personal nature of the work and be cautious about uniformly assigning students to create private images in formal contexts. On the other hand, should students voluntarily present these works in the public environment of art classroom, art teachers must be prepared with languages and skills necessary for engaging students in meaningful discussions.

Steven Johnson (1997), an observer of Information Age technologies and society, reminds us: "All great symbolic forms address the conflict between the private self and the larger community that frames that self, whether this valuation lies at the surface of the work or is buried somewhere in its underlying assumptions" (pp. 221-222). Certainly, the visual qualities peculiar to various exemplars of art created or embraced by Information Age youth have inspired art educators (Gude, 2004; Manifold, 2004, 2003), critics of pop-culture expressions (Carrier, 2001; Levi, 1996; Thorn, 1995), and aestheticians of new media (W. Eisner, 1996; McCloud, 1994; Stephens, 1998) to consider the need for an expanded vocabulary in order to be able to critically discuss these visual products with students. However, what is needed is not a new vocabulary for discussing peculiarities in the surface appearances of Information Age expressions; rather, what is needed is an aesthetic lexis for understanding the underlying assumptions or socio-aesthetic functions and meanings of *Neo-Theatrum Mundi*.

In other words, critical discourse about the new symbolic form of *Neo-Theatrum Mundi* may require adoption of a canon of aesthetic elements and principles that describes how works are conceptually structured to produce meaning. Among the aesthetic elements would be 1) the *iconographic element* or the single motif, gesture, use of space, or other abstract convention that conveys narrative meaning; 2) *convention* as a negotiated set of rules governing a specific expressive form; 3) *emotional realism* or *soul truth* as the ineffable 'something original' that is applied to or drawn out of a universal archetype or copied form; 4) the *archetype* as the basic conceptual (or soul truth) nature of a character; and 5) *psychological color* and *psychological depth*, with the former referring to the degree of psychological light or darkness of a represented character or visual narrative and the latter referring to the complexity of a represented character's psyche. The aesthetic principle of *metaphoric complexity* would describe tacit connections among various elements and how these combine to create new meanings. Armed with these terms, art teachers could engage young fans in critical inquiries into their own favorite images, characters, and stories of popular culture and open up dialogues with them about beneath-the-surface meanings of the works they produce.

In terms of skill and knowledge acquisition, art teachers might consider asking students what skills they would like to learn in order to achieve their expressive goals, encourage students

to propose aesthetic problems of life and art as well as their solutions (Eisner, 2004), and ask meaningful aesthetic questions aimed at determining and guiding students toward deeper socio-aesthetic goals. Art teachers also should consider assisting in broadening students' horizons by introducing them to and helping them identify and comprehend a wider range of exemplars to use as models or commodities of culturally appropriate images and persona. Finally, art teachers can notice images that students spontaneously or voluntarily create, and rather than ignoring, dismissing, or censoring them, they can use these images as points of reference when initiating dialogues with students about their real, imagined, and possible worlds.

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¹ Krazy Kat, created by George Herriman, first appeared in *The Family Upstairs* daily newspaper comic strip in 1910.

² Alfalfa, played by Carl Switzer (1927-1959), was a favorite character of Hal Roach's short subject film series *Our Gang/Little Rascals*. The series was distributed by Metro-Goldwin-Mayer (MGM) studios from 1927 until 1944.

³ Walt Disney's cartoon character Mickey Mouse was introduced in 1928. It rose rapidly to the pinnacle of American popular culture and may be more widely recognized overseas than any other American icon with the exception of the U.S. flag (Wikipedia, 2005).

⁴ The Popeye cartoon character was created by Elzie Segar in 1929.

⁵ By spontaneous artwork, I am referring to images a youth may choose to draw in the context of informal non-school settings. Lark-Horowitz, Lewis, and Luca (1973) defined spontaneous art of youth as work "made on their own initiative as a play activity or in pursuit of individual interest" (p. 75).

⁶ The Information-Age began in the United States in 1979 with the sale of personal home computers to the general public. It spread to other post-industrialized countries as computers became available to the middle-classed public (Stephens, 1998).

⁷ The term *fan* refers to someone who has an intense, occasionally overwhelming liking of a person, group of persons, work of art, idea, or trend. The word emerged as a shortened version of the word *fanatic* in reference to enthusiastic followers of sports teams. In popular speech, fans may coalesce collectively into *fandom* groups that exhibit *fannish* behaviors. Fandom refers to a community of fans who share interest in a specific phenomenon. These communities are often online but can also exist in the real world. Fans "typically are interested in even minor details of the object of their fandom; this is what differentiates them from those with only casual interest" (Dictionary.laborlaw.com, 2005).

⁸ A few fan sites explored in the preparation of this paper include:

<http://uk.geocities.com/pottermovie/art.htm> and

<http://www.mugglenet.com/art@dobbyshop.com>, sites featuring art based on the *Harry Potter* series;

<http://www.lotrfanart.net/>, a fan art site based on the *Lord of the Rings*

trilogy;<http://pluto.spaceports.com/~lms/art.html>, dedicated to *Star Wars* fan art;

<http://fanart.theotaku.com/>, a mega-site featuring all types of manga and animé fan-art;

<http://elfwood.lysator.liu.se/elfwood.pike>, advertised as "the largest science fiction and fantasy art site in the world"; and <http://www.deviantart.com/>, a site that presents a wide variety of fan and original artworks by young artists.

⁹ A forum thread is a series of comments and responses to a specific question or topic posted on an online forum.

¹⁰ Blog is the slang term for web log and is a compression of those two words. A web log is a personal journal posted on the Internet. "A person's web log is almost like an open diary. It chronicles what a person wants to share with the world on an almost daily basis" (www.brilliant-id.com/site/index.php).

¹¹ LucasFilm Ltd. And Lucas Arts Productions, and Marvel Comics are known to be less than friendly to fan artists (see "Star Wars' fans clash with Lucas over film contest" retrieved January 10, 2005 at <http://www.chillingeffects.org/fanfic/news.cgi>" and Marvel's anti-fan lawsuit explained by EFF lawyer" retrieved January 10, 2005 at http://www.boingboing.net/2004.12/13/marvels_antifan_laws.html). On the other hand, fans have successfully won the rights to appropriate copyrighted materials by boycotting the products of those who refuse them these rights (Moore, 2005).

¹² For examples see <http://elfwood.lysator.liu.se/erb/rules.html?770> or <http://www.blizzard.com/inblizz/fanart/rules.shtml>.

¹³ For an example see http://graf-users.edu.ats.dk/marius1/Matrix_Reloaded.html.

¹⁴ All informants mentioned or quoted are identified by the name or self-selected pseudonym by which they are known online.

¹⁵ The organizers of AnimeExpo, like the organizers of most fan-conventions, are established members of the fan community served by the convention.

¹⁶ The official AnimeExpo website is available at <http://www.anime-expo.org>

¹⁷ Media inventions relevant to this discussion include the modern comic book form attributed to Outcault (American) in 1895, the motion picture camera attributed to Lumiere (French) in 1895, and the motion picture projector attributed to Edison (American) in 1896.

¹⁸ *Astro Boy*, a Westernized remake of Osamu Tezuka's manga character *Tetsuwan Atom* was introduced to American audiences in the 1960 and gained a few fans. Thereafter, although, a number of Japanese created or inspired visual narratives found fans in limited Western venues, manga and animé went 'global' with release of the series *Sailor Moon*, by artist Naoko Takeuchi. *Sailor Moon* was introduced to Japanese audiences in 1995. According to Drazen (2003), the show almost immediately became popular in global markets "in Japan, in the U. S. and Canada, in Poland, in the Philippines, in Brazil, and especially on the Internet" (p. 11).

¹⁹ Rumiko Takahashi's popular manga series, *Urusei Yatsura* has also been made available by Animeigo to English speaking audiences in televised, video, and DVD formats.

²⁰ Written and directed by animator and cinematographer Hayao Miyazaki, the animé *Princess Mononoke* was released to Japanese audiences in 1997 and to American audiences by Miramax Studios in 1999.