

4.3 Visual and Material Culture in Situational Analysis

Kerstin Pinther and Alexandra Weigand write how, in an African situatedness, “non-material qualities are bound with material ones, [and] certain materials are reserved for privileged groups or people, and skeuomorphic principles can be found, for instance, in wickerwork, various weaving techniques and architecture” (Pinther and Weigand, 2018: 8). Venny Nakazibwe (2005) showed how, in Uganda, barkcloth has always had cultural, political, and social functions and how they have shifted over time. Other scholars have reconstructed how art production in Africa was closely related to social status (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999), and how art products were and are interlinked with political power and agency (Odutsa et al., 2019; Reid, 2017). Art products and their production (sites) thus have social and political components, and a situated analysis of art needs to consider those – alongside cultural, economic, and ecological factors.

Clarke, Fries, and Washburn (2018) assume that visual elements are significant “in most if not all situations of inquiry” (269). Whereas Pinther and Weigand, Nakazibwe, and Littlefield Kasfir move from the visual and material to the social and political for a situated analysis of art and visual and material culture, Clarke et al. argue with Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell and understand “visual culture as embodied in social and cultural practices” (Heywood and Sandywell, 2012: 4, as cited in Clarke et al., 2018: 269). They find that visual and material elements contribute richly and densely to social life. While the points of departure may be different, both positions are similar in that they understand the visual and material to be influential for the social and political and vice versa.

This is, at least in part, the result of the coming of visual studies, “after the disciplines of art history, anthropology, film studies, linguistics, and comparative literature encountered poststructuralist theory and cultural studies” (Dikovitskaya, 2006: 1). This “encounter” resulted in a cultural turn in the humanities which began to consider culture as a “cause of – rather than merely a reflection of or response to – social, political, and economic processes” (*ibid*: 1). By conceptualizing culture with Raymond Williams as a ‘way of life’, Margaret Dikovitskaya tells us, culture became “the object of inquiry of cultural studies, which encompassed the ‘high’ arts and literature without giving them any privileged status” (*ibid*: 1). It also enabled the study of visual hegemonies and the establishment of “discourses of resistance to such visual hegemonies” (Clarke et al., 2018: 273), for example by Stuart Hall, but also by artists in Africa who refused to submit to the prevailing discourses in institutionalized art spaces (Pinther et al., 2015).

The analysis of art in general, but especially in Africa, needs to consider its situatedness and its conditions of production and dissemination (e.g., Clemens, 2015; Dikovitskaya, 2006; Littlefield Kasfir, 1999; Preston Blier, 2018). This includes the “so-

cial and historical contexts of both the *production* of images and of *spectatorship* – expectations of viewing" (Clarke et al., 2018: 274).

Furthermore, visual and material culture – which I, following Ludmilla Jordanova (2016), understand as merging – are not mere products of human creation but also convey "claims to realism" (Clarke et al., 2018: 272), which shapes the conceptualization of reality. Visual and material culture products "that surround us constituting everyday life not only reflect our worlds but actively construct them" (ibid: 274). Analytically, Clarke et al. conclude, no matter whether we link the social to the visual or the visual to the social,

we need to be alert to the many different kind of work visual materials can be doing in a given situation [...]. Visual materials can be colonizing, racializing, gendering, sexing, classifying, stunning, muting, distracting, subjecting, cherishing, preserving, cluttering, and so on. And, most challenging analytically, they can be doing multiple and contradictory things at once. (Clarke et al., 2018: 274)

By building methodologically on Visual Culture Studies, Clarke et al. propose methodical strategies to integrate the analysis of visual and material culture into a SitA research project as either "researched on their own and/or as part of integrated multisite research projects" (2018: 270). They propose to consider four main levels of an image in analysis: (1) its content, (2) its referents, (3) its situatedness, and (4) its roles and functions (Ball and Smith, 2017).

Analyzing Visual Material with Situational Analysis

Doing so directs the researcher from more descriptive to more interpretive levels. Being able to analyze a product's referents, for example, requires an in-depth understanding of the situatedness of the object in terms of contemporary and historical references. "You may not even know that some element in the image carries symbolic weight – that the element *is* actually referential. Like an ethnographer, the visual analyst must become an insider to the creation, dissemination, and reception of an image while also being an outsider" (Clarke et al., 2018: 279).

To do so, Clarke et al. (2018) propose intensive memoing about visual and material objects and their discourses. The first memo is called a (1) locating memo. It is succeeded by a (2) big picture memo and a (3) specification memo(s). The authors propose to imitate a GT line-by-line coding memo, which is translated to segment-by-segment coding of the material.

The first visual material I analyzed was a leaflet on *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda* (Image 4.1). It is one of several materials that were produced by the UNESCO and the Uganda National Commissioner for the UNESCO for and about the *Strengthening*-project (see also chapters 5.2.2 and 6.3).

When I first chose to use this leaflet and other related visual and narrative material I found on the UNESCO project website, I had not yet begun to understand how powerful the UNESCO discourses on sustainable creative development and cultural heritage would become⁵. What I did know by then is how it was also through the agency of the *Strengthening*-project that the NACCAU was considered an expert in Ugandan cultural crafts and came to be seen as an expert on its material cultural heritage. Furthermore, it was through the *Strengthening*-project that Nuwa Nnyanzi and Bruno Sserunkuma toured Uganda to train 'master craftspeople' how to "strengthen[] [their] artistic, design & marketing skills" (Project Leaflet). In my first locating memo, I wrote down why I had opted to include the leaflet and how it fits into my research situation.

In the next step, I looked at the big picture, thereby focusing on the visual components of the product. In the case of image 4.1, I used the opportunity to present it in a research methods workshop with Andreas Wernet on Objective Hermeneutics (25/06/2021). In a group, we discussed the first impression of the image on the cover page of the leaflet. The basket in the image remained unrecognized by workshop participants. In the succeeding discussion it became clear that the blurriness of the image prevented them from relating the color patterns to any object which suggests that a viewer might need to know the artefact at display in order to see it. Editing choices invisibilize the basket to the point where it becomes unrecognizable. The blurriness of the image, which hides the artefact from viewers, strongly correlates with the conflictual title: "Strengthening the [...] Skills of [...] Professionals" (Workshop Memo from 25/6/2021).

Based on the joint work, I then moved to what Clarke, Friese, and Washburn call a specification memo, whereby I focused on elements such as selection, framing, featuring, viewpoint, light, color, focus/depth, presence/absence, intended/unintended audiences, composition, references, remediations, and relations to other elements/visual productions (Clarke et al., 2018: 282–283). In the final step of my analysis, I mapped the elements from the visual and narrative material produced around the *Strengthening*-project in a messy situational map, which I later used for a comparative analysis with the micro-maps I created for the two handicraft groups I decided to focus on (see also chapter 4.4.1).

Material Culture in Situational Analysis

The methodical steps provided by Clarke, Friese, and Washburn were immensely valuable for the integration of visual material, such as the project leaflet or visual components of project reports, online shops of social businesses and/or NGOs, as

⁵ See also Labadi (2017; 2020c) for a detailed elaboration on the linkages between the UNESCO, cultural heritage, aid, and sustainable development

well as posters promoting cultural events which negotiate the meanings of artistic handicraft products locally and internationally. For selected handicraft products, I sought to proceed similarly. However, as I proceeded with the analysis (see sample description in chapter 4.1), I came to understand that some of the essential material cultural elements – artistic handicraft products – can be reconstructed as a boundary object in my research situation (see also chapter 4.4.1), which made it impossible to analyze by locating, big picture and specification memos. Instead, I decided to follow the artistic handicraft objects discursively and physically and asked how the various social worlds conceptualize and position them instead (see especially chapters 5–7).

Image 4.1: Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda Project Leaflet front page, retrieved on 12/07/2020



4.4 Doing Situational Analysis

Thus far, I have introduced the theoretical and epistemological roots of Situational Analysis and displayed why and how it is compatible with my inquiry from a post-colonial perspective. In addition, I have elaborated on how SitA methodically con-