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The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education

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Social Theory & Art Education

Features:

A Democratic Alternative to DBAE

The NAEA Convention as Ritual
The Sacred Journey of the Art Educator

JSTAE, No. 9, 1989

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University of Alberta, Edmonton

Treasurer ANDRA JOHNSON
University of Georgia, Athens

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Ohio State University, Columbus

Caucus Coordinator ELLEDA KATAN

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to promote the use of theoretical concepts from the social sciences—which include, but are not limited to, anthropology, sociology, and political science—to study visual culture and the teaching of art; to inform art educators about theory and practice in the social sciences, thus acting as a liaison between social scientists and art educators; to encourage research into the social context of visual culture and teaching art; and to develop socially relevant programs for use in the teaching of art.

The editors invite formal and informal contributions on all matters relating to social theory and art education. Correspondences, permission requests, performance pieces are welcome. Original manuscripts, together with three copies should be prepared in conformity with the guidelines established in the Publication Manual of American Psychological Association (APA). Deadline for submission for JSTAE No. 10 is February 15, 1990. Send relevant articles to:

jan jagodzinski, Editor
Journal of Social Theory in Art Education, (JSTAE)
University of Alberta, Department of Secondary Education
338 Education South, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T6G 2G5

Book, conference and exhibition reviews should be forwarded to:

Pat Stuhr, Book Review Editor, (JSTAE)
Ohio State University, Department of Art Education
340 Hopkins Hall, 128 North Oval Mall
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1363.

Inquiries concerning membership and distribution of past issues should be addressed to:

Andra Johnson, Treasurer, (JSTAE)
University of Georgia, Department of Art
Athens, Georgia 30602

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ON THE COVER: The cover graphic was designed by Arthur Guagliumi. The organic graph, with its enfolded hyperspace and the torn edge of the collage have replaced the grid and the hard edge of Modernism. Such logics of disintegration are suggestive of a historical moment searching for definition in a world which has imploded in a sea of technological communication.



We, the Members of the Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education dedicate this journal to the memory of

NANCY R. JOHNSON

Colleague, friend and founding member of the Caucus, her hopes were part of this journal's history. Her contribution, her criticism, and her support will surely be missed. To many of us she was a personal friend. Without her our lives are diminished.

In Memory of Nancy Johnson

CSTAE COORDINATOR 1983-1986

"I am sorry to inform you that Dr. Nancy Johnson died on September 6, 1988 at 4:15 a.m. at Our Lady of the Lake Medical Center in Baton Rouge. . ."

Who is ever ready to read words like these? How do we ever believe that face, that smile, that special vision, those words are gone from the workings of the Caucus on Social Theory? Herein are some of those words, and some of the memories of those of us who worked with Nancy over the years:

"Why do art students sit mainly on stools or benches rather than chairs? Does one's back need less support while learning about art?"

(Caucus on Social Theory column, NAEA News, December, 1986)

Cathy Mullen: I treasure the fact that the last time I saw and spoke to Nancy, she looked terrific. She exuded an outgoing glow and sense of personal presence that struck me with its strength. As usual, that encounter was at a conference, I knew Nancy mainly through years of attending conferences, and our mutual involvement in the Social Theory Caucus. We also shared membership in that community of junior academics struggling to find a secure job and a place in this profession. I respect her research; I have my students read her articles as valuable models of research and content. Although I wasn't in contact with her during the last few years, I was aware of Nancy's struggles - the professional ones and then the personal one with cancer. I had always thought of Nancy as a quiet, shy person - except for that laugh that revealed an inward exuberance just waiting to pop out and delight us all. When I saw her that last time, I saw the exuberant Nancy, out there in full view. Knowing what she had been through, her presence that day taught me something I remember often: In a world where most of us live "lives of quiet desperation," Nancy Johnson showed me that it is also possible to live a life of quiet heroism.

"We support the idea of participatory democracy in the schools. . . (and yet within the NAEA there is) the self-appointed fifty member Council for Policy Studies. This group is not affiliated with NAEA, but meets on the same day as the affiliate groups. Why are the group's affairs private and not public?"

(Caucus Newsletter, Vol 2, No. 4, Spring, 1983)

Elleda Katan: It was at the Detroit Convention, at a session led by a shy and flushed lady, wearing wire-rimmed glasses and a midWestern look. The modesty, the steadfastness, the occasional quick smile. . . all my stereotypes clicked into gear: this was going to be one of those sensible presentations adding some small grace note to the academic accumulation. Right? No. Wrong. This was Nancy Johnson and she was dealing with metaphors in the conceptualization of design curriculum. Those were years in which I was shaping and reshaping my own teaching of design. It was as if she had crawled into my head and made a neat and vivid order out of the questions and tentative answers I'd been forming. And then there was a question from the audience on some issue that she hadn't yet thought through. I had, so I jumped in. There was this click between us of kindred spirits. One of those one-hour highs you hit when you are very very lucky at a National Convention.

The problem was, I wanted to learn more from this lady, and you had only to look at the two of us to know that that was going to be a problem. Beyond living in different parts of the States, there was this enormous contrast in temperament, dress, noise level, thinking style, and basic philosophy of parties. There was only one thing to do and we did it from that year on: we became annual roommates at the National. She taught me so much: how New Yorkers look to MidWesterners; the secret networks within the NAEA; oh, and yes, not a little about social theory. Sadly now, with her gone, I realize how much what I write about, I write for her to read and in response to discussions we had. I've lost a voice and an ear that had become the better part of my professional self, as well as a point of view which in large measure defined for me what the Caucus is all about. It is a great loss indeed.

"Well reader, do we give up trying to engage the art teacher in and with the Caucus, and become only an elite group of specialists on social theory who meet once a year for esoteric discussions or conversations with each other?"

(Caucus Newsletter, Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall, 1984)

Amy Brook Snider: I did not know Nancy Johnson very well. For several years, she was the President and spiritual leader of the Social Theory Caucus. She also guided us in the intricacies of Parliamentary Procedure, wrote the Caucus column month after month in the Newsletter, and never gave up trying to get new people to take positions of responsibility. Often the life and integrity of an organization or a group can be traced to the perseverance of only a few individuals. Nancy was one of ours.

Ironically, she was curiously shy and retiring for such a strong leader. She wasn't "good" at the silly inanities that pass for conversation at parties. And yet, you had to admire the way she tried; it wasn't easy but that didn't stop her.

This April, I ran into Nancy when she was leaving the hotel in Los Angeles for home. She looked beautiful and happy. And why not? She thought she had won her fight with cancer. Her strong and gentle spirit will be missed by the group she nourished.

"Why are the elements and principles of design often the only content of the curriculum in art from kindergarten through twelfth grade? Is all that we know about art the sum of line, shape, balance, etc.?"

(Social Theory column, NAEA News, December, 1986)

Karen Hamblen: As a graduate student at the University of Oregon, Dr. Nancy R. Johnson was one of my idols. I read and admired her dissertation for its ground-breaking methodology and for what it revealed about the socialization processes of art museum tours. After graduation, my university students and I continued to use Nancy's work, and I saw another group of students grow to admire her contributions to the field. When it was possible for Nancy to come to Louisiana State University, I felt truly privileged, and my idolizing image of her was never tarnished. Dr. Nancy R. Johnson was a consummate educator - she was an excellent classroom teacher and researcher. I told her that she seemed too good to be true - and perhaps the gods thought so too.

After Nancy's death, I helped her mother sort and pack Nancy's papers, books, household items, etc. I came to know a mother who was fiercely proud of her daughter's accomplishments, who cared for Nancy through a previous bout with cancer, and who was shocked by the quickness of the final events of Nancy's passing. I learned that Nancy was an Elder in the Presbyterian Church, that she helped artists by always trying to buy at least one art object at exhibitions she attended, and that she contributed objects from her travels to various art museums. In a folder I found Nancy's photographs taken throughout the years. Nancy, from first grade onward, was totally recognizable. She always had the same smile - a smile, slight laugh, and an upward look to her eyes that she had when confronted with the insaneness of academia and when the two of us talked

about forming a song and dance team that would specialize in the "academic shuffle." Certainly Nancy's research will endure beyond individual memory, but it is the memory and image of Nancy's smile and laugh that give recognition of her triumph over life's ironies.

"Why are the visual arts often referred to as the fine arts? What is a fine art? Why do we perpetuate a concept that was contextually appropriate about two hundred or three hundred years ago?"

(Caucus on Social Theory column, NAEA News, December, 1986)

Bob Berrson: I have lost someone I deeply respected, a warm, giving person and a committed professional with whom I worked closely for many years. One of the founders of the Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education, Nancy blessed us with an incisive mind, passionate loyalty, and a generous and humane spirit. A serious intellectual given to body-rolling peels of laughter, she was ever at the forefront of progressive change for the profession: in respect to multiculturalism, to the application of social science research methods and theories to art education, and to the critical social-cultural analysis of our unexamined assumptions about art, design, and aesthetics. Never superficial or small-minded, Nancy took on the big issues and probed them to the core. Ever committed to the teacher in the field, she always related her theoretical or research work to practice, whether for school or museum. Her last professional wish was that the Caucus put together a practical curriculum where the organizing principle would be the relationship between art and society; a curriculum that art educators at the local, state and national levels might draw upon.

To me, Nancy was heroic. Whether in good times or bad, she gave her all to the art education profession. She richly deserves both our appreciation and our commitment to carry on where she left off.

Jan Jagodzinski: I knew Nancy Johnson since 1982. I recall that she was a determined individual who really gave a damn, wanting change and justice. I always thought Nancy a strong woman, a matriarchal figure who had an uncanny sense of the NAEA network. When she was president of the Caucus I always knew that organizational matters would be taken care of. There was a generosity in her style, always listening critically to others. I never knew that she was gravely ill. There were rumours of course, but no one ever thought that the worst would come. The Caucus will miss her drive, desire and belief that it can make a difference to art educational discourse.



Editorial Re(Mark)! : The Question of Voices

JAN JAGODZINSKI

There is always the danger that the editor's thumbprint remains so heavily pressed on the parade of pages within that the reader is unable or is discouraged from a prying look between the covers. Partly through curiosity, partly through sensuality, partly through the hope of a surprise, the creation of desire for a reader's attention is always seductive. The editor's fingerprints *lie* hidden, invisible to the reader: they form a pretext, and pretend that they are omniscient, speaking one Voice for the many: they are cursed with power, the ability to survey the landscape from above and feel in control. And this is a male/mail curse; you never know whether it is indeed your message or someone else's that you are delivering. The irony of the index sign of my thumbprint and the fact that I have signed personally all copies of this journal in a letter on page 131 should be apparent. In an age that claims the possessive individual, the thumbprint and personalized signature is supposed to be the height of such personalization, the guarantor of authenticity, the moment documenting the presence to consciousness of a signifying intention. The whole *modernist* tradition has continued to promote art as a blue-chip stock based on the "authenticity" of that artistic signature. Copyright laws, a relatively recent phenomenon have been instituted to ensure the authenticity of the signature, to make sure the possessive individual is alive and well, that intellectual labour, as signature may be bought and sold as a commodity.

Derrida has pointed out the folly of such reasoning. To ensure the authenticity of the signature requires that it become readable, therefore it must become repeatable, iterable, an imitable form. The very sense of uniqueness is put into doubt. For a signature to function, to act as a check that the artwork is indeed authentic and different from others, it must conform to a model, reinforcing the belief that the artist has developed that unique style, that personalized statement which offers a market differentiation. A style guarantees repetition and recognition, but then the paradox emerges, one unique to our postmodern condition: the very detachment from the present and intention of its production is what makes it function. Since a signature must be recognized as a repetition the modern means of reproduction becomes part of the structure of the signature. It eliminates the need for any particular intention at the point of signature. We can rubber stamp anything in the style of anything. If you have followed these arguments, a Proper Name paradoxically cannot exist! As users of language and visual images we continually recycle the inherited meanings of our current

generation; every historian must speak as if s/he were the last, only to realize that history will again be rewritten.

Perhaps the greatest irony of this discussion is how the editor's Voice has leaked out from the confines of an editorial and into the Text of the Other, hoping not to dominate but finding a seductive pleasure in bringing the journal to fruition. The confession of a will-to-power is t(he)re. Hopefully, the reader will find that this journal is full of Voices: Voices rendered through the modern means of technology; Voices presented with different *f(r)onts*; Voices which try to recall the spirit of a dedicated departed member, Nancy Johnson; Voices which try to push back the homogenization of culture by DBAE zealots so that more Voices with a *difference* might be heard so that the Other is vindicated; Voices which look at themselves and *write* an understanding of their own participations in the conference ritual and recognize how it is that they *rite/right* themselves; Voices which wish to name a different reality but whose horizon remains blurred and indistinct but whose journey the reader can identify with.

The search is to find a different Voice, a different tone for art education. But this is also an enunciated Voice. It should not be forgotten that these are also Voices with an unconscious who write in excess of what they want to say over what they know. There is a *telling* about them without them consciously knowing - and there is a saying over which they want to say - the desire to speak to the *silence* of what they cannot adequately say. Many simply point to where the interface between art and society *lie*. The reader will find, at times, a strange dialogue. What appears as idle gossip is examined as if it were an anthropologist's midden. There is a decidedly postmodernist edge to many of the essays. The questioning of the dominant representation appears time and time again. There is a celebration of local events, real time, and serious 'gossip.' Marginal and fringe groups are placed at center, echoing perhaps the Caucus' place as marginal in relation to the Centering of art education. All these Voices are committed to social change. Their agendas are varied and their tones diverse. We hope the reader will engage in their dialogue.