

# The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education

JSTAE, No. 10, 1990

Featuring:

Questioning the Foundations of Art Education |  
Issues in Aesthetics  
Men in Feminism?  
Art Criticism in a Postmodern Age

# journal of social theory in art education

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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 in art education. Correspondences, permission requests, performance pieces are welcome. Original manuscripts, together with three copies should be prepared according to an internally consistent publication style. Membership is not a precondition for submittance. Deadline for submission for JSTAE No. 11 is January 15, 1991. Send relevant articles to:

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## Editorial Re(Mark)! : The Question of Representation(s)

JAN JAGODZINSKI

Pretext **AS** the perceptive, or should I say - receptive reader may not(e), no *thumb print* appears in the margins of this years editorial - rather, an index finger 'figures' prominently. The index sign is particularly apropos for this issue for index signs give us clues to what is being represented. Deceivingly, they establish their meanings through a *physical relationship* to their referents. As Krauss puts it: "They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index, we would place physical traces (like footprints), medical symptoms, or the actual referents of the shifters (p.198)." Playfully, on the front cover of her book, *Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, from which the above quote is taken, a thumb 'print' is *literally* represented as a photograph - yet, it could easily be mistaken, or 'misread' as a 'toe -print'? The word "print," such as a photographic "print," remains an index sign, a recorded representation of some framed 'reality.'

Thus, a new figure emerges - the toe/thumb- an anatomical part which never existed before! It belongs to no order. It is born in absence, seemingly in disorder. Such an indexical sign makes us oscillate its 'reading' between the hand and the foot suggesting a variety of interpretations: from an evolutionary viewpoint, hands were once feet, yet both are used for balancing our upright position differently; being on your hands and knees suggests inferiority and humbleness - the reduction to animalness. Both are necessary for fine motor control but we privilege the hand over the foot; dexterity is associated more with hands than with the dance of feet.

In a more sophisticated reading, the toe/thumb which appears on the front cover is a photograph by J. -A Boiffard. We are informed that it was the front jacket for George Bataille's, *Le Gros Orteil* which plays with the anatomical geography of Bataille's thought between man's pretensions toward the elevated, spiritual and ideal realm associated with verticality and uprightiness ( the hands?) and the horizontality of the mud, the real source of libidinal energy where 'he' is truly mired. My own misreading of this print vivifies the play of such indexical 'undecidables' (Derrida) or figures (Lyotard) which make us question the very borders or frames around signs - around names - around any forms of correspondence which we believe have captured the essence of a thing.

**ON THE COVER:** This year's cover was, once more, designed by Arthur Guagliumi. The organic graph, with its enfolded hyperspace, and the torn edge of the collage, is endangered by the new grid of postmodernism; only now this grid is no longer hard edged. Rather it resembles a "pool game," the X's and O's marking places of chance, forming an uneasy gradation over an embattled territory. Such logics of disintegration are suggestive of the tension between late modernism and the postmodern scene/seen/sea-n.

### Framed

'We' are all *framed* by index signs,  
by representations.

And the rhetorical tropes used to construct them.

Representations have now become our conceptualizations.

Borders between art and philosophy has vanished as:

Form becomes Content.

Our naive notions of mimesis, the avant garde, and art as Truth  
have been decentered .

For it is 'we' who 'unwittingly' create the Truth.

For there is no transcendental signifier.

Only form and process,  
which

reveals the human(e) process of making Order.

So Nothing remains outside the text,

for what is 'real' is what is represented.

Identity remains constructed through

impersonal social relations

of ubiquitous

power.

Krauss's definition of the index sign, as it was first conceived by Pierce, remains a two dimensional effect. By introducing perceptual ambiguity on her front cover, it adds to the releasing or opening up of meaning of the signified, thus putting representation to doubt. The celebrated example of Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, discussed at length by Foucault, represents Representation itself in the Classical Age where "representation is the principle of ordering." Velasquez presents the final word, the end of representation, for "nothing seems to escape representation when representation itself is represented."

The perceptive reader will not(e) that the interplay of the meaning of representation, quoted from David Carroll's study of *Paraesthetics*, is as much a conceptual end as the work he comments on. Foucault wants the spectator/reader, "to reflect representation back on itself and open it up to what it is not - to make conscious of itself and, in doing so, to indicate the limitations of this consciousness, the gaps or empty spaces with it." The artist in Velasquez's painting is caught, frozen in that gap of representation, "on the border between visibility and invisibility, at a moment when he can still be seen looking out at his model and just before he moves behind his painting in order to paint his model and is hidden from view." In that oscillation, a leap of faith is made, for what is then represented is said to be true.

In that gap, "being" hides.

To interrogate "being" requires a deconstructive move. Naively we assume sugar is sweet. The verb "to be" supplies us with the necessary illusion of Reality. But that Reality is only experienced in Taste, sweetness lies neither in the sugar nor on our tongues. It is dependent on context, in the act of tasting which exists in that gap. To the Native refined sugar may taste bitter and be spat out. To a Westerner, if raised on candies, the natural sugars of fruit or yams taste rather bland. Deconstruction of naive Reality

then, requires a defamiliarization, a disturbance to everyday perception so that thought is forced to question itself and begins to confront alternatives to itself. Critical theory begins with non-recognition in a carnivalesque distorted mirror for, to confront radical alterity is to recognize the excluded categories.

Text **T**hese opening explanatory remarks permit me to dwell on the the kinds of writings the reader will find in this years journal: all in one way or another question representation by treating art education as an index sign - for they play with its shadow; they attempt to continue the decentralization and fragmentation of the meaning of art in education. There is, I sense, a continued vigor and reluctance to be entrapped by the Modernist rhetoric of DBAE and the centralizing tendencies which wish to place everything back to a 'white mythological order' and chase away ambiguity. There is, therefore, also the anxiety of *beginnings* - not influence, to be found in these essays, which in their part, reflect holographically the larger problematic that the Social Caucus continually finds itself in: how to respond to a postmodern world bent on nihilism, where it is far easier to go back to a Romantic past, to pull back into a conservatism and continue to promote the Great Western View of Art with its parade of Masters on reproducible celluloid slides and disregard the feminist critique that this is a phallogocentric discourse occupied by the Man of Genius - the invention of humanism. The Social Caucus, like feminism, is caught in an impossible political position. It must provide both critique and direction simultaneously, forever rehearsing this anxiety of beginning within a context that already claims parity, equality and justice. Is there, i ask, any known ideological position which cannot be accommodated within the DBAE mandate? Its rhetoric serves us all. Doesn't it?

In the first section, entitled: *Foundations of Art Education*, Thistlewood's examination of Read's political and social commitment reminds us of the inescapability of our own posture in the World. Since there are no neutral observers, no non-neutral symbolic systems which governs our organization and valorization of phenomena, socially committed teachers must find their own political convictions and state them openly. Like John Caputo's claim that today Derrida practices a "responsible anarchy," Herbert Read, in his day, exhibited a similar anarchical conviction that art education must become socially responsible. Graeme Chalmers' essay is equally clear in its insistence that art education must embrace the cultural pluralism which exists globally today and recognize the diverse functions that the arts have always fulfilled culturally. With similar vigor and debate, Katan and Pearse give us a cross-section of the various paradigms which ground teaching. Their dialogue vivifies the variation of political commitment to transformative changes. We become mindful of the difficulties of developing a socially and ethically responsible educational practice. Lastly, Jansen offers a succinct analysis of the ideological uses of art appreciation courses in New England Universities where the the stage was set for securing the 'right' cultural capital. All of the above authors are cognizant of the conceptualization of art: how the discourses of the artworld - museums, art history within universities, and contemporary conventions of understanding art - go about shaping what art education takes to be its 'object' of study. All the above authors put this 'object' of artistic representation to question.

With this very same conviction, authors who have written on *Aesthetic Issues* in the journals second section go about decentering this "object" of institutional discourse by showing us that there is a wide range of aesthetics to be seen/scene at the margins. Cherokee Culture, Native American Artifacts, and the 'neighborhood' view of art are examined. These political locations constitute periphery, marginalized spaces which mainstream art education seldom entertains in its stock journals. Rafferty's study of Vancouver graffiti artists is a paradigmatic case study of those disenfranchised artists outside the art world who legitimate themselves as artists in their revolt against arts institutionalization. In a postmodern world, the irony remains that there is no political space outside/inside the art institution. These graffiti artists have become legitimated through their very documentation. Schellin adds yet another important dimension to the artist as Outsider. He questions the representation of AIDS victims in his own poetic way, thereby heightening our consciousness as to the neglect this socio-historical issue has for art educators. Historically there has always existed an iconography of disease - how the Other's Body as unhealthy, sick, alien, is charted and mapped through the media of reproduction (newspapers, television, film, magazines). This should be the concern of all socially responsible art educators.

*Men in Feminism*, the third part of this journal, provides a variety of vignettes of responses by men and women who address feminism from both personal and theoretical viewpoints. Intertextually, this panel drew from Jardine and Smith's previously published book *Men in Feminism*, which emerged as a series of papers from a MLA conference - also presented at Washington DC. These essays provide ample evidence that Social Caucus members are fully aware of the theoretical developments in the literary field. Their responses are admirable and *necessary*, given, once more, the gender blindness of DBAE advocates.

Lastly, one of the most exciting sections the reader will examine, are the essays written in the area of *art criticism*. I am personally delighted that the four essays exemplify some of the most recent developments in art criticism, which has undergone a phenomenal change in the past several years. Tom Anderson provides us with a well balanced socially critical look at Billboards. He has paradigmatically provided a social critique which exposes the ideological assumptions behind the advertising industry. Gaines and Paul, I believe, have given us a wonderful display of how psychoanalytic art criticism is possible - Gaines through his examination of Sandra Rowe, and Paul through an entertaining playful display of word games when examining gendered images. Last, but not least, Dan Nadaner closes our journal with a thoughtful and succinct questioning whether art education can accommodate the openness of the text, the ambiguity of representation, and the multiplicity of reading which our postmodern condition has brought. This last essay, in many ways confirms and justifies the *need* for the existence of this Caucus.

In closing, I would like to personally thank Carolyne, Harold, Kerry, and Amy for making this issue possible through their proofing, through their typing, through their solicitation of excellent manuscripts and through their friendship. This ends my two year love-affair with this journal and I wish Harold Pearse, the new editor, the best for the next two years.

## CREATIVITY AND POLITICAL IDENTIFICATION IN THE WORK OF HERBERT READ

DAVID THISTLEWOOD

The idea of a class conflict, in which a powerful minority subjugates the majority among other ways by depriving it of any sense of self-esteem deriving from worthwhile, original work - that is, by suppressing its creativity - was something Herbert Read acquired through his youthful involvement in the late stages of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It was a premise he was never seriously to question, as was the corresponding idea that to assert one's right to be creative was to engage in a political act. He was certain that artistic conventions were the means of suppression, and that to be truly creative required conventions to be defied, which in a sense also meant defying the social order. While the Establishment would tolerate this in individuals - indeed, encourage it for its refreshing influence upon the elites taste and artistic possessions - it could not contemplate it in the mass (in the form Read proposed in his middle age in his book *Education through Art*) for this would be to initiate complete social upheaval. Thus his mild-mannered arguments in favour of a properly creative education for all, and his workable proposals for implementing this, in fact made him a danger to the political standing. It was perhaps his amused realization of this which persuaded him to dramatize this aspect of his work by calling himself an anarchist.

This is the only reasonable explanation of this political identification of Read's, the central topic of ten of his books written after 1938, and a substantial feature of twenty-five more. For he was never a member of 'organized' Anarchism<sup>1</sup>; and what he propounded was hardly orthodox - his campaigning for freedom from centralized government, for localized production, for a federated industrial economy, and above all for the preservation of regional stylistic traits in all creative work owing more to Kropotkin, and to Guild Socialism, than to Anarchism in the forms it had assumed by mid century. As Read's earliest vivid political experiences had been Guild Socialist it seems fair to consider whether he was always a Guild Socialist at heart. The purpose of such an enquiry would be to wonder whether Guild Socialism, which failed as a political force in 1922 with the collapse of the National Guilds League, lived on a philosophical force in Read's writings and survived into the present in those educational ideas of his which are still widely practised. Such an enquiry, of course, must cope with the prospect of his Guild Socialism surviving other changes of political identification too - to Marxism and to communism. And it must also consider the sources of a political persuasion positive enough to have such lasting potency.

## Notes on Contributors

**David Thistle** is a Professor at the University of Liverpool. He is a Read's scholar who publishes widely, especially in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*. **Graeme Chalmers** is a Professor of art education in the Department of Performing Arts, University of British Columbia, Canada. He is currently a vice-president of the *International Society for Education Through Art*, as well as a Chief Examiner in Art/Design and the Coordinator for all the Arts for the *International Baccalaureate Organization*. **Elleda Katan**, past coordinator of the Caucus, continues in her capacity as an arts program specialist in the Boston area. **Harold Pearse**, is a Professor and past chair of the Art Education Department at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Widely published, a recent exhibition of his work on the *Canadian Mounted Police* demonstrates his capabilities of bridging both textual worlds. **Charles R. Jansen** is an Assistant Professor of Art History, Middleborn, Tennessee. **Karen L. Sorensen** is a research assistant at Southern Connecticut State. **Charles Wieder**, formerly at the University of Kansas, now teaches at Southern Connecticut State University. His interests range from concerns with liberal theory to childrens' artistic development. **John Wilton** is a visual arts instructor at The Southeast Center for Photo/Graphic Studios, Daytona Beach Community College, Florida. **Peter Schellin** is involved with helping AIDS victims. He teaches in the Department of Art, California State University, Los Angeles. **Patriacia Stuhr** is an Associate Professor in the Dept. of Art Education, Ohio State University. Her special interests lie in the ethnographic study of art. **Jeffrey Leptak** is an Associate Professor in Adult Education Program at the Ohio State University. **Pat Rafferty** is a Professor in the Dept. of Elementary, University of Alberta. She teaches art education and is interested in the sociological aspects of art and issues of postmodernism. **Kristin Congdon** is Chair of Community Arts in the Art Dept., University of Central Florida, Orlando. Both her and Doug Blandy write the NAEA News column as well as co-editing a new book on criticism. **Doug Blandy** is an Associate Professor, and teaches at the University of Oregon, Dept. of Art Education. **Karen A. Hamblen** continues to be a very active writer, publishing widely. She is an Associate Professor in the Dept. of C&I at Louisiana State University where she teaches courses in art education. **Amy Brook Snider** continues to be Chair of Art Education at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, N.Y. She is currently the coordinator of the Caucus. **Ken Marantz** is a Professor at the Dept. of Art Education, The Ohio State University. Known for his ascerbic humour, Ken was a former editor of *Studies*. **Georgia Collins** is a Professor of art education at the College of Fine Arts, University of Kentucky. She is an active feminist and one of the founders of the Women's Caucus. **Jan Jagodzinski** is presently editing this journal for the last time. **Clayton Funk** is a Doctoral Candidate in the Dept. of Arts in Education, Teacher's College, Columbia University. **Sara Snowden** is a student at the Dept. of Art Education, University of Oregon. **Tom Anderson** is a former editor of this journal. He is an Associate Professor of Art Education, Florida State University. Tom's interests are in popular culture and criticism. **Charles Gaines** remains a mystery. **Jim Paul** is a Ph.D. student in the Dept. of Secondary Education, University of Alberta. His interests are in semiotics and critical social theory. **Dan Nadaner**, formerly of Simon Fraser University, now teaches art education and studio courses at The California State University, Fresno. His current focus has been on postmodern criticism.