

<i>jan jagodzinski</i>	102	The Nostalgia of Art Education: Back to the Future, Part 4
<i>Ron Sylva</i>	140	Commentary: Media, Environment, and Art: A New Agenda for Art Education
		Reviews
<i>Joanne Kurz Guilfoil</i>	143	The Playful City: A Vision of the City through the Eyes of Young Children
<i>Lorrie Blair</i>	150	S. Price's <i>Primitive Art in Civilized Places</i> M. Torgvunick's <i>Gone Primitive Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives.</i>
	150	Contributors

On The Cover: From a series of re-fragmented collages/xeroxes (metamorphosis) by Arthur Guagliumi

Editorial Essay

Marginalia on Marginality and Diversity

Harold Pearse

The 1992 NAEA Conference in Phoenix highlighted a series of sessions as "A Celebration of Diversity," a kind of "conference within a conference." Organized in response to Arizona's decision not to establish an official state holiday in honour of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as an alternative to boycotting the convention, the forum provided art educators with an opportunity to explore how issues of diversity and marginality relate to our field. As could be expected, the relationships are diverse, involving not only racial, cultural and ethnic considerations, but also issues involving gender, disability, economics and class. Since the postmodern orientation results from and includes insights and attitudes borne out of the revolt of those marginalized by virtue of gender, race, or class and minority and socially critical concerns, it should come as no surprise to learn that many of the sessions explored diversity and marginality within the context of postmodernism. It should also come as no surprise to learn that many, if not all, of the articles in this volume, intentionally or not, derive from or extend notions of diversity and marginality.

MARGINALITY

Over the past several months I have been gathering bits of information and jotting down notes on items that passed my way having to do with marginality or diversity. I guess this accumulation of semi-random musings, complete with notes scrawled along and around the margins, could be called "marginalia," what my dictionary calls "marginal notes." Dictionaries are where I usually begin when exploring an idea. Word origins and diverse and obscure meanings often trigger connections and provide insights into a word's essential meanings. At least it is a place to start.

Margin: n. (L. *margo*, -ginis. Akin to MARK, MARCH). 1. A border; edge. 2. A condition approximately marking a limit; limit. 3. An amount, as of time or money, which is allowed to meet conditions that cannot be foreseen. 4. Com. The difference between the net sales and the cost of merchandise sold, taken as that from which expenses must be met, profit derived, etc. 5. Econ. The minimum return or reward barely covering the costs of production, and constituting a limit below which economic activity under existing conditions cannot be continued. 6. Print. The part of a page outside of the main body of printed or written matter. 7. Stock and Produce Exchange. a cash or collateral deposited with a broker to secure him from loss on a contract. b A customer's equity if his account is terminated at prevailing market prices. c A speculative transaction in which the broker does part of the financing. 8. Psychol. That part of the momentary field of consciousness which is felt only vaguely or dimly.

Is it coincidental that such a socially charged word has so many usages in commerce, and economics? The idea of margin being "akin to a mark" is intriguing; being on the border or edge, but not actually outside or off the page is fascinating. What about marginal?

marginal: adj. 6. Sociol. Incompletely assimilated and denied full social acceptance and participation by the dominant group or groups in a society because of racial or cultural conflict; as, a second generation immigrant often becomes a marginal man because of color, racial and other barriers.

MARGINAL MAN

I guess that as a heterosexual white male North American employed Professor, I am by most standards and in many ways not only part of the mainstream, but probably part of an elite - far from being marginal. But shift the frame just a bit and I am a citizen of Nova Scotia, a "have not" province, in Atlantic Canada, on the Eastern edge of the Atlantic, far from the populated economic and cultural centres of the continent and the world - surely on the margins. Shift it again. I am an art educator, not a role considered by most to be central and vital to the art world. Not a role central to the world of education, be it acted out on the national stage, the research journals of professional educators, or the school district balance sheets. In the NAEA, as a member of the Caucus on Social Theory, I am a member of an even more marginalized group. In my own classroom, my role is not marginal but central. I am no longer on the border - I am the picture - or the mirror. In my workplace, my family, my home, my marginality diminishes. Even a homeless person, likely, has some small place or situation in which he or she does not feel marginalized. Margins shift. Marginality is a shifting signifier.

Marginal note:

In many folk

art paintings,

the painting on the border

(in the margins)

is often as

important as

the painting

inside the border.

Marginal note:

Folk artists

often paint patterns

or objects

around the borders

of their pictures.

Indeed, they often paint

these on the frame itself.

The margins define the centre.

The centre defines the margins.

MARGIN OF ERROR

(Are the whites in South Africa Marginalized?)

(Are the blacks in Los Angeles marginalized?)

(Which is marginal - or more marginal if that is not an impossible idea - the 12 non-black jury members or the thousands of black protesters?)

The marginal are not always the minority.

The marginal are always those without the power.

CULTURAL MARGINALIZATION

Marginal quote:

"The margin is the place for those feelings and intuitions which daily life doesn't have a place for."

(Maxine Greene, 1989, p.215)

A few weeks before the Phoenix conference, I had the occasion to chat about "marginality" with Terrance Heath, one of the Keynote speakers. He remarked that "the marginal is the preserve of some of our most important values." For example, he explained, we associate closeness to the land and nature with a marginalized group, Native People, or First Nations people, as they are now known. We embody courage and loyalty in animals, more specifically, dogs. He reminded me of what John

Berger (1980) wrote about the marginalization of animals in our culture. They have of course been physically marginalized by human beings' encroachment on what was once the wilderness environment and by confinement in zoos. But they have also been culturally marginalized.

"The cultural marginalization of animals is, of course, a more complex process than their physical marginalization. The animals of the mind cannot be so easily dispersed. Sayings, dreams, games, stories, superstitions, the language itself, recalls them. The animals of the mind, instead of being dispersed, have been co-opted into other categories so that the category animal has lost its central importance. Mostly, they have been co-opted into the family and into the spectacle." (Berger, 1980, p. 13)

Animals have been co-opted into the family as pets and into the spectacle as "human puppets", toys, or cartoon characters. They have been Disneyfied! Ironically, as the reproduction of animals in images increased, their biological reproduction in birth became a rarer and rarer sight. The effect has been to make animals ever more exotic and remote (Berger, 1980, p. 24). Simultaneously and paradoxically, they became tamed and familiar.

In zoos, animals are isolated from each other and have little or no interaction with other species. They have become totally dependent on their keepers. Most of their responses have been changed and they have become passive waiting for a series of arbitrary outside interventions (Berger, 1980, p. 23).

"All this is what makes the marginal. The space they inhabit is artificial. Hence their tendency to bundle towards the edge of it. (Beyond its edges there may be real space.) In some cages the light is equally artificial. In all cases the environment is illusory. nothing surrounds them except their own lethargy or hyperactivity. They have nothing to act upon - except briefly, supplied food and - very occasionally - a supplied mate. (Hence their perennial

actions become marginal actions without an object.) Lastly, their dependence and isolation have so conditioned their response that they treat any event that takes place around them - usually it is in front of them, where the public is - as marginal." (Berger, 1980, p. 23-24)

Are Art Museums like zoos - places where values of human expression can be preserved; where wild thoughts and feelings can be tamed? Both institutions evoke admiration and sadness as they serve as memories for our consciousness. If they were not on the margins would they be totally out of the picture?

Perhaps art education in the curriculum serves an analogous function; art classrooms in schools are seen as sanctuaries by many students. They are also preserves of marginalized values. If art were not marginalized; if art was filtered into the mainstream; blended into the melting pot; homogenized; would it lose its distinctive values and potential power?

Margin as Mark:

borderlineborderlineborderlineborderlineborderlineborderlineborderlineborderlineborderline

South of the border

Whose border?

DIVERSITY/DIFFERENCE

What's the difference?

Same difference

that's different!

Viva la difference.

Differ: v.i. 1. To be unlike in quality, degree, form, etc.; often with *from*. 2. To disagree, dissent: often with *with*. 3. To quarrel. (< OF *differer* < L *differre* < *dis* - apart + *ferre* to carry. Doublet of *DEFER*.)

Difference: n. 1. The state, quality, or degree of being unlike or different; dissimilarity; variation. 2. A specific instance of such unlikeness. 3. A distinguishing characteristic or peculiarity. 4. A disagreement or controversy; quarrel; dispute. 5. A discrimination; She makes no difference between truth and falsehood.

-Syn. (noun) 1. Difference, dissimilarity, unlikeness, divergence, diversity, variation, and distinction denote lack of complete equality or correspondence between things. Difference is the widest term; it may be used whatever the basis of comparison. Diversity is difference among more than two objects.

Diversity: n. 1. The state or quality of being diverse; unlikeness; difference; also, an instance of this. 2. Variety; multiplicity; a diversity of interests. - Syn. See *DIFFERENCE*.

NOTE: In the Nov. 23, 1991 *Globe and Mail*, Design and Architecture Critic, Adele Freedman, writing on the opening of Architect Moshe Safdie's new wing of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, notes that a modernist will try to "...unify and homogenize the fragments rather than exploit their tensions and differences." She adds: "Ironically, the result was chaos."

Victor Burgin: "... meaning is only ever produced in difference, and the final closure of meaning is only ever deferred - the combination of observations which Derrida enshrined in his neologism, *differance*..." (1986, p. 112).

Derrida's Differance:

"Derrida uses the term *differance* (differing and deferring), recognizing that "ance" sounds just like "ence" when spoken, however the undetected difference shows up in writing. He suggests that meaning occurs only within a text and in relation to (in being different from) all other text. Deferral takes place as one term displaces another before it, too, is displaced. For Derrida, it is *differance* that prevents a final fixing of meaning... True meaning is always deferred: The signifier "dog" indicates the idea "dog": the real dog (the referent) is never present; the meaning (the real dog) is always postponed." (The Primer Committee, 1990)

Issues of gender, race, ableness, sexual preference achieve power and meaning to the extent that they make difference apparent. Difference is apparent in the relation of the One to the Other. To understand the nature of the Other is to understand difference.

THE OTHER (ALMOST BY DEFINITION THE OTHER IS MARGINALIZED)

To modern (white) man (himself a minority), the others are: women, children, slaves, criminals, the insane, savages, primitives, animals - they are all alike in that they are different from him.

"THE PERIOD AFTER THE MODERN IS WHEN OTHERS OF MODERNITY TALK BACK." (Kearney 1988)

Would the theme song of a postmodern tolerance be: He Ain't Heavy, He's my Other?

Perhaps as the antidote to the existential paranoia of Sartre's "Hell is Other People"?

FINDING US IN THEM: GONE PRIMITIVE

Western people have a long history of fascination with cultures they consider less developed or primitive (with or without the " "). These cultures, these Others, embody secret desires and hidden unarticulated aspirations. In my explorations on marginality, diversity, and Otherness, I "discovered" Marianna Torgovnick's book *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. (see Blair's review in this volume.) Here are some quotes I captured:

"Imagining Them: They exist for us in a cherished series of dichotomies: by turns gentle, in tune with nature, paradisaical, ideal - or violent, in need of control; what we should emulate or, alternately, what we should fear; noble savages or cannibals. They exist also as a global whole - complete, knowable, definable. (p.3)

The "we" or the "us" in this discourse refers to the populations that the pioneering anthropologists such as Malinowski or Mead consider "normative and empowered - European or of European ancestry, white, literate, educated, of or above the middle class" (p. 4) To "us" the world of the primitive is both exotic and familiar. It is a world structured by sets of images and ideas that have slipped from their original metaphoric status to control perceptions of primitives - images and ideas that Torgovnick calls "tropes."

"Primitives are like children the tropes say. Primitives are our untamed selves, our id forces - libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies. Primitives are free. Primitives exist at the "lowest cultural levels"; we occupy the "highest," in the metaphors of stratification and hierarchy commonly used by Malinowski and others like him. The ensemble of these tropes - however miscellaneous and contradictory - forms the basic grammar and vocabulary of what I call primitive discourse fundamental to the Western sense of self And Other." (p. 8)

"Western thinking frequently substitutes versions of the primitive for some of its deepest obsessions (i.e. fear of certain ethnic and/or racial groups) - and this becomes a major way in which the West constructs and uses the primitive for its own ends." (p. 18)

How we regard the Primitive Other is a measure of how we regard ourselves. Unfortunately, the code is one which we seem to have trouble deciphering. Again the message is paradoxical. As Foster says (1989), Primitivism is actually a "(mis)construction of the other," "a fetishistic recognition-and-disavowal of difference" (p. 198). Foster's article, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art, or White Skin Black Masks" is in response to the 1984 MOMA exhibition-cum-book, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. In Foster's view, both examined "certain modernist involvements with tribal art: interest, resemblance, influence, and affinity proper - usually of a roughly analogous structure and/or conception" (p. 185). Through affinity and use, the primitive is co-opted into the service of the western tradition which in turn is seen to have partly produced it.

"Primitivism, then, not only absorbs the potential disruption of the tribal objects into western forms, ideas, and commodities; it also symptomatically manages the ideological nightmare of a great art inspired by spoils. More, as an artistic coup founded on military conquest, primitivism camouflages this historical event, disguises the problem of imperialism in terms of art, affinity, dialogue, to the point (the point of the MOMA show) where the problem appears 'resolved'". (Foster, 1989 p. 199)

Primitivism (western art derived from primitive art), in its co-option and colonization strategies, is a denial of difference. The counter-measure is opening the culture to experiences of the Other.

Not appropriating the Other

Not assimilating the Other.

Is this what we mean by "multiculturalism?"

IMPLICATIONS/QUESTIONS

Are we attracted to studying multiculturalism (the disavowal of difference; the fetishization or celebration of the Other) because it is exotic?

Can a postmodern world include tolerance?

Only if it is possible to see the other

not as a threat but as a completion.

Only if it is possible

to see marginalization

not as domination/subjection,

but unsentimentally as the preservation

of important values.

If difference is seen as necessary for meaning, difference is essential, then diversity will not only be tolerated (i.e. allowed to exist if it does not affect me), but difference, diversity, will be embraced and will be seen as essential for all life, human and non-human.

DIFFERENT STROKES

This volume of the journal can be seen as consisting of extended and diverse explorations of notions related to marginality and diversity. Anderson writes of how art is marginalized in both society and the school curriculum. He notes that "the tendency towards creative divergence is the reason for the marginalization of art." Hamblen too, considers the relationship between art and general education and examines the implications if art becomes "a discrete discipline with core curriculum status." Sylva's commentary argues that art is too diverse and multidimensional to be contained by the notion of cores or disciplines and presents a manifesto for the implementation of an approach that recognizes that diversity.

jagodzinski speaks of marginalized groups in terms of "the Other" and of Derrida's notion of difference. He writes from a stance that is intentionally different, exalting in its marginality. A nice companion piece is Wilton's personalized quest for

meaning of and in postmodernism. Blair reviews books that delve deeply into notions feuled by postmodern concerns, especially that of "the primitive" as Other. The articles by Blandy et al and Guilfoil advocate for marginalized groups - people experiencing disabilities and children and youth. Kiefer-Boyd explores cultural diversity through modes of cultural behavior.

The pieces in this journal also reflect a diversity of styles, formats, and type faces. In keeping with our editorial policy of accepting any "internally consistent publication style," articles written in conventional APA style coexist with articles presented as manifestoes, as lists, and as experimental, personalized explorations. Appropriate to his postmodern content and stance, jagodzinski has succeeded, I believe, in developing an effective, "post-APA" style with his own internal logic. There is even diversity in spelling conventions, as I struggle to keep "internally consistent" both American and Canadian spellings for certain words. Vive la difference!

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