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The Nostalgia of Art Education: Back to the Future, Part 4

To write the impossible, which is impossible to write, requires an excessive gesture.

Beyond Punk:

Puke Writing and its Discontents

Violence need no longer be self-inscribed on the body in the forms of self-mutilation with razor blades, safety pins, dog collars, padlocks and other accoutrements of bourgeois garbage.

Violence can now be vomited and regurgitated back.

This essay is purposefully polemical.

It is meant to position the reader so as to provoke a strong response. It is entirely anti-aesthetic in its intent, for it hopes to insert and twist a knife into that area which lulls and bathes itself with the perfumes of aestheticism, connoisseurship, and excellence. This is a violent and outrageous form of writing *puke* writing, entirely excessive, written by an ear whose earring has become heavy with journal chatter and NAEA conventions, whose only response comes in the form of a vomit, to push away the seductive melody.

voices
of
excess

Or

read in another way,
This is a bad temper tantrum by a big kid
who never grew up,
searching for recognition.

There are other readings. Take your
choice.

This is an attempt to write between the binaries of aesthetics and anesthetics when, paradoxically, the first term has been reversed into the second. Like a glove turned inside out to become its mirror opposite, aesthetics has become the

Right glove of western consumerist society. Cartel globalism, the universalization of a McWorld now aesthetizes and tries to colonize all the available spaces,

the "markets" of everyday life with the magic touch of simulated artifice. A creeping anesthetization is taking place by our inability to practice any long lasting forms of restraint - a form of aesthetic overkill. Resistance by the "Jihad," whenever it is found at the local level through rebellious factions, dissenting cultures, religious sects,
is often
reactionary and violent.

Structural violence is so ingrained in everyday life that it has reached a point where we, as viewers cannot distinguish between real or simulated violence. The news coverage of the *Gulf War* can be interchanged with *Hard Times*, a film which deliberately deconstructs the boundary between real and simulated violence. Simulated T.V. crime shows (*Top Cop*, *Crime Inc.*) are slowly displacing *Wrestling* whose unsophisticated rawness has become a postmodern freak show.

The distinction between youth and adults, like the distinction between "children" and teenagers is fading as codes of fashion on and of the body begin to gender-blend, age-blend, and even color-blend. These distinctions may even vanish, like the anorexic body of *Michael Jackson* who is now
ageless, sexless, bleached raceless.

And what of *Prince*?
 a black man in white drag, masked in
 effeminacy.
 He is *not* gay. He is excessively hetero-
 sexual, yet he flirts with lesbianism.

Pepsi

understands the borders blurring all too well. A recent advertisement introduces their newly designed pepsi can with a double code and double-talk. As a model pulls up to a vending machine, buys a pepsi and drinks it, two youngers in conversation describe the pepsi can in sensuous terms. Are they describing the model or the pepsi can? Answer -both/and. The acts of "looking," "seeing" and the male gaze all collapse on one another into a space that can only be described as one of pleasure and desire -true connoisseurship. The model's body is doubly inscribed by an aesthetic discourse of beauty and materialism. She has become an interchangeable signifier with a label on a tin can. The liquid inside purposefully remains mysterious, out of the imagination and out of sight/cite/site. The superimposition of a dual subject position has "opened" a doubled space which can be readily occupied by white youths and virile white men. Both have been "targeted."

A white woman's gaze is supposed to identify with the model, to become de-

sired as an object, a tin can of
 fetishistic admiration.
 Pepsi has now repackaged, updated and
 avoided the "classic" mistake of
Coke

(My son, Jeremy asks," why do you find that ad so interesting dad?)

Within that enfolded space of writing,
 within the **pepsi/coke differend**
 rests the struggle for the "real" thing.
 But the "real" thing is only a *simulacrum*
 and
 "You've got to have it!"

"Today, the image precedes the reality
 it is supposed to represent."
 The world has become 'more real than real,'
 hyperreal.

Where/Where?

the boundaries of fact and fiction, truth and falsity, continually collapse as the news media makes its own news and then reports on it.

Where/Where?

the society of spectacle pervades every household by way of T.V., the superego of

society.

Where/Where?

Wim Wenders 'now' gives us impossible films to follow. Peter Greenway 'now' gives us *Prospero's Books*, a film done with MTV video trickery, overlaid with so much allusion and quotation that the re-writing of Shakespeare's *Tempest* has become nonsense. It is incomprehensible in its attempt to say the unsaid. The result has been a self-indulgent jerking off.

Where/Where?

it is possible to lip sync and rise to the top in the record business (*Milli Vanilli*, *The New Kids on the Block*). The spectacle of the lips are simulacra for the voice.

Where/Where?

it is possible to be schizophrenic, decentering yourself into a multiple of a Marilyn Monroe, Jessica Lange, Judy Holiday and Carole Lombard (*Madonna*), or playing the Shadow of an unknown woman behind the camera of her own photographic representations (*Sherrie Levine*).

Where/Where?

the good guys and the bad guys are always confused. *Bugsy*, a bad guy, is really a good guy. And every undercover cop is really an addict or a dealer. Good/bad, law/criminal binaries are continually deconstructed. Fortunately there is also *V. Warshowsky* who plays hardboiled detective with a feminist touch.

Where/Where?

the effeminate Michael Jackson collides and colludes with Elizabeth Taylor to reenact the ritualistic myth of the "never-ending story" of youth and happiness by celebrating the marriage of Taylor to her 8th husband, reenacting yet another fairy tale: the princess who kissed the frog and turned him into a prince charming. Taylor's greatest sexual fantasy - serving him lunch on his construction site wearing only her lingerie (Oprah/Opera W. Show). With her 60th birthday held in Fantasyland, Liz says she doesn't think of growing older, she only thinks of growing. Some would say she refuses to grow up, a feminized version of Peter Pan, the very embodiment of arrested youth whose inflationary diets tell a different story. Cher and Jane Fonda are in hot pursuit of such youth and Zsa Zsa already paved the way, 'wacking' a cop away while doing it. The knife of plastic surgery in each case performs the same violence as this essay but under the guise of beautification, aesthetization, the everlasting skin of the Hollywood smile.

Where/Where?

that smile has entered into the smiling professions where performance is measured by consumer satisfaction. Above all smiling has entered *aesth-lectics* to become an Olympic sport - synchronized swimming. Smiling here is emblematic, not only of femininity but contemporary politics of pictures. It is a spectacular invention where only women

compete. It has no history as a participant sport and its genesis comes from the viewers gaze upon the desirable bodies or *aesthetics*.

Nowhere/No-Where?

Alas! even Madonna's subversive use of the "fallen woman" has become yet another consumerable. Parody and pastiche which is supposed to subvert the imaginaire of contemporary late capitalist society ends up being co-opted or assimilated. Men love her.

Between where/where? and Nowhere/Nowhere? as *active consumers* of our 'already ready' world, we are caught-up in the intricacies of a rizhome. Gone are organic metaphors like "web," which still suggested some comprehensible omniscient eye/I where the strands of the knots could be identified, disentangled, and causal explanations given for their appearance. The ability to reason, to work with an epistemological dominant where the manufacture of 'knowledge' was perceived to be a heuristic tool to further the ends of 'progress' no matter how defined (economically, artistically, socially, morally), has become nonsensical. This was a grand narrative the West told itself around the campfires of male institutions: the school, the patriarchal family, the medical profes-

sions, the technologies of scientific practice. The West finds itself on a different landscape where the distinction between the real and the imaginary have disappeared. It has become a desert landscape like that of Wim Wender's opening scenes of *Paris, Texas*. In the sands of uncertainty, the West searches for its lost origins; its amnesia fastened only through the remembrance of a single faded photograph. Like Paris, Texas the answer to the riddle is to be found somewhere between the Old and the New World, in the Atlantic Ocean - the desert's Other, -in Atlantis!

Gaze at the glitter of the sun, glance at the plethora of images that *conscript* you, the viewer into the *mirage* of the real. There is no A-wall to be found, the oases and ocean islands are themselves illusions.

Baudrillard's *simulacra* continues its play as an enabling concept. Image and reality have become virtually indistinguishable, brilliantly developed by Stephen King's recent horror thriller, *The Lawnmower Man*, a film where *Frankenstein* (artificially organic) meets *Charly* (organically artificial) to give us Jobe, a 'retard' turned 'hypergenious,' god-like through the effects of chemicals and computerized programming (hyperorganartific). This is involution not evolution. Virtual reality of computerization once more vaporizes what is "real" and what is represented as "real." Virtual reality places the physical body in states of ecstasy, between pleasure and pain, heaven and hell.

Data has replaced Spock on *Star Trek, The New Generation*. No longer is it a struggle between the dualities of emotion/logic, the old modernist Spock was part human. But Data is just data - information looking for a human face, an intertextual machine without feeling. Pushed to ITS limit Data can easily reverse the glove and become Dada, performing Shakespeare, painting like Van Gogh, playing any version, any music on any instrument he wishes - all technically perfect, thus putting to question modernist dichotomies of art: the authentic vs. the artificial, the expressive vs. the reproducible, the original vs. the copy, the natural vs. the cultural.

Postmodernism now re-writes the chaos of 20th century as a "butterfly," a fractal structure. The 'snake,' in *Blade Runner*, at least required the gesture of a magnifying glass to detect its artificiality and the cyborgs required, not the "nose" but the linguistic skill of questioning of a *Bladerunner* for detection. There still was a belief in an identifiable "natural" world, although this is put to question throughout the film. But the virtual reality of the *Enterprise's* "holodeck" requires no such detection. The detective belonged to the era of clues, rational logic and causality. The ship's crew frolics freely in their fantasies in space's Other. The computerized programs are often holographic scenes from Earth. Jean Luc's nostalgia to

play the detective, his fondness for Shakespeare and his desire to ride horses are antithetical to what happens on "the bridge," the space of "in between." Here he must sit at his "captain's chair," deal with problems that defy logic and translate incommensurable texts - the customs and life-styles of aliens - against the only human(e) text he lives by, Shakespeare.

"But the mirror of the postmodern paradigm reflects neither the outer world of nature [*Einbildungskraft*] not the inner world of subjectivity [*pour-soi/en-soi*]; it reflects only itself - a mirror within a mirror within a mirror[simulacra]."

This is the world of *Total Recall*. The title is a hyperbole of the Lacan's *ex-centric* self, for in this film we find that Frank/Arnold Schwarzenegger does not function as the controlling agent of his own self-expression. He appears to have been himSELF programed and re-programmed, paradoxically by HIMself in leagues with a corrupt governor of Mars.

Or did he?

Will the 'real' — please stand up?
Arnie is unable to distinguish his imagination from what is happening to him.
Ironically he is easily able to disguise himself through technological wizardry

into a woman! That causes him no identity problems! In the film, no one appears to be who they say they are. They live in a space between dreams and reality, in "virtual" reality.

Pastiche is parody that has lost its sense of humor.

As the slogan of my title suggests, the discourse of *Back to the Future* reinscribes, in the name of the new, that which has been 'lost,' rather than the imagined *memories* of that which has been 'lost.' In brief, *total recall is impossible*. *Total recall* becomes another form of the postmodern mirror. DBAE claims 'total recall' in its slogan "back to the future" and tries to stabilize and re-center a mythical past, a past that never existed in the first place. DBAE colonizes the entire discourse of postmodernism into a pasturization of Rococo, an idyllic periodization that emerged after Baroque's excesses, where happy children are engaged frolicking with materials, self-expressing themselves, or are earnest artists developing portfolios, finding their own 'style.'

Has "the end of history" been reached as we know it? The future wants the idyllic past so bad that it desires its very Body. In the science fiction world of *Freejack*, with enough money it is possible to *hijack* a body from the past so that it may be used to house

the mind of a greedy dying corporate magnate. In a future which is polluted and diseased, the only healthy bodies are those found in the past, reversing our common perceptions that the technological future is "progressive." In this context, the possibility of the ultimate achievement of medical technology - a brain/mind transplant - is viewed as a form of rape. Is this so far from "reality?" The film *Coma* gave us the possibility that healthy organs could be sold on the open market by corrupt doctors who deliberately let their patients die on operating tables. Today, in some parts of South America the homeless have become fodder for a similar scheme. Stories have emerged which report the actual murders of homeless people for their organs. These were then sold to buyers at universities and medical labs. Ripley's *Believe it or Not!* has become a market phenomena.

... the real is not only that which can be reproduced, but that which is already reproduced, the hyperreal which is entirely simulation (Baudrillard, *Simulations*)

The Palliatives of Nostalgia (voice of the past)

One would think that with such a profound change in the electronic media, and the new 'logic' of postmodernism, art education would find itself at the forefront of possibilities; problematizing, questioning, 'seeking new worlds where no *person* has gone before'? As the culture of print slowly becomes replaced by the culture of the electric image, a historic moment presents itself when art educators might provide leadership, rather they remain caught with old conceptions (modernist) of perceptions and percepts. There is no question that there are teacher's who are sensitive to these changes and have begun to raise questions with their students, but this is not the case with mainstream art education. I am reminded of Wittkower's study, *Born Under Saturn* where he describes those artists who were unable to comprehend the Copernican Revolution. Many of them went mad, others held on tenaciously to a nostalgic past that gave them ground and security. As *Voyager* goes deeper and deeper into space, forcing astrophysicists to revise their "laws" of the universe, the globe is experiencing yet another Revolution as the universe slowly becomes decentered. For example, multiple (intertextual) universes have been seriously proposed by Andrei Linde.

Our schools are running scared - both figuratively and literally as guns and killing have now penetrated into their borders (Jefferson High, Chicago) and (the) DBAE is running with them. And like the time of Enlightenment, there are those who want to hold onto a nostalgic past.

When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production. (Baudrillard, *Simulations*, pp.12-13)

When I think of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts and the art educators it employs, the postmodern riddle of political subjectivity comes to mind: what do a trade unionist, a Tory, a racist, a Christian, a wife-beater and a consumer have in common? *they can all be the same person.*

Columbus was a visionary and pioneer. He imagined a new territory, explored it, named it and mapped it. Our Columbus was Lowenfeld. Since his time, which was not too long ago, numerous pioneers settled in the territory of art education: Logan, Barkan, McFee, Eisner, Feldman, Lanier, Chapman—to mention a few...

There are three pioneers in our growing community, namely Clark, Day, and Greer, who have built on the work of our predecessors. I refer to their article, "Discipline-Based Art Education: Becoming Students of Art," in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 21(2), Summer 1987. In that article they have reclaimed, renamed and remapped our territory; they have given conceptual focus to our scholarly evolution. (Hermine Feinstein, *The Getty Center for Education in the Arts*, 1988).

Nostalgia assumes that there was once a stable exchange between meaning and the real. Both had their designated place in the order of things. Feinstein is providing this order for the *evolution* of art education, asserting its grand narrative, identifying those players who stabilize the chaotic and contradictory violence of the present. Feinstein's list plays on three nostalgic notes; they are all

phallogocentric in their desire to totalize. The first is the male myth of the explorer, the conqueror. To evoke the name of Columbus is to reinstate and legitimize Western "civilization" as the center for artistic heritage. It asserts land rights at the expense of the aboriginal peoples and dismisses the artistic inheritance of other minorities. The

second excursion into nostalgia is Adventureland, a desire to revive a mythical time when the heroes of Art education (two women are mentioned in her list, but they

have been subsumed by this discourse of adventure discourse, like Superwoman and Maggie Thatcher) could be clearly identified, their lineage plotted on the branch tree of art education. The third myth is one of progressive evolution, where there is an assumption made that there is an avant garde in art education who somehow see further and better than the rest. These few are the visionaries who light the way in the darkness. By virtue of their genius there is no need to question their interests, nor their ideology. They have the answer.

DBAE, and other nostalgia programs like Mortimer Adler's *Paedia* Project, Smith's notions of excellence in art education, and Broudy's views on aesthetic education, swim analogously with other movies of nostalgia whose job is to reinscribe patriarchy in a time when its edifice is breaking down: *Peggy Sue Got Married*, *Back to the Future, Parts 1,2,3*, *Radio Days*, *Tucker*, *Hoosiers*, *Stand By Me* and the films of *Happy Days*' Ron Howard who has managed to keep the home fires of middle-America "lit" (*Backdraft*).

The earliest voices of the DBAE (the comedy team of Clark, Day, and Greer) gave us a *Back to the Future* dreamscape of a time when America spearheaded the capitalist world; when art education was centralized, 'everyone' was doing their part for economic and social

growth; where self-expression roamed supreme in schools and at MOMA, and where the Cold War provided that ideological fulcrum, that perfect foil to s(p)lit the world into two: the good guys and bad guys. But rather than arriving in an industrial, vibrant, city-scape of mid-50s America, with its well-ordered, smoothly functioning bureaucracy and its glass skyscrapers where Mies van der Rohe can still be seen running about straightening out office blinds, imagine an overload in the network of fiber filaments and in the simulated images of hyperreality we arrive elsewhere. Everything looks strangely familiar but somehow changed. The stage is a melange of *Brazil* and *Blade Runner*, peppered now and again with a little bit of *Batman's* Gotham City - a 1930s stage set with gangster cars and their "hoods" now displayed as a Mercedes symbol worn around the necks of rock stars and gang members who roam its streets. This symbol, wedged between the cartel capitalism and cartel music industry, represents the line between the signifier and the signified. Once again both sides of what appear to be contradictory positions, one dealing in materialism of money and the other advocating the free expression of music, become interchangeable. Both search for profit and new markets. Both lobby -Mercedes to keep the *Geschwindigkeit* from being imposed on the Autobahns - the music industry to make sure that copyright laws are adhered to so that music is retained as personal property.

In this landscape, depending where you are located, it is either raining, or it appears to be nightfall, sometimes you find yourself in some artificially lit underground environment, where the border between the 'outside' and the 'inside' remains undecidable. The dark sky appears to be some organic membrane screening out the harmful effects of an ultraviolet white 'sun' which

appears like a translucent sizzling discoid in the distance.

In the distance can also be seen the great Egyptian pyramid-like offices of Cultural Center League. The Year is 2037. Every Independent Constituted Group (ICG) in the world sends its yearly update of 'cultural images.' Inside the Pyramid, this material is selected and sorted by a group of elected representatives from each ICG. A true democracy has been established as a global set of standards has been achieved thanks to the recent innovation of the McWorld computer, the next computer generation past the nanno computers. Scientists have now gone beyond the ability to move single atoms on microchips, electrons are now on their agenda. Different 'worlds' appear to exist side by side.

The False Dream of Artistic Interpretation (the scholarly voice)

It seems a truism to say that art criticism is about interpretation. Art education thrives on this endeavor. The DBAE marks it as an essential component in its vision quest to centralize art education - re-territorialize and place the chaos into a tight manageable package. Simple schemas of interpretation, like that of Feldman's are remarkable in their staying power, for they fit so well within the ideology of the Western conceptualization of art. This ideology is about the "hidden" meaning of art. Artistic intents are anything but what the art-text literally means. What is "hidden" from (students, viewers, readers, listeners) is *not the meaning itself*, but a clear explanation of how that

meaning connects to and emerges from the art-texts that signify it. The "slight of hand" used to accomplish this explanation is through the routes of description and analysis.

The mere fact of artistic criticism presupposes that art does not communicate clearly or successfully. It becomes necessary to use our own words to convey what an artist has communicated, and implies that the original artworks do not clearly communicate what we thought they were about. It further implies that we should interpret - to see beyond the specific images we see, the words that we read, the sounds that we hear, to get at the meanings hidden within them. In brief, the *important* meanings are what the art-text *never* shows. Detailed discussion of what significant meanings are found in the art-text is a practice of this century. Dr. Johnson or Coleridge didn't do this in literature, Hogarth and Constable didn't do this in art.

Derrida is right, the meaning of visual texts, like written texts, exist somewhere separate from the images themselves. This is a basic concept of Western civilization. Both writing and 'arting' are seen as distorted representations of reality and the thoughts the artist had about that reality. If we logically explore what we know about the operations of language (including visual language), the conclusion is reached that all communication, all thought, all consciousness is a form of 'writing' in a universalistic sense. It would be impossible for us to think or speak, paint, draw, sculpt, printmake . . . if we did not already have a system of signifiers related to each other structurally by their differences from each other. All 'writing' in the arts is through a language of

vision (art), sound (music), body (dance), sound words (poetry). If all consciousness is writing, then there is no consciousness of anything outside 'writing.' "There is nothing outside the text. " Every act of perception - the singling out of objects as separate and different from their backgrounds, is an act of 'writing.' An act of perception is akin to an act of reading a visual text against an absent code, a code which not any one can possibly know in its entirety. Yet this very functionality of partial knowledge paradoxically suggests disfunctionality as a norm.

But, the argument goes, arting and writing are limited. They *necessarily* distort a truer more integrated reality outside themselves. But that is the illusion of *presence* i.e., that every signifier marks and stands for something signified. Derrida shows that which is signified is itself a signifier for something else - just as the significance of each of the words in the dictionary is explained by other words, each of which is itself defined elsewhere in the dictionary, so that finally the meaning of each of the words depends on the existence of all the others, and none of the words refers to anything except other words. Since each signified is itself a signifier, the system neither requires nor allows any insight into a world of concepts or objects or being outside itself. There is no transcendental signified - nothing which transcends language.

Art does not escape this logic. It would be impossible to 'read' a picture, a photograph, if its code wasn't understood. Quite often this is precisely what happens, most dramatically when cultural comparisons are made. Works are rejected by a sector of the public on the grounds that the art-text is meaningless to them.

The 'point' is that there is no 'point,' only direction but no "transcendental signifier," no hidden meaning that can be unveiled through the operations of an interpreter, no final court of appeal. This is the paradox of origins. For us to speak meaningfully a system has to be 'already ready' in place.

Derrida challenges this transcendental signified which sees its central truths as being hidden or veiled by language. He replaces this hidden word, which is actually outside and beyond the purview of language and therefore not available to consciousness, at the center of language, inside it. He forces us to become aware of 1) the dependence on other writing, and therefore *intertextuality*, and 2) intertextuality prevents us from taking on a wholeness or unity "because signifiers always imply and evoke all the things they are different from, texts always imply and evoke all the things they do not say" - they undermine their own apparent meanings and intentions.

Just because there is no transcendental signifier does *not* mean that it is possible to live without one. We live with projected illusions of our own creating. Illusion is necessary to our very existence. It is the recognition that reality and illusion swim together which transports us into a postmodern world.

Postmodernism has challenged the depth models of interpretation, the dialectical model of the essential and the apparent, the Freudian model of latent and manifest, the existential model of authentic and unauthentic, the

semiotic model of signifier and signified. The depth model presupposes the value of hermeneutics for meaning. Meaning which appears to be absent, indeterminate or inaccessible, is in fact merely latent, waiting to be revealed by successive acts of excavation and penetration. The dialectics of essence and appearance and inside and outside, encourage a distrust of surface and favors a sort of analysis that peels away the superficialities and reveals an underlying reality and truth that somehow exists apart from and beyond the immediate object of analysis. In contrast, postmodernism accepts the synchronicity of meaning - its horizontal intertextual surfaces, its references yet to other texts, and not its diachronic vertical axis.

Since Paris is ending its current retrospective on Giacommetti, he appears to be a modernist that could be 'picked on' to illustrate these difficulties. Giacommetti spent his whole life searching and recognizing that he could never find the "essence of man." An existentialist to the core, he left behind him thousands of sculptures. His search was so intense that his sculptures became smaller and smaller as time went on, more and more precious as if to acknowledge that his quest was impossible. His achievement should be celebrated for the final recognition of this impossibility not for the sculpture themselves. But the artworld doesn't work like that. His artworks have been interpreted as if they "represent" the essence of man," as if his sculptures "are" that which he himself was unable to capture! His sculptures, like words, have become an iterateable text - reproducible, repeatable when they are incorporated into the "art industry" through a system of published books, written "histories" of art, retrospectives, exhibitions, reproductions. This forms the artistic canon, the dictionary from

which artists' draw on. The 'total' histories as presented by Arason, Janson *et al.* The avant garde is a necessary part of this process. They form the dictionary's supplement. They are necessary to keep art criticism fueled and alive. While those who have made it into the dictionary - dead or alive- can feel assured of making a "contribution" to the canon. However, it is at the supplemental level that the politics is at its fiercest - the so called contemporary art - the contested zone. Teachers cannot escape these texts, these dictionaries, nor their supplements. To "keep up to date" requires attendance at gallery openings, exhibitions, scanning the latest videos, to stay "on top" or "ahead" and have the last "image."

D i s p e r s i o n s

Given the diatribe on modernism, it's time to shoot oneself in the foot and suggest the creative nihilistic dispersion of postmodernism. By creative nihilism I mean that everything is possible and so i celebrate the possibility of opening up closed systems through the elements of game and play. To do this requires a "twisting" of the given enlightenment traditions.

The Performance of *Andenken* and
Verwindung :
 Beyond *Aufhebung*

If you can't hide, or run away from the system, if there is no outside/inside, we have to live with *involution* rather than evolution. There is no escape hatch to an outside world that *THX 1138* found. Even when you think you have escaped, into the Brazilian forest, THEY will even find you (*Medicineman*). Artistic emphasis should be placed on the rewriting of the *popular narrative* to cause inversion and turn the values around, thus performing a *Verwindung*, rewriting the myths of Modernist tradition. The realization that you are stuck with centering, patriarchal, racist, discourses doesn't mean that you can't appropriate them and make them do what you want them to do. This way they remain accessible to many levels of the audience. For example *Thelma & Louise* rewrites the male's adventure story of *Butch Cassidy & the Sun Dance Kid* from the preferred reading of a liberalist feminist discourse. The film makes room for multiple subject positions; the lesbian (gynocentric affection between friends), the heterosexual (Louise is able to have an orgasm), the liberalist feminist (equality before the law is questioned), and even the social feminist (the right to rob groceries to keep alive). At the same time, this film accuses two specific kinds of male masculinity - both the physically violent and seductively violent man. The *Femme fatal* & the Virgin, each answering to these two masculinities differently, become united in a struggle to 'beat' the phallus with its own weapon - a phallic gun. The ending can even accommodate an ecofeminist reading - two women friends swallowed up by Gaia's cavernous Vulva - the Grand Canyon. Suicidal Death becomes a Return after a joyride of Life. In light of such a

reading the canyon requires a re-naming. *Thelma and Louise* inverts and displaces the mythic male western. Killing and robbery here are justified over men's bodies who are Southern bigots, patriarchal husbands, rapists, seductive lying thieves, power ridden, gun-toting, sunglass screened police officers.

Thelma & Louise is not an isolated film. As Jim Collins points out there are many films that have rewritten the accepted scripts from new subject positions. Although Kevin Costner's *Dancing with Wolves* is still Hollywood, he does take responsibility for his text and rewrites the Indian/White relationships, pointing out that other gestures of contact did occur. It is, of course, limiting from an aboriginal point of view. But such films offer the art educator a way to perform an *Andenken* on the established represented text.

Unfortunately the legacy of the old Left has been to paint everything as a problem of false consciousness. Such a position is untenable. Not enough careful qualitative research has been spent to recognize the complexities of intertextual interpretation. Resistance theories and reader response theories, reception aesthetics and that enigmatic procedure of close reading called 'deconstruction' have gone a long way to problematize any naive reflection theories and depth hermeneutics. de Certeaux's research on the popular arts and John Fisk's continuous studies on popular culture have come closest to showing the oppositional cultures that exist - and the uses of popular culture for personal oppositional statements. Pop songs, soap operas, fashion magazines are symbolically appropriated to produce opposition and creatively transform what exists. The possibility of controlling symbols and their cultural work is crucial for 'political' action on a larger scale.

An Oikoumenical Consciousness

To avoid a totalized nihilism, the bad cholesterol of the postmodern world, a new transcendental signifier is needed. A totalizing God, a Science in the pursuit of Objectivity, a Philosophy in search of Truth can no longer occupy the last court of appeal in today's age. Unquestionably a new spiritualism is required and the ecological signifier is emerging as the one that the globe needs to pursue. None of this has been entirely worked out. It is a 'new emergent.' From new cybernetic technologies based on processors that are capable of analogous thought to New Age 'quacks' handling their crystals seem to be the limits of new possibilities. How this translates into art education is not fully understood. My personal contribution in this direction has been at the level of philosophy (see 'credits'). Some will comment - just more words - but the implications here are far reaching. It requires the rethinking of design education from an ecological level (see 'credits') within the contexts of notions of bio-regions, bio-nomes, where the local initiatives are sensitive to local populations and hence mitigate against totalizing notions of National Curriculums and standardizations. Under a cybernetic metaphor these ideas are easily manipulated into notions of "excellence" thereby promoting more competitions rather than socialistic notions of symbiosis. Yet an ecological consciousness is sensitive to difference and representations which leads me to another dispersion

Representation & Difference

For this dispersion, Mercer says it best for me:

The decentering of 'Man,' the central subject of Western liberal humanism is nothing if not a good thing as it has radically demonstrated the coercive force and power implicated in the worldly construction of the Western rational *cogito* - the subject of logocentrism and all other 'centrisms' that construct its representations of reality. 'Man' consisted of a subject whose identity and subjectivity depend on the negation, exclusion and denial of Others. Women, children, slaves, criminals, madmen, and savages were all alike in as much as their otherness affirmed 'his' identity as the universal norm represented in the category 'human.' *Indeed, if the period after the modern is when others of modernity talk back*, what is revealed is the fictional character of Western universality, as the subject who arrogated the power to speak on behalf of humanity was nothing but a minority itself - the hegemonic white male bourgeois subject whose centered identity depended on the ordering of subordinate class, racial, gendered and sexual subjects who were

thereby excluded from the category 'human' and marginalized from the democratic right to a political subjectivity (my *italic*).

This means exploring the aesthetics of the marginalized. Here I am thinking of the culture of the 'Other' be it the disabled 'Other', folk Other, aborigine Other. But then how is this gesture to take place without alienation. Who has the rights of representation. Can only the Other speak as Other? or will there always be some appropriation because of the inequalities of power.

Representation is the central question surrounding the semiotics of the lie; who controls the representation of the Other constructs the reality that is perceived as 'natural.' There is no false consciousness for all ideologies present neither the Truth nor the Lie. Artistic productions are forms of cultural ideologies which represent competing representations of reality; embedded in those realities are lived forms of ethics and politics. Art teachers cannot possibly avoid this dimension of their teaching since their vision is reproduced through their students at this tacit dimension. For example, teaching children the figure through 'how to books' stereotypes it as a white middle class well fed average (usually female). Students then consume and reproduce this visual text.

These three dispersions are in complete contradiction to the humanist —liberalist statement made by Feldman in his AIM statement: art means work, art means language, art means value. For me art means

Text, art means Cultural Representation, art means Ideology.

L(oops!)

Eco-Speak

All this, of course, has been said before in other discourses, in other circles, in stronger ways. This is a gesture of repetition. The text has its own aporias and may be deconstructed. I merely repeat the litany here as a "lost-leader," to sell my own wares, as it were, in the market place of a journal's space; a Sophist practicing sophistry to get your attention amongst the competing din. Nietzsche once remarked that there would be more writers than readers. It appears that at least the illusion of his prediction is emerging as more and more youth turn away from the print media, leaping into the world of images. Whether this is the case is not at issue. Numbers are politics and statistics to satisfy both sides can be found. The question is whether the illusion is sustainable in the currency of signs. It seems appropriate to exit this essay with a quote and an eco-speak note:

Man believes that the world is filled with beauty - he forgets that it is he who has created it. He alone has bestowed beauty upon the earth - alas! only a very human, all too human beauty Man really mirrors himself in things, that which gives him back his own reflection he considers beautiful: the judgement 'beautiful' is his conceit of his species ...(Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*).

A supportive and insightful reviewer, whose name should go in the credits but cannot due to the double-blind of the review process, indicated that puking was a biological striving for "ecological equilibrium." Puke criticism, like slash&burn ecology, helps clear the palette/palate so that the left over ashes act as fodder for re-birth. Without such acts of vomit we might suffocate in the consumption of our own excesses. But how much puking should be allowed before its therapeutic effects turn into the gushing out of blood and guts? Remember Rome had its vomitoriums and we all know what happened to it!

So **Remember: Enjoy yourself,
it's later than you think.**

Credits

McWorld and the Jihad can be found in 'Jihad vs. McWorld' by Benjamin R. Barber, *The Atlantic*, March 1992. The idea of simulacra comes from Jean Baudrillard's, *Simulations*, Semiotext(e), Inc., 1983. The idea of the differend comes from Lyotard's *Differend: Phases in Dispute*, trans. G. Van den Abbeele, Minneapolis: The U of Minnesota Press, 1983. Its meaning can best be understood between two language games (Pepsi/

Coke), between two phrases there is always a differend which must be encountered. It marks the place of incommensurability, of dispute or difference where no criteria exist for judgment. Quote on page 123 comes from Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 2. On page 125, the concept of synchronized swimming as a form of *aesthetics* comes from a paper given by John Hartley presented to the International Television Studies Conference at the University of London, July 1991. The idea of the rhizome comes from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizome*, Guillaime, 1981. Fractal structures and chaos theory is popularized by James Gleick's journalism, *Chaos, Making a New Science*. Penguin, 1987.

The quote on pg. 129 comes from Kearney, p. 15. The reference for pg. 132 j. Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn*, Routledge, 1956. The proposal of intertextual universes has been proposed by Andrei Linde, *The Universal Wizard*, *Discover*, March 1992. Herminie Feinstein statement on pg. 133 may be found in *Issues in DBAE: Strengthening the Stance, Extending the Horizons*, The Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 1988, p.ix. The riddle comes from Andrew Ross, m/f, no. 11/12, 1986. Nostalgia is discussed by Neville Wakefield, *Postmodernism: The Twilight of the Real*. Pluto Press, 1990. chapter 4 and Iain Chambers, *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity*. Routledge, 1990. The Year is 2037 alludes to Elleda Katan's essay in *Art Education*, March 1989, Vol. 42, No. 2. IBM has shown the capacity to arrange single atoms in a pattern on computer chips. The critique of 'depth hermeneutics' is carried out by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, the G. Spivak translation. John Hopkins

Press. "There is nothing outside the text" is found on p. 158 of this text while the second quote on pg. 139 can be found on p. 168. On pg. 142 the words *Andenken*,

Verwindung, and *Aufhebung* are left standing alone. Their use can be found in Gianni Vattimo's, *The End of Modernity*, Polity Press, 1988. The term *Virwindung* indicates ... a 'going beyond that is both an acceptance [or 'resignation'] and a 'deepening', while also suggesting both a convalescence, 'cure' or 'healing' and a 'distorting' or 'twisting.' (xxvi). Jim Collins, *Uncommon Cultures*, Routledge, 1988. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989 and *Reading the Popular*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. Michel de Certeau *Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984

The notion of the Oikoumenical is something I develop in "The Poetics of Green Esthetics: Situating "Green Criticism" in the Postmodern Condition (pp.32-44), in C. Congdon and D. Blandy's (Eds) *Pluralistic Approaches to Art Criticism*. The Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991. On ecological design I highly recommend Victor Papanek's (1978) *Design for A Real World*. London: Verso Press, 1974. Feldman's AIM statement can be found in *Art Education*, 1982, Vol. 35, #2. Kobena Mercer's quote comes from his article,

"Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics. In *Identity Community, Culture, Difference*, Edited by Jonathan Rutherford. Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, p. 57. The Nietzsche quote that opens the essay comes from *Twilight of the Idols*, in *A Nietzsche Reader*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, p. 145. For the idea of eco-speak I should like to thank my unknown

viewer for this brilliant insight.

that's all folks!

Commentary

Media, Environment, and Art: A New Agenda for Art Education

Ron Sylva

Much has been written about what an education in art should be for. We might think more about what an education in art should be against. We live in a world where objects, environments, ideas, and feelings are manufactured for, and merchandized to, people defined as consumers rather than citizens, spectators rather than participants, and users rather than doers. Despite the proclaimed democratic ideals of education and the celebrated independence of the artist's vision, art education has contributed little to the education of independent minded, informed, and empowered human beings.

One premise for this paper is that the mind is neither a passive material to be shaped, nor an empty vessel to be filled. Students begin with active minds, eager to engage and make meaning of the world around them. This capacity is underestimated by a great deal of what is presented to them as education and as art education. They can think in more abstract and complex ways than most education systems make provision for. They are capable of comprehending more sophisticated issues, concepts and images than much current practice now affords. But those capacities can atrophy. Students can become accustomed to pedestrian ideas, gimmicks, and cleverly produced, but uninspired and crassly motivated imagery. They can learn to require little from themselves, and to expect little from the world except entertainment.