has argued, Generation X, which itself is splintered into various locations of class, race, and sex/gender, is a special focus of the New Right's efforts to maintain and reproduce the social imaginary by delegitimating, regulating, repressing, or cajoling the youthful "bottom-up" culture. The taste for symbolic violence by Generation X culture comes from the social position they find themselves in—a subordinated position where there is a denial of the rewards (the American Dream of modernism) that the dominant rhetoric after the Second World War had promised them as their inherited right. This has resulted in a strange alliance between the capitalist commodification of youth culture and youths poaching this very commodified culture as forms of resistance for their own ends, as demonstrated, for instance, in their '50s antinostalgia films.[64] The best way to reduce both physical and symbolic violence in today's postmodern society is, therefore, not to censor it, nor to introduce more "quality" programs (ersatz for educational programs); nor is it to moralize and rail against such images, rather the best way is to change the social conditions that produce the *desire* for its taste. In other words, the gap of privilege has to close if violence is to decrease and the moral panic is exposed for what it hides: namely the fear that those who are now privileged may stand to lose their status. On the very day that I end this essay, French youths are violently clashing with police in the *poorest* districts of Paris.[65] The government's response has been to blame these disturbances on incoming American broadcasts of television violence. Their solution: introduce the V-chip technology into every television set in France!

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[64] The refinement of such an argument can be found in the writings of Paul Willis, especially his *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young* (Milton Keyes: Open University Press, 1990) where he develops the idea of "symbolic work" as creatively expressed by today's youth. Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* ((London: Methuen, 1979) is an early precursor of the same argument. Youth's appropriation of material culture reveals a dramatic "refusal," a stylized repudiation of adult culture that "in spectacular fashion (signals) the breakdown in consensus in the post-war period" (p. 17). As part of the New Left, his thesis is an obvious challenge to the Frankfurt School of cultural analysis. A similar argument can be found from a broader perspective in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1984).
[65] As reported on the CBC News, 20 February 1996.

The Clash Between Sacred and Profane: Controversial Art and Religion in the Postmosern Era

Rosalie H. Politsky

Abstract

Using mythic criticism, this paper examines the current cultural and religious instability that may serve as the impetus for the appropriation of ancient religious myths and symbols by various visual and performance artists. The paper concludes with implications of ritual, personal mythology, and controversial art for art education.

The Appropriation of Religious Rituals and Symbols in Controversial Art

Durkheim describes the *sacred* as transcendental and extraordinary, inspiring love, awe, and sometimes, dread (Dubin, 1992, p. 80). The *profane*, on the other hand, is instrumental and mundane. But the traditional boundaries between the sacred and the profane are breaking down. In appropriating traditional religious imagery and symbols, contemporary artists have

pushed the boundaries of both aesthetic and religious sensibilities.

Controversial art is difficult to define, since Western art and popular culture have been preoccupied with nudity (Schneemann, 1991). But according to Lankford and Pankratz, (1992), controversial art has recently become a categorical term. This paper will define *offensive* art as artistic acts or images that are judged to be immoral, obscene, lewd, distasteful, or blasphemous in nature. It also refers to art that is perceived as an attack of taken-for-granted moral sensibilities (Veith, 1994). Such images become *controversial* because they are deemed to break the "general standards of decency" (p. 17).

I have used McEvilley's (1983) discussion of controversial art elsewhere (Politsky, 1995a), and will review his categories, as well as the work of Lippard (1983), to illustrate instances of shamanic rituals and religious appropriation in performance art. McEvilley in particular acknowledges that many of the artists he discusses feel that shamanic material and traditional rituals, as well as Freudian and Jungian influences, serve as the cultural parallels for their work (p. 66). He refers to the following performances as, "Art in the Dark" (McEvilley, p. 62).

Rituals of Divinization

Some performances reflect ancient rituals of divinization. For instance, McCarthy cut his hands and mixed his blood with water and food, making explicit the sacramental rites from the Dionysian to the Christian (McEvilley, p. 66). The *OM* (1960s) ritual of Nitsch, appropriated ancient rituals of divinization by disemboweling a bull and covering the participants with the bull's blood (p. 65). Lippard (1983) describes the consumption of the dead one's powers as a metaphysical idea later adapted to the Christian Mass (pp. 46, 175).

Shamanic Rituals of Self-Mutilation

While self-injury and self-mutilation have been essential

practices in many shamanic traditions, these actions tend to be the most shocking. Kim Jones and Chris Burden have engaged in rather bizarre performances involving self-injury. Jones, for example, cut himself 27 times with a razor in a pattern resembling the circulatory system. Burden, in a piece called *Movie on the Way Down* (1973), hung naked by his feet (McEvilley, p. 66). Such actions parallel ascetic rituals in which shamans cut themselves while in ecstatic states. Lippard (1983) suggests that some artists have also combined feminism and ecology with mutilation in order to emphasize the victimization of women and the earth (p. 52). Stephen Whisler's, *Plant Work #2* (1977), for instance, expresses the classic nature/culture split by cutting a v-shape in the "crotch" of a tree and "sharing the pain" by bleeding into it (p. 192).

Rituals of Androgyny and Union with the Goddess

McEvilley views McCarthy's performances as parallel to various tribal rites in which men mime female menstruation and parturition. Female imitation, as found in the works of Brus and McCarthy, is also a standard shamanic motif. Brus made a vulva-like incision in his groin and held it open with hooks (McEvilley, p. 66). In *Old Man in My Doctor* (1978), McCarthy wore a rubber mask over his head to form a vagina-shaped opening and gave birth to a ketchup covered doll (p. 66).

Taboo Acts to Draw Away Societal Contempt

The performance of taboo acts has its roots in ancient religious custom and is also central to shamanism. Shamans engage in practices that bring about contempt from others by conducting themselves in offensive and unconventional ways. McEvilley suggests that performance artists who break gender, sexual, or cultural norms are replicating this ancient shaman custom. Lankford and Pankratz (1992) cite how Mapplethorpe's and Serrano's art works were used to outrage and shock. These artists may be viewed as taking on the role of shamans who acted as scapegoats by drawing calamity away from the communities they served.

The Cultural and Religious Instability
Behind Controversial Art

Many view the appropriation of religious content as scandalous and even blasphemous. Yet, such deleterious consequences have not stopped artists from appropriating traditional religious symbols and imagery. Why is such appropriation occurring? Part of the answer can be traced to the development of postmodern ideology. Modernist art criticism has focused on the aesthetic object and ignored its religious or socio-political dimensions (Stuhr,1994). But controversial art has pushed these dimensions to the forefront.

Art Education and Religious Concerns

The currents of postmodern times are turbulent. Hargreaves (1995) summarizes the paradoxes of the postmodern age by stating, "We live in exhilarating and terrifying times . . . [and] heightened moral uncertainty" (p. 14). The unified world of formalism has given way to pluralism and critical discourse. Now, religion and spirituality are brought to the forefront in critical discourse. Art educators have responded likewise. Cahan and Kocur (1994), for instance, describe how they are concerned with "unearthing the spirituality buried in contemporary secular existence. Our works are both political and spiritual, syncretizing traditional African, Judeo-Christian, and Eastern religions, mythologies, and cosmologies, forming a synthesis of cross-cultural references" (p. 27). Dubin (1992) refers to the religious based controversies as "spiritual tests" (pp. 79-101). At a time when artists alter old religious symbols or substitute new ones, others attempt to protect and restore long-established religious symbols (p. 80).

The purpose of this paper, then, is to investigate the cultural forces that have encouraged this type of artistic expression. My intent is to delve into the cultural and religious instability of the postmodern era, which I believe has provided some of the impetus for controversial art. I will focus on the Christian religion which includes Roman Catholic, Protestant, and evangelical Christianity.

The methodology of this study utilizes the psychoanalytic, mythic criticism of Lauter (1984), Heaney (1984), and Samuels (1985). These post-Jungian theorists have revised the notion of *archetype* from Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. Post-Jungian theorists disagree with Jung's premise that we are born with fixed images from our unconscious. Instead of defining an archetype as a universal, unchanging entity, post-Jungians describe a tendency to form an image in response to recurrent, yet unpredictable experiences (Lauter, p. xi). "The archetypal power is an innate patterning power but the archetypal images are not innate but are culture bound" (Heaney, p. 46). Myths and the mythmaking process are not part of a static reservoir of stories, but are part of an ongoing process of both individual and cultural construction (Lauter, p. 3).

Characteristics of Postmodern Culture

The Loss of Tradition

Toynbee (1934-1954) asserts that Western civilization began a new transitional period as early as the late 15th century when Europe, as it began to influence non-western people, realized that it needed to coexist with many different cultures (Owens, 1990, p. 186). Pluralism and the discovery of multiple cultures profoundly threatened Western claims to sovereignty as well as cultural monopoly and universalism.

Daniel Bell (1976) agrees with Toynbee and characterizes postmodernism as a radical assault on tradition. He further judges the postmodern era as hedonistic and narcissistic. Perceiving this transition as the loss of rationality, sobriety, religious values and morals, Bell calls for a revitalization of religious values (Kellner, 1990, p. 261).

The Absence of "Presence" and the Loss of
Transcendental Signifiers

Modernism centers around notions of "presence" made visible though works of art. It also concerns itself with the

ability of individuals to find meanings by way of universal mental operations. However, Saussure (1857-1913) questioned these assumptions and argued that meaning in language is just a matter of difference. Saussure's followers suggested that if one wants to know the meaning (or signified) of a signifier (sound/image) the dictionary supplies merely more signifiers (Eagleton, 1983). Thus, the process of meaning is infinite, circular, and less stable than what structuralists had believed.

Furthermore, Western philosophers have been *logocentric*. They have been committed to a belief that there is some ultimate word, presence, essence, truth, or reality which acts as the foundation of all our thought and experience. Western philosophy has yearned for the sign which will give meaning to all others—the *transcendental signifier*—the unquestionable meaning to which all other signs can be said to point; for example, God, the Self, the essence, and so on. However, Derrida labels as metaphysical any such thought system that depends on a first principle or impeachable ground upon which a whole hierarchy of meaning may be constructed. Such transcendental meaning (Self, God, Idea, etc.) is a fiction embroiled in an open-ended play of signification. Thus, if there is no transcendental "logos," then it follows that there can be no absolutes, no meaning apart from human culture (Veith, 1994).

Loss of a Common Culture and Common Iconography

Art educator, Ralph Smith (1976) suggests that contemporary alienation is a result of a detachment from a common iconography of compelling images that make visible the invisible world of the spirit (p. 9). The cultural transformation we are undergoing is dramatic and more thorough than in the past. Contemporary culture, Smith insists, is both image-confused, and value-confused.

In relation to art education, Kerry Freedman (1994) asserts that the promotion of Western models of aesthetic value has maintained the assumption of a "common" culture (p. 161). "Western" is used here to denote the Euro-American (Erickson, 1994), dominant White culture of the fine Art World (Stuhr,

1994). But a definition of contemporary Western art is problematic (Dufrene, 1994) in the postmodern era since contemporary visual culture is so continually fragmented and in flux that there is little that is common about "common" culture (Freedman, 1994, p. 161). Postmodernism fragments society into contending, unintelligible subcultures (Veith, 1994, p. 144). This fragmentation results in a "loss of a comprehensive worldview" (Veith, 1994, p. 139). In addition, multiculturalism results in the leveling of cultures and the exaggeration of differences.

Burgin (1986) proposes that the decline of universal religion, defined as traditional Christianity, has undermined cultural stability, making the creation of common religious symbols and images difficult to acquire. Religion has become displaced, and is no longer the center of contemporary life (p. 36). Because of the interrelationship between religious and cultural values, the lack of common religious symbols significantly fractures the culture at large.

The Loss of Art as a Source of Knowledge

The emergence of a pluralistic avant-garde has dealt a serious epistemological blow to viewers and has aggravated the lack of a common iconography. Arnold (1979) proposes that during the 1950s a series of American avant-garde movements supplanted one another in succession. But the 1960s saw the emergence of a pluralistic avant-garde. Because of its rapid pace, Arnold speculates that people failed to comprehend the meaning of contemporary art and may have cut themselves off from important sources of knowledge.

While pacing is one barrier, complexity is yet another. The avant-garde not only pushes the boundaries of acceptability and perception, it also challenges our basic ideas about the nature of art and its relationship to life. The avant-garde art opens the possibility that anything can be art and art can be everything.

The Loss of Human Sexuality and the Goddess Mythology

Lippard (1983) employs mythical criticism and combines Jungian psychology with feminism. Artists and educators in the postmodern era have sought to recover the goddess in patriarchical cultures and religions. They have disputed the notion that male dominance has existed "everywhere and forever" (Collins, 1995).

Lippard's work represents a mediation between modernism and postmodernism. Instances of modernists' assumptions include the use of the metaphors of woman as nature, the Great Goddess and Mother Earth. However, her work is also instrumental in illustrating postmodernist, feminist concerns. Lippard suggests that contemporary artists' renewed interest in natural processes can be traced to a prevalent anxiety of loss over our rural/matriarchal, sexual connection. Many women artists relate their cultural creativity to their natural creativity and explicitly link their art and their bodies (pp. 46-47). Moreover, the abyss between nature (associated with woman) and culture (associated with man) was officially sanctioned by Christianity which displays a "deeply anti-natural bias and a brutal severing of spirit from matter" (Lippard, 1983, p. 46). Lippard gives many examples of how Christianity absorbed or disguised "pagan" matriarchal images.

Postmodernism and the Current Religious Crisis

There are theorists from diverse fields who construe the cultural crisis as a religious crisis. Researchers in theology (e.g., Wallis, 1995; Fox, 1994, 1988; Harpur, 1987; Moore, 1992; Griffin, Beardslee & Holland, 1989), in cultural and mythological studies (e.g., Flowers, 1988; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988), and in history (e.g., Hobsbawn, 1996) suggest that America is culturally, politically, and spiritually bankrupt.

Harpur (1987) claims that there is a great majority of people today for whom the Christian faith makes "little sense at all" (p. 5). While Christianity is thriving in parts of Africa and Asia, it is rapidly eroding in the West. While traditional Christian

churches have suffered drastic loses, the Roman Catholic Church has been the hardest hit. Roughly 55% avoid the church, and the new recruits of nuns and priests has declined sharply. In Canada, less than 30% attend church. Hence, some theologians now speak of "the post-Christian Era" (p. 6). Harpur claims that the traditional dogmas about Jesus are becoming more and more incomprehensible for many people.

Veith (1994) asserts that while liberal churches seem to wither, conservative and evangelical Christian churches flourish. These churches, Veith asserts, have sold out to popular culture and consumerism of the "McChurch" (Veith, p. 213). Churches resemble malls or theme parks, Veith argues. *The Crystal Cathedral* is like a religious theme park with babbling brooks, luxuriant plant life and multimedia overload. "Christians, like everyone else in todays economy are consumers" (p. 118). More importantly, Harpur (1987) fears the apparent hostility and absolutism in the conservative evangelical view.

Theologians acknowledge the intense anxiety that the collapse and disintegration of modernism evoke (Sweet, 1990). Anderson (1992) and Veith (1994) discuss the particular trauma that postmodernism has had upon Christian thought and practice. While Veith's book focuses on evangelical Christians, his analysis includes Roman Catholics and Protestants as well. Common to these Christian critiques is the loss of moral absolutes. "The postmodern consciousness seems to make possible either a new radicalism or a new conservatism" (Veith, p. 24). Postmodernism emphasizes speaking in one's own voice and legitimizes pluralism and the destruction of the foundations (Veith, pp. 220 & 225). The essence of postmodernism is "anti-foundational" (p. 226). Postmodernism seeks to live with chaos and avoids foundational judgments altogether.

A Theology of Hostility

Harpur (1987) describes the rigidity, absolutism, hostility, isolation, and defensiveness in the fundamentalist-style religion of the extreme conservative evangelicals, the Roman Catholic fundamentalism of John Paul II, and Islamic fundamentalism (p.

xi). He believes that the conservative evangelicals have set stumbling blocks in front of the World Council of Churches who seek to form a dialogue between Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhist, Jews, and others. Instead of seeing these religions as part of the entire completeness of the human spiritual quest, the conservative evangelicals stress a commitment to dogmatic intolerance of pluralism and tolerance (p. 14). Also inherent in this theology is male chauvinist ideology.

This conservative theology is more likely to divide life into the sacred-profane, body-soul dichotomy that is very visible today, especially in the Roman Catholic Church with its obsession about celibacy, divorce, sexuality, and the ordination of women (Harpur, p. 66). In light of these developments, institutionalized religion has obliterated the original mythos of Jesus, who never thought of himself as the high priest with special privileges of wealth, power, and prestige, but as healer, teacher, prophet and master to the oppressed, the marginalized and the poor (p. 67).

America's Cultural Mythic Crisis

Myths, according to Joseph Campbell, bring us to a spiritual level of consciousness (Flowers, 1988, p. 14). The term, *spiritual* is not bound to the dogmas of any particular religion, but is the search for meaning that transcends religion and superficial worship (Politsky, 1995a, p. 111). Feinstein and Krippner (1988) suggest that the long-enduring myths have crumbled under the weight of abrupt shifts in the very foundations of social organizations, and that cultural myths have been drifting toward obsolescence (p. 6). Campbell believes that we either experience ourselves living in a demythologized world, or we experience confusion over the many competing mythologies with adherents from diverse backgrounds (Flowers, 1988, p. 9).

America's Collective Shadow

Fox (1994), a Catholic theologian, identifies the current crisis as a soul crisis of the entire soul of the nation. We lack a cosmology, a sense of universe as home, and thus, a sense of

ecology. Ecology derives from the Greek *eikos* or home (p. 48). The crisis of our country is caused by our collective shadow which is the neglect of mystical thinking. Artists, Fox claims, "awaken our images in order to take us to our mystical origins" (p. 207). Myth and ritual take us to deeper levels of our being, but ritual is also a great threat to the guardians of the machine civilization. Without ritual and rites of passage a civilization is sick and loses its soul. "In the case of poverty of ritual, our culture and its religions are sinning grievously against justice and the right of the new generation of humans to experience effective ritual and participate in ritual making" (Fox, p. 265).

The Underlying Spiritual Crisis

Wallis (1995), in critiquing his own Evangelical Church, describes the cultural, political and spiritual bankruptcy. At the root of the brutality of violence, poverty, white racism, homophobia, discrimination against women, the rape of the earth, and the general loss of meaning and hope, is a profoundly moral and spiritual crisis (pp. 4-9). Recognizing that there are diverse and pluralist expressions of religion and religiosity, Wallis admonishes the two extremes. On one hand, "he refuses to allow the religious right to have a monopoly on morality and spirituality" (p. xi). On the other hand, he accuses liberal religion of losing its center by becoming more bureaucratic than spiritual (p. 44).

A Thirst for the Spiritual

Finally, Veith (1994) contends that while modernism sought to divest itself of religion, postmodernism draws from the most ancient religions and spiritualities. The New Age movement, with its affinities to Hinduism and Buddhism, has grown rapidly and is an indication of the contemporary thirst for both pluralism and spirituality (pp. 198-199). Jung observed the disintegration of Christianity and speculated that Westerners would attempt to adapt Eastern religious modes (Stevens, 1983, pp. 286-287). Wallis (1995) acknowledges that while the New Age movement is sometimes shallow, it nevertheless indicates the cultural hunger for spiritual experiences. Watts (1971) also noted that

the presence of all kinds of small mystical and pseudo-mystical groups attests to this type of cultural confusion.

Conclusion

Harding (1961, p. 5) asserts that when a religion becomes weak or dies, the spirit which informed these venerable symbols will only manifest itself somewhere else under some other form. During this period of the loss of symbols and the corresponding hunger for affirming, regenerative myths and symbols, it follows that artists may attempt to become vehicles of transition and transformation. However, these controversial artistic activities are hardly clear cut. Many people wonder if controversial art is a sign of healing or a manifestation of pathology.

From Functionalism to Radical Humanism

A description of the paradigm shift from functionalism to radical humanism puts these opposing views in context (Burrell and Morgan, 1985). The paradigm shift included a movement away from the unifying effect of the aesthetic experience that is reflective of a private aesthetic, toward a public aesthetic which challenges the status quo and deliberately seeks to transform individual and collective consciousness. From this perspective, the artists discussed in this paper may be acting as social reformers rather than as psychotics or tricksters. Rather than anarchic aesthetic turbulence, we can view their work as the consciousness raising of a symbol deficient collective.

From Collective to Personal Mythology

Campbell asserts that Americans are not well acquainted with the literature of the spirit (Flowers, 1988). Over the centuries, religions used the power of the myth to illuminate deep inner problems, inner mysteries and inner passages (pp. 3-4). Because modern people crave fresh rituals, Feinstein and Krippner (1988) perceive a growing number of individuals and communities acting as their own "inner Shamans" by attempting to rediscover ancient ceremonies and rituals (pp. 13 & 17). By appropriating

religious imagery, the artists mentioned here, may have taken on the role of the shaman to reactivate the original power, awe, and fascination of the archetypes; that is, forms or images of a collective nature (Heaney, p. 144).

Constructive or Revisionary Postmodernism

Sullivan (1993) argues that there are different views of postmodernism. One view emphasizes the negative and nihilistic elements of contemporary life and forms a *destructive* postmodenism (p. 10). *Constructive* or *revisionary* postmodernism, on the other hand, seeks a revision of modern premises and traditional concepts (Griffin, 1989, p. xii). The latter view supports ecology, peace, feminism, and other emancipatory movements, as well as a postmodern global order (p. xiii). However, both views share the common notion that the belief systems that supported modernity are obsolete. Meaning is socially constructed, open to multiple interpretations (Sullivan, pp. 10-11). Most importantly, constructive postmodern thought perceives modernity as socially and spiritually destructive (Griffin & Beardslee, 1989, p. xiii).

In defining structures and in seeking a sense of meaning and a sense of connection, controversial art parallels constructive postmodern practice. However, I also recognize that the proclamations of underlying or universal principles are alien to postmodern thought. Therefore, we must approach controversial art from various perspectives.

Contrary to this alleged transformative and healing effect (Politsky, 1995a), controversial art also possesses an enigmatic, paradoxical, and regressive nature as well. To the conservative, such offensive art appears to drive an even deadlier division between the sacred and profane. Many religious conservatives view the return to ancient religious rituals as terribly misguided and regressive. This latter judgment marks the real paradox of controversial visual and performance art. Its offensiveness and sometimes vileness flies in the face of the underlying assumptions of Greenburg's modernism; namely, that the "artist," by virtue of special gifts, expresses the "finest in humanity"—the essence

of civilization (Burgin, 1986, p. 30). Ultimately, however, controversial art will defy categorization.

Implications for Art Education

Art educators have contended with controversial art in various ways. Barrett and Rab (1990) took twelve high school seniors to view the Mapplethrope exhibition. These researchers concluded that the exhibition provided their students with new kinds of knowledge and understanding about cultural differences. Lankford and Pankratz (1992) analyzed key concepts found in arguments surrounding controversial art including the concept of art, and the relationship between art, morality and artistic freedom. Both sets of researchers concluded that controversial art provided opportunities to confront important issues about the nature of art and exposed viewers to subcultures that are part of our society.

Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference

Barrett (1994) notes that the first step in dealing with the cultural disputes over controversial art is a "cease-fire." This step is important since it gives all participants the right to speak, and more importantly, to listen (p. 5). Multiculturalism may provide the means to approach the complex issues raised in controversial art. Cahan and Kocur (1994) suggest that multicultural art education can address the sensitive issues raised in contemporary art. Barrett concludes that, "We would advertise broadly to our public constituencies that artistic expressions are often at the forefront of social conflicts; thus, they have a very special import in society" (p. 5). The following suggestions are part of the cease fire negotiations.

Developing Our Own Personal Mythology

Campbell believes that children make up their own myths (Flowers, 1988). Their innovative rites include graffiti, gang membership, and their own initiations. He also suggests that we read myths, and not only our own but other people's myths since we tend to interpret our own myths as facts (p. 6). Art educators also need to labor intensely to discover our own guiding symbols and myths (Politsky, 1995b) and help our students to do likewise.

Aesthetic Pluralism

Danto's theory goes beyond formalist criteria. Teachers and students must bring knowledge to the work in order to respond to it. Understanding is not static but is constructed. We are encouraged to look at art in relation to aesthetic theory, cultural, and historical contexts (Wolcott, 1996, p. 17). Hart (1991) suggests that each art form has its own set of standards, and that no one universal aesthetic can apply to all art forms (p. 150). It follows that art educators must be aware of distinct religious and aesthetic systems, particularly in ritual art that is based on religion and mythic themes. Rituals are very complex and are bound up with specific histories, traditions and mythologies.

Content and Issue-centered Art Education

Controversial art presents an opportunity to go beyond purely formalist concerns. Postmodern art deals with issues and content rather than form. Controversial art explores issues such as sexuality and gender explicitly. Wolcott (1996) asserts that contemporary artists, "confront us with issues that are sometimes difficult to deal with and not always easy to understand. Therefore, if art educators select such works of art to be used in the classroom, they must present them in a more studied context" (p. 75).

Sexual Politics and Social Reconstruction

An important aspect of multiculturalism is *social reconstruction*. This approach to teaching art challenges educational and social inequities, promotes appreciation and diversity, and encourages students to take action against social

structural inequities (Tomhave, 1992; Cahan & Kocur, 1994). Delacruz (1995) maintains that the eradication of racism, sexism, homophobia, and prejudice is part of educational reform based on more authentic knowledge and the pedagogy of liberation and social responsibility (p. 61). Scholars and educators have only begun to explore the relationship between homosexuality and art education. Eaton (1988) asserts that art educators need to study modern sexual theories. Honeychurch (1995) suggests that art educators need to push the dominant culture to examine its homophobia and the ideological and political systems that surround this fear. Finally, the reconstruction enables the emergence of a "new iconography of empowerment being evolved by women and minorities" (Fehr, 1994, p. 211). Fehr claims that as these groups gain access to the mainstream, their new images will penetrate social consciousness.

Religious Studies and Spiritual Explorations

In addition to social censorship, art educators need to study how the *Church*, both Catholic and Protestant, has inhibited examination of controversial art (Eaton, 1988, p. 318). However, other religions must also be studied since, as Delacruz (1995) and Dubin (1992) have recognized, racial and religious tensions are becoming more pronounced with the emergence of global awareness and multicultural conflicts. Barrett (1994) describes how pervasive these "culture wars" have become and cites controversies among Islamic fundamentalists and Muslims (p. 4). Barrett suggests that deeply rooted religious concerns are fundamental to these culture wars.

Certain religious symbols have enormous power and significance for some. Others, who are more open to a variety of interpretations, take a more critical approach (Dubin, p. 101). For example, Stinespring (1990), examined the relationship of fundamentalist religion upon the practical aspects of teaching art. His position is that the most important principle of education in a democratic society is the free flow of ideas. Fundamentalists, with a narrow definition of truth, cannot be allowed to close down areas of inquiry. Furthermore, instructors should resist efforts of those students who plead religious objections to shield themselves and others from information intended to broaden

their bases of knowledge (p. 53). The spiritual aspects of art are also recognized by Garber (1995) as an important element in teaching about culture. Chalmers (1981) and Rogers (1988) have pointed out the need to understand which functions and roles of art are important to our students. This would certainly include religious and spiritual functions as well (Chalmers, 1981, p. 11).

Feminism and Spirituality

Wallis (1995) calls "prophetic feminism" the intertwining of spirituality and politics. The demands of feminism are too extensive to be satisfied with a few adjustments. "Its actualization demands conversion and conversion is always a spiritual issue requiring spiritual force" (p. 148). Schussler Fiorenza (1984) seeks to construct heuristic models to write women back into early Christianity. She asserts that androcentric Western language and patriarchal religion have "erased" women from biblical discourse (p. xviii). A feminist reconstruction of Judaism and early Christianity can recover the goddess images that patriarchical Judaism extirpated (p. 106).

Modern Axiological Project

Wallis (1995) states that we are "suffering from a profound erosion of moral values" (p. 156). At the roots of this crisis is American overconsumption and our wounded relationship with the earth. The crisis of value calls for a well established modern axiological project (Fekete, 1987). Feldman (1996) has acknowledged the clash of values in art education over religion, sex and gender, class, and race. Stuhr, Krug, and Scott (1995) propose that multicultural education poses critical, moral and ethical questions.

The Development of Critical Thinking

The examination of values enhance the development of critical thinking skills in art criticism. Because of political attacks upon the photographs of Mapplethorpe and Serrano, Lucy Lippard promotes critical thinking for the ordinary person

(Barrett, 1994). Protestors, who are often dualistic thinkers, view topics such as mythology, pagan cultures, the supernatural, the occult, homosexuals, and women in non-traditional roles as "wrong" (Rogers, 1988, pp. 6-7).

One way to address dualistic thinking is to move from an objectivist orientation to a contextual orientation (Ettinger, 1990). This latter view maintains that knowledge about art is socially constructed and that there are multiple interpretations which include sociological, personal, and symbolic dimensions. When our approach encourages alternative views, students are more likely to be actively involved and take personal responsibility for their learning (Ettinger, 1990, p. 39). Lankford and Pankratz (1992) also hold to the importance of equipping students with critical thinking skills by providing forums for the exchange of contrasting ideas that promote reflective dialogue (p. 24).

Summary

I have attempted to make a case for the potential healing and transformative effect of some controversial art. In the past, religious dogmas and rituals reflected the working of the unconscious and protected the believer from the powerful contents of the unconscious. But contemporary Western culture has lost these psychic buffers. Taboo acts, as represented in visual and performance art, may act as a vehicle for keeping in check the *shadow* reality of a particular culture. Jung used the concept of the collective shadow to refer to those qualities neglected or rejected by a particular culture (Jacobi, 1967). Thus, *dark* refers to the Jungian notion of the *shadow*. It refers to material that is either unconscious or rejected in the individual or the culture. Cultural imperialism and hegemony usually result in the repression of collective psychic energy. When this oppression occurs, the dark, rejected material tends to be expressed in a more blatant, bizarre, and often violent forms. Within a symbol impoverished culture, controversial art may act as a regressive yet transformative movement into the depths of the psyche in order to reactivate the awe and fascination of the archetypes that are made manifest within ancient symbols, myths, and rituals.

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Editor's Note:
Social Action through Art

Karen T. Keifer-Boyd

Many artists now conceive their roles with a different sense of purpose than current aesthetic models sanction, even though there is yet no comprehensive theory or framework to encompass what they are doing. . . . A more participatory, socially interactive framework for art [is emerging]. . . . [This] new paradigm thinking involves a significant shift from objects to relationships. (Gablik, 1991, p. 7)

Continuing the tradition, begun with *JSTAE 14, The Gallery* features visual research, actions, and art that contribute to social change. Nine artists/activists/art educators, many serving as facilitators of projects involving diverse communities, have contributed images for *The Gallery.* The images direct our attention to issues of racism, exploitation, intolerance, war, world relations, joblessness, homelessness, a damaged infrastructure, women's health, equal rights, and peace.

I thank Elizabeth Hoffman, Don Krug, and the artists for writing descriptions to accompany the images. One image may communicate more than a treatise of words, but the descriptions help us to understand the context of these images. They represent actions situated in an experience.