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Notes

¹ Despite the fact that numerous art educators and scholars have problematized the role of discipline-based art education in a postmodern context (Chalmers, 1987; Duncum, 1990, 1997; Hamblen, 1997; McFee, 1988; Smith-Shank, 1995; Wilson, 1992, 1997a, 1997b), and within the last decade both theorists and practitioners of DBAE have embraced the study of multicultural, folk, and other forms of art, classroom examples are rarely drawn from areas outside the museum realm- outside the parameters of the artworld.

Art, Action Research, and Activism at Artpark

**Carole Woodlock &
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The History of Artpark

The authors have an ongoing interest in combining local history, culture and environmental issues as topics for teaching. As newcomers to western New York, we became fascinated with the story of Artpark in Lewiston, New York. High on the edge of the Niagara Gorge, the site of Artpark has a complicated history that has been enlivened by Native Americans, the French, the British, contemporary artists, senators, toxic waste specialists, visiting art teachers, and local students. The passage and effects of time on nature, art, and culture have been an important influence on art production since the beginning of Artpark in 1974. For over two decades, professional artists have been invited to build temporary sculptural installations that were dismantled or deteriorated due to human and natural forces, leaving artifacts on the site that echo works documented primarily in exhibition catalogues.

The region has been a culturally significant site since the Seneca tribe anointed it as sacred centuries ago. Seneca, French, and British battled over it in 1720 because a French trading post that was established there became a powerful trade center. This confluence of commerce

and cultures later led to development of the escarpment railway that connected the area to urban points east and south. The extraordinary potential for production of hydroelectric power culminated in the building of the massive Niagara Power project in the 1960's. This project disposed of thousands of tons of rock, refuse, and chemical waste at the site that seriously defaced the area, preventing residential development.

In the 1970's, Earl Brydges Sr., a powerful state senator, secured state funding for a theater in the 200-acre park. Funding was also obtained for emerging artists to create temporary artworks to exhibit during concerts and plays in the auditorium. In an exhibition catalogue for sculptural installations, Brydges (1988) wrote that the whole region around Niagara Falls has been in transition since ancient times. 12,000 years ago, the spectacular Niagara Falls was located where Artpark is today. The powerful force of the water eroded the rock south to where tourists from all over the world view "The Falls." Brydges wrote:

The processes of movement, erosion, and sediment play a sublime counterpoint behind all conceivable human activity. . . The eroded walls of the canyon created an advantageous portage for rails and bridges. Precipitously untenable for settlement, these terraces were convenient dumps for spoils from the massive excavations of the power plants upstream. (Brydges, p. 16)

While some invited Artpark artists responded to the apparent natural beauty of the outdoor park, many artists confronted issues in conservation, reclamation, community, and power. Many art installations were based on the conflicts in the region, the accumulating pollution from the river, and the toxic wastes buried beneath the soil near the auditorium.

The graduate seminar class discussed in this paper had an ultimate goal of combining research about the history of Artpark with the creation of site specific art installations. The participants addressed issues in epistemology through the study of the history of the region and through the work of the artists who have left their mark on Artpark. Participants raised issues relating to how the art works and historical documents alike privileged certain viewpoints and reflected certain ideologies. As practicing artists and art teachers, they collected and interpreted resources from archives, art criticism, art education sources, and personal visual documentation.

Before visiting the site, traditional research skills were introduced via library and internet searches. Part of their task was to question how history is created, documented, and maintained in traditional sources. The graduate students studied the history of the region through web sites, exhibition catalogues, and reviews in visual art publications. Because the artworks were not maintained on the sites, the students had to learn about them and interpret their meanings based on primarily black and white photographs or written reviews. They discussed how history and knowledge are often created from that which is photographed. They had to respond to their research and their seminar discussions through written journals and their own visual art installations. Written entries, plans for visual art, and the final art projects reflected how students sift through information and assign value to art that is impermanent and often created for activist purposes.

The Power of Water

Many of the Artpark artists made connections between the restorative power of water and the inspirational mythology built around springs, falls, rivers, and pools. Conventional wisdom tells us that water can wash, dissolve, and heal, given enough time. Artist Nancy Holt, in the first Artpark exhibit in 1974, installed *Hydra's Head*. Also

known as Constellation Pools, the work consisted of pools of water arranged to correspond to the stars in the constellation Hydra. Holt based her work on a saying from oral history of the Seneca Indians, that "pools of water are the eyes of the earth" (Pomeroy, 1988). This saying illuminates a concept of the earth as an entity similar to, and inseparable from, ourselves. In a less crowded, less polluted world, streams and rivers were able to purify themselves. In Hydra's Head, Holt was tapping commonsense associations of water as a cleanser, and connecting with an ancient oral tradition as sources of timeless knowledge and wisdom. The pools have disappeared, probably giving way to the inevitable drainage of water down the gorge. Water as an agent of decomposition exists on the site in contrast with the concept of timelessness.

O Nega Nus

The graduate seminar came upon the remains of a 1989 installation art piece that once reclaimed a natural spring, O Nega Nus, by artist Peter Richards. While looking for a site, Richards rediscovered an overgrown natural spring that had been covered in the 1960's by material excavated by the Niagara Power Project. After testing the water and finding it drinkable, he began plans for reclamation of the springs. He wrote, "The spring, or well, has always played a special role in the human psyche, offering images of refuge, well being, or relief" (Richards, 1989, p. 16). He speculated that the local inhabitants had used the spring because of the history of nearby remains of an indigenous village and the location of the first French trading post in the area. He reclaimed the covered site by removing trash, planting herbs, and developing a pond stocked with fish and other aquatic animals. In the summer of 1995, the seminar students recognized the site from photographs they had seen in the 1989 exhibition catalogue. They located the helix shaped channel in the photograph that is still visible, carved into the sandstone that continues to channel the water from the springs to the pond.

One of the graduate students made an installation that was related to the "Maids of the Mist" by visual artist Morton, who responded to how we document ancient and recent history of the region. In "Maids of the Mist," Morton performed a ritual near the Lewiston-Queenstown bridge, decorating a cement wall she found there with polaroid photographs. She also created a trail of oil paintings done in a "postcard" style to comment on the culture of tourism in the Niagara Falls region (Midland, 1976, p. 169). She positioned the postcard paintings near the scenes so that viewers could be seated in rows of theater seats and compare the actual landscape with the Polaroid "Production" view (p. 169).

In response to Morton's commentary on tourism, graduate student Michelle Seifried-Ruksc chose photography as her primary medium. She also reflected on the current state of the "O Nega Nus" spring and pond site in a digital photography installation called Looking in & on the pond. She first photographed the surrounding plant life of the site. After scanning her photographs, she used the computer to alter the color, scale, and texture of her collected imagery, to create an "unnatural" representation of the pond. She printed her collages in color and laminated the results. When she returned to the site, she floated the series on O Nega Nus pond. She photographed the effects of the water on the collages. Both Morton and Seifried-Ruksc explored the definition of "natural" and "unnatural" representation to comment on mediated meanings in photographs.

Time-Based Art and Interpretation

In their final projects and summaries, seminar students drew upon sources for theory in criticism and aesthetics. Several students addressed how photography mediates the representation of locale. Art educator Terry Barrett (1996) wrote about photography and how to use criticism and interpretation in teaching.

People's knowledge, beliefs, values, and attitudes—heavily influenced by their culture—are reflected in the photographs they take. Each photograph embodies a particular way of seeing and showing the world. Photographers make choices not only about what to photograph but also about how to capture an image on film, and often these choices are sophisticated. We need to interpret photographs in order to make it clear just what these inflections are (pp. 37–38).

Another useful source was critic Susan Sontag (1977) who addresses the issues of photography, history, and tourism. She wrote,

As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure. Thus, photography develops in tandem with one of the most characteristic of modern activities: tourism. (p. 8)

Contemporary critics such as these offer ways to present to students the concept of photography and other visual systems of representations as contestable documentation of "truth."

To re-interpret exhibition catalogue photographs of past site specific art installations, another Buffalo State College graduate student manipulated and reconstructed photographs in the locale. Wendy Nachreiner responded to the emptiness of the park through the creation of a temporary site-specific sculptural collage that used photocopies of documentation of the site. She also responded to the effects of the weather on the decomposing art. She researched past exhibition catalogues, interviewed people who also walked the gorge path and shared the results of her investigations with other students in the seminar. She pasted photocopied photographs and other

documentation onto a large stone that presented a resting spot along the gorge trail. Water-soluble glue was used to attach the photocopies to the stone. Nachreiner documented the process of deterioration of the collage throughout the fall of 1995. She sought to comment on the mediated cultural history of tourism through use of photography. As the collage gradually washed away with the change of season, it echoed other site-specific temporal installations of the past. The artist's documentation of the final collage brought together remnants of art production that spanned two decades.

Introducing Action Research

May (1993) wrote, "action research is the study and enhancement of one's own practice" and that "practitioners of any professional field and at any level can engage in action research" (p. 114). These students wove together many practices as artists, teachers, writers, and researchers. Before meeting at the site, the students were introduced to technologies for documenting their own explorations and gathering their own data. Traditional research methods and library searches were introduced as springboards for individual exploration. Students were asked to document their investigation of Artpark using video, photography, audio recording, and computer generated images as instruments for reflection. These documents were gathered to be shared and contested. The emphasis was not on a lasting final product or conclusion, but on the process of examining and responding.

Issues of interpretation and representation through photography in Artpark exhibition catalogues, art magazines and art reviews arose in seminar discussions. They also discussed the hierarchies in the art world that were reflected in news releases and reviews. The art installations were critiqued as representative of competing interests in the social order. Without art objects that can be marketed or made of permanent materials and maintained on public sites, many artists will

be forgotten . Many of the installations specifically addressed controversies surrounding ownership and environmental concerns about the history of toxic waste dumping by chemical companies in the area.

A primary emphasis in introducing action research was on exploring epistemology, or how we know what we know. May (1993) discusses the understanding of epistemological issues as fundamental to undertaking action research. May (1993) wrote that epistemology

refers not only to one's view of the nature of knowledge in general but of art knowledge in particular. Epistemological interests relate to how one might be concerned about such things as reliability, validity, objectivity, or what counts as evidence or truth claims. (p. 115)

The traditional model of a researcher as an objective analyst who dispenses current knowledge to practicing teachers is replaced by a model that merges the professional and personal in shared knowledge production.

Art and Epistemology

Interestingly, one of the installations pictured in the first 1974 exhibition catalogue specifically addressed issues of epistemology. An artist in the Artpark exhibition, Charles Simonds, constructed "Dwelling Places," a series of dwellings for imaginary people. This work was designed, according to the artist, to challenge how we construct history and how we view artifacts. Simonds' dwellings began in the beginning of the gorge area, near the remains of the old NY Central Railroad tunnel. The architectural structures were intended to give the viewer the feeling that the site and its history are being excavated and the viewer is part of reconstructing the story. This

fanciful approach countered traditional linear research methods and conclusions used to validate the truth about a site or a people. Since viewers were presented with a fictional site, they were free to use vision, touch, and imagination as primary tools of discovery. An irony lay in the pleasure of constructing knowledge that is improbable, based on Simond's fictional "ruins." The epistemological issue of belief in the final "historical" narrative was radically shifted. At the same time, hewn rocks from the "real" ruined entrance to the railway tunnel stood by as evidence of labor long past. The artist works to question realism and representation in visual art. In this work, as in many others, the artist created an illusion of ruins from an imaginary past to make us question in a conceptual way how we know what we know.

Redefining Nature and Culture

Many artists and scholars have been challenging and redefining the boundaries and political structures that control nature and culture. Early issues in environmental design in art education were introduced by June King McFee and Rowena Degge in *Art, culture, and environment*, published in 1977. This infusion of environmental awareness into art education coincided with many of the Artpark installation artworks that protested the toxic waste and chemical waste in the area. McFee and Degge (1977) focused on attention to diverse cultures and community based pedagogy that called for a contextual approach to teaching art.

According to environmentalist Gottlieb, "Deep ecology" is a term coined in the early seventies by philosopher Arne Naess, who wanted to distinguish between a "radical biocentric" view that brings humans into harmony with the environment and a "shallow anthropocentric" view that "places humans at the center of the human-environment relationship" (Neperud, 1995, p. 229). Deep ecology is also a contextual concept, wherein the human is not viewed as separate from nature,

but as a part of a larger dynamic ecosystem. These early educational efforts led to contemporary environmental design where humans are joined to "environmental concerns and are not outside looking in" (Neperud p. 227).

In *Landscape and Memory*, art historian Schama writes about experiencing landscape through ones' personal cultural history. He writes about the lack of human presence in many visual representations of the landscape we inhabit. He writes that "...the very act of identifying (not to mention photographing) the place presupposes our presence, and along with us all the heavy cultural backpacks that we lug with us on the trail" (1995, p. 7). He implies that a landscape or architectural site is not a fixed unchanging place with visual cues that can reveal a past phenomena or event. When an artist represents a landscape, the viewer sees what is in the artists' mind and culture as well as what is in the world that we designate as "nature." Both Simonds and Schama offer tools for individual interpretation of cultural history and its connection to site and place. Both force us to consider ourselves and our memories as part of our perceptions of a place. Their works also reconceptualize a separation between the individual and the natural world.

The summer seminar students at Artpark were encouraged to think critically and consider the impact of individual interpretations on cultural history as well as the natural environment. In *Maidens of the Mist*, artist Ree Morton constructed a paper and canvas ladder that became the focus of a performance that attempted to tell an untold story. In this 1979 performance, several women walked to the gorge, descended the ladder, and launched a wreath. Morton wrote that the performance was a gesture of rescue toward being female and to commemorate the "maidens," women who were supposedly sent over the falls. This famous and recently controversial legend, of the "maidens

of the mist," used to be told on tour boats of the same name that transport tourists close to the base of Niagara Falls. Local Seneca raised objections to the story, maintaining that Seneca women were not "sacrificed" as told on the tour boats. They objected to and actively protested this negative portrayal of Seneca history and culture. Well-known for their history of activism, the Seneca are part of the Six Nations of the Iroquois, one of the first federations for peace in this country. The sacrifice story is no longer told. The Seneca have also sought the return of several sacred properties in the area. In May 1999, the Lewiston Mound, a sacred property of the Seneca in the Artpark area, was restored to them. The history of this property demonstrates how cultural history can be re written and negotiated.

Art educators Doug Blandy and Elizabeth Hoffman (1993) began a paper by warning that the world is on the verge of irreversible environmental damage. They cite research showing that there are "more environmental than political refugees as people of the world flee from nuclear testing sites, toxic waste areas, contaminated water supplies, and human made deserts" (p. 22). They discuss "ecothery" that provides methods to radically alter the way we perceive the world to provide art education that is community based, without defining the community in an anthropocentric way. The community, they suggest, should be defined in a bioregional way.

Ronald Neperud (1995) wrote that environmental design education should shift from consumption to production and biodiversity. He said that the meanings of design and environment have shifted in ways that parallel modern/postmodern changes in contemporary society. It is a deep ecological view and a view of "new environmentalists" who "sought freedom for neighborhoods from toxicity and to freedom to exercise environmental choices" (p. 229.) By studying and investigating certain art installations on the Artpark

site, graduate students learned how visual artists represent such "deep ecological" views.

Art as Activism

Bingo, created by artist Gordon Matta-Clark in 1974, was an activist response to the impact of the Niagara gorge development on the surrounding urban community. The artist acted as a catalyst for change by making a statement about urban renewal in the economically depressed city of Niagara Falls in the US. The artist contacted the Niagara Falls Planning Commission to find a house that was targeted for demolition. In ten days time, pieces from the walls of the house were dismantled and transported to the Artpark site. Matta-Clark said, "In keeping with the history of construction debris on the Artpark site, the pieces were judiciously dumped and, with the forces of natural reclamation, these buildings became eternally mysterious remnants of an elaborate celebration of abandonment" (Edleman, 1976, p. 29). Matta-Clark addressed issues of power in communities confronted with the negative aftermath of industrial development. Bingo is an excellent example to show students how art and research of a site can be used to confront social problems.

In 1975, artist Jon Brooks constructed Wood Falls, a work installed purposely next to site marked "chemical spoils pile" in Artpark. The piece included a series of large wooden balls that rolled downhill aided by several variously shaped wooden ramps. The balls and the ramps were hewn by hand in wood found on the site. In this work, the artist used the natural site to highlight recent history of chemical waste dumping. Unregulated expansion of chemical industries in the area led to the dumping of toxic substances in the area as documented in a 1978 study (Office of Toxic Substances). Also in 1978, the state health department began the relocation of families in the nearby Love Canal community. Lois Gibbs, a resident and activist, wrote that grassroots

efforts made this now famous subdivision the first nationally recognized toxic waste dumpsite (Gibbs, 1982). By studying the documentation of Wood Falls, students can expand their understanding of the location as important to a history of environmental activism.

Activism as Action Research

Action Research is often linked to social and political change that grows out of the reflection of the researchers. One of May's (1997) assumptions underlying action research is that "such inquiry can purposefully address social inequities and issues of power" (p. 114). May further asserts that we must be "concerned with the ethical dimensions of inquiry" (p. 115). She cites a 1946 work by Lewin, who focused on social change for minority groups. For Lewin, "fact finding" was only part of the cycle in action research that also included "planning, acting, and analysis" (May, 1997, p. 120).

Noffke (1997) wrote that action research is a new paradigm that challenges existing epistemologies. This challenge results in upsetting the "political economy of knowledge production" (p. 307). "This emphasis denies neither the importance of political activity nor the generation of professional knowledge, but it views the main benefits of engaging in action research as lying in areas such as greater self-knowledge and fulfillment in one's work, a deeper understanding of one's own practice, and the development of personal relationships through researching together" (p. 306).

According to Noffke (1997), action research traces its lineage to the preeminent activist, Martin Luther King. In a 1966 address to the Conference on Social Change and the Role of Behavioral Scientists, King urged social scientists to move out of their laboratories and shift their focus to social problems. Noffke (1997) goes on to discuss how education for African Americans has been an inherently political

activity, citing studies of those forbidden to teach to enslaved African Americans. Noffke also discusses, as an example, an activist who was recently inducted to the Western New York Women's Hall of Fame, Lois Gibbs. Gibbs had a common goal with local citizens and several of the Artpark artists for her activism.

Noffke describes how Lois Gibbs, the activist mother in the Love Canal Community in the 1970's, engaged in action research by collecting data to expose injustice, to direct policy development, and to promote change in reacting to the dangers of toxic waste in this region. Gibbs had the ultimate goal of publicizing the contamination and providing compensation to the victims of Love Canal. Her interests coincided with the theme of several Artpark installations that were specifically activist for the purpose of raising awareness and calling for environmental reclamation at Artpark. It has taken until July 1999 for a settlement between Hooker Chemical and other companies to reimburse the Federal Government for its expenditure in the clean up of Love Canal. Western New Yorkers are fortunate that Lois Gibbs did not take a value-neutral approach to her research and activism.

Conclusion

We assert that art education should provide a venue for re-interpretation and criticism through visual art and action research that can bring about cultural and environmental reclamation. We can study artifacts like Brooks' hand hewn wooden balls, Morton's postcard paintings, or the changing natural elements in our physical world in works of Holt and Richards. We can also look at how artists use non-traditional materials, even refuse, as Matta-Clark did, to act as a catalyst for change. The temporal nature of most of the past Artpark art installations created a space for inquiry, leading the group to question how we learn about our past. Instead of some traditional aesthetics

that value timelessness in art production, students learned to consider the transitory and to embrace decomposition as a visual and conceptual mode. Students learned and debated how the influence of photography constructs history and changes our understanding and involvement in our natural world. To track the effects of time on both the natural and the cultural environments, students need to re conceptualize how we define and value culture. By studying these installations, we can define culture not only through artifacts in traditional media such as wood sculpture, but also through unseen accumulated byproducts of industrialization and struggles of communities affected by toxic waste. We can also look to the reclamation of traditional cultures, as the Seneca successfully did, to reclaim the Lewiston Mound. While we can study the past through cultural and environmental change, we can teach students to look through a proactive lens that enables telling untold stories. We should go further to use art and research to instill an attitude of stewardship toward our communities and bioregions.

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The Blackwell Summer ArtsProgram: An Experience in Community ReVitalization

Marjorie Cohee Manifold

Like many American cities, Richmond, Virginia is pockmarked by once middle-class neighborhoods that have fallen into decline and are now blighted by decayed and abandoned buildings. Among the more severely depressed areas of Richmond is the historic Blackwell district. Decades ago, in an effort to provide homes for the poorest of Richmond's citizens, row after row of nondescript, multi-family, brick-faced, public housing units or "projects" were erected in Blackwell. By the end of the 20th century, their boarded windows, crumbling infrastructures, and graffiti covered facades were sad but eloquent monuments to inefficacious governmental policies and the unrelenting poverty and despair of Blackwell's irresolute residents.

Taking advantage of grants made available by HOPE VI, a federal program of HUD aimed at revitalizing severely distressed public housing and addressing the social needs of their residents (HUD, 1999), Richmond's Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) targeted Blackwell for revitalization. The RRHA plan called for the demolition of 440 outdated run-down public housing units and the relocation of hundreds of families pending the construction of 99 new multi-family