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*Cover Design*  
Arthur Guagliumi  
Southern Connecticut State University
Un(becoming) is one of those adjectival words in the Merriam-Webster dictionary that holds the tension of its own contradiction. Its synonyms seem to summon an endless array of descriptive abjections: unsuitable, unflattering, unappealing, undesirable, unfitting, out of place, unfit, tasteless, malapropos, unseemly, indecorous, inappropriate, unsuitable. We need not go on to get the point. Becoming, on the other hand, appears entirely positive. It denotes well chosen, tasteful, presentable, welcoming, excellent, graceful, acceptable, agreeable, attractive, effective, and so on; in short, all that which is familiar, acceptable and beautiful. Un(becoming) is, therefore, purposefully presented as a portmanteau word containing the word (becoming), which always gains legitimacy in education through forms of transformation and growth toward some progressive end. It is the very tension, the ambiguity of transformation between these two positions that make it pregnant for creative deconstruction.

Freud (1919/1955) identified a similar word that conceals its own secret—unheimlich, literally meaning “un-home-like” or unfamiliar. Often it is translated as “uncanny,” meaning frightening, eerie, sinister, all synonyms that could just as well point to un(becoming). What was strange and uncanny (unheimlich) dwelled within what seemed very much at home (Heim) and “natural” or native (heimisch). The adjective heimlich in German also means something secretive and clandestine. The uncanny that dwells at the very heart/ or hearth of the home was
not to be revealed. Freud made the point that when this happened, an uncanny experience occurred. What had been familiar suddenly appeared inexplicably strange and alien, the perceiver was shocked by the revelation. There was a return of the repressed for what we perceive often represses what we do not wish to see. Un(becoming) is also such a word.

The twenty-fifth anniversary issue explores the paradoxes that surround the ambiguity and tensions of this word for art and art education, where the golden middle—the balance—that is so often called on for some sort of organic unity is vacated. When confronted with un(becoming) we must squarely face ambiguity and paradox, which an instrumental approach to education tries to eliminate. Organic wholeness, non-exclusion, harmony, androgyny, are those sorts of platitudes that emerge when the “secret” of un(becoming), its bold faced problematic of abjection, marginalization, and ugliness are faced and thought about. Un(becoming) points to what “sticks out like a sore thumb,” a place of suffering, an extremity that exists in pain. Such suffering could be a failure of recognition, it may well be outright rejection by structures that may or may not be apparent. Un(becoming) has also the connotation of an aesthetics of ugliness, which raises all sorts of issues as to who and what objects in art education are invested with an aestheticized “becoming.” Something “sticks out “again, but this time it is not ignored and abjected, as much as it is hated for its possible effects of ruination. Something ugly intervenes into the pristine beauty of the accepted picture. To be fanciful, an ugly toad like Shriek wins the hand of a princess who is really a “grrrl;“ she is willing to face the ugliness of her own Being to create a chance for their momentary happiness.

Un(becoming) has in it the portmanteau word “becoming” and here we can play with the notion of something that has yet to come out, has yet to appear, has yet to emerge. What rests within the habitus
of art education that could be given other "lines of flight" to follow Deleuze? Deleuze and Guattari's important concept of "becoming woman" is significant here. It is, after all, the first quantum, or molecular segment because woman's identification is absent. This same term paradoxically refers to a nomadic or itinerant machinic vector or force, a "middle-line" in-between a system (logos) and its dissipation—in-between, in their terms, molar and molecular lines of flight—in-between order and chaos, the proviso being that such a "quanta" of energy can "cause" a collapse back into order (molar state of closure) or offer new potentialities. What waits to be written and "recognized" for its potential impact on our field?

Finally, but not exhaustively, the notion of un(becoming)'s inverse is possible as well. What has to be "undone" within art education itself so that new "becomings" can emerge? Un(becoming) therefore can be interpreted as an unraveling, an un-knotting, or de-framing, dropping and opening up structures that too long have held the parenthesis of (becoming) hostage. The complexity of un(becoming) has opened up new vistas and imaginings for the authors of our quarter century journal. It is a theme that is quite rich in its implications for transformative change and justice that the social caucus stands behind.

The essays in this year's collection have risen to the occasion and met the challenge of un(becoming)'s problematic. Where possible we have taken the author's abstracts so that their contents are represented more accurately. The first section, The Un(becoming) in Us, is highly autobiographical, a bold attempt to recognize what Julia Kristeva meant by coming to terms with the "stranger in us." Such an approach presents us with the first paradox of un(becoming): the realization that there is no separation between object and subject; that positions where difference is still treated as benevolent "tolerance" continue to separate the subject from its object. By asking that we come to terms with the
difference that already dwells in us we find ourselves in transformative territories that leave behind any simple psychologies of the subject. The blurring of the inside and outside, what Jacques Lacan called "extimate" space, is well represented by the three essays and the images that open this section by Kevin Tavin's provocation on identity as a charting of growth. Anniina Suominen's addresses this question by directly drawing on Kristeva through her title: "Stranger Within." The title has even further reverberations when the definitive article is missing. It provides the possibility of self discovery that "becomes" ever more stranger "within" as she explores and unfolds her narrative. So here we have the tension of becoming and unbecoming creatively being explored. Suominen boldly attempts to name and articulate the suppressed aspects of her Finnish culture so that difference can be grasped where it lies: as a relationship of transference. She provides directions for a critical pedagogy that incorporates these insights.

A rather heart wrenching and emotional essay follows as Ed Check attempts to interrogate the signifier of what means to be "working class" when one achieves a position in the academy that bestows privilege and cultural capital, which then makes the tension between becoming and un(becoming) equally paradoxical. Check faces this dilemma squarely, attempting to explore the meaning of this signifier through his own art based on working class themes, and through mentoring students with working class backgrounds. As he told us, writing this essay was painfully difficult as he interrogated questions about himself, which are easily repressed and dismissed.

Ed Check's activism as an outed gay is well-known and admired by Caucus members. Hence it only seems appropriate that his essay be followed by the many active voices who have contributed to a self examination of their self-definition as LGBTIC (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Issues Caucus) to change to the possibility of what some feel to be the more inclusive term "Queer Issues Caucus." In their essay, "(Un)Becoming Queer/(Un)Becoming LGBTIC" the tension
seems to be between two lines of flight for “becoming.” The parenthesis surrounding the (Un) indicate that the quarrel over a signifier for self-definition: who owns it, who becomes excluded, who benefits, whose voice becomes masked, and so on. This is always a necessary but painful experience. The different perspective voices indicate the libidinal attachments any signifier has, and the question of mourning and healing that would be necessary to let it go, to suffer the loss of identity should the Caucus change its name, is hauntingly present.

On an equal journey of self-discovery of a stranger within is the last essay in this section by Tamara Katz. Here the signifier that is struggled with is her being /White/. In “Unbecoming White: Exposing Power and Privilege Within My Own Eurocentric Education,” Katz poignantly summarizes her essay as follows. “I have chosen to contextualize this social phenomenon through my writing by deconstructing my own complicity with racism throughout my life. By writing about my own imbedded and conditioned racism, I am exposing myself as an example. In order to become aware of the power and privileges of whiteness and begin the process of developing one’s own positive racial identity, it is important to deconstruct one’s education. Most of us in America have been educated through this Eurocentric based education. To undo the conditioning and belief system based on this, we must rethink and relearn the truth and find an unbiased and objective view of our history. I hope the process I have gone through will serve as pedagogy in itself for others.” While “an unbiased and objective view of our history” may be impossible, it is this very interrogation of “whiteness” that she initiates which helps to destabilize its libidinal hold over her.

The next section we have entitled Un(becoming) the Self and Other. Closely aligned with the previous section, the two essays here dwell more on the Other, not autobiographically as with the previous authors,
but with an equal recognition of the estimate space that makes for the paradox of becoming and un(becoming) possible. Sharon Chappell’s essay, “Toward Art-Making as Liberatory Pedagogy and Practice: Artists and Students in an Anti-bullying School Reform Initiative,” addresses the question of social aggression (bullying, gossiping, alliance/club forming) in elementary grade school and what processes specific to art-making can artists-in-residence utilize to address this? As she writes in her abstract “In the paper, I investigate this reform effort using the following questions: what are the conditions that define pedagogy as liberatory? What are the constraints and possibilities of art-making with youth as liberatory practice? How does the ideological framework of the school institution affect artists’ practice and their conceptualization of their own pedagogical role? What are the dangers and benefits of the working toward social reform through the arts in schools?” Chappell points out that a certain disavowal goes in these explorative classes despite the attempt to get at the root causes of such behavior through an artistic venue. The expressive output, however, was on victimhood with no claim to subjective acts of aggression. Through the work of drama educators such as Augusto Boal (e.g., *The Rainbow of Desire*) who specifically attempt to address the root cause of such behavior through a theatrical encounter where desire is confronted and the libidinal attachment to the Other comes out in the open, the possibility of transformative liberatory education remains alive.

Carrie Markello’s essay, “Visual Culture and Teenage Girls: Unraveling ‘Cultural’ Threads Tied to ‘Self’ and ‘Other’” explores the way the complex relationship between the visual and the cultural come together when it comes to young women’s concepts of their body image. Although this is a well-trodden territory, the body being a postmodern trope of the highest order, Markello refuses to make a simple and easy causal connection between media influences and women’s bodily images. Paradox and ambiguity are reinstated into this equation by
recognizing the complexity of identity. And, while no "solutions" are offered as such, it is to Markello's credit to provide the reader with an understanding of that complexity. Visual culture remains, then, one of the key theoretical challenges for the Social Caucus Theory.

In our third section, The Un(becoming) Aesthetic, opens with an artistic statement with images by Debora Smith-Shank. This is a fitting opening to a section that explores an "ugly" aesthetic; ugly in the paradoxical sense that un(becoming) puts on the table. What is shit or waste to one person is gold to another. The investment of libidinal value can change on a dime. So what are sublime moments of pleasure for President Bush as he watched the images of bombs exploding in Baghdad as Saddam Hussein's Palace was being destroyed, was absolute terror for those citizens on the ground who heard the explosions, and fled for their lives. Many did not make, so many that the silence over the number of civilians killed during the glorious short war has yet to be revealed with any sort of certainty. Smith-Shank's artistic statement needs no comment. Hers is a cathartic experience, an "ugly" reaction to the war on Iraq. It is fitting therefore that her images be followed by more "ugly" images, unfortunately calling upon that stereotype that was almost forgotten, "the ugly American." Meant more as a derisive term for the tourist who demands a replica of his or her own culture, condemning all that is different and Other, Nancy Pauly's essay on "Abu Ghraib's (Un)becoming Photographs: How Can Art Educators Address Current Images From Visual Cultural Perspectives?" provides a stunning example of visual cultural research to expose this hypocrisy. Her words, taken from her abstract, speak succinctly to what is at stake in such a smug aesthetic. "The vivid Abu Ghraib prison photographs became the visual culture fulcrum for an international media event that provoked discussion, outrage, and action in May of 2004. As an art educator, teacher educator, and human rights advocate,
I reacted strongly to the images and made connections to other experiences, thoughts, memories, histories, and feelings during this media event. Upon reflection I asked myself, if art teachers wanted to address these photographs, or other photographs in the news, from visual culture perspectives, what theories or questions would I recommend to guide them and their students? Then, what suggestions could I offer for making art?"

To live up to this promise she further writes: "This article aims to explore the multiple ways that teachers and students might investigate, analyze and interpret images in the mass media from visual culture perspectives, such as the images photographed at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2003. First, Abu Ghraib photographs are explored from diverse approaches as advocated by visual culture scholars using key concepts such as: representation, power/knowledge/truth, image, cultural narratives, and intertextual articulation. Next, the author explores her own reactions to experiencing the media event surrounding the Abu Ghraib photographs and discusses a collage she made in response another tragic event. Finally, suggestions are given about how teachers could investigate these images with students from visual culture perspectives and how students might respond to popular media culture through creative works using collage and assemblage."

As a change of direction, but equally dwelling on the "ugly" aesthetic Kathleen Keys presents the reader with the paradoxes that surround community pedagogy through four separate but nevertheless related incidents that took place at Boise State University. The first was a quarrel over the removal of a certain "statue," the Kaikoo sculpture from the universities quad. In the second incident, Keys identifies the many benefits that a First Nations artist, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith brought to the campus by utilizing a community pedagogical approach through her lectures and art. The third incident describes Keys' indignation towards the crass politicization that went on during the
university’s Governor’s Awards in the Arts, a community event gone astray. Lastly, she reflects on an exhibition, The Vanishing: Re-presenting the Chinese in Idaho, a community project with redeeming feature of recovering the traces of memory of Chinese immigrants who helped develop and settle Idaho. She concludes her essay, “Community Pedagogy in Idaho,” with a guideline as to how such community pedagogy in the Idaho arts community might be further promulgated.

The two essays in the next section, The Un(becoming) Outsiders, focus on the question of Outsider Art. Just what is Outsider Art and what is its role in relation to the broader field of art and art education are discussed in these two papers. Alice Wexler’s article, ”Identity Politics of Disability: The Other and the Secret Self,” discusses the importance of re-evaluating the distinctions made between such terms as normal and abnormal, and the unconscious assumptions that “Normals” make about the “Other.” As she further writes in her abstract, “because these assumptions are played out in the arts, it might also be useful to re-evaluate the long-held division between art therapy and art education. I will give a brief background of art made in institutions, and how from them came a hybrid form of art making lying somewhere between art therapy and art education. This model has something to tell art educators who may teach inside schools or in alternative settings. The principles that make art effective, such as self-motivation, and judicious intervention, are also effective in classroom studios. This article looks at the historical bias and institutionalized discrimination of individuals with disabilities that has existed in western culture and advocates for a new paradigm and scholarship for educators. It presents two examples of artists with disabilities who have benefited from this way of making art.”

Jan Jagodzinski also takes up the issue of Outsider Art, but for a different purpose and emphasis. Outsider art becomes a way to identify the paradox of art education itself, namely Outsider artists do not need
teachers. Further, he draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis to identify the realm of the psychic Real, which he argues is what Outside Art dramatically illustrates by way of Bataille's *informe*. His title, "In the Realm of the 'Real': Outsider Art and its Paradoxes for Art Educators," plays on the title given to the artistic oeuvre of Henry Darger by his "biographer" John McGregor—"In the Realms of the Unreal." The paradox explored here is what McGregor claims to be "Unreal" in Darger's art is just the opposite read from a Lacanian perspective. It is very "Real." Without this "unreal Real," Darger would have become psychotic.

In our last section, *The Technologies of Un(becoming)*, three papers are grouped together on the grounds that all of them explore in their own unique way the very importance of the new technologies in art education for social and political transformation. The title of this grouping also obliquely references Foucault's *Technologies of the Self* where he presents a notion of self-fashioning (*souci de soi*), as the ethical care of self that itself presents the *paradox* of technology: like fashion it can be imposed and/or freely chosen. Technologies of the self are devices—mechanical or otherwise—which make possible the social construction of personal identity. Beginning with "Visual Culture Explorations: Un/Becoming Art Educators," the collective co-authored essay by Knight, Keifer-Boyd and Amburgy utilize the Internet (as one such technology of the self) in an online dialogue between nine art educators who examine their teacher identity and the assumptions of that identity held together through their own artistic and teaching practices. Four assumptions are queried through these exchanges: 1) given the new technologies, the assumption as to whether 'real' artmaking is hands-on is decentered, 2) given the assumption that visual culture emphasizes the visual, for art educators what is to be made of the realm beyond the visual? 3) given the assumption that the Euro-
Western culture is central, how might that notion be decentered? Finally, 4) given that knowledge is transmitted by teachers, how might art teachers become aware that their own beliefs are socially constructed? The essay ends with a self-reflexive discussion on the new merits of visual culture and how it should be taught given the changed climate both in the *habitus* of art education and postindustrial societies in general.

The next essay by Alison Colman, ""Un/Becoming Digital: The Ontology of Technological Determination and its Implications for Art Education" attacks the heart of the paradox of the new computer digitalized technologies, their irreconcilable two-sidedness as both promising a vision of freedom and shared humanity, at the same time becoming an instrument of global surveillance and personal alienation. Colman's exploration of this paradox is best stated in her own words: "In this manuscript, I construct a conceptual framework from which to interrogate determinism regarding the use of digital information technology by drawing upon on the work of three contemporary philosophers of technology: Frederick Ferre (1995) Ian Barbour (1993), and Andrew Feenberg (1991). Each has explored human attitudes toward technology and devised broad categories framing these attitudes; I term these categories "technological optimists," "technological pessimists," and "technological contextualists." I use these categories to examine determinist attitudes about the Internet and the use of the Internet in contemporary classrooms. I then address the question "what does this have to do with art education?" by providing three examples of artists and artist collectives whose use of the Internet highlights information technology as a social/cultural practice as opposed to a tool. These examples include British "artivist" Heath Bunting, artist collective eToy, and telepresence artist Eduardo Kac. I conclude with suggestions for art educators how to circumvent
technological determinism when constructing a curriculum that includes the use of new and emerging technologies for art making.”

Our last essay in this collection is by Sara Wilson McKay. McKay’s essay “People Should Come to Work” is a provocation. It’s subtitle, “Un-becoming Cartesian Subjects and Objects in Art Education” reveals her attack. It is a pleasure to read an attempt to theorize a much needed post-Cartesian subject for art educators today by calling upon two metaphors—the rhizome and the cyborg, which may help us re-vision vision. We applaud McKay for engaging us in a much-needed discussion, which calls on the work of Deleuze and Guattari and those theorists who have been captured by their work. McKay is able to bridge the gap of modernism and postmodernism by calling on the democratic ideals of John Dewey into her discussion, reminding us not to lose sight of the need for democratic responsibility. Again, we leave the reader with the author’s own words as developed in her abstract. “This article calls for a reexamination of the work that artworks can do in our communities, particularly by calling into question the usual Cartesian seeing subject/seen object dichotomy, which typically results in a vicious circle of passivity—both a passive (often victimized) seen object and a passive (generally apathetic) viewer. By unpacking the connections between democracy and conflict and offering two metaphors—the rhizome and the cyborg—that can explore such connections in the art/viewer dynamic, I argue for a post-Cartesian sense of intersubjectivity that activates both viewer and art mutually through metaphoric extensions of both. The implication of such activation expands the expected role of art in our communities and draws attention to the necessary engagement by viewers in and for a democracy.”
To close, this collection of authors presented here have all explored the portmanteau word un(becoming) in their own way. Some have preferred to place the stress on the (un). Others decided that the slash was more important to make their points—un/becoming. In one case a hyphen was used. Still others seemed not to demarcate the "crossing" of the two terms at all. But all have shown us that it is the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of the logic that un(becoming) presents where the truly fruitful discussions can and do emerge. In a climate of education where ambiguity and paradox is slowly eroded through the testing mania of Bush's *No Child Left Behind* for funding dollars, and the continued emphasis on instrumental relationship to knowledge so that each nation can compete globally for more profit dollars, the Social Caucus theory continues to be engaged in a "line of flight" that attempts to keep the questions in the abyss of the paradox alive. We hope that the readers of this journal will come to the same conclusion after reading this collection of essays.
An Unbecoming Child: A (per)verse Growth Chart

Kevin Tavin

Within silhouettes of male and female figures, cut out in the space between two walls, are chemically transferred images from (Spectral traces of) photos in my life—adulthood to childhood. These are representations of d(evolved) (dis)solutions to the crisis between my / self and other(s). The growth chart is reversed and perverse with the marking and masking of my maleness/ femaleness. It is (the) unbecoming of me.
I began to try to represent to myself what was happening to me by using my camera. But how to represent myself to myself, through my own visual point of view, and how to find out what I needed to articulate it.... and give [it] visual form? (Spence, 1988, p. 155)

I base my teaching philosophy on the continuous self-directed learning of an individual. My goal is to help my students to learn to problematize their perception, their ways of thinking, their understanding of themselves, and their satisfaction with achieved learning goals. I support my students in their journeys of becoming critical searchers and inquirers of knowledge, visuality, and perceived reality. Although it is apparent they have learned to question authority and pre-given role and behavior models, I watch them searching for shortcuts for the answers within the complex structure of too many potential solutions.

While I greatly respect my students, who are often first generation college students, at the same time I am frequently powerless in trying to explain how they, as consumers of knowledge, are protected and
blinded by the seemingly free media of this country. When U.S. troops entered Iraq, I was troubled by my students' limited interest in finding information published by sources other than American. I sadly realized how the information provided by governments that opposed the U.S. military actions in Iraq, such as France or Germany, was muted from my students by language barriers. The students too easily assumed and adopted the roles of “we” and the “other” respectively when the mainstream media, provided only homogenous and synchronized reports from the “outside.”

My intention is to discuss the importance of critical investigation, analysis, and questioning of the silenced and suppressed aspects of one’s cultural identity that strongly influence our interaction with others, and the way we perceive knowledge and ourselves, and, furthermore, to promote visual and written/oral narratives as a method leading to an open dialogue. Through this process we come to an increased and more complex critical understanding of diversity and “otherness” as we learn to recognize the suppressed stranger within one’s self. To explain the connections I make between the importance of learning to name and articulate the suppressed aspects of one’s self and critical diversity education, I first discuss my understanding of identity construction and cultural identity. I aim to question the independent and self-directed identity model of one’s cultural identity, our socially and culturally learned role as an independent individual, and introduce my understanding of relational identity. I introduce the suggested stranger and discuss the educator’s participatory role in producing otherness. I then discuss how I began to question the construction of cultural identity through my personal experiences and an arts-based autoethnographic research process and how I learned to identify and express the silenced and suppressed aspects of my identity that, though previously unidentifiable by conscious thought, strongly influenced my self-perception and my everyday interactions. I call
attention to the importance of critically studying the identification categories and classifications commonly emphasized in pedagogical discussion on the learner’s cultural identity. Finally I make suggestions for critical pedagogical practices that help the learner to go beyond easily identifiable categories of his/her personal identity and learn to understand and critically investigate themselves in their varied cultural contexts in more complex ways.

Although Jo Spence (1988) focuses on photography as a method of studying and representing self, I believe that the following presents the power of visual representation and the self-directed critical study of one’s identity:

If we could learn new ways of using our cameras we could start by telling our own stories in different ways...we could use the camera for a dialogue with ourselves, ...to de-censorize ourselves, or as a type of visual diary-writing....We [could] begin to re-imag(in)e who we are, both visually and verbally. (Spence, 1988, p. 214)

Culture and identity / Beyond Categories and Relational Identity

I am on the island. My legs long and slim against the granite stone marked by the moving ice, thousands of years ago. Warm sun behind my back filling what’s behind with yellow light. I smell and hear the sea and I feel playful, but grounded. Even though my feet couldn’t grow roots, even though the surface is too hard to spear, I feel rooted, grounded in stone, sea and its history. I can afford playfulness apart from where I now live, returned to where I used to belong. I have missed these sounds and smells, and I have longed for this connection.

Rarely do I find it though. I find it with my mother, I feel it with my sisters, but everything else has already changed and become something other than what it was when I left.
My thoughts are heavy, but uplifted with safety. If something were to happen, this sea would rescue me, these people would swim after me, this island would not forget. I would become another mark on the stone, marked against the moving ice next winter. I would rest in the colorful leaves molding against these rocks. I would become a small bit of autumn that the sea wind would carry and I could drink the juice of these tiny flowers if I ever felt thirst.
It may indeed be idealistic to stress the importance of individual thought and identity construction as a means of providing answers to the intercultural, interethnic, and interpersonal communication difficulties with which we seem to be increasingly struggling. Yet, I believe it is imperative to re-evaluate the methods we use and theories we follow in studying personal and cultural identity. Reprising the argument in my prior research, I call attention to the sociocultural borders we build and live by and within, and to the moments of contradiction at the borders and their eventual or possible rupture. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) suggests a search for a more complex understanding of cultural and communal identity:

What is...need[ed] [is] to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide a terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular and communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (pp. 1-2).

Culture is in-flux, multilayered, alive, simultaneous and based on creative thinking; a constant search for meaning and a negotiation of ethical behavior. Culture is very personal, because one’s age, gender, sexuality, social and economic class, exceptionality, geographic location, religion, political status and ideas, language, ethnicity, and racial identity all influence the construction of personal cultural identity and self-perception (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; and Freedman & Stuhr, 2004). Moreover, how a person perceives one’s cultural identity creates guidelines and boundaries for how one views the world and how “otherness” is understood.
Like culture, identity is complex, changing and plural, and self-perception, as it can be communicated through artistic and cultural behavior or representation, is thus only a temporary expression of one’s understanding of a culture (Stuhr, Krug, & Scott, 1995) and self. In order to further develop philosophies of diversity art education and make suggestions for finding and surfacing the suppressed stranger within, it is crucial to discuss and re-evaluate how identity is understood. Readily defined categories and classifications are related to, depend on, and change along with their evolving historical and cultural context (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997), but identity determines how we understand reality, culture, and theory. Then again, our cultural, political and theoretical frameworks strongly influence our self-perception. The political and cultural influence of critical multiculturalism, interculturalism, feminism, and postmodernism in arts, theory, and education could be argued to have caused our fragmented identity: We understand ourselves as plural, and identity as dynamic and always changing, appearing somewhat schizophrenic when we consider everything that forms the temporary selves that we are. However, the continuous process of forming a selfhood needs to be understood through the relational (Eakin, 1999) and the performative (Smith, 1998). According to Smith, there is no individual, single self, or coherent selfhood; rather, selfhood is temporarily found through performative acts of the narration of self. Stages of performance are multiple, causing the self to be always fragmentary and making coherence impossible.

I understand identity as constructed in relation to the cultural, political and historical framework of one’s life, in which families (or alternatives to the bourgeois family) often provide the most influential institution by which traditions and ideas are continued. A person finds agency through relationships with others and his/her environment, but I do not believe in an individualistic, autonomous self, but rather
an identity that embodies the temporary agency of a self that is repeatedly and actively gained in an interaction with one's immediate, physical, social, and imagined environment.

Several educators and scholars, especially feminist scholars, (Eakin, 1999; Witherell & Noddings 1991; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986) have written about relationality in the process of identity formation and learning to understand one's self. Although it has been argued that women especially form their identities in relationship to the significant people in their lives, Bhabha's (1994) analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1998) depicts this suggested 'feminine' communal identity.

The women speak...from a space 'in-between each other' which is a communal space. They explore an 'interpersonal' reality that appears within the poetic image as if it were in parentheses - aesthetically distanced, held back, and yet historically framed. (p. 17)

I do not intend to argue that understanding women's identities as communal and formed in-between, as well as within one's self, means that all women are the same or even similar. While occupying a gendered identity, a woman as a "subject occupies different subject positions at different moments [and simultaneously], and she cannot be determined by any single discursive apparatus" (Ong, 1995, p. 351). Gender identity is only part of one's identity and some feminist scholars', writers', and artists' work (Behar & Gordon, 1995; hooks 1998; 1996; 1995; & 1994, Carrie Mae Weems' art work, 1998) investigates the complexity of identity construction that crosses the set boundaries between the self and other. Lila Abu-Lughod (1995) states: "By working with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partially the self,
we might be moving beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide" (p. 347). Rishma Dunlop (1999) suggests that by allowing the space in the educational curriculum, critical reading of personal narratives, and interpersonal dialogue for the search of identity that is formed in a “third space” (p. 57) we can learn to recognize and understand the “other within” one’s self (p. 59).

Narrative and Relational Identity

Narration and storytelling shape one’s identity and expand one’s views about self and “otherness.” Three important aspects or components of narrative form a relational autobiographical narration: (1) the autobiographical aspect, the narrative of the author; (2) the biographical story of the “other”; and (3) the story of the story. (Eakin, 1999). The story of the story is fundamental in understanding Eakin’s concept of relationality. It constructs the written narrative; it is about the birth of the story and about the complicated relationship between the narrator and the other.” Through the story of the story we come to understand how and under what circumstances the narrative is composed. It tells us something fundamental about the relational structure of the autobiographer’s identity” (p. 60). It reveals the complex nature of constant self-reflective practices between self and other and is often similar to ethnographers’ personal accounts about the process of their research. However, in relational narration, the story of the story is foundational to the narrative told, giving the story its structure. In relational autobiographies the story of self is as important as the story of the other. This dynamic relationship is reflected in the story of the story, which is the narration of developing the co-operation, performances, and relationship between the self-reflective narrator and the other. This relationship and the creation of the other’s story provide the narrator “a measure of self-determination” (p. 61) and a possibility of re-reading the constructed self.
Furthermore, it becomes possible to understand relationality between a person, his/her surroundings, and others through shared stories and life experiences; we easily relate to the story of the narrator, and read our own stories through complex parallel readings of the other. This relational reflexive behavior promotes acceptance, because the complex and layered reading of personal and others' narratives helps us in identifying different dimensions and aspects of ourselves, some which have been suppressed and silenced, dominated by painful and problematic life experiences or trapped in pre-accepted self-identification categories. It is also through these personal narratives that we best relate to another person's experience and come to question pre-existing assumptions and stereotypes. Reading the work of Art Spiegelman (1986; 1991), Jo Spence (1986; 1995), Carrie Mae Weems' (1998) and, Sandra and Sheila Ortiz-Taylor's (1996) written and visual narratives helps us understand not only their life stories, but also our own, thus providing influential ways of teaching for educators whose goals are deepening understanding of otherness and more democratic and equal societies.

Relationality, of course, is not Eakin's (1999) original term; he has adapted the idea from previous feminist studies and the significance of his approach lies in that he enlarges and expands relationality to all autobiographical narration, not just women's. However, he is not alone in making this argument, nor is this phenomenon unique to literary studies of autobiography. Connections to relationality can be found in Michael Renov's (1999) discussions of domestic ethnography in film studies in which he focuses on the complexity of and boundaries between the self and the other, and the representation of the domestic world in film. While he views domestic ethnography as a supplement to autobiography, he further claims that there is a "peculiar sort of reciprocity (which might equally be termed self-interest) built into the
construction of Other subjectivities in this paraethnographic mode” (p. 142).

**National or Cultural Identity and the Problematic Stranger Within**

Not many texts by art educators specifically deal with the construction of individual identity but commonly discuss its relationship to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, multicultural education and visual culture. The basis for socially constructive or critical multicultural education, with its goals of equity and a more democratic society, is the understanding of how age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, context, language, ethnicity, and politics affect the formation of a person’s identities (Hesford, 1999; Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001). I understand visuality and visual culture as active concepts that include art, but which are not limited to forms of visual representations; they are complex means through which identities are both produced and represented. Visual culture circulates “visibilities (and poli[ces] invisibilities), stereotypes, power relations, the ability to know and to verify” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 20). But I argue we need more research and critical discussion on how individual learners come to combine information received using different ways of perceiving and modes of understanding, how this information constructs their self-perception, and what are the possible methods for investigating and problematizing the perceived notion of self.

Not all talk of identity involves thinking of the self as unitary or contained; nor need boundaries be conceived in ways that make the identity closed, autonomous or impermeable. We need to think individuality differently, allowing the potentiality for otherness to exist within it, as well as alongside it. (Battersby, 1999, p. 355)
It can be argued that the concept of a nation state is problematic and its institutional and cultural maintenance need to be critically discussed (Alasuutari, 2001; Mirzoeff, 2000). Nicholas Mirzoeff (2000) argues that interpretation is the prevalent threat for a modernist nation state. While diasporic, hybrid, plural, multiple, in-flux identities constructed in-between and in the interstices of culture are widely discussed today (Bhabha, 1994; Mirzoeff, 2000), it is relevant to return to Stuart Hall’s (2000) definition of diasporic identity, which “lives through, not despite difference: by hybridity... are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (p. 31).

Using Bhabha’s (1994) text and the feminist analysis of domesticity as my theoretical basis, I argue that there are links between the questioning of national identity as homogenous, and one’s private, domestic life. While it is in the space of culturally conflictual situations and the emergence of minority and women’s narratives that the need to re-negotiate the larger, cultural narratives becomes evident, it is also in those moments that the “borders between home and world become confused” (p. 9).

The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the ‘beyond’ that establishes the boundary; a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9).
Feminist scholars in particular have brought attention to the richness of culturally embedded codes and power relations that can be studied through the complex interactions of domesticity. While turning the private into public in the form of fiction or biography is not new, it is characteristic to the postmodern era to read culture through such strategies.

...it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence...there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9).

Lately, I have been fascinated by the concept of strangeness within us, not just alongside (Battersby, 1999). A stranger is a newcomer to the community, somebody who lives on the edge, in-between, in the interstices (Bhabha, 1994); it is not necessarily that the 'newcomer' is profoundly different from the 'regulars' but something about her presence evokes uneasiness, questions the communal ways, initiates fear and self-protection. Thus the strangeness within is not about the newcomer but about the recognition of otherness within one's self, only evoked by the interaction with the newcomer. For a stranger to be heard requires "enter[ing] into dialogical relationship with her. Real dialogue allows for the uniqueness of the other to be brought forth" (Shabatay, 1991, p. 136). Finding a language for this dialogue requires us not to enter the dialogue with which we are already familiar, but requires questioning the dominant rhetoric within which she is heard. Referring to Goethe, Bhabha (1994) suggests that a nation's cultural life is homogenously and unconsciously lived without questioning the national culture. If we can come to recognize the relationship between
the domestic and public and the relationality of identity construction, we may be able to form new questions and educational models for teaching critical awareness and acceptance toward “strangeness” and “other.” Finally, we can arrive at the questions of exclusive/inclusive nations, and the (un)necessity to cherish and protect distinct nationality. I suggest a critical pedagogy that devotes time in the curriculum to form visual and textual narratives, and critically studies them as well as promotes relational readings of narratives of all kinds. We can begin by reading the stories of the stranger and allow these strangers’ stories to lead us to the stranger waiting to be discovered within ourselves.

**Educator and the Construction of Otherness**

Challenging and insightful articles outline theoretical changes to the curriculum (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Desai, 2003; Davenport, 2000), yet I believe that changing pedagogy requires more information about the personal involvement of the educators practicing disciplinary reform. Through learning about myself as a teacher and scholar, I have gained an increasing acceptance of the more private aspects of myself. On the other hand, learning to understand my private self has made me more aware and open-minded as a teacher. Andra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles (2000) state that “knowing ourselves as persons is very much part of knowing ourselves as professionals” (p. 15), and bell hooks (1994) talks about “engaged pedagogy” that strives for well-being and points out that “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (p. 15).

Wendy Hesford (1999) writes about the politics of academic identity as they relate to autobiography, and how this must be seen within the contemporary political and cultural framework. She calls attention to the participatory role of the educators “in the construction of ‘other’” (p. xxx). To gain a deeper understanding of their participation in constructing and supporting stereotypical “otherness” in their
academic practices she, similarly to many art educators, advises all educators “to be accountable for the narratives of gender, race, and class that they [the educators] inhabit” (p. xxx). Quoting Peter McLaren (1995), Hesford argues that educators “need to be able to read critically the narratives that are already reading us” (p. xxx, author’s emphasis). Motivated in by McLaren’s assertions, my current research is a study on “What narratives of identity and difference shape [my] authority, and how can [I] use the authority conferred to [me] to challenge and expose these [mine and my students’] narratives?” (p. xxx). Through this research process I have gained an appreciation for my students’ stories and come to understand better how to help them investigate their complex and in-flux global, national, local and personal cultural identities through the critical study of visuality.

Excavations into my Personal Silences

I have come to write this text through my own experiences as a “newcomer” in a previously unknown country and social system. Like any stranger in a new environment I had to learn to cope and manage according to what appeared to me as strangely defined coding for appropriate social behavior. Unlike many other newcomers, however, I was simultaneously working as a university educator teaching about issues of diversity, social awareness, and art within the United States, thus I was in a position of assumed power. I had come to the United States from Finland to study art education at the Ph. D. level and my main interest at that point was to learn about theory and the various philosophical thoughts influencing teaching and our understanding of visual knowledge construction. In my dissertation work I positioned myself through different components of my identity “in relation to the great traditions, be these epistemic structures, the signification of specific location and its national/cultural identification or gendered narratives and histories” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 123) that have formed my
self-perception. My life and story began reshaping as I relocated to a new social and cultural context at The Ohio State University and my study focused on the first three years of my life there. However, I soon found myself delving into layers of family history to understand how it was that, even before I was born, events took place that influenced who I assumed I was. Although I had found this change in living conditions and cultural environment helpful in questioning my socially learned and adopted identity, my “sliding” back to old behavioral patterns and daily routines required investigation when I was re-writing my identity. In this process I applied different theoretical and conceptual frameworks to approach the concept of identity construction. While my writing relates to many contemporary, social, and cultural phenomena, I am mainly writing myself into the map or genre of writing and representation. According to Carol B. Stack (1993) “the goal is to explore and experiment – to learn and write as much about our understanding of how we locate our voice[s] in our writing as possible” (p. 81).

My study focused around the questions, “Who am I?” and “How is my culturally informed identity and self-perception constructed?” The starting point for the critical study of cultural identity was the first months in this country, and how the culture and educational system, new professional roles, changed the way I viewed myself. The following three years caused a questioning all the aspects of life and knowledge I had previously accepted as the basis of my existence. During the first year in Ohio I was a stranger, an alien, and I experienced the privileges and downfalls of being incognito. The beauty of strangeness lies in the freedom for self-creation, but fears are easily fed by insecurity and a need to become part of the new society and to feel accepted. Virginia Shabatay (1991) following Stein’s (1995) work, argues that a stranger faces difficulty and struggle in a new cultural and living situation because s/he is still living in part in the old and what was before. The
richness of this multicultural experience is that I have lived multiple lives, personalities, and roles at once that may never merge. Yet, multiplicity naturally causes a loss of a united sense of self.

**Visuality, Narration, and the Ways I Came to Learn About Myself**

*Pool*

Swim, swim, swim and float.
Water gives you comfort.
Soft, calm, slow and easy,

*Surrounded by older people.*
The founding idea of my arts-based autoethnographic research methodology that I suggest here is to learn more about the process of identity construction. One naturally desires positionality and the sense of security provided by a feeling of belonging within the intricate structures of everyday life as well as within the academy. One of the ways belonging could be understood is “the ability to live out complex and reflexive identities which acknowledge language, knowledge, gender and race as modes of self-positioning” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 13). We read texts and visuals from our contemporary perspectives, bringing personal desires and needs into reading (Kuhn, 1995). Through this ‘reading,’ and the interpretation of the information, Irit Rogoff (2000) suggests that we “fragment, appropriate, rewrite and utterly transform those texts” while these visuals and texts simultaneously change and mold our understanding of culture and our place within it; visuals and texts “constitute us rather than being subjected to historical readings by us” (p. 9). According to Rogoff, by constantly asking oneself the question “Where do I belong?” and pursuing the articulation of this question in relationship to one’s life brings awareness to the process of self-positioning, in-flux identity and the complex process of writing one’s self into culture.

Although Laurel Richardson (2000a) focuses on text I believe that the concept “writing, a method of inquiry” can be extended to visuals, artistic visual production, and narratives that combine visuals and text. I have used the artistic medium of photography, the medium I know the best and am most comfortable with to study changes in my life situation, ideals, and self-perception. Most of my ideas are born while photographing, and I can best analyze and understand my behavior when writing in a fictional or poetic form in relationship to my photographs. Only lately have I found writing to be an important expression for self-reflexivity and therapy through the theoretical writing of my dissertation. I now write to verbalize my conceptual
understanding; I write to further the complexity of embodied and tacit knowledge represented in my photographs. For me, combining and intertwining visuals and writing has "created new ways of writing and reading" (Richardson, 2000b, p. 154). It has changed me—the ways I understand knowledge, the ways I read and write/create visuals and text. This, I believe, is due to the nature of visual and bodily knowledge, the awareness and understanding of something that has not 'reached' the level of linguistic self-expression or logic. I am not merely reading theoretical knowledge into existing visuals (though this also happens) as could be argued, but claiming that some of the epistemological understandings existed before I came to write about them. My work is theoretically influenced by critical visual sociology (Chaplin, 1994); critical visual ethnography (Pink, 2001); embedded in critical ethnography (Clifford, 1986) that recognizes the partial nature of all ethnographic knowledge; cultural studies (Hall, 1997); and interdisciplinary visual culture studies (Mirzoeff, 1999; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001) and studies of visual methodologies (Rose, 2001) that have greatly advanced the social, cultural, and political nature of visual knowledge. I have studied visual and textual autobiographies and memoirs as well as theories of autobiographical writing, knowledge construction and individual artists' works. I have also been involved in studying contemporary art theory, and the study of artists' work (especially that of women photographers) whose work is engaged in studying cultural, gendered and situated identity and who have written about their own work. Like other scholars studying the construction of visual knowledge, I argue that the study of art and art theory helps to critically re-evaluate the academic methods of studying identity. I am also, and especially, influenced by feminist works that through questioning the established practices "produce different structures of intelligibility that, in turn, produce different epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies" (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 2).
I have written my story into being through domestic ethnography that "play[s] at the boundaries of inside and outside" (Renov, 1999, p. 141). The process "functions as a vehicle of self-examination, a means through which to construct self-knowledge through recourse to the familial other" (p. 141), but it has been written as a narrative about the cultural framework within which I think and function. I question my subjectivity, identity, authority and intelligibility during the process, never separating these from the discourse. I have broken boundaries between the other and myself through our mingled stories inseparable by blood, past, memories and experiences. While I started studying my identity with the intention of approaching this study from the perspectives of gender and ethnic or national identity, what exposed me to the hybridity of experience was not the physical and mental transition from one context to another (Finland to the United States) but the problematic overlapping of these layered and complex experiences that most strongly caused the confusing tearing down of the boundaries and fragmentation of selfhood – or the hybridity. Through my experiences in Ohio, I found myself simultaneously mainstreamed based on my looks and skin color yet exotic for the same reasons. For example, the overlapping similarities, yet the defined and complex differences of assumed female roles helped me to understand the problematic nature of these globalized roles but simultaneously exacerbated the context bound experience of my female identity (jagodzinski, 1996). Today, several years into the process of conscious and intense study of my selfhood, I realize that the current relationality that I use to reflect my identity is the mythical essence of Finnish identity. I found that the most painful re-negotiations of my identity stemmed from the heretofore well-hidden and deeply cherished notions of my romanticized national identity, the influence of traditions, folklore, personal and public past that culminate in my experiences of nature and self. I studied my relationships to women in my family and
analyzed the changes in my behavior as I tried to modify my attitudes to fit the cultural roles based upon women in an American university context, yet I was slow to understand my own gender positioning (or my confusion of why I could not quite fit) through these gender behavioral models. Through the alternative and artistic research methods (named in the next section of this article), I was able to temporarily enter a realm of lost boundaries; a realm where caring about the real, unreal, imagined and fantasized did not direct my inquiry for knowledge but a desire to understand my self as embodied, spiritual, emotional, and vulnerable. What I wrote was not solely personal, professional, or theoretical but articulated my understanding of all these aspects. Giving space for the vulnerable nature of exposing one's self to the public scrutiny through my visual installations and texts, I lost some of the fears of facing problems I did not know how to solve. I became, for brief moments, one with my breath as if meditating, and found a pause from the reflection or vision I had learned to think of as my self.

Understanding Research and Educational Practices as Acts of Self-Creation

I believe that people create an understanding of who they are through reflecting on the stories they tell and the images and other documents created about their lives. I believe that as educators all the research we do, all the academic texts we publish, and all our interactions with our students also change our understanding of who we are (Richardson, 1997). Accordingly, conducting research and redefining one's pedagogical philosophy is an active form of self-(re)creation; thus I find it important to actively engage in processes that seek for methods of researching visual and linguistic knowledge construction that best express one's intentions and epistemological understanding. While artists are trained to be deeply involved in the process of inquiry emotionally and through bodily experiences,
scholarly and scientific modes of cultural and social learning often separate the body, senses, and emotions from the process of knowledge construction and devalue forms of knowledge construction other than logic (Pink, 2001). Many art educators have shifted their curriculum toward teaching about life in its multiplicity through the critical study of art and visual culture and several scholars have shown innovative interest in studying humanity through art and creative behavior. I believe, however, that we need to continue critically re-evaluating the methods we use to study art, visual cognition, and identity construction with the intention of creating links between the complexity of knowledge construction and how identity can be critically studied in the context of an increasingly diverse society through local, personal and artistic experiences and critical self-reflective methods.

Finding and modifying methods for my research forms the heart of my epistemological narrative that is tightly linked to the more personal narrative as it is told and that evolves simultaneously. Through my research I promote an alternative approach to researching cultural identity, one based on personal experiences using investigation through creative behavior and visuality. At the beginning, I did not know what kind of research project would emerge from my intuitive and creative investigation. I started photographing my life and writing short stories based on the photographs, but theory was read into my behavior and practices afterward while writing my behavior into wider cultural contexts. In this kind of research process, methods and theory form and emerge through practice and deep engagement with the research topic. What I aimed to construct was an allegorical and layered text that continually turns inward, travels and forms connections between different layers, stages, and through the process, interprets itself (Clifford, 1986).
Some Suggested Methods for Studying Self-perception

The following are the methods that evolved during the research process of studying my self-perception and aspects of my socially and culturally constructed identity.

Photographing and participant observation as methods are based on critical visual ethnography and critical visual anthropology but also intuition, bodily-, tacit-, and craftsmanship-knowledge, as well as recognition and analysis of feelings and emotions. I photograph people I socialize with and places I feel comfortable or am troubled in, such as the roof patio of my dorm building, the only window of my room, and the old gym swimming pool where I did water aerobics with elderly women.

When engaged in "photo-writing" (my own term) I write, with my photographs in front of me, informal, self-reflective narratives. I meditate with chosen photographs. This is a secondary creative process and an important stage between the initial visual process and the subsequent critical essay writing.

Memory work is a systematic study of memory in the political and social context through public and private visual documents: a critical analysis and recollection of past events and memories, also silenced and untold, in the contemporary context. Performing memory work involves three stages: (1) awakening of the questioning of life and world around a person (critical consciousness); (2) finding a voice for the questioning followed by (3) endless learning and understanding when this critical consciousness has been awakened (Annette Kuhn, 1995, 3 stages modified from pp. 102-103). Memory work as a method has helped me to theorize and contextualize my personal narratives.
Photo therapy means that instead of studying existing documents, alternative representations of self are created to critically analyze one's socially and culturally constructed identity (Spence, 1988, 1995, Spence and Solomon, 1995). Through photographing my surroundings, family, and the people I socialize with, I created an alternative “family album,” and alternative representations of myself. This method, combining visual and verbal narratives, provides me with an opportunity to actively re-create multiple representations of myself as I wish to be “seen.” Although I am mostly physically absent from my images, all my images discuss and re-negotiate my identity in relationship to the topic currently under investigation. The absence of my body is a way of claiming the power of gaze instead of being observed. My study is about my vision and visuality, not about others seeing me.

The process of “discovering” the above-mentioned two image-based methods prepared me for re-writing and re-conceptualizing all aspects of my study as well as my self.

Critical essay writing as a method intertwines visuals, creative and theoretical / academic essay writing. Through critical essay writing I analyze my visuality and photo-writing in the light of relevant theories and in the disciplinary context. This method is influenced by autoethnography, narrative research, arts-based research, and especially Laurel Richardson's approach to “writing as a method of inquiry” (1997; 2000a; 2000b).

Through public display and presentation of my visuals and creative writing, presentations and exhibits, I offer myself and my texts and images to public exposure and discussion. While I have sometimes been anxious about the feedback and about being judged based on the criteria and expectations of quality set for
professional artists, I have been excited to add another level to the interpretation of the images. The feedback has been less judgmental and more focused around sharing personal narratives. One of the main goals I set for my projects is to provide spectators a way to relate to another person’s narrative and in that, find temporary self-determination.

**Pedagogical Suggestions**

As educators we need to start from the learner’s perspective in helping them define the elements that structure his/her “self,” when the learner in their current and contemporary situation is willing and able to define themselves. We can then help our students move beyond these boundaries and begin questioning his/her identity as previously perceived.

I suggest that similar methods of visual and self-reflective inquiry as those described earlier in this article can be adapted to the study of self and other in diversity education at different levels. Methods of visual ethnography, domestic ethnography, critical visual anthropology, photo-writing, memory work, photo (any visual) therapy, critical essay writing based on critical visual analysis, and public display and discussion of visual artifacts can be used as tools for critically studying identity and the learner’s perception of themselves. Through these visual and critical inquiries of self in relationship to personal and public experiences, we ask learners to alter themselves in transforming their thinking and worldview. The pre-requisite for engaged (hooks, 1994) and critical pedagogy is the creation of safe communal atmosphere in the classroom that supports sharing. The process of studying knowledge construction and self requires willingness to expose one’s self to public scrutiny, which at times, hurts. If the classroom is seen as a place where attitudes and behavior are transgressed the educator has to be willing to share their personal narratives and experiences first (hooks, 1994).
Although we write about or create images about ourselves, and the text discusses themes specific to our personal lives and thinking, I believe that we can find temporary self-determination through relating to other’s personal narratives. As an educator, I believe that there is a continuous need to re-evaluate methods used in multicultural and diversity education. My critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1994; hooks, 1994; 1995; Hesford, 1999; Dunlop, 1999) is based on an in-depth study and understanding of individual learners’ as well as cultural producers’ contextual lives and narratives. Acknowledging the achievements of diversity education thus far, I assert that we need to reconsider the categories that some multicultural and ethnic philosophies of education assume and instead focus on interpersonal communication and critical reflection on a very basic individual level. I am not suggesting that we should abandon categories, but that we need to see beyond gender, ethnic, cultural, sexual, geopolitical, and social classifications, and focus on the complexity and fluidity of identity construction. We have to be willing to listen, hear, and share, take the time and commit to developing further understandings of “otherness,” that which is strange to us, and recognize the “stranger” (Shabatay, 1991) and otherness within ourselves (Dunlop, 1999) that makes interpersonal communication complicated. Pausing and recognizing the uniqueness, strangeness, and sameness of each learner, we can create new grounds for acceptance. This requires curricular material and practices that do not rely on preset categories but recognizes the relational nature of identity, the inseparable nature of I and the other, the “polyphonic nature of our world,” emphasizes the “multiplicity of voice[s], the intertwining of speech and silence, ellipses, autobiography and fiction” (Dunlop, 1999, p. 59), and still reads these experiences through the recognition of the importance of individual experience. Central to my pedagogy is pausing to listen to self or other when sensing that silences that inform our experiences are not being articulated.
Notes

1 While I talk about autobiographical narration, I believe that the same aspects or principles of telling a story can be applied to everyday narration and short anecdotes. Stories about self are always told in relation to self as seen reflected in others and even short stories are often about this (re)negotiation of relationality between self and others.

References


Okay. To go back to “it ain’t pretty.” Like when I’m trying to ignore the shame or rage. Or my every once-in-awhile hatred of the rich. A hatred that made me want to shoot, string up, demolish a bunch of preppies in Harvard Square last year. To destroy them. For that air about them. That entitled air. That they had been born to inherit the earth. It’s all there: the careless way they hold their forks, wear their clothes, snap for the waitress (who used to be me). It brought out that “I wish I had a machine gun” feeling. That urge to blow their leisured heads right off. (Vanderbosch, 1997, p. 89)

1. Introduction—My Confusion About Class

I am writing this piece as a white self-identified gay male raised working class associate professor in art who is actively reconnecting with my past/roots, trying to better understand my sense of isolation in academe and my slowly seething anger directed at many of my academic colleagues. By working class I mean 2nd and 3rd generation Polish-American, devout Catholic, white privilege, contractor father, housewife mother, large family, in and out of poverty at times, racist with no real information. By academe I mean working for six years to achieve and be granted tenure at Texas Tech University in visual studies.
I am uncomfortable in middle and upper class settings (especially academe) where I continuously monitor my body movements, and edit my language, my stories, and my white working class histories. I get angry when colleagues talk with authority about “white trash” or ways for workers and the poor to redeem themselves.

Though I addressed working class issues in my dissertation (Check, 1996), gender and sexuality played topmost in my academic work (Check, 1992; Check, 1996; Check & Lampela, 1999; Check, 2002; Check & Akins, 2003, 2004; Lampela & Check, 2003; Check, 2004; Akins, Check & Riley 2004) to date. My reading testimonies about others’ experiences being raised working class and their relationships and analyses of class and academe (Kadi, 1996; Lubrano, 2004; Penelope, 1994; Ruffo, 1997; Ryan & Sackrey, 1984; Vanderbosch, 1997) prompt me to not only reconsider but question many middle and upper class and queer ways of knowing that I assumed falsely as universals: “the closet,” “coming out,” “good pedagogy,” history and social justice. So, this paper is a way for me to continue my struggle with my working class roots and rethink the relationship of them to my experiences in academe, my scholarship, teaching, and art.

Using feminist autobiography and Standpoint Theory (Langlois, 1997), I examine working class issues in relation to academe, retracing my social class roots and values chronologically, concluding with questions and strategies to help me (and others) better cope with the silence and ignorance surrounding social class in academe. I continually ask myself: What does it mean for me to leave behind working class values and histories? Is it possible to be a working class person in academe? If so, how? How can I mentor for other working class students and colleagues?

This is at least a start of a conversation that voices concerns about my frustration of being raised working class now living somewhere in a middle. The more I self-label working class roots, the less comfortable
middle and upper class people are around me—possibly because they will have to admit benefiting from an unjust and stacked system? As Penelope (1994) noted years ago, class is not a discussion topic in the United States and "...the silence about it is institutionally approved of and perpetuated" (p. 17). Penelope also states that each of us may have unclear senses of our class identities, but each of us "learns our 'place' and that of others" (p. 22). Penelope names this an "institutionalized injustice" that covertly and overtly operates against working people. My shame about growing up working class and anger against such injustice is starting to make more sense to me. For me to change from an unconscious state of ignorance and denial to what was happening to me to a conscious state, a heightened awareness of how class matters (hooks, 2000) is paradigmatic and my only place to begin.

This re-examination of social class issues has many of my white middle and upper class friends and colleagues scoffing at my remembering and reclaiming, often denigrating my rethinking/reclamation of working class experiences. They assert that a Master's and Ph. D. disqualify me from being working class. My more recent coming to working class consciousness (hooks, 2000) about my past parallels Lubrano's (2004) concept of being in "limbo," being an outsider to both working and middle class. Other reactions and feelings I have, like shame, anger, rage, and grief (hooks, 2000; Kadi, 1996; Vanderbosch, 1997) against a culture that renders invisible the stories and histories of working people is also ever present in my mind. My decision to begin to talk through these issues publicly is both frightening and empowering, frightening and empowering, ....

The tensions of crossing class ranks, if that's what happened, is uniquely frustrating. Until I became aware of a working class email listing and other testimonies analyzing class in academe, (Kadi, 1996; Lubrano, 2004; Ryan, & Sackrey, 1984; Vanderbosch, 1997), I had no
way of making sense of frustrations, shames, and pain that I was experiencing in my everyday life.

2. Theories and Allies—Class Distinctions

The following section is my attempt at a theory section. I'm looking for theory to develop a framework to connect these difficult topics. I want to forewarn you the reader that though my allies are clear to me, my theories are at best jagged and awkward.

Entitlement (As Seen From the Outside)

In *Thinking Class: Sketches from a Cultural Worker*, Joanna Kadi (1996) writes about growing up working class, lesbian, Arab-American (Lebanese), poet and artist. She explores the lifelong tensions she experiences associated with growing up working class and Arab and pursuing professional degrees. She delineates a stupid/smart dichotomy, taught early as a kid that working class kids were not as bright as their middle class peers in schools. Suggesting that a stupid/smart dichotomy is the hallmark of academe she states:

> University degrees constitute a symbol, a marker, so the world understands the bearer comes from the middle/upper class. Degrees separate this group from lowly, unprivileged, stupid workers. (p. 52)

Kadi (1996) challenges some myths about class: not all rich people are smart; no matter what initials follow your name, you are still working class; and that she didn’t “acquire privilege, entitlement and arrogance after slogging it out in the academy” (p. 53). Privilege, entitlement and arrogance serve as the defining characteristics of the middle class for me. Coupled with Freire’s (1970) concept of “false
generosity,” that gifts given come with strings attached, I grieve when I think that the middle and upper classes are much more interested in maintaining the status quo than social change or justice. Bowles and Gintis (1976) demonstrated this about education. The power to name and maintain; for example, Kadi questions a common-held notion (held by many middle and upper class colleagues) that class identity changes if one component of class changes. Kadi disagrees with middle class people who view a good salary and a university degree as middle class:

...I believe class identity comes from many places: education, values, culture, income, dwelling, lifestyle, manners, friends, ancestry, language, expectations, desires, sense of entitlement, religion, neighborhood, amount of privacy. If one of these, such as education, shifts dramatically, class identity doesn’t change...When a person with class privilege takes on the task of defining and articulating class location of someone from a lower class, it’s arrogant and offensive. (p. 53)

This is important for me, because many friends and colleagues suggest that because I am an academic, I am no longer working class (and many more of them would not want to identify with working class people). If I am not working class, can I be working class identified? What about my roots and personal social histories and the values and life strategies I was raised with? So I have to ask, Why the erasure? Why can I be totally discounted if I identify as working class?

So, I’ve been scrambling to put to words as to why my roots should count. I often take the side of working people in academic discussions about unions, agency, and dignity. For me, the importance of working class and working poor lives cannot be underestimated, nor diminished—especially in terms of queer liberation in the United States. It was the workers and street people who started gay liberation—not the middle or upper classes. Both Gomez (1995) and Kadi (1996) remind
us that it was Black and Puerto Rican drag queens, dykes (white butches and femmes) and street people that fought back in June of 1969 at the Stonewall Inn. Jamakaya’s (1988) twenty-seven oral histories of working women in Wisconsin labor unions throughout the twentieth century reminds me how workers must continue to fight for benefits many middle and upper class persons take for granted: just compensation, safe work environments, and health and pension benefits.

In *In Limbo: Blue Collar Roots, White Collar Dreams*, Alfred Lubrano (2004) writes about growing up working class and attending college, and now as a journalist how he “straddles” two social worlds. He refers to his experiences as a type of “limbo,” where he doesn’t belong to either class. Lubrano interviewed over one hundred white collar professionals who have similar working class backgrounds and found like frustrations and alienations. Lubrano notes that gaining an understanding of social class aids “straddlers” (his term) in understanding their frustrations, angers, and fears. He reports that these professionals stated how the class chasms and pain never go away. Judith Herman’s (1992) analysis of violence, from domestic abuse to political terror—labeled trauma and recovery, aptly applies to the war zones of social class in our culture, especially as I have experienced them. And Jane Vanderbosch’s (1997) analysis of working class anger and shame helps me better understand what it means to be shut out of entitlement. So I have to ask myself; am I perceiving middle class arrogance from my perspective alone? Is it the reality for middle class persons? How they experience it or feel about it? I don’t know.

**Passing?**

Passing is a strategy used by many people to assimilate or infiltrate other groups—for example gay and bisexual people passing for straight. I tried to pass for straight and middle class when I started to think about self-identifying as gay—what others would describe as “coming
out of the closet" (circa early 1980s). In this instance, I was trying to protect myself psychically and physically. The type of class passing that Jane Vanderbosch (1997) describes is another version even deeper felt, a passing that eventually nullified and/or vilified her working class past. She talks about passing, as a reality of growing up working class with formal education, getting her farther from who she was: “I pass. First for smart. Then educated. And then middle-class” (p. 86). “I have been trained by twenty-six years of education to speak middle-class, think middle-class, make love middle-class. In other words, to pass” (p. 89). Eventually, it hurt too much for me to hear my friends put down workers, unions, and my reality of being raised working class. My own attempts to purchase my way to another social class reality brought only more debt and dissatisfaction. My refusal to pass for me and to accept the reality of my working class roots was revolutionary and at the same time disquieting. So, let me next explain how I got the values I have. The values that impact my living, teaching, activism, and making art.

3. My Working Class—Growing Up

What Did I Leave Behind?

I can still feel the excitements in my mother’s kitchen (circa early 1960s) and my dad’s carpentry shop in Manitowoc, WI. The kitchen was the hub of our house. My mother was always baking, cooking and/or cleaning. She baked homemade bread on Tuesdays and Fridays. (We took a loaf of bread to the Felician (Polish) Sister’s convent of our parish every Friday.) My mother also made chocolate and crumb cakes from scratch, peanut squares, pies (apple, rhubarb, and raspberry), chocolate chip cookies, homemade donuts, bakkas, and apple coffee cake. Mulligan stew, chicken dinners on Sundays, roasts,
dumplings, fish fries on Fridays, canned mushrooms, pickles...the list is endless.

My family socialized in the kitchen especially when company stopped by. My dad’s shop was where many old and long retired white working class men would gather on Saturday mornings. There, they would talk about their lives, local politics, and they made things. They would sweep the floors, cut wood, build, stain, and finish furniture, and work on assorted other small projects (fix windows, pile scrap wood, etc.). Saturdays were great days to visit the shop. My dad had time to talk on Saturdays. He sometimes looked more relaxed in comparison with the rest of the week. (But he always had time for us no matter when.) And I had time to listen, watch and smell: listen to the men’s stories, watch old men socialize, and smell the woods, glues, paints, and other smells of the shop. Oral traditions were time honored in the shop. On cold nights when my dad had to fire-up the old shop wood furnace, I would tag along and build things out of wood like cranes, small buildings, and cities, while my dad stoked the furnace in the basement. This was my initial inspiration for making wood collages.

I was raised with four brothers and one sister. My uncles were welders, painters, electricians, carpenters, and farmers. My aunts worked as cooks, custodians, cashiers, and in factories. My dad had fourteen brothers and sisters, my mom ten. We were raised Polish Catholic. My mom had an eighth grade education. She grew up during the Great Depression and though wanting to go on to high school because she was bright and loved learning, had to forgo high school and work at the “Goods” (Mirro Aluminum Company, Manitowoc, WI) to help bring in money to support her mother and siblings at home. My dad grew up on a farm and received a sixth grade education. I was the first in my family to go to college.
Not only was there no college education fund for me, but also I had no expectation of receiving one. I attended my first year of college at a local two-year center in Manitowoc and worked nights, weekends and summers to pay for my tuition. The idea was to save money before transferring to a larger state university. I was able to find a $6.05 paying job at a large Manitowoc bakery (circa 1975) driving a 3/4-semi truck from the bakery to a warehouse two blocks away. I worked for five summers at this job before I quit. When I transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, I found other jobs (main desk clerk at a dorm, bouncer at a local club, and part-time gigs at factories) during the school year to pay for food and housing. My parents paid part of my tuition and room and board during my first year away at school. I took out my first loan in my senior year of school.

The only expectation expressed by my family was that I get a good paying job. And like many first generation working class kids going to college, I became a teacher. Other working class friends studied to be nurses and accountants.

4. My Working Class—Walking Away?

Trying to Pass as Middle Class?

I was an elementary art teacher for ten years in a small rural school district (1980-1989). I taught 780 kids, at three schools, with no art rooms. I became active in my teacher’s union, often holding an office. I got a Master’s degree at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee part-time over a four-year period (1983-1987) incurring more college debt. I always remember getting some summer job to help pay the bills.
I went to gay clubs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the early 1980s (pre-AIDS awareness). I noticed many clean-cut and well-groomed white men sporting shirts with monogrammed horses near the front pocket. I had no idea what Ralph Lauren Polo shirts were and much more importantly what they represented (status, fashion, integrity). Not only was I trying to pass for straight when not at clubs, I was also trying to pass for middle class when at clubs. I charged higher-end clothes on department store credit cards, borrowed money to purchase a used BMW in good condition, and tried to change my manners, look, and talk to pass for middle class. I wanted to pass so I could find a handsome boy friend/husband—which I never did find.

I somehow knew that to be successful and handsome also meant access to sex, love and dates. And I needed to be like them, the middle class gay white guys if I wanted to date them. Gay male white pornography demonstrated this clearly. I learned about sex and sexuality in bars, in beds and from pornography. Middle class gay white guys wanted fantasies of working men to “get off” on, but resorted to their own kind for dating.

I eventually found that “passing” for middle class was something that was too costly for me—money-wise and emotionally. I did not have the money to vacation, buy clothes, and eat out as my middle class white gay peers did. I did not have the stories or experiences to date middle and upper class men to hold their attention for more than a few dates. I had to work year round.

My sense of social justice emerged in my middle 20s (circa mid 1980s) in gay bars watching white middle class closeted and out gay men put down drag queens (some who were my friends). I noticed I now had even less in common with the men I wanted to date. I also noticed how colleagues at school frequently put down working poor and working class elementary kids and their families. I remember having a conversation with a fifth grader, Marc Smith, whose two
brothers and sister had different dads. Many teachers looked down on his mom (many referred to her as the town slut) and siblings. Marc was bright and a nice kid and so were his brothers and sister. I remember telling him that he had seven more years of bias and abuse to endure in the local schools, but that he was bright and a good kid and the bias from this community would eventually end and he could go on to other things, go on to other places. Now I wonder if my advice was misleading or just wrong?

When I left teaching to pursue a Ph. D. in 1989, I concentrated on feminist and queer issues and activisms (Check, 1992; Check, 1996). This was the primary lens I used for understanding my identities, art, research and teaching. As I volunteered at a gay social agency, I noticed social and political chasms between gay men and lesbians over issues such as dating, sex, relationships, community, misogyny, class, violence, and AIDS, to name a few. Feminism and its critique of gender power relations inspired me to combine academics and activism. My dissertation, "My Self-Education as a Gay Artist" (Check, 1996), explored issues of gender, sexuality and social class as war zones (Herman, 1992; Wojnarowicz, 1991). Theoretically and academically I focused more on sexuality issues than class issues. Other than from friends in the university Socialist group, class was rarely mentioned as an art or education issue. My socialist friends said life was all about class. Not persuaded wholly and knowing class had a lot to do with life, I replied that it was mostly about gender and sexuality. This is insightful for me now given the class shame and terror I experienced.

Class shame influenced my dating middle and upper class gay men during this period (1989-1996). Dating and desire now had conscious class implications. I often realized I didn't have anything in common with middle and upper class gay men in terms of culture. I often battled shame attacks—Why wasn't I more successful? Why didn't I have more access to capital and power? Why didn't I have a better
house? Trips to Europe? There was always pressure to hang at cool spaces, spaces that were usually expensive. I added more debt.

It was during this time that Jane Vanderbosch became a class ally for me. She grew up white working class in Queens. She chose not to work in academe. Initially, I didn’t understand why Jane, who graduated with a Ph. D. in Education and Women’s Studies from a Big Ten university, opted not to teach in academe. After negative social class experiences during a postdoctoral fellowship in Women’s Studies, she settled for temporary menial jobs, though later served as a Director of a non-profit agency while continuing her work as a poet and essayist. It was during this time that Jane mentored me while I wrote my dissertation. Jane edited my dissertation and really “chaired” my dissertation. (By that I mean Jane was not a member of my official committee but without her advice and support, I would not have graduated.) Jane (1997) often spoke and wrote about her class shame and anger. She often felt ashamed of not faring better, given her education, eventually going on disability before dying of cancer. We had many late night talks about queers, activisms, art, teaching, and growing up working class.

I initially felt my dissertation alienated me from my family. My primary focus on gay issues marginalized me from my working roots, often portraying my family and relatives as stereotypes when in reality they accepted and loved me. I recall my sister cried as she discussed my dissertation after reading it. “Did you not enjoy anything growing up?” she asked me. I explained how the dissertation was just a small part of my understanding my roots. But my sister’s responses made me realize I was not prepared to talk about working class issues in relation to my family, my teaching and my art. I was still in a shame place in terms of class and didn’t realize it. I realize this now.
5. My Working Class—Here and Now

I was astonished in 1999 when I discovered a working class academics’ email list. Established by Barbara Peters in 1994, it is a venue for working-class academics to discuss issues (personal, research, classroom, social, tenure, etc.) related to being raised working class and teaching in middle class environs. I identified with the first-person testimony emails about working class academics’ frustrations, fears and traumas working in academe. The emails criticized the institutionalized values of middle class academics: the entitlements, the arrogance, the confidence, the social connections, internships, individual achievements, senses of knowing, self-importance, and grandiose social histories. I related to the cultural splits posted in emails: the physical, emotional, and intellectual self-doubts and shames that are created in moving from one class to another, in this case from working class to middle class, what I and others have referred to as social class war zones (Check, 2004; Herman, 1992; Wojnarowicz, 1991), the experiences of being outsiders.

It was the emails that inspired me to read and reread first person testimonies and related working class issues (Bourdieu, 1984; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; hooks, 1995, 2000; Langlois, 1997; Lubrano, 2004; Nader, 2004; Payne, 1996; Ryan & Sackrey, 1984; Schlosser, 2002; Swanson, 2001; Tea, 2003; Zandy, 2001) and the relationship of class to gay issues (Kadi, 1996; Penelope, 1994; Ruffo, 1997; Wojnarowicz, 1991). These testimonies revealed to me how the working class is connected to money, power and cultural capital.

I better understand now why my friend, mentor, writer, poet, and activist Jane Vanderbosch chose not to become an academic. She said she could not compromise her gender, sexual and social class truths for the middle and upper class bias and the politics of academe.

That I dislike attending faculty parties and other social spaces where colleagues talk department business, money and politics, or talk
about their accomplishments, recent research findings, or recent trips overseas, is part of my “limbo” experience. Clothes, conference trips (often not funded by my department), eating out, and living in an isolated part of the country, contribute to my growing debt—one that I feel shame about. Paying off graduate loans and credit card debt doesn’t allow for disposable income for me to go to Europe or travel anywhere for that matter. Investments? How do I do that? In spite of this, my friend Rose (raised upper class) reminds me I am part of the professional class and there are rules to follow and to adhere to.

I purchased a smaller house (1,022 square feet) in a working class neighborhood that some of my middle and upper class acquaintances have said is not in a safe neighborhood. My neighborhood is a cross section of races, ethnicities and social classes. Evidently, the presence of any workers or poor people creates a feeling of non-safety for some of them as they openly expressed this to me (though they could not produce facts to back their fears).

Built in 1942, I was impressed with its simplicity, an original Chambers stove (in good working condition), wood floors and tall windows. I’ve kept the red counter kitchen tile intact to honor the choices made by the original owners. My house aesthetic has a definite industrial and working class feel. By that I mean I work with the original architecture and when possible, I purchase period working class accessories. I try to restore my house/recycle it as I do in my art. I furnish it with diner plates and other simple working class articles that I remember growing up with. My friend June (working class artist) says my house is a “working class repository of sentimental relics from my past” (June White, personal communication, October 10, 2004). My reclamation is consistent with working class values I was raised on—to respect the land (I xeriscape), not waste, simplicity, and getting the job done.
I often compare my simplicity to that of friend’s who own larger houses, sometimes with shame, sometimes with pride. I have bouts of shame about my aesthetic choices—often made out of necessity and not by choice. I don’t have the money and do not want to put myself farther into debt. How do I pay $5,000 for a couch? It’s just not in me. It’s not my training. In the fall of 2004, I had my house appraised for a refinance loan. I intended to reduce some credit card debt. The appraisal was so shockingly low, that I said to my friend June, “It’s official. I am white trash.” In my opinion, the house was seen as less than acceptable by the biased appraiser. After a bout of self-doubt and shame, I called a local mortgage company that appraised my house closer to the city’s appraisal (they appraised it 33% higher than the first appraiser) and I was able to continue with the refinancing.

Mentoring Working Class Students

Class membership doesn’t ensure awful art or good art. Class membership does ensure whose art, whose cultural expression, is valued and appreciated. (Kadi, 1996, p. 21)

Recently (September 27, 2004), one of our Ph. D. students died suddenly. Jo Beth defined herself as growing up white poverty/trash in a research class I taught. Being white, female, working poor, and fat made her feel out of place in academe most of the time. Jo Beth regaled us with stories and perspectives of white West Texas working poor. She often felt out of place in the Ph. D. program, but was determined to make it work for her. Like a working person, she tried to do much on her own. Three days before she died, she failed a qualifying exam that I was present at. I purposefully stayed after the exam to comfort her and offer my advising for her next, second and final attempt. We talked about social class issues that worked against her exam performance. I assured her that she was intelligent and not a failure. I
often ally with working class students in our graduate and undergraduate programs.

An undergraduate student (Tara Smith, personal communication, September 26, 2004) talked about how biased an undergraduate education course is in terms of social class views that totally ignores working people’s perspectives. Tara said the education course is totally biased and skewed toward middle class ways of knowing and teaching. Her histories and values were not represented nor even mentioned in the course. “It was as if working people do not exist,” she commented. She was angry and determined to speak up about the slight and question her professor in the next class.

Renee, a graduate student, often talks about her working class background and the silence surrounding class issues, and especially working people, in her graduate education classes. She is writing a thesis about networks of queer working kids, how they support each other, how she supports them, and how institutions ignore their lives and needs. We chatted about her thesis as we drove three hours to Jo Beth’s funeral in Pampa, Texas. Jo Beth’s service was short, replete with Elvis’ version of “Amazing Grace” and The Eagles “Desperado.” On our return to Lubbock, we stopped in Amarillo, Texas, where I bought Renee’s dinner. I told her I wanted her to fondly remember our trip and talk about her thesis ideas, and thought food was a great way to achieve that goal. I wanted her to be excited and not afraid while writing, and sad when her writing is over. A much different way to think about writing as artful—a birthing of ideas and experiences—working class experiences.

I am finding that conflict over class issues is inevitable and messy. In the summer of 2004 at a National Women’s Studies Conference in Milwaukee, WI, a young woman approached me in the exhibits halls thanking me for my comments about growing up white and working class at an earlier session that morning titled “Being Queer, Teaching
Queer: Our Silence Will Not Protect Us." At that session, I said I offered students options of how to address me in classes—Ed or Dr. Check, based on their comfort levels. A Black lesbian academic with a poverty background lambasted me, that my male privilege and whiteness permitted such naming/addressing options (and she was right). I regret that she failed to see my efforts to rethink my current classroom practices in terms of my working class background rather than solely by my whiteness and maleness. Back in the exhibit hall, the female student further wondered if she herself had a working class background. I asked her what her parents did for livings. She said her dad worked in a factory. We then talked at length about how her parents not having money for cable (she was told there was nothing good on cable so why get it) and other money issues were directly related to her working class background.

The Black lesbian was right. I knew how to pass for straight and middle class with white male skin privilege, though I am suspecting it is even much more complex than that. Vanderbosch (1997) suggests that we are all in pain around class issues, trained to think they are different pains, hence not recognizing the need for more dialogue about class:

And as long as we believe that, as long as we act on those beliefs, dear reader, we are going to kick the shit out of one another. Or get the shit kicked out of us, And nothing will ever change. (p. 94)

The psychic and emotional pain is incredible as experienced by me and described by students. And the silence is deafening.
Revisiting My Working Class Family and Places
Where I Grew Up

In June 2004 I visited my Aunt Helen for an hour while passing through my hometown, this right after the Women’s Studies Conference. As we visited in her kitchen, I looked around in disbelief. The brick home that seemed so huge when I was a kid seemed so much smaller now with a definitely working class aesthetic. My visit betrayed my childhood memories. Where were the large rooms with very nice things? How now years later, Aunt Helen in her late eighties, her still beautiful flowers in her backyard—and everything so working class—how could I have missed this?

In December 2003, my sister tells me about her uneasiness shopping in a higher end gourmet shop in a local Milwaukee suburb. I rage inside at the clerk who made my sister feel so unwelcome, made my sister feel less than, that she was out of her social class. I am angry that my sister had to feel that way. I am angry we grew up working class. And yet, I am planning a trip home (October 2004) to document some factories and other industrial landscapes for an art poster series surveying the lives of working class people. Part of my vision is to document people and buildings that haven’t disappeared yet. I can’t deny my roots.

6. Conclusion—Unbecoming Middle Class?
...the university system is intricately linked with the capitalist system. People with power at the university will do their part to reinforce and promote the capitalist explanation for class difference—smart rich people, stupid poor people—in return for continued benefits and privileges from the current structure.
(Kadi, p. 44)
It is taking me a long time to come to terms with my working class roots and to begin to realize my working class roots give me a place to ground my teaching, art, writing and life, to better understand my shame, grief, pain, and yes the rage that I have toward middle and upper class privilege and entitlement. I witness to my own experiences, talking about the contradictions I live and feel. Using my voice to witness is better than the silence and shame I experienced. I can model and be a mentor for others. I am excited about further exploring my pain, pleasure, desire, shame and rage in relation to class issues and sexuality, teaching and art.

Am I working class? Working class identified? A hybrid? Am I reappropriating my own past? Is it mine to claim? All I know is that I identify as working class—it's in my marrow: my values, culture, manners, ancestry, language, and ethics. I'm an insider because I am white, but other than that I am an outsider. It's such an odd feeling to talk about, even now.

Art to Question Class
In my art, I explore working class themes birthed in my father’s shop and my mother’s kitchen. In “Domestic Saints” (2002) I canonize three working class women photographed in a kitchen (my mom, an aunt, and family friend). Hilda wears an apron and holds a dinner plate, my mom holds an aluminum cake pan marked with medical tape, while Aunt Sally smiles into the camera. I used gold glitter to create halos around them. Like Jamakaya (1998), I wanted to publicly showcase the lives of working women that taught, influenced and protected me. Where else would the canonization of everyday working women occur? In “Sun Dress” (2003), I created life-sized dress installations around the outside of my house honoring the lives of working women who taught me. I used materials that wear, tear, fade and disappear, just like the lives of millions of working-class women who remain nameless, invisible, and/or forgotten. Sundresses, like this one, were popular in the Midwest in the 1960s and 1970s with working women in my life. This piece gently and quietly moves in the wind, fading in the sun, tearing from the elements. It stands as a testimony to a class of women often taken for granted.
Further Implications

It is also in writing, teaching and in my community that I ask crucial questions about class. Those are areas where I can also mentor to other working class students, colleagues (and mentor to middle and upper class students and colleagues) and neighbors and community members about her/histories, art, and other working class social phenomena.

As stated earlier, I want to talk about class in my writing and art. This paper is one example of me beginning that public discourse. Creating a poster series and postcards that can be handed out to people for free. This is another way for me to do outreach to working class allies and others. Many working class and working poor families are strapped for cash and cannot buy art.

At university and in classes, I can help create safer spaces for working class and other students who are exploring their working class roots. For example, in preparing for a spring 2005 graduate art education seminar on art and social justice, I decided to include Kadi’s Thinking Class knowing one graduate student who will be taking the course is struggling with her working class background. It is a way I can support her and myself in class. We all need to talk about class as an issue in education. There are also many working class artists, and artists with working class backgrounds that can be utilized in classes for teaching. Judy Baca, Ralph Fasanella, Luis Jimenez, Yolanda M. López, and David Wojnarowicz are a few that come to mind.

In politics and interactions with university colleagues, I can continue to support working class students in meetings, tests, and reviews. I can also talk about class at faculty meetings and when planning School of Art activities: visiting artists, lecture series, exhibitions, etc. I can also support other working class academics who
are just beginning to realize that their working class backgrounds impact their academic lives, including their teaching, art, and research.

And finally, I can talk about class in my own greater community where I live. I recently attended a neighborhood meeting where some residents readily recognized the plight of working poor in our neighborhood and strategized ways the working poor can access public and private monies to fix up their homes. Though safety is an issue in our neighborhood, residents were not quick to blame the working class residents and the working poor for recent thefts and burglaries. Residents recognize that social class issues are complex and want to work toward equitable changes in our neighborhood, and not quick fixes that blame one socio-economic group.

Finally, I want to open this up to other working class (and other) academics/artists/activists to begin to talk and share our histories, issues and possible strategies and lessons for dialogue and continued survival.

Author Note: I dedicate this essay to the memory of Jo Beth Shelley. And thanks once again to Rose Lapiz for her vision, support and great editing skills.

References


(Un)Becoming Queer/(Un)Becoming LGBTIC
Kimberly Cosier; Laurel Lampela; Susan Marie de la Garnica; James Sanders; et al
The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education; 2005; 25; Arts Module
pg. 69

Introduction

(KC & DSS) This article is one result of an ongoing dialogue among a number of members of the LGBTIC/Queer Caucus. The dialogue has taken place primarily through a torrent of e-mails, but also through a number of emotionally charged telephone calls. It began as a friendly, (perhaps naively) simple idea—to turn members’ viewpoints about changing the name of our caucus, from “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Issues Caucus” to “Queer Issues Caucus” into an article. What began with good will and a fervent hope for understanding, at times turned into vitriol and contention—volleys of worldviews, personal identities, and philosophies. Although tempers flared occasionally, we feel each of us came to better understandings of the others’ points of view. Editors Debbie and Kim have attempted to distill a bubbling pot of various points of view into an imaginary roundtable dialogue: respecting all stances, without silencing anyone, without
hurting anyone's feelings, and without privileging any one viewpoint. All actors in this drama are named above and identified in the text by their initials.

We apologize in advance.

Description of events

(KC & DSS) Perceptions and accounts of the events leading up to the vote for the name change from the LGBTIC to Queer Caucus are varied. Some members were unaware that a call to vote on the name change was going to take place in Denver, while others of us had been talking about it since the conference in Los Angeles in 2000, under Ruth Slotnick and Anne Manning's leadership. Our first recollection of a discussion about the issue was at the NAEA Conference in Miami in 2002, when Debbie assumed the office of President and Kim assumed the office of Vice President of the LGBTIC. At that time, we were both enthusiastic about changing from the lengthy acronym to what we perceived to be a user-friendlier name. In addition to being easier to say, we also thought that "Queer Caucus" would be more inclusive, as did other members we spoke with at that time. There were then, as now, others present who were opposed to the name change. No official action was taken in Miami.

Discussion continued in Minneapolis at the next NAEA meeting in 2003, during which Jim Sanders was elected Vice President. Kim was not in attendance at this meeting due to illness. Those in favor of the name change were still of the opinion that this was a relatively non-controversial idea. At the Minneapolis LGBTIC business meeting, the group decided to call the question at the next meeting in Denver. In the meantime, members agreed to e-mail each other over the course of the year and to discuss the issue in the NAEA News column. Perceptions of the level of discourse that led up to the vote are wide ranging, as Laurel recalls:
I first received an e-mail message from Jim Sanders, the vice president (November 23, 2003) of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered Issues Caucus (LGBTIC) labeled 'Queer Caucus On-line Newsletter.' Part of the message, sent to members of the LGBTIC Executive Committee, stated, "Given recent court decisions and cases pending, NAEA needs our queer perspectives! We need to share our understandings of LGBT issues with the larger NAEA community, and this is a process that should involve all of us, not just a few voices," (sanders-iii.1@osu.edu). I was surprised our caucus was referred to as 'queer caucus' before everyone had a chance to discuss the change or vote on it.

Several of us, as members of the LGBTIC Executive Committee, had the opportunity to discuss this among ourselves during the early part of 2004. Then in another e-mail message in March 2004 from president, Debbie Smith-Shank and vice president, Jim Sanders (March 10, 2004) of the LGBTIC, I read that there were plans to change the name of our caucus to the Queer Caucus. I was surprised, perplexed, and confused by these changes. I wondered how all members of the caucus felt about this change and why there hadn't been an on-going discussion via email or listserv about the proposed change. I also wondered where I fit in, as a lesbian, in queer issues and a Queer Caucus.
(KC) Since I was unable to attend the meeting in Minneapolis, I found out about the vote in pretty much the same way as Laurel—through email. The electronic meeting announcement read, “Below is the agenda for our upcoming meeting at NAEA in Denver, April 16-21, some announcements, a proposed caucus name change (we’ve discussed for the past two years) and schedule of NAEA sessions sponsored by and/or presented by LGBTIC members.” Another source of information about the issue was Debbie’s columns in the NAEA News.

(KC & DSS) Many issues of the LGBTIC column in the NAEA News during 2002 and 2003 were at least partially devoted to the topic of the name change. The discussion in the NAEA News culminated in the June 2004 issue, which is partially reproduced below:

One thoughtful discussion over the past year in this column and continuing at the Denver conference was use of the word “Queer” to describe our group of multiple people who self-describe in numerous ways. Both CAA and AERA have changed the names of their affiliate groups to use the designator “queer.” Ballots and wording were sent to paid members before the conference, and at the Business Meeting in Denver the group voted—after considerable debate and discussion. Sixteen paid members voted yes, fourteen voted no, and one person abstained. Because the name change to Queer Caucus won by such a small margin, it was decided to continue the discussion in this year’s NAEA News columns and on the Website before actually proceeding to the Board with a written justification for the change. (Smith-Shank, 2004, p. 18)

(KC) As a newly elected co-president of the caucus, I worried about the impact the name change could have on our caucus. I have no desire to go down in the archives as someone who
presided over a mass exodus from the caucus. So, I made the motion to table action on the vote, given the strong, emotional opposition to the change, in order to give us all a chance to come to understand one another. Jim, who had just been elected co-president, seconded the motion.

(JS) This gesture of concern for maintaining a sense of solidarity and keeping the peace by continuing dialogue about an issue that a majority (no matter how slim) has approved, should not be misconstrued as a message that the vote itself has been voided. Such a denial of the democratic process would clearly be in violation of our caucus constitution and by-laws.

(KC) I acknowledge that there are some members who feel that moving to table action subverted the democratic process. However, I feel that the way the process played out was not exactly in the true spirit of democracy. Casting a vote is but one small part of the process. I feel that the discourse that surrounds various issues, and the degree to which such discourse is supported, or thwarted, is at least as important to democracy as the vote itself. It was in the interest of fully enacting democracy that I moved to table action on the vote, and proposed the idea to turn our arguments for and against the name change into an article. There have been a number of times when I could have kicked myself for having done both - I am sure others would have liked to join me on a number of occasions!

(KC & DSS) At the time of the vote, we had yet not given the name change the hours of soul searching and opinion weighing that we now have given to this topic. This article represents the very difficult work we all have undertaken to understand cross-generational, gendered, racial, geographical and other borders to reach a place of
respect for the beliefs of one another. We now have more nuanced understandings of the multiple parameters of the topic(s) that un-becoming the LGBTIC un-covers.

Discussion

(JS) I appreciate Debbie Smith-Shank's and Kim Cosier's offer to serve as moderators for our discussion around the topic of the Caucus' name change. The website established for our group, dialogue is http://ets.osu.edu/~mbell/lgbtqic/index.htm. A search engine and discussion board (to which only paid members will have access for entering opinions – so as not to have our website trashed) are on the site to facilitate dialogue. At that site all caucus members are welcomed to post their queries and opinions on not only this initial topic, but also others they consider important to our mission.

A majority of the 32 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues Caucus (LGBTIC) members present at our 2004 Annual Meeting in Denver (4/8/04: 17:00) approved the new name. Subsequent to the Denver meeting, Secretary-Treasurer Jessie Whitehead circulated e-ballots to all members not having voted in Denver, to ensure a greater percentage of the membership was counted in this closely contested decision. That e-ballot process was completed by August 22, 2004, with an additional 9 approving and 6 opposing the new name (J. Whitehead email correspondence of 8/22/04: 13:07 EDT which included an attached file titled e-ballot results.doc). The combined 25–to–20 vote accounted for 75% of all members' voices being heard on the question of the name change. This follow-up balloting was consistent with the motion made immediately after the announced results of the paper ballot in Denver. Compare this to a US election – where 75% of all voters would be an unthinkably huge turnout!
Although, I am aware the caucus name change is official, from the LGBTIC to the Queer Caucus, I continue to be left with a feeling of disassociation. Are lesbians disappearing? Can one (un)become Lesbian? Does one need to (un)become Lesbian to be part of the queer circle? Is a queer woman the same as a lesbian? Had the caucus voted to include the letter ‘Q’ as an addition to the acronym I could accept that. But leaving off lesbian is problematic for me.

Part of the reason that we initially began the conversation about the name change, way back in 2002 in Miami, had to do with the unwieldy acronym “LGBTIC.” Those of us in that discussion found this “alphabet soup” name to be cumbersome. But it was not only that aspect of the acronym that bothered us, we also discussed the fact that no number of letters could ever cover the many ways that people identify their sexual, affectional and/or gender identities. Laurel’s argument is understandable, but we would argue that adding letters to an already long string of other letters is not desirable.

An almost equal mix of men and women has published an incredibly broad range of scholarship regarding queer theory over the last decade (see for example: Boone, Dupuis, Meeker, Quimby, Sarver, Silverman, & Weatherston, 2000; Blasius, 2001; Butler, 1990; Kumashiro, 2001; Sedgewick, 1990). My use of queer follows Kevin Kumashiro’s (2001) framing of the term as an umbrella covering multiple [and multiplying] gender identities, and my interest in the political tactics of the Guerilla Girls, (a multiracial feminist group), Queer Nation (largely gay guys) and ACT-UP (a death-defying HIV activist initiative that transcended interests in identity politics) in demanding visibility and positive social change. As members of oppressed Queer communities
comprised of lesbian, gay, bisexual transsexuals, intersexual, two spirited, curious, supportive and queer peoples (an almost infinite array of political and personal identifications could be listed here), we struggle daily to defend our rights against those who have already lumped us together as a threat to “traditional definitions of marriage.” Personally, I feel that rather than debating the caucus naming my energies should have been more focused on defeating Issue #1 on the Ohio ballot; an amendment that may now overturn my university’s recent honoring of partner benefits—a law that constitutionally denies my equal rights and protections.

(II) Still, I don’t consider myself ‘queer’ but I do identify as a lesbian. Jeffreys (1997) suggests that lesbians are under threat of becoming invisible within the discipline of Queer Studies. She notes that there is seldom mention or analysis of feminist issues such as sexual violence and pornography in queer theorizing. Despite the fact that organizations such as Queer Nation and ACT-UP have provided lesbians with more confrontational and aggressive style politics, these in-your-face tactics are contrary to strategies of lesbian feminists (Rudy, 2001).

(MR) Queer theory finds its roots in the history of sexuality in general, and homosexuality more specifically. According to Weeks, (as cited in Jagose, 1996) homosexuality has existed throughout history and all societies, but what has differed has been how these societies conceptualize homosexuality and treat those engaged in homosexual activities, as well as how those engaged in homosexual behaviors have viewed themselves (15-16). There are parts
of Laurel’s arguments that resonate with me. I do not like the idea of becoming subsumed in a group that privileges (white) men. I think her point...that many men “coast” while women do much of the work is one that deserves attention and consideration, but also deserves a response within queer theories and communities. This creates a situation rife with tensions, though, as men dealing with these issues may then get academic credit for publications using feminist theory to move themselves ahead. I don’t know that this is overly problematic, but again, men may be using women’s work to just “coast.”

(LL) Walters (as cited in Rudy, 2001), notes that queer theory valorizes men and overlooks lesbian specificity. Califia (as cited in Rudy, 2001) suggests that most issues brought to our attention by queer actions are related to men and that gay men are ignorant about feminism. Much of queer theory ignores the issues of lesbian feminists and instead focuses on gay male issues including AIDS research, gay marriage, free expression of sex, cross-dressing, and man-boy love. How do these issues relate to lesbians – to feminist lesbians?

(KC & DSS) Man-boy love is a highly charged topic –and we agree with Laurel that it is probably not at top of a Lesbian feminist agenda. However, we have to ask, since when have issues of AIDS research, gay marriage, free expressions of sexual behaviors, or even cross-dressing been gender-linked issues? Safe, freely expressed sex is not just for gay men anymore! Just as appropriate needle use is not an issue limited by gender. More conversations, not fewer, need to include topics such as funding programs for needle exchanges, safe sex
education, and the needs of babies born with AIDS. We believe that the interconnection of social issues, with an eye toward liberation, is very much a feminist issue. Categorizing issues—and arguing over who is more oppressed than who—these are the failings of identity politics!

(JS) The decision and our dialogue about the shift from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues Caucus (LGBTIC), to the Queer Issues Caucus is important, but while engaging in this discussion, I hope we will put it into perspective.

(KC & DSS) Yes, while we were arguing amongst ourselves, voters in eleven states approved anti-queer/lgbt amendments to their states' constitutions. (Democracy is Dead, Long Live Democracy). We strongly support Jim's argument that we should be working together—though we still feel unsure about whether the name "Queer" supports that end. LGBT/Queer—no matter what you call it, our histories are the histories of the oppression of people who are perceived as other. Those who are in control through the tyranny of colonialism care little about how marginalized people choose to name themselves. queer, lesbian, transgender, gay, intersexed, these names are of little consequence to the people in power who use fear of difference and ignorance as political tools.

Our identities coexist and signify within our public and personal frameworks. My reflective positioning into spaces that situate me outside my comfort zones is not generally publicly acknowledged. I only reluctantly share them because I’m still working on my self, BUT I am whole only because of the sometimes fractured, always multiple, facets of my multiple selves. Can I un-become? What happens when I absolve myself from union with a facet of myself that has sustained me through months or years of self-knowledge?

The ugly duckling un-became his duck-ness but still had one hell of a time fitting in. The ugly stepsisters cut off their heels and bled to un-be ugly and to fit into a cultural stereotype of beauty. The performance artist Orlan self-mutilates as art, to question us about our responses to the ugly, beautiful, and culturally appropriate. She un-becomes herself for us, or maybe not. But she certainly un-becomes.

What mutilations happen to our psyches when we un-become?

I understand acronyms as one legacy of modernism where efficiency is more important than clarity, and exclusion is prevalent — unless you are on the inside/in the know, you are not privy to the information. Consider NASA, NCIC, NAEA, GM, IAEA, and even SNAFU. You don’t have to consider the meanings behind the letters when they serve as placeholders for the words. Consider LGBTIC.

What happens when an organization that is laden with social stereotypical and historical baggage changes its name from an acronym that allows distancing from the signified words in the title to a real word/non acronym word steeped with negative and socially dangerous significance?

Queer. LGBTIC. Queer Caucus. LGBT. Queer. Queer ISSUES Caucus. They don’t read or sound the same. They don’t mean the same. And they don’t signify the same. Connotation/ denotation. What does it mean? How does it feel?

Is queer like Chicano/a and political? What if a member is not political? Is it possible to belong to this group and not be political?
Lesbian. Gay. Bi-sexual. Transgender. What about allies? What about intersexed people? What about people who prefer the anonymity of an acronym? What possibilities exist for exclusion and elitism with either or any of the designators?

(MR) Foucault (as cited in Jagose, 1996) asserts that homosexuality is itself a modern construction developed in the 1870s when medical authorities named homosexuality as an identity and pathologized it as deviant (11). By the late 1600s, an urban male homosexual subculture had developed in London, emphasizing homosexuality as an identity (12). Female homosexuality did not follow the same trajectory as male homosexuality, taking much longer to become the basis for a subculture and separate identity.

In the United States in 1951, the Mattachine Society was founded as a way to create a collective homosexual identity with members who could work together to fight against their oppression. While the Mattachine Society included small numbers of lesbians, many lesbians felt that the group expressed and constructed gayness in ways that, according to D’Emilio (1983, as cited in Jagose, 1996), further marginalized them and their particular concerns and issues (26). As a result, in 1955 four lesbian couples formed the Daughters of Bilitis to address specifically lesbian concerns, but they were continually faced with proving the need for a separate women’s organization in fighting against the oppression of homosexuals.

(LL) I still feel that lesbians are left out of the term Queer. I often note that when the words ‘gay’ or ‘queer’ were used in the popular media there
was no mention of lesbians. The television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* does not include lesbians. Showtime’s *Queer as Folk* focuses predominately on gay males and the same network cannot even use the word ‘lesbians’ in their television show about lesbians, *The” L” Word*. Where are the lesbians?

(KC) Can you imagine? A show in which a lesbian “fab 5” teaches straight “wimmim” the things to consider when choosing a sensible shoe, and the finer points of potluck etiquette. You can only go so far with Birkenstocks and bulgur wheat! In fact, there was a Saturday Night Live segment that parodied the idea of such a show, “Queer Eye for the Straight Gal” –yes, it played on stereotypes –but it was fun and had lots of flannel! And, unlike the real Queer Eye, they had an African American character as culture czar (NBC October 4, 2003, Episode 29).

(JW) In *Queer As White Folk*, Boykin (2002) addresses the idea of inclusivity of the term queer. He suggests that despite the claim that “queer” is more inclusive than “gay” and simpler than “LGBT,” the word “queer” is just as white as the television show that bears its name, and that it does not represent the vast majority of black homosexuals and bisexuals. Boykin additionally states that he has encountered few Black LGBT individuals who identify as queer; the majority of these few are activists and academics in white settings. Boykin is not opposed to the term, but questions the insistence that queer is an all-encompassing term that represents everyone and transcends race and sexual orientation.

(JS) Inextricably, queer theory is concerned with the concurrent analyses of class, sexualities, critical race and gender theories, and the multiple intersections, overlapping structures, specific histories, and inter-dynamics between forms of oppression.
(DSS) Inextricably, queer theory is indebted to feminist theories since first wave feminism.

(JS) You’re so right Debbie, and I couldn’t agree more when I use the term queer, again following Kevin Kushamiro’s (2001) framing of the term as an umbrella covering multiple [and multiplying] gender identities. Letting go of the safety and surety that identity politics provides, queer theory troubles and questions subjectivity itself. It calls attention to the fluidity and instability of identity. It attempts to disrupt the binary logic of black/white, yes/no, male/female, hetero/homo that defines difference and deviance.

Queer theory calls attention to the ways gender, race, class and sexualities are perpetually performed and perceived by performers in different spaces, cultures and times (See Butler, 1990). It acknowledges that we are never just about our sexual identifications, but also those identifications in dynamic relation to race, gender, class, ability and, I might add, religious and political beliefs.

(KC) Yes, but queer theorists do this in the rarified world of academe—for the rest of the world, queer may be another matter.

(JS) Well for the teens I’ve been interviewing in the Midwest and southeast, queer is a membership naming amongst friends, not an academic property. Think of Paris is Burning (a 1990 lesbian documentary on queer performativity) — it is the younger folks amongst us who may be least fearful of difference or change.

(JW) The results of National Gay Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Policy Institute survey Say It Loud: I’m Black and I’m Proud do not support that argument. The study includes information about the family structure, political behavior, experiences of racism and bias, and the policy priorities of Black
GLBT individuals. The sample consisted of approximately 2,700 participants surveyed in nine cities in different regions of the United States during the spring and summer of 2000.

A component of the survey addressed identity, whereby respondents were asked to select one label of identification. “Queer” was one of the least popular labels. Only 1 percent of the respondents self-identified as queer. The authors of the study speculate that there are various reasons for the reluctance among Black GLBT people to use the term “queer”:

(a) the lack of identification as “queer” possibly reveals the racism that Black GLBT people experience from White “queer identified” activists in their organizations and campaigns. White “queer” activists are viewed as having greater access to resources and privilege, and embrace a greater fluidity concerning their sexual practices and sexual identities;

(b) the rejection of queer possibly indicates that Black GLBT individuals have not embraced the radical promise of the term as an alternative way (and politics) of sexual identification; and

(c) the low levels of support for queer possibly reveal elements of social conservatism within the general Black community, and specifically in the Black GLBT community. As a result of the study regarding identity, the authors suggest that serious thought be given by political organizations seeking to mobilize Black GLBT people about the use of the term “queer,” and the (de)merits of organizing around a “queer” identity. This viewpoint is applicable to the discourse surrounding the (re)naming of our affiliate.

(LL) In many circles, the term queer continues to have a negative connotation and may be used as a homophobic label for homosexuals, as it has for decades, if not longer. How can we expect to reach art teachers in the NAEA when the title of our caucus may push them away?
Although, academics in higher education are familiar with the term as a field of study, and are aware that the term *queer* has been reclaimed to promote an activist stance that questions social and cultural norms, many people not associated with higher education continue to characterize *queer* as homosexual men and those who are strange, odd, and different. I have never felt that the term queer was as inclusive as it purported to be. As a white, middle class lesbian feminist I never felt part of queer folk.

(MR) I find it interesting that the same arguments Laurel makes against queer are only a variation of the ones used to criticize feminism. Many women of color or of lower socioeconomic classes have long criticized both feminist and lesbian as terms that privilege white, middle class women, asserting that they do not see themselves as belonging to those identity categories, although many lesbians and feminists would place them within those categories without hesitation.

(LL) I believe that queer theory is grounded in camp. Camp that celebrates a parody of the feminine that lesbian feminists tried to expose – learned behaviors of those who lacked power and who were at the mercy of those in power – behaviors such as crossed knees, lowered heads, soft voices, made up faces, high heeled feet, exposed cleavage – behaviors that drag queens misrepresent –behaviors that put women at risk if they don’t follow and at risk when they do.
(KC) But camp/drag/cross-dressing/queer gender performances are not just the province of drag queens! What about drag kings? Alisa Solomon (1993) noted, in an analysis of drag in the context of theater studies, that most discussions of drag or cross-dressing focus on men performing as women. Focusing only on male performances of femininity she argues “simply reinstates the presumption of the male as universal; he remains the standard, the given, even when wearing feather boas and four-inch stilettos.” (Solomon, 1993, p. 144).

In addition to a male versus female, or gay versus lesbian, point of view, I think the differences in the way camp and drag are viewed have also to do with generational influences. Like Jim, I have noticed that young people are more open to being thought of as queer. For them, gender may be viewed in a profoundly different and more fluid way now than it has in the past (see Halberstam 2005, for a discussion of youth and gender identity). For example, I have been working with a young woman who performs as a drag king/boi. The gender play that happens at the shows is astounding! “Charley” is as popular with young, gay men as “he” is with the young women. For these reasons, I think Laurel’s argument against Queer theory on the foundation that it is grounded in camp needs to be rethought.

(JS) Drag groups not only perform their cross-gender identifications, but also may perform social consciousness raising functions. They, like their outrageous sisters at Stonewall in the late 1960s openly and publicly challenge norms and the oppressions we share, refusing to continue enduring harassment, physically putting their bodies on the line to perform their dissatisfaction. I am not hurt or embarrassed by their bravery but acknowledge their impact in making
marginalized and oppressed sexual minorities visible and audible in our culture.

Camp or outrageous cross-gender performances have provided ways for working through the pains of oppression, for celebrating pleasure, or simply to pass the time (see Sue Golding’s 1997 Eight Technologies of Otherness, Fabio Cleto’s 1999 Camp: Queer Aesthetic and the Performing Subject, and Richard Dyer’s 1992, Only Entertainment). Critiques of some drag queens’ female impersonations rightfully have called into question, the recirculation of sexist portrayals of women. Exaggerated make-up, body gestures and sexually suggestive performances can seem offensive. Alternately these may (and sometimes quite appropriately) be read as social critique and commentary on the social constructions of women these (usually gay) men perform. Such queer readings and/or intentions cannot be generalized, but can specifically be investigated and explored, often yielding insights into the self-oppressions in which we still participate. Camp provides both strategies and tactics employed to break free or challenge these oppressions.

The consciousness of the gay and lesbian liberation movement has evolved dramatically over the past 60 years. At first actively organizing (following peoples party politics of the 1940s & early 50s) and proudly claiming minority status as a distinct cultural group following WWII (see Katz and D’Emilio in Jagose, 1996). Threatened by McCarthy and the witch hunts known as the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities, the Mattachine organizing group abandoned its loud and proud stance, assuming instead an assimilationist approach designed not to offend anyone, —leaving it to “authorities” to help those inflicted with difference fit into “normal” society.

Membership in the original liberation organizing groups dropped off dramatically (declining by more than 80% in three years), as there was nothing to really belong to other than the subsequent affinity clubs.
The movement largely languished. It took the African-American civil rights struggles, protests against the Viet Nam War and an active women’s liberation movement before lesbian and gay peoples would again renew their public protests of injustice. None of these could be accomplished politely or without offense. It required groups willing to fight and stand up for their rights in very public and outspoken ways.

(MR) Building on the success of gay and lesbian studies in the early 1980s, queer theories (and queer communities) developed with the intent to cut across previously well-defined, constricting, and exclusionary categories of identity, including gender, race, and sexuality. Queer looks at these previous identity categories and examines their problems due to their basis on essentialized and constructed categories of identity. Queer is not about merely combining lesbian and gay, although it examines sexual/gender identity categories, but it is more concerned with suspending identity classifications. Queer theory positions identities as multiple, shifting, fluid, variable, and unstable. Hennessy (cited in Jagose, 1996) believes that ‘queer’ questions conventional notions of sexual identity by deconstructing, disputing, and disrupting the categories, qualities, and correlated behaviors we have been taught to believe are self-evident and indisputable (97, 111). Queer advocates for the ability to move between and within identity categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, [straight] and also advocates for movement outside of those categories. While all queer theorists would allow for movement from bisexual to lesbian, or even from lesbian to straight, some queer theorists, like Luhmann (cited
in Jagose, 1996), would also include the ability to question and shift among race and class identities.

(JS) These contributions to the literature, and practice (e.g.: political struggles of people with HIV/AIDS), are not always warmly received, as Lyda Goldstein, in “Queer Theory: The Monster That Is Destroying Lesbianville,” confirms.

[M]any view queer theory with the same unmitigated horror as did Victor Frankenstein his imprudent animation; it moves as the latest epistemological mutation in postmodernity to stomp lesbian subjectivity into oblivion. As one of many players in the contemporary crisis over binary paradigm, queer theory shakes up either/or and hetero/homo notions of identity. In so doing, the inhabitants of Lesbianville have discovered much to their displeasure that, as Colleen Lamos writes, “it is no longer theoretically feasible nor politically practical to demarcate lesbianism as a unique identity!” (1997, p. 263)

More than 500 books have been released under the rubric of queer theory in the past ten years, over 100 more in the last year alone; representing most every academic field of inquiry. Perhaps the most renown and often cited of these queer theorists is Judith Butler, a self-avowed lesbian feminist (see Gender Trouble, 1990—a title after John Waters’ 1974 cult film Female Trouble). Butler’s concept of gender performance has its locus in drag, recognizing that we are not simply born this or that, but that we perform our identities daily.

(MR) I think political activism and working against inaction can take many shapes, including actions not typically considered political by people who don’t consider themselves to be political. Debbie asks if someone can belong to this group without being political. I believe that just belonging to this group is a political act.
(KC & DSS) Yes, but isn’t naming also political? How does that fact come into play if the term “Queer” is still hurtful & demeaning to some members?

(JS) That’s called “the real world.” It ain’t all sweetness girlfriends...

(LL) A member of the LGBTIC who wished to remain anonymous, noted that in his era the word *queer* was very derogatory and was hurled at boys, not girls. As a young boy, he was deeply hurt by being called “sissy” and “queer.” The pain was still present when he heard either word.

(KC & DSS) Yes, at the 2004 NAEA conference, members who are uncomfortable with the term Queer approached us both. These are older people who were working during earlier fights for gay and lesbian rights. They are still uncomfortable with words that were, in the past, used to hurt them. We also heard from people who are non-tenured teachers both at K-12 institutions and in higher education, who were uncomfortable being unintentionally outed by the term queer. Those of us who are privileged to work in places that value diversity and gender fluidity must keep in mind that others of us work in less liberated sites. Not only their jobs, but also their selves are at risk in some situations.

(LL) In the world of public K-12 education, organizations for lesbian, gay, and questioning youth are referred to as ‘Gay-Straight Alliances.’ Art teachers in the public schools may not choose to, or are not able to, use the term *queer* to define who they are or what particular caucus they are connected to in the NAEA.
Of course, now the word "gay" has taken on new meanings since our elders were young—when young people say something is "gay" now, they more often than not mean it to be understood as stupid, un-hip or in some way defective.

So do business as LSQ and drop the Q if that advances you. But many K-12 teachers, administrators, and students are quite familiar with the word queer—not only in its historic hurtful naming applications, but also in its contemporary reclaiming and from what they see on TV.

It is in institutions of higher education that tomorrow’s teachers and teachers of teachers will be trained. Our caucus is comprised of largely higher-education faculty or those trained or training to be practitioners. Aligning ourselves with both those working to change our circumstances today, as well as those helping change the attitudes of the progeny of those most vociferously opposing us, we might eventually reach our goal of fair and equitable protection and human rights.

We wonder if changing the name of our group to Queer Issues Caucus more clearly aligns the goals as well as the social and educational needs of pre-service teachers, practicing K-12 art teachers, museum educators, community college teachers, and other higher eddies? We question if it truly does.

Queer always questions its own constructions, so I consider such questions concerning “queer” to be healthy self-doubt. Even within academe, there has been little agreement about what exactly is meant by queer theory, its methodologies or epistemology (perhaps Sedgwick (1990) is exempted). As a performance and a practice—from writing and reading to research and history—queer as a concept is being widely accepted by those gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender groups in higher education to which I, and most arts educators could belong.
(College Art Association, American Education Research Association). Our group has been the last to join in this more politically active and theoretically sound movement. I accept that someone has to take a stand or we'll continue to remain mired in our self-doubt.

(KC & DSS) Most arts educators are K-12 and working in classrooms. They generally do not belong to CAA or AERA. In fact most art teachers don't even belong to NAEA. While it's true that AERA & CAA have changed the name of their SIGs to Queer, the membership of those organizations is exclusively from Higher Education. The National Art Education Association has always included art teachers and museum educators who work in pre-K through higher education settings. We feel strongly that we must be inclusive of all the members and potential members of our caucus. There are those who may be put off by the term queer – as in queer theory, which is an academic discourse and may be problematic for K-12 teachers.

We do agree that queer theories can be useful tools to challenge the heteronormativity that keeps us all oppressed. It can also be an exercise in intellectual masturbation. Whose self-identity is the most important? Whose oppression is the most oppressive?

(DSS) I acknowledge my need to act within political spaces, but high drama is not comfortable to me. Either by nature or nurture, but certainly by practice, I have become a nurturer and a peacekeeper. I want inclusion, comfort zones for all members, and I want all of us to have a voice – wherever we fit within or outside the acronym. Pollyanna maybe. But if ONLY ONE member who has found an intellectual home and support in this “community with name issues” feels isolated, then I believe that we need to reconsider, reflect, and certainly reconnect gently with each other, and our multiple basketfuls of needs and comfort zones.
(KC & DSS) We struggle with the balance between politeness and in your face aggressiveness. We agree that there are times to get up at arms and get in the face of authority. We doubt that there are any of who have not, at one time or another, stood up to authority and felt the satisfaction of a job well done and/or felt the smack of authority’s leather gloved hand on our asses.

We must respect that each one of us works toward a better world in different ways. Using a couple of our heroes as mighty metaphors, (and we acknowledge that both [at least publicly] identified as straight men), we need both Dr. King and Malcolm to come to our minds when we are working toward change. Sometimes we need more help from one and sometimes the other to accomplish our missions.

(JW) As a black person, the recent appropriation of queer reminds me of the similar path taken by some blacks in the use of nigger – the “claiming” of a derogatory term to function as a positive identity. It is my understanding that somehow this appropriation establishes a sense of empowerment. In Debbie’s musings regarding the terms, queer, Igbtic, etc., she states that they don’t read or sound the same. They don’t mean the same. And they don’t signify the same. Connotation/ denotation. What does it mean? How does it feel? I can honestly say that calling myself a “queer nigger” does not imbue me with a feeling of empowerment!

(SMMDlG) Didn’t we vote in Denver? My question is how do the labels we have been discussing represent the people in our caucus in relationship to art in education? Where are the classroom art teachers? K-12th grade? Are we marketing a product? No, we are marketing a label that cannot and will not fit all. We are a diverse group. Or are we? One Chicana. I can only speak on this issue for myself. I was born Susan Marie Moreno de la Garnica. The name was too long to fit into the boxes on the Iowa Basic Skills test, which of course was the
assessment tool back in the day. My name was then shortened to Susan M. Moreno. The government labeled us Mexicans on our birth certificates. I was born in Iowa. In the 50's we checked the census box (OTHER). In the 60's I called myself Chicana. In the 1970's the government gave us a choice of Mexican American, Native American, or other. Now we are labeled Latino or Hispanic. We as a group need to focus on what we want the caucus to achieve within the National Art Education Association.

(KC & DSS) Susan makes an excellent point –and her words bring up as many questions as answers in this debate: Do we change our identity as we change our name(s)? Would the name “Queer” make our voices heard more clearly within the broader association, or just make us seem louder? Who do we suppose we are speaking for with any change? Will we be able to come to a compromise that will satisfy all members and allow us to speak to/for/about all the folks we wish to reach?

The votes were cast. The queers won. But we have learned an awful lot through this process. Throughout the process of putting this article together, a number of members and allies have suggested alternatives to “Queer Issues Caucus.” One idea that was interesting was, simply “Identity Caucus.” This person’s idea has merit, but since she and others who have made suggestions are not members of the caucus, her voice is acknowledged, but not counted. As this group dialogue has shown, the issue of naming has the potential to liberate, anger, acknowledge, silence, motivate, cooperate, generate discussion, and serve as a catalyst for action. As a result of our year-long engagement with identity, and after much “processing” (as second wave lesbian feminists were so fond of doing), we have come to a compromise that, though not perfect, satisfies us –at least for now.
During the 2005 convention of the National Art Education Association in Boston, almost a full year after the big debate had begun, members attending the annual business meeting came to an agreement. At the Issues Group Board Hearing on March 7th, our co-president, James Sanders, confirmed that the process of officially changing the name, from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Issues Caucus to the LGBT/Queer Issues Caucus, would be set into motion. Members are encouraged use any part, or all, of the name as it suits their needs/desires/hopes/political aspirations and the context of its naming. This multifaceted approach recognizes that no one strategy is sufficient to meet the challenge caucus members now face. We invite all to join the LGBT/Queer Issues Caucus, and support the (at-times unbecoming) process of working toward human rights.

Notes

1 Issue #1 is an amendment to the constitution of the State of Ohio, which passed by 3,329,250 / 61.71% Yes votes against 2,065,411 / 38.29% No votes, in the November, 2004 election. It reads as follows:

Be it Resolved by the People of the State of Ohio:

That the Constitution of the State of Ohio be amended by adopting a section to be designated as Section 11 of Article XV thereof, to read as follows:

Article XV, Section 11. Only a union between one man and one woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this state and its political subdivisions. This state and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance or effect of marriage.
References


I began reading about the subject of whiteness about a year ago in my social theory class. There were many times that I questioned the definition of whiteness and what implications this research had on art education. This subject felt new, exciting, and challenging to me. I was so intrigued with the subject of whiteness that I made the decision to write this essay and embark on research addressing racism through autobiographical writing. Through this process, I have formed an understanding of Whiteness as the social construction of the white race. Whiteness as a critical study and pedagogy questions the many ways the white race has acquired, maintained and protected their power, privilege and dominant, normal status in the United States. I began to understand that there was an undeniable connection between the power and privilege of white skin and racism. I have chosen to contextualize this social phenomena through my writing by deconstructing my own complicity with racism throughout my personal life and education.
A statement by Nelson M. Rodríguez (1998) has made an impression on me and informed my research. He states: “The problem is that whiteness and white ethnicity have rendered themselves invisible; they have been able to hide, so to speak, from scrutiny by maintaining an everywhere-and-nowhere position” (p. 39). The white race has been invisible in the racial and multicultural education that I experienced. This is why Rodríguez suggests that they have an everywhere and nowhere position. White people are everywhere, and they are the majority in United States, yet, as a race they are mostly unscrutinized and unquestioned when discussing multiculturalism. In the past when I have thought of the word “race” and “multiculturalism” I never thought of white people fitting into these categories, especially in the area of education. However, I have come to understand that “whiteness operates as the unmarked norm against which other identities are marked and racialized, the seemingly un-raced center of a racialized world” (Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2001, p. 10). Whiteness was invented and is maintained with a dominant and normal status to make “others” less privileged and powerful. Whiteness as the norm then labels different races as “Others” and exotic.

As I became aware of racism and my own whiteness, this topic became increasingly intriguing and urgent. I chose to critically examine and deconstruct my past education and experiences with race. Growing up in a predominately wealthy white area in the middle of the United States, race was rarely, if ever, brought into the schools (other than during multicultural fairs or Black History Month). Race was not discussed because it was not reflected in the students in our classrooms. However, through the process of researching multiculturalism and deconstructing my own racism, I realized how harmful my education has been. I also realized that knowing that racism exists and not doing anything to combat it is a way of perpetuating it. By recognizing and
owning my own whiteness, I have gone past the paralyzing feeling of guilt and shame about my complacency within racism. I am striving to change my racial identity to one that is positive and anti-racist.

In my experience, race is discussed in education usually in the form of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is often a code word for promoting issues of race and diversity in education (Kincheloe & Steinberg 1997). However, multicultural curriculum often fails to discuss whiteness when confronting race. The most popular forms of multiculturalism practiced today are: liberal multiculturalism, which includes the “colorblind” theory, which emphasizes sameness and similarities, and pluralist multiculturalism, including celebrating diversity in the form of fairs and festivals (Kincheloe & Stienberg 1997). Both of these forms of multiculturalism neglect to deconstruct whiteness in relation to social and economic structures as well as ignoring the power and privileges related to racism.

Throughout this essay, I am attempting to suggest and set an example for deconstruct the ways in which race is addressed in education. In the process of researching, dialoging, and writing of this manuscript, I have investigated the following key concepts:

1) How can I raise critical issues to the readers of JSTAE by confronting people’s hidden racism through the deconstruction of my own education?

2) How can I begin a discussion, stressing the importance of the inclusion of whiteness in racial studies?

I have continued to ask myself these questions throughout my entire writing process. By reflecting on them, I have pursued my goal of bringing about a critical discussion which addresses and questions racism through art education. I realize that I have a long way to go to
fully comprehend this complex topic, but accepting responsibility for undertaking this journey is a productive place to begin.

My Story

I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (McIntosh, 1988 p.1)

In the fall of 2003, I read White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, an article by Peggy McIntosh. Suddenly racism and skin color privilege hit home. For the first time I recognized “my privilege”. McIntosh (1988) compiled a list of all the ways that she could describe that she took advantage of the unearned white privilege on a daily basis and had been conditioned to not recognize it (McIntosh, 1998). I read through this list and my world seemed to change as I realized this was basically my reality as well.

1) I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them
2) I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
3) I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
4) I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
5) I can choose blemish cover or bandages in flesh color and have them more or less match my skin (McIntosh, 1988 p.2).
These are just a few examples of ways in which I concur with McIntosh, and take advantage of my skin privilege. This list goes on and on, and was one major factor that prompted me to write this introspective article. If I am in any way going to try to take action against racism, I will need to examine every way in which I enjoy my white skin power and privilege. These actions continue to be unnoticed, however, like McIntosh, I will now need to make myself aware of them everyday.

Deconstructing my Past

I am racist in many ways; the thoughts that go through my head, the predominately white and privileged neighborhood I live in, and the people I choose to surround myself with. I recall instances in my life in which I initially feel a certain way because I am approached or confronted by a person or people of a race or culture other than my own. The initial feelings were usually of discomfort or fear for the unknown; however, I am always ashamed and mad at myself for this prior feeling. I feel more frightened when I am walking alone if a black man is walking behind me than if it is a white man. Why is this? Was I conditioned to feel nervous about this, especially when I am in a predominately Black or Hispanic neighborhood? If I have been conditioned to feel this way, how do you change 26 years of conditioning? It feels so strange to acknowledge something like this. I think so many white people feel this way but are afraid to admit it.

When I began this internal exploration of racism, I tried to ignore my personal participation in this social construction. I learned more about the power and privileges that come along with white skin and the complicity of whites to continue this status quo. It became imperative for me to confront my cultural upbringing and become aware of my whiteness and everything I have become conditioned to and comfortable with. I am an ongoing participant in racist beliefs and racist privileges, which are based on my dominant white cultural
education, formal and informal. I have unknowingly accepted and taken advantage of this power and privilege throughout my life. Now that I have become aware of those thoughts and behaviors, what do I do with this knowledge? How can this realization of self in regards to race change the way I live my life? How does one denounce their whiteness or change their racial identity when all of their belief systems, social systems, and knowledge are based upon it?

I have chosen to critically analyze and deconstruct my past. My knowledge of different cultures and races has brought me to the understanding of today, so it must be important to question where this came from. Storey (2003) comments on this theory, "remembering is about making meaning in the present and in response to the present" (p. 84). By critiquing and questioning my past, I can hope to make sense out of my present and find ways to change my personal acceptances of white privilege.

I grew up in a space of veiled racist dominant whiteness where "multicultural" students were few and far between. My parents are wonderful and liberal and open minded compared to the other people in the conservative suburb we grew up in. They encouraged me to be friends with everyone no matter what race, culture or difference and were both ecstatic when I became best friends with the one Asian girl in my class. This friendship validated my parent's hopes that I would grow up with a well rounded, non-sheltered experience. My father commented on this experience, "We just wanted you to be more comfortable and at ease with people from different cultures and races and have these experiences that we did not have" (M. Katz, personal communication, December 20, 2003). However, as happy as they were about this, my family is Jewish and they were most happy when my friends and boyfriends were Jewish. As my father said, "we always feel more comfortable with those who are similar to us and those we
have something in common with” (M. Katz, personal communication, December 20, 2003).

My parents grew up in University City, a middle-class suburb of St. Louis. In the fifties and early sixties this area was predominantly Jewish, as were most of the students in the public school and their friends. My grandmothers were both racist and felt completely comfortable making prejudiced comments about non-whites and non-Jews in their native Yiddish language. My father’s father owned a grocery store in East St. Louis, Illinois, which was a black low-income area of the city. The store was called Leading Food Store and I have a vague memory of it. My father tells me he used to take me there when I was little and let me ride up and down the conveyor belt with my sister and cousins. My grandfather loved his job; he was living his dream. I have never seen anyone love picking out produce and the environment of a grocery store the way he does. His love for his job showed in the relationships he made with the customers. They seemed to sincerely like him and appreciate the work he did. He felt so good about providing these less privileged people an important service. Despite the friendliness, the store was often robbed and broken into by members of this neighborhood. The violence got so bad that a butcher who worked for my grandpa was shot and murdered during a robbery.

I can recall some huge fights between my grandma and grandpa. My grandma along with other members of the family wanted my grandpa to either retire or open a new store in a better area, better referring to a more wealthy and white suburb. My grandmother would often say, “Sheldon, you need to leave the store, those shwatzes (Yiddish for blacks or literally dark people) are irresponsible, they don’t pay, they are violent, and I am so scared they will kill you some day” (S. Katz, personal communication). The term shwatzes was used in the house often in a derogatory way by my grandma. When they would discuss the violence and stealing that would happen at the store my
grandma would say, "what do you expect from shwatzes" (S. Katz, personal communication)? Even when I was young I knew this was not right because my parents would ask them not to use those words in front of us, however, the grandparents were the heads of the family and people rarely challenged their views.

My parents both graduated from schools in St. Louis, my mother at Washington University with her Masters degree and my father at St. Louis University with his Ph.D. Following graduation my father received a fellowship to teach for a year in a low-income area of Baltimore at a city school called Coppin State College. My mother found employment there as well as a counselor in a nationally funded anti-poverty program. They found themselves for the first time to be the minority. They were two of a handful of white people in the entire school. My parents both told me they took these jobs to have a new experience, something very different from what they had grown accustomed to in St. Louis. My father said, "We wanted to break away from the comfort and stability of our community and experience different parts of the country and other people" (M. Katz, personal communication, December 20, 2003). They both admit to feeling very nervous and frightened in this new environment. However, my parents are both very happy to have been offered this opportunity because it put them in an unfamiliar space, which they would have never been exposed to otherwise. My father recalls this year fondly as one of the most educationally rewarding and emotionally challenging experiences of his life.

I had a childhood similar to many others who grew up white in an upper middle class suburb and as a child I thought this is all there was. I believed everyone had the same toys and comfortable nice house situated in a quiet subdivision just as I did. This was the Kansas City I was aware of, sheltered and delusional as it might seem. I also believed that blacks and other people of color did not want to live in our
neighborhoods; they just chose to live somewhere else that I had never seen. My neighborhood was filled with subdivision after subdivision of big cookie-cutter four bedroom newly built homes. My father refers to our area as "the suburban sprawl," the new wealthy homes of southern Overland Park. Everyone had big yards full of green grass and small freshly planted trees with a cul-de-sac at the end of every street for the neighborhood kids to ride their bikes around.

In my wealthy upper class public school, my classes were filled with white children. Once in a while we had one or two black students and an occasional Asian student, but the yearbooks were dominated by rows of white students. We learned from Kindergarten on about many different cultures. Through our multicultural curriculum, I ate all kinds of different foods, learned to use chopsticks, as well as sing songs in French, Spanish and German. My parents thought this education was great especially because I did not have the opportunity to mix socially with many multicultural people. I thought this part of my education was fun, although a little strange, since it did not reflect the reality of the students sitting around me.

In school when we were taught about racism it was always something of the past. If it was still around at all, hateful and uneducated individuals practiced it. McIntosh (1988) describes this notion as well,

In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth. (p. 3)

Though, when I look back at my education, many things we practiced, as "educational lessons" were racist and disrespectful. We learned about different cultures and historical society through a Eurocentric lens. The books and curriculum were written by and for white students.
Just one example of this Eurocentric education was our annual Thanksgiving parties and festivals. Every year we dressed as a pilgrim or an Indian (if you were really lucky you could be the turkey) and put on a play about the first Thanksgiving. I loved dressing up when I was little, so any holiday in which I was encouraged to dress up and imagine I was a fictional character was great in my opinion. When I was five I really loved my Indian costume that my mother made for me so much, which I decided to wear it for Halloween the following year as well. My problem was that dressing up as an Indian was the same thing as dressing up as a princess. They were both fictional characters, constructed images of imaginary figures that were non-existent in my life. I was never educated that Native Americans were people with rich cultures who were still celebrating their cultures right here in America. My sister teaches kindergarten and every year she continues this Thanksgiving lie as she was taught to do along with most teachers around America. Why do we perpetuate this lie? Is it because it sounds nice? Is it just easier for teachers to lie than to try to expose students to the truth?

After high school I went to Indiana University and found a great group of friends who were extremely homogeneous. All of my good friends were white, Jewish, and upper middle class. Many of them had been with me over the years at a Jewish camp in Zionsville, Indiana. While studying photography, I developed my undergraduate thesis project. I wanted to construct fake and humorous dramatic scenes, which capture the lives of adolescent and teenage girls. After completing half of the photos for my final project my professor asked me why everyone in my high-school scenes were white and asked me if this is something I had planned or intended to make a statement about. This question surprised me because this had honestly not even occurred to me at all. I was trying to reconstruct and exaggerate my own high school experience using my group of friends in college. There
were very few people of color in my high school and they were not in my circle of friends in high school or college. I was just documenting what I knew at the time. However, I now understand this was an autobiographical project in itself because I was realizing for the first time the sheltered homogeneous life I had led up until that point.

After college I moved back to Kansas City and found a job in the suburb I grew up in at The Kansas City Jewish Museum. I found myself surrounded by the same types of people I had always been with. During college I learned about the effects of art on at-risk youth and realized that I had never even encountered people like this. I felt as though there was so much more that I needed to learn, and that I could benefit from experiencing other cultures and people. To change this, I took another part time job working in an after-school art program at an elementary school in Kansas City, Kansas (a low-income, predominately African-American area).

My father drove me to my school site the first day because I had no idea where I was going, having never been across the river before. He was also very nervous for me to go to this neighborhood by myself. We drove through the projects to reach the school, and I asked my father why I had never seen this part of the city. I could tell my dad was uncomfortable in this setting, and he said there was never any reason to come here. I told him it was important to me to know this part of the city exists and not to ignore it. I think my father felt badly about this and regrets the way he sheltered my sister and me, but my parents both wanted us to have the best life they could provide.

Every day I would drive over the river to Kansas City, Kansas. Whenever I entered this low-income residential area, there would be numerous Black young men hanging out in the streets. There were a few women and children but mostly young men. They would stand in the middle of the street and approach my car almost every morning. Some days they would not let me pass by. I could hear them say, "what's
this white girl doing in our hood.” I was scared about this drive, but I enjoyed the job so much and the students appreciated and enjoyed the projects we brought that it seemed worth it. I was afraid that these men might hurt me, and I was also uncomfortable to be in this unfamiliar area. I just felt so out of place and I did not belong there. I questioned this notion, “why didn’t I belong?” Was it because I drove there in my brand new car with a loud alarm that embarrassed me when it went off, or because I after I left I drove thirty minutes to the other side of town where I physically, economically and socially fit in.

I learned a lot in this short period of my life. I was only working at the low-income elementary school for about six months before I made the decision to move to Chicago. While working in this school, I assumed I was judged as being different because of the color of my skin, and for the first time, I really felt my whiteness. Dyer (2002) comments on this notion, “White people need to learn to see themselves as white, to see their particularity. In other words, whiteness needs to be made strange” (p. 12). I felt like I was doing such good things bringing art into these youth’s lives, however, it was easy for me to leave this neighborhood and go home to my privileged area every night. This experience implanted within me the passion to study art education and work with youth that are being neglected by the lack of art curriculum in their schools. I thought that art could be used to encourage these students to think critically about their society and provide them with a platform to make positive changes in their education and life. After studying in the art education field I now realize even these assumptions, that the youth need my help to look critically at their lives and to make positive changes in their own communities, is extremely naïve and is based upon my illusionary feelings of cultural and class superiority.

After enrolling at the School of the Art Institute and studying in the Graduate Art Education program, my mind opened to critical
pedagogy and critical multiculturalism. I began to look back at my past education and find essential holes in the curriculum. Issues of power and privilege, those who have it and those who do not, were rarely if ever addressed in my classrooms. I feel privileged to now be aware of this critical lens, and I now feel as if I have a moral obligation to pass this on to others. However, to do this I feel as though it is imperative to rethink my past education and upbringing so I can learn from it.

* * *

I believe the deconstruction of my own upbringing and education through this paper has been a way to confront and raise issues of racism in our society. By writing about my own imbedded and conditioned racism, I am presenting myself as an example. In order to become aware of the power and privileges of whiteness and begin the process of developing one's own positive racial identity, it is important to deconstruct the way we have been educated. Most of us in America have been educated through this Eurocentric based education. To undo both this conditioning and belief system, we must rethink and relearn the truth and find an unbiased and objective view of our history. By deconstructing my education, I have been able to relearn and rethink my position and identity as well as expose untruths in my education. I believe this process I have gone through will serve as pedagogy in itself for others.

I believe this project implies that there is an urgent need for schools to include whiteness in education. I also believe that art education can be an engaging and thought provoking way to address racism. An issue, which arose many times throughout my research, was the question of what I can actually do as one person to change the problems in multiculturalism and take action against racism. I think my autobiography can serve as a model for many people. Instead of
approaching racism as a whole, which is an enormous and daunting issue, it is important to expose the racism in one’s own life. After completing this task, it is easier to develop a positive racial identity that can then serve as an example for others and promote change on a small but significant level.

There are many more issues left to explore within racism. The steps I would suggest for future research of the inclusion of whiteness within art education are:

1) Question teachers as to the way they teach racism and multiculturalism in their schools as well as what prevents or enables them to do so.
2) Exploring the resources for teachers within multicultural education, where do they get the information and curriculum that they implement?
3) Developing an antiracist curriculum, which would be available for teachers and adapted for different age groups of students.
4) Researching the role of parents in perpetuating racism as in my own experience.

I am looking forward to continuing work to raise issues of racism in my future career as an art educator. This research has answered many of my questions concerning my role in racism and actions I can take to change my own racial identity. Through self-reflection, I have become more aware of my own racist assumptions based upon my feelings of economic and white superiority. Prior to examining my whiteness, I believed that my knowledge and upbringing gave me the right and privilege to impose upon others the desire to make what I subjectively considered, to be positive changes in their lives. Now I realize that art education should be a process of inclusion and leveling the power differential. Students and teachers should have mutual
responsibility to teach and learn from each other’s unique perspectives and life experiences. I hope in my future work I can encourage other white art educators to engage in self-examination and accept their own responsibility to stop perpetuating racism in our field.

References


Introduction

I sit at my desk for the last thirty minutes before driving to school where I will teach a painting lesson on abstract art. I am an after school visual arts intervention teacher who travels among ten K-6 urban schools in the Bay Area of California. When I am not on campus, I am working at the district office coordinating visiting artist programs and developing integrated arts curriculum. Yet each day, I notice an increasing disconnect between my duties as a teacher and my own arts practice. My painting, collage, and drawing lessons look just like the ones in the textbooks: how to, step by step, with safe subject matter like animals and landscapes. But my art at home is different; I contemplate how to achieve peace, express anger, and relate my frustrations with the world’s oppressions to my hopes for the future. I rarely speak of this motivation for creative expression with students at school; I fear not knowing how to facilitate the conversations that emerge or that I will say the wrong thing. And the world’s oppression is too big to tackle anyway. I feel myself un-becoming the artist I am when I step into the classroom. I am alienated from my own worldview. Then I worked at Cleveland School.
This school, where I had served as a second language acquisition support teacher only two years before, was struggling with student and staff aggression, racial and language tension, alienated parents, migratory staff and school leadership, and limited district support for the instructional needs of a bilingual campus. I received a call from the teacher who had taken over my job there. She asked me to help with the reform effort aimed at bullying, which the school was beginning to address. Maybe this project would help me answer some of the pains I had developed in my own art teaching. If I could locate artists that understood how to socially engage students in art-making, maybe I could learn from them as well.

I did not realize the extent to which I would grow critical of anti-bullying, aggression reduction efforts or the degree of reflective, discerning practice it would require of any artist to engage in what I would later define as liberatory pedagogy. In the writing of this article, I explore:

1) how the local meanings of conflict at a particular school site emerge in the conceptualization of the project,

2) which processes specific to art-making that the artists employ to address students’ concerns, and

3 the effects of the school reform effort’s ideology on the art-making process and student interactions.

Using data collected through interviews with the artists and observations of in-class art making sessions, I analyze the school reform intent, the emergence of individual and collective voices, dialectical thinking through metaphor, and the social context of art-making. I suggest that educators must critically analyze how race, gender, class contexts and the historical trajectory of school culture frame the “problems” they observe at school. From that reflective stance, educators can develop a pedagogy with students that dialectically engage personal and social meanings.
The Visual Arts Residency

Cleveland School* is a Title I school with the majority of its students English Language Learners speaking primarily Spanish, Vietnamese and Khmer. The school district has identified low-test scores as the main target of school reform. However, Cleveland principal Ms. Martinez wanted to address with social aggression among students, believing that personal safety and interpersonal cooperation are prerequisites to academic success. Martinez designed a program with the school leadership team that included the district arts facilitator (me), the school language specialist, classroom teachers, artists-in-residence, and a non-profit professional development organization. My immediate role in the project was to help identify the artists and provide resource support during the residency (materials, an extra hand, photographing). The non-profit organization provided Cleveland School with staff training on understanding aggression and building a school safety plan, as well as the use of their fifth grade social skills curriculum.

The 5th grade classroom teachers facilitated the social skill lessons with their classes during the school day, while the artists-in-residence provided an after school extended arts unit which complemented the in-school instruction. Students attended the after school art sessions on a voluntary basis, with a 90% participation average throughout the 10-week unit. The artists did not modify the social skills curriculum, but rather identified specific dynamics to explore extending from the in school curriculum, common school situations like bullying, gossiping, and alliance/club forming. Students learned about the roles of the bully (the aggressor, the controller), the victim (the recipient of aggression, the one being controlled), and the kid in the middle (the one who chooses sides and alliances) in these social situations.

Visual artists specializing in painting and printmaking, Heather and Jonathan, used metaphor as the primary concept in their art lessons
to make structural comparisons between art concepts and personal and interpersonal experiences with aggression. Students employed these metaphors in an accordion book project that offered the ability to reveal and conceal pages through book binding choices. The book structure could represent the degree to which students externalize or hide their emotional states during social interaction. In their selection of the book structure, the artists also intended to raise student awareness of the concept that people are more complex than their presented behavior. When opened, the book allowed for two presentational sides—the front and back. This structure could be engaged to represent various perspectives on an issue or experience. The students were told about the intentionality of the book structure throughout the project, during the demonstration lessons and one-on-one discussions.

Within their individual books, students explored layers of art-making with various materials to represent the layers of self and community. As students built their books, the artists asked students to section the pages with tape and discuss how these sections might relate to ways we control space in relationships, such as the physical and emotional boundaries that we set. Using abstract imagery in layers of watercolor, students explored how binaries of warm and cool, light and dark, and open and closed spaces might relate to the social dynamics of aggressor, victim, and the kid in the middle. (See fig. 1) Stencils were introduced to engage ideas about the human figure and body language. The artists posed questions like, how and when do we mirror each other? What part of you is like another person? What part of you is different?

Students constructed visual narratives by combining, positioning, and relating figures to different spaces and colors on the page. While free hand drawing might have allowed for more creativity in conceptualizing the figure, the artists decided that stencils allowed the students to focus on the positionality and relationships created by the
figures’ interaction, rather than on the precision of drawing the figures themselves. It is unclear to me if students were aware of the symbolic representation of their figures’ placement in terms of power relationships and tension that developed in the visual spacing. Rather than exploring the relationship between technique and story, students I interviewed more often explained the story that inspired the work or literally described art elements they used.

**Artist Jonathan relates a specific example:**

One girl would come in every day and intentionally figure out where she was that day and make a picture about that. Her level of empathy grew about herself, that she could check in with how she felt about herself and her friends and put that out there in front of everyone. One day she came in and made this image that was really dark and said, “This is how I feel” (Interview 9/04).
In the final day of the 10-week unit, the artists Heather and Jonathan led a reflection session for students to share their books. They asked each student to present their thought process when creating the book and decide which pages to reveal or conceal. They then prompted the audience to comment on their observations about the images:

During the class dialog, one boy held up his work and said, "I forgot to share something. I made this because I felt like I was encased in an iceberg. And when I was drawing this picture I broke out of this iceberg. I don't have to be the victim. I can act and help people be friends with each other" (Jonathan, Interview 9/04).

I was surprised by most students' decision to share their whole book, private stories like the one above, and an intense interest in understanding the stories of others. What motivated these students to express themselves and listen to others? Why did students opt not to conceal their work? Was there pressure to reveal, or a precedent to do so? Was there a sense that students did not really have a choice about concealing their work? What would have happened if students had assertively NOT revealed their work? Or, were these rare moments in school in which young people are actually asked about their personal lives? Still not all students spoke enthusiastically or candidly. Why did they remain silent?

Contemplation

When I witnessed the efforts of these artists to facilitate personal and community dialog through art-making, I was invigorated because of my commitment to working toward education as a liberatory process. But I realize that my own excitement is not enough: I must analyze the artists' intervention acts as situated in schooling ideology to understand
its location in work toward social change. Schools both reproduce and resist ideologies based in the economic and social stratification of our system, so that intervention acts function dialectically as agents of stasis and change (Apple, 2004; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1994; Weiler, 1988). What are the constraints and possibilities, then, of art-making with youth as liberatory practice?

In the following analysis, I will work from Paulo Freire's definition of liberatory education as an environment whose purpose is critical consciousness: "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements" (2003, p. 35). This consciousness occurs through a process of reflection and action on hegemonic ideologies and discourses that promote inequalities and work toward compassionate care and justice (Purpel, 2004). Understanding the ideological constraints of our schooling systems, structures, relationships and processes (the limit-situations) will help us identify the limit-acts we can embody as we work toward less alienating and more liberatory practices (Glass, 2004, p. 17). The act of naming the world through praxis (reflection and action) is one such limit-act (Freire, 2003, p. 87).

bell hooks (1994) suggests this work might entail a dialectical engagement of concepts often dualistically opposed and fractured in the process of schooling, such as teaching and learning, mind and body, public and private, silence and voice, powerful and weak (p. 16-18). Addressing relational aggression (bullying) through school reform and art-making can engage many of these dyads, and an analysis of the school's approach will help me clarify how art-making with young people might move toward liberatory practice.

Naming and Silence: The Bullying Prevention Project

It is important to begin an analysis of the "deep structure"—the underlying meanings and functions—of the school reform project itself since it functions to guide the artists' curriculum and instructional
choices. The project sets out to stop aggression, or bullying, and provide a forum for victims and kids-in-the-middle to gain empowerment and "speak up" against aggressive behavior. This seemingly well-intentioned effort—as other bullying prevention programs may also be—falls short of being a critical project, since it remains in the immediate psychology of the situation without extending to a larger social analysis. As students worked through the social skills curriculum, classroom teachers and teaching artists asked them to consider how they felt about bullying when witnessing it on campus. They wrote in journals and spoke about "knowing someone who" committed an act of bullying or aggression. Because the students were classmates, it is most likely they knew the exact identities of the students referenced during this anonymous "naming" process. In the lessons that I observed, there was not a single instance in which a student claimed his or her own aggressive behavior in front of peers. Does this project contribute to a larger ideological purpose of coercing behavior that is socially-desirable, while convincing students to deny aggressive acts that do not bolster the current social/political/economic system? Remaining at the level of immediate personal and interpersonal, in the psychology of victimization, may build empathy in some students but approaches propaganda: bullying (read: conflict) is bad and wrong. By ignoring the productive, necessary role of social resistance to discriminatory conditions and policies, does this approach ultimately contribute to further marginalization of lower-income, second language learning populations in the United States like those students at Cleveland School?

Interpersonal conflicts can be investigated in terms of how difference (race, class, ability, gender, family background, sexuality, language, culture, etc.) has been disproportionately allocated in terms of privilege, status and power. An educational program dedicated to compassion toward difference requires a deep exploration of
constructions of Other in our society. In theorizing about a pedagogy on difference, Sharon Grady (2000) states, "Confronting difference is not always comfortable. One response is to ignore the difference and pretend it doesn't matter; another response is to enter into more self-consciously complex relationships with what we perceive as different or foreign" (p. 5). Grady further asks, "How might an embodied understanding of difference develop from a critical awareness of self and context? How might this embodied understanding positively inform how we approach our work and those with whom we work" (2000, p. 8)? Anonymous naming of bullying situations does not provide space for student subjectivity and history to emerge, nor for classrooms to embrace efforts of children to work out difference as a productive form of conflict.

Ameliorative reform efforts do not attain this level of critical awareness of difference. When adults ask students anonymously to name bullies and bullying situations, we inculcate shame around those who have acted aggressively and around the aggressive acts themselves. In emphasizing the power of the kid in the middle to break alliances and silences about bullying, students are turned into whistleblowers, pitting them against one another in a veneer of safety. This dynamic, when made personal, can lead to labeling and essentializing students, as well as enforcing a civil conduct code that does not explore why conflict occurs. This, in turn, allows beliefs and attitudes toward the Other to remain hidden. Chris Mayo (2004) suggests that civil speech involves "using the right words, but not substantially altering practices" (p. 36). Under civil conduct codes, "social fractures continued unabated under a watchful process of removing what can be said" (p. 40). This call for civil speech (that which does not speak the name of the problem) enforces what David Purpel (2004) calls "structural silences," a way to avoid a discussion of the "intense relationships between moral/social concerns and formal education" (p. 54). (see fig. 2)
Figure 2. Lists created during the residency based on internal and external emotions and actions of the three roles.
The Individual and the Collective: Finding Voices

While the philosophy of Cleveland School's reform project worked from an ameliorative perspective, I have identified events that hold the potential for counter-hegemonic practice and critical engagement: student's discoveries of their personal visual and storied texts and the classroom's multi-vocal text produced when projects are 'read' together. How might issues of power, voice and access be developed during art production and critique in an arts classroom?

In her interview, Heather viewed dialog as occurring both with and without words, in which the act of disengaging with others (and thus knowing yourself) will enable future listening in a communal setting. Jonathan also posits that art-making is a space of silent, albeit active engagement:

Art makes the invisible visible. The wordless space: as it becomes more realized through the art work, then through talking about what happens and the image itself, we are talking about the image but we are also talking about the motivations of making the image. The emotional state, the wordless space.... There is a dialog between the image and the maker.... It asks that we listen and respond not out of personal gain but out of helping the image evolve. (Interview 9/04).

While the artists themselves never mention the social context of power, voice or access coming from the material conditions of art-making, they indicate a keen awareness of the power of image to engage metaphors of experience. They stay in the aesthetic rather than a sociological cast of mind for looking out on the world. If art-making is to engage a critical perspective, it is important to consider Jonathan's insight that artists should not over think or engage the inner critic when
making work. This would be an encumbrance rather than a help. Yet, we might engage students in the sociological criticism of conflict and then move to a more aesthetic engagement and then back to a critical one in the student discussion of finished art works. In critical dialog, artists might ask students about their perceptions of silence and (dis)engagement in school. Is silence always about self-reflection? What other forms of silence do students employ? How can we discuss interpersonal and societal conflict in schools through our aesthetic choices? Students might then move to the art-making process with those questions in mind.

In this residency, student experiences with aggression surfaced from vulnerable areas of pain and may have untold consequences at school or home when related to the class. Heather and Jonathan were surprised at the number of students who shared their experiences regardless of the risk, yet each experience told was from the perspective of victimization. bell hooks (1994) states, “we must embrace struggle and sacrifice. We cannot be easily discouraged. We cannot despair when there is conflict. Our solidarity must be affirmed by shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth” (p. 33). One avenue, she states, is to “focus attention on the issue of voice. Who speaks? Who listens? And why?” (p. 40). During and following discussions of student art work, educators might reflect on the dynamics of dialog. For Heather and Jonathan, why did the class’ “collective dedication” to speak emphasize stories of victimhood without claiming subjective acts of aggression as well? Were there unexpressed tensions for students who wanted to speak but did not because the classroom dynamic sanctioned a singular approach to the hegemonic discourse on conflict? Classroom pedagogy has its own (un)spoken ideology that should be interrogated.
Work in Metaphor: On Dialectical Thinking

Another potential site for critical, liberatory practice is in the artistic use of metaphors with students. Metaphor is the usage of language that "...swerves from 'ordinary' usage... [that] treats something as something else" (Culler, 1997, pp. 67-68). In metaphors we understand one domain in terms of a very different domain (Lakoff, 1992). These relationships demonstrate how we know things based on the comparisons we make; they hold the potential to carry "...an elaborate proposition, even a theory..." about how we structure social ideas and practice (Culler, 1997, p. 68, emphasis added). In order for metaphor work to engage the social in a critical, educational context, teachers would need to overtly explore this function with students. Otherwise, metaphors may remain theoretically social yet uncritically examined, deconstructed, or re-visioned.

In one lesson of this residency, Heather and Jonathan asked students to tri-segment a page and represent figures of the victim, kid in the middle and bully. Then they encouraged the students to apply a warm or cool watercolor in each section to abstract and re-present their feelings about each role and their relationship to that role. This lesson represented what Jonathan called building a "...common lens and language, but with a goal of multi-vocality, empathy and listening to an incredible variety of human experience" (Interview 9/04). In my observations of this lesson, the students did not express their understanding of the representations on the segmented page as a multi-faceted expression of their own subjectivity (that we all have a victim, kid in the middle, and bully inside of us). One male student said, "Here I am in the middle. This is when it is most confusing." When asked about the other segments of the paper, the same student said, "That's the victim [on the left] and that's the bully [on the right]" (Interview, 2/04). (See fig. 3) This student seems to externalize rather than identify with these roles. While the artists wanted to present a dialectical
engagement across binary constructions of color and space and develop relational thinking in students, they actually furthered what Foucault (1991) calls “dividing practices” that lead to the objectivizing and fracturing of the subject position.

In another example, a female student (mentioned in the Visual Arts Residency section of this paper) explored dark colors to reflect her difficult encounter with a friend. In so doing, she shifted from an experiment with materials to a constructed metaphor about color selection, mood and the immediate personal/social relationships that remained dichotomized as light or dark, good or bad, happy or sad. She developed a strong stance about her pain that stayed in the “dark,” rather than exploring the relationships between her personal experiences and the social systems that may produce disempowering relationships.
According to Meszaros (1973), dualistic representations of concepts are historically situated and can "...only be applied under certain conditions and from a specific point of view, i.e. their assessment is subject to change" (p. 166). Arts educators should engage in an ongoing interrogation of dualistic categories as they relate to visual culture. We can think across these binaries (like light and dark) and problematize their constructions. When the female student expressed a negative emotion as feeling dark and employed the paint color as an extended metaphor, she also employed a historically constructed notion of darkness as essentialized representation of race and morality. What is the impact of continuing the use of dualities as they have been historically imbued with meaning and conferred with unequal status and privilege? What would happen if students explored "darkness" in art-making in a way that recognizes the contradictions and complexities of language, representation, and experience?

Thinking dialectically "considers all phenomena as being in movement, in process of perpetual change" (Rius, 1976, p.146). In a dialectical employment of metaphor, we might reclaim "lightness and darkness" (or any other set of dualisms) to juxtapose personal and historical meanings. With awareness, this negotiation might increasingly affect how we name the world, holding the potential for resisting dominant, oppressive ideologies.

The Social Context of Art-making

Perhaps educators and students can further explore naming the world through the intersecting praxis (action and reflection) on art-making, interpretation, and the social conditions for artistic production. When one is making art, there is an ongoing internal dialog between oneself and the emerging image. Later, when the image is displayed for others, there is a dialog between the produced image and the viewer’s interpretation of both with traces of the artist’s process remaining in the image (Johnson, 1996). For example, the boy who broke
through “the iceberg” of his own silence toward being a victim of aggression did so first through his artwork but finally through a statement made to his peers related to that work. The act of making the object public, considering its impact on the viewers was an integral part of his “break through.”

Yet, for art-making to be a critical social practice, the relationship among artist, art work and audience must also include an engaged awareness of the social and material conditions surrounding the production and viewing of art, including the context in which the artist and audience are situated and situate themselves. Janet Wolff (1981) describes this environment as one of manufacture, social rather than isolated practice and ideology. We engage these contextual factors simultaneously, whether conscious of them or not, while we make and view art. If we consider relationships between artists and audience in this way, in terms of their conceptual and perceived meanings on the level of the individual, community and ideology, we would ask, Raymond Williams suggests, “What processes of transformation or mediation these components have gone through before they arrived in this accessible state... we should look not for the components of a product but for the conditions of a practice” (1973, p. 16). Rather than understanding art-making as process and art product as static object, we might also understand art processes and products in terms of social conditions and community context.

In terms of this Cleveland School’s reform project, a reflection into these conditions and contexts would necessarily begin during the conceptualization and curriculum development phases of the school reform project. For example, poor, Spanish speaking students and middle class white teachers predominantly populate Cleveland School. How do issues of race and class affect student alliances with peers and/or adults on campus? How do these differences and constructions of difference influence the degree and types of conflict at this school?
Teacher reflexivity should come first, taking apart their own status and privilege and how these affect the ways they think about students. Teachers’ ability to hear students in a critical social dialog is predicated on being critical of their own social and material location in the institution of schooling. Other questions might include: how do teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about student language and home culture affect their treatment of students? How does the curriculum itself address these issues or nullify them? How does each of these questions affect student’s aggressive or acquiescent behavior?

Moving to the social context of art-making with students, art-making techniques may also work to engage these critical questions, such as layering and juxtaposing human figures and colors in and across different masked off sections of the work space. Yet the selection of abstract rather than representational genres from the students’ own cultural traditions may have served to amplify the constructions of social difference and privilege that a critical project would seek to dismantle. By determining which aspects of the book to reveal during the reflection session, students might overtly demonstrate the tension between private and public in sharing their art work. In discussion, the artists would need to encourage deliberate choices in order to employ the physical metaphor of space with the social implications of restricting and opening relationships. When does someone not feel comfortable exposing personal experiences in school? What is the power dynamic at play? What structural conditions—those of social class, cultural capital, and pedagogy—would be necessary for openness in classrooms? What happens when someone restricts access to others? Why is that access restricted? And who benefits from this restriction in different circumstances?
Conclusions: Art-making as Liberatory Pedagogy and Practice

School reform projects targeting bullying and aggression should consider the relationship between situated, local individual and collective experiences as framed within contemporary and historic discourses on conflict. Schools might consider "...seeing social activity as tied to larger arrangements of institutions which apportion resources so that particular groups and classes have historically been helped while others have been less adequately treated.... things are given meaning relationally, by their complex ties and connections to how a society is organized and controlled" (Apple, 2004).

When trying to understand aggression and conflict in the classroom, educators might discuss the following issues together and, through concrete tangible examples, with students: What kinds of student behaviors are valued at school? What forms of knowledge matter to teachers and students? What forms of cultural capital do bullies and victims use, and are these knowledge structures connected in some way to behavior labeled as aggressive or acquiescent? Why are "kids in the middle" staying silent?

Liberal education theory, according to Apple, "turns educational concerns into administrative 'problems' rather than instances of economic, ethical, and political conflict" (p. 16). Critiques of this disciplinary approach include their implicit assumption, as Kathleen Weiler (1988) notes, that addressing these problems will "lead to changes in social relationships and that [people] will be equal in a capitalist society" (p. 28). It is clear that Cleveland School does not view aggression as strictly an administrative problem to be handled through punitive discipline. Instead the school focused on building empathy among students in order to increase campus safety and build positive social relationships.
However, as demonstrated in this analysis, educators cannot trust that through a curriculum focused in psychology and surface peer relationships, conflict in schools will disappear. (Nor should we necessarily hope that all conflict should disappear from any event.) Otherwise we may evolve into what hooks (1993) calls a “have-a-nice-day smile...the stuff of colonizing fantasy” (p. 31). Curricular activities, including art-making, must move from the emotional and empathic to the social. If schools dwell on the emotional pain of students as solved through the erasure of conflict, they may ignore structural constraints and contradictions that influence action. How can we build authentic empathic relationships between students, students and teachers, teachers and parents while still valuing the role of conflict in expressing discontent with injustice? How can we reframe our thinking to consider students as value-creating agents who may express their concern with forms of domination, oppression, and subjection (Foucault, 1991)?

According to theatre theorist Augusto Boal (1979), the purging of emotions through identification with characters in the arts pacifies an audience, communicating that such emotions are extraneous and undesirable, and diverting our attention from “a social fault, a political deficiency” (p. 32). In this anti-bullying effort, the social practice is designed to appear that things are changing while everything remains the same. Students are eager to claim their experiences as victims but not as bullies, silencing the whole social context and diverting attention away from social structures that influence action. Were students to become critical, voicing their anger at people, institutions and contexts, they might be dangerous. Perhaps with such reform efforts we are preparing students to accept the legitimacy of sequestering and silencing certain experiences, emotions, and responses to living in society.

Boals (1979) suggests redefining the goals of artistic practice from a purifying catharsis to a revolutionary call to action. In the act of doing
school we can create counter-hegemonic educational practices like those Boal calls for. Apple (2004), Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) and Weiler (1988) point to schools as a site of struggle, in which participants amend and produce their own meanings, often with the intent to overcome injustices. For educators, the art of teaching might take a more sociological turn toward an analysis of alienating and freeing social conditions, the political and economic constraints on resistance, and the causes of conflict in relation to social constructions of difference. Art educators and visiting artists might explore tools like metaphor, text and dialog with conscious attention paid to critical analysis in the preparatory work before art-making as well as in post-production discussions. We can investigate the tools, techniques, processes, and dynamics unique to the arts that help students articulate messages of concern and outrage about the discourses reproduced at school.

In future work with artists in schools, we can also investigate parallel questions about the role of artists as critical public citizens. When do artists claim that their pedagogy and practice is liberatory? What are the motivations, conditions, and responses to such intentioned practice? What happens when the pedagogy and practices of self-identified liberatory artists are institutionalized into the school program? Looking at the reform efforts at Cleveland School has revealed sites of potential critical engagement for me, helping me to envision new pedagogy that forges stronger bonds between my personal art practice and my role as facilitator of art-making with young people.

*Note:*

All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the school and the individuals involved in this project.
References


Visual Culture and Teenage Girls: Unraveling “Cultural” Threads Tied to “Self” and “Other”

Carrie Markello

Visual culture is prevalent in almost every aspect of our lives. We take photos with our cell phones, read magazines brimming with full color images, visit art museums, download streaming video, watch MTV, and scan street signs to find our favorite fast food restaurant. One hundred years ago, except for visiting art museums and reading magazines, these activities were nonexistent. As the twentieth century progressed, visual culture has increasingly been disseminated through new technological developments. In the sixties, Marshall McLuhan forecasted the impact of media upon our changing world. “The medium
or process, of our time—electronic technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life" (1967, p.9). As the transmission of visual culture continues to "reshape" our personal as well as our communal identities (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004), it is important to acknowledge and understand visual culture's role in our lives. Recognizing the resulting shift and change brought about by the proliferation of imagery in our world, Tavin (2003), described visual culture as a "present-day condition where images play a more central role in the construction of consciousness and the creation of knowledge than in the past" (p. 204).

In response to the consumption of persistent and pervasive imagery, visual culture is frequently blamed for social problems in youth (Steinheimer, 2003). The author of *Reviving Ophelia*, Mary Pipher (1994), warns us that teenage girls "are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized and media-saturated culture. They face incredible pressures to be beautiful and sophisticated, which in junior high means using chemicals and being sexual" (p. 12). Steinheimer's view of visual culture as a scapegoat for the real problems of youth and Pipher's concern for the effects of visual culture on young girls are topics addressed in this paper. However, the larger questions about the role visual culture plays in the development of youth and the public's response cannot be addressed in their entirety. I will focus primarily on visual culture as it relates to a young woman's concept of body image and the development of self.

My understanding of visual culture is particularly influenced by art historian Nicholas Mirzoeff and art educator Paul Duncum. Mirzoeff (2002) argued that visual culture "is concerned with visual events in which the user seeks information, meaning or pleasure in an interface with visual technology" (p. 5). Expanding his point, in light of our rapidly changing world, Mirzoeff suggested that visual culture allows for a convergence of thought that is both "enabled and mandated by
digital technology” (p. 6). He further described visual culture as the “triangulation of the viewer in relation to herself, the watchers and the watched” (p. 18). Duncum’s (2003a) perspective, “adopts a critical view of society, seeing society as structured in power relationships that are unequal and unfair. This is essentially a view of society in constant conflict where making meaning is always a struggle of one group to establish power over others” (p. 22). Mirzoeff’s “triangulation” of the viewer and Duncum’s acknowledgement of the power hierarchies, as inherent structures within visual culture, provide the foundation for this paper.

A review of the literature on visual culture revealed tensions in the meaning and function of visual culture. Attempting to grasp the slippery term visual culture is challenging because of the dynamic and fluid nature of two words loaded with historical and cultural meaning. In my view, visual culture is an active and dynamic term that encompasses a wide range of visual experiences encountered in our daily life. Visual culture refers to engagement in our present visual environment, relies on critical understanding of cultural influences, embraces visual art histories, and is ever-changing in response to new technological developments.

My examination of visual culture focuses on both the visual and cultural aspects of the term as it relates to teenage girls and their development. The relationship of cultural factors to visual imagery is too often ignored or oversimplified. Visual imagery is often viewed as the dominant force in visual culture, creating an imbalance that shifts the focus away from its underlying, dynamic cultural influences. This may contribute to the general public’s views regarding the impact of visual culture on adolescents. Secondly, investigation of visual culture led to my realization of hope for dialogic interaction beyond the dichotomous relationship between “viewer/viewed” and “self/other” that appear to have developed within the power structure of gender
hierarchy confronting young women. The possibility of dialogic interaction allows for multiple perspectives and emerges as a tool. I believe this tool is capable of disrupting the conflict that results from dealing with the limitations of the dichotomous relationship of the "self" and "other." I conclude with a brief exploration of the perceived threat of visual culture as a negative force in a teenage girl's concept of self and body image and how this investigation relates to art education.

"Re-shaping" Visual Culture

Do teenage girls embrace visual culture and become "reshaped" by it? Is this "reshaping" the result of the medium, as McLuhan suggested in the sixties, or is it an insidious content that sucks teenage girls into buying products and pursuing unrealistic feminine ideals in spite of their awareness of false claims as suggested by Wiseman (2002)? Today's "medium" goes beyond McLuhan's sixties technologies of photocopy machines and television. Young women today can watch streaming videos on their home computers while simultaneously "instant messaging" their friends, scanning images to email and uploading to their web journals. How does this barrage of visual imagery affect the development of young women of the 21st Century?

I suspect that an adolescent girl's concept of body image and sense of self are mediated by visual and cultural influences. However, this mediation is an extremely complicated process and therefore, it is necessary to "re-shape" the term visual culture in order to better understand the complexity of the interaction between adolescent girls and visual culture.

Considering the unequal weight of the terms within visual culture, I suggest that the visual aspect of visual culture has been attributed to having greater influence on the development of teenage girl's concept of body image and sense of self than from the culture aspect. There is a host of contributing factors including political, philosophical, cultural, economic, and social that contribute to the culture aspect of visual
culture. These factors relate to prevailing power structures, perceptions of personal power, family history, personal and cultural values, personal and family philosophies, family structure and expectations, social interactions, and language usage. At this point, it is important to note that in Mirzoeff's (2002) view of culture, a historically loaded term cannot be seen as static, but instead it must be seen as incorporating the dynamic nature of every day life, where previously existing forms of culture merge to become a new “transculture.” As identity boundaries shift and fade creating new transcultural experiences, there is a demand for revised histories, ideas, and representations.

A Parental Perspective

My arguments in this paper are tempered by the exposures I have had to my teenage daughter and her friends. I am continually reminded of the complexities of passing through the awkward stage of adolescence and have done my share of questioning the role of visual culture in my daughter’s life and the lives of her girlfriends. The teenage girls I have known for the past four years come from varying economic and cultural backgrounds, and I’ve heard them talk about school, friends, social activities, TV shows, movies, music, boys, sex, clothes, body image, and acne. Some of their talk focused on self-destructive behaviors such as “cutting” or anorexia. In describing negative and destructive behaviors demonstrated by young women, Valentine (1994) found motivation for such behaviors to have been associated with their ideas about body image. I’ve seen evidence of such behaviors through my interactions and observations of teenage girls: a young woman who re-shaped her appearance by taking diet pills; another who reportedly cuts herself; a third who is angered when her heritage is assumed to be Mexican; and yet another adolescent who dresses in skimpy and tight clothing. I do not wish to imply that my observations of these young women speak for all young women transitioning from childhood to
adulthood. Instead, my experience observing them as they talk among themselves, watch TV, play video games, instant message each other, and talk on their cell phones, has led me to appreciate the specific and complex scenario that influences each of these young girls as they move through the vulnerable period of adolescence into womanhood.

A Broader Perspective

With the experiences of teenagers intersecting my everyday life as a backdrop for this discussion, I can focus on the often overlooked aspects of culture as a component of visual culture. One reason adolescent girls are vulnerable, claims Pipher (1994) is because American culture values adolescent girls on the basis of their appearances. Additional evidence suggests that the value of being attractive and the stigmatization for unattractiveness appeared greater for females than males (Jackson, 1992). Valentine (1994) analyzed journals of late adolescent primarily white female students and argued "that idealized images of female bodily perfection and messages of perfectibility exercise control over women’s lives by constructing a self that is distorted and divided against itself, and that is self-policing and self-destructive" (p. 113). She maintained, however that these ideals for body image are "produced and disseminated by electronic and print media" (p. 113). Valentine's research suggested that there is a stronger and more direct impact of visual imagery on young women in consumer societies that minimize the non-visual impact of social, cultural, and political aspects. In my estimation, Valentine is underestimating the role of culture in visual culture.

More recent discussions suggest that boys are also experiencing pressure to conform to image expectations derived from social, cultural, and political influences (Stout & Wiggins Frame, 2004; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). While the gender gap between boys and girls may be narrowing in this respect, Balsamo (2002) suggested that the influences of visual culture continue to affect females differently:
The body becomes the vehicle of confession; it is the site at which women, consciously or not, accept the meanings that circulate in popular culture about ideal beauty and, in comparison, devalue the material body. The female body comes to serve, in other words, as a site of inscription, a billboard for the dominant cultural meanings that the female body is to have in postmodernity (p. 693).

At this point, it is necessary to look more critically at the social, cultural, and political constraints that affect teenage girls. First let us look at fundamental social/cultural ideas regarding beauty for women in a society where vestiges of patriarchal practices remain. It is important to note that feminine beauty is socially constructed and within a patriarchal system it is defined and controlled by men. Therefore women who strive for beauty do so to obtain approval of men, not for personal satisfaction (Berger, 1972; Bloustien, 2003; Callaghan, 1994). Vestiges of patriarchal concepts regarding beauty have remained within philosophical, religious, social, political and economic arenas giving way to a perceived "natural," "necessary," and "unchangeable" order.

Cultural influences of age, class and race are also used as a means of social control in the development of identity in women (Bloustien, 2003; Callaghan, 1994). Jackson's (1992) review of scientific studies on gender supports the role that social class plays in influencing women and concluded that there may be an association between body thinness and wealth in the United States. In our current period of prosperity, the ideal of body thinness prevails as the desirable body type (Bloustien, 2003). Cultural trends dictating the ideal female body forces extreme choices such as excessive dieting or plastic surgery. To achieve that ideal image, there is the suggestion of an inherent, unspoken element of social and political control. Unfortunately, the choices made by women are considered voluntary and natural, rather than dictated by
an oppressive power of a patriarchal system (Bartky, 2003). Bartky suggested that the responses young women make as they progress from youth to adulthood are social constructions such as a rite of passage into adulthood, an acceptance of a particular aesthetic, a means to announce social and economic status, an avenue to compete with other women for jobs and men, and/or a way to engage in narcissistic behavior. These social constructions often include a hidden agenda promoting the concept of the ideal feminine body to prevail. As a result, a woman must see herself in two ways, as both an identity of the “self” and as a subject or an “other” in order to achieve the culturally, socially, and politically required desirability. To view herself otherwise is to be forced outside the system.

The Conflict of “Self” and “Other”

In consideration of the gender hierarchy’s ability to control, the concepts of “self” and “other” emerge as important, yet limited constructs of identity development for young women. Reviewing the work of Callaghan (1994), Valentine (1994), de Beauvoir (1952), Pipher (1994), and Bartky (2003) it is apparent that decision points form for developing young women who function within a system of gender hierarchy. These decisions have to do with how a young woman views herself within the system. In response to the “legitimated” oppression of patriarchal practices, women’s motives to achieve become mediated by expectations of others (Callaghan, 1994). The adolescent girl eventually reaches a critical decision point. In Simone de Beauvoir’s (1952) view, it is not Freud’s idea of penis envy, but rather power envy that provides the conflict. A young woman must either choose to relinquish power by being strong and independent or paradoxically obtain power covertly by becoming submissive and manipulative. Ultimately, the discrepancy between a young girl’s independent self and the role of becoming feminine, forces a young woman to deny her natural inclinations (e.g., displaying: intelligence, athleticism, overtly
aggressive behaviors) in favor of the adoption of behaviors related to perceived expectations (e.g., being: passive, demure, nurturing).

Berger (1972) viewed the dichotomy slightly differently. Instead of a decision to relinquish power or paradoxically hold power through submission, he sees the dichotomy as a simultaneous internal conflict of the “surveyor” and “the surveyed” to be ever present in a woman’s life. He described the “woman’s self being split into two” because: a woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. From earliest childhood she had been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.

And so she comes to consider the surveyor and surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another (p. 46).

In Berger’s view, the “surveyed” or “other” self dominate the personal “self” or “surveyor”. However, both “self” and “other” construct and instruct the young woman’s sense of identity.

In Reviving Ophelia (1994), Pipher refers to Shakespeare’s character, Ophelia, as a literary example of the dichotomous self literally self-destructing. The story brings the critical nature of the split selves in terms of a “happy and free” young girl who after falling in love with Hamlet, lives only for his approval. Torn between getting approval from either her father or Hamlet, she is rejected by Hamlet because of her expressed devotion to her father. She drowns herself in a flowered stream dressed in beautiful clothes as a final expression of grief. Pipher
contended that these internal conflicts cause modern day teenage girls to “lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic and ‘tomboyish’ personalities and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed. They report great unhappiness with their own bodies” (p. 19). Pipher described the conflict as complicated and acknowledged destructive behaviors by noting, “their voices have gone underground—their speech is more tentative and less articulate. Their moods swing widely....Their problems are complicated and metaphorical—eating disorders, school phobias and self-inflicted injuries” (p. 20). While I acknowledge observing behaviors that seem to fit the above descriptions and the construction of “self” and “other,” I recognize the limitations of describing the development and behavior of adolescent girls and offer an expanded view that goes beyond the binary conflict of “self” and “other.”

**Beyond Binary Choices**

I question whether or not self-destructive behaviors are the only results of internal conflict. I argue that the inner struggles that adolescent girls face in trying to please others and to define themselves, not only fuels self-destructive behaviors, but also fuels the secret aggression against other girls, as recently documented by Rachel Simmons’ (2002) *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* and supported by Wiseman’s (2002) *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends & Other Realities of Adolescence*. In extensive interviews with teenage girls from several US cities and schools, Simmons described “mean” as contrary to the “feminine identity” which is “to be nice, to nurture, to say ‘yes’” (p. 150). Simmons’ and Wiseman’s findings suggest that to achieve what adolescent girls perceive as expected of them in terms of a “feminine identity,” they hide their aggressive acts to appear feminine.
It is Simmons' notion that girls identify themselves dichotomously, not as “self” and “other” but as “victims” or “bullies”. The either/or classification of “victims” and “bullies” simplifies and continues to hide the true nature of the aggression. I agree with Simmons' argument that by ignoring the hidden aggression and clinging to the stereotype of women as non-aggressive, we assist in the cultural repression of young women. However, I believe the attempt to appear non-aggressive relates to the young woman's construction of “self” and “other” and that this tension fuels hidden aggression. Rather than admit to aggression (e.g. backstabbing) and be labeled unfeminine, women are more likely to provide assistance to silent aggression. This pathological behavior ultimately separates young women from each other (Simmons, 2002). Until young women are able to accommodate upfront honest assessments of the destructive, hidden aggression, there will not be a change in our cultural and social interactions. The cultural and social change necessary for the improvement of teenage girls' inner and inter-social struggles, require more than Pipher's (1994) limited and socially acceptable suggestions for the development of emotional strength, nurturing, and self-protection as change agents for young women.

At this point, it is important to consider the perspectives of “self” and “other” through the eyes of philosophers Bakhtin, Sartre, and Barthes. These authors wrote about the body in terms of “subject” or “self” and “other.” In their views, “the body is what others see, but what the subject does not, the subject becomes dependent upon the Other in a way that ultimately makes the body the focus of a power struggle with far-reaching ramifications” (Jefferson, 1989, p. 153). In the teenage girls' cultural/social/political position within a patriarchal system, the internal power struggle between “self” and “other” emerges as womanhood is approached. In this less restrictive view, the possible choices for a teenage girl are: 1) choose to embrace “self” and reject “other,” 2) choose to reject “self” and become the “other,” 3) choose to
resolve the conflict through self-destructive behavior and/or destructive aggressive acts towards others, or 4) choose to acknowledge and enter into critical dialogue to deal with the conflicting agendas of both "self" and "other."

In the first situation however, Bakhtin, Sartre, and Barthes oppose the view that the body/self or "subject" is capable of freely determining itself because the body/self or "subject" is always within "the grip and grasp of the gaze of the Other" (Jefferson, 1989, p. 153). Thus, the first choice is not viable and therefore forces the selection to the second, third or fourth choices.

The second choice stipulates that a young woman chooses to be the "other" or the "object" and relinquishes "self" which allows for a paradoxical power to be obtained by submitting to the "other." The extreme realization of the second choice ironically results in the wielding of power often exercised in terms of actions that are dishonest, manipulative, hypocritical, and inauthentic. The use of this power suppresses a young woman's true sentiments (de Beauvoir, 1952). Recently, aggressive behaviors of girls toward each other were documented in Wiseman's *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, Simmons' *Odd Girl Out* and Tina Fey's screenplay for the newly released *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004). These works suggested a common power play used by girls that rejects "self" and accepts the expectations of the "other." Simone de Beauvoir asserts men are willing to view women as equals, however with the stipulation that women remain non-threatening to men's position of power. Once again, the tension which de Beauvoir identified as woman's independent success is in direct conflict with her "femininity" and requires that she choose to be the object or the "other."

The third and fourth options represent two alternatives for maintaining both "self" and "other" simultaneously. The third choice reflects the inability to deal with the dualism of "self" and "other."
dualism results in the destructive behaviors that cause personal individual harm, such as anorexia, cutting, or harm to others (Pipher, 1994). The destructive aggression toward others documented by Simmons (2002) and Wiseman (2002) may also be an outcome in this choice.

It is the fourth choice that suggests the acceptance of the conflicting voices of “self” and “other” as an adversarial relationship but also with a willingness to deal with the conflict in a dialogic manner. Within the dialogic framework the potential conflict is allowed to surface and to be considered by multiple views. This translation of “self” and “other” into a dialogic framework encourages interaction that is a powerful force with the potential to stimulate change. The fourth option goes beyond the potentially destructive polarized relationship described in the third option. Considering the attempts that both men and women have made to equalize the vestiges of patriarchy, I wish to consider the question of how we can promote a move away from the subversively permeating dualism of “self” and “other” and its negative impact on gender equality. Bakhtin’s “ability to think through many of the sterile binaries (e.g. subject/object, form/content, individual/society) that have plagued existing philosophical and sociological pronouncements on language, the self, and society, and to transcend these limitations via a whole series of innovative syntheses” (Gardiner, 1992, p. 190) provides a thread of hope for positive change. It is Bakhtin’s concept of “dialogism” that promotes “re-integration of the fractured and fragmented consciousness of the modern individual into a non-estranged whole” (Gardiner, 1992, p. 193). It is through dialogue (including that of “self” and “other”) that “enlightened self-understanding” can be achieved with the potential for improved interactions with others.
Visual Culture Ties to Fear and Control

In the final phase of this argument, I return to the visual aspect of the term visual culture with particular attention given to the cultivation of the fear of visual media. The fear can be traced back to Plato's (360 B.C./1998) contention that everyday objects and images are only imitations of the ideal. Plato's thinking significantly influenced Western thought and its distrust of visual imagery, aiding the prevailing and excessive emphasis on the visual of visual culture. In spite of this notion of distrust, it is imperative that we acknowledge the connection of visual culture to our actions (Mirzoeff, 2002).

When George W. Bush and Al Gore campaigned against each other in the 2000 Presidential election, they warned the public of popular culture and its potentially dangerous effect on children (Steinheimer, 2003). Politicians continue to blame visual culture for the problems of today's youth. This deflects "our public conversation away from addressing the real problems that impact children's lives" (p. 4). The public conversation is further distracted by the mixed messages endured by America's youth. Today's children simultaneously experience protected innocence and greater opportunities to gain knowledge of adult behaviors. This contradiction appears to exacerbate the need to control youth (Mintz, 2004). The rapidly changing visual culture promotes a prevailing sense of lack of control fed by a fear of change. Examples of the attempt to gain control can be seen in the representations of thin, childlike women. These images function to project restricted ideas of femininity as well as suggest the need for protection. Such projections subversively oppress a young woman's ability to be strong, developed and mature (Steinheimer, 2003).

I agree with Steinheimer's argument that "media culture is not the root cause of American social problems, not the Big Bad Wolf, as our ongoing public discussion would suggest" (p. 3). Steinheimer maintains that the sources of the problems are more closely aligned
with fear of change, the unknown, and our unwillingness to address serious social issues such as the consequences of the objectification. While admitting that visual media has a pervasive influence in children's lives, it is important to broaden the focus to the social, cultural, political, and economic problems confronting today's youth, relating the visual to the culture in visual culture. Instead of blaming visual culture as the source of problems in today's youth, it is time to seriously address children in poverty, children with poor quality day care, children without health benefits, and children suffering from poor quality and lack of support for public education.

The nation's anxiety about the future, symbolized by our youth, has been projected onto the visual media making it symbolic of our present society (Steinheimer, 2003). It is imperative that the real issues facing our teenage girls are addressed by the public. Instead of attempting to protect youth's innocence, it is necessary to take a hard look at the issues of social class, economic status, cultural influences, and political systems as active participants in the force of visual culture. These social/political/cultural issues need to have higher visibility and public awareness than what currently exists.

**Visual Culture's Tie to Art Education**

The overt and covert effects of visual culture and its role in the development of identity of teenage girls is complex. The background and influence of each developing teenage girl is unique. The specific way in which the visual and the cultural impact a teenage girl varies for each individual. It is with this understanding that parents and educators must understand the importance of their roles as active participants in the guidance of teenage girls. Instead of sabotaging young women by fearing and shunning the world of visual media, it is time to make sense of visual culture by creating opportunities for openly discussing cultural pressures and inequities.
As the parent of a teenage daughter, I am aware of the complicated nature of my claims and suggestions. Sometimes it is readily apparent that my daughter does not wish to discuss or reveal at my request or within the context of the classroom issues that concern her. As she progresses toward adulthood, she seems to be looking for ways to separate from my husband and me, preferring to confide in her peers. However, I have noticed that when I reserve time to be present in my daughter’s life by listening, watching television and movies together, sharing meals, and taking an interest in her activities and concerns, I am more likely to be solicited for deeper and more critical discussions. Admittedly, the ability to be “present” is not easy to provide in our busy lives and often conflicting schedules.

Our postmodern times can be differentiated from the past by acknowledging that adolescence is prolonged, that teens have more freedom, and spend less time with their parents. Instead adolescents are increasingly spending more time within public institutions and with their peers (Jagodzinski, 2004). In light of this shift from times of greater parental contact to greater institutional control, it is critical for politicians, parents, educators, and art educators to find ways to be “present” in adolescents’ lives. Taking an interest in their activities includes acknowledging and discussing the visual culture present in their lives. Addressing visual culture in the art classroom through technology and/or traditional and non-traditional materials is not a new recommendation (Duncum, 2003a, 2003b; Freedman, 2003; Taylor, 2000; Wilson, 2001). These previous recommendations give space for the dialogic hope to be realized, facilitated by the use of visual culture in the art curriculum, where teachers and students can begin to create opportunities for critically addressing issues related to their cultural context. Unveiling underlying assumptions attached to visual culture and recognizing the opportunities for creative open ended discussion related to artistic practices is one way to provide dialogic interaction.
The art classroom provides one possible arena for teachers and students to explore the complexities of visual culture's relationship to the past, to uncover assumptions that limit possibilities, to reveal multiple possibilities, and to provide for new understandings that are relevant to students' lives and their concepts of self.

Conclusion

Visual culture surrounds us. Instead of fearing visual culture, it can be a valuable tool that encourages interaction, awareness, and understanding. My argument is not meant to portray teenage girls' as victims in their response to visual culture or to promote a reversal of power of young women over young men. Instead, this initial proposal is advocating a paradigm of dialogic interaction where adolescents consider visual culture within the architecture of patriarchal practices and engage in active interpretation of visual culture's impact upon their lives. Considering Mirzoeff's (2002) visual culture as a "transforming encounter that leaves nothing the same as it was before" (p. 17), we can move away from the diametrically opposed concepts of "self" and "other" and move toward an interaction or dialogic relationship between the two. In view of the current gender hierarchy, Mirzoeff's contends that visual culture is an interaction of the "viewer in relation to herself, the watchers and the watched," (2002, p. 18). Future research is needed to unpack the inter-relationship of the visual and culture in the term visual culture to better understand its relationship to adolescents. Further research will help to refine the argument for dialogic interaction and determine how it may help adolescent women in particular resist victimization and passivity in favor of establishing a strong, confident, and an autonomous sense of self. In this paper, I begin to unpack the term visual culture. In subsequent research, I encourage deconstructing the social construction of visual imagery and the interaction between the terms. As a first step, I recommend a
reconsideration of the term *visual culture* by placing as much emphasis and importance on the term *culture* as on the term *visual*.

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**References**


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Unbecoming War: Becoming Witness and Scribe

Debora Smith-Shank
Wargoddess: Shock & Awe
War has its own aesthetic.

Invasion of Iraq was in the air. The words “Shock” and “Awe” were on the tongues of politicians, radio announcers, and people in the street were starting to take sides.

Anger and fear, shock and awe competed for my attention.

I agreed to make art for a group fundraising event at the NIU Gallery on West Superior Street in Chicago. Artists made their art during the day, and in the evening it was auctioned. We brought our own supplies to use on the paper the Gallery provided; very good paper that could be cut to any size. My artwork needed to be larger than life.

Anger and fear competed with ideas for my art project. I gathered objects that symbolize memory. I collected pictures of my close and extended family, as I thought about the families in Iraq: The families that were facing the aesthetic of war.

Shock and awe competed with mourning which has its own aesthetic.

As I drew, cut, pasted, and painted, I mourned for my close family; my extended family; and family I never knew. Anger and fear competed with the tears I cried for all the mothers and daughters and sisters who never asked to be party to a terrorist act.

My artwork, called Wargoddess: Shock&Awe, positions me as a Witness and a Scribe.

I cut pictures of my family into small pieces and pasted these people I love without reservation around the goddess. I wrote and pasted words. I pasted the map of Iraq on her stomach and made
Baghdad her belly button. As I worked, I wondered whose side god[dess] is on and why anyone could possibly think that s/he took sides.

I wasn't satisfied, even with the last pasted image of my brother-in-law, Richard. [Richard looks like he might be part of the Taliban, but he's as American as apple pie.]

The fear is gone. The anger, rage, and passion painted my hands as red as fresh blood and I put my own handprints on this war.

The blood is on my hands. My family is dying and I am mourning and I am witness and scribe to this awful war. I have un-become an impartial observer of an event taking place thousands of miles away. I have brought the war home with me and it itches like the plague it is.

She was an object of conversation, but nobody bought my goddess. I wasn't surprised.
Abu Ghraib (Un)becoming Photographs: How can Art Educators Address Current Images from Visual Culture Perspectives?

Nancy Pauly

*Newsweek* reported that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld “ignored Colin Powell’s presentation of the Red Cross evidence of abuses in Iraqi prisons... [until] the pictures made him realize the seriousness of the reported behavior—the ‘words [in Pentagon reports] don’t do it.’” (Alter, 2004, p.31)

On Friday, May 7, 2004 the front page of *The New York Times* contained two photographs and a headline: “From Picture of Pride to Symbol of Abuse” (Dao, 2004, p.1). In the top photograph Lynndie R. England appears in 2003, smiling, standing in a relaxed family setting, and wearing a blue “Authentic USA” hooded sweatshirt with red and white lettering. Until early May that photo had been displayed in the Mineral County West Virginia Courthouse with other photographs of local soldiers stationed in Iraq.
Below, the photograph of Private First Class Lynndie England, 21, shows her standing; wearing a brown T-shirt, camouflage pants, and boots; holding a leash; and, looking down dispassionately at the body of a naked Iraqi man with that leash around his neck on the floor of the Abu Ghraib prison. This image appeared repeatedly on television and in other publications, such as *Newsweek* (Thomas, 2004, p.26-27) and *Time* (Wallis, 2004, p. 38-39), the following week. This photograph, and others like it, was taken by soldiers on December 12, 2003 (Hersh, 2004b, p. 38) to document the behavior of United States’ soldiers with Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison outside of Baghdad, Iraq. The
photographs contained images such as hooded or naked Iraqi men in sexually suggestive poses, connected to electrical wires, forced to masturbate, piled on top of each other, threatened with dogs, or dead. Several photographs juxtaposed restrained naked Iraqi men with White women soldiers who were smiling or making "thumbs up" gestures next to the genitals or over a dead body.

On April 29 the photographs from Abu Ghraib prison aired on CBS's 60 Minutes II. In the days that followed, these pictures were circulated around the world as part of a massive media event. These prison photographs provided evidence that forced the Bush administration to investigate incidents reported by the International Red Cross nine months earlier, but ignored until the photographs emerged. Newsweek reported that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld “ignored Colin Powell’s presentation of the Red Cross evidence of abuses in Iraqi prisons . . . [until] the pictures made him realize the seriousness of the reported behavior—the 'words [in Pentagon reports] don’t do it.' [Rumsfeld said]” (Alter, 2004, p.31). Rumsfeld knew about the photographs in February but “said that he had not actually looked at any of the Abu Ghraib photographs until some of them appeared in press accounts . . . When he did, they were 'hard to believe,' he said. 'There are other photos that depict . . . acts that can only be described as blatantly sadistic, cruel, and inhuman'” (Hersh, 2004b, p. 41). Rumsfeld admitted that even more objectionable pictures existed that were not released to the media, which reportedly contained images of soldiers raping Iraqi women prisoners.

The vivid Abu Ghraib prison photographs became the visual culture fulcrum for an international media event that provoked discussion, outrage, and action in May of 2004. On May 7 the New York Times reported, “Mr. Bush said on Wednesday that the first time he saw or heard about the photos was when they appeared on television last week” (New York Times Chronology, 2004, p. A10). Time reported
that on May 5, President Bush went on Arab television “to proclaim the abusive treatment ‘abhorrent behavior’ that ‘does not represent the America that I know’. His words weren’t enough to dent the outrage of Muslims who wondered why he failed to apologize. A day later Bush finally said he was sorry, but America’s image in much of the Arab world may well be irredeemable. U. S. officials tried to portray the sordid scenes as the isolated acts of a few low-ranking soldiers who were violating U.S. policy...but the horror stories keep coming...[of] ‘numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton abuse’ for months” (McGeary, 2004, p.28). Senate investigations began on May 7 during which time Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld and several generals were asked to explain the incidents surrounding the images.

As an art educator, teacher educator, and human rights advocate, I reacted strongly to the images and made connections to other experiences, thoughts, memories, histories, and feelings during this media event. I watched television coverage and purchased magazines, newspapers, and books to learn how other people articulated these photographs as cultural narratives. Upon reflection I asked myself, if art teachers wanted to address these photographs, or other photographs in the news, from visual culture perspectives, what theories or questions would I recommend to guide them and their students? I also considered what suggestions I could offer regarding making art regarding these, or other, current photographs in the media?

This article aims to explore the multiple ways that teachers and students might investigate, analyze and interpret images in the mass media from visual culture perspectives, such as the images photographed at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2003. First, Abu Ghraib photographs are explored from diverse approaches as advocated by visual culture scholars using key concepts such as: representation, power/knowledge/truth, image, cultural narratives, and intertextual articulation. Next, I explore my own reactions to experiencing the
media event surrounding the Abu Ghraib photographs and discuss a

collage I made in response another tragic event. Finally, suggestions

are given about how a teacher could investigate these images with

students from visual culture perspectives and how students might

respond to popular media culture through creative works using collage

and assemblage.

Since visual cultural studies is a transdisciplinary field of study,

this article is informed by theories proposed by scholars in cultural

studies such as Foucault (1980), Hall (1997) and Sturken and Cartwright

(2001); art historians such as Mitchell (1997) and Mirzoeff (1998); art

educators such as Duncum (2001), Tavin (2001), Garoian and Gaudelius

(2004), and Barrett (2003); and media critics such as Kilbourne (1999),


Representation

Representation is both a concept and set of practices. “Representation

is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and

exchanged between members of a culture. It does [author’s emphasis] involve the use of language, of signs and images, which stand for or represent things” (Hall, 1997, p.15). According to Hall (1997) we encode and decode words and images based on the conceptual maps that we carry in our heads. People from the same culture usually interpret meanings similarly based on their shared histories, values, and codes of representation. We also construct new meanings based on intertextual connections we make through memory and associations with prior experiences and other “cultural texts” (such as books, movies, television, and games) that remind us of these images or narratives.

All images are encoded with meanings by the maker and must be decoded by the viewer according to their particular set of cultural assumptions, associations, and the larger cultural contexts in which
they are produced and viewed. "Their meanings lie not within the image elements alone, but are acquired when they are 'consumed,' viewed, and interpreted. The meanings of each image are multiple, they are created each time it is viewed" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 25).

While the Abu Ghraib photographs were taken by individual people, the person who recorded the image encoded them with social meanings based on the history of images and psychological support systems that made those acts of photographing possible to imagine, think, feel, and do in this context. The photographer encoded the picture by framing the image and selecting certain items, and not others. He or she consciously, or unconsciously, made those decisions based on culturally-learned visual codes of representation, assumptions, associations, and the larger cultural contexts present at the time. Although these photographs are invested with meaning by their makers, surplus meanings resonate based on how each viewer engages the images and invests it with meanings based on their own histories, memories, associations, and their own sense of what this image means in terms of their own bodies and subjectivities.

Stuart Hall (1993) described three positions that viewers might assume when decoding meanings. Viewers may: (1) receive the dominant message in a rather passive unquestioning manner, (2) negotiate meanings actively by deciphering the imposed meanings and allowing an interplay with our own memories, knowledge, and cultural frameworks; and (3) oppose or challenge the ideological positions embodied in image or suggest the discourses operating within it.

In order to unpack the meanings encoded in images, Terry Barrett (2003) recommends asking students what is denoted and connoted when interpreting any form of visual culture. Denotation refers to identifying the subject matter and sensory qualities. Connotation refers to the symbolic or cultural meanings inferred by the juxtaposition of elements.
In the case of the image of Lynndie England and the unnamed Iraqi prisoner mentioned above, we might *denote* the representation of a small, young White woman, who is a soldier of the United States of America, standing next to a naked, reclining, Iraqi man in a Baghdad prison. She is holding a leash connected to his neck. She is wearing a tan v-neck t-shirt, camouflage pants, and boots. The man appears to be lying on a cement floor in a room with curtains hanging from open doors. He is reclining on his right side and is raising his head off the ground with his left hand. His right arm is outstretched and his right leg is bent in front of him. Converging lines in the room direct the viewers’ attention to the woman. A diagonal line, created by the leash, connects the woman and the man.

The symbolic or cultural meanings that the viewer *connotes* from the photograph above will depend on how that viewer *articulates* (Hall, 1986/1996), or links, this image with other *images* and *cultural narratives* about humane/abusive treatment; male/female representations; images that include clothing and nudity between men and women; the meanings of standing and reclining in images; images using a leash or a noose around the neck of humans and animals; historical narratives and images about invaders or liberators; and the history of military prisoners and international conventions regarding war or occupation. These images are further filtered through religious and cultural beliefs such as appropriate relations between men and women, the proper use of sexuality, and the grounds for humiliation within cultures.

For example, a leash around the neck *connotes* the sense of inhumane treatment (since leashes are commonly used for animals). A tight noose, which might be used to discipline an animal, could strangle a man in this position. The noose may be associated with images of lynchings or enslavement, both carrying racial narratives about Europeans or Euro-Americans controlling the bodies of dark-skinned peoples. This kind of dehumanizing treatment by an invading army
suggests the forced imposition of power and the suppression of masculinity, human decency, and human compassion, the latter quality associated with woman but challenged here by the woman holding the noose.

Connotations will vary based on the viewer's cultural identification and the way he or she wants to use the image. A senior White House aide connoted the meaning of these photographs based on the intention of the soldiers to mean "the work of a handful of bad hats egged on by a ringleader who was doing it for kicks" (McGeary, 2004, p.34). The presentation of Iraqi prisoner and others conveyed a very different connotation in Arab communities. Hersh (2004b) reports, "[t]he photographing of prisoners, both in Afghanistan and in Iraq, seems to have been not random, but, rather part of the dehumanizing interrogation process . . . Hayder Sabbar Abd. . . one of the mistreated Iraqi prisoners . . . told Ian Fisher, the Times reporter, that his ordeal had been recorded . . . which added to his humiliation" (Hersh, 2004b, p.43). McGeary's Time article (2004) supports Hersh's report about the intended connotations for Moslem men. She writes, "One U.S. Official says that some FBI agents were well aware that the military was using 'very aggressive' interrogation methods that would not be condoned in the U.S. An Army officer seems to confirm that. Among Arab men, he tells Time, sexual insecurity is a powerful lever: fear of homosexuality and, almost as significant, female dominations, are particular issues" (p.34). Reporting from London on May 6 Cowell (2004) stated, "Abdelbari Atwan in Al Quds Al Arabi, a London based Arabic daily, [wrote] 'The torture is not the work of a few American soldiers. It is the result of an official American culture that deliberately insults and humiliates Muslims'" (Cowell (2004, p.10). These statements suggest different connotations but most people interpreted these images as dehumanization by psychological and physical force. While the experience of torture might only produce invisible psychological scars,
the documentation of shame is a social act meant to create outer evidence of humiliation.

Figure 2: An Iraqi family in Baghdad and the Pierce family in Lanark, Ill. React to the Abu Ghraib photographs on the same day. *Time* May 17, 2004, p. 30-31
Empathy and Respect

These photographs hail us not only as representations but also as images of persons with particular bodies. How can art teachers ask students to respect the images, and the people whose bodies we see, rather than approaching the photographs as voyeurs to be entertained? Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius (2004) ask us to think about the use of “spectacle,” a concept defined by Debord (1967/1994). Spectacle “is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1967/1994, p.12). Garoian and Gaudelius (2004) explain that “images are ideological, they teach us what and how to see and think. They influence our choices and how we interact with one another. Considering this influence, we internalize the spectacle pedagogy of visual culture as naturalized dispositions in the body” (p.299). They advise art educators to examine the codes of mass communication but to be wary of voyeurism or other pleasures afforded through images generated for mass marketing and consumption. They cite bell hooks (1996, p.2) to make a helpful distinction between those who “consume visual culture to be entertained and those who seek it out to learn something” (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2004, p. 299).

Mitchell (1997) thinks about visual culture as the “emphasis on the social field of the visual, the everyday processes of looking at others and being looked at” (p. 230). Mitchell goes further to personify pictures. He asks, “What do pictures want?” He responds that pictures want equal rights with language, not to be turned into language. They want neither to be leveled into the “history of images” nor elevated into a “history of art,” but to be seen as individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities. He advises that we encounter an image, not as an object, but as a subject.

How might we encounter this image as a subject that reveals social relationships? Should the viewer enter into the picture with his or her imagination and become a friend of these pictures, a voyeur, a witness,
or assume some other relationship? Could we imagine ourselves in the position of the soldier or the detainee? What might this photograph suggest about how our bodies might be desired, endangered, or shamed? If human beings are capable of such acts, what might a person do to me? How might I be touched, harmed, or humiliated by persons from a society that condones acts like these? Could this happen to me if I were in jail in my hometown under the surveillance of these soldiers (some of whom were former prison guards)? Might the viewer participate in the power of the perpetrators or the vulnerability of the victims? Further, who are the victims, and are we, the viewers, among them if we do not discuss these events and respond?

**Intentionality**

Historically art teachers have discussed the intentions of the artist with their students. In visual culture studies, the viewer starts with the intentions of the individual who produced the image but also looks at the contexts that made his or her intentions meaningful. What were the soldiers' intentions for photographing these events? For whose gaze and for what audiences were these photographs intended? Do their motives matter? Do their behaviors reflect the thoughts of a collective mentality released from the constraints of clear rules and tight management? Were the photographs used to signify a trophy of power over subjugated prisoners, a sexual joke to amuse the guys back home, a sign of bravery, or inventive ways to interrogate detainees? Were the photographs originally designed as part of a battery of torture, to blackmail individual Iraqis, or to intimidate other prisoners to talk, as Hersh’s (2004c, p. 42) research suggests? Or were some soldiers concerned about the treatment of detainees and wanted to use the photographs to document what they were being asked to do (as the lawyer defending one of the women maintained was her intent)?
The work of Michel Foucault (1980) is important to consider when discussing the representation of the Abu Ghraib prisoners and soldiers in photographs from visual culture perspectives. One of Foucault’s major contributions was to link “knowledge,” “power,” and “truth.” Foucault argued that knowledge is a form of power and that people exert power when they use knowledge in certain ways that have real effects in the world. Writing about Foucault’s ideas, Stuart Hall (1997) stated:

Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself true [author’s emphasis]. All knowledge once applied in the real world, has real effects, and in that sense at least, ‘becomes true.’ Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practices.” (Hall, 1997, p.49)

The “official truth” about the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal given initially by the Bush Administration was that a few soldiers had acted independently of military rules of conduct. For example, the Chicago Tribune, and most of the media during the week of May 7 -10, repeated Donald Rumsfeld’s version of the scandal. “In testimony Friday, Rumsfeld portrayed the abuse as the aberrant behavior of a few rogue soldiers” (Glauber, 2004, p.10) or, more commonly they reported the story as “a few good apples, gone bad.”

Secondly, Foucault did not speak of truth in an absolute sense, but rather as “regime of truth” in which each society permits certain things within a particular time and context.

Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which
enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned . . . the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

Although a “regime of truth” may circulate, individuals may disrupt that dominant message and circulate it in new ways. In the case of the Abu Ghraib prison photographs, Spc. Joseph Darby (372nd Military Police Company), an auto mechanic from rural Pennsylvania, did what Amnesty International, the International Red Cross, and Human Rights Watch could not. He challenged the sanctioned “truth” and “knowledge” but he used images to back him up. He obtained a CD containing pictures with the naked detainees, wrote a letter about what he knew, and put both under the door of Special Agent Scott Bobeck on January 13, 2004. The digital images, according to Seymour Hersh (2004a, p. 25), made the difference. When the Army’s senior commanders realized the images were being swapped from computer to computer throughout the 320th Battalion, they knew they had a real problem. At 2:30 in the morning of January 14, Staff Sergeant Ivan L. Frederick II was searched and arrested. On January 16, the U.S. Central Command issued a press release about an investigation into the mistreatment of prisoners. It was at this point that Donald Rumsfeld said he first heard about the investigation. Hersh (2004a, p. 26) reports that Rumsfeld informed President Bush soon afterwards. Darby, and a few other soldiers who supported him, challenged the military’s “regime of truth.”

Finally, Foucault also conceptualized power in a new way. Rather than viewing power as a force exerted from a central government to subjects below, Foucault envisioned power as circulating in a “net-like organization” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).
Power relations permeate all levels of social existence and are therefore to be found operating at every site of social life— in private spheres of the family and sexuality as much as in the public spheres of politics, the economy, and the law. What’s more, power is not only negative, repressing what it seeks to control. It is also *productive* [author’s emphasis]. It ‘doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be thought of as productive network which runs through the whole social body’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). (Hall, 1997, p.50)

Foucault has discussed the study of “events,” such as this scandal, as places where networks of cultural meanings are more visible and connected. In this case, the circulation of images through computers, television, and printed sources contributed to the disclosure of evidence and served as the kind of productive network that produced new knowledge. While conventional photographs are produced from a single plastic negative, the digital images, once released, might pollinate the social landscape in any direction and take on a variety of forms. Some of the photographs were made using cell phones with photo imaging, which were immediately sent to email addresses. These images “have legs,” as they say in advertising. Unlike images that are carefully constructed as advertisement or propaganda, these images have a rough immediacy that seems to stem from some hidden collective consciousness of what humans might do to each other. The power of this new mode of circulating knowledge, truth, and power was evident on May 24, 2004 when Donald Rumsfeld banned the use of cellphones with cameras, digital cameras, and camcorders by U.S. Military in Iraq.
Foucault shifts our attention away from grand, overall strategies of power to notice what discourses of power/knowledge are used to discipline the bodies of particular individuals, and the social body as a whole, to regulate people to think and behave in certain ways, and not others.

Major General Antonio Taguba was another person who was willing to tell the truth as he saw it and challenge the conventional discipline. Hersh (2004a) writes,

As the international furor over Abu Ghraib grew, senior military officers, and President Bush, insisted that the actions of a few did not reflect the conduct of the military as a whole. Taguba's report, however, amounted to an unsparing study of collective wrongdoing and the failure of Army leadership at the highest levels. The picture he drew of Abu Ghraib was one in which Army regulations and the Geneva Conventions were routinely violated, in which much of the day-to-day management of the prisoners was abdicated to Army military intelligence units and civilian contract employees. (Hersh, 2004a, p. 46)

According to Hersh, General Antonio Taguba suffered the fate of those who do not behave. "'He's not regarded as a hero in some circles in the Pentagon,' a retired Army general said of Taguba. 'He's the guy who blew the whistle, and the Army will pay the price for his integrity. The leadership does not like to have people make bad news public'" (Hersh, 2004, p. 43).

After May, the media event ended, and the story, more or less, disappeared as a media event. On August 25, at the end of the summer when few people are paying close attention to the news, a report was issued saying Army investigators found five military intelligence officers and "a handful of renegade military police guards were largely to blame" (Schmitt, 2004, p. A1). Hersh's research, however, suggests
that the abuses at Abu Ghraib are consistent with the policy authorized by Donald Rumsfeld in the summer of 2003 that “male prisoners could be treated roughly and exposed to sexual humiliation” (Hersh, 2004a, p. 59).

What do Images do? Are Images Real?
Do images Tell “the Truth”? 

What is the role of images in constructing knowledge/power/truth? How are images linked to truth using cultural narratives? How are images connected to other images and cultural texts (such as books, movies, television, and toys) to construct meanings? How do images suggest consequences and choices? In order to answer these questions, it is important to analyze three concepts: image, cultural narratives, and intertextual articulation as tools for teaching from visual culture perspectives. This is necessary to learn how images have been used historically and what cultural or personal associations students might unconsciously associate with images to construct meaning.

Since the 13th century, the word “image” has referred to “mental conceptions, including a quite early sense of seeing what does not exist as well as what is plainly visible” (Williams, 1976, p. 158). The “truth” of images has been challenged historically such as a stick that appears to bend under water, yet images have held validity in terms of “common sense” (Gramsci quoted in Hall, 1986/96) truth. Popular wisdom exhorts us that “seeing is believing” as evidence of truth. Mirzoeff challenges this assertion by saying, “seeing is not believing but interpreting” (Mirzoeff, 1999, p.13).

Many current scholars have argued that images do not work predominantly on level of truth claims, that are debated rationally, rather images work on multiple emotional, physiological, and symbolic levels. Media theorists such as Jean Kilbourne (1999), Stuart Ewen (1988), and Sut Jhally (1987), who appeared in a video, Ad and the Ego (Boihem, 1996), have suggested that the potential power of visual
images lies in our emotional engagement, our need for symbolic meaning, and our cultural conditioning. Images, according to the three, arouse our aesthetic pleasure or revulsion, and invite our dreams, fantasies, fears, or desires. To extend this idea, Paul Duncum used the work of Guy Debord to argue that images "have become so common they not only fuse with reality but also have become reality. Images now often refer to each other rather than anything previously thought to be real" (Duncum, 2001, p.102).

In summary, images, by themselves, do not necessarily prove anything, yet they are powerful cultural artifacts to which we respond emotionally and symbolically. In addition to looking at meanings the Abu Ghraib photographs may encode, they must be treated with the respect due to the persons whose bodies are presented to the gaze of innumerable viewers. I advocate that students approach these images to investigate the "social relationship between people" (Debord, 1967/1994, p.12) that may influence students to see, think, and act in particular ways, as illustrated at the end of this article.

Cultural Narratives

People associate images with cultural narratives, or discourses, that they use for many purposes. Cultural narratives are a metaphor for the transparent cultural stories that people employ to interpret meanings and imagine their possibilities in the future, which is based on the work of Lyotard, 1984; Fiske, 1996; Gee, 1999; and Hall, 1986/1996. Narratives may take several forms: personal, familial, ethnic, racial, gendered, classed, sexualized, institutional, and "master" narratives. All of these types of narratives are potentially present when looking at these Abu Ghraib photographs.

The following example illustrates how personal, patriotic, military, and class-based narratives were used to explain Ms. England's actions. In a special report in Newsweek and Time on May 17, Lynndie England and her fellow soldiers were portrayed by families and friends
as "normal, patriotic Americans who put their lives on the line to serve their country but went astray because they followed orders" (Wallis, p. 38). Thomas (2004) reported that England’s "best friend, Destiny Goin, described England as 'a caring person' who adopted a stray cat in Iraq" (Thomas, 2004, p.27). The reservists of the 372nd Military Police Company in Cresaptown, MD were described as coming from the poor communities in valleys of Appalachia, many of whom signed on to receive college benefits. This personal narrative employed normalcy, patriotism, class, and kindness toward a cat as supportive evidence.

Narratives may be imagined and told differently based on the needs of the storytellers, which are usually based on their identification and vested interests. "Master" narratives, described by Lyotard, (1984) encompass major historical ways of thinking about progress, modernity, civilization, imperialism, and rationality, which have been used to legitimize European and United States' dominance and imperialism in the world. The Abu Ghraib prison photographs also participate within narratives about who we are as members of groups, and who we consider to be "the Other."

McGeary (2004) uses the personal story of Haider Sabbar Abed al-Abbadi, one of the photographed detainees, to construct the meanings from the point of view of "the Other." Haider Sabbar Abed al-Abbadi told Time that he was never charged or interrogated yet he spent nine months in detention after his arrest for a petty scuffle. He reported knowing the photographs were taken "because I saw the flashbulbs go off through the bag over my head." He says he is the hooded man in the picture in which a petite, dark-haired woman in camouflage pants and an Army T-shirt gives a thumbs-up as she points to the prisoner's genitals. He says he was in the pileup of naked men ordered to lie on the backs of other detainees as a smiling soldier in glasses looks on. And al-Abbadi says he was told to masturbate, though he was too scared to do more than pretend, as a female soldier flaunted...
her bare breasts” (McGeary, 2004, pp. 27–28). The *Time* article called these photographs, “raw cruelty of U.S. soldiers ridiculing the manhood of Iraqi captives . . . images of sadism [that] symbolized all that is going wrong with the U.S. venture in Iraq . . . debasing Islam and humiliating Arabs . . . turning even more ordinary Iraqis against the occupation.” (p. 28). She uses his story to discuss cultural narratives about military power, sexual abuse, and U.S. foreign policy in Iraq.

People use images and cultural narratives in many ways to construct understandings about the world, to advance arguments that support a logic about their place in society, and to inform the ways we think, act, dress, speak, or imagine ourselves as “people like us.” These are real issues for art educators as we consider the power of images as cultural texts circulating in society.

Rush Limbaugh constructed another cultural story that he used on his national radio talk show to challenge the human rights logic and change the rhetoric about the abuses. “Rush Limbaugh told his audience last week that the whole thing reminded him of a ‘Skull and Bones initiation.’ He argued that the torturers should be cut a little slack: ‘You ever heard of emotional release? You heard of [a] need to blow some steam off?’” (Alter, p. 31.) Alter comments, “Limbaugh’s peculiar rationalization didn’t get traction, but he’s right about one thing: when it comes to pictures, context still counts” (Alter, 2004, p.31). Alter argues most of the prisoners were not terrorists but civilians resisting an occupying army. While Limbaugh’s story was not well received, his cultural narrative still carries considerable weight in the cultural sea of ideas since his radio show is broadcast in most markets in the U.S. Limbaugh made an intertextual articulation by comparing the Abu Ghraib photographs to the “Skull and Bones” initiation, which is a secret society at Yale (to which President Bush and Senator Kerry belonged) in which men lie in a coffin and confess their sexual secrets.
Intertextual Articulation- How do people link images with cultural narratives?

Intertextual articulation is another tool that teachers may use to help students investigate meaning and realize their own thought patterns. Intertextual refers to linking one cultural text such as a photograph with other texts such as novels, music, movies, television shows, toys, games, or personal experiences. Articulation refers to particular interpretations made while connecting these texts. Stuart Hall (1986/1996) describes articulation as the connection between two different elements that are suggested under certain conditions. Hall has written:

It is a linkage, which is not necessarily determined, absolute and essential for all time. . . Thus, a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements came, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects. (Hall, 1986/1996, p.144)

Teachers may ask students to probe their memories to see if they associate, or link, a particular image with other things they have seen or experienced. This helps students to realize that prior experiences often unconsciously influence them to interpret new experiences. After the association is made, students should scrutinizing why they made the connections, the messages they have learned, and the possible consequences.

My “Intertextual” Connections and Art Work

I experienced the images from Abu Ghraib through my eyes, mind, and body and made “intertextual” connections. First, I remembered the human rights trips I took to El Salvador and Nicaragua in 1983; to the Philippines in 1986; and, to South Africa and Namibia in
1992. I recalled people describing the atrocities they had suffered and seeing their wounds. I saw photographs of death squad victims at the Human Rights Watch sponsored by the Catholic Church in El Salvador. I remembered the secret torture manual that was produced by the United States CIA and used by the U.S.-sponsored “Contras,” who were former guards of the Nicaraguan dictator, to perform violent acts in Nicaragua in the 1980s. I remembered a refugee who was protected by my church in 1983, who had been trained by the death squads in El Salvador and escaped to tell his story. His superiors, and other soldiers in Latin America, were trained in the United States at the School of the Americas in Columbus, Georgia to commit acts of torture during interrogation in their countries.

Because torture is not an abstract concept to me, the Abu Ghraib prison photographs seemed very powerful and real. As I researched and wrote this article, I first experienced the images very physically, through my body, as if I were present for the telling of the event by the victims. Next, I concentrated on the spectacle as it unfolded—watching the Senate hearing and trying to understand what happened and how the arguments were constructed. Then I immersed myself in reading about the event and I started piecing together the events historically. After that, I experienced a sense of detachment. I was able to remove myself and see these photographs as evidence of the “codes of representations” and “cultural narratives.” I could feel myself relying on my mind to abstractly understand the circumstances surrounding the photographs, rather than seeing them as the embodiment of human experience. Finally, I saw them as mediated through all my experiences as individual human experiences and through my research as important visual culture artifacts used to articulate complex meanings and power relationships internationally.
To better illustrate how I have translated a similar experience into a creative work that I recommend below for students to do, I have included a collage that I did on September 15, 2001, four days after the attack on the New York Trade Center and Pentagon. As I reflected on
my thoughts and emotions during that week, I cut out images and texts that appealed to me and juxtaposed different elements. At the time I was hopeful that the attack would help Americans to sympathize with the families of the victims, empathize with other victims of terror, and lead to new international compassion and understanding. Instead, I saw evidence of repressive measures against Arab Americans and calls to avenge the attacks by bombing Afghanistan and Iraq. As I worked, the face of a dark veiled woman emerged. She looked up-hopeful. The words “politics, morality, and repression” appeared in the middle of an advertisement for high heel shoes. To me the shoes signify female conformity to society’s standards - by contorting the foot and changing the natural balance of the body. I thought of those black shoes as the restrictive military boots of our times. I felt we were being asked to fall in step with these times, through the rhetoric of morality, to join the call for revenge and repression of civil liberties.

Examining Images with Students

In the following pages I discuss why it is important to discuss violent or sensational images with students. I also make suggestions for teachers about questions they could ask regarding images and art making experiences that could follow that discussion. The following research suggests that if images and narratives in popular culture go unchallenged, students consider them to be normal, “the way it is,” promoting a possibility that these acts might be enacted toward them, or by them, in their lives.

Steyer (2002) documents the responses of young people to violent media. He writes that “[m]ore than a thousand scientific studies have shown that over time, exposure to violence in the media results in desensitization, fear, and increased aggression” (Steyer, p.16). Violence-saturated media can teach that “violence is an acceptable way to deal with conflict . . .and can desensitize them toward the use of violence in the real world” (p. 72). For example, one study (Lefkowitz, Eron, Walker,
& Huesmann, 1977) conducted with boys between the age of eight and eighteen found “[t]he more TV violence a boy watched at the age of eight, the more aggressive his behavior would be—not only at age eight but ten years later, at eighteen” (Steyer, 2002 p. 77). In a report by the U.S. Surgeon General (2000) the number of violent acts by high school seniors has climbed by 50% and assaults by young people have jumped nearly 70% since 1983, which corresponds to the time when violent television programming was allowed under President Ronald Reagan’s deregulation policy for children’s television (Steyer, 2002, p. 94) and other changes in social programs offered to the poor.

William Dodsen, superintendent of the school district in Pearl, Mississippi, where two girls lost their lives, said, “Somehow . . . we are not getting across to young people, that life is not a movie. There are consequences” (Steyer, 2002, p. 95). These statistics and stories suggest that teachers should discuss visual images that record violent acts with their students and give them ways to channel their feelings through art making.

Recommendations for Discussion and Art Making

Teachers might ask students a range of questions, such as the following, to engage students in discussion about any contemporary image based on the theories discussed in this article. I have translated those concepts into questions that I believe secondary students would understand.

1. **Denotation - codes of representation:** What do you see in the picture? What subject matter or design features do you recognize?

2. **Connotation - symbolic or cultural meanings based on the juxtaposition of elements:** What do the things in the picture “suggest by what they show and how they show it” (Barrett, 2003, p.11)? In other words, what meanings do these images or design qualities suggest to you? Why?
3. **Intertextual Articulation - Connections between the image and other experiences:** Do the things in the picture remind you of other pictures you have seen or things you have experienced in places, books, movies, video games, television, or stores? Explain. When you compare this image to those other experiences, do they influence you to think about this image in certain ways? Does this image remind you of any fears, desires, or fantasies?

4. **Empathy/Subjectivity:** Do you personally identify with the people or parts of the image? Explain. How would you feel if the people in this picture were related to you? What messages does this image suggest about relationships between people? How would you feel if you were in the position of another person, one who doesn’t remind you of yourself? Explain.

5. **Encoding - Producing the image:** Who made this image? From what perspective did he or she take the photograph? Do you think the image-maker is an insider or an outsider to this experience? What values or ideas do you think influenced the producer to make this image? Can anyone suggest another explanation?

6. **Socio-historical Context:** What was going on in the world at the time when this photograph was taken? What social, economic, political, or cultural situations existed that might influence your understanding of this photograph? What ideas, feelings, or actions does this image support or challenge?

7. **Cultural Narratives:** Do you see evidence of cultural stories that have been told for many years in this photograph about gender, racism, class, sexuality, military power, or domination of some people over other people or resources? Could someone else tell another story about this photograph to use it in another way to support another purpose? Does this image suggest consequences or choices to you?

8. **Possible Social Consequences and Response-Ability:** How might this image influence people to think, feel, act, or imagine future
possibilities for themselves or others? Does this image influence you to respond to ideas or messages in your art or life?

Suggestions for Making Art

1. Find images and texts from magazines and newspaper articles to which you respond because of the personal importance of the issue, graphic appeal, or your desire for an object or a person. Journal about why you selected these items. Challenge your motives. Cut, tear, or photocopy the images for use in a collage or assemblage. Find other human-made objects or natural forms that seem related to your purpose.

2. Juxtapose the images with other images and texts. Reflect on the associations that these words and images suggest from your experiences or other “cultural texts” such as books, movies, games, songs, art, or television, and write about those reflections.

3. View artwork by artists who have used collage, assemblage or an assortment of images in their work in response to historical events or personal issues such as Ester Hernandez, David Avalos, Amalia Mesa-Bains, Robert Rauchenberg, Hannah Hoch, Romare Bearden, Keith Haring, Richard Hamilton, Charleen Teeters, Eddie Chambers, and Barbara Kruger. Research how they used collage or assemblage to express their feelings, ideas, or beliefs.

4. Clarify your ideas for your own art work. Make or search for other images that would help you to make connections and strengthen the content or design.

5. Continue with an intuitive and reflective process as you juxtapose images and texts in the creation of a work. Decide on the background, middle ground and top images in layers before gluing or setting the images in place.

6. Once the images are secure, add paint, words, or objects that support or challenge the meanings of the images and words you have already selected.
7. Reflect and share what you have created with others and listen to their views.

Conclusion

This article aims to explore the multiple ways that teachers and students might investigate, analyze and interpret images in the mass media and visual culture, such as the images photographed at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2003. I explored ways that teachers might use key concepts such as: representation, power/knowledge/truth, image, cultural narratives, and intertextual articulation as tools for discussions with students. Next, I explored my own way to thinking about the implications of the Abu Ghraib photographs and a collage I created. Finally, I suggested questions teachers might use to explore images from visual culture perspectives and recommended an artistic process for making creative work using images in popular media culture.

No image has an essential identity, meaning, or truth in itself. Rather images are employed and interpreted within historically-constructed social discourses. The meanings that people have constructed for images have depended on the social conditions under which they are produced and used; the responses of people who encounter them; the cultural narratives that producers and users employ to construct their sense of reality; and the social power needed to give one set of meanings precedence over others. These are significant issues for art educators as we consider the power of images as cultural texts circulating in society and the meanings students may construct from them.
References


The following pages chronicle a diverse collage of recent un(becoming) and becoming events from arts policy realms, as well as issues, events and programming in the Idaho arts community. Throughout the narration and description, critical analyses of these actual events, and the articulated and sometimes hidden pedagogies of these situations are measured against the criteria of community pedagogy. Rather than examining un(becoming)/becoming as a simple binary, the complexity of evaluating these events as either or both is presented when appropriate. Strong motivation to recognize social change and justice efforts through exercised community pedagogy nonetheless leads the evaluation and analysis. Local unbecoming tales exemplify challenges to be undone in Idaho, if a truer, and more holistic art education practice is to fully experience its own becoming.

One may assume that the realm of pedagogic reflection is often left to formal art educators, but the extended arts community made up of artists and arts organizations, as well as support entities taking on informal educational roles, also implement and radiate pedagogical
philosophy and practice. Evaluations of both un(becoming) and becoming practices within the larger purview of art education in these contexts are dependent upon the political, philosophical and, in this case, pedagogical underpinnings of the evaluator. Here, in efforts to position arts teaching and learning as a catalyst to individual and communal transformation within social change, the author argues for the implementation of an evolving community pedagogy in any and all educational related arts work, and thus evaluates recent Idaho happenings and their pedagogy against this criteria.

Keys (2003a) links and explores the goals and ideas of community-based practices in art education and arts-based community development within the context of an evolving pedagogy. Community pedagogy is grounded in theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy and social reconstruction. To develop, maintain and utilize an evolving community pedagogy, first

...an initial foundational layer, a base of a sincere and well functioning egalitarian community must exist, no matter what the teaching/learning setting. Next the educator/learner-cultural worker must commit to ideas of facilitative leadership and to empowering students/colleagues/communities. Additional layers include fostering an educative experience that demands decision-making, encourages freedom and facilitates self-expression. This creates a situation or experience of lived community—the essence of community pedagogy (Keys, 2003a, p. iii).

[Pedagogy that claims to be community pedagogy is one that must articulate, model and induce actual lived community within its spheres of application. This means that teachers, artists, community arts workers, scholars, and practitioners must take leadership roles to first cultivate egalitarian environments in their
classrooms, cities, and community activity spaces. Only then can persisting and persevering efforts at empowerment, engagement, freedom, voice, expression and increments of social change follow (Keys, 2003a, p. 206).

Given the minimal formal education in the arts and access to arts programs student and citizens’ experience, certain arts situations carry intense impact that may empower or harm the Idaho community. Situations that qualify as un(becoming) to the progressive improvement of art education in the state of Idaho seem to sequence themselves in an alarming dot-to-dot delay away from critical arts teaching and learning. Betwixt these bewildering manifestations implemented by named “student leaders” and “arts leaders,” however, amazing visionaries and events of becoming come into focus and potentially radically impact those who are listening and seeing. These becomings clearly manifest characteristics of community pedagogy by laying the groundwork not only for critical improvement to art education, but also for transformative arts work and social justice efforts within these arenas.

I—unbecoming statue and student leaders
awkward, clumsy, discreditable, gauche, ill-suited, inappropriate, inapt, incongruous, indecent, indecorous, indelicate, inept, maladroit, malapropos, offensive, rough, salacious, tacky, tasteless, unattractive, unbefitting, unconely, undue, unfair, unfit, unfitting, unflattering, ungodly, unhandsome, unlovely, unseasonable, unseemly, unsightly, unsuitable, unsuited, untimely, untoward, unworthy (Webster.com).
Boise State University, September 22, 2003

Kaikoo Sculpture

In an eye-catching front page photograph in The Arbiter university newspaper, the Associated Students of Boise State University (ASBSU) President, and Vice President stand in their school color collegiate rugby shirts affront a 21 foot worn red formalist geometric steel sculpture in the central campus quad. On its awkward cement platform the formidable abstract shape looks a bit like a lonely funky rocket on a launching pad. The title of the newspaper article graphically emblazoned over the sculpture and above the heads of the student leaders reads: "What the hell is that big red thing in the quad?" The article describes point-by-point the newly elected leaders priorities for the ensuing school year.

Among the biggest goals for this year are:

**Removing the statue in the quad.**

**Problem:** The red statue is not only a hindrance to the function of the quad, but is also considered by many to be aesthetically displeasing.

**Solution:** Several options are available for the replacement of the statue, but none have been decided on. One of the most popular is replacing the memorial fountain that was buried underneath the extension of the Albertson’s Library" (Olsen, 2003, p. 1).

The priority list continues on to mention the important work of establishing new traditions, adding teaching evaluation systems, adding a diversity requirement to general university studies, matching the Idaho Promise Scholarship, and getting equitable funds for Boise State University (BSU).
Needless to say, the initial priority and sheer disregard of a campus public artwork managed to stir the ire of many in the art department. At this time just a month into my new post as gallery director and lecturer, I committed to taking up the cause of advocacy in a guest editorial and began a short and intense research project into the sculpture. To my surprise, the art faculty did not know allot about the work—and no one seemed to know its name—or the artist offhand. The new chair, however, did remember its installation during his undergraduate studies in the mid eighties. I gathered a bit of the available folklore and then planned to visit the archives department of the library.

Internationally renowned artist Betty Gold created the piece. It was donated to BSU in 1985 by leading steel industrialist and art collector, Sidney M. Feldman. Our sculpture is one of Gold’s Holistic Sculptures—meaning Gold cut one piece of steel into geometric shapes and then rearranged them to create the sculpture. She likened this process to her holistic view of art. Our piece, *Kaikoo Series # H VIII* is from a 17 sculpture series, originally inspired by a trip to Hawaii. Purdue University installed *Kaikoo VI* in 1987. Others in the *Kaikoo* series are located in Seoul (IX & XVII) and Brea, California (IV & XVI)...The fact that BSU owns a Betty Gold sculpture links our campus internationally and globally to other important cultural sites and institutes of learning (Keys, 2003b, p. 4).

Before I made it to the archives, and worked up the promised editorial, a colleague hearing of my inquiry passed on a very alarming flyer created to assist ASBSU leaders in their campaign to remove the sculpture. This increased my concerns, and I doubled my efforts to quickly establish a rich contextual history and cultural significance for the work.
Attempts were made to dismiss the sculpture earlier this semester in the limited circulation of '[an] informal proposal from ASBSU,' complete with a photographic montage of the sculpture with a cut out of Saddam Hussein's head on top. The flyer, called readers to '[join] the effort to tear down the Saddam statue!' The association of BSU's Kaikoo with such an iconic image representing war and terror is inflammatory, appalling and completely unbecoming of student leadership. Not to mention that an 'effort to tear down' or otherwise 'dispose' of the artwork, is illegal according to the Federal Visual Artists Rights Act enacted as part of the Copyright Act in 1990. Protecting after-sale rights of artists, the act prevents the distortion, mutilation, modification or destruction of artworks (Keys, 2003b, p. 4).

In the remaining passages of the editorial, ideas to convene a diverse campus and community public art review committee are mentioned, and potential solutions are presented for educational and conservation improvements.

It is my opinion that the university has an obligation to educate the campus community as to the cultural and historical significance of our Kaikoo, by means of initiating new signage reflecting the title and Holistic Sculpture classification. Additional contextual information should be supplied in the library and on the BSU website. The sculpture is also in great need of a condition assessment by a professional conservator. In time an educational walking tour of BSU public art could be developed and marketed to the general public increasing cooperation between the university and the greater community (Keys, 2003b, p. 4).
In continuation of the dialogue in the press—four additional letters to the editor and/or columns were written and the story was picked up by the Boise Weekly, a local arts and entertainment paper. In the additional BSU writings, other ASBSU members stressed the university student senate’s real initiatives, chastised others for wasting time on this issue, further demonized Kaikoo and touted a traditional bronze “bucking bronco” sculpture as “public art for everyman” (Aasvik, 2003). As evidenced, however in the following excerpt, some individuals in the community, such as letter to the editor writer, Coonrod, did begin to thoroughly consider Kaikoo and added metaphorical suggestion of this event being paralleled with higher education practices, to our understandings.

Kaikoo is a non-representational abstract sculpture made of geometric shapes cut from a single sheet of steel and then welded together to the specifications of its creator, Betty Gold. With asymmetrical balance, it can be viewed from different sides, angles, and times to produce multiple images and impressions. Comprised of diagonally implied lines, it seems to draw the observer to a focal point somewhere above its tip. It is loud, it is vibrant, and defies the quiet of the trees and grass that surround it. In asking people I know what they think of it, I find that most of them have not really given it much thought, but when they do, it is usually something confusing. Kaikoo seems to create a disturbance. The form and content escape me, but it seems to contrast with the natural setting, has a chaotic rhythm, and stands there as if to taunt the old, established, traditional administration building. These traits would seem to me to be ideal in a sculpture to represent a college campus...But I guess the real problem, as is hinted at in the Sept. 29 piece,
is that most students, and apparently our illustrious ASBSU leaders, don’t really find that they are willing to open their minds, learn something new, and find something like this (something that would cost them nothing, and is already well known outside of the Boise backwater) as something [of which to] be proud. (Coonrod, 2003)

The ongoing dialogue led to the university administration’s preliminary establishment of a committee made up of Boise State students, art academics, planners and local arts professionals. As of March 2005, there has been no forward development on the committee but these initial steps taken to develop a trustworthy structure in a committee reassured the campus that the community will assist in decision making regarding the fate of the sculpture. Additionally, Karen Bubb, Public Arts Manager at the local Boise City Arts Commission and new BSU masters in public policy student will spearhead initial campus public art efforts, such as new policy development for acquisition, placement, conservation, education, campus investment and potential committee development as part of her graduate study.

In the above account of Kaikoo, a sculpture cited as unbecoming through an unbecoming campaign invoked by student leaders motivated dialogue and the potential establishment of a diverse review committee. If handled with strong leadership this beginning pattern of community pedagogy may continue and flourish. Without it, any decision made will be viewed as forced and hierarchical, similar to the burial, covering up of, or fill in of the Veteran’s Memorial Fountain, to expand the Library one summer break without campus investment as cited in the student leaders solution section of their priority list.
Boise State University, September 24, 2004

*Jaune Quick-to-See Smith*

Within the role of a visiting artist, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith\(^2\) loaned twenty artworks from her personal collection for university exhibition, delivered two printmaking workshops to students and faculty, critiqued the work of graduate MFA students, and gave a public lecture at Boise State University. Smith’s presence in the studio classrooms, the gallery and the ballroom where she lectured was affirming and empowering. Advocating that we really listen to one another, Smith selflessly gave her time and ear to everyone with whom she came into contact. In her lecture collaged with storytelling and critical residues from everyday life—such as e-mail correspondence, headlines and other items from popular culture, she communicated the finer points of a truly evolved sense of culture—essentially arguing for the equality and celebration of all peoples—and of course their cultural expressions.

‘In the beginning, art had no name.’ Thus did Native American artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith open her lecture at Boise State’s First Nations Conference on September 24. It goes to the heart of the special relationship the ancient indigenous cultures of the Americas have had with the creative act. Art was such an integral part of society, helping shape its collective consciousness, defining a spiritual way
of life, that for thousands of years it was never put on a pedestal. That rich heritage is part of what Smith brings to her work along with a commitment to social justice, an appreciation for popular culture, a taste for the wit and irony of Pop and the brashness of Abstract Expressionism. A talented painter and printmaker, Smith’s art captures the multicultural existence that informs Native American life today. A traditionalist, a modernist and a non-conformist, she calls herself ‘a mediator,’ ‘cultural worker’ and ‘bridge builder’ between cultures, stating ‘my art, my life experience and my tribal ties are totally enmeshed.’ Smith stirs your conscience without bitterness (Schnoor, 2004).

When it was time for the visual section of her lecture presentation, Smith treated the audience to her own slide collection of images and commentary regarding the artwork of over twenty current contemporary Native artists. Her intimate knowledge of the artwork and the artists, enabled a deeply contextualized talk that gave way to an exciting level of exposure and understanding to audiences who do not experience contemporary Native artwork on a regular basis. This decision exemplified not only Smith’s willingness to really listen to other artists and her intentions to continually network individuals and communities but also her commitment to sharing her stage, her lecture time, and her visit to BSU with non-present contemporary Native artists such as James Luna and C. Maxx Stevens.

Later, Smith discussed many of her own works, elucidating her intentions and adding to our interpretations. To hear from such an accomplished and aware artist, working to benefit the community and messages of contemporary Native artists and to better and enlighten the community of our world in general was a rare treat. In these ways, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith emphatically epitomized an artist utilizing a community pedagogy.
III—unbecoming stewardship
awkward, clumsy, discreditable, gauche, ill-suited, inappropriate, inapt, incongruous, indecent, indecorous, indelicate, inept, maladroit, malapropos, offensive, rough, salacious, tacky, tasteless, unattractive, unbefitting, uncomely, undue, unfair, unfit, unflattering, ungodly, unhandsome, unlovely, unseasonable, unseemly, unsightly, unsuitable, unsuited, untimely, untoward, unworthy (Webster.com).

Idaho Commission on the Arts, October 2, 2004
Governor’s Awards in the Arts 2004

On a cool night in October I attended the Governor’s Awards in the Arts 2004: A Celebration of the Arts in the Spirit of the USO at the Warhawk Air Museum in Nampa, Idaho. Here the artistic excellence in Idaho was to be celebrated. “Artists, art educators, and arts organizations make Idaho a special place and encourage Idaho’s growth and reach for becoming a greater lived community each and every day. On this special evening a total of 17 Awards in the Arts were shared with awardees” (Idaho Commission on the Arts, 2004).

The critique that follows is not designed to detract from the due credit to awardees and their tireless efforts toward their work and dedication to making Idaho a better place. The critique rather, is in regard to the partial funding and organizing body of the awards, the Idaho Commission on the Arts.

Called to our feet, the entire $100 per ticket, black tie optional, audience most with hands held over hearts (myself and few other independent dissenters held hands down) the Governor’s Awards in the Arts ceremony and gala presented at the Warhawk Air Museum began with a formal presentation of the colors by military personnel (national and state flags were presented), an instrumental version of
America the Beautiful, and an invocation by a Catholic priest delivering a prayer. Ignoring at the get go, the separation of church and state and the fact that all Idahoans do not acknowledge a Christian God or a deity at all, we were nonetheless beckoned to pray and show respect to our country's flag regardless of our opinions about the ensuing war in Iraq.

The event touted a United Service Organization (USO) theme referencing WWI and WWII arts as entertainment theme utilizing the likes of Bob Hope, Marilyn Monroe and hundreds of other entertainers who uplifted troops in past wartime. Used currently the theme implied unspoken full support of current US troops at war in Iraq. The sincerely spoken and tasteful interview video clips celebrating each awardee were grievously eclipsed overall by an overly staged awards show highlighting the history of the USO and catering to the elite arts supporters in Idaho. Rather than a sincere and tasteful recognition ceremony of arts excellence in the state, a heavy dose of sugar coated pro-war sentiment, support of current troops in Iraq and the Governor's unwavering support of the current Bush presidency, was served up alongside our Cornish game hen and asparagus. In critique one has to wonder why someone did not advise the Governor and the Idaho Commission on the Arts board and/or staff planners against the idea of holding a state sanctioned, partially state funded event at the Warhawk Air Museum in the time of a highly questionable war—and/or mention this as a potentially ridiculous and tasteless fiasco during its planning efforts as far back as the time our nations leaders were simply courting war. Surely the Idaho of today still represents a conservative Republican strong hold, but within the state population there are other points of view and dissenting opinions. It is the role and duty of the arts to express diversity in opinion, and one would assume, therefore, an interest of the Idaho Commission on the Arts as well given their objectives.
The Idaho Commission on the Arts is the official state agency for the support and development of the arts in Idaho. The Commission promotes artistic excellence, education in the arts, access to the arts for all and community investment in the arts. Its professional staff administers and develops the programs and services of the agency, assists grant applicants, and provides technical assistance (Idaho Commission on the Arts, 2004).

Even though providing arts access to all is a priority at the Idaho Commission on the Arts, this was not echoed in the Governor’s Awards in the Arts planning. With tickets at $100 per plate, several citizens were precluded from attendance. In years past, a more reasonable $15 for tickets to the award presentation was set, and subsequent gala participation requested the purchase of an additional more expensive ticket. As it was in 2004, the mass of an estimated 300 attendants were made up of Idaho Commission on the Arts Commission and Staff members, awardees and guests, entertainers, and political and arts leaders from across Idaho. A diverse presence from the public—and conscientious outreach to the greater arts community—and the greater state of Idaho was missing. Plans were shared with the audience that, the general public may soon tune in and watch the recorded awards ceremony re-narrated by the Governor himself on Idaho Public Television.

Lastly, the constant reminder of the private and corporate donations assembled for the very expensive event on the video screens during the social hour and through dinner was crass. It was and a constant reminder of the lack of community pedagogy at work in this arena. All of aforementioned decisions regarding the USO theme, the location and cost of the event, and the illuminated “donor wall,” re-enforced the ideas that the arts are for the elite and that all are really not welcome to celebrate the artistic excellence of Idaho’s artists,
educators and organizations, except of course later on their own televisions, providing they own a set.

Overall, this event was non-reflective and non-responsive to the aspects of community pedagogy the agency’s own mission in part purports. In turn these actions instead seem to negate the entire premise of supplying competitive arts-related grant money, education, advocacy and assistance to each corner of the state, and undermine the fragile cultivation of a statewide arts community.

IV—becoming a remembering community
acceptable, agreeable, attractive, beautiful, comely, cute, effective, enhancing, excellent, fair, graceful, handsome, neat, nice, presentable, pretty, seemly, tasteful, welcome, well-chosen (Webster.com).

Sun Valley Center for the Arts
August 6-October 29, 2004

The Vanishing: Re-presenting the Chinese in Idaho

Comprised of new work commissioned by the Sun Valley Center for the Arts^5^, located in Ketchum, Idaho, the exhibition, The Vanishing: Re-presenting the Chinese in Idaho, includes paintings and drawings by contemporary artist Hung Liu and an installation by artist Rene Yung. In Yung’s installation, “...The viewers in fact become performers of the acts of erasure and of remembering, in analogous anonymity to that of the Wood River Valley Chinese immigrants (Yung, 2004. p. 18). Now the exhibition is touring in Idaho and the regional west.
Serving critical roles as railroad workers, miners, business owners, farmers and cooks, Chinese immigrants were a significant factor in the West's development. By 1870, Idaho had the largest percentage of Chinese people per capita in the nation, comprising nearly 30% of Idaho's entire population. Today in many western towns and communities this legacy has virtually vanished. In the most recent census Idaho's Chinese population was barely measurable. This multidisciplinary program will explore and expose the history of Chinese immigration in the Western United States, particularly in Idaho where the Chinese were crucial to the development of the young western territory.

Hung Liu's large-scale paintings are a powerful means for exploring memory and truth, loss and recovery. Using historical photographs from local and state archives as the basis for her paintings, these works will make real Idaho's Chinese population in the last decades of the 19th century. Artist Rene Yung's installation addresses issues of memory for immigrants. Walls of soap imprinted with the word REMEMBER, are slowly dismantled throughout the run of the exhibition as the soap is used by visitors to wash fabric imprinted with words referring to things remembered. As the fabric is washed and hung to dry, both the imprinted words and the soap's REMEMBER fades away referencing the vanishing memory of the valley's Chinese occupation as well as the Chinese individual's lost histories (Sun Valley Center for the Arts, 2004, original capitals).
This culturally riveting and aesthetically inviting exhibition and its commissioning utilizes community pedagogy. It has been explored by many members of the community and recently the Idaho Art Education Association (IAEA) members visited as part of their 2004 annual conference. Additionally, Rene Yung was an artist in residence for the conference and interacted with art teachers and other conference participants talking about her work and the ideas of community memory.

Community memories may assist in the reclamation of self, space, and place. Likewise, as informed by community-based arts education, arts-based community development, and critical pedagogy, a surfacing and ever-evolving model of community pedagogy (Keys, 2003) identifies community as a state of mind coinciding with both space and place. “Important and relevant for arts educators, arts administrators and other cultural workers, a community pedagogy utilizing the arts for social change offers entrances to reclamation of self, space, and place leading to individual and/or communal agency and progressive social justice efforts” (p. ii).

Like others who promulgate a community pedagogy in their practice (Baca 2002, Cleveland 2002, Ballengee-Morris & Keys 2001), and/or cite these characteristics in the work of others (Cieri & Peeps, 2000) Hung Liu’s and Rene Yung’s commissioned artworks act as a reclamation of the Chinese culture, immigrant memory and their forgotten or lost legacy in Idaho. The Sun Valley Center for the Arts radiates a community pedagogy in this presentation and through their artistic and humanities leadership in the state. Through the work and the vision of the Sun Valley Center for the Arts to commission this exhibition and installation, the significance of the lost culture is remembered, reconstructed, reclaimed and established anew. Additionally, they created a free zone of innovative expression and community building.
Truly free spaces or zones of expression, real communication, and community making are hard to locate. These by-products of creative work seem neutral, yet in reality are determinately political as free spaces support critical thinking, empowerment, collective action, and potentially revolution among the communities where they exist. These manifestations of created spaces put partial control back with the people and provide a place from which to work, think, and be together. This work and togetherness makes the public space their own and encourages others to join in the reclamation of the space—potentially in different ways. It also contains within it the energy to start an extending effect of this creation and reclamation by catalyzing additional action (Keys, 2003, p. 63).

In the Sun Valley Center for the Arts example, the reclamation of space occurs first in the gallery and then passes into the community at large as the Chinese are remembered and the community becomes a remembering community. Additional action catalyzed by this exhibition will continue the community making an remembering.

Moving Toward Greater Community Pedagogy in Idaho

Though preceded with the tell-tale synonyms for unbecoming and becoming each of these partial tales at times take on both manifestations, which reminds us that good things may grow out of unwise choices and decisions. Viewers and attendants at The Vanishing or at Jaune Quick-to-See Smith’s lecture, who are less enlightened regarding minority and/or multicultural issues, or perhaps not aware of nor committed to social justice concerns, may have found this programming to be unbecoming for an arts center or an art departments
visiting artist series. Likewise, many Governor's Awards in the Arts attendees found that event to be very becoming, and were not startled by the additional implied (yet perhaps hidden to some) pedagogies.

Lessons from each of these situations regarding what each one formally and informally teaches the public, and what participants may have learned, may be further illuminated when considered against the criteria of community pedagogy. In the above re-tellings, affirmation of many actions and chiding of others for lack of ability, awareness and/or interest in progressive social change efforts were articulated. Finally, these points of recapitulation are offered as guidelines to further promulgate community pedagogy in the Idaho arts community:

1) Boise State University arts leadership must work to transform public art advocacy, placement, and education to carry this significance into the future.

2) Idahoans consistently need to seek out and listen to the diverse visionary voices that exist both within our borders and outside of them.

3) State arts leaders need to take greater care to plan celebratory events of the arts that are truly accessible to a diverse citizenry, deliver more funding out to the state, and mindfully play up the uplifting power of arts excellence rather than champion current bi-partisan political causes.

4) Arts and education entities need to consistently work to develop programming which attempts to recognize, reclaim and remember lost and current cultures—adding to a greater and more full multicultural understanding across the state.

Encouraging this type of community conscientious work will allow those catalytic occurrences to keep building in our state and will model a continual improving and evolving utilization of community pedagogy. This in turn will assist in the progressive journey toward a lived community—and that is good for all of us.
Notes

1. For more information on the Kaikoo research article or to read the several letters to the editor please go to

http://www.arbiteronline.com and search for “Kaikoo” in the archives search engine. For more information on artist Betty Gold, please visit http://www.bettygold.com


To see visual images by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith please visit the Tamarind Institute website:

http://www.unm.edu/~tamarind//editions/jqts-img.html

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith’s art presents a cross-cultural dialogue between those values and experiences of the artist’s inherited past and those of late-20th-century Euro-American culture. A painter of Salish, French-Cree, and Shoshone heritage, Smith was born in St. Ignatius, Montana, and raised on the Flathead Reservation. She became an artist while in her 30s, and was already earning a living as a painter before she completed her M.F.A. degree at the University of New Mexico. By the mid-1970s Smith had also founded artists’ groups, curated exhibitions, and organized grassroots protests to express her concern for the land and its people. Over the past two decades, she has become one of the best known American Indian artists in a ground-breaking generation that includes herself, George Longfish, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, and others (National Museum of Women in the Arts-profile).
3. Excellence in the Arts:
    Cherie Buckner-Webb, Boise / Robert Wrigley, Moscow
    Frank Werner, St. Maries / Twin Falls Municipal Band,
    Twin Falls Company of Fools, Hailey

Excellence in Folk and Traditional Arts:
    Daniel Ansotegui, Boise / Dale Harwood, Shelley

Support of the Arts:
    Jane Falk Oppenheimer, Boise / Beaux Arts Société of the Boise
    Art Museum, Boise
    Thelma Stephens, Boise

Support for Arts Education:
    Cathy Mansell, Boise / La Var Steel, Twin Falls

Lifetime Achievements: Nat and Sally Adams, Boise

Idaho Artist to the World:
    Paul Revere, Boise / Bruce Willis, Hailey / Reunion,
    Idaho Falls / Driggs

Medallion Design: Elizabeth Wolf, Boise
(Idaho Commission on the Arts, 2004)

4. It is duly noted that both the Jaune Quick-to-See Smith lecture
and the Sun Valley Center for the Arts are partially supported by grant
monies from the Idaho Commission on the Arts. For more information
on ICA please visit the Idaho Commission on the Arts website at:
    http://www.arts.idaho.gov/
5. For more information on the Sun Valley Center for the Arts or The Vanishing: Re-presenting the Chinese in Idaho, please visit http://www.sunvalleycenter.org/

References


Moreover, I myself have reached an age at which my failing flesh reminds me at every moment that the ultimate questions about mortality, normality, and identity are ones which, though we cannot finally answer them, whatever our area of expertise, it is incumbent on us, for the sake of our common humanity, to keep on asking (Leslie Fiedler, 1978, p. xvi).

Introduction

Ambivalence with severe physical and mental abnormality runs deep in pedagogy, but it is only a reflection of an historical ambivalence in western culture. By analyzing institutionalized behaviors towards, and assumptions about, disability in art and education, I hope to speak to the theme of the journal, which is “(Un)becoming.” For at least a century individuals with severe physical disabilities have been derided as freaks, while for two decades of youth counterculture, the same term denoted a rite of passage. Individuals who exhibit their disability professionally want to be called performers or entertainers, while the Mothers of Inventions’ first album beckons their fans to “Join the United Mutations.” Artists have portrayed the Other in ways that might not
be faithful to their reality, while art made by the Other has made its way into the mainstream. Trained artists have made their profession look less becoming by co-opting the raw naiveté of their Outsider counterparts. This paradoxical penetration of boundaries deserves to be heard under the ambiguous rubric of (Un)becoming.

The dichotomy of such terms as normal/abnormal sets the stage for the domination of the majority of the so-called “Normals.” Leslie Fiedler (1978) calls the institutionalization of normalcy the “tyranny of the Normal” and the oppressed as the “Ultimate Other.” The historic division between “normal” and “Other” has deep roots in the collective unconscious, so it is to archetypes, myths, and legends that Fiedler turns. The fear that we might appear freakish to someone else lies in our adolescent unconscious only to be activated at the site of physical and mental deviation. Thus it is with wonder and awe that we gaze at the exception from the norm, or the Other. But far from reassuring us that we are normal, the “Other” is “really a revelation of what in our deepest psyches we recognize as the Secret Self” (Fiedler, 1996. 152).

The acceptable and self-conscious term “Other” became popular at a time when such terms as “Freak” were rejected, as well as a clear and non-transferable divide between “us” and “them.” The political correctness of “Other” appears to make deviation a matter of degree rather than of kind. Fiedler challenges political correctness as a thin veneer behind which remains long held fears, myths, and fantasies about disability. So it is with some irony that he invents the term “Absolute Other.” In his politically incorrect Freaks, Fiedler mines the collective unconscious peopled with the malformed, the overly large and the very small, the many limbed and those with missing limbs, as they are conceived in literature and art. The reader becomes aware of the simultaneous repulsion and attraction with the congenitally deformed and disabled who make their entrance into his or her consciousness. It is not through social interaction that the Absolute
Other is known, Fiedler writes, but in literature: fairy tales, myths, fiction, and in art. Fiedler sites such artworks as Goya's Giant and Velasquez's Las Meninas. Along with kings and courtesans, Velasquez and Goya also depict dwarfs and other physically deformed fellow-humans that were kept for their amusement. He sites fictional characters of authors such as Shakespeare's Richard III, Nathaniel Hawthorne's deformed and dejected Chillingworth in The Scarlet Letter, Victor Hugo's Hunchback in The Hunchback of Notre Dame, and more recently, the antihero in the revival of Merrick's Elephant Man. What do archetypal roles in these works of art and literature reveal about our historical obsession and oppression with the Ultimate Other? According to Fiedler, as long as these archetypes are embodied in literature and visual art, they live outside the "real world," and remain in the collective imagination. Are the disabled to be either pitied or revered as something other than human, as these images and characters suggest? Or are they merely to be perceived as one of the many varieties of humanity? To what extent, then, do we, as "normals," know the life of the Other?

Fiedler removes the Ultimate Others from the context of literature and art, and presents them center stage in his "sideshow" for our contemplation. "It took me into dark areas of my psyche which I had hitherto entered only in my most troubled dreams...in which we come to terms with the ultimate mysteries of Love and Death, the Self and Other" (1978, xiv). Confrontation with the dark side of the self was not the purpose of freak shows as the Victorians conceived them, however. Rather, they were cathartic spectacles. Human oddities were supposed to reassure the onlooker that they are the freaks, not us (Fiedler, 1978). Now, as our trust in these distinctions wanes, the freak show has come to mean something quite different, something coarse and embarrassing. Possibly the 60's and 70's subculture of freaks and punks helped to usher in a self-reflexive era, reminding normals of their tenuous separation from these oddities
Somewhere between the sideshow and the arts lie the lived experiences of the Other. Fiedler suggests that although more humanistic than the sideshow, the arts still fail to tell the truth about the Other, or how the Other perceives herself. Rather, the arts show us how the Other is perceived by “Normals.” Fiedler suggests that this less than perfect human body, its decline, and ultimate death, is behind the disownment of the Other. Is it the psyche’s secret deformities and the fear of death that keeps disability from entering spontaneous conversation? If little value is found in the cultural and social discourse about disability, what possibility is there for reconstruction and renewal? Is the institutionalization of the Other a socially sanctioned way of keeping death and disability at a distance?

While the institutionalization of the old and infirm, the wheelchair bound and the psychotic, is an imperfect practice, the art that has emerged from these same institutions has redeemed the inevitable isolation and loss. In the past century, making art has been used in institutions as a way of offering psychic freedom, if not bodily freedom, by providing a partial antidote to the social problems generated in an impoverished environment. The lack of efficacy one has in an institution can do more harm in the building of a positive self-image than the physical disability itself (Lowenfeld, 1987). These limitations, however, become the driving force for making art. The urgency to conquer isolation and reclaim selfhood often results in equally powerful art. Reaching out to the world through visual symbols transforms physically and psychically painful experience into metaphor and neutralizes feelings of isolation and loss. With experience, unintentional behavior becomes intentional, and mastery over the laws of materials parallels how effectively one communicates through them. The following pages briefly describe the current history of art that has emerged from such institutions.
The Marginal Arts

Who is there who will ensure the production of the barbarous images, the impudent graffiti, the intrepid doodles, the shaggy embroideries, in this age of the computer, the television, and the cordless phone? (Roger Cardinal, 2000, p.72)

Only since the early 20th century has art made inside mental institutions and other facilities become of interest to the art world, and given the appropriate name of “Outsider Art,” coined by the British art historian, Roger Cardinal in 1972. For Cardinal, the “otherness” of Outsider art was characterized by its lack of regional, ethical, religious, or occupational tradition. “It wasn’t fine art because it wasn’t learned in an academic setting, and it wasn’t commercial because it wasn’t made to sell” (Krug, 1992, p. 107). Outsider Art extends beyond institutions and into prisons and rural back roads. The term is now used with some irony since Outsider Art has become a style co-opted by trained “insider” artists. That the orthodox art world embraced this art form is indicative of the historically ironic relationship the normal world has with disability. Cardinal (2000) dates the end of the nineteenth-century in Europe as the genesis of the marginal arts, which at the same time gave birth to the lone genius of the avant-garde and set the stage for a host of marginalities. Even while crossbreeding with the primitive and untrained, the linear progress of high modernism constructed an insular, insider world. Museum and gallery art might then be considered the insider counterpart of what is deemed to be outside. The acknowledgment of these Outsiders who make art inside institutions disrupted this trajectory. Enter the paradox of the passive patient, as described by McBryde Johnson (2003). Having lost ownership of life, the patient now takes up a brush and symbolically
takes control once again. Within this new locked-up life, art is made as a form of resistance — the declaration of one’s humanity in the face of powerlessness. “As a glimpse of something other than what normal perception makes available, art offers a special sort of hope” (Cardinal, 2000, p. 54). In these institutions that imprison the body, impulse outweighs real and symbolic constraint. Ironically, what is distinctive about the work of these artists is its unrestrained and uncontainable quality (Cardinal, 2003). In acts of self-construction and self-affirmation, they invent worlds that beckon us, and we submit to them unconditionally. “They have a disturbing authority and intensity, these Outsiders. We get sucked into their world ... they invent an alternative world that is inhabited absolutely” (Cardinal, 2003).

In the early twentieth-century, Prinzhorn in Heidelberg and Leo Navatil at the Gugging Institution in Austria, saw that making art could use madness as a point of departure from which a new identity might emerge. Unlike art therapy, the artists were not being prepared to re-enter society in a conventional role, but to offer society something of themselves as they are and on their own terms. A hybrid form of art therapy and art training was forming, driven neither by psychology nor the canon of western art technique. Rather, Outsiders are characterized by the need to communicate emotions that are uncontainable within the orthodoxy of the art world. Isolation and illness motivates the maker to express the ironic condition of living outside social conventions, and the strangeness of their spontaneous visual gestures and utterances are reminders of the arbitrariness of artistic conventions. Many of these works show evidence of a striving to construct and explain their own world through figures, symbols and text. Many artists decontextualize discarded materials and objects and reconstruct them with an obsessive and compulsive use of language (Rhodes, 2000).
Thus, the inhabitants of institutions that were designated as having nothing to say to us are now telling us something. There is contact through this visual world that stuns us into comprehension. They have reached across the divide and we can see ourselves in their images, “...there is a distinct sense that a compelling private vision gains authority over the frustration and failures of ordinary life, transmuting social deficit into artistic resplendence” (Cardinal, 2000, p. 66).

Dubuffet seized on the art of those “innumerable species and subspecies” (Cardinal, 2000, p. 52) that do not bow to the art world because they don’t know it exists. The institutionalized and disabled continue to hold a large space within the umbrella that Dubuffet called Art Brut. The art of this genre included, but was not limited to, folk art, child art, prison art, tattoo art, fairground art, and graffiti art (Cardinal, 2000), “art in the purest state of spontaneity, immaculately conceived, innocent of orthodox prescriptions, impervious to influence and audience alike” (Cardinal, 2000, p. 53). The artistic styles of those in confinement are nothing if not extraordinary assertions of freedom.

In Cardinal’s 1972 book entitled Outsider Art, he calls the Art Brut artists Outsiders, and it is this term that has remained most current and convenient, despite the authenticity rhetoric and redefinition of terms by curators, collectors, and gallery owners. The following pages describe two examples of such Outsider artists who spent most of their lives in institutions.

Two Artists Emerge

Art enshrines memories we sometimes never knew we had. It is said that everything fades. Yet the patterning of human expressions always represents a call to contact, a faint yet audible appeal to our curiosity and our generosity. Even the least communicative trace made by an alienated individual can touch us, pointing to our own solitude, our
Judith Scott, a 55-year-old woman with downs syndrome, was warehoused in an institution for 35 years until her "normal" twin, Joyce, rescued her (MacGregor, 1999). Her deafness was not recognized for the first 30 years and so she remained alienated and mis-diagnosed. Joyce soon brought her to the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland California, one of the oldest art programs for disabled men and women. She was unresponsive to most of the materials offered her until she wandered into the textile studio. After the long silence of neglect, Judith suddenly and spontaneously made soft fiber sculpture with scraps of yarn woven around discarded and found objects. From the first
construction, her work was entirely independently conceived. Its origination might have at first appeared as an accident, but it was soon followed by similar structures. They were unlike anything found or seen in her environment, all with the same bound reed form. It appeared that Judith found an image and a form of construction that had great significance for her (MacGregor, 1999). From our perspective, as insiders, Judith is making art. But there is no evidence that Judith has a concept of art, although what she makes seems to have great meaning for her. Each work takes months to complete, and she works with intensity and dedication.

This question of how we “Normals” make meaning of the art of the cognitively disabled can only be conjectured (MacGregor, 1999; Cardinal, 2003). Is it the disability itself that gives rise to such intensity and peculiar meaning? And what language does the viewer use to understand it? To the viewer’s eyes these works produced from compulsion and obsession sometimes look like the work of professional artists. But are they alike? Or is it that the viewer’s ideas about art need to change in order to embrace and apprehend these works on the level they deserve? MacGregor (1999) writes that the burden of assumption that is brought to bear on the artwork is troubling, even for professional artists. So much more troubling, then, are the unanswerable questions about Outsider Artists such as Judith Scott. Only to the extent that the observer can free himself or herself of assumptions, is entry possible into a “psychological and creative experience that departs radically from the norm. Merely to discover what we expect to find, is to have failed” (1999, p. 8).

Judith cannot speak or hear, and has little concept of language. Outside the intense relationship she has with her work, she seeks few others. She called her first constructions “Baba” and rocked them in her arms. They grew larger, even to life size, and many photographs show her embracing them. MacGregor finds a parallel between the
woven, layered fiber works and cocoons, both literally and metaphorically, as a form that protects, but also makes possible new life, or metamorphosis.

Something begins to grow slowly, meticulously, thoughtfully, day by day, month after month. Watching Judith working, witnessing the deliberate repeated gestures of her hands summoning an object into being, observing the slow evolution of a ‘thing,’ is not less fascinating, or essential than recording the step by step development of a spider’s web, or a moth’s cocoon. The recent works are large. Some could easily contain Judith’s body. All of them ‘contain’ Judith’s mind. (MacGregor, 1999, p. 32)

Judith gives life to these forms (see Umbrella, 2002 below), and at the same time they have given birth to her new life. They grow from objects that she adopts in the studio and wraps until only their shapes are left protruding under the layers of yarn. During this process she develops a lasting relationship with her work. “Occasionally, little loving pats serve as a way of saying hello or goodbye to the piece, or suggests a gentle gesture of approval or affection reminiscent of a mother’s touch” (1999, p.35).
Larry Bissonnette was, by turns, diagnosed as mentally retarded, clinically insane, schizophrenic, and autistic, and locked up for ten years at the now defunct Brandon Training School in Vermont. Like Judith, Larry’s sister removed him from the institution, and placed him in a residential program for developmental disabilities. It was through this program that he found his way to the Grass Roots Arts and Community Effort (GRACE) program in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. At GRACE he infuses his paintings with the rage he felt at Brandon. But even at Brandon he deflected rage by making art, prying open the door of the art room and working through the night. He has a rudimentary concept of language, focusing and persisting on words that have immediate relevance and meaning. This limited ability to communicate verbally translates into an intensity in his production of art work equal to Judith’s. Unlike Judith, he works two dimensionally, using paint,
crayons and markers, often on large and heavy boards. He makes his own frames from found wood, which puts the right finish to the rough rawness of his work. Most of his images are interiors of Brandon Training School, with such titles as Eating of Individuality by Institution, Pell Mell Mainland of Rolling Fortress of Painting of Monastery of Brandon Training School, and Utterly Gray Day at BTS (Brandon Training School). With his hands he carves embedded messages deeply into the paint. Only since 1991, when he became part of a process called facilitated communication, has he been able to communicate the meaning of these powerful art works. In March and July 1994, Bissonnette wrote:

Theories are the dangerous shingles of mandatory names of people and earthy houses. Omnipotent ecological art lends ordered structure to spelling termed expression or spraying tree of grapes of abstract concepts like love... Peach of startled tensions of ideas like love and happiness is picked best when world of daily checking for ripeness is dramatized greatly with paintings of titled explanations of methods of discrimination. (Sunseri, 1994, p.2)

Every day at the GRACE workshop in Burlington Vermont, Larry Bissonnette will religiously follow the same schedule. Larry knows the routine; he sets up his painting table, puts his board on it, and mixes his paints. The workshop lasts for three hours during which Larry is entirely occupied, murmuring words usually related to the text of his paintings. Every movement is sure and steady. He mixes a color for the base of his painting and works the paint with his hands onto the board. The paint becomes thick and viscous under his hands. Another color is soon applied, and forms start to emerge. The forms become the interior of Brandon; walls surrounding a shallow space. One might
interpret the walls as oppressive, suffocating the inhabitants. He has been working out his anger about Brandon in paintings such as these.

Just before noon, he puts his paints and board away, and takes a break with his caseworker before the afternoon workshop. I did not observe a workshop facilitator, as they are called, interrupt his flow. His concentration was confident and focused, and so the facilitator must have recognized that intervention was not desired or necessary. GRACE and The Creative Growth Art Center are similar in their approach. Both encourage highly individualized forms of expression by judiciously choosing when to intervene with advice or suggestions.

Judith Scott and Larry Bissonnette have much in common. Both have had damaging experiences in institutions. Both have found the release of anger and the birth of a new identity in art making. Both make art with a vengeance, and apparently follow an impulse that is akin to survival. Thus the significant aspect of Judith and Larry’s work is that it is self-motivated. Both artists are deliberate and confident in their process. Both artists begin the day with a routine that is as self-directed as any professional artist. This behavior, however, is in stark contrast with the artists’ inability to care for themselves or live independently. And it is this ironic condition that makes their life and work compelling. The onlooker cannot help but admire the purity and purpose with which such individuals make art.

The function of art in the lives of these Outsiders is complex and something other than what we know as the traditional function of art, in terms of production and communication. The insider, however, gives the artwork meaning in ways never conceived or intended by the artists. Where the point of contact is between their works and what we, of the art world, recognize as parallel, is unknowable. The outward form can only suggest to us our own pre-conceptions and well-established notions about meaning and art.
Conclusion

Mainstreaming in the public schools makes demands on teachers to become skillful with children with special needs. The art room is often the first regular classroom where this population is placed. New challenges are going unmet as both young art educators and art therapists are placed in settings that do not have clear boundaries. Both art education and art therapy are broadening their conceptual frameworks to include wider populations for which students are not prepared. Art education practices might benefit from the artistic processes of artists like Judith Scott and Larry Bissonnette. But in order to crossover to this approach, a few foundational assumptions about art making might be necessary to consider. First, these artists teach us that art making is a necessary form of communication when speech is inaccessible or inadequate. For them, art making might be viewed as a general behavior (Dissanayake, 1992), rather than as an object or quality, which are more common notions in art education. The second assumption is that all human beings have the capacity to create something of artistic value; an inherited ability to shape into concrete form one's inner reality. Finally, and this is where art educators come in, the right environment needs to be provided so that this human potential can be realized. If natural inclinations are thwarted or misdirected, art making will lack the conditions, or factors, that produce health.

This article advocates for a new form of scholarship: one that uses the lessons learned from both art therapy and art education. It might be considered a hybrid with aspects of both. In such places as GRACE and the Creative Growth Art Center, individuals with disabilities reshape their relationships with the world by using metaphor to transform emotion into poetic form. A critical space between these two fields allows for new identities to form with the least external intervention from us well-meaning, but clueless, insiders.
Notes

(1) Section 504 prevents discrimination in programs financed by the federal government.

References


In this essay I want to argue that un(becoming) is a word much like Freud’s (1919) discussion of the word unheimlich (uncanny), which reveals a secretive and clandestine aspect of art that art educators must and should concern themselves with, since it identifies a “realm of the Real” whose abjection legitimates our very practice at its expense. It marks a return of the repressed. Un(becoming), like Freud’s uncanny is visual art’s non-reflected double as I attempt to show. This is the issue I wish to raise when it comes to the question of so-called “Outsider art,” sometimes referred to as l’art brut (raw art) in the French context singularly because of the influence of Jean Dubuffet, but this is a somewhat misleading representation. Roger Cardinal published a book in 1972 with this title. Cardinal struggled to find the “right” term for such art. Many terms alluded to the creator’s social or mental status such as isolate art, maverick art, folk art, visionary art, inspired art, and schizophrenic art; or to the eccentricity or oddness of the artist as being independently taught, hence, self-taught art, autodidact art, untutored art, idiosyncratic art, and original art. Other categorical candidates had been outlaw aesthetics, estranged art, anti-cultural art, unfettered art, the art of the artless, unmediated art, breakaway art, and art without precedent or tradition. All these labels give the reader a sense of what is at stake. Cardinal settled for Outsider art. The label stuck.
Dubuffet had an extensive collection of "anti-cultural art," as he called it, but he himself was mainstream. His art, which celebrated raw matter over form, was influenced by the creations of Art Brut he collected. But not all Art Brut should be considered Outsider art; what is and is not Outsider art always remains problematic. As the one element that cannot be incorporated into the artistic canon, yet remains paradoxically a part of it, it predicates the entire system. For example, Vincent van Gogh was not an Outsider artist. His psychological instability was not the basis for his creative expression; he always represented himself as a professional artist. The same made be said of Dali's paranoiac-critical method. Dali hoped to arrive at "a spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based upon the interpretative-critical association of delirious phenomena" (1935, p. 15). But, he too remained mainstream, notorious for his quip "The sole difference between myself and a madman is the fact that I am not mad!" These artists presented an art of sublimation. Their cultural objects remained within the accepted frame of society, although, of course, they may have been rejected at the time. Nevertheless, they still recognized an established canon if only to rebel against it.

It seems that many celebrated "insider" artists besides Dubuffet, such as Paul Klee, the surrealists Paul Eluard and André Breton, and a whole host of others were influenced by Outsider figurative art. They drew on what I shall identify later as the driving "sinthome" (after Lacan S XXIII, Sinthome) of those artists who were truly "outside" the social order, that is, artists who had an acultural relationship regarding their place within an established social order. Theirs was not a social alienation in the normative sense of many well-known artists, like Edvard Munch, Antonin Artaud, and Vincent van Gogh, for instance, whose art was shunted by the established artistic institution, rather their alienation was complete. Their existence was one of estrangement, isolation, and solitude. Desublimation, rather than sublimation,
characterizes their work. For Freud, the ego's relative autonomy was based on its role as a mediator between the non-sublimated life-substance of the bodily drives ($I_d$) and the Superego as the agency of social "repression," the representative of the demands of society. Desublimation succeeds in getting rid of this autonomous mediating ego. It loses its relative autonomy and regresses towards the unconscious—what Lacan identified as the Real psychic register. Hence, the issue here is not that insider (established) and Outsider (non-established) art are simply binary opposites of each other; rather, the complication is that such Outsider art—desublimated "raw art" as identified by Dubuffet—is not simply just another kind of art, a supplement in the Derridean (1976) sense as to what falls under the category of art at any given time. Such an artistic supplement to the art of western history, for example, the non-Western areas of art historical study (African, Chinese, Indian, Islamic, Native North American, Oceanic, and so on), feminist art, or the art of the Diaspora, are eventually recognized, studied and incorporated into the curriculum. For example, Zolberg and Cherbo's (1977) book on Outsider Art is precisely such a stance where traditional outsiders (asylum art, naive art, African art) are discussed along with forgotten artists who are eventually admitted into the grand narrative of art history. In distinction, Outsider art presents the art educator with an uncanny, unnamable kernel that perpetually remains outside established art by its very definition. Its existence is ghostly, haunting art and its "education" which normatively presupposes that "art" is learnable, a transferable skill, which will eventually become refined into some sort of expressive style, is strangely lacking. Outsider art presents "us" with a puzzling anti-pedagogical proposition. The visual and three-dimensional problems are often uniquely solved outside any accepted canon, not necessarily naively, but often with great sophistication. This is disturbing. Such artists do not need "us" teachers. Some critics have
argued that freedom from instruction should be the defining characteristic of Outsider art. This means we have to accept the possibility that art is unteachable, a proposition I will come to towards the end of the essay. But, what is even more disturbing, Outsider art points to the realm of the psychic Real—to the “other side” of the modernist/postmodernist agenda where the centrality of the ego and the narratological form remains of central interest. It points to what Bataille (1985, p.31) referred to as “scatology,” namely “the science of the wholly other” where form and content collapse.

Outsider art hovers within the interstitial space of visibility and invisibility. Its invisibility outside the symbolic culture identifies it as a cauldron of creativity that cannot be “framed” in any normative sense to make it fit within the confines of a signifier (artistic movement, gallery, museum, genre), whereas its visibility as leading a perpetual Outsider existence influences and shapes the mainstream, not in the sense of being avant-garde, on the contrary, in the very sense that it decenters the very notion of an avant-garde by mitigating the idea that there is an advanced group of artists who are the harbingers of what has yet to come. As an eternally present phenomenon that is evident in each and every culture, Outsider art throws into question our understanding of the grand narrative of artistic progress. The paradox encountered here is that “progress” might mean the very death of Outsider status as there is a fall into mediocrity. The artistic idiosyncrasy disappears.

This kernel of un(becoming) identifies the place of the Freudian drives (Triebe), the place of the Lacanian Real, that is, a place of pre-signification, of “rawness,” of un(becoming) that opposes the meaning of a signifier—the becoming of a refined aesthetic. And so, when a gallery exhibition opens up of Outsider art, much like the infamous “Primitivism” in the Twentieth-Century Art exhibition at MOMA in 1984, not only is there an obvious irony in the domestication of the
undomesticated through such a gesture, but there is obviously a conflicted assault at work also. How does one approach this Other art without once more appropriating it as simply just another art form? One argument is to say that the artist, and not the art object, is outside society, but that is too easy for it simply appropriates this art once again. Like the label the "art of the insane" (MacGregor, 1989), it represses the "truth" of Outsider art as the very enigma of what is socially acceptable (or unacceptable) art. In their book, Formless: A User's Guide (1997), Yes-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss try to present what they take to be the characterizations of such "truth" as theorized by Bataille's concept of the informe. Base materialism, horizontality, pulse and entropy (closer to negentropy when Bataille's term "expenditure" is taken into account) are the ensemble of four operations that reveal the informe (formless) that resides in the heart of modernist art narrative, which then works hard repress the excesses of the frame. Yet, this very same ensemble of operations defines the art of the Outsider, suggesting—I would even chance to say, confirming—that the border between the psychic Real and the Imaginary register of the ego is where the exchange or slippage takes place between what is becoming and un(becoming) art.

Outsiders in Our Classrooms?

In my own memories of visiting art classes as a consultant, university facilitator and liaison, I was struck how often art teachers pointed out to me drawings of what they referred to as "special needs" kids, especially in the junior high. Some were hard-of-seeing, others were autistic suffering from particular forms like Asperger's Disorder, still others were identified as anti-social, depressive and "slow," a descriptor that vivifies fully the value of speed associated with the technology of education. When it came to high school, at least in the art classes I have visited, by the time grade eleven rolled around many of these "special" students had been weaned out given the
instrumentalism of making the grade. They had been streamlined and enrolled in special ed-programs. Would such students be identified as Outsider artists? Difficult to say. There may have been some who developed a whole different iconography at home rather than in school. Dubuffet argued that Child Art should, by-and-large, be outlawed from Art Brut, for despite their spontaneity and ignorance of artistic canons, they lack the experimental momentum and depth that sustains Outsider artists (Cardinal, 1994, p. 29). The same applies to Folk Art and Naïve Art. Such artists do work within a canon of patterning and tradition, while children, after all, are still searching for reiterative signifiers that eventually change their pre-schemas into repeatable schemas to narrate with. In contrast, Outside art points to something much more allusive and mystical.

It seems ever since the case of Nadia (Selfe, 1977), an autistic child whose drawings could not be categorized within the neat and orderly progressive developmental charts of Piaget's intellectual contemporary, Victor Lowenfeld, art educators have been bewildered by the anomalies of "true" Outsiders. Nadia reiterates the paramount factor in the creative definition of the creative Outsider; that s/he "should be possessed of an expressive impulse and should then externalize that impulse in an unmonitored way which defies conventional art-historical contextualization" (Cardinal, 1994, p. 30, author's italic). When her autism disappeared, so did her Outsider art. Outsiders as the abjected Other have had a democratic interest of inclusion by Social Caucus members. Doug Blandy (1991) wrote about the handmade books of Dennis Bye (fig. 1, next page taken from Blandy's article as photographed by Russ McKnight), a middle-aged man who was living in Bowling Green, Ohio, in an apartment complex for people labeled mentally retarded.
Although Bye’s speech was very difficult to understand—he primarily communicated through a few sign language gestures and pantomime—it was his books that presented an autobiographical account of his struggle with himself and his surroundings. The source of the books’ materials was the debris of his daily life and what he found of interest in the waste collections of others. Such raw debris of matter speaks directly to his indeterminate ground of being—his un(becoming). This materialogical and scatological aesthetic recalls the psychoanalytic understanding about the origins of art. The matter that Bye works with is the chaotic and unorganized stuff of his existence and the existence of those around him. By ellipsis, this matter can signify fecal matter—the waste that he collects into his books. What must be understood is that Bye is not playing with matter as an artist would (as
Dubuffet did) to discover new effects—be they aesthetic or antiaesthetic. For him this debris (previously used cellophane tape, newspaper circulars, glossy magazine illustrations, mail advertisement catalog pictures, past calendars, Polaroid film packages and photographs, mattress tags, bumper stickers, school report cards, work reports, shopping bags, political buttons) hold a magical, even mystical quality. They are Bye’s “base materialism” in Bataille’s sense; that is, matter than an image cannot reabsorb, the place of the psychic Real where the distinction between form and matter collapses, This debris is immediate, unformed, and unnameable. Its symbolic identity becomes idiosyncratic to Bye alone, like an ill-formed indistinguishable letter of the alphabet by a child, or a pre-schematic symbol that holds a special unique meaning to that child alone. Bye is not “becoming” through these autobiographical books. He is not growing, nor is he interpreting the world around him through his art in the conventional understanding of that sublimated gesture. His narratives are not linear story lines. They meander a linearly in labyrinthian directions. He glues Polaroid pictures of himself throughout the books as a means of attaching himself to them and in them. His “inspiration” by such waste is to localize and particularize these aesthetic objects as his own double. Bye’s books are as close to him as he is to them. Although they are often stolen, he obsessively continues to make them. In the Lacanian sense, they are his “field of enjoyment” in that they are an attempt to recuperate his fragmentary ego over and over again through his libidinal body as manifested in his artistic practice. Each hand-made book is a repetitive “pulse” to draw again on Bois & Kraus’s (1997) important work. It is his sexual libidinal investment that makes up for his impotency—it is the way he “gets off.” Such “enjoyment,” or jouissance is characterized by painful pleasure. His bookmaking is as much a burden as it is a joyful necessity. They are his symptom (sinthome). As Blandy states (p. p.99), he had no conception how many
books Bye has made—some were stolen, others perhaps lost. Like Humpty Dumpty's great fall, the fragments of Bye's ego can never be put together [again]. There was never a moment before the "fall," when his ego was whole, so that it could be restored [again]. These books are inseparable from his imaginary; their excessiveness illustrates what Bataille (1985, pp. 140-144) (along with Dubuffet) identified as a nondialectical materialism—a "desubliminatory heterology"—that is guided by the constant expenditure in the forms of transgression and excess. In this case such excess is fragilely held within the confines of the bound book. Bye's self-made books, like his "Outsider's face," which appears jarring at first, presents a poetics of desublimation that Bataille and Dubuffet characterized as **informe** (formless). There is no one coherent and consistent narrative that runs throughout them; there is only Bye's pantomiming gestures and isolated words as he tries to gather up the scattered images to say "something" to anyone who would listen.

Although there is no Outsider art that isn't conditioned, influenced and impinged by the visual culture of our media society—Nadia drew farm animals that she saw in children books, Bye's books use the western codex form drawing on magazine images and Polaroid snapshots and Darger, whom I discuss below, knew intimately the printed magazine images in early twentieth-century society—it is the case, however, that such art resists cultural stereotyping of any sort. This strangely enough means that an Outsider artist does no know that s/he is creating art! John MacGregor (1999), who must surely must be one of the most prominent commentators on Outsider artists says this explicitly of Judith Scott, a fiber "artist" who has received much acclaim thanks to the efforts of Sylvia Seventy, a fiber artist herself, and the support of California's Creative Art Center. Scott's deafness, undiagnosed until middle age, led to exaggerations concerning her retardation. A Down's Syndrome child, she was classified as
“uneducable” in childhood and then confined to an Ohio asylum for some thirty-five years. Now, her amazing fiber sculptures have become an unprecedented event. Yet, according to Sylvia Seventy, she thinks that Scott is color-blind and never knows when her fiber sculpture is actually finished. As MacGregor remarks: “There is not the slightest possibility that Judith envisions the eventual outcome, the final form of her work (p. 33). “Judith was certainly not engaged in the production of works of art” (p. 72). She “is completely unaware of the existence of sculpture” (p. 92). “The notion of abstract, non-representational form [which her work exemplifies] is a complex idea totally outside Judith’s ability to conceptualize” (p. 109). All of Scott’s activity, says MacGregor, is best categorized as “unconscious,” perhaps because she does not use language (p. 106, 111).

It is this last remark concerning language and the unconscious that provides a clue as to what might be happening. Like Bye, Scott works with the primacy of matter, the wound fiber leads to a formlessness (informe) that possibly has no ending. Recognition by an Other plays no merit when producing these “objects,” which helps explain why language under normal circumstances identifies a belonging to the Symbolic Order plays such an insignificant role for an Outsider artist. There is no interference from the Other, no aesthetic standards of other people to live up to, no transfer of desire. Whereas the artist must face critics, commissions and pending subsidies—thereby often inhibiting the creative process—the Outsider artist copes only with the private fantasy within.

We are dealing with singularities, not styles. The edge between Outsider and Mainstream art is reached here at this junction, the junction between a pre-egoic realm—otherwise referred to as the Lacanian Real of the informe, and the psychic realm of the egoic Imaginary. The Outsider artist lives only in his or her imaginary, struggling to articulate the trauma of his or her ego. The Symbolic Order
of the Superego, of language, of the Other, of the social Order within which she or he lives simply drops out. This is illustrated magnificently in Leon A. Borensztein’s photo of Judith Scott hugging her fiber bundle (fig. 2, below).

The subject-object distance between her and her fiber sculpture, a biomorphically resonate shape of wound, wrapped and darned layers of multicolored yarn that resembles her own body, has totally disappeared. Much like Bye’s self-made books, her sculptural bundle embraces her as much as she embraces it. Both look at one another, as if she had just finished giving birth to her child but does not want ever to let it go, to give it up, but remains comforted by its presence. To cut it away from her body would mean to send it into the uncertainty of the Symbolic Order. This reminds me of the paintings of Edvard Munch, some of which he worked on for ten years, unwilling to part with them.
because of their close association with his personal traumas. Every artist knows that the recognition by the Symbolic Order is just that special moment when the Other (critic, public, buyer) identifies with an art piece which is then sold, cut loose from the artist's body no matter how precious it may be; like the mother who must let go of her son (and now her daughter as well) to the call of war. The nation demands its pound of flesh and makes the transaction in the exchange of patriotic loyalty.

**Slaying Monsters**

What then does Outsider Art point to? What lessons can art education glean from its un(becoming) nature? And, does it teach us anything about creativity that mainstream artists in the past have tried to learn from? All, I hope are good questions to tackle. Let us take the intense and obsessional nature of this Outsider art first, its singularity. The thesis I would maintain is that Outsider art provides us with a glimpse of the unconscious Real as developed by Lacan (1977), that realm which is both beyond the visual and the linguistic. The Real identifies the very kernel of our "true" self, that is to say, it is the realm of our symptoms, of our drives, of our bodily pre-egoic dispositions. Such a psychic bodily dimension is the place of primordial fragmented being—a place of un(becoming), a "shadow self" to use Jungian language, where the traumas of our existence are lived out. To say this is where we slay our monsters (fears and anxieties) is no exaggeration. It is a cauldron of energies that are eventually harnessed through images and contained by the meanings of the linguistic signifiers that we use so that through our memory—as externalized through the use of mnemonic devices—we are able to stabilize and codify a system of cultural representation. We appear "sane" since there is a recognizable Other who shares the same codes and signifiers. The imagination becomes a "theatre of memory" that shares a world-view through language with the larger social order, or "big Other." The singularity
of the unconscious Real, however, produces its own idiosyncratic "monsters." They may defy categorization, have no signifier, and only imagined and then perhaps drawn, or rendered externally. Monsters, therefore, reveal the madness of the imagination. They point to the manifestations of alterity and difference in extremis, and symbolize the life of the drives, of "raw" being. We can identify this life as that of zoë—"naked life" as Agamben (1998) referred to it in distinction to bios—life that is already signified and politicized under the auspices of the Law of the state. The life of zoë, of the drives, is the place of un(becoming), the terrors of the soul, the regions beyond the thresholds of rationality—the place of non-sense, and the cauldron of creativity.

To make an important distinction for art educators: For the Outsider artists these monsters are fought on the playing field of the imaginary—incessantly, obsessively, excessively—so that the semblance of a fragile ego can be maintained. Without their “art” there is a fall into the horrors of the Real. What little framing of a world is possible exists only at the level of their imagination. They are, as it were, caught in the battle between their unconscious Real self—their monstrous symptoms and traumas—and the playing field of the Imaginary, a field of “enjoyment” (jouissance), for there is no symbolic stable Order they can anchor themselves in. If they could, they would no longer have Outsider status. In this “Realm of the Real” a carnival of fragmented forms swirl, where the catastrophes of the flesh as a body in pieces circulate; the primeval horror of a world that is chaotic and threatening reveals itself; a fearful world of primal matter that is yet unformed (informe) and essentially uninhabitable. Every child has to pass through this “night of day,” and find framed images and a language to tame it. The dolls, blankies, and stuffed animals have to be hugged to weather the night when the eyes must close. Hieronymus Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights gives us a glimpse of the Realms of the Real as a desublimated living nightmare, while Goya’s famous The Sleep of Reason
**Henry Darger’s Sinthome**

The fundamental question of existence for the obsessive individual, Lacan (S VIII, *Transference*) tells us, is whether s/he is “dead or alive.” The importance of this insight to the Outsider artist will soon become apparent. The obsessive Outsider artist is only “alive” when battling the monsters of his or her imagination. To stop would be to fall completely in the unconscious Real—to be “dead.” The sustainability of be(coming), no matter how tenuous, collapses. The field of the imaginary implodes into an abyss. The self’s shadow, still cast by light no matter how dim, would fade into the blackness of Night. Perhaps no better case to illustrate such a never-ending battle is the “artistic oeuvre” of Chicago Outsider artist Henry Darger (1892-1973) who posthumously left hand and typewritten 15, 145 page illustrated epic called, The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion. Better known, *In the Realm of the Unreal* (fig. 3, next page), its running title indicates its non-narrative assemblage that would have never ended had Darger not been “discovered.”

The big Other found out his secret. Much like Bye’s books never stop being produced, and Scott’s fiber sculptures never entirely stop being wound with more and more “yarn,” Darger would have continued to illustrate and write. Illness, frailty, and a move to an old age home did him in. When his landlord discovered his life work in his apartment of thirty-three years, Darger initially was shocked, but then became indifferent, telling his landlord to “Throw it away” (MacGregor, 2002, p.19). Effectively his obsession had been “killed.” He had become totally unraveled. He died within a year of the discovery.
Darger had a deprived and tormented childhood. He never got over the trauma of the loss of his mother and his sister when he was four. His father basically abandoned him. “In a real sense, Henry Darger remained a child, not intellectually, but emotionally. There was an unmistakable failure to mature” (MacGregor, 2002, p.21). Much of his youth was spent in asylums unable to stay with his father who himself suffered from a debilitating illness. Darger had lived in a Boschian monstrous garden all those years, but in 1935 he started writing and illustrating it to face his demons. The epic tale begins on a far-away planet where a long and violent history of child slavery erupts into a war between the nations of Angelinia and Glandelina. Seven sister heroines lead the enslaved children against the adult male Glandelinians. The graphic battle scenes are a re-visitation of Bosch’s garden—a field of bodies in pieces. The young Christian Angelinian girls are eviscerated, beheaded, disemboweled, and strangled by the
evil and godless adversaries. The Vivian Sisters are victorious thanks to the support of a Christian Army and the help of fanciful winged creatures called Blengomenians. Darger incorporated popular imagery and knowledge of historical societal events as he wrote this epic.

Like Scott and Bye, his illustrative epic was composed of waste and debris. He rescued and transformed the bits and pieces of discarded Americana he found in the garbages of Chicago’s North side to compose the several hundred illustrations for his epic novel. He picked up bottle caps and packaging while walking and talking to himself. Like Scott, he collected string and rolled it into balls throughout his life. His apartment was littered with stacks of newspapers and magazines bound with wire. What was waste for the affluent became treasure for Darger. The preciousness and investment in material can be read throughout his work. The several hundred collage-drawings were double-sided due to the scarcity of available materials. He made plastic devices that were attached to the end of the smaller stubs of pencil so that the entire graphite would be used up. Scrapbooks filled with traced figures and cutout images were kept. Above all he archived images of pubescent girls like the Coppertone Girl and Little Orphan Annie. One of his favorite figures—Little Annie Rooney, the heroine from Darrell McClure’s comic strip with the same name, was a staple character that appeared often. These girl images haunted him, their eyes were entirely filled with lead pencil. In the dark of his apartment, passing light would reflect in the lead-filled eyes giving the impression that these pictures were alive and watching him (MacGregor, 2002). Darger’s struggling alter ego, the fantasy image of the self that appears during the mirror stage of psychic development, was their Angelinian protector.

Darger, however, was “stuck” in this mirror stage—his tale is laden with brutality, violence, strangulation, and evisceration of nude and transsexual children. “These are images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open
of the body—in short, the imagos that I [Lacan] have grouped together under the apparently structural term *imagos of the fragmented body* (Lacan, 1977, p.11, author’s italic). There was no Other to confirm the gestalt of Darger’s alter ego in one way or another so as to legitimate his social role as to who he was within the Symbolic Order. He had to do this himself, as the protector in his epic. For the few that knew him he only spoke of the weather, and avoided contact as much as possible. For most of his life he remained a janitor and dishwasher at local hospitals. Hints of the absence of the social Other come from the fact that his illustrations were “collage-drawings,” as McGregor (2002) characterized them, and not sketches that directly engage with his environment—as if capturing some live event from observation. He dealt with “dead” matter in the sense that the visual images cut out from magazines, or traced from found pictures, had been stripped of their symbolism in the “real” world of their meaning, and appropriated into the imaginary world of his epic. They were re-signified into a Catholic epic battle between good and evil (Darger attended mass several times a day) through a colorful comic book aesthetic that influenced his visual sensibilities—simple lines and bright colors.

Darger’s fundamental fantasy, the nude children and girls with penises, who did battle with the violent adult men, the Glandelinians, articulates his own personal struggle with authority—the Law of the superego. Within the epic, Darger is in conflict with God. He couldn’t understand why God failed to answer his prayers to end the suffering of children and silence the face of evil. This was the reason why MacGregor (2002) argued that Darger had the mind of a serial killer since he was an outlaw of society. He had not internalized the superegoic Law. Not only had his father abandoned him, he had already showed signs of violence and aggressiveness as a young boy. At the age of 12 he was confined to an asylum as an inmate until he escaped at the age of nineteen. It was his art that staved off his total fall into
psychosis where voices inside the head would begin to dictate his behavior, as if language was a disembodied Thing. He may have talked to himself like a schizophrenic, but the illustrative epic was also his way of talking to himself, to instill "The–Law-of-the-Father" (authority) by taking on various guises of heroism as the protector of children, especially as Captain Henry Darger, head of the secret organization of men called "The Gemini," devoted to protecting little girls from harm.

MacGregor attribute's Darger's fascination with little girls to the loss of his sister who was put up for adoption when his mother died in childbirth when Darger was four. This childhood trauma, coming at a time when the sexuality of the ego was still forming, provides the clue to Darger's fundamental fantasy, his sinthome, which is so obviously displayed as a conflict between his angelic (Angelinian) side and his glandular (Glandelinian) driven aggressive side. Self-therapy and self-theology seem to collapse on each other into a distilled hole out of which emerges a redemptive birth that is led only in the Imaginary psychic register. Lacan's use of the word sinthome in his XXIII Seminar was in relation to James Joyce's own psychic struggles, breaking with the old word symptom. The classical Freudian-Lacanian theory identified symptom as metaphor, that is, as a substitution of one term—the signifier of the symptom—for another, as the repressed signifier. In this regard Darger's epic (as signifier) is a symptom of the loss (repression) of his sister at the age of four. The symptom is lifted when the word associated with the symptom appears in treatment. In Darger's case this never happened. But, Lacan argues that even when this does happen—the anaysand grasps what his fundamental symptom (sinthome) is—such a symptom does not necessarily go away. The anaysand is not "cured" as was claimed by Freud. Rather, she or he recognizes the fundamental fantasy that is the "cause" of behavior. To "give this symptom up" would be to fundamentally unravel existence as it is lived. This would be like a heterosexual traversing his
or her fundamental fantasy to desire a same sex partner. When and if
that does happen, this is to recognize that one is gay, bisexual, lesbian,
or transsexual. The "closet" is removed and life becomes radically
changed. But this may not happen—ever.

Here I extrapolate from MacGregor's account to grasp Darger's
sinthome. When a real-life photo of a young girl, Elsie Paroubek aged
five, and his notebook, both signifiers for his lost sister, went missing
from Darger's belongings when he was nineteen and still in a mental
asylum, he began to wage war on God (which was later worked out
through his epic tale) believing that God had abandoned him. He
demanded that God intervene and the two items be returned to him—
according to his autobiography. (Paroubek had been found strangled
in a drainage ditch about the same time that the picture and notes went
missing, casting suspicion on Darger by MacGregor's intensive
investigations. This caused some consternation within the artistic
community by those who presented Darger as posthumous Outsider
artist.). Again, in a classical understanding of the symptom, a type of
unconscious formation can disappear. Producing the repressed signifier
(e.g., Paroubek's photo) unmakes the metaphor and unknots the
symptom. Darger is (perhaps) relieved of his guilt over his missing-
lost sister, or (perhaps) guilt over the possible murder of Paroubek. A
symptom as metaphor contains within itself the possibility of its own
cure. However, we need only think of the strings of balls that Darger
wrote about throwing at the statue of Christ in his diaries. There was
no simple "disentanglement" of his symptom. In his seminar XXII, R.S.I.
(1974-1975) "the symptom can only be defined as the way in which
each subject enjoys [jouit] the unconscious, insofar as the unconscious
determines him (p. 45)." It is this excess in relation to Freud's pleasure
principle (pleasure as experienced within the acceptable cultural laws),
which defines jouissance as an excess of pleasure or suffering—Darger's
"strange satisfaction" that is attached to his art, which is found in the
Real. Not to overcomplicate what can become a very difficult discussion, this means that the symptom is *transformable, but not curable*. We all must live with the *jouissance* of our symptoms. This is not a pathology as it is a primordial state of existence. We are all constantly struggling with the empty kernel of ourselves that we do not know, our unconscious drives.

Lacan pushes this understanding of symptom one more step. To be psychotic, and here my argument has been that Darger's art prevents his fall into psychosis, means to be outside the Law. There is no internalization of the Name-of-the-Father. The psychotic, as a serial killer, kills without remorse. There is no guilt. In certain cases of psychoses (like that of Darger I am suggesting), his *sithome* (epic) can keep his ego together and supplement the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father; in brief, Darger's art prevents him from becoming—perhaps—a psychotic serial killer. This is why MacGregor's accusation that Darger may have killed Paroubek when he escaped from the asylum was so disturbing and controversial. If we say that he did, his artwork is a long-standing battle *not* to kill again. Bizarrely, his epic as his *sithome*, kept him "alive." When found out, to reiterate once again, he was "dead."

This, of course, takes us back full circle as to why Lacan states that the fundamental question of existence for the obsessional remains "Am I dead or alive?" Darger, as do the other Outsider artists previously mentioned, illustrates an important characteristic of Bataille's *informe*—entropy, or "expenditure," by which he means regulation through excess. To the extent the obsessional can repeat the "pulse" of his or her *jouissance*, s/he remains "grounded"—or "horizontal" to call on Bois and Krauss (1997) again, in the way the body remains attached to the Imaginary narrative. For Darger, like Jackson Pollock, this narrative was stretched out before him—*horizontally*, on the tabletop that he worked on. Restricted and determined by the table's dimensions, it
was then rolled up into a tube much like scrolled manuscript to be
continued each and every day. It does not take too much imagination
to recognize that such action was much like rolling up a ball of string,
or weaving with string like Scott, or creating yet another book, like
Bye. These obsessional activities in a very fundamental sense provided
the “expenditure” needed to maintain the energy necessary to stay
minimally horizontal (grounded). But his string (narrative) snapped
when he was “discovered.” There was no activity to give him the will
(energy) to go on. Entropically speaking, it was simply a question of
time that Darger reached the state of ice-cold death.

Lessons for Art Education:
The Paradoxes of Artless Art

Was Darger a madman turned artist, or an artist who became
mentally ill? The question raises one of the perplexities of teaching art.
In his cheeky title, Why Art Cannot be Taught (2001), James Elkins exposes
the repressed un(becoming) in art educational institutions—art colleges,
art schools, and fine art departments in universities. To articulate his
thesis Elkins, over and over again, stumbles across the irrational kernel
in art education, especially in the way critiques are conducted where
often there is no rhyme nor reason as to what gets passed as art. Most
often it becomes a rhetorical interaction between student and instructor
that negotiates what is acceptable and what isn’t. This kernel of
irrationality is found in the simplest of questions concerning art history.
Take German Expressionism and the various expressionists that
developed from it. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and the movement Die
Brücke achieved their l’art brut style in the space outside the artistic
academy, intentionally ignoring its established canon. This
phenomenon is not isolated, but almost the rule. Much like Marx could
not be a Marxist, Kirchner could not be an Expressionist. Those that
followed became Expressionists, a generalized signifier that became
incorporated into the artistic canon. The "event" of Expressionism, which had its moment of being Outside, preceded them. What was un(becoming) became one of becoming, the Derridean supplementary logic referred to earlier. After World War I, when Kirchner turned to scholarly research by examining historical styles, he lost his "edge." The point is that this "edge" is always Outside. Initially, it always eludes a supplementary logic.

This tension between an Outsider art that needs no instruction and an art that does is continually negotiated repressed in art and its education. Teachers can often quickly recognize student artwork that seems to defy any need for studio instruction. The art teacher really is no help here since a rational canon is not being transferred in such exceptional cases. For such artists, it is best that they do not stay in fine art departments or art schools lest what is singular and unique quickly becomes mediocre as conformity sets in despite the art teacher's desire not to have this happen. Ever since Romanticism, when art became a fragment, no longer part of the social order but a critique of it, such an irrational kernel of un(becoming) remains repressed in our art institutions. Outsider art, as I have theorized it above, is the pure raw expression of such lifted repression for the Symbolic Order is completely ignored. There is complete withdrawal. Only life (zoe) as led in the incessant production of art necessity to maintain sanity becomes all encompassing and consuming.

The repression of this irrational kernel of the Real in art making—historically referred to as mania, passion, poetic rupture, and even more prosaically as creativity, as that "something" which cannot be "graded" or taught—has been successfully carried out in art schools through a Bauhausian legacy; namely, as the application of skill, craft, identifiable principles and elements of design, basic rules and procedures, all of which can be taught. Here the authority of the Symbolic Order rules as embodied in the art teacher—the holder of the canon. In postmodernity
this repression has become even more dominant as designer capitalism invests in art forms that continue to rationalize visual communication through the new computerized media of the Internet and the design of consumerables for the market. At the same time, as a counter measure there has been a “return of the Real” in art, as Foster (1996) argued. Art students who lean on the irrational side of the ledger often end up being art teachers, searching for a “legitimate” way to keep up their need to create to stay sane. Those who wish to earn designer dollars turn to multi-corporations that promise wealth.

Both madness and possession by trance were long believed to be manifestations of divine inspiration. Tribal shamans as schizophrenics who heard voices in their head as auditory hallucinations were signs that the gods were talking to the chosen. Oddly, can it not be said that this lingering Real still calls on art education? Art teachers find students in their classes, especially in the senior years when they say: I cannot teach this person anything. They have gone far beyond what I can offer them; they seem to be inspired by their own passion, developing portfolios that seem unique and idiosyncratic to them. We have all recognized such students. The most outstanding students are often the most troubled ones. They do not easily fit in the Symbolic Order.

What is the extreme example of Outsider art—the battle for sanity minus the Symbolic or big Other—is the everyday occurrence in our art classrooms with the big Other very much present. The Journal of Social Theory would lose its impact if this was not the case. The difference however is that the monsters are sublimated in the classroom—framed, trapped, explored, examined, and finally overcome and done away with. Violence is channeled, signifiers are imploded, and exploded. Texts are played with, Situationist détournement actions are marshaled against the social Order, graffiti is given its free reign when possible. The portrait transforms the face into an icon, a symbol. And, as this symbol becomes more and more expressive, stylized, the portrait loses
its verisimilitude and passes into something else—caricature. From there, it is a short step to monstrosity. Often the question is whether the caricature, by revealing the person through extreme exaggeration and distortion, doesn't capture the "true" Real self—that grotesque hidden side, the demonic inversion of the self? The metaphorical humanized animal emerges; the continuity between human and animal becomes distorted like so many horror shows like *The Fly*, "becoming-animal" as Deleuze and Guattari (1987pp. 242-243) would say. One need only think of Francis Bacon here, who shows the inside of the person outside, or even Daumier’s characterization of Charles X as "Le Poire," his grotesque pear shaped head "crapping out" legislative laws for the specific benefit of the haute bourgeoisie. Such experiences in art classrooms show us just how close we come to the horrors of the Real. Fortunately, art again and again sublimates such formlessness through the materialized signifier, no matter how tenuous, as demonstrated by the many examples by Yve-Alain Bois & Rosalind Krauss's important book *Formless* (1997). But, not everything can be controlled. In specific traumatized contexts—like the children's art of refugee camps, war, drought and starvation—does the Real dramatically show itself.

**The Real Lesson**

The fragility of un(becoming) sits uneasily in art programs. Art history is littered with substance abuse and excess as this irrational kernel within ourselves—the *sinthome*—is struggled with. To sum up we can identify the contradiction embedded in un(becoming) as the very tension of the bodily *drives* (*Triebe*) as opposed to social *desire*, and spell this out in Lacanian terms. All art is a sublimation of the psychic Real—put more prosaically, all art struggles to "frame" some "impossible" aspect of reality (the *informe*) so that we may become "enculturated." The psychic Imaginary of our egos is precisely where this struggle goes on. On one the side of the ledger, this is the tension
with our unconscious Real selves, our embodied symptoms that we are ignorant of. Looking over an artistic oeuvre we, as an audience, can get a glimpse of what those struggles may have been for any given artist. The hundred upon hundreds of Rembrandt self-portraits trace his transformations throughout his life. But Rembrandt painting any single one of them could never fully grasp who he was at any one time. They document his struggle to know his Real self. Yet, every now and again, within his portraits, the excesses of what he could not control (informe) began to reveal themselves, dwelling within the spaces of his masterly chiaroscuro—smudges and paint strokes that no longer held together in a coherent context—unconscious actions trying to grasp ghostly, ephemeral states of being that defied representation.

The fall into the Real where there is no Law, no authority and no embodied language as it is commonly understood is referred to as psychosis. There is a foreclosure (Verwerfung) of the Le Nom-du-Père. The Law has not been internalized. Here is where Outsider art dwells. The un(becoming) art that is produced, vivifies the kernel of the Real within a Symbolic Order that has been pathologically foreclosed in any number of complicated ways. Symbolic language as we know it, does not play a significant role. Visual signifiers are singular and idiosyncratic in their formation, unique to the individual. If we take Darger as an exemplary case, he was his own authority. There is no subject-object split between his body and his art. It was his “art” that prevented him from becoming totally psychotic. The distorted, caricatural, and stangified nature of Outsider art, the extreme distortions of the human face and figure, are the intensifications of mental struggle to at least exist within a Symbolic Order that has no normative meaning. The bodily drives take precedence. There is no desire of the Other.

On the other side of the ledger, the tension between the Real and the Imaginary where the Law is already internalized, where the Symbolic Order as a shared language is in place, the art produced must
face the critique of authority as represented by the art teacher, the artistic institution and they paying public. Desire of the Other is therefore very much present. The artist struggles to be an authority but cannot escape entirely this ethical and political obligation demanded by the Other. I would argue this is the normative tension that is felt in artistic becoming. On the one hand, there are artforms that critique society (the big Other). This is not Outsider art, but art that is often, at first abjected, but then finds its way back into the accepted canon through a supplementary logic. Since Romanticism, such art has pitted itself against the Law (as rebelliousness, avant-garde, anti-institutional, and so-on). Accepted conventions are intentionally broken—the nihilism of Dada, being the exemplary case. The psychic Real is struggled with in such art forms, but it is done so within the cultural contexts of institutions. What the Other thinks and says still matters. Take the case of Duchamp. His "retirement" into chess playing was also a clever disguise for his constant critique of the Western frame of reference. As mentioned earlier, Van Gogh may have become mad, but he still wanted to be accepted by the artistic establishment. On the other hand, we have what I would call today designer art where the Real is tightly sealed up—the Bauhausian tradition rules despite the mysticism of Johannes Itten. Walter Gropius soon ended his three-year tenure. Art appears as if it is a rational disciplined exercise, where the canon can be taught and innovations—endless it seems—are possible. More often than not, economics, safety, and measured standards take precedence.

This then is the secret of un(becoming): the tensions of the Imaginary psychic register with the unknowable Real, Bataille's informe, as pressured by the presence of the Symbolic social Order of language. Our art classrooms are a testament to such tensions. We attract the "rejects," the "throwaways," as well as the Advanced Placement academic kids, the IB (International Baccalaureate) students where all their art is conceptually researched. And also, we find the occasional
student who is truly Outside, struggling hard with those demons and dragons of the unconscious that are just barely tamed. Sometimes they can't. There is more than one art teacher who has told me of the tragedy of suicide, at times suffered as a violent death. This perhaps is the toughest lesson of all. In the end, the Outsider is always living in us.

Notes
1 This passage refers to the 15,145 page illustrated epic, *The Realms of the Unreal*, by the Outsider artist Henry Darger whom I discuss later on. Jessica Yu made a documentary bearing the same title in 2004. My title substitutes the Unreal with the Real, which will be given a Lacanian psychoanalytic definition.


3 A remarkable attempt to show the influences between mainstream and outsider artists can be found in the exhibition held from Oct. 18, 1992 – Jan. 3, 1993 in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art curated by Maurice Tuchman and Carol S. Eliel (1992).

4 Bye “is concerned with the uses of the page, the relationships between the images on the page, movement within the book and the composition of singular and multiple imaged pages” (Blandy, 1991, p.100).

5 I am capitalizing Symbolic Order throughout this essay to refer to both the accepted and unaccepted clandestine operations that go on in the name of the Law. The Symbolic Order refers to the normative circulation of signs that encompass the Law and its shadow side. (see Zizek, 1994).
6 Capitalized throughout the essay to indicate all possible authoritative representatives of the Symbolic Order, including language itself. The Symbolic Order can be thought of as a “big Other.”

7 The pun should be obvious. He also produced a six-volume weather journal (1957-1967), which was telling of his psychic state, and an eight volume, a 5,000-page autobiography, *The History of My Life*, which was a sequel to his epic novel.

8 The mirror stage is a well-known Lacanian concept that identifies the birth of the ego in the imaginary mirror of the consciousness. A gestalt image forms of who one thinks he or she is in the reflection of a metaphorical mirror. The formation of such an alter ego is actually a *double reflection* formed by an impossible gap that opens up between who one believes she or he is and who one is within the Symbolic Order. The two reflections can never become one. We can never know with complete certainty how we are perceived by the Other. Typically this happens as a process from six to eighteen months of age.

9 Darger bestowed the girl figures with male genitalia. The psychoanalyst, Harvey Freed (in Bonesteel, 2000, p. 22) argues that perhaps this was due to his identification with the young Angelinian children, feeling himself effeminate, weak, and helpless. A better explanation for such transsexuality would be his ambiguity to sexuality in general since he was impotent. The penis is portrayed as flaccid, there is no aggressiveness of masculine machismo. There is no sex in the epic, only hugging and kissing. Freed diagnosed him as an “ambulatory schizophrenic” (MacGregor, 2002, p.79).

10 *Le Nom-du-Père* is often translated into English as “*The- Name-of-the-Father,*” but in the French it has the added meaning of “*The- no-of-the-Father*” indicating that the Law has been internalized.
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What we consider to be obvious, true, or commonsense depends on the various assumptions we hold. Becoming aware of our assumptions is difficult at best. Despite our belief that we know what our assumptions are, we are hindered by the fact that we are using our own interpretive filters to become knowledgeable of our own filters. Described as a “cognitive catch-22,” it is the equivalent of our trying to see the back of our head while looking directly into a mirror (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). Becoming critical requires that we find a mirror that critically reflects our thinking and reveals our most influential assumptions.

Writing [images] necessarily refers to writing [images]. The image is that of a mirror capturing only the reflections of other mirrors. When i say “I see myself,” I/i am not alluding to the illusory relation of subject to subject (or object) but to the play of mirrors that defers to infinity the real subject and subverts the notion of an original “I.” ... Yet how difficult it is to keep our mirrors clean. We all tend to cloud and soil them as soon as the older smudges are wiped off, for we
love to use them as instruments to behold ourselves, maintaining thereby a narcissist relation of me to me, still me and always me. ... In this encounter of I with I, the power of identification is often such that reality and appearance merge while the tool itself becomes invisible. (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 22)

In order to change one's way of doing, one must undo assumptions or beliefs. K-12 art teachers came together in an online continuing education non-degree course, during Fall 2004, with an openness to explore visual culture with their students, not sure at the onset what this would mean to their identity as art educators. What needs to be undone to become visual culture educators? To transform one's teaching is an unbecoming task in that only the most reflective seek change, and a reflective practitioner has confidence in one's teaching to delve deeply into questioning self. When, where, and how "becoming" happens emerges out of an undoing or an unbecoming of assumptions. This paper explores the "betwixt and between," the space between projection of teacher identity and unraveling that identity. The un/becoming is an intervening in teachers' positions constructed by conventional expectations and dominant-hegemonic positions of "the world of art." The backslash (/) that we use in un/becoming suggests that unbecoming is also becoming, and becoming is unbecoming. We explore the / space, which is not a transition between two states of being, but rather a perpetual displacement of a static identity. We facilitated identity displacement through Socratic pedagogy of probing questions within an activity that involved art teachers presenting a visual symbol of themselves as art educators, interpreting each other's symbols, and responding to the interpretations and questions posed. The discourse then moved to discussions of teachers' perceptions of the purposes and methods for visual culture explorations in their K-12 classrooms.
We present practicing K-12 art teacher online discourse on visual culture in relation to un/becoming from an exploration into the socialized contexts that shape art education in the United States. This collection of stories and reflections of teachers' interventions into their own assumptions reveal teachers' self-interventions into “knowing” their identities as art educators. Teachers use journal reflections about their visual culture explorations with their students to un/become assumptions about their roles as art educators and to become aware of the historical, political, social, and economic factors that make art knowledge a slippery domain.

Un/becoming art educator assumptions about culture, art, education, and students begin with un/doing the dialectical premise that we act IN the world and the world acts IN us. Our combined stories are simultaneously individual lives and social lives. The division between self and others is ambiguous and exists in analytical constructions. Filmmaker, social theorist, and writer, Trinh Minh-ha (1989), stresses in her work that multiple layers of one’s identity are formed not in isolation of self, but from the social codes of representation performed by and on us each day. Minh-ha (1989) tells of becoming through stories, and believes in the power of writing as a way to become. “The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 119).

The following themes and ideas arose in a written online dialogue, rewoven here as a story of nine art educators who look at themselves and each other through their art educator self-symbols and visual culture explorations. “Past, present, future” stumbles over each other resisting their interconnectedness because un/becoming is not easy. It is not a shedding of past assumptions, but an un/doing that actively layers on the porous watery substance of art educator identities. Un/
becoming in these K-12 art teacher explorations of visual culture ignites a transformation that enables further transformation. Teacher identity borders begin to shift when the constructed borders are perceived as limitations.

**Undoing Assumptions: Real Artmaking is Hands-On**

Who can forget the experience of wet clay coursing between your fingers? Elliot Eisner (2001, p.8)

The idea that artmaking involves direct experience with media is one of the assumptions that needs to be undone in order to become visual culture educators. This assumption has been apparent in recent criticisms of visual culture (e.g., Eisner, 2001), but even before visual culture became the “buzz” in art education, it was apparent in debates about art and technology. In the past, art educators assumed that creating images with computers was a sterile, mechanical process. Creating art by hand was seen as a more “authentic” process, one that entails a physical manifestation of talent and heroic human achievement (Johnson, 1996). In theory as well as practice, hands-on approaches to artmaking were viewed as the “normal” way to make art.

Some of the participants in our course still hold on to assumptions about the normalcy of making art by hand. The first exercise in the course was to “[d]evelop a visual symbol to represent yourself as an art educator.” Participants were encouraged to use any means they wished to create their symbols, such as scanning a drawing or collage, creating a digital graphic, or uploading a digital photo (Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, & Knight, 2004). Each participant in the course (including the facilitators Karen, Wanda, and Patricia) posted a visual symbol on the course web site, sometimes with a brief description of the image. Participants then commented on each other’s symbols, offering various
interpretations and insights into the ways our symbols reflected our beliefs as art educators.

Looking at symbols that had been posted by some of the others, one participant, Alice, found it interesting that many of the images were computer-generated. She wrote, “When I first heard about the assignment, I immediately thought about creating my symbol by hand drawing.” As a result of time constraints, however, as well as seeing others’ digital symbols on the course web site, she, too, decided to “create with the help of the computer” (Walkowski, 2004, September 19). Patricia asked whether there were significant differences between using tools such as pencils and brushes, and using computers to create images: “Is one way more expressive than the other? Is one more authentic or ‘real’ than the other?” (Amburgy, 2004, September 21). Alice replied,

I guess I am from the old school and feel that the direct hands-on approach is somewhat more expressive. It is like handwriting versus the word processor. You can read what is there but some of the little nuances of a line or pressure of the stroke [are] missing. ... The computer is just another tool like the pencil or brush but I think it has a whole different feel to it, a less personal feel. I like using the computer to create but sometimes feel “distanced” from the final piece. (Walkowski, 2004, September 21)

David, another participant in the course, also commented on pencils and brushes as opposed to computers as artmaking tools. He said that after initially resisting contemporary technology, he has now “completely embraced the digital world.” He sees his students interacting with contemporary technology, “the tools of their generation,” with “amazing dexterity.” Observing one of his students drawing with Freehand®, David noted, “She has a wonderful ‘touch’ with that tool. It is no different to her than a pencil or brush” (Miller, 2004a, September 24).
Assumptions about technology and artmaking were reflected in the visual symbols that participants in the course created to represent ourselves as art educators, as well as the verbal messages we posted. Some of us used traditional forms of artmaking as a first step in creating our symbols, while others created symbols that were digital from the beginning. Because of the nature of the course—an online environment—all of us had to use digital technology to some degree. Even if we created our symbols “by hand,” we then had to scan our symbols in order to post them on the course web site. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

Figure 1. David Miller, 2004, Symbol. Image posted to A ED 5011: PreK-12 Art teachers’ explorations into visual culture
Figure 2. Alice Walkowski, 2004, *Maybe This Is My Symbol*. Image posted to *AED 5011: PreK-12 Art teachers' explorations into visual culture*.
Two participants incorporated images of brushes and pencils—traditional artmaking tools—in their visual symbols. Alice used traditional tools in her symbol, not to represent what she sees as the focus of her teaching, but to represent students' expectations that art class will concern only making. (See Figure 2.) Alice noted that she includes traditional forms of artmaking in her curriculum, but she also wants students to learn about a whole spectrum of content in art, including history, artists, cultural significance, legal issues, and so on. She wants students to know that "art is about more than just making things" (Walkowski, 2004, September 20). The commonly held assumption that art is handmade, and technology distances the hand, continues to haunt students' assumptions about the nature of art.

As everyone posted their symbols and discussed what the symbols meant, Wanda posed an interesting question to us. "If we had created a symbol to represent ourselves as art educators ten years ago, would it be different from the one we created today?" (Knight, 2004, October 9). Alice wrote that ten years ago, her symbol would have included:

more art media to represent the 'projects' that go on in class. Projects would have been more media-based than concept based. The world of art history would have been much smaller and less central to my teaching, (although I'd have to go back farther than 10 years for that). (Walkowski, 2004, October 10)

Social change is on-going and seldom immediate. It is never isolated in an individual (Minh-ha, 1989).
Undoing Assumptions: Visual Culture Is Only Visual

It may be that if art educators continue to privilege visual objects and/or visual experiences, which is characteristic of visual culture studies, our students and the field will be susceptible to manipulation through our other sensory modalities.

Paul E. Bolin and Doug Blandy (2003, p.247)

As contemporary art educators have debated the merits and drawbacks of teaching visual culture, some have become concerned that the “visual” part of visual culture will be interpreted narrowly to mean only what can be observed with our eyes. An emphasis on what can be observed—the kinds of qualities that can be “immediately felt,” as John Dewey (1934) put it—was characteristic of modernist conceptions of aesthetic experience that drew distinctions between aesthetic, intellectual, and practical or ethical aspects of life. Most contemporary theories of visual culture, however, are not grounded in a separation of the intellectual and the ethical from visual aspects of life. On the contrary, contemporary theories of visual culture typically assume that vision, knowledge, and ethics—particularly social ethics—are deeply intertwined (e.g., Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Smith-Shank, 2004). Another assumption that needs to be undone in the process of art educators un/becoming visual culture educators is the idea that vision can be isolated from other socially constructed experiences.

One of the questions we asked participants in our course was, “How do you define visual culture in relation to your role as an art educator?” (Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, & Knight, 2004). Leslie wrote that, before this course, she had not thought about visual culture as being separate from aesthetic studies. She had thought of visual culture as being part of “the visual art experience” (Flowers, 2004, September
30). David wrote that he defines visual culture as "the information or stimuli that identifies or characterizes a group of people and their attitudes." He added,

The word "visual" is tricky because I don't consider visual culture to be limited to the properties of the human eye. As an art teacher, however, my context is primarily visual. (Miller, 2004, October 3)

Like other art educators, participants in the course sometimes struggled with the "visual" part of visual culture. Karen responded to David's comments by saying she thinks it is important "to inquire into visual manifestations of cultural practices that shape knowledge, representation, ideology, and power," and like David, she does not "limit visual to physiological sight" (Keifer-Boyd, 2004, October 4). Patricia agreed: "Visual culture is about more than what we see with our eyeballs" (Amburgy, 2004a, October 6).

How does visual culture go beyond what we see? In discussing our definitions of visual culture, participants in the course examined ways that visual culture is related to ideology, social power, representation, and constructed knowledge. Donna noted that in teaching visual culture, there is more of a focus on the message of images, both in "the art we are viewing" and "the art that the students are creating" (Maske, 2004, October 4). Julie wrote about how it is important for children to understand what they are seeing, especially the way right and wrong, good and bad, ugly and beautiful, important and unimportant are culturally determined (Palmer, 2004, October 4). Responding to Julie's insights, Patricia wrote that from a visual culture perspective, viewers are not understood as passive recipients of images. "[V]iewers may negotiate or oppose cultural narratives about right & wrong, good & bad, ugly & beautiful, etc." (Amburgy, 2004b, October 6). Julie wrote back, "[I]t is called empowerment" (Palmer, 2004, October 8). David provides an example of how leading a discussion to focus on
the cultural narratives within artworks tends to lead to issues of hegemonic power and ways people have sought empowerment:

For the past few years I have strived to be topical or thematic in directing the intellectual/artistic traffic in my courses. For instance, a topic last year was Art & Society, which quickly led to notions of Manifest Destiny. Conversations led to topics of empowerment and dominance. (Miller, 2004, October 10)

**Undoing Assumptions:**

**"Euro-Western Culture" is Central**

Is this [visual culture] not the way to bring western culture back into the center of art education again?

Julie Palmer (2004, October 4)

Some art teachers in our group tackle in their teaching the assumption that there is a “world of art” separate from capitalistic and imperialistic ploys for economic, political, and social power. Yet, this un/becoming is difficult given the complexity of imagery valued differently within cultures and the complications of artists categorized according to cultures of a specific place and time period, or by their nationality, skin color, gender, and/or sexual orientation. Unquestioned categorizations of artists normalize these social constructs and foster expectations of the artist based on one’s own cultural “knowledge.” Art critic, Lucy Lippard has raised such concerns:

The intercultural enterprise is riddled with sociological complexities that must be dealt with before esthetic issues are even broached. There are classes and cultures within cultures, not to mention the infinite individual diversities that disprove both external stereotypes and group self-naming alike. (Lippard, 1990, p. 21)
To undo the assumptions that categorizations provoke, students can ask questions about the social environments that the artist traverses in relation to their own situation within and between cultures.

Culture, by definition, is a social phenomenon. Geertz defines culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings employed in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life” (1973, p. 89). Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle (2004) underscore assertions that “culture shapes the way we think ... it holds people together by providing us with a shared set of customs, values, ideas, and beliefs” (p. 3). Images then codify cultures in ways that do not represent all within the culture and can become the signifier for transmission of narrow views or stereotypes of how we come to know self and others. Un/becoming the cultural impact of images is impossible. However, we can work toward un/becoming our relationship to those images and thereby change the nature of knowledge. If this process stagnates oppressive tropes will flourish.

All students come to school as members of specific and often multiple cultural groups, and as prescribed by their cultures, they have learned particular ways of seeing the world and particular ways of being in the world. Alice explores cultural jostling for visibility and dominance in how she presents the “world of art.”

When I talk about wanting my students to understand the world of art, I am talking about them having as complete understanding about what the artist goes through to create. How science, politics, history, religion, the media, etc. influence what is made. How art is used to influence and control people. What struggles the artist must go through
to achieve success. What legal issues have plagued artists and what controversies surround this thing we call art. Depending on what year we are studying the content can vary. I don't have a priority to this list. I usually just go chronologically through the time era that we are studying. My choices for artists are based on many different art history sources. Of course the usual artists that you find mentioned in art classes are there such as Van Gogh, Picasso and Michelangelo. But, I also try to go over artists who have influenced the current of art, have influenced later artists and of course some that I just personally find interesting. (Walkowski, 2004, September 22)

David stated “a good reason for studying visual culture ... [is to] understand the context of today's student better” (Miller, 2004b, September 24). Since culture shapes our interpretation of the world, our perception of reality, our sense of what is normal, art educators must become culturally conscious. They must not only examine the culture of their students; they must first examine their own cultural backgrounds and frames of reference, particularly in cases where they have been exposed primarily to one culture. Because so much of our culture is taken for granted, teachers may assume that their particular way of being in the world is the only way (provincial assumption) or their culture is superior to that of others (ethnocentric assumption), or that they do not even have a culture (naïve assumption). Becoming culturally conscious is also un/becoming cultural encapsulation (Banks & McGee Banks, 2004). This process begins with recognition, on the part of the teacher, that his or her worldview is not universally shared and differs significantly from that of other nations and peoples.
Undoing Assumptions:
Knowledge is Transmitted by Teachers

How do you, as a teacher, communicate information without being in control of some kind? Not necessarily power over, but “the knowledgeable one.” I have my student’s critique each other’s work; at least one person in the class inevitably complains that grading is the job of the teacher.

Julie Palme (2004, October 4)

Turning our attention to the roles, responsibilities, and actions of the teacher, cultural assumptions exert power over us by permeating our thinking at a deep, even unconscious level. We noted this in the visual symbols created by the course participants. All but one had a radial design, a bursting from the center, suggesting a worldview shared by art educators. What is this worldview? We interpreted it to mean that teachers are the central power or authority in their classrooms, impacting all else. They are assumed to have acquired valuable knowledge and understandings that must be given to students through lectures, presentations, scholarly writings, and other means. As repositories of knowledge in their classes, teachers give information and students receive it. This is what teachers (and their students) assume they are supposed to do. Before long, the culturally determined roles of teachers appear to be “natural” because this is how they have been socialized. However, if art teachers are to become effective teachers of all students, through explorations of visual culture they come to recognize that knowledge is not just given and received but constructed by people individually and collectively (Stanton, 1996; Tarule, 1996). As in Julie’s case, becoming aware of the assumption that the teacher is positioned to be “the knowledgeable one,” is also unbecoming that assumption. She recognizes that such positioning is part of a larger cultural context.
Becoming culturally conscious requires us to examine our worldview and embedded assumptions. Moreover, because schools are patterned after the predominant culture, it is imperative that teachers challenge the validity of these long held generalizations (Bennett, 2003) in relationship to the "world of art" and the curricular choices they make about what visual culture to study. We note the assumptions that art education is the study of well-designed or beautiful images and objects and suggest, "each may be based on ethnocentric interpretations of evidence" (Bennett, 2003, p. 44).

**K-12 Art Teacher Explorations into Visual Culture: Changing Visions of Art Educators**

There are shared characteristics by this group of art educators who decided to devote time to a non-degree course for professional development. We looked at why these art educators are open to reviewing and revising their teaching and are interested in a visual culture orientation. The teachers' stories indicate they have profoundly transformed their students' lives. Alice, one of the art teacher participants, indicates the impact of her teaching from a recent email she received from a student of ten years ago. Her student writes,

I must point out that the dreaded "lecture day," at least at the time they were dreaded, ended up to be one of the best things I took from your class. ... I can pinpoint the exact moment when art truly touched me. If you remember, the last "living painting" I was involved in with you was Jacques-Louis David's Oath of the Horatii. ... I was at the Louvre in Paris in December of 1998 when I came around a corner in a dimly lit room. ... and there it was. It was larger than life. It was The Oath of the Horatii. I knew it by name ... I knew who painted it ... I knew when it was painted ... I knew what it meant ... but I never knew how beautiful (or how big) it was. And there I sat for almost a half hour...
admiring it. It completely took me off guard because I didn’t know it was in the Louvre and wasn’t looking for it. And lightly to myself I whispered, “Thank you, Mrs. Walkowski. I hope you heard me.” (Walkowski, 2004, September 22)

David, another art teacher who has taught art long enough to have students who are in their mid 30s, described a conversation with one of his former students who said his “art class had had a profound impact on her life’s direction and view of the world” (David Miller, 2004c, September 24). A one-day presentation by David on the importance of art and why it was worthy of pursuit to a class motivated a teacher to go to art school and have a career in the arts. “She said it had been a very important day in her life” (David Miller, 2004c, September 24).

With such success, why would they be interested in changing their teaching? As the stories un/folded it became clear that this group of art educators were not new to the profession, and as seasoned art teachers they had experienced the changes in art education to include discussion beyond studio work, and to present to their students works of art. The broad-scale funding of a discipline-based approach to art education, called Discipline-based Art Education (DBAE), added another expectation of art educators—to discuss works of art. Duncum (2002) asserts that DBAE has taught us that there is more to art than making pictures; there is the need to learn how to discuss images sensibly. ... It would have been impossible to move from a self-expression approach to a visual culture approach without the intervening period where critique of art became accepted as an essential component of curriculum. (p. 8)

Attacks on DBAE by social theorists, feminists, and postcolonial theorists disrupted the “art world” containment of a canon of works all should learn if they were serious art students. The rise of postmodern
discourse of art as visual culture percolated to mainstream art education venues in Spring 2003, when three prominent journal publications in the United States (i.e., *Studies in Art Education*, *Visual Arts Research*, and *Art Education*) had special issues on visual culture, and the National Art Education Association conferences proliferated in visual culture sessions since 2002.

The teachers presented here regenerate themselves in continual self-reflexivity, an un/becoming process that contributes to a perpetual un/folding of art education. Art educators transform their teaching through regeneration that is a slow process of un/becoming assumptions; yet keep remnants of the familiar fabrics of art knowledge. This continual regeneration, evident in the teachers involved in the online professional development course, is analogous to the slippage that often occurs in African and African-American music where with each repetition, each return of the familiar, there are imperceptible elements of change; something is slightly off, slightly varied, and these minute differences make the music flow in a state of constant regeneration, so that one never has a static reproduction of the same.

(Minh-ha, 1999, p. 28)

Some of the participants noted that a good reason for studying visual culture is to understand the context of today's student better. These art teachers have a desire to connect to the familiar and technologically mediated world of their students. Visual culture orientations now in mainstream art education discourse is opening the field of art education to study students' popular culture, which is heavily integrated with technologies.

What appears natural and authentic artmaking has and will continue to change. Individuals such as the art teachers participating in our visual culture explorations online course can extend such changes to consider learning that is significant to the individual within society.
on a local and global scale and to the environment. This includes studies of the deep and lasting social impact of visual representations, having a political engagement with visual culture, and asking of any image what are the overt and covert gender, nationalistic, and racial tropes? A visual culture orientation would study how race and nation “are fictions, cultural constructions that shape our social interactions” (Wallis & Fusco, 2003, p. 8).

A concern raised by one of the art educators in this group was whether the study of visual culture would make art education a study of the mediocre.

What about excellence or quality in art? I haven’t read anything about that. Actually, the word hasn’t entered any of the discussions. Is that a part of visual culture? ... Isn’t that an aspect of the work found in galleries or museums? Are there dolls that you have seen that you’ve said to yourself—now—that is a well design or beautiful doll? Is art going to be watered down or become mediocre? Our society/culture tends to do that to things. (Palmer, 2004, October 8)

Karen responded “A study of fine art as visual culture uncovers the signifying processes of artistic merit” (Keifer-Boyd, 2004, October 10). She provided examples of the fluctuations of artistic merit depending on mis-attributions of a work to a “master,” that later scholars discovered to be created by a “mistress.”

Alice stated that quality was not the focus of her teaching of art from the past, thereby not questioning with her students what is selected in the text she uses, Living with Art (Gilbert, 1998). Instead, she believes that she would discuss visual culture critically and equates quality with critical discourse or critique.
Since we can look at work critically or historically, I have chosen to have my students study who, what, when, where, and the why of art. In other words the historical aspect ... I haven’t discussed quality in relation to my art history classes. I don’t know if that is necessarily a good thing or not. I tend to find myself liking a work less if I analyze it too much and feel that maybe the students will like it less too. Quality can be a part of the discussion of visual culture because it is another aspect of what we see. (Walkowski, 2004, October 9)

David challenges the notion that quality is not a part of visual culture dialogue by redefining quality. He suggested to the group of art teachers, “Art does not risk being watered down or becoming mediocre—it risks becoming more relevant” (Miller, 2004, October 10). With each return to the familiar in our dialogue of art teacher identity and approaches to visual culture in K-12 art classes there are glimpses of change. The dialogue enabled us to explore the space between the mirror’s reflection and our constructions of art education and visual culture.

Authors’ Note: This is a true co-authored work with equal contributions from all of us and no first author. The order in which we list authors is based on a rotation we use in our collaborations on publications.

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Un/Becoming Digital: The Ontology of Technological Determinism and its Implications for Art Education

Alison Colman

Introduction

Artists have been experimenting with analog and digital technologies since the 1960's; early examples include Billy Klüver’s Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) and Nam June Paik (1966). While countless artists have since made highly innovative use of new media such as the computer, artificial intelligence (AI), biotech, the Internet and the World Wide Web, LED, motion capture, gesture tracking, GPS, open source, and robotics, artist/theorists such as Penny (1995), Lovejoy (1997), Weibel (1996; 2001) and Wilson (2002) have cautioned against appropriating deterministic engineering models underlying such technologies. These models, predominant in commercial industry, government and the military, embrace efficiency, commodity economics, innovation, progress, and privileging explicit (as opposed to ambiguous and metaphorical) knowing. However, each of these artist/theorists has acknowledged the extreme difficulty artists have when attempting to critique or distance themselves from the institutional values embedded in the technologies themselves.

As a result, according to Weibel, most media artists “become voluntary victims within the mighty text of technology. They celebrate their own fascination with fetish technology instead of developing a
distance to this fascination" (Bartha, 1996, p.10; Wilson, 2002). In other words, it is an uncritical acceptance of technology, rooted in a utopian determinist perspective, and the technology's "intended" purpose that instigates and drives the work's creation, not the artist's exploration of technology as a social and cultural phenomenon—the work is ultimately a showcase of the technology itself. This technological imperative is reflected in the curriculum of many art educators who incorporate digital technologies (primarily computers and the Internet) into their teaching in that their curriculum is technique oriented and technology-driven, often focused upon teaching students how to use certain computer packages and peripherals (Freedman, 1997). I have seen evidence of this at the annual state art education conventions I have attended, in that the vast majority of the K-12 art teachers' presentations on digital art in their classrooms center around the particular software packages they have taught their students how to use. The student artwork they almost always choose to display is meant to showcase their students' mastery of the software, as opposed to their students' exploration of an issue or idea.

It is true that artists throughout history have experimented with the technologies of their time; in addition, it is not uncommon for art educators to focus almost exclusively on technical proficiency and skill acquisition with beginning students regardless of the medium being used. What makes computer technology different from other media in this regard is that hardware and software generally become "obsolete" roughly every eighteen months, theoretically requiring artists to constantly re-learn a skill set, which in turn forces them to continuously engage in skill acquisition at the expense of experimentation and investigation. This dynamic is present in the curriculum of art educators who teach computer graphics, in that they must search for a "delicate equilibrium between artistic expression and technological proficiency" (Eber, 2000, p. 920). The challenge for art educators is to devise ways to
include in their curriculum the discussion of issues raised by information and communication technologies themselves, such as "planned obsolesce"; the relationship between technology and culture; technological narratives of progress and revolutionary change; technology's impact on our perception of self, the body, and identity; and technology's impact on perception, representation and thought, to name a few.

A second but no less important challenge is for art educators to engage students in critical inquiry about new media technology while remaining at basic levels of instruction as they are becoming acclimated to new technological art forms. The art educator (as well as the students) must also examine the desire to use the newest and most powerful computer technologies, a desire fed by futurist (and seductive) deterministic discourse touting the "impact" of the digital "revolution," and thus shift their focus onto meaning and content. When I refer to meaning and content, I am not necessarily alluding to critical investigation of mass media images, although this is a valuable activity in its own right. Instead, I am alluding to a critical interrogation of the assumptions and myths about technology perpetuated by industry, as well as placing technology and media within larger cultural trends. I feel it is certainly possible for the art educator to use works in which the artist interrogates technology that are enjoyable and compelling as well as approachable as a vehicle for demonstrating to students how to analyze their relationship with specific technological apparatuses and processes. Requiring the students to engage in interpretive and critical thinking about their perceptions about and interactions with technology ought to be the means toward the end of artistic production.

This essay is divided into two parts. In the first part, I begin with an overview of a range of deterministic perspectives on technology, such as utopic, dystopic, and critical/contextualist. I then describe how these perspectives have shaped discourse on Internet technology in
general, in education, and in the art classroom. In the second part, I focus more narrowly on the Internet and artists who use the World Wide Web (WWW) to create their work, instead of approaching technological and digital art more broadly. I have two reasons for doing this. First, Web art, in comparison to other forms of digital art in which the artist utilizes technologies such as motion sensors, AI, biotech, or robotics, for example, is generally more accessible to K-12 students if they are enrolled in a school equipped with one or several computer labs and Internet access. Second, I focus on Internet art because Internet technology has been the subject of much deterministic discourse, both utopic and dystopic. The artists I have chosen include British “artivist” Heath Bunting, Web artist Andy Deck, and telepresence artist Eduardo Kac. The reason I have chosen these artists is that they each use the World Wide Web as a means to interrogate Internet technology as a social/cultural practice, as well as address specific issues pertaining to Internet technology, such as the rhetoric of power and “newness,” collective action and collaboration, the nature of interactivity, and what it means to “know at a distance.” I conclude this section with a discussion on how an art educator might use the work of these artists to introduce the aforementioned issues into their curriculum and critically examine popular, determinist views of technology.

Visions of Technology

Both utopian and dystopian perspectives of technology reflect a particular technological determinism that positions technology as a determinant of social forms and processes. In other words, technological determinism is molded by a set of narratives that presume “new” technologies impact (positively or negatively) directly upon society, replacing what has come before, and producing a predictable set of effects regardless of the unique specificities of time and place (Bingham, Holloway, & Valentine, 2001). What is missing from technological determinism, according to Thrift (1996), is “any concerted sense of new
electronic communications technologies [such as the Internet] as part of a long history of rich and often wayward social practices (including the interpretation of those practices) through which we have become socially acquainted with these technologies" (p. 1472). The dilemma of technological determinism, according to Castells (2000), is a false problem because technology is society [emphasis his] and society cannot be represented without its technological tools. Technological determinism is often conflated with social determinism because socio-cultural determinism sometimes leaves as little room for individual agency as extreme technological determinism leaves to social control (Chandler, 1995a). In addition, more extreme versions of technological determinism ignore the interpretive processes that emerge when humans become socially acquainted with technologies, whether through their design and manufacturing, or their use in the home or workplace.

Utopian Visions of Technology

Barbour (1993) characterizes the optimistic appraisal of technology under the notion of "technology as liberator." Throughout modern history technological developments have been welcomed for their potential for liberating humans from hunger, disease, and poverty, and celebrated as the source of material progress and human fulfillment. In addition, technological fixes have been sought for social problems brought on by technological developments, rather than trying to change human behavior or forge a consensus on political policies. Therefore, the position of "technology as liberator" is particularly familiar in the West. Barbour explicates the technological optimist's position by outlining four kinds of benefits instigated by technological development:
1) Higher living standards brought about by new drugs, better medical attention, improved sanitation and nutrition, and machines releasing us from backbreaking labor.

2) Opportunity for choice regarding social and geographical mobility; power over nature that gives greater opportunity to exercise human freedom.

3) More leisure due to the development of laborsaving devices that free us to do what machines cannot.

4) Improved communications offering the possibility of instant worldwide communication, greater interaction, understanding and mutual appreciation.

Feenberg (1991) refers to the notion of technology as subservient to values established in other social spheres as "instrumental theory" (p. 5). This theory is based on the premise that technologies are socio-politically neutral, universal tools without evaluative content, ready to be put to either good or evil use via their users, inferring that technology as pure instrumentality is indifferent to the variety of ends it is used to achieve. From this theoretical perspective, technology appears detached from politics, particularly with respect to capitalist and socialist societies. The socio-political neutrality of technology is attributed to its "rational" character and embodiment of universal truth in that it is based on verifiable causal propositions. Instead of being relative, technology, like science, maintains its cognitive status and norms of efficiency in all social contexts. Also, this universality implies that identical standards of measurement can be applied in different settings, such as increasing the productivity of labor in different countries, eras, and civilizations.

The instrumentalist understanding of technology also advocates an unreserved commitment to technology's use. This does not mean that an instrumentalist would never make exceptions and refuse to use specific devices out of deference to moral values. However, the
notion of “trade-offs” is central to instrumentalist thinking: ethical, religious or environmental goals can only be achieved at the expense of efficiency. Thus the technical sphere can be limited by non-technical values, but not transformed by them (Feenberg, 1991).

Dystopian Visions of Technology

Ferre (1995) describes the dystopian perspective as “somber visions [of technology]” (p. 63), Barbour (1993) as “technology as threat” (p. 10), and Feenberg (1991) as “substantive theory” (p. 7). Ferre refers to Martin Heidegger as representative of one with a somber vision, although he cautions that Heidegger’s thought cannot simply be read as “anti-technological” despite his warnings and grim view of technique. The primary question regarding technology, according to Heidegger (1977), is “what it is” (p. 4): an end-seeking human activity that uses equipment, tools, machines and the like to achieve those ends. Such an “instrumental and anthropological” (p. 5) definition postulates that technology is a mere means, something that is manipulated toward practical ends and contained within human mastery.

However, modern technology challenges this view because it is “something completely different, and therefore new” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 6) in that it demands the extraction of energy from nature for storage and manipulation at will and has a much more intimate relationship with modern science than older forms of technology. From this Heidegger derived the notion of the technological a priori, which is not itself a machine or anything overtly technological, but a machine way of thinking that allows nature to be approached as something to be mechanized, reducing it to a manipulable standing reserve for ordering and regulation. As the will to mastery itself, the danger of the technological a priori lies in our efforts to control modern
technology: the more we will to master it, the more it masters us through the technological quality of our act of willing.

Those who perceive technology as a "threat to authentic human life" (Barbour, 1993, p. 10) consider technology inimical to human fulfillment. The human costs of technology are many, including mass society’s push toward uniformity: standardized products created via mass production, mass uniform culture produced by mass media, homogeneity promoted via industrialization. Technology promotes narrow criteria of efficiency leading to rational and efficient organization, requiring fragmentation, specialization, speed, and the maximization of output; the criterion is efficiency in achieving a narrow range of objectives. Relationships in a technological society tend toward specialization and functionality, utilizing technology for subtle yet insidious and pervasive forms of manipulation, surveillance and psychological conditioning. Technological pessimists also cite technology’s uncontrollability as an interlocking system or mutually reinforcing network that leads a life of its own, no longer a set of adaptable tools for human use, but rather an all-encompassing pervasive structure with its own dynamic and logic. Barbour (1993) refers to the work of French philosopher Jacques Ellul (1964), who argued technology is an autonomous and uncontrollable force that dehumanizes everything it touches.

Feenberg (1991) also refers to the work of Ellul and Heidegger to illustrate the substantive theory of technology. Substantive theory argues technology “constitutes a new type of cultural system that restructures the entire social world as an object of control” (p. 7; Winner, 1986). This system is embodied by an expansive dynamic that mediates every pre-technological enclave, shaping the whole of social life, and the only solution to this dilemma is retreat. Feenberg (1991) explains how Ellul linked the rationalization of society with technology by arguing that technical phenomena has become the defining
characteristic of all modern societies regardless of political ideology. What substantive theory tries to make people aware of is the cultural character of technology, i.e., through our decision to use particular technologies we unwittingly make certain cultural choices. Technology is not only a means to an end, but an environment and a way of life: this is its "substantive" (Feenberg, 1991, p. 8) impact.

_Utopian Visions of the Internet_

Much theorizing about cyberspace and the Internet in academia and the popular press characterizes either the utopian perspectives or the dystopian perspective in that both share a technological determinism representing cyberspace and the "real world" as distinct, unconnected, and possessing different, often oppositional qualities (Doel & Clarke, 1999; Holloway & Valentine, 2003). Technological optimists conceive the "virtual" as "improving" upon the "real," and cyberspace as holding promise for all global citizens. Technological pessimists view cyberspace as a threat and the "virtual" as an inauthentic, poor imitation of the "real." These two views are constructed within a discourse of disembodiment, disregarding the embeddedness of on-line activity within the context of offline spaces and the social relations of everyday life (Holloway & Valentine, 2003).

For instance, Hayles (1996) has pointed out that cyberspace has been heralded by technological utopians as a disembodied medium that offers transcendence from the material body and worldly environments. This opportunity to leave one's body and its accompanying racial and cultural markers also enables users to "try on" various identities (Plant, 1996; Turkle, 1995) in an atmosphere inhospitable to discrimination and prejudice. Technological optimists trumpet new forms of social interaction the Internet makes possible: global users meeting mind-to-mind, unconstrained by geographical
proximity. They argue such relationships are potentially more intimate and rich compared to “real life” friendships because they are based on genuine mutual interests. Finally, cyberspace has served as a source of inspiration for optimistic promoters of globalism and global capitalism, particularly those who perceive the Web as ushering a new human condition. In a 1996 interview with Wired contributor Kevin Kelly, Derrick de Kerkhove, head of The McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology, describes the Web as a “new guise of language” (p.6) in a tribal world where the cosmos “has a presence. It’s alive. The tribe shares in this huge organic reality” (ibid.). He continues with the agenda of the Web is that of a tribal chieftain: the language is shared, not imposed... The screen is the collective shared image. The content of that screen is a collaboration of zillions of synaptic connections. That’s what the Web is for me, it’s so close to a mind (p. 6, 7).

Technological optimism has also found a home in discourses on education. Some art education theorists (Marschalek, 2001; Taylor & Carpenter, 2001) and classroom art educators (Halsey-Dutton, 2001) have claimed that communication technologies such as the Internet will transform teaching and student learning, precipitating a major shift in pedagogy as well as how schools and universities operate. Digital technology, the Web in particular, has been seen by educational reformers as a technocratic solution to “problems” of education by offering access to enormous amounts of writing and visual materials from all over the world (Sefton-Green & Reiss, 1999). This solution is based on two assumptions: a) people do not have enough access to information or are bereft of information, and b) information is knowledge (Bromley, 1997; Winner, 1986).

Technological optimists center computers in discourses regarding the purpose of education: preparing students for effective participation in knowledge-driven information economies (Bryson & de Castell,
While technological optimists argue that all children must acquire so-called "necessary" technological knowledge now deemed invaluable in the workplace and academia, optimistic visions of educational technologies construct computers as autonomous tools that are educationally valuable only when distinctions are made between certain computer-based pedagogical activities, such as "drill-and-practice" software and online games on one hand, and "learning environments" on the other. For example, some educators have championed the nonlinear design of interactive multimedia programs and the Web as enabling students to become active participants in their own learning rather than passive observers and consumers of meaningless and irrelevant facts (Gregory, 1996). Multimedia learning environments have also served as an example of student-centered constructivist pedagogy that facilitates higher-order thinking skills through self-directed activities such as gathering information, solving meaningful problems, communicating with others, and constructing their own knowledge of the world (Parrish, 2000). This constructivist view could be characterized as a "soft" technological determinism that allows some scope for human control and cultural variation, claiming that "the presence of a particular technology is an enabling or facilitating factor leading to potential opportunities which may or may not be taken up in particular societies or periods (or that its absence is a constraint)" (Chandler, 1995b, p.8; Finnegan, 1988, p. 38).

Bryson and De Castell (1998) caution against positing a direct relationship between children's acquisition of "higher" forms of thinking and use of particular learning styles such as metacognitive thinking and their engagement with certain computer programs and/or environments. They argue that such rhetoric on "thinking styles" and "learning styles" often glosses over socioeconomic inequities by "creating essentialist ontological categories out of what are far more plausibly seen as vastly unequal access to power in school" (p. 72).
This optimism does not sufficiently acknowledge sociopolitical differences amongst learners and resultant inequitable relations to educational technologies, thus severing these technologies from the normative contexts of social practice in which they are used.

_Dystopian Visions of the Internet_

Just as there have been Internet enthusiasts, there have been detractors ranging from cautionary to hostile. Implicit in their arguments is the assumption that a state of being exists independently of technology, attributing technology with a certain level of autonomy and self-propelling logic (Kendrick, 1996). For example, information technologies are seen as challenging the status of human subjectivity (Barglow, 1994) by fostering a worldview that privileges analytical thinking over holistic forms of understanding (Robins & Webster, 1999), making possible new metaphors linking functions of mind to the function of machines, or likening students to information processing apparatuses. Postman (1992) explains we have “relinquished control, which in the case of the computer means that we may, without excessive remorse, pursue ill-advised and even inhuman goals because the computer can accomplish them” (p. 114). On-line communication and interaction is regarded as distinct and less authentic than the complex human engagements occurring in the off-line world (McLaughlin, Osbourne, & Smith, 1995). At the same time, Internet users have been portrayed as withdrawn, overly attached to on-line culture, neglectful of their social and physical surroundings and “real-world” obligations (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kielsler, Mukophadhyah, & Scherlis, 1998).

Children’s Internet use has also alarmed technological pessimists who feel it puts their physical and emotional well being at risk. Some commentaries have painted the computer as the new “electronic babysitter,” replacing television as detaching children from friends and
family, keeping them indoors and immersed in their own private online worlds. The Internet has also been portrayed as dangerous for children, making pornography, neo-Nazi hate sites, sexually explicit discussions, and forms of racial and ethnic hatred too accessible. In addition, children’s Internet use has prompted fears that they are easy targets for pedophiles, dangerous strangers, child-sex tourism and child-sex abuse (Sardar, 2000). Holloway and Valentine (2003) explain such discourses are problematic because they essentialize childhood (i.e., “angelic child,” “dangerous child”), deny children their status as social actors, and rely on deterministic understandings of communication technologies.

**Critical Perspectives of Technology**

Feenberg (1991) and Barbour (1993) have each offered a third way of looking at technology that serves as an antidote to technological determinism. Barbour refers to this third position as “contextualist” (p. 21), a position that perceives technology as neither inherently good nor evil but rather an ambiguous instrument of social power whose consequences depend on its social context. Contextualists believe that as social constructions, technologies are seldom if ever neutral because particular values and purposes, as well as social goals and institutional interests are already embedded in their design. Choices exist regarding how the technologies are designed as well as deployed. In other words, there is no “one best way” to use or design a technology; thus designers and users should explore the various choices available to them.

Although contextualists tend to criticize technology in a manner similar to pessimists (Barbour, 1993) they differ in that they are willing to offer hope that technology can be used toward more humane ends, either by political measures or changes in the economic and political system. Contextualism allows two-way interaction between technology
and society; it does not frame technology as an actor upon culture, nor does it single out cultural forces upon technology for scrutiny. Barbour (1993) also contends contextualists are more likely than optimists or pessimists to privilege questions of social justice when evaluating technology because they interpret it as both a product and an instrument of social power. Conflicts concerning technology must be resolved in the political arena, while technology itself must be redirected toward the realization of specific, commonly agreed upon human values (Barbour, 1993).

Feenberg (1991) proposes a critical theory of technology, a course of action promoting the invention of a politics of technological transformation. This theory analyzes new forms of oppression brought about by modern industrialism, argues they are subject to new challenges, and attempts to explain how modern technology can be redesigned to adapt it to the needs of a freer society (p. 13). The critical theory of technology has in common with substantive theories the notion that technology is more than the sum of its tools and "enframes" the world in an autonomous fashion, but it denies that modernity is ultimately exemplified by atomistic consumer culture. Like instrumentalism, the critical theory of technology rejects Ellul and Heidegger's fatalism, proposing that the choice of civilization can be affected by human action, and political struggle can influence technical innovation. Unlike instrumentalism, it rejects the neutrality of technology, positing that the values and interests of elites are installed in the design of any technology even before it is assigned a goal. Critical theory also argues that technology is not a "thing," but an "ambivalent" (p. 14) process of development suspended between different possibilities; therefore, technology is situated as a scene of struggle, a social battlefield rather than a destiny. Finally, Feenberg (1991) argues that contemporary society possesses a suppressed potentiality for a "coherent civilizational alternative based on a system of mutually
supporting transformations of social institutions, culture and technology” (p. 18).

Art, Technology, and Social Practices

I now turn to three examples of artwork and cultural activism facilitated by Internet technology: Heath Bunting’s *King’s Cross Phone In* (1994), Andy Deck’s *Lexicon* (2002), and Eduardo Kac’s *Teleporting to an Unknown State* (1996/2001/2004). While the meaning and intent of each work differs, what they all have in common is that the social practices and modes of communication made possible by the Internet are integral to the work. In addition, each work demonstrates how artists are able to educate and challenge viewers regarding commonly accepted assumptions about the use of specific, albeit ubiquitous technologies. Not only does each piece demonstrate how Internet technology has changed social, aesthetic and political practices, representation, and patterns of communication, each also demonstrates how cyberspace and “real life,” despite the exhortations or lamentations of technological determinists, are not separate from each other. These two modes of being do not represent a disjuncture in human existence; they are woven together and negotiated meaningfully by people who choose to engage with them.

*King’s Cross Phone-In*

Heath Bunting’s earliest Internet project *Kings Cross Phone-In* (1994), is an example of art that facilitates the collision between physical public space, everyday life and communications technology. The project involved Bunting’s creation of a Web page listing the phone numbers of thirty-six phone booths around London's King’s Cross train station. The crux of the work was Bunting’s use of the Internet to publicize an event that could only occur if the online “audience” participated. Having publicized his project on Usenet newsgroups alt.cyberpunk
and alt.artcom, as well as artnet and cybercafe electronic bulletin board systems, he includes instructions and an explanation for individuals perusing the page: “During the day of Friday 5th August 1994 the telephone booth area behind the destination board at Kings X British Rail station will be borrowed and used for a temporary cybercafe. It would be good to concentrate activity around 18:00 GMT, but play as you will.” After listing the phone booths’ telephone numbers on the same page, Bunting invites people to:

1. Call no./nos. and let the phone ring a short while and then hang up
2. Call these nos. in some kind of pattern (the nos. are listed as a floor plan of the booth)
3. Call and have a chat with an expectant or unexpectant [sic] person
4. Go to Kings X station watch public reaction/answer the phones and chat
5. Do something different

The project was successful, as random telephone calls created an auditory intervention disrupting the daily routine of an urban transportation hub as commuters passing through the station chatted with strangers around the world calling to say hello (Greene, 2000; Greene 2004). The function of networks was configured on the level of a friendly phone call, while public space was reconfigured aurally and socially (Greene, 2000; Greene, 2004). One could argue that Bunting draws upon a logic fostered by the Internet, the creation of a networked communications environment accommodating multiple participants simultaneously, and expands upon it using an individualized medium such as the telephone. King’s Cross Phone-In reconceptualizes the public phone booth not just as an instrument for personal one-to-one conversation, but also as a conduit for engineering encounters between members of a worldwide public. In a real sense, Bunting is grounding
and intertwining two worldwide communications networks (the Internet and the telephone) within a specific local context.

The phone-in, despite the distance and anonymity between participants, in principle constitutes a collective act through individual actions (i.e., phone calls) due to their simultaneity. Although the callers do not know whether they are the sole followers of the artist’s instructions, or even if they are contributing to an intervention in public space, they act in the belief that their individual, solitary action is part of a greater pattern. Here an individualist medium such as the telephone becomes a medium of collectivity, both in the imaginations of its participants and in the local context of Kings Cross, where a chorus of ringing telephones created a localized disruption by drawing upon an absent and scattered “community” (Berry, 1999).

*Lexicon*

*Lexicon* (2002a), an open-source software piece by Andy Deck, uses the programming language Java to facilitate user participation and interaction. Integral to the piece is the open-source philosophy of transparency: software source code belongs in the public domain, subject to public review, manipulation and development. The visitor is able to interact with the work in several ways, by creating programmatic images and/or writing scripts that affect what other users experience when they traverse through the site. The work contains a *Lexicon* vocabulary page in which the viewer is presented with sixty-eight buttons, each containing a different word, from “action” to “zap.” The words are alphabetized, and all letters of the alphabet are represented. Every one of Lexicon’s visual effects and transitions is linked with a word. To create an image on a “canvas,” the user puts together a combination of these words, which generates an interactive montage that changes every time the user clicks the mouse. The word
combination is recorded on another page within the site; a hyperlink represents the date and time at which the combination was created, and future users are able to click on this hyperlink to generate another visual interpretation on the canvas. In addition, there are pages within the work that display the definitions of each of the sixty-eight words, as well as pages that display the source code associated with each word. Users who are familiar with the Java programming language can add to Lexicon's vocabulary or change the visual effects generated by existing words using what Deck has called the Lexicon Development Kit (LDK), thus enabling them to increase the number of words available for other visitors to use when engaging with the site.

Deck created Lexicon as a means to explore notions of public creativity and cyberspace performance, as well as exploring ways to balance "the image between the time-honored practices of written narrative and the often frustrating dominance of programming codes in digital media" and offering a "live telematic medium for communication and verbal-visual communication" (Deck, 2002b, pp.6-7). His ultimate aim, however, is to create Internet artwork that illustrates the need and the possibility for the average Internet user to shuck their feelings of helplessness in the face of market forces and contribute to a more open and independent media. Deck, a strong proponent of open source, is concerned with the increasing amount of control the entertainment and marketing sectors have over the Internet's infrastructure software, distribution technologies and content formats. He argues that corporate interests are threatened by the development of free alternatives such as Linux and Java, and software giants such as Microsoft are engaging in the process of "retrofitting" Internet software to suit their ideological and commercial agendas (Deck, 2003). Microsoft, for example, discontinued its support for the Java language in 2004 due to the fact that Java enables programmers to develop software for Windows users while simultaneously offering software to users of other
operating systems. As a result, computer users are coerced into using the Windows operating system (Deck, 2003).

Teleporting an Unknown State

*Teleporting an Unknown State* can be described as a biotelematic interactive installation that merges computer-based telecommunications with biological processes, metaphorically transforming the Internet into a life-supporting system. The installation consisted of a darkened room with a pedestal covered with a mound of earth containing a single seed. A video projector was suspended above and faced the pedestal, through which remote individuals sent light via the Internet, enabling the seed to photosynthesize and grow. Viewers were unable to see the video projector itself; they were only able to see its cone of light projected through a circular hole in the ceiling, not unlike a ray of sunshine breaking through clouds. Anonymous individuals worldwide pointed their digital cameras skyward, using free videoconferencing software to re-emit photons through the projector in the gallery, transmitting sunlight onto the seed. The slow process of growth of the plant was then transmitted live via the Internet for the duration of the exhibition. The graphical interface of the work was projected directly onto the bed of earth on the pedestal, enabling direct physical contact between the seed and the photonic stream (Kac, 2000).

Three versions of this work were exhibited between 1996 and 2001. The first version was shown at the New Orleans Contemporary Art Center as part of the SIGGRAPH Art Exhibit “The Bridge,” which took place between August 4, 1996, and August 9, 1996. The second version was exhibited at the KIBLA Art Gallery, in Maribor, Slovenia, from October 24, 1998, to November 7, 1998. What made this version different from the first version is that it was realized on the Web, in which
participants activated a global network of webcams directed skyward from eight regions of the Earth: Slovenia, Vancouver, Paris, Moscow, Chicago, Tokyo, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, Mawson Station, Antarctica, and Sydney, Australia. As remote participants interacted with the work, the piece's web site was projected onto the soil piled on the gallery floor. These participants would click on a portion of a 3 by 3 grid representing the eight locations on the site, resulting in the dark areas on the site gradually lighting up. Live still images from the different locations displayed the sky, capturing the sunlight. The live stills projected by participants faded to black after sixty seconds, enabling other online participants to interact with the work (Kostic, 2000).

The central image, showing the projected webcam views, was captured and uploaded automatically with a self-contained camera server. When projected, this image concentrated the light sent by Web participants and projected it onto the seed. The eight surrounding images were automatically captured by the KIBLA server from webcams around the world and made available every five minutes. One of the benefits of webcams is that while they make global information sharing of live still images possible, they do not require highly sophisticated technology, and Kac was able to avoid problems of slow transmission telephone lines in several parts of the world (Kostic, 2000). A third, highly similar version of this work was exhibited at the Austin Museum of Art in Austin, Texas in November, 2001.

What all three versions of the work have in common is that they each foster a sense of community and collective responsibility without any verbal exchange. The collaborative action and shared responsibility of anonymous individuals around the world, enabling photons from distant countries and cities to be teleported into a gallery, makes possible the birth of a fragile and small plant (Kac, 2000). This piece demonstrates a dramatic reversal of the regulated unidirectional model imposed by broadcasting standards and the communications industry. Instead of
transmitting a specific message from one point to many passive receivers, *Teleporting an Unknown State* enables remote individuals to transmit light to a single point in a gallery space. What this work makes evident is an ethic of Internet ecology and social network survival through a distributed, collaborative effort and shared responsibility. During each show, photosynthesis depended on remote collective action. Birth, growth, and death on the Internet form a horizon of possibilities that unfolded as participants dynamically contributed to the work and made possible the survival of the organism (Kac, 2000).

**Implications for Art Education**

The purpose of this final section is to discuss how an art educator can use the three Internet art works I have presented to facilitate students' awareness of how deterministic perspectives have shaped, and continue to shape, their perceptions of and relationship to new media technologies, the Internet in particular. I have chosen two persistent, utopian perspectives regarding computer technology, the tropes of “progress” and the rhetoric of the “new,” and the “radical,” “revolutionary” potential of interactivity. The first highly pervasive and powerful perspective regarding computer technology emanating from the hardware and software industries is the necessity of remaining up-to-date and keeping up with technological progress. The implication for art and art educators is that this focus on the constant development of new tools can entrap them in a cycle of continuously purchasing new equipment and spending an inordinate amount of time learning new software. Beneath this implication is another, more insidious implication: it is only possible to make “good” art if you use the most up-to-date technologies. By extension, using out-of-date equipment to create works of art is the equivalent of using crayons and tempera paints. In my view, *King's Cross* refutes this perspective very well. This is a work which makes innovative use of what we would consider a
relatively "low-tech," rudimentary and commonplace technology, the telephone, in conjunction with a website which would most likely be considered downright "primitive" by current standards. It could lead one to ask: should an artist use the most sophisticated technology available to them? To what degree should an artist who uses a particular technology push it to its limits? Should the artist's technological prowess be used as a measuring stick to determine the work's success? Is an artist obligated to learn as much as they possibly can about a particular technology as a prerequisite to using it to create their artwork?

Another pervasive determinist perspective associated with computer based media is the "radical" and "revolutionary" potential of interactivity, with proponents pointing to artworks which invite viewers to engage in some action (navigating through a menu, clicking a mouse) to influence the flow of events or to navigate through cyberspace. Contemporary youth take for granted certain forms of conventional media interactivity, such as video games; however, it is less likely that they have thought to question the nature of this interactivity. Conventional interactivity has its roots in the disciplines of human-computer interface design and engineering, premised on efficiency, productivity, and the manipulation of objects. Ultimately, the user does not have any impact on the final outcome; nor is s/he required to make any truly meaningful choices – choice is an illusion.

All three works challenge the notion that interactive systems are inherently or automatically revolutionary by creating more open-ended systems dependent upon individual and collective responsibility, initiative, and cooperation. Yet each of these works raise a number of questions regarding the limits of interactivity: can an artwork still be considered interactive if no one participates, or if very few people participate? Should the success of the artwork be determined by the degree to which the participants get to know each other? By the degree to which the final outcome evolves from the work's beginning? Can an
interactive artwork still be considered successful if it still looks and feels like the artist’s own work after a large number of people have interacted with it? How much control should the artist have over the process that shapes the interactive artwork? How much control should the artist have (or not have) over the outcome if the work is finite? Should the success of the artwork be determined by the degree to which the participants learn something about themselves? Should an interactive artwork require the viewer to use their entire body?

Both lists of questions are by no means exhaustive. It is my hope that not only do these questions generate more questions, but also that they prompt both art educators and their students to examine more critically their use and understanding of the digital technologies they take for granted.

Notes

(1) Determinism is a philosophical system that posits every physical event, including human cognition and action, is causally determined by an unbroken chain of past occurrences and therefore makes it possible for us to know future effects with certainty. Technological determinism claims that technology is an autonomous, “self-controlling, self-determining, self-generating, self-propelling, self-propelling, self-perpetuating and self-expanding force... out of human control, changing under its own momentum and ‘blindly’ shaping society” (Chandler, 1995a, p.1).

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“People Should Come to Work”: Un-becoming Cartesian Subjects and Objects in Art Education

Sara Wilson McKay

When asked about how he wants viewers to engage with his often confrontational and difficult work, performance artist William Pope L responded, “people should come to work” (personal communication, February 3, 2003). Preparedness to engage, to work, is at the core of considering the connection of art education and democracy. All too often that connection is reduced to the idea of beauty being in the “eye of the beholder” and you can do whatever you want—“it’s a free country!”

Re-imagining the work of art education, I want to talk of rhizomes and cyborgs, perhaps at the risk of alienating readers with raised eyebrows and being accused of hiding behind nouveau metaphors d’jour. But I want to argue for these metaphors because as Nietzsche (1979) suggested, metaphors have life spans: once a metaphor dies, it is time for a new metaphor. The rhizome and the cyborg do what metaphors help us do; think creatively and imaginatively about a previously known idea—in this case the Cartesian seeing subject and seen object. Too frequently art education and democracy get linked at the most superficial level. I argue for new complex metaphors, which require work, to help us understand the relationship of these ideas on a more profound level.
This essay examines the role of the eye of the beholder within art education. The eye here is never simply functioning as a "neutral" process of seeing, but rather it is the contemporary, politically-situated eye. How we see, what we choose to notice, recognize and perceive is very much a political act, one intrinsically linked to ideas of democracy. The association of vision with identification, definition and representation surely has larger implications than just what it means to see and be seen. Could what we see and not see (i.e. how we see) play a major role in what constructs the social status quo and continued undemocratic political arenas? How might art education figure into this equation? In what follows, I suggest two metaphors that can be powerful tools for re-envisioning ideas of socio-political art education.

The Role of Conflict in Critical Education: What Does It Mean to Work?

Reconceptualizing vision in order to open up new metaphors with implications for understandings of democracy, bell hooks (1995) explored in her book, *Art on my mind: Visual politics*, how to invent a decolonized self who can envision democratic freedom through art. In her pursuit of democratic participation, she demanded, "There must be a revolution in the way we see, the way we look" (p. 4). hooks further described this revolution of visual politics as beginning with "diverse programs of critical education that would stimulate collective awareness" (p. 4). The current age of US mind-numbing standardized test-prep seems to undermine critical education that would stimulate such collective awareness.

But awareness is not enough; there has to be new creation, the doing of something new. John Dewey (1916) suggested that democratic education is characterized by novel communication among varied social groups. Further, it is the belief that, "every individual brings with him [sic] . . . a new way of seeing and feeling that in its interaction with old
material creates something new, something previously not existing in experience" (Dewey, 1934, p. 108). A re-visioned understanding of democratic education also involves a solid pursuit of social justice: "democratic educators seek not simply to lessen the harshness of social inequities in schools, but to change the conditions that create them" (Apple & Beane, 1995, p. 11).

The novel doing that democratic education requires is typically squelched by monocular vision, perpetuating the status quo of unquestioned cultural reproduction commonly known as public education. We are all too familiar with the status quo in education—public education that fails to meet the needs of all students and provide opportunities for all students to be successful. Annually, as reports of standardized tests fill the pages of the newspapers, it is increasingly apparent that democratic education is really less of an educational goal than the hollow pursuit of numbers and percentiles. The current educational system is limited to the pursuit of Truth (capital T intended), that is somehow quantifiable and definable through our usual, normalized envisionings. These visions of "truth" seem to have "arisen from some immutable, infallible source" (Apple & Beane, 1995, p. 13). The status quo begs for new metaphors to dislodge the reified mythical truths.

In his discussion of power/knowledge marked by their "constitutive interdependence" (p. 239), Foucault (1980) urged us to ask questions about what creates regimes of truth, not in hopes of escaping them, but so that we can change them. The questioning of Cartesian monocular vision is one attempt to isolate a large force in creating unthinking regimes of truth. The implicit trust of the eye and what it defines as knowledge is just such a factor in creating regimes of truth that must be questioned.
Cartesian Seeing Subjects/Seen Objects

But from where did this knowledge-producing eye come? Descartes claims: "all knowledge is of the same nature throughout, and consists solely in combining what is self evident" (in Lloyd, 1989, p. 115). That which is "self-evident" to the eye is that which has imprisoned us in attitudes of knowing that require external authoritative structures. This external authority may take shape in categorical designations that disallow ambiguous knowing or it may simply be "that which is on the test." Either way, being told what and how to know supersedes experiential knowing; the latter frequently results in murky, unclear, non-categorical knowledge which is often less comfortable and requires more work.

Lorraine Code (1991) expertly traces the origins of what is deemed "self-evident" to "visual metaphors—knowledge as illumination, knowledge as seeing, truth as light" (p. 140) at the root of Platonic philosophy. However she also recognizes that "a dual sense of vision is operative... Vision at once severs the object from the subject through perceptual distance, and [yet] connects subject and object across a perceptual distance" (p. 141). The resounding effect in this schema of perceptual epistemology is that of distance between subject and object.

Unpacking Foucault’s "truths," requires an analysis of our inheritance from Rene Descartes with regard to this distance: the subject-object split. In Western philosophy, the cogito, "I think," establishes a dualistic condition between mind and matter. This "Cartesian split" also results in a split between the perceiver and the perceived, the legacy of which lies in terms of a seeing subject and a seen object (Jay, 1993). Thus a Cartesian worldview has reduced visual worlds to a singular visual field and consigned the body to objecthood in it.

The impact of the Cartesian worldview on discourse about vision valorizes the privileged objective eye that Plato conceptualized, and
fortifies the Western subject–object split yielding an institution of
domination, hierarchy and exclusion. With such a strongly acculturated
worldview behind it, vision, particularly the gaze, has no doubt been
manifested in an array of power-lobbying ways: the gaze controls; the
gaze is not neutral; the gaze perpetuates patriarchy; the gaze claims
epistemic relations. Clearly, an un-becoming of Cartesian seeing
subjects and seen objects is required, but how do we begin?

Intersubjectivity and Art Education

A discussion of Cartesian perspectivism and its distance from
experience begs the question of what might transpire if we begin to
conceptualize something other than domination within a subject–object
dichotomy. What happens to vision within an intersubjective
worldview as a new millennium ushers in the explosion of the virtual
world where experience is an evolving concept? One cannot ask this
question without thinking of Donna Haraway’s ground-breaking essay
“A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-feminism in
the Late Twentieth Century” (1994). In this essay, Haraway calls for a
feminist renegotiation of the visual through which the visual field is
imploded:

From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about
lived social and bodily realities in which people are not
afraid of their kinship with animals and machines, not afraid
of permanently partial identities and contradictory
standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both
perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations
and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point.
Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision
or many-headed monsters (p. 429).
She goes on to define the cyborg as "a kind of disassembled and reassembled postmodern collective and personal self" (p. 437); identities give way to woven, networked affinities and the politics of partiality are bound up with intersubjectivity and vision: "the topography of subjectivity is multidimensional; so therefore is vision" (p.193).

Art can be instrumental in breaking down the Cartesian split by requiring of us multiplicity in our visions and an extension of who we have defined ourselves to be. Art plays itself out through multiple connections and ruptures—connections by virtue of its multiple interpretations over time and space and ruptures within our perceptions of easy recognition, which jolt us out of our complicity. Feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis (1988) asserted the necessity of aesthetic texts to help us "see difference differently" (p. 184) meaning artworks can help us explore and value that which is difficult to categorize. Film theorist Kaja Silverman (1996) maintained that artworks, "can intervene where we cannot. . . [and] at the same time, they are available to scrutiny and interrogation" (p. 4). These ideas about art suggest that indeed the field of art education holds great potential for the un-becoming of limited Cartesian vision and its implications.

There are many reasons why examining the undemocratic effects of limited vision should take place within art education. In my experience, students tend to hesitate when they are asked to comment about their observations of a work of art. They are unsure of the quantifiable "right" answer that they feel they should know or at least be able to arrive at through some formulaic and reliable act of observation. They feel extreme discomfort that their usually powerful eye, skilled in the act of recognition, is somehow failing them. Rarely do educators point out that the processes of schooling, including several aspects of art education, are largely based upon a dismissal of complexity in favor of definitive looking. Even though art education is a discipline born of the multiplicity and complexity of art, often
educators give into the systems' (be they education or larger social institutions) and our students' resistance to ambiguity and multiple meanings by telling students what to see and how to see it. Opening up our vision to different views and beyond certainty asks us to explore a philosophy of alterity, of difference.

A Philosophy of Alterity & Rhizomatic Anding

British literary scholar Thomas Docherty (1996) refutes the Cartesian worldview as a philosophy of identity, which is characterized by its pursuits of the categorical, a lack of the political, and a dismissal of temporal change (pp. 19-35). This valorizing of the homogenous is countered by Docherty's postmodern proposal of a philosophy of alterity or difference. He, like other vision scholars (e.g. Jay 1993, Levin 1993), acknowledges the proliferation of a philosophy of identity through issues of vision, which have grand repercussions for epistemology:

here the eye is the location of truth. But, more importantly, truth is in an eye which is marked with a specific kind of power, fundamentally the power to reduce alterity to identity...Such an eye cannot see alterity at all, in fact; rather, it sees only a mirrored reflection of the self, or it so successfully interiorizes alterity as to reduce it to identity. (pp. 104-5)

A philosophy of identity is what keeps the subject-object dichotomy in operation by employing a sense of definition, a necessity of reductionism. A philosophy of alterity, on the other hand, creates opportunities to engage in the political and the possibilities of change.

Docherty's philosophy of difference resonates strongly with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's conception of the rhizome. In their collaborative thinking, rhizomatic grass is preferred to hierarchical trees:
a rhizome doesn’t begin and doesn’t end, but is always in the middle, between things, inter-being, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, exclusively alliance. The tree imposes the verb “to be,” but the rhizome is woven together with conjunctions: ‘and . . . and . . . and . . .’ (1983, p. 57)

The defining feature of a rhizome is its connection and heterogeneity: any point on a rhizome can be connected with any other. There are ruptures in rhizomes (or lines of flight) but these become part of the rhizome. For example, “we can never get rid of ants, because they form an animal rhizome that never ceases to reconstitute itself, even when almost completely destroyed” (p. 18). The rhizome enacts difference and seeks multiplicity.

Another way of understanding the rhizome metaphor is through the AND. The conjunction “and” has profound significance in both the work of John Dewey and Deleuze and Guattari because of the privileging of a conjunctive method of understanding relations. They are interested in the interconnectedness, the interpenetrations of emerging conjunctions rather than attempting to fix identities with equalities. It is not that these conjunctions are predetermined or dualistic linkings of bipolar oppositions, but rather that the connectivity of concepts is predicated on an immanent inseparability of concepts. Of Dewey’s many publications during his prolific lifetime, the majority of his titles are conceptually expressed by his use of the conjunction: “The Public and Its Problems,” “Experience and Nature,” “Democracy and Education,” “Art and Civilization.” The emphasis in these titles does not lie so much on the two topical elements as it does on the “and” of interpenetrations of the two concepts. Dewey does not assert a bifurcated philosophy of discrete elements but rather conceptualizes how the discrete and the continuous interconnect yielding a better articulated experience.
Likewise, in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, the "and" has special importance. The "and" does a lot of work with regards to denying the conceptuality of a "whole." Multiplicity is at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's obsession with the conjunction because any singularity is always a multiplicity. Therefore, the conjunction exercises a necessary complexity in any encounter.

AND isn't even a specific conjunction or relation, it brings in all relations, there are as many relations as ANDS, AND doesn't just upset all relations, it upsets being, the verb... and so on. AND, "and ... and ... and ..." is precisely a creative stammering, a foreign use of language, as opposed to a conformist and dominant use of the verb "to be." AND is of course diversity, multiplicity, the destruction of identities. (Deleuze 1990, p. 44)

There is a necessity in rhizomatic "anding" to commit to the complex and non-definitive ways of looking in order to cultivate an understanding of vision, which induces double vision, or confusion—not unlike Haraway's cyborg who sees multidimensionally. This kind of commitment to the unclear, the ambiguous in vision, creates room for those choosing objectification, those rejecting it, those unaware of its process and those deliberately seeing otherwise. In short, by dethroning the Cartesian gaze of its unique corner on the perceptual market, its existence is not disallowed, but rather diminished in power by promoting multiple ways of perceiving.

However, it is often not desirable or possible to commit to the confusing state of a milieu composed of multiple choices and multiple meanings. This very point is the focus of Susan Bordo's essay "Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender Skepticism" (1993). After dismissing the "view from nowhere," which she equates with Cartesian (and male) constriction of the possibilities for knowledge, she equally refutes a "dream of everywhere" marked by "recognition of interpretive
multiplicity, of the indeterminacy and heterogeneity of cultural meaning and meaning-production" (p. 460). She says this not in denial of perspectival seeing and knowing, but rather:

this is an inescapable fact of human embodiment, as Nietzsche was the first to point out: “The eye . . . in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking [is] an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspectival seeing, only a perspectival knowing.” This selectivity, moreover, is never innocent. We always “see” from points of view that are invested with our social, political and personal interests, inescapably -centric in one way or another, even in the desire to do justice to heterogeneity. (p. 463)

Bordo applauds Haraway’s conception of the cyborg as an ambiguous entity but warns against hints of ideal perspectivism from any position. As indicated in her citation of Nietzsche above, such perspectivism is unavoidable because that is the very thing which makes seeing, seeing something, that is to say, meaningful. Perspectivism is not the problem. Rather, it is our attitude toward perspectivism that dethrones spectator ideas of knowledge.

With this realization and my desire to hedge against tendencies for perspectives to become totalizing perspectives, I argue for a committed attitude to the confusing and the connective so as to more fully articulate the important role of art education in the rejection of reductive learning in classrooms and the production instead of an attitude of openness to difficulty and difference in education generally and in a democracy more broadly. In William Pope. L’s words, I argue that “people should come to work.”
The Power of Perspective: Art Crawling and William Pope. L

Performance artist William Pope. L has created art crawls in a variety of cities across the country drawing attention to what he deems “the privilege of being a vertical person.” On February 1, 2003, Houston, Texas was the site for such an event, in which William Pope. L, and for the first time volunteer crawl teams, crawled from Freedman’s Town to Downtown Houston, a 10-block stretch connecting a dilapidated historic area of Houston’s black community with the shiny Houston skyscrapers, including Enron’s now vacant tower.

In an Art Education and Technology class in Spring 2003, I encouraged my students to attend the art crawl and/or visit William Pope. L’s mid-career retrospective at a local art space in order to create an interpretative slide that would be added to a collective powerpoint (Fig 1, below, Student’s interpretive slide of William Pope. L’s Art Crawl in Houston, Texas). One student who participated in the crawl created

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crawling

Your progress is slower than you ever imagined.
You are intimate with gravity.
Your vulnerability is inescapable.

You fluctuate between spectacle and invisibility.
You think only of the next few inches.
You can not bear to think any further.
You accept your pain as inevitable.
You realize that it hurts too much to raise your head, to set your sights.
You forget that you once could walk.
a slide that effectively shared her experience by revealing how impossible sharing that experience in any way other than experiencing it could.\(^{1}\)

Over a faint background of crawlers approaching towering downtown, text literally crawled in from the right side of the screen to surround images of a crawl team and the singular crawling student. The text invokes the body’s intimacy/extension to the street and issues of vision, stating that the crawler fluctuated between spectacle and invisibility and a major effect of crawling was the pain associated with raising your head in order to “set your sights.”

In this art crawl, William Pope. L opened up experience to involve other people quite literally enacting a cyborg extension of the body to asphalt and the rhizome of the crawl in that each participant became a singular, yet multiple, grass shoot of the experience. Politically involving the horizontal bodies collectively, yet mobilizing them separately, the art crawl opened up experience rupturing the status quo perceptions of the participants and of the Houston community.

In summary, this experience was one of critical perception—an experience that invited seeing otherwise and enacted imaginative possibilities for looking and experiencing in a social realm. Thoughts were manifested not in the realm of the “what is” but rather in the realm of the “what could be.” William Pope. L’s art crawl critiqued the social constraints of the privilege of verticality giving us cause to see otherwise, and pause to be otherwise. The revelation of structures of power challenged our usually distanced vision and enacted a situated, attitudinally-open, accumulation of views critically looking for connections.

**Resistence, Rupture, Art & Democracy**

In the artworld, resistance has always played a major role precisely because of its critical exhortation of experience: “resistance and conflict have always been factors in generating art; and they are, as we have
seen, a necessary part of artistic form” (Dewey 1934, p. 339). Consequently, “the first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art” (p. 346). Arresting the spectacle, uprooting the tree, and rupturing the status quo give art the ability to enact, or at least seriously investigate, virtualities—the realm of what could be. The lines of flight producing virtualities begin from blocs, tension, and resistance. Rupture thus becomes another name for responding in the future to such blockage. Anything that interrupts the proliferation of seamless experience ruptures. To enact the capacity to AND is to rupture, and the infinite variability that inheres in such a capacity is what leads to an active sense of democracy. In this sense, democracy is never achieved but constantly in process.

Art plays a crucial role in critically perceiving experience in ways that activate our ideas of resistance, rupture and democracy. Mapping art as a rhizome suggests future possibilities while subverting stagnating ideas of the status quo. Art education, despite its rhizomatic subject, is one such arena that embodies tendencies to become a tree. What is necessary is a re-situation, that is to say a mapping of the connective and ambiguous routes of the rhizome, so as to open up possibilities for art education in the future.

**Rhizomatic Art Education: Social Theory in a Post-Cartesian World**

Dewey (1920/1957) argued that “full education comes only when there is a responsible share on the part of each person, in proportion to capacity, in shaping the aims and policies of the social groups to which he [sic] belongs” (p. 209). The realization of each individual’s connectedness to the benefits and ills of society echoes the results of critical experience in art education. Openness to such connections is predicated on the ability to perceive them, and as argued previously,
this does not generally occur with Cartesian vision. Previously, democracy was actively positioned, as a verb always in motion. Education must be similarly conceived. Neither should be conceived as a fixed locale at which we rest once we are believed to have achieved them. Rather, democracy and education must constantly vary, change, connect, and move, as along a rhizome. In such conceptions of democracy and education, authoritative vision has no place; multiple perspectives connect to create knowledge and possibility. Rhizomatic art education cultivates this idea.

Dewey (1916) further exhorts an active understanding of both education and democracy by pointing out the oppressive results and abuses of power in a society that does not value or perceive connections:

A society which is mobile, which is full of channels for the distribution of a change occurring anywhere, must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability. Otherwise, they will be overwhelmed by the changes in which they are caught and whose significance or connections they do not perceive. The result will be a confusion in which a few will appropriate to themselves the results of the blind and externally directed activities of others. (pp. 87-88)

Education in a critical sense has the elimination of such oppressive, non-democratic ways of life at its core, and connective vision as exercised in rhizomatic art education plays a crucial role in achieving such critical education.

The recognition of the intertwining verbing of democracy and education denies the development of trees in preference for rhizomes. Such an idea places a premium on education that is connective and open, ambiguous, imaginative, and dwelling in possibility. Rhizomatic art education enacts such critical components ever striving toward democracy and education. However, responsibility for partial visions
and attitudes toward change and resistance rests with each person because each of us is "subject to the influence of custom and inertia, and has to protect himself [herself] from its influences by a deliberate openness to life itself" (Dewey, 1934, p. 304). Rhizomatic art education enacts such deliberate openness by emphasizing the partiality and limitations of vision requiring constant re-visioning of imaginative and connective possibilities.

**Conclusion**

In her essay "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered" (1992/1997), Susan Buck-Morss explores Marx’s factory model as described by Benjamin (p. 389) and argues that in this kind of model the "goal is to numb the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory" (p. 390). She goes on to argue that in such a "crisis in perception," education’s goal must be in "restoring ‘perceptibility’" (p. 390). If this is not the agenda of education, Buck-Morss exhorts that the eyes see too much and yet see nothing: "Thus, the simultaneity of overstimulation and numbness ... destroys the human organism’s power to respond politically" (p. 390).

The invocation of the metaphors of the rhizome and the cyborg, as Docherty (1996) suggests, requires the abandonment of the idea of education as correction (p. 81). This means abandoning our usual way of understanding wherein alterity is reduced to identity characterized by a "colonization of the space of alterity and the collapsing of that complex and three-dimensional space into the narrow but reassuring confines of the two-dimensional and stereotypical mirror" (p. 83). Such an attitude requires advocacy for the complex, the confusing, the ambiguous.

The costs of continuing to reduce education to a method of correction are far-reaching. Continued monocular views of knowledge in education create a citizenry that is hesitant and unsure of their own
ability to deal with complex ideas and create hypostasized understandings of the world, wherein difference is to be feared, not valued as the basis of democratic life. In conclusion, this essay has explored the problems inherent in unexamined Cartesian vision and explicated the ramifications of such vision continuing to function unchecked. Democracy and education are at stake. Rhizomatic art education keeps a complexified understanding of vision at the forefront. Complexified vision enacts the rhizome celebrating its connectedness and its openness. Such vision requires alternatives to binaries of domination and submission, subject and object and creates corresponding attitudes of openness resulting in multiple active perspectives, aware of their limitations. Such limitations necessitate the cyborg, the rhizome—a connected understanding of who we are that is bigger than ourselves. Even though it means more work, viewing ourselves as connected entities, we see the value of who we are when we are multiplied, when we value difference, as epitomized in another’s point of view. Only with this kind of re-visioned vision, can we begin to live in a world where we can go elsewhere, and imagine something else to be.

Notes

(i) Thanks to Tria Wood for sharing her slide and her ideas about the art crawl.

References


