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possibilities
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## CONTENTS

**Journal of Social Theory in Art Education,**
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### possibilities possibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wanda Knight &amp; Bill Wightman</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Editorial Language of Possibilities and Sense of the Im/possible in Art Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanie Buffington &amp; Jodi Kushins</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Pre-service Possibilities: Reconsidering “Art for the Elementary Educator”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debrah Sickler-Voigt</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Opening the Door to Possibilities: Research Journals in Pre-Service Art Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wan-Hsiang Chou</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Contamination of Childhood Fairy Tale: Pre-Service Teachers Explore Gender and Race Constructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jan jagodzinski</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Art Education in an Age of Teletechnology: On the Impossibility of Portraiture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Keys</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Plazabilities for Art Education: Community as Participant, Collaborator &amp; Curator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kryssi Staikidis</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>Maya Paintings as Teachers of Justice: Art Making the Impossible Possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Editorial:
Language of Possibilities and Sense of the Im/possible in Art Education

Wanda B. Knight / Bill Wightman

Schooling in the United States is “increasingly defined by arthritic traditionalisms of standardized assessments and testing, school and teacher accountabilities, models of exacerbated efficiency and tracking, and even more strident state and federal calls for more of the same” (Kanpol, 1997, p. ix).

Mired in escalating restricted conventional practices that deny humanistic and democratic possibilities, many art educators are frequently unaware of what, in reality, is possible with/in art/education. Moreover, our praxis continues to reflect dispositions and actions that are oftentimes bereft of the language of possibility or hope. Using the language of possibility, we transform our thinking from how it has been to how it could be.

Those who achieve the “impossible” tend to focus their thoughts and energies on possibilities rather than limitations. Possibilities encompass the big picture, and provide hope for the future. To predict the future, we are obliged to actively create it. Even impossibilities give way to possibilities when we exhibit conduct, habits, or ways that lead to success. What we envision today with/in art/education, raising the quality of education, equity of opportunity in education, social responsibility, research, and possible initiatives, will give birth to worlds of possibilities.

Experiencing Possibilities and Im/possibilities With/in Art/education

In the spirit of the call for papers for Volume 27 of the Journal of
Social Theory in Art Education contributing authors approached the theme possibilities in various ways. The strikethrough in possibilities concerns the slippery routes taken by some to navigate or transgress boundaries of censorship, erasure, and obstacles in social theory orientations to art education in socio-political climates and varied educational contexts.

Buffington and Kushins, Sickler-Voigt, and Chou, introduce possibilities through particular notions and approaches to pedagogy with/in art/education. jagodzinski utilizes psychoanalytic theory to bolster his argument for the im/possibility of portraiture in art education; whereas, Keys and Staikidis consider possibilities of art/education outside conventional classroom contexts.

In an essay titled Pre-service Possibilities: Reconsidering “Art for the Elementary Educator,” Melanie Buffington and Jodi Kushins describe challenges they face in teaching general education majors who routinely enter generalists preservice teacher art courses with “little to no art background” and who “might show resistance to contemporary ideas about comprehensive art education in favor of holiday art lesson plans reminiscent of their own positive experiences as elementary art students” (p. 13). Facing such challenges as these among others and the “seemingly inherent possibilities of the course” Buffington and Kushins consider the course a site of possibilities for the field of art education with opportunities to provide pre-service elementary educators with “meaningful reintroductions to art education” (p. 14). In an attempt to revitalize the rhetoric related to perspectives, responsibilities, needs of pre-service elementary generalist teachers, and the future of art education, Buffington and Kushins challenge the field of art education to re/consider its thinking and its resource allocations towards developing generalists preservice teacher art education courses so as to provide greater service to elementary classroom teachers who need to be able to meaningfully
integrate art into their classrooms.

Similar to Buffington and Kushins, Debrah Sickler-Voigt has focused her manuscript on pedagogical possibilities in an undergraduate Introduction to Art Education course. In her manuscript, Opening the Door to Possibilities: Research Journals in Pre-Service Art Education, Voigt describes a qualitative case study of six selected preservice art teachers enrolled in her course during 2005 and 2006 spring semesters. Using Tom Anderson's and Melody Milbrandt's Art for Life method, the research question that guided the study focused on themes that drive preservice art teachers' research journals and how the exploration of these themes espouse preservice art education. Through the creative research journals that fused art and writing, Voigt's students were able to analyze, interpret, and evaluate their belief systems as they contemplated what it means to become art teachers.

Likewise, Wan-Hsiang (Mandy) Chou's article, Contaminating Childhood Fairy Tale: Pre-Service Teachers Explore Gender and Race Constructions, describes a qualitative study in which she used creative artmaking and writing possibilities with students enrolled in her children's literature course. In the manuscript, Chou explains how her twenty-five White students of European ancestry reconstructed traditional childhood fairy tales to challenge dominant "European-American middle-class social codes [gender roles, race, sexual orientation] perpetuated by fairy tales" (p. 55). In retelling traditional fairy tales, through reworking, replacing, and adding text and illustrations, pre-service teachers gained insights into their own belief systems and gained insights into pedagogical possibilities for future classroom practice when working with learners from diverse backgrounds.

Jan Jagodzinski's essay, Art Education in an Age of Teletechnology: On the Impossibility of Portraiture, draws on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory "to question the possibility of portraiture and to rethink
its practice along non-representational lines” (p. 78). jagodzinski extends his discussion to Deleuze and his notion of the time-image to further problematize representation in art practice.

In considering the im/possibility of portraiture, jagodzinski challenges art education in contemporary society to deviate from its current focus on the “still image and the action narrative, even that of journalistic photography” (p. 85) and rethink the possibilities of portraiture in an age of teletechnology. To achieve the objective of maintaining political and ethical engagement of the world by art students, jagodzinski points to insights gleaned from installation, performance, time-based imagery and conceptual art as possibilities.

Kathleen Keys uses the plaza metaphor and theories of plazability in her manuscript, Plazabilities for Art Education: Community as Participant, Collaborator & Curator to “articulate a refreshed vision for an art education based in community pedagogy which expands possibilities, builds community, and uses art to work for social change” (p. 98). Moving beyond conventional forms of classroom based art praxis, Keys encourages communities, art teachers, artists, scholars, and other cultural workers to explore collaborative possibilities for innovative curricular design that provide learning experiences through community-based interactive art that generates social participation.

Kryssi Staikidis also moves beyond conventional forms of classroom based art praxis into rural Maya indigenous community contexts to convey the capacity and possibilities of paintings to “relay concepts of social justice” (p. 119). In her essay titled Maya Paintings as Teachers of Justice: Art Making the Impossible Possible, Staikidis describes her experiences studying in two Maya contexts with two Maya “master painters,” (p. 129) who as teachers had to navigate censorship, erasure and obstacles and focus their energies on possibilities rather than limitations to illuminate, through their paintings, three decades of genocide of Maya indigenous peoples.
However, as illustrated in Staikidis's manuscript, "through revealing, art can liberate, teach and create possibility" (p. 121) where there is seemingly impossibility.

In conclusion, whether this volume's featured manuscripts provided insight(s) into possibilities, considered possibilities and limitations, looked at unlimited possibilities and possible limitations, or whether they focused on transforming limitations into possibilities, the call for papers and the selected resultant manuscripts are not exhaustive of the theme. However, they collectively represent unifying possibilities with/in art/education and, hopefully, they set the stage to motivate, and mobilize art educators and respective stakeholders to effect change.

We are now at a point in the field of art education in which a new and revitalized language must be sought, a language of possibility. As art educators we all have bodies and minds to bring possibility into being. As bell hooks (1994) notes:

The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In the field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207)

References

Pre-service Possibilities: Reconsidering “Art for the Elementary Educator”

Melanie L. Buffington & Jodi Kushins

“Art for the Elementary Educator” courses are sites of possibility in the field of art education, particularly art education oriented toward curriculum integration and meaningful art experiences. Drawing on literature about “Art for the Elementary Educator” courses and our own teaching experiences we make recommendations for reconsidering possible futures for this course as related to the future of art education. We believe that this course, its students, instructors, and course materials are worthy of sustained attention by the art education community. Ultimately, we argue that art education appreciation and advocacy, concepts we define in our concluding remarks, should be primary objectives for such classes. Reconsidering “Art for the Elementary Educator” in light of these ideas requires renewed examination of course content, student dispositions, instructor preparation, and teaching and learning resources.

Introduction: When Life Gives You Possibilities, Make Possibilities

Over the last few years, we have both taught versions of the course commonly referred to as “Art for the Elementary Educator.” When we began teaching these courses, our colleagues and supervisors repeatedly told us to anticipate challenges. They warned us that students routinely came to the class with little to no art background and might show resistance to contemporary ideas about comprehensive art education in favor of holiday art lesson plans reminiscent of their own positive experiences as elementary art students. As we suggest throughout this paper, the literature provided equally discouraging forecasts.
As predicted, “Art for the Elementary Educator” has been a challenging class for us to teach. Although we were warned about, we were not prepared for our students’ overwhelming interests in “school art” (Efland, 1976) and fear of the creative ambiguity that is part of artistic and intellectual endeavors. Few of our students had comprehensive exposure to the diversity of images and objects that comprise contemporary artworlds or appreciation for art as a way of making meaning and integrating curriculum (Stewart & Walker, 2005). In turn, their confidence in discussing art or imagining how art could help them provide their students engaging educational experiences was restricted. Facing challenges such as these, we began discussing our teaching practices, reading extant literature about the seemingly inherent possibilities of the course, and attempting to identify its possibilities.

Over time, we came to view the course as a significant site of possibilities for art education. We use the term possibilities to suggest that while this course has potential for providing pre-service elementary educators with meaningful reintroductions to art education, such opportunities have often been overlooked. Some departments offering this course have, for example, regarded it as service to their university, rather than the field of art education. As such, they have not invested significant human or material resources in the development these courses as readily as they have in courses for art education majors. In such instances, the importance of this course to the field may have been overlooked. Because of the potential effect elementary generalists have on the art education that their students receive, we believe this is an influential course in the field. We contrast such possibilities, with new possibilities that highlight the potential inherent in these courses and their importance to the field of art education. Many elementary generalist teachers are their students’ primary art instructors (Kowalchuk & Stone 2003; McKean, 1999). Indeed, a 1999-2000 study by the National Council for Educational
Statistics (NCES) found that only 55 percent of elementary schools that include art in their curricula employ a full-time art specialist (as cited in Chapman, 2005). Considering these statistics, it seems clear that preparing elementary generalists to meaningfully integrate art into their classes as well as to advocate for arts specialists in their schools should be a primary concern of those leading the field of art education. To meet these objectives, art educators must commit more resources towards researching, writing, and teaching for, as well as about, elementary generalist educators.

**Calls for Possibilities**

We are not alone in our call for increased attention to “Art for the Elementary Educator.” The Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870, which called upon public school educators to teach drawing, is often regarded as the launching point for the field of art education. As Jeffers (1995) suggested, however, the contemporary field of art education has not always invested substantial resources on elementary generalists. Is this representative of a fear that by preparing elementary generalists to teach art, art educators are demonstrating our own expendability? Ironically, although the field has not always provided significant support for educating elementary generalist teachers, it has been called a “bread and butter” course by some and is a consistent source of revenue for some art education programs (Jeffers, 1991; Allison, 2007). Perhaps more importantly, as Jeffers (1995) noted, “…policy-makers at state universities and state departments of education consider preservice art education so important that an elementary art methods course is required [often] for graduation and certification” (p. 17). She went on to observe the contradiction that “…these same policymakers frequently do not consider K-12 art courses to be so important” (p. 17).

NAEA’s support of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium’s “Model Standards for Licensing Classroom
Teachers and Specialists in the Arts” (INTASC, 2002) suggests that possibilities may be unfolding. That document calls for the preparation of and collaboration between classroom teachers and arts specialists to support comprehensive art education. In addition to supporting INTASC, the NAEA has also funded research on this course (Denton, 1998). While we agree with NAEA that having an art specialist in every school is an important goal, we also recognize that in order for arts specialists to collaborate with elementary classroom teachers, both groups must be able to envision the potential benefits of such work.

The purpose of this article is to summarize and further the discussion of “Art for the Elementary Educator” as a site of possibilities for the field of art education. In what follows, we continue our call to action with a discussion of the general goals, objectives, and structure of “Art for the Elementary Educator” courses derived from our experiences, our review literature written about the course, and an informal survey we conducted over the NAEA Higher Education listserv in the spring of 2007. We organized our questions around the following areas of concern: the form and content of the course itself; the beliefs and attitudes of students enrolled in the course; and resources available for use in the class. Much of what we say here is indeed a review of past research about possibilities attributed to this course. However, we hope that by reconsidering this research in the language of possibilities we might revitalize this rhetoric, as it relates to the perspectives, responsibilities, and needs of classroom teachers as well as the future of art education. Ultimately, we define and recommend art education appreciation and art education advocacy as possible objectives to guide the reconstruction of “Art for the Elementary Educator.”

Planning the Form and Content of “Art for the Elementary


Like its title, the specific form and content of “Art for the Elementary Educator” varies according to institutional context and instructor. From our survey, we learned that amidst this diversity, the course typically aims to meet some or all of the following basic goals—introduce stages of development in children’s artmaking practices, foster art appreciation, provide studio art making experiences, develop art education lessons or units, build an understanding of integrated or interdisciplinary curriculum, and share art education methods. This is a formidable agenda. Jodi’s course, for example, meets only once a week for two hours and forty-eight minutes over a ten-week quarter. This hardly seems like enough time to unpack and navigate the “ill-structured” (Efland, 2002) discipline of art and the diverse producers and theories of visual culture now in vogue. We examined publications on “Art for the Elementary Educator” in relation to the three overlapping emphases of art education Eisner (1972) identified in Educating Artistic Vision—student-, discipline-, and society-centered.

Writing from a student-centered perspective, Davis (1960) argued for the importance of introducing stages of child development throughout the course. Additionally, she promoted the idea that creative work in “Art for the Elementary Educator” should be meaningful to the students in that course for themselves as learners in addition to enabling them to envisage the kind of work they might do with their own students. Similarly, Andrews (1982) argued that pre-service teachers need to participate in “significant experiences” which he defined as private opportunities for them to examine and communicate their feelings and values about art and life. Both authors advocate for a course that goes beyond having university students create replicas of what elementary students might make. They argue that when pre-service teachers have meaningful engagements with art education, they will be more likely to provide such experiences
for their students.

Speaking from a discipline-centered perspective, Siegesmund suggested, “we need to put a lot of emphasis on how teaching creating is different from following directions” (R. Siegesmund, personal communication, July 23, 2006). Illustrating the importance of this statement at all levels of instruction, Melanie found many of her students requested projects in which they copied a teacher’s example, in a seemingly trivial step-by-step manner. Her students were frustrated when she assigned projects that required them to generate their own ideas. Similarly, Roberts identified “the [low] comfort level that the elementary generalists themselves have with approaching art as inquiry” (T. Roberts, personal communication, August 10, 2006).

Davis (1960) provided encouragement for challenging students to appreciate and approach artmaking as more than following a recipe: “Nothing could be worse than an art education course based upon the creation of the easy, the short cut, and the novel, a sure way to the creation of trivialities” (p. 243). In other words, “Art for the Elementary Educator,” like elementary art itself, should provide opportunities for students to “think like an artist” (Roland, 2004) in the most intellectual and technically-engaged senses of the term.

Pre-service elementary educators might practice one way of thinking like an artist by, “using old ideas to create new ideas and ways of seeing things” (Roland, 2004) by discussing possible variations of projects they create in class (Davis, 1960). Jodi explored this theory and a society-centered approach to art education, through a photographic exploration of a university environment intended to foster students’ understanding of the Reggio Emilia theory that the classroom is the “third teacher” (Kushins & Brisman, 2004; Strong-Wilson, 2007). After taking and discussing images of their school, she asked students to brainstorm ways they might alter or continue such an investigation with their own students. Recommendations included interviews with school personnel, making murals and using
printmaking to create public messages. Through such discussions, students practice cognitive flexibility and prepare to develop their own visual art projects authentically related to their students' lives and curricula.

Kowalchuk and Stone (2003) also argued for a society-centered art education. They noted the importance of helping students see "...the impact of the visual world on daily life" (p. 153). In other words, "Art for the Elementary Educator" instructors need to help students rethink the social contexts by which art is made. Our efforts to address this in our teaching have been met with both affection and resistance. For instance, Melanie found that the majority of students in her classes believed that art is usually about artists' personal feelings rather responses to social and cultural contexts. This observation is further compounded by McKean's (1999) study that found that elementary generalists value the arts as a tool for self-expression. Jodi found her students were responsive to Szekely's (1989) idea of incorporating close examinations and extended discussion of the structure and function of objects during show and tell. They demonstrated resistance, however, to extending such discussions to include critical analyses of the power and privileges inherent in the design and consumption of such objects advocated by Tavin and Anderson (2003). As we discuss in the next section of this paper, our students' reservations reflect beliefs and values about art and culture they bring with them to educational arenas.

Pre-service Students Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Art and Art Education

Perhaps it goes without saying that art educators should always take their students' beliefs and values about art into consideration when facilitating a course. This seems particularly important in regard to "Art for the Elementary Educator." While teachers of this course have spent years studying the arts, most pre-service elementary
educators have not. This can make it difficult for teachers and students to relate to one another’s perspectives and expectations. One strategy some instructors use is to ask students in “Art for the Elementary Educator” to write and talk about their previous experiences with art and art education. Data gleaned from these exercises have been used to generate research on pre-service elementary generalists beliefs about art (Forrer, 2001; Smith-Shank, 1993; Thompson, 1997). These studies reveal two important patterns in the art education experiences of pre-service elementary generalists: negative experiences fostered anxiety, rather than appreciation for art and positive memories of art and art education were often tied to notions of downtime and holiday celebrations. In what follows, we summarize and expound upon these findings.

Art Anxiety

Multiple authors (Jeffers, 1991, 1995; Metcalf & Smith-Shank, 2001) used the term “art anxiety” to refer to the intense fear and intimidation many pre-service elementary generalists report about art and art making. In studies of their students, Smith-Shank (1993) and Metcalf and Smith-Shank (2001) found that many had unfavorable, anxious-ridden memories of their own elementary art educators. The authors labeled these teachers “dragons” and compared their behaviors to those of the mythical beasts who “inflict injury on their students, not by stinging, but by subtle and often unreflective blows” (p. 45). Smith-Shank argued that having a dragon art teacher may contribute to students’ abandonment of creative practices in their middle childhood. Similarly, our students recalled vague or limited criteria for assessment that left them feeling badly when their work was not praised and displayed.

In a related study, Forrer (2001) asked her pre-service elementary generalists to write about their elementary art education memories. Based on their essays, she also identified an anxiety in students’
memories about art classroom management, including assessment of their art skills, and their attitudes about art. As a result, Forrer highlighted the importance of teachers' attitudes, planning, and management skills as objectives for "Art for the Elementary Educator." In other words, how material is introduced in this course may be as, if not more important, than what is covered. Students should be given opportunities to reflect on their prior art education as they encounter new possibilities for art and art education. Again, instructors of "Art for the Elementary Educator," perhaps more than others, must embrace the latent possibilities of designing and implementing integrated curriculum around real-world relevant themes and open-ended assignments. This may assist in the development of positive understandings and perceptions of art and art education rather than reaffirming the negative perceptions that some of our students bring to the class.

**Student Understandings of Art and Art Education**

Other survey-based studies have focused on students' beliefs about art, understandings of the goals of art education, past experiences with art teachers, and the artmaking skills they bring to "Art for the Elementary Educator." For example, Kowalchuk and Stone (2003) surveyed pre-service elementary generalists' (before and after they took "Art for the Elementary Educator") and in-service teachers about their beliefs about and approaches to teaching art. Analyzing the three groups' responses, Kowalchuk and Stone found contradictions between respondents' knowledge of art and beliefs about how art should be taught. For example, while students expressed appreciation for art history as a source of cultural enrichment and space for curricular integration, they simultaneously argued that elementary art education should emphasize self-expression. Understanding and bridging this disconnect is a leading issue in realizing the possibilities of "Art for the Elementary Educator."
As a methods course, "Art for the Elementary Educator" is not primarily intended to teach content. However, Galbraith (1992) noted, with the expansion of art education beyond production activities, classroom teachers must "widen their limited perspectives of art education" (p. 87). Given the limited experience many elementary educators have examining, critiquing, and creating art and visual culture, variations of this class often incorporate experiences in art appreciation and art making for pre-service teachers themselves.

Kowalchuk and Stone (2003) found that 86% of respondents to their survey had taken a university-level art history course, most often to fulfill a general education requirement. This is a promising statistic that suggests pre-service teachers have studied art, however, before celebrating we must ask what and how students are introduced to in such courses. If the focus of introductory art history courses is chronology and form, students may continue to view art in isolation from the social contexts in which and for which it is made. As a result, they might ask, as one of Melanie's students asked her, "Why do we have to do all this stuff with community? Why can't we just draw pretty pictures like we would in a real school?" Challenging the pre-service elementary generalists' views about art pushes them into territory that may be uncomfortable. In our experiences, this may lead to further resistance, rather than encouraging them to change and expand their views of art education. Exploring ways to harness this resistance is another area of possibility for "Art for the Elementary Educator."

Among in-service respondents, Kowalchuk and Stone (2003) found appreciation for and desire to forefront art in the elementary classroom. These comments were tempered, however, by reality checks regarding restrictions of time and space elementary generalists meet in their day-to-day school lives. Preparing elementary educators to advocate for time and space for the arts in their classrooms is another important possibility instructors of "Art for the Elementary Educator"
need to consider. Additionally, the importance of contemplating and sharing ways for educators to meaningfully integrate subjects they are studying with their students with responding to and creating works of art and visual culture must not be underestimated. Many elementary educators do appreciate the benefits of hands-on activities. But do all “active” learning exercises constitute art education? An assessment and reconsideration of common elementary classroom projects including dioramas, thematic illustrated books, and studies of monuments might be a first step in bridging the gap between art and elementary educational objectives. Investigating the potential of forms that the pre-service elementary generalists are already familiar with, we may be able to focus more attention on teaching them ways to make the content of these projects meaningful.

Teaching Materials

There are numerous textbooks used in the “Art for the Elementary Educator” class including: Children and their Art (Hurwitz & Day, 2000), Artworks for Elementary Teachers: Developing Artistic and Perceptual Awareness (Heberholz & Heberholz, 1997), The Colors of Learning: Integrating the Visual Arts into the Early Childhood Curriculum (Althouse, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2003), Contemporary Issues in Art Education (Gaudelius & Spiers, 2002), Emphasis Art (Wachowiak & Clements, 2005), and Rethinking Curriculum in Art Education (Stewart & Walker, 2005). Based upon our recent survey, we found that Emphasis Art is the most commonly used book among the fourteen respondents who indicated a title for the textbook they use. These books provide overviews of generally accepted stages of children’s development in drawing, introductions to basic materials, vocabulary (focused around the elements and principles of art), and frameworks for developing curriculum in art including discipline-based (DBAE) and thematic approaches, among other topics. Many of these texts are cross-marketed toward pre-service
elementary generalists and pre-service art teachers, two populations with different pre-existing knowledge bases, interests, and needs. Based on our experiences teaching the class, we believe pre-service elementary generalists have different concerns than pre-service art teachers. Like one respondent to our survey who reported that “there’s no good textbook for this class,” we have found the need to qualify and supplement textbooks with journal articles that address contemporary ideas or issues particular to non-arts specialists.

Unfortunately, looking through journals for articles to use with this class, we noticed that the vast majority of those we read were written primarily about “Art for the Elementary Educator” course content and students rather than for use in designing or teaching the class. For example, Metcalf and Smith-Shank’s (2001) “The Yellow Brick Road of Art Education” includes excerpts from pre-service elementary educators’ reflections on their art educations and experiences entering “Art for the Elementary Educator.” The authors metaphorically relate these comments to the scarecrow, tin man, and lion in The Wizard of Oz and these characters’ ultimate realizations that they have the brains, heart, and courage to confront their fears. The authors did share these analogies with pre-service elementary generalists and received positive feedback. We believe the students’ positive responses may have reflected their appreciation for their teachers’ attention to elementary generalists’ strengths as well as their fears about art and art education. Feeling they were not alone and that their professors recognized and respected their art anxiety may have prepared the students to challenge their preconceived ideas about art and art education. Thus, this is an important descriptive article in the field about the course and the students who take it.

Duncum’s (1999) “What Elementary Generalists Need to Know to Teach Art Well” also recognizes, and directly addresses, pre-service elementary generalists and their fears about teaching art. Duncum outlined several strategies for creating and responding to art that
could easily be incorporated into elementary teachers' existing practices. Responding to art is a novel concept and new possibility for many pre-service elementary generalist students. While drawing might seem like something they cannot do and therefore cannot teach, talking about works of art seems less frightening, though they may not have had previous experience with interpreting art works. Some of the specific strategies Duncum outlined are new to our students; however, they are presented so that that they seem both realistic and feasible. Most of our students are receptive to the strategies he proposes and are able to relate some of their own classroom experiences, as both students and teachers, to Duncum's recommendations. Thus, this is an important article in our field, one of the few written specifically for students in the "Art for Elementary Educators" course.

Though there are some articles that addresses strategies for teaching "Art for the Elementary Educator" and offer ideas for instructors, (Ballengee-Morris & Streideck, 1997; Buffington, 2006; Deniston-Trochta, 2002) they are rare, leaving instructors, with little support or guidance. This is particularly important because as our recent survey confirmed, numerous schools assign sections of "Art for the Elementary Educator" to graduate teaching assistants and adjunct faculty (Jeffers, 1993; Mittler, 1975). As a field, we need to move away from treating this class as the "black hole of art education" (Duncum, 1999, p. 33). A range of materials specifically for the students and instructors of these classes must be developed in tandem with reconsidering the possibilities of art education and the course itself.

**New Possibilities for "Art for the Elementary Educator"**

Through discussions and reviews of literature about "Art for the Elementary Educator," we learned that our struggles with this class were not unique. As already discussed, past research and our own
informal surveys of pre-service generalists suggest their beliefs and attitudes towards art and art education may be limited and are not always positive. We believe that our field needs to focus sustained attention on understanding and supporting the role that elementary generalists play in art education. However, we remain hopeful about possibilities for this course.

There are many topics that art educators could redress for the pre-service elementary generalist audience without fear that they will contradict the need for art specialists. We propose the terms “art education appreciation” and “art education advocacy” as two such possibilities. If pre-service elementary educators learn to appreciate visual art as a core subject in both name and action, they may be more willing to work with arts specialists to provide and advocate for comprehensive art education. In the following sections, we define and make recommendations for addressing these objectives.

**Art Education Appreciation**

As we mentioned throughout the first half of this article, many pre-service elementary educators have limited or negative views of what constitutes art education. Few are aware of the cognitive effort and impact involved in creating and responding to works of art and visual culture. Identifying and reflecting on these factors through exposure to research and their own work in “Art for the Elementary Educator” may help.

Amidst our efforts to recruit elementary educators to advocate for and help facilitate comprehensive art education, we must also recognize the increasing demands they face to rationalize their teaching objectives and strategies. Presenting the idea of education through art we demonstrate appreciation for elementary generalists’ various responsibilities in addition to presenting them with new, more comprehensive ideas about art. Discussing, for example, theories of teaching and learning such as the integrated “project approach”
(Katz & Chard, 1989) and Reggio Emilia from the perspective of the arts is important. Jodi emphasizes arts-based integrated curriculum planning and the social contexts and implications of schooling as well as artmaking. Hers is not the only class in which students discuss these issues. She wonders how the pre-service curriculum could be revised or planned more cooperatively so that courses compliment and enhance, rather than overlap and repeat one another. Discussion of project-based learning in the art classroom should focus on the art learning achieved in such explorations. If we can address this goal, elementary classroom generalists may see more value in art and help us advocate for arts specialists while simultaneously supporting our efforts in the art room in their own classrooms.

One possibility, periodically employed at the University of Georgia, engages groups of students as curriculum teams. In this program, pre-service elementary generalists work with pre-service art teachers to develop and implement integrated lessons in local schools. This program obviously requires significant cooperation and collaboration among pre-service teachers, college instructors, and co-operating teachers (Siegesmund, personal communication, July 23, 2006). If elementary generalists and art specialists learn the importance and experience the benefits of collaborating to develop and teach integrated units during their pre-service training, they may be more likely to engage in this type of teaching once they have their own classrooms.

Art Education Advocacy

Art education appreciation and art education advocacy are two sides of the same coin. Many of Jodi's students have expressed enthusiasm for integrated and emergent curriculum design and creative approaches to "making learning visible" (Project Zero and Reggio Children, 2001). However, many doubt whether they will be able to make these things happen in their classrooms given the
current structures of schools and high-stakes testing environments. We need to encourage and prepare these students to advocate for their pedagogical ideals for the sake of their students' intellectual, social, and emotional development. We need to ensure that they have the language and knowledge to make arguments that the arts are a cognitive endeavor (Efland, 2002) in Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and in correspondence with elected officials. Pre-service teachers are voters and potential lobbyists for arts education. Through courses such as "Art for the Elementary Educator" they could be introduced to statistical research on the percentage of schools in their state with art specialists and research on the impact of arts education on children's learning.

Conclusion

We know that art instruction in elementary schools is often provided by elementary generalists (Chapman, 2005; Institute of Education Sciences, 1995; McKean, 1999; Stone & Kowalchuk, 2003) and yet our field has not devoted significant sustained attention to the "Art for Elementary Educators" course. Since at least 1960 countless authors have called for increased study of this course and a deeper understanding of the students, the effects of the course, and its outcomes (Davis, 1960; Duncum, 1999; Jeffers, 1991, 1995; Kowalchuk & Stone, 2003; Smith-Shank, 1993). We need to heed their advice, to stop thinking of this course as a black hole, and to start seeing and creating its possibilities for the future. In this article, we proposed accomplishing these goals through art education appreciation and art education advocacy, creating more materials specifically for use in this class, and challenging our national organization to devote more time and attention to this significant population of future teachers and educational leaders. By working toward these goals, we hope to turn possibilities into possibilities.
In this article we use “Art for the Elementary Educator” to refer to courses offered to pre-service elementary generalist teachers. Institutions list such courses under various titles including, Art in the Elementary Schools (Florida State University), Art and Curriculum Concepts for Teachers (The Ohio State University), The Arts: Interdisciplinary Learning (Hunter College).

In our survey, faculty from 29 universities responded. Twenty-two of these indicated that their department offers this type of course and of these 22, 15 indicated that their departments enroll between 100-600 students per year in Art for the Elementary Educator courses.

While Jeffers presents a tidy contradiction, Fowler (1996 as cited in Thompson, 1997) notes that only half the states in the U.S. require pre-service elementary educators to complete art methods courses. These are important statistics to consider. One resultant possibility might be advocating for more states to require “Art for the Elementary Educator” courses.

Interestingly, Metcalf and Smith-Shank (2001) found that students who did not have “art anxiety” and were comfortable with their artmaking abilities attributed their abilities to luck or talent rather than education.


### References


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Opening the Door to Possibilities: Research Journals in Pre-Service Art Education

Debrah Sickler-Voit

Preparing to be an art educator is a time when future teachers anticipate the endless possibilities the profession has to offer. Unfortunately, many leave teaching within a few years of service because of lack of support and preparation. This qualitative study investigates how preservice art education students enrolled in their first university art education course used the *Art for Life* method to create research journals. The research question that guided this study is: What themes drive student research journals and how does the exploration of these themes espouse preservice art education? After coding student journals, I discovered three majors themes including self-reflection, what it means to be an art teacher, and creative ways to connect the disciplines of art education to social issues. The discussion identifies strategies for faculty to consider when using journals in preservice education including communicating objectives, providing feedback, ethical considerations, and means to improve teaching.

Preparing to be an art teacher is a time when future educators anticipate the endless possibilities the profession has to offer. Many look forward to the day when they will have their own classrooms filled with youth who are eager to learn about art. While teaching is a noble and rewarding career choice, sometimes preservice art educators enter college art education programs with an idealistic view of the profession (Gibson, 2003; Roland, 1995). Being a teacher of art includes working with youth who have different learning styles and educational needs, administrators, fellow teachers, and parents as well as coping with possible budget shortfalls, and feelings of isolation and/or lack of respect. To begin the journey of becoming an art educator who is better prepared for the realities of the classroom, I teach an Introduction to Art Education course where students learn
about art theory, practice, and curricula. Research journals play a significant role in this course because they enable students to self-reflect on their responsibilities as future teachers and contemplate how their thoughts on teaching relate to educating youth about the greater community and the disciplines of art education.

Many educators leave teaching within five years of service (Day, 1997; Galbraith, 1995; Gradle, 2006). To survive, teachers need more than academic knowledge. Factors such as stress and lack of preparation and emotional support lead to teacher burnout. This astounding truth causes some people to believe that universities need to do a better job preparing teachers (Bain, 2004; Gold, 1999; Schoonmaker, 2002). As Goodland (1999) observed, “An ill-prepared beginner is likely to be the ill-prepared experienced teacher” (p. 5). Gold (1999) and Bain (2004) argue that fostering preservice teachers’ psychological needs can help assuage this pandemic. Teacher psychological needs are not typically a major component of teacher development programs. By addressing psychological needs of preservice teachers, successful education programs teach students the value of being an authentic instructor—one who is caring, understanding of others, flexible, and able to manage stress (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Authentic instruction addresses the necessity of fostering student-teachers’ psychological needs and teaching individualized problem solving skills. With effective training, student-teachers and practicing teachers are capable of searching for solutions to specific problems through divergent courses of action (Schoonmaker, 2002). If preservice teachers are unable to solve problems and manage stress by the time they begin teaching, Gold (1999) observed that they develop decreased self-confidence, which can become so severe that it causes promising educators to leave the profession.

What makes teacher education so challenging is that there is no single comprehensive model to teach a student how to teach properly
(Gradle, 2006). Many researchers believe that teaching preservice educators how to become self-reflective is an important component of teacher training (Bain, 2004; Belmonte, 2003; Campbell, 2005; Schoonmaker, 2002; Susi, 1995). Belmonte (2003) explains:

Teachers who have a grasp of their own lives, who have reflected on what has occurred and how it has shaped their persona, are able to succeed. They are more comfortable in their own skin, know who they are, and reflect to students a confidence and assurance that offers students directions. (p. 75)

When used regularly at the university level, many preservice teachers discover how self-reflection assists them in constructing what type of teacher they want to become. Being self-reflective requires that they examine what works and what needs to be improved upon. By understanding themselves, teachers can effectively project the passions that drive them and use these passions to spark student interest. Additionally, teachers must reflect upon how their personal biases and worldviews shape their teaching philosophies (Campbell, 2005). Throughout their careers, teachers' professional identities, likes, and dislikes continue to grow and reshape. Reflective teachers repeatedly contemplate their actions and decisions (Hatfield, Montana, & Deffenbaugh, 2006; Susi, 1995).

As preservice educators gain practice in their field, it is essential that they learn how to respond to their personal intuitions and challenging situations. Lowenfeld (1964) noted that intuition is a part of being a creative teacher because it enables an educator to adjust appropriately to the many changes that occur throughout the school day. Teaching is challenging because instructors need to master both curricula needs and have a passion for working with people (Belmonte, 2003). Curricular standards require educators to teach youth how to become empathetic to others as they investigate social issues (Cohen-Evron, 2002; Goodland, 1999; Leshnoff, 2003; Serre
& Fergus, 1998). While investigating global topics in the classroom, students listen to others' opinions and learn how to become more flexible and open-minded (Gradle, 2006).

In teacher preparation, journals provide a format for individuals to communicate personal beliefs, reflect on life's circumstances, and record observations (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Mueller, 2003; Russell, 2005). Many educators have used reflective-learning journals in their classes to involve students in creative approaches to learning (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Pedro, 2005; Thorpe, 2004; Tsang, 2003). Both Thorpe (2004) and Tsang (2003) concur that reflective learning journals in teacher education programs work best when developed over a significant period of time. When structured as a meaningful class activity for preservice and practicing teachers, students gain insights into their own self-awareness as they explore numerous concepts about themselves, teaching, and the worldwide community. Roland's (1995) research on journaling with preservice art educators calls upon art education faculty to use journals to aid preservice art educators in examining why they want to become teachers and how their desire to teach can endure the test of time by earnestly contemplating the profession's many challenges and rewards. In line with this thinking, Bain (2004) argues: "Preservice students must play a larger role in examining their own suitability as art teachers because no one knows them better than themselves" (p. 46). Honest, reflective journals provide a constructive space for individuals to let out their frustrations and assess inner feelings as they develop their own teaching styles (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Larrivee, 2000). They can also assist students in better understanding their strengths and weaknesses and how this relates to their teaching. Through self-investigation and research on how others connect to the human story, we learn that we are not alone and that other people face similar experiences.
Methodology

This qualitative study was based on the *Art for Life* method of creating research journals\(^1\) (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Anderson and Milbrandt's model of creative research journals fuse art and writing to engage students in meaningful learning about topics that are important to them. Within their journals students analyze, interpret, and evaluate how interdisciplinary knowledge corresponds to their lives. The research question that guided this study is: What themes drive student research journals and how does the exploration of these themes espouse preservice art education?

Procedure. This study was conducted with undergraduate students enrolled in Introduction to Art Education during the 2005 and 2006 spring semesters. Out of forty-four students I selected six students' journals as suggested by Hodder (2000) to study in further detail based on their descriptive contents and varied themes. Participants were at different stages in life. Four were traditional undergraduate students, while two had previous careers before deciding to pursue art education. The students' names have been concealed to ensure privacy due to the personal nature of research journals. As part of the class curriculum students created research journals that were approximately 100 pages long. They turned in their journals five times a semester in two week intervals. Each section was approximately twenty pages long. For the first section, students described who they are through art, text, and photographs. In the second section, students selected three topics that were important to their lives. Next, they chose one of the topics and researched it in depth through subject integration, art history, aesthetics, art criticism, and art production. The final two sections provided the students with a format to fine tune their research and make general conclusions about the process.

\(^1\) In *Art for Life*, the sample journals were developed by high school students enrolled in an International Baccalaureate program.
Throughout the semester I provided students with feedback on the progress of their journals as suggested by Anderson & Milbrandt (2005) and Bain (2004). I wrote remarks in student journals on sticky notes that provided them with suggestions on how to further develop their journals through research. In addition, I talked to students during class and office hours to go over any questions that they may have had about the journaling process and the development of themes. Since this form of journal writing was a new experience for the students (and me during the 2005 semester), we had many discussions about the route the journals could take and sharing sessions in which students could walk around and look at other students’ journals and ask them about their work. We also used Chapter 10 What Drives You? Research Notebooks and a Sense of Self in Art for Life (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005) as a guide. During the 2006 semester, students could view photocopied examples from the previous class. Because journals are personal in nature, students who did not want to share specific information with the class had the option of using bulldog clips to mark off private pages. All students respected other students’ privacy.

Qualitative data analysis. This qualitative study of student research journals represents my interpretation of how the preservice art education majors used personally driven themes to reflect on their lives and the field of art education. I collected student journals and coded them into themes. When working with these documents, I followed Hodder’s (2000) method of evaluation. First, I interpreted the context in which the journals were made. Second, I looked for individual similarities and differences in student journals. Third, I used my review of literature and knowledge of teaching to determine how this data is relevant to the field of art education. Upon completion, I submitted my interpretations to the students for a member check. Lastly, because it is my job to prepare
preservice art education students for work as teachers, I reflected on my own teaching and interpretation of the journals.

Presentation of the Data

After coding the data I observed three common themes in the students' journals. First, each of the students pondered what it meant to become an art teacher. Next, all students used the disciplines of art education to research a variety of social issues, yet students had different comfort levels when learning how to connect their topics to art production, aesthetics, art history, and criticism activities. Lastly, all students used the journal as an instrument to self-reflect, problem solve, and ask questions. The following paragraphs provide a glimpse into the students' thoughts about teaching and what is important to them.

Mary: "Do I have enough skills to teach art"? Mary, a junior, is the first person in her family to attend college. Throughout the beginning sections of her journal she repeatedly asked: "Do I have enough skills to teach art?" (p. 33). She questioned her ability to teach because she had limited exposure to art in school (see Figure 1). While observing a special needs school she came in contact with an art therapist who worked as the lead art instructor. Mary explained that she felt uncomfortable with her drawing skills. The art therapist listened to Mary and assuaged her fears by explaining that she too had fears about teaching, yet she loves her job. All Mary needed to do was practice drawing and she would be fine.
Due to overwhelming stresses in her life including going to school and work full time and family and social commitments, Mary had difficulties finding a research topic. She remarked that she had spent more time venting in her journal about her overwhelming stresses than researching and admitted: “It does feel better to get some of this out of my mind and off my chest” (p. 79). To help her select an appropriate topic, we talked about her personal stresses and how both teachers and students have stress. If she wanted, she could research this topic and relate it to her own experience. Mary was finally satisfied with her topic and went over the required 100 pages. Her research identified the reasons behind teacher and student stress. She also learned stress reduction strategies. Near the completion of her journal, she articulated what she learned:

In the beginning the journal was okay! But as the sections went on I was not happy with my topic. Thanks to help from an understanding teacher! I am now working in a new direction! I am happier with this topic because it relates to me, what I am feeling, thinking, and wondering. (p. 89)
She further added that she is learning about good stress and how to use stress to her advantage. Moreover, she wants her classroom to be a place where children learn how to manage their own stress and partake in lessons that assist them in becoming successful in life.

Chris: "I am constantly in the process of reinventing myself." Chris, a sophomore whose journal theme is self-discovery, describes himself as a story teller. On the first page of his journal, he professed that while art was a form of expression to most people, for him it was a means to create his own identity. "In writing and visually [through art], I am constantly in the process of reinventing myself, hoping that with each incarnation I will be another step closer to understanding myself and my relationship with the world" (p. 1). Like many students in the class, Chris questioned his ability to teach others as he is still in the process of developing his own identity. Yet, he realizes that others have asked this same question. His journal is filled with original comic book characters that are based on different aspects of his personality. Delving deeper into his journal, he states that he has a better understanding of who he is and how different aspects of his personality connect him to others.

As a teacher Chris wants his students to be able to convey their ideas creatively. He argued: "Everybody has a story. But not everyone believes in their ability to express themselves." To make his case, he interpreted research on teaching art through writing and comic strips (see Figure 2). In the process, Chris voiced his frustration with the standardization of American schools because it limits a student's individuality and creative expression.

It is believed that art is just ornamentation to the standard repertoire of English, mathematics, and the sciences. This makes art seem like it is unnecessary, when in reality, art is vitally important to the development of a well-adjusted person. (p. 25)
Chris strives for an educational environment where children can critically analyze materials and come up with their own interpretations. He will use his art classroom to promote this. Within his journal, he argues that students can choose whatever means they are interested in to express themselves. For instance, Chris validates comics as a relevant art form that is useful in the classroom by comparing a Manga\textsuperscript{1} to Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937).

“We need to get past the idea that comics are only meant to be funny. They can be philosophical thought experiments. Good cartooning, like any art, is about the message as much as the skill of the artist” (p. 103).

*Irene: “I am struggling on the art history, art criticism, aesthetics, and production activities.”* At the beginning of her journal Irene, a junior, writes: “My mom teaches first grade. She hates her job and discourages me everyday from teaching” (p. 4). Irene chooses not to heed to mother’s warnings because she is convinced that her mother only feels that way because she does not like the paperwork. Irene has a passion for both children and art and wants to make a positive difference as a teacher. She selected eating disorders as her research topic based on her high school experience when several of her friends

\textsuperscript{2} A Manga is a Japanese style comic.
on the track team suffered from them. At first Irene found it difficult to connect her theme to the disciplines of art. "My topic is very defined by this point, but I am struggling on the art history, art criticism, aesthetics, and production activities" (p. 61). Through class discussions and brainstorming, she was able to relate her research to art by identifying how body types have been portrayed throughout history. In her search, she discovered identical twin sisters whose artistic mission was for the two of them to equal the weight of one healthy woman. Irene felt shocked by this art form and used aesthetics to question whether their work was indeed art, an illness, or a combination of the two. Ultimately, she decided that their art was an illness. Irene enjoyed the journaling experience because it was the first time that she learned how to unite art with real life issues (see Figure 3).

Vanessa: "As a teacher I can make a difference." Like Irene, Vanessa's mother is also a teacher. She developed her research topic based on a lesson plan called Art: It Takes a Village. In her mid thirties, Vanessa left a higher paying job to teach. As part of a global village, Vanessa wants to make a positive impact on children.

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Figure 3. Irene's collage A Binge Eater's Dream is filled with french-fries, chips, a hamburger and sweets.

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3 Visit http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4357763,00.html for more information.

4 Visit http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/prek2/issues/pflesson/art.shtml for more information about this lesson.
and wrote in her journal “As a teacher I can make a difference” (p. 31). To do so, she observed practicing art teachers who shared lessons and talked to her about relevant pedagogical issues (see Figure 4). One teacher described a time when a student’s artworks revealed trouble at home. After hearing this Vanessa felt it was her responsibility as a teacher to help. She then reflectected on the situation in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and how so many people suffered while waiting for assistance. She collected children’s artworks and poems that she found on the Internet that told of their experiences in the storm. Concurrently, she connected the present situation with the city’s rich cultural traditions. She selected and analyzed numerous artworks including jazz, fine art, folk art, and poetry.

In her quest to make a difference in students’ lives, Vanessa observed practicing art teachers who made a difference in their students’ lives. Of the teacher she observed in these pages of her journal, Vanessa described her experience: “I could have stayed with this teacher all day. She was so fun, creative, welcoming and loved by her students.”

After learning about the community’s history, she questioned
whether or not New Orleans should be rebuilt. Despite the massive destruction, she discovered that there had been several improvements made since the hurricane. At the onset of her research, she felt that New Orleans was beyond reconstruction. However, after learning about the city, she decided that New Orleans had no choice but to rebuild. New Orleans is a part of the American village and too many people’s lives had been interrupted by the storm. To conclude her journal, she wrote: “Every time I tried to find a reason for people to give up, I found three reasons not to” (p. 100). Her discovery has provided her with a resource to teach children that even if it takes a long time to rebuild persistence and hard work do pay off.

Kennedy: “Can art help overcome ... obstacles?”. Kennedy is also in her mid thirties and chose art education as a second career choice. She wants to be a teacher to provide students with a richer art experience than both she and her daughter had in school. She used her journal to pinpoint how to make it better. Before returning to college, Kennedy worked as a counselor for a homeless shelter and volunteered with animal rescue (see Figure 5). Her experience brought her in contact with people and animals who were challenged by obstacles. When pondering her research theme she asked herself: “Can art help overcome some of the obstacles?” (p. 33)
Tiffany died at the age of twelve. Rodrigue missed his dog terribly; she always sat by his side as he painted. As a way to connect to her he started painting her image. Kennedy admired Rodrigue because he used his art as a positive way to deal with Tiffany's loss. Furthermore, in honor of Tiffany, he promotes awareness and raises money through his art for animals living in dire conditions.

The journal experience combined issues Kennedy cares about and taught her about herself. At first, she felt that journaling would provide her with an opportunity to try a project she would do with her future students. Then, her feelings changed:

The journal has taught me that no matter how old you are, there is always a little something left to learn about yourself. I have learned that although the road I took to get where I am today, was long and sometimes tumultuous, nonetheless, it was meaningful. I can only benefit from a deeper understanding of myself and allow this benefit to trickle down upon my students. I am confident that my personal experiences, beliefs and desires will compliment my teachings. Unforeseen by myself earlier, it is now clear that obstacles as a theme is not just a unit I will teach, but an underlying theme in my philosophy of teaching. (p. 98)

Eric: “If I can teach one student ... I have changed the world.” Eric, a senior, described the restrictive art experience he had had in school. Many of the assignments seemed useless to him because they did not connect to his personal interests. When choosing his career he stated: “I'm not going to let that [my negative school art experience] stop me. I'm going to grow from the experience” (p. 26). Eric acknowledged that giving a child a paintbrush cannot solve world hunger; however, he is aware of art's benefits and how a good teacher can beget positive changes in the young people (s)he will teach. He feels that a teacher should show students their potential through guidance, facilitating

To learn more about George Rodrigue visit http://www.georgerodrigue.com/ and http://www.art4now.com/biogr.htm.
their creativity, and mentoring. Eric selected the topic of the healing powers of art based on the positive role that art has played in his own life. In college, Eric was introduced to the artist Joseph Beuys and felt an immediate connection. “Through Joseph Beuys I see my potential. If I can teach one student to understand themselves, their world, their fellow human beings, then I have changed the world” (p. 44). Eric has a solid grasp of the disciplines of art. He enjoys discussions on art. As a teacher he wants his students to be able to talk about art as well. In his journal, he critiqued Beuys’ *Felt Suit* (1970) because he believed that he could use it in class to pique student interest and allow them to explore their unique viewpoints.

At the end of his journal, Eric reflected on the type of teacher he would like to become.

I feel like I have set out some clear reasons for me to teach. I feel like I have explored teaching on a personal level in order to bring about a personal desire to teach. In my life, I want to do things that are meaningful—things that help people. Art is one of my favorite things, and I really think

*Figure 6. In this image Eric ponders “Who am I?”*
Even though he cogently presented his goals as a teacher, he still questions how his philosophy of teaching will change once he enters the classroom. He desires to remember the big picture of what teaching means to him and why he wants to teach.

Implications for Instruction

This study demonstrates how students have used journaling to cogitate about their roles as teachers, self-reflect, and identify topics that are meaningful to them by interpreting them through art. Following Thorpe's (2004) recommendations for reflective learning journals, the following paragraphs address the need to (a) communicate journal writing objectives clearly; (b) provide constructive feedback; (c) remain cognizant and observant of ethical considerations; and (d) use journal writing to improve teaching.

As previously stated, teaching research journals was a new experience for me. Similar to Roland's (1995) and Bates's (2000) studies, I understand that some students prefer to communicate orally, while others prefer written and visual formats. By clearly explaining the journal's objectives and providing students class time to talk about their journals, I was able to meet both types of learners' needs. However, I observed that even though my objectives were clear and broad enough to encourage students to creatively interpret them, some students had difficulties applying their research topics to the disciplines of art. For many, my Introduction to Art Education course was the first time they connected the disciplines of art to social issues. While developing their research journals, most students were in the process of learning how to fuse these ideas. In essence, journaling was an exploratory, learn-as-you-go process. In the future, I plan to attenuate student stress levels by explaining that many people have difficulties learning how to connect themes to art. Furthermore, I
will provide students with additional class time so that they can work on the specific artworks they selected for their research journals, view class examples, and talk with fellow students and me. It helps have peer and teacher support as well as see how others have successfully connected their research themes to art production, criticism, history, and aesthetics.

On a positive note, I felt that I was able to provide students with constructive feedback throughout the journaling process. Working with students' journals, I was able to discover their strengths and where they needed additional assistance. I also had an open-door policy and let students know that I was available to help them. While providing feedback, I discovered how open and trusting many of the students were as they revealed personal information and shared their hardships. A few felt uncomfortable discussing deeply personal issues. I remember one instance when a student wrote that she had to decide how much she wanted me to know. I agree that it is the student's choice. Under the guidance of a caring teacher, journals provide a constructive space for individuals to let out their frustrations, assess inner conflicts and feelings of isolation as they develop their own teaching styles (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Larrivee, 2000). Therefore, students need to have the option of closing off pages that they do not want to share. As art educators we are not trained therapists and need to respect a student's right to privacy. When their remarks seemed troubling to me and/or weighed heavily on a student, I talked with each student privately and provided professional references such as therapists who are available free of cost at the university health center. I also stressed when using research journals with youth a teacher cannot send a child back into a potentially harmful situation. The teacher must report suspected abuse to the proper authorities immediately.

The aim of the research journals was to teach my students how to become effective teachers. Roland (1995) maintained that
Sickler-Voit

journaling can assist students in overcoming the assumptions and misunderstandings they have about teaching; however, it is not a panacea. I agree with this argument. In teacher preparation programs knowing oneself is an important part of becoming a teacher and journaling is an effective mode to teach students about self-reflection. Journaling provides students insight into their worldviews and how their likes and biases shape their teaching philosophies. While enhancing their self-knowledge, I encourage preservice teachers to see how their own identities relate to society. The journals used in this study demonstrated that students' ideas and perceptions changed and strengthened over the semester.

To be better prepared for teaching, I argue that journaling should be combined with a variety of school observations, where student-teachers can engage in meaningful conversations with teachers. Additionally, preservice teachers need to accrue experience teaching children before they begin their student-teaching. Likewise, preservice art educators should be aware of the various regional, state, and national organizations available to teachers. Leaving the university is often a lonely experience for beginning art teachers because they miss the embracing environment that authentic art education programs provide. When students are given choices and taught how to self-reflect and reach out to others for support, they go from limited possibilities to endless ones.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these six research journals provided a glimpse into the minds of preservice teachers who are at different stages in life. Each student selected his or her journal theme as a means to learn topics that were important to them. Using the Art for Life philosophy (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005), it was my aim to teach preservice art education students who were enrolled in their first art education class about the value of teaching meaningful art curricula through
authentic instruction. Those who used the journal experience to its full advantage grew from the process and contemplated their belief systems. This project has opened the door to the many possibilities that they can call upon to begin a prosperous career as an art teacher. The students have pondered what it means to become an art teacher, connected a variety of social issues to the disciplines of art education, and used their journals to self-reflect, problem solve, and ask questions. Thus, they can apply this knowledge to teaching their students that they too can cultivate their own talents through engaging student driven curricula that challenges and sparks their imaginations. Because this study examines students’ use of the *Art for Life* journal method in their first university art education course, further studies could investigate how their thought processes develop and change throughout their studies and into their teaching careers.

References


Contamination of Childhood Fairy Tale: Pre-Service Teachers Explore Gender and Race Constructions

Wan-Hsiang Chou

This study explores the possibilities of challenging European-American middle-class social codes perpetuated by fairy tales through creative writing and artmaking. For centuries, writers and artists have continued to create new versions of old tales. Critiquing through recreation of fairy tales can reveal biases of personal and cultural constructions of race and gender. Like authors and illustrators of children's books, 25 pre-service teachers were invited to "contaminate" fairy tales from their childhood, through which to become aware of metaphors they live by and explore where and how pre-existing codes entered their lives. Their retellings of traditional tales and accompanying illustrations show their awareness, as well as unawareness, of gender and racial stereotypes in children's fairy tales. Students were comfortable reconstructing the traditional gender roles, but hesitated to challenge the racial identities in their creations. The students and I gained insight about the possibilities of children recreating fairy tales in future classrooms.

As a child, the best part of the year was when Disney released a new animated film in the theaters. I imagined I was every one of Disney's princess or female characters: Ariel, Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty. I never thought of these characters as weak, helpless, or dependent on men. I saw them as beautiful and radiant.

Being raised by all the movies didn't harmfully affect me. I watched the same movies when I was their age, and I don't feel I have a warped view of gender or race.

I grew up on these movies; they are movies! The adults look
into the movies too much, and do not realize that children watch these movies for entertainment and pleasure. They are not picking up on what the adults feel are prejudices.

These are reactions of the pre-service teachers in my children's literature classroom after watching *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* (Sun & Picker, 2001), a videotape about racism and sexism in Disney animation films, and were typical reactions for all eight classes of college students I taught. Interestingly enough, in a lesson about fairy tales, I had my students as small groups draw "Snow White" in their minds, and all six groups in one classroom drew a very similar image—a princess with a red hair band, blue and yellow gown, and a red cloak. With no reference to Disney's Snow White in display, these college students vividly recalled her image from memory. Is it true, as many of my students said, that Disney retellings of fairy tales, or other texts for children, have no impact on children's view of gender and race?

Entertainment and pleasure, as Giroux (1999) stresses, can never be only taken at face value and there is always public pedagogy involved. Zipes (1995a) points out:

If we look at the Walt Disney industry and the vast distribution of bowdlerized and sanitized versions of fairy tales by Perrault, the Grimms, Bechstein, Collodi, and other classical authors, it is apparent that they have been incorporated into the Western culture industry mainly to amuse children and adults alike. Yet amusement is not to be taken lightly, for distraction and divertissement have an important ideological function: Almost all the classical fairy tales that have achieved prominence and are to be enjoyed in the United States can be considered as products that reinforce an ideological and middle-class social code.
Stories are never neutral. Authors’ ideologies and worldviews, including their views of what it means to be children, and more specific, what it means to be boys or girls, are embedded in their narratives for children. Davies (2003) found that children as young as four or five years old already have pre-existing knowledge and anticipation of how princes and princesses should look and act in fairy tales.

The goals of this study are twofold: First, to review what kinds of social codes are embedded in fairy tales for children and to examine how these codes are perpetuated or changed through time. Second, to explore the possibilities of how re-writing and re-creating a familiar tale from childhood offer pre-service teachers a critical space to reflect and negotiate their own experiences of being girls and boys and their assumptions of children and childhood.

Social Codes in Traditional Fairy Tales

In the beginning, folktales and fairy tales were not created with a child audience in mind. In the Middle Ages, oral tales accompanied adult audiences during the time of repetitive household chores or harvesting tasks to shorten the hours, and these tales were “fast-paced adventure stories filled with bawdy episodes, violent scenes, and scatological humor” (Tatar, 1992, p. 37). Perrault in late 17th century France and Brothers Grimm in early 19th century Germany were among the first who systematically collected and put the oral tales into words. The realization by the Brothers Grimm that the tales they collected (the original intended audience were scholars and linguists) were to be shared with children influenced the editing and selection of tales for their second edition of Nursery and Household Tales (Zipes, 1988). They wanted to produce a collection appropriate for children as well as attractive to parents. The traditional tales have therefore been altered, sanitized, or re-interpreted to meet the general and personal standards of what were appropriate for children
and reinforced the preconceived notion of gender and class roles according to the patriarchal codes of their time (Zipes, 1988).

Fairy tales in the patriarchal tradition, in general, portray women as weak, submissive, dependent, and self-sacrificing, while men are powerful, active, and dominant. Stone (1975, cited in Zipes, 1986) compares the original Grimms’ fairy tales with the British and U.S. translations of the past two centuries as well as with the Disney versions of the 20th century. The results of her study reveal that the products of the modern culture industry specify that a woman can only be considered a heroine if she is patient, industrious, calm, beautiful, and passive. Disney studio continued to reproduce and duplicate the traditional fairy tales revised by early male collectors such as Perrault and the Grimms without questioning their ideology. One shared aspect, for instance, is the domestication of women: Disney went further than the Grimms to make Snow White care and clean by nature and make the household jobs seem effortless and fun (Tatar, 1999).

Because fairy tales are specific to the historical and cultural context and are products of the dominant discourse, people growing up in these contexts tend to accept the gendered storylines and representations of children as natural and essential, especially when the plots and characters reaffirm their ideologies. Canonized patriarchal fairy tales contribute to such repetition and layering and reinforce the notion that polarized gender roles are only natural and logical. If pre-service teachers leave the classroom with their ideology of gender unchallenged, it is highly possible that they will perpetuate these binary gender roles in their future classrooms. It is therefore important to be aware of and critically look at the cultural assumptions and unexamined messages in texts. Trousdale and McMillan (2003) suggest that through comparing and juxtaposing multiple texts and conflicting storylines students are offered the possibility of seeing culturally dominant scripts from new perspectives. Through critical
reading and rewriting of familiar, but destructive, cultural scripts, students are also offered the opportunity to create their own life narratives.

**Possibilities: Contaminating the Old Tales**

Disney’s case of protection and lawsuit of their fairy tale animation films demonstrates that “the question of ownership...is a question of control” (Haase, 1993/1999, p. 361). Haase suggests that fairy tales truly belong to every one of us. It is through the claiming of fairy tales for ourselves “in every individual act of telling and reading” that we can “avoid reading fairy tales as models of behavior and normalcy” (p. 361). By creating and re-creating our own versions, we, both children and adults, can “re-appropriate the tales” and assert our “own proprietary rights to meaning” (p. 363).

Zipes (2001) also argues that “contamination” of fairy tales can be a powerful source of knowledge. The term “contamination” has traditionally had a negative connotation: folklorists use it to “point to foreign elements that may have been added to or have seeped into what appears to be pure, homogenous narrative tradition” (p. 102). In this sense, the Grimms could be described as the greatest contaminators of fairy tales. But Zipes opens up a positive aspect of the contamination of tales: “Contamination can be an enrichment process; it can lead to the birth of something unique and genuine in its own right” (p. 102). Likewise, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stress that “new metaphors are capable of creating new understanding and, therefore, new realities” (p. 235). The recurring motifs in traditional fairy tales become metaphors of one’s life and the construction of stereotypes. Immediately one recognizes the roles of the evil stepmother, the beautiful princes, the wise woman, and the fairy godmother. Yet, revision of fairy tales holds a sense of agency: revisionists create retellings, which provide readers new possibilities to be aware of and read against stereotypes in the traditional pre-
Authors and artists of fairy tale retellings “contaminate” the old tales and create new meanings and metaphors, both literally and visually, through which new ways of structuring our experience and new conceptual metaphors are created (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Anne Sexton’s (1972) poetic version of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” offers a new way of reading the well-known fairy tale. The poem ends with Snow White looking into the mirror just as the stepmother did, suggesting the story goes into a circle:

Meanwhile Snow White held court,
rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut
and sometimes referring to her mirror
as women do. (p. 9)

Paul (1998) resonates this idea by talking about Gilbert and Gubar’s (1979, cited in Paul, 1998) discussion about how the story of Snow White can be read as a beauty myth: “the story of the aging of a single woman, represented as a mother/daughter split ... the story pivots on beauty, its fundamental importance for young women, and how the loss of it turns old women into [evil] witches” (p. 37).

There is also a visionary quality to metaphors. Carrie Mae Weems’s photo art, *Mirror, Mirror* (1987), is a powerful example of interrupting cultural definition between race and beauty. In the artwork, a Black woman is holding a mirror and a White fairy godmother figure is looking out from the mirror. The inscription under the photo says ‘LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR, THE BLACK WOMAN ASKED, “MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, WHO’S THE FINEST OF THEM ALL?” THE MIRROR SAYS, “SNOW WHITE, YOU BLACK BITCH, AND DON’T YOU FORGET IT!!”’ Chicago and Lucie-Smith (1999) talked about Weems’ piece:

Carrie Mae Weems combines gender and race in *Mirror, Mirror*, in which the forthright inscription carries at least
as much weight as the actual image ... The piece is a reminder of the way in which our attitudes are formed at an early age by things like folk tales and fairy tales, and the illustrations that accompany them. This is especially the case when a fairy tale is transformed, translated, and rendered almost universally available by modern mass culture ... Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), offered an image of youthful female beauty and desirability which must have affected generations of Black children, who found themselves classified by implication as permanently inferior. "Whiteness" and "goodness" are insistently related in the movie. (p. 153)

Both the artwork and the critique share the belief that our attitudes toward gender and race are formed early in life. Narrative and artwork, along with critiques, enable readers to read the old tales critically and form multiple perspectives. This brings new possibilities into teaching reading, writing, and art-creation: Readers of fairy tales can also actively take up the roles of cultural creators.

**Fairy Tale Recreation Project**

Twenty-five students, six males and 19 females, enrolled in my summer children's literature course participated in a fairy tale recreation project. The purpose of the project was to reconstruct a traditional fairy tale from childhood by reworking, replacing, or adding to the illustrations and texts in order to reform the cultural values and identities in the fairy tale based on their experiences and beliefs about gender roles, race, and sexual orientation. Most students were junior and senior elementary education majors; others were returning with a bachelor's degree and seeking teaching certification or a master's degree. Three of them were married and had children. All were White and of European ancestry.

The summer course contained 12 sessions, three hours each. As
a class, we first generated on the blackboard a list of fairy tale titles that the students remembered. Each student then drew a fairy tale character they visualized in their mind on a piece of paper. The fairy tale characters and scenes that the students chose to draw came from memory of diverse stories, both traditional and literary fairy tales, including *Cinderella*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Rapunzel*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Frog Prince*, *Little Mermaid*, *The Princess and the Pea*, and *The Sword and the Stone*. Not all of these stories have Disney versions, but it is not difficult to find Disney influences in the drawings of this group. The most obvious case is the candlestick from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (see Figure 1). Two of the three Little Mermaid pieces have a red hair mermaid in it, whereas in Anderson's version her hair color is never revealed. This first assignment let students reflect back on their childhood fairy tale encounters and establish a starting point for the possible topic for their final project.

In the sessions that followed, we talked about common elements in fairy tales, and looked closely at different versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Snow White*. At this stage, students started to think about which fairy tale they would like to rewrite and who they might like to work with. They were encouraged to form a group of two or three to generate discussion, but were also given the freedom to work
Students spent half of a class session to discuss with partners their initial ideas for the project. They were then required to read at least five versions of the same tale they chose to rework and were encouraged to constantly revisit and make connections to their project as the class continued to discuss different topics, such as multicultural children's literature and children's popular culture. On the last day of the class, students presented their final work to the class and turned in a two-page reflection paper on their creative process.

Patterns of Gender and Race Constructions

Some of the final works are powerful parodies both visually and literally (e.g., *The Cindy Ella Story*). Others, however, fail to rewrite the story in a more critical way by merely changing the traditional tale into modern settings (e.g., *Rapunzel in L.A.)*. There are individual differences as well as general patterns across these twelve projects. These patterns include gender reconstruction, problematic representation of race, and popular cultural influences.

Gender Reconstruction

All groups except one chose to rewrite fairy tales with a female protagonist. *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty* were the most popular choices for revision. The only exception was *Jamie and the Alien*, a rewriting of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, where the gender of the main character was not revealed. This group intentionally chose a gender-neutral name, Jamie, for the main character and avoided the use of he or she to refer to the character throughout the story. The purpose was to show, as they wrote in their reflection paper, that girls can have adventures too, and it is up to the reader to determine if Jamie is a boy or a girl. They also used a picture that could be either a boy or a girl for their cover illustration (see Figure 2). The
domination of female protagonists among students’ retellings might be due to the high percentage of female students in the class. However, even groups containing male students chose tales with female protagonists, too. It is highly possible that when referring to fairy tales, the most popular and typical stories coming to students’ minds were those that have been made into Disney films.

Most of the retellings portray a strong and independent female character. Rather than being passive and helpless as in the traditional tales, these female characters are resourceful and pursue their own destiny. In The Sleeping Star and Rumpelstiltskin, the female protagonists do not choose to marry the saviors of their lives but decide to live happily with their family and friends. In The Princess and P.E., the princess runs away from the arranged marriage by her royal parents and pursues a college degree in New York City. She eventually meets the lover of her life, who happens to be a rapper, and brings him back to her kingdom. Snow White is a powerful retelling: with no romance going on in the plot, the story is about how the kind and courageous princess regains the kingdom from her evil stepfather, and forms a strong sisterhood with a lower social class girl. This story also challenges the binary gender roles by having Snow White love learning how to use a sword and a
shield, and by having the seven dwarfs love cooking, cleaning, and sewing (see Figure 3). These retellings break traditional romantic ideology by giving agency to the princess and reconsidering female roles.

Another significant aspect of gender in students’ retellings is the villain. In *Snow White, The Cindy Ella Story, Rumpelstiltskin*, and *Rapunzel in L.A.*, the evil stepmother and stepsisters have been reversed to father/stepfather and stepbrothers. On the other hand, in *Jamie and the Alien*, instead of a male giant, the group made the villain a female alien on Mars. Although students wrote in their reflections that they did so to challenge the gender stereotype, the gender reversion of the same character is still problematic. Crew (2002) and Parson (2004), for example, point out that a simple reversal of gender roles does not necessarily result in a feminist text. The subtle discursive formations encoded in patriarchal tales are also what need to be reworked. Feminist reworking of fairy tales often pays attention to the silenced voices in the story, the representation of power relations, the empowerment of both female and male, the new possibilities of gendered relationships, and the work of feminist thinking, such as subjectivity, agency, choice, autonomy, and the ethic of care into the retelling. In my future teaching, these issues need be stressed in discussion in a similar class project.

*Figure 3. The cover of Snow White, written and illustrated by a male student.*
Problematic Representation of Race

All the female protagonists created by students are White or suggested by the illustration to be White, except the Cinder-Puppy story, which uses dogs as characters. Three groups, however, include minor characters of diverse ethnicity in their stories. Both Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: What Really Happened and Snow White Meets Cinderella use diverse racial representations for the seven dwarfs. The former uses names from different cultures, such as Pedro, Fantasia, Yi Wang, etc. The later uses images of multicultural groups copied from the Internet (see Figure 4). These visual representations are exaggerated cartoon figures that are rather stereotypical. The

Sleeping Star is the only story that uses an African American as leading character, the prince. In this modern version of Sleeping Beauty, the princess, Estelle, who is a famous star, is severely hurt while filming an exploration scene and falls into a lengthy coma. One day, while a Black nurse was doing his daily rounds and tending to Estelle's needs, he attempts a revival technique that he learned during his schooling. To his surprise, although the procedure had been tried many times
already, Estelle opens her eyes this time. The nurse explains everything
to her and tries to kiss her, but Estelle says, “Exactly what are you
doing?! ... I apparently have been in a coma for years and as soon as
I awake, you try to kiss me; no thank you!” Here, the representation
of the nurse is problematic: we see a nurse doing a procedure that
is probably beyond his training or even violating his work ethics,
and we see a Black man kissing a vulnerable White woman without
her permission. All three representations of race are stereotypical and
problematic. They are merely an inclusion of diversity and fit Sims's
(1982) definition of a “melting pot” story, which recognizes and
celebrates the university of human experience, such as friendship,
family relationship and everyday life, but “ignore all differences
except physical ones: skin color and other racially related physical
features” (p. 33). They ignore the uniqueness of culture specific
experiences and avoid the discussion of racial problems. Again, these
aspects of multicultural issues need to be stressed and discussed more
in my future classroom.

**Popular Culture Influences**

Another pattern that emerged concerns the elements of the
narrative texts that students chose to change. Nine groups chose
to set the background of the story in modern time. Four of the
twelve groups chose to have the main female character become a
star or singer and perform successfully in Hollywood or Las Vegas
(*Snow White Meets Cinderella, Rumpelstiltskin, Rapunzel in L.A.*, and
*The Sleeping Star*). This pattern might be a result of our reading of
French’s (1986) picture book *Snow White in New York* in class. In
French’s retelling Snow White becomes a famous singer in the 1920s-
30s in New York City. However, this pattern also shows the students’
idea of what it means to be successful for a female in modern times.
Rather than, say, being successful in academia or receiving a Nobel
Prize, a “princess-dream-come-true” story today is to become famous
Students' retellings also reflect the subculture of this group. Elements of popular culture are interwoven in their stories; for example, in The Cindy Ella Story the rich but evil stepbrother's name, Sebastian, comes from the movie “Cruel Intentions” (Moritz & Kumble, 1999). Images of Simon Cowell of the television show American Idol, actor Pierce Brosnan, singer Elvis Presley, and characters from popular TV series Friends were also used as visual portraits of their characters (see Figure 5). Others include new technologies in popular culture such as computers, chat rooms, and cell phones in the new versions of fairy tales. Along the same lines, Mary Kay lady, high-profile modern designers within today's fashion industry, plastic surgery, and new forms of diets are also written into their plots. As one student from The Cindy Ella Story group wrote thoughtfully in her reflection paper, “Our fairy tale project mirrors how media driven and oriented we are. Almost every aspect can be rooted in some type of media from our generation” (personal communication, July 14, 2004).

Discussions and Conclusions

The touch of race, class, and sexual orientation is rather superficial in the students' retellings (in some cases, gender as well). Strong White female characters pursuing success and fulfilling their own
Contamination of Childhood 69

destiny is a major theme across the stories. In most cases, race and social class, however, are mentioned only as background information of the minor characters. These characters are rather flat and their voices are not heard in these retellings. The issue of authenticity and authorship might be the students' major concern. As one student discusses in the reflection paper about his comfort level of portraying diverse characters: "I thought about changing Snow White's ethnicity. However, I did not think I had the proper knowledge to write from the perspective of a character that had a different cultural background from my own" (personal communication, July 14, 2004). As a result, gender seems to be the only accessible cultural element students could personally relate to and comfortably reconstruct.

Although some students seemed to fail to rewrite the story through a critical pen, their reflection papers showed a heightened awareness and sensitivity of the cultural assumptions and values that go into the story as well as a self-understanding through this project. Rapunzel in L.A., for example, shares the same plot of the traditional Rapunzel tale, with the only change being the time and setting. Nevertheless, students in this group acknowledged the ideology behind the story they created. Although this group did not create a story to interrupt traditional ideology, they were conscious that their story shares mainstream White, middle-class assumptions and makes this population probably the major consumer of children's books.

Students' works and reflections show different degrees of awareness, from creating a “politically correct” tale to interrupting the romance ideology. The Cindy Ella Story is a powerful realistic story that has a Cinderella theme. Set in a contemporary era in New Jersey, the female protagonist is abused by her stepfather and stepbrothers and dreams to one day leave the family and go to New York City to become a star. Instead of repeating the romantic scene, the group said they did not want to sugar coat life. They wanted to show that "dreams can be shattered and life may not always turn out
to be the happily ever after ending that you expect it to be”. One student thoughtfully wrote:

Having Cindy become a prostitute is a portrayal of what happens to many girls who go to the big city looking for love or to become a star... Cindy was able to get away from her evil stepfather and stepbrothers, but all the pain they caused her has made her resort to a profession in which men abuse her. In a way, this story changed from being a funny modern version of Cinderella, to an example of male abuse, and how it can seriously affect a young woman’s life decisions. (personal communication, July 14, 2004)

Some students started to talk about the possibilities of applying this project in their future classroom and how they realize the importance of teaching children to be aware of the dominant discourse in popular culture. By fostering critical awareness of social codes in cultural text, I hope students will in turn take this sensitivity into their future teaching careers. Researchers have reported using artmaking and creative writing to help elementary school children think critically about the dominant cultural texts. Tavin and Anderson (2003) outline a unit of study in a fifth grade classroom where students addressed issues of race and gender stereotyping, historical inaccuracies, and violence in Disney films. The fifth graders engaged in the critical interpretation of Disney characters and produced artworks based on those interpretations. Zipes (1995b, 2004) also documented his successful use of fairy tales and folktales in creative storytelling and drama with middle school and elementary school children. Children read and listen to various versions of stories from oral traditions around the world, rewrite and illustrate their own versions, and finally act out the stories they create. Sipe (2001) researched first- and second-grade students’ responses to five Rapunzel variants during storybook readalouds, and found that with each text being read to them the children’s understanding and
interests to the fairy tale progress along a path: from understanding and expecting a basic storyline to finally showing their readiness for becoming authors of their own variants. Although the first and second graders may not be able to create fairy tales as sophisticated and reflective as most college students did, they are ready to actively engage in taking the ownership of the tales into their hands.

One student concluded her reflection paper by saying, “I guess the most important thing to learn is just to try and be as sensitive as you can to race, gender, religion, and even sexual preference” (personal communication, July 14, 2004). By having the students contaminate a fairy tale from their childhood, this project successfully heightened the students’ awareness of race and gender stereotypes in children’s fairy tales and opened up the possibilities of exploring these issues with children in future classrooms.

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New York: Routledge.


Art Education in an Age of Teletechnology: On the Impossibility of Portraiture

Jan Jagodzinski

The preText: Lacanian Moves of the Real

Art since the Renaissance has been obsessed with the portrait and defined by it as the form of representation made even more iconic through the invention of photography where the notion of the profile became established as a sign of prosperity, prestige and power (Sekula, 1986). This enlightenment tradition of portraiture is not likely to perish at any given future date; the digitalization of the image continues to make the banal snap-shot proliferate at such an incredible rate identifying the thirst for personal representation in contemporary society. The explosion of celebrity magazines, the spread of the paparazzi, and the easy access to digital printers should give us all the more reason why art educators should re-examine the representational value of portraiture as subject matter for the art classroom.

Artists and art educators have always included portraiture as part of their curriculum repertoire. It has a long venerable tradition in art education since the founding of the Florentine Academy during the Renaissance where anatomy and life drawing were first taught. The growth of portraiture, of course, reaches its height in Holland with such figures as Franz Hals, Rembrandt and Vermeer, where humanism takes command, so to speak, as the haute bourgeoisie are able to gain economic ground, setting up the first Constitution in 1588 against the interests of Church and Aristocracy. The portrait essentially was a representational technology that “stole” the light of God from the Church and power from the Aristocracy by imbuing the sitter with a "unique" subjectivity and importance, as if two subjectivities were present: the actual representation of the sitter and his or her “unique”
self perceived as the “soul” of the person, an ideal inner self that is aligned with God. Vermeer’s studio was essentially an inverted Cathedral. Hence, the artist was always judged as to whether he (it was a male dominated occupation) could capture the “essence” of the person through the skill of the hand. The technology of representation: the under-painting in grays, the grinding of colored minerals, and the glazing techniques with oil paint secularizes “revealed theology” as “natural theology” by presenting the tangibility of things.

This “double” claim of portraiture held up even stronger when the bourgeoisie came to power, establishing Nations through revolutionary means. The Impressionists readily represented the bourgeoisie frolicking along the banks of the Seine through a technology that ranged from rapid (Degas, Monet) to slow (Seurat) brush strokes, with watercolors, paintings and sketches done en plein air rather than necessarily confined to the studio, as empiricism reigned supreme. Again, the skill of rendering the portrait, still a fascination for tourists who watch sidewalk artists earning their keep, was retained. However, the move towards artifice, as in the developments of post-Impressionism, already meant a confrontation with photography that had begun in 1839 with Daguerre when photographic technologies eventually put into question the “essential” self as it became increasingly easier to touch up the negatives to produce ideal images, a direction which has now lead us to the complete manipulation of the digitalized image.

Since the invention of photography, it is often argued that technology of the lens apparatus and printing process changes our understanding of what portraiture “is.” In a seminal essay, the art historian and theorist Rosalind Krauss (1985) argued that “[e]very photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object” (p.203). She goes on to suggest in the second part of her
essay that:

the effect of the work is that its relation to its subject is that of
the index, the impression, the trace. The painting is thus a sign
connected to a referent along a purely physical axis. And this
indexical quality is precisely the one of photography. (p.215)
Published in 1977, Krauss could not have anticipated that by the turn
of the century the day of chemical-based technologies would be over
(except for "purists" who complement those enthusiasts of vintage
"vinyl" music and analogue synthesizers). "Technically" speaking,
however, Krauss is entirely right despite this technological change.
The conventional icon/index that defined duality in photography
has broken down. But, of course, the iconic portrait continues to
function in everyday life, otherwise the industrial complex that
surrounds the reproduction of "family snaps" would collapse—not
likely to happen given the thirst for "memories" that attempt to
freeze time as reminders of how we thought we once "were."

The family "snap" at first glance, seems to preserve the claim that,
like the former technologies of painting, the "essence" of the person
photographed is being "caught." The paparazzi photo functions in
this way as well: the celebrity is "caught" in his or her "natural" state
of just being "human." Often, this means being caught unaware,
undressed or in some unflattering pose, just the opposite of the
artifice or role as a celebrity's mask. Somehow, this is perceived as
being the "authentic" self. In this way the paparazzi "steal" a celebrity's
jouissance (libidinal vitality) so it can be consumed by a voyeuristic
public—a rather vampirish act. However, the photographic archive
that each family or individual member possesses, oddly enough, has
little do with representation per se. What is this "essence" that seems
to fade in an age of simulacra? The photographic archive seems to
point to its "outside," to what cannot be retrieved, to what cannot be
represented—to the impossibility of time itself. It is this impossible
"trace" that Marianne Hirsch (1997) is able to articulate so well in
her *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. As she notes in her opening discussion of Roland Barthes celebrated study on photography, *Camera Lucida* (1981), the one photograph that he cherishes and discusses in detail, where he finds not only his mother but the qualities of their relationship—a congruence between “my mother’s being and my grief at her death” (p. 70)—is not reproduced in his book. For us, as viewers, it would just be another generic family photograph from a long time ago. We cannot see the photograph like he sees it. It is impossible. Yet, this picture of his mother provoked in him a moment of self-recognition. In his reading process, it opened up a corridor of time enabling a process of self-discovery, a discovery of a self-in-relation to his mother—as his loss and his mourning. The photograph “moved” him as it released its frozen moment of time down a corridor that seems faster than the speed of light. The referent (his mother) haunts him like a ghost, evoking what has now become the mainstay of our understanding of what he meant by the sting, prick, cut or puncture of the *punctum* of the photograph. So, while there is no doubt that technology changes the way we “see” the world through an “inhuman” eye made possible by the machinic lenses of the cinematic apparatus, the fundamental question of the “impossibility” of representation remains open to question.

The first part of this essay draws a preText. It draws on psychoanalytic theory of Lacan to question the very “possibility” of portraiture and to rethink its practice along non-representational lines; that is, as a practice of “impossibility” where the failure of representation is already presupposed. The second part, which I call the text, extends this discussion to Deleuze and his notions of the time-image to further the question of grappling with an art practice that *ruins* representation.

What Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* teaches us (from the spectator side in this case) is that the object must “look” back at us if we are to meet its gaze. It looks back at us not from its immediate physical
location—after all, Barthes came across this particular photograph amongst many. But only this one made him hesitate. It shocked him immediately. Contemplation occurred only after this initial “punch” took place. Rather, the photograph looked back at him from a site that cannot be articulated through the site of language, nor can it be seen (sighted). We have to posit a bodily register that exceeds both language and representation. For Lacan this is the psychic register of the Real, the unconscious, and if we were to give this claim a Deleuzean twist, we can call it the brain, a site that can never know itself, that can never be entirely transparent to itself, no matter what the context is. Some aspect of the brain’s functioning will always remain mysterious and unknown no matter how sophisticated neuroscience might become. And, so it is with the unconscious. There is a negativity that pervades all of life—an unknown dimension that remains opaque.

We can now add to this yet another aspect—the virtuality of time as a past that always presses on the present, on the actual “now.” Such a time dimension—in the form of memories, traumas, dreams, hallucinations, and above all desire, haunts the register of the Real and the affected body. From a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, when the object “looks” back desire has been created in the register of fantasy and impossibility. It was, after all, Barthes loss of his mother that prompted his hesitation. Simply put, the object of desire is caught up in an unfulfillable (impossible) search for an eternally “lost” pleasure—a pleasure referred to as jouissance—when, as infants, we become civilized as our bodies become “shaped” by cultural discourses and image formations as we slowly enculturate to become law biding citizens. Psychoanalytically speaking, aphanisis or a fading of the full possibility of the polymorphous sexual subject takes place as the infant realizes that the Other (parents and society at large) demands and expects certain behaviors of him or her that have to be followed. The infant can no longer expect to get every
little thing s/he wants. Some pleasure has to be given up—it becomes lost in this sense, retrievable only through imaginary fantasy. In a phallogocentric society such as ours, to become a speaking subject this means the infant must take up either a masculine or feminine position usually along biological lines. One must (mistakenly) assume that one has the phallus (active) as the abstract symbol of power, or one must assume that one is (passive) the phallus. This latter position associated with the feminine position, stands in for what masculinity desires to feel complete. For Barthes, an openly outed gay who strove not to be so positioned by the symbolic order, the desire to recall his mother to help restore this lost jouissance was therefore especially acute.

Exploring the Psychic Real

Let us now look on the painter’s side of things rather than that of the spectator, to flesh out the claims when exploring the intricacies between desire, jouissance, memory, time, and the psychic register of the Real. In her magnificent study of Rembrandt, whose prolific output of self-portraits constitutes and exemplifies the artist striving to assert self-reflective individuality so that he might improve his status as a miller’s son in seventeenth century Holland, a country where both Church and Royalty had been displaced by an early constitutional government formulated by a moneyed haute bourgeoisie, Mieke Bal (1991) writes:

The self-portrait can become self-reflexive, not because it shows us the face we know to belong to the painter, but because it stands for the study—for the practice of painting and its difficulties...[T]he self-portrait gains in self-reflexivity when the reflection on painting is not signified in the study, in the exaltation of the self but in the detail that demonstrates the danger to the self....The body at risk is the representation of the threat to subjective wholeness that self-reflection poses. (pp.
254-255, added emphasis)
Bal fingers something like Barthes' *punctum*, but now placed on the artist's side. Of the hundreds (should we say thousands?) of portraits (paintings and sketches) that Rembrandt did, several stand out that mark the trace of this bodily “risk” she identifies. Despite his wealth, Rembrandt's life of ostentatious living led to bankruptcy and his life was filled with great personal tragedy (only one of his four children survived birth and his wife died at the young age of 30). Despite this, his artistic output increased, which seems contradictory. Yet, it is through artistic work that an artist's symptom separates itself from *jouissance*. The symptoms of Rembrandt's suffering brought on by the loss of his three children, wife and fortune, fueled his desire as he fell into subjective destitution. “[T]he symptom is *jouissance* as sense enjoyed by a subject, while a piece of [art] work offers a sense to be enjoyed by whoever wants to enjoy it ... the condition of creation is that the subject realizes that the Other does not exist” (p. 43), by which Miller (1998), Lacan's brother-in-law and the author of this sentence, means that through art the suffering associated with *jouissance* is sublimated. “The Other does not exist” refers to a pushing back of the expectations of the symbolic order that position and mortify the body in a particular way. There is a certain freeing of the self by facing the very void that is the empty center of the self, formed by the evacuation or loss of polymorphous sexuality—of *jouissance*. Only when Rembrandt dared to face this abyss within himself, brought on by the utter devastation of his psyche through those losses—his children, his wife and then his fortune, was he most successful in capturing that “danger to the self” which Bal writes about. Portraiture no longer is just simply a question of representing “subjective wholeness.” The representation of such “wholeness” is precisely what Lacan meant by his notion that the ego misrecognizes (*méconnaissance*) itself. It is when artists paint or snap portraits representationally that they avoid the “work” of being an artist. This
“work,” as I will come to show at the end of this essay, refers to the struggle with non-representation, with the attempt to open up realms of the unthought. So, for instance, Rembrandt’s reworking of the Bible along more secular grounds is yet another indicator of his struggle with this “big” Other as represented by the power of the Church. His secularization of biblical themes raised questions concerning official interpretations. Some have argued (Hayes, 1999) that the self-portraits of Bernini, Rembrandt’s contemporary, equally exhibit gazes that are always querulous and indecisive—no longer self assured and confident autonomous subjects was the case in their predecessors: Alberti, Botticelli, Leonardo, Michelangelo.

Let me develop a more, perhaps obvious example in the well-trodden iconography of Modernism that every art teacher knows, but now can be read with a twist of Deleuzean-Lacanian theory—the “expressionist” artistic output of Edvard Munch, the same Munch who could not part (easily) with his portraits, who worked continuously on some canvases for more than ten years, still feeling dissatisfied that the image was finished. Slavoj Zizek (1991) has done an excellent exposé of how Munch’s work embodies the Real, but it is Lacan in Seminar XII (1964-65), known as “Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis” who took the time to analyze in Seminar 12: Wednesday 17, March 1965, Munch’s celebrated self-portrait The Scream. What Lacan demonstrates is usually the very opposite of what “seems” representationally to be the case by this ‘portrait’ of Munch in a state of incomprehensible psychic turmoil. It is the scream that brings on silence and not the other way around says Lacan. The scream he says, “abolishes itself in silence... The scream is traversed by the space of the silence without dwelling in it; they are not linked either by being together or succeeding one another, the scream creates the abyss into which silence rushes.” This has “already happened,” he says, “when we see Munch’s image.” In other words, the silence of the scream pierces us right away. Its frozen moment of
time is instantaneously released. What remains “stuck in Munch’s throat,” the signification that he is unable to speak, that turns his larynx into a pipe, exposing the inherent point of failure (the very limit) of subjectivity, is the very ontological gap of Being itself—the gaping abyss that forms his mouth in the painting. This, properly speaking, is the “work” of portraiture. The subject is the subject of representation—of the signifier—precisely because of the status of this fundamental void of impossibility, the kernel of the Real that lies at the heart of subjectivity itself. This impossible void, nevertheless, enables the very condition of possibility for infinitude of possible significations to emerge. As Lacan and Zizek, his best contemporary translator show, Munch’s Scream makes accessible the impact of traumatic experience where we (in Hegelian terms) experience a “night of the world”—the “true” condition of the subject where the lived coherence and cohesion of the ego in control of reality becomes ruptured. The point is that this rupture happens more often than we think if we stay tuned to it and “work” through it. This is not “therapy” in the traditional sense, but recognition that the work of art sublimates the Real, and that there is a certain ethics to both viewing and doing such work. In the Freudian tradition working through one’s aggression, anxiety, angry, envy and so on, creatively; provide a distance from these uncontrollable emotional responses. Hence, the “ethics of the Real” that is involved requires sensitivity to the way we approach such a volatile and potentially destructive state of being.

Text: Deleuzean Moves of the Time-Image

The enigma of such portraiture, like that of the Mona Lisa’s smile, rests in this time dimension of the Real. It is this dimension of virtual time, a Deleuzean development, and the psychic register of the Real, a Lacanian development, which can help art educators rethink portraiture in an age of teletechnology where the mediated world of
lens technology and the ubiquity of the image seems to promote an overlooking of time as memory and the unconscious desire of the Real. This is what the next section attempts to do: provide an insight to such a possibility.

In an age of the image society where teletechnological media attempt to construct our societal consciousness, this part of the essay attempts to help rethink representation’s “outside” by drawing now on the work of Giles Deleuze to further Lacan by focusing on the “portraiture” of Francis Bacon and the “living” monumentalism of Jochen Gertz. This move might help us grasp the necessity of ruining representation by introducing a much-needed re-conceptualization of time and sensation that remains wedded to objects and their movements through narration, illustration, and representation. The attempt in this part of the essay is to grasp thinking of an art education that no longer goes from image to thought, that is from percut to concept—such a direction is overwhelming present in elementary art education where story telling narratives through images is perhaps the quintessential practice in all its possible myriad of forms—nor from concept to affect; that is from thought to image, which is the polar opposite practice that governs much of junior and high school art where self-expressionism still by and large reigns supreme and supported by various forms of arts based research where the researcher’s subjectivity still remains a central concern. Exceptions to this set of generalities can always be found—but this legacy of modernism continues to linger in our schools despite the rhetoric that there are inroads being made towards teaching more contemporary art forms like performance art, installation, and conceptualism—all three of which, provide a way to surpass the above stated bifurcated dialectic.

Performance art, installation and conceptual art are three forms that begin to deconstruct representation as such. In these forms, time has been pulled away from an action-image dominated by movement
(gesture) and explored as an entity in itself, and not attached to an object as famously developed in the early modernism by cubists and futurists. Performance art gives us time taken away from movement, often disembodying the voice and repeating movement through various forms of automation; conceptual art gives us thought immanent to the image, while installation art gives us conceptual time-space in which the body must relate to in new ways. In all three art forms, the event as a problematic comes to us from the “outside” – not in our comprehension or control.

To go beyond this stated bifurcation, we take the Deleuzean path where concept and image are one. As Deleuze (1989) puts it, “The concept is in itself in the image, and the image is for itself the concept. This is no longer organic and pathetic but dramatic, pragmatic, praxis, or action thought” (p. 161). To state this proposed trajectory as succinctly and forcefully as possible, an art education that is “fit” for contemporary society must move away from its emphasis on the “still” image and the action narrative, even that of journalistic photography where time is still governed by movement and space, and begin to identify the way time itself, in the current forms of the moving image of the new media, is being explored through “new lines of flight” that encompass virtual forms of presentation. This is where Nietzschean necessity of entertaining the “powers of the false,” a positive sense of lying (see Deleuze, 1989, chapter 5) becomes important since we no longer live in a society where fact and fiction can be distinguished from one another. Simulacra and the decentering of the faith and belief in the documentary (especially the factual claims of news) as just another form of construction necessitates that art educators rethink our teaching positions, which generally remain fixated by the “-isms” of modernism because they are easily categorized and can be taught as distinct movements, and especially because they appeal to the school curricula structures with their well-ordered buzzer blocked times of so many minutes. A different order
of understanding of the body, offered by some forms of time-cinema, installation art and performance, provide a change in perception that identifies a body of dispersed sensations that is being technologized and targeted as separate organs. The tension between the cyborgian body of technology and what William Gibson and sci-fi fans call “meat” is part of this identifiable gap—the gap between living “flesh” and dead “meat” which refuses to become entirely absorbed into the machine.

From a Deleuzian perspective a very different notion of the subject emerges, a subject not so much in control of its environment as an agent, but also not a subject who is entirely controlled by the institutional agencies (i.e., by Foucault’s understanding of governmentalities). His is not a body in the usual phenomenological sense as theorized by Husserl and then entertained by a long line of aestheticians starting from Merleau-Ponty and Mikel Dufrenne, but a body “before discourse, before words, before the naming of things” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 38), which reiterates a similar distinction Lyotard (1971) makes between the figure and the figural.

This view disrupts the usual seamless narratological arts based research and self-expressionistic works that are the order of the day. In this view, the image is unhinged from the body as well as reality. The subject to the body is reversed where the synthetic apperception of I-Me-present-to-itself becomes undone. Especially with cinema “the image no longer derives from perceiving (sleeping, memorizing ...) body, nor from a rain-archive of data; the image sets the subject adrift, sucking it into a transperceptive and ‘falsifying world.’ Thought becomes immanent to the image (Deleuze, 1989, p. 173). “Depth of field is no longer understood in relation to obstacles and the concealment of things...as in Euclidian perspective....but in relation to a light which makes us see beings and objects according to their opacity” (Deleuze 1989, p. 176). Thought becomes immanent
to the image. And, of course, this is one of the foundational ideas of conceptual art. We can apply this to the three art forms mentioned earlier. With installation art, the viewer is forced to piece a disjointed narrative together by him or herself, as the installation holds the “secret” of what is trying to be “shown” by not revealing nor reveling in its obviousness. Performance, which is just the opposite of conceptual art, attempts to introduce the body “Real” into movement by staging its event in such a way that its perception by spectators is duly “hesitated,” in the sense of time as durée, forcing estrangement and thus reflexion. Finally, with Conceptual Art, the force is to recognize art as an Idea where an anti-aesthetic approach requires that the witness (or artist) explicate to him or herself what the work is about. Time here is “hesitated” as well since, with some conceptual pieces, the viewer may never “get” it. The anti-narrative may never emerge.

Although these remarks may appear enigmatic because of the complexity of the contemporary shifts by artists to grasp anti-humanist notions of the self, I will begin by discussing one work of Francis Bacon as an artist who stood on the threshold between movement image and the time-image... still working with a “still” image but making it move, and one work by the Jochen Gertz, a conceptual artist whose “work” does away with representation, certainly not meant as a mere drift into abstraction or its variants. These two arts should help to articulate these somewhat troublesome theoretical musings.

**Francis Bacon: Nowhere Space and Time (Non-Euclidian Space)**

Bacon can be considered as the exemplary portrait artist in terms of emphasizing the psychic register of the Real as theorized by Lacan and exemplifying the time-image as contemplated by Deleuze. Deleuze (2004) has written a very important book exemplifying Bacon’s attempt to explore the body of the “flesh,” that is, the body of
sensation, what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) named (after Antonin Artaud) the “body without organs” (BwO). Sensation is no longer thought representationally—as the sense of stirring the emotions of the viewer—but in the sense of the consciousness of perceiving itself. This is not phenomenological for there is no “intent” by the consciousness for an object, which would plunge us back again into representation. While much can be said about Bacon, the approach here is to discuss his theory of affective embodiment by examining just one of his many works: Triptych May-June 1973. Since copyright laws are always problematic there is an excellent Bacon online site (http://www.francis-bacon.cx/) that lists his works chronologically. I encourage the reader to look up this particular work before reading ahead.

The first thing to note about Bacon is that many of his painting are composed as triptychs, which seem to lend themselves immediately to narrative representation. It is precisely such narrative representation of the movement image that is being deconstructed and the time of the gaps existing in the Real between the three frames that are being engaged, implicating the viewer to “figure” it out this “other” space-time dimension. Sometimes two or more characters (figures) are placed in the same space, which suggests an interaction between them as if they are caught in the middle of an act, even when this act seems stilled (sleeping, sitting, lying around, waiting). Time is introduced into his paintings through a “rough” style of paint application to the figures (especially the heads and bodies). Heads and bodies appear to be in constant motion, as if the body is constantly flowing and shifting. This movement, however, is non-narratological. Something always “seems” to be going on, but the viewer is unable to piece together some coherent story between the three frames. Further, the figures are often enclosed in a translucent surround by means of circles, parallelepipeds, or frames within the canvas—as if there is a proximal distance between inside and outside
of the body that is constantly being imperceptibly exchanged.

*Triptych May-June 1973* shows a single subject performing a sequence of actions in a bathroom. Two doorways on opposite walls frame the figure. In western perception, text is read left to right. It appears at first glance that Bacon attempts often to consciously reverse this taken-for-granted perception by forcing the viewer to read right to left. The right panel depicts a naked man vomiting into a bathroom sink. He then crosses the room (middle panel) and sits on a toilet (left panel), as if he is dead or keeled over. His face is buried in his hands. Hands and face form one big mass. Such would be a "normative" reading of the work. On closer inspection however, such a reading is put into serious doubt. When one focuses on the *details* another more striking problematic emerges. The light switch on the left panel is repeated on the right panel, but is has now "moved" to the other door! The doorjamb that frames the figure is depicted frontally in the center panel but the angle of the doorjambs on the left panel is painted from a slight movement to the right showing a bit of the left door, while in the right panel the doorjambs have been painted from a slightly left perspective showing slightly the perspective of the right door. So the left and right panel seems to be mirror opposites. The viewer now cannot read the narrative from right to left nor left to right, but is positioned on the center panel.

Bacon is not illustrating an action sequence, a movement image. He is conceptualizing something more profound by the implication of time that is being introduced. A light bulb appears in the central panel, which is obviously missing in the left and right panels. The light-switch is also absent in the central panel. In this new subject position, the viewer must begin to read these panels as to their symmetry or comparability. On both the left and right panels the body is clearly in pain—excreting abject bodily fluids: shit and vomit. As reversals these panels present us with two holes—the asshole and the mouth hole; the ass-mouth connection form a "desiring machine" in Deleuze
and Guattari's (1983) terms. The central panel adds to the clue. What is striking in this panel is the shadow that is coming out of the doorway. Clearly, this is not a "naturalistic" shadow, a representation of the figure, but "the night of the world" to use Hegel's phrase again. It is amorphous, having vampire-bat like qualities—what Deleuze and Guattari would name as "becoming-animal." As a body fluid, this shadow seems more viscose—thicker and more substantial than the figure who seems rather insubstantial. As if the shadow that flows from his body is more overwhelming, draining him so that he only appears as a corpse, making him the ghost of the shadow, reversing the usual understanding of shadow and its object. Something in the body is afflicting the subject. The body Real—the suffering of physic pain is being juxtaposed to its externalization as abjected bodily fluids made possible through the ass-mouth assemblage machine. The physical excesses of the body are compared to the shadow-Thing that is overwhelming him. Hence, there is a similarity between all three events, held in the way Bacon has presented us with the body of sensation through representation that has reversed substantiality and its void, the kernel of our unconscious Real.

**Jochen Gertz: The Disappearance of the Object**

Jochen Gertz is an artist, but an artist who does not draw, paint or sculpt! Further, he does not create objects in the usual sense of the term, nor is there anything to "see" in the usual way art education has treated sight. He might be called a portrait artist since the "work" of his art grapples with memory, namely monuments as "time that is out of joint." The idea of a monument is perhaps the apotheosis of what it means to remain in the realm of representation. The traditional purposes of a monument is to function like a stele, a beacon, to etch the memory into the most permanent and durable of materials—marble, stone, steel, bronze. Monuments are meant to center a community to a memory. All such commemoration leads to,
more or less, religious communion. It endorses an official memory to perpetuate a past recollection. Monuments act like banks—time and memory are locked into a social space like a vault, trapped as it were, into a permanent reminder.

Gertz is interested in the “other” of such memorializing, to awaken the forgetting that haunts every memorial of its permanency as it rusts, decays or is simply forgotten. His invisible monuments have a peculiar force to exhibiting what you are not supposed to see—the haunt of the Real. They make the spectator “see” what cannot be seen. They make the “visible” arise where it is lacking—to exhibit the time of absence of bodies and the memory gaps that are kept out of the perceptual space of representation. Their character is not “to say,” but to assert what cannot be said, the absent in the field of the visible. Like *The Scream*, these monuments plant a “bone in the throat,” so that their silence pierces that which is not being heard nor recollected. It forces the spectator to become a witness to that which is anamorphic to the monument itself. Gertz’s works initiate a transfer of memory into the viewer’s living memory, conveying the dead recollections of the monuments that usually mortify memory. Gertz by doing the “proper” work of art, once again releases time.

Although there are many examples in his oeuvre that continually demonstrate this uncanniness, let me take one: The Anti-Fascist Memorial in Hamburg (*Das Hamburger Mahnmal gegen Faschismus*), collaborated with his wife Esther Shavlev, and unveiled in Oct. 1986. (Again, I encourage the reader to google him— http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jochen_Gerz). The monument is a square column—40 feet high by three feet on each of its 4 sides. It was entirely wrapped with sheets of black lead. A sign in eight different languages was fixed to a nearby wall where spectators could read and then leave their signatures and thoughts on the monument by carving in the lead with the help of stilettos provided. (Some blasted the column with their shotguns, leaving their pellet marks of hate!) This phallic
column was meant to sink into the ground about six feet per year enabling inscribers to access its very peak. By Nov. 1993, five years later, it had completely vanished into the ground, becoming invisible. Only its flat top appeared at street level as a pavement stone covered by a glass plate as if to say that this is Germany's foundation. The sign for the instructions had appropriately ended with: “Since nothing can stand up for us against injustice.” Gertz’s conceptual monument changed its identity with the time of its movement to the point of its de-erection. No longer a souvenir, it became a memorial to the holes in memory, a memorial to oblivion, loss, absence and to the actual facts - all aspects of the Real. His “work” addresses the problem of representation by creating a screen to the effects of the Real. It is a non-specular resemblance, meta-mimetic in the way representation is erased through the time of its disappearance.

The “Work” of Art

The notion of “work” has emerged “time and time” again throughout this essay to suggest that the “work” of self-portraiture tackles the void of the Self in the register of the Real. This is the place of “becoming,” as the consciousness of perceiving itself. This is where the difficulty of art lies, the difficulty that emerges when working in a world of the aestheticized image that surrounds us through the screen images of telematic technologies. Representation is not life. Representation cannot preserve life. It can only expose its undoing, not as the essence of life, but as death. Death, like the inevitable butterfly that is chloroformed and pinned in order to be studied through the microscope. If life is not to be shown to be just representation, as so many structuralist theories tend to do, then the dimension of virtual time in the psychic register of the Real has to be engaged in as in the “works” of artists like Gertz, Munch, Bacon. They reveal a dimension of becoming that forms the gaps of the seamless narrative we tell ourselves, the narrative of representation
that forgets the *unthought*—the "work" of creativity.

This to suggest that art education much engage the affective body (BwO) at the level, paradoxically that is "beyond" representation, not a easy task in a designer capitalist world where it is the business of the neo-capitalist enterprise to reproduce an aestheticized world of consumerable images. I recall seeing Alfredo Jaar's installation called *Geography=W* _War, 1990_, I believe it was at the Venice Biennale but I am not sure, where the "secret" of the work was revealed to me only after I entered the darkened room and tried to figure out just what _was_ being shown—it was like a rebus puzzle. The installation consisted of a series of photograph-bearing light boxes that hung over six water-filled oil drums tightly packed together 3X3, the photos reflecting on the surface. I could blow on the water and make each one quiver, and also see my silhouette as a reflection when I peered over to look at the photos. One of the images that quivered in the water showed several people in hazmat suits investigating what looked like a dumpsite. Another image that reflected on the floating pool was a man holding his hands to his face. I soon realized that this was about corporate exploitation and expropriation not only of Nigeria's natural exports, such as oil, but also the use of Nigeria as a dumpling ground for toxic industrial waste by US and Europe. Jaar's light boxes reverse the usual advertised goods by projecting Nigerian people suffering from this capitalist exploitation, and we the viewers are potentially implicated, symbolically shown when we stare into the barrel to see the sights of devastation.

This essay points to the task at hand if a political and ethical engagement of the world by our art students is to be maintained, but does not offer some sort of definitive curriculum. It suggests a change to installation, performance, time-based imagery, and conceptual art, which offers the possibility of such a direction. I believe these arts offer the power of a self-reflexion, where the core of the self as BwO is disturbed as an affective neurological level as marked by
the “X.” In the past, the field of art education has tended to follow (albeit belatedly) the trends of contemporary art—theoretically and stylistically. There are no guarantees that the field of education, which is continually seduced by representational images, will engage such a possibility. Is it even possible in overcrowded schools that are perhaps structured to prevent such awareness? “Time” will tell.¹

¹ I would like to thank Olivia Gude for her suggestions when rewriting this essay.

References


Plazabilities for Art Education: Community as Participant, Collaborator & Curator

Kathleen Keys

In the following article, a plaza metaphor and theories of plazability are applied to the recent work of three “Other” art educators to acknowledge, examine and articulate a refreshed vision for an art education based in community pedagogy which expands possibilities, builds community, and uses art to work for social change. Examples suggesting such achievements in creating plazability include work from a community artist backed by a visionary community arts foundation, a progressive cultural museum director and staff, and a contemporary artist each actively engaging the community in diverse ways. The innovative and community grounded practice and philosophies of these “Other” art educators suggest new possibilities for art teaching and learning through making a transfer to collective authority in the art classroom and call for the creation of new discursive spaces within art education practice.

A Plaza Metaphor

While spending significant periods of time in Mexico, Spain and Italy over the past decade, I was both impressed and extremely jealous of the many public spaces that seem to freely exist for myriad public use. The characteristics of the plaza as a free and aesthetically intriguing space make them intensely desirable destinations or throughways for tourists and residents alike. Every city and town abroad it seems, no matter how grand or small, offers gathering sites in their plazas which are appropriate in number and size for each locale. It is as if supply of citizenry equals demand for plazas (Whyte, 1980). Some are simple with just a few benches, others are fringed with sculpted trees, crowned by lampposts or accented with tiled fountains, and still others hold intriguing contemporary public art. These physical spheres of public space, free of many social controls
(Whyte, 1980) provide people, all people, a place to be, to sit and rest, mingle, imagine, and dream. I am consistently refreshed and reinvigorated by visiting plazas great and small. I am freer in these spaces in other countries because I feel in communion with others, even strangers, within these environments of plazability.

In this article, this plaza metaphor and articulated theories of plazability are applied to the recent work of three “Other” art educators (Congdon, 2005) to acknowledge, examine and suggest a refreshed vision for an art education based in community pedagogy (Keys, 2003) which expands possibilities, builds community, and uses art to work for social change. Congdon’s (2005) contextualization of “Other” art educators involves this scholar’s recognition of the valuable art education and life lessons taught informally to her by working with and learning from folk, outsider and self-taught artists. Borrowing Congdon’s reference, I broaden it to include three diverse cultural workers including a community artist backed by a visionary community arts foundation, a progressive cultural museum director and his staff, and a unique contemporary artist. These individuals acting as informal art educators “implement and radiate pedagogical and philosophical practice” (Keys, 2005, p. 188-189). Consequently, the innovative and community grounded practice and philosophies of these “Other” art educators suggest new possibilities for art teaching and learning through making a transfer to collective authority in the art classroom and call for the creation of new discursive spaces within art education practice.

These examples reiterate what formal art education should offer its students—rich and compelling content, active communal participation in creative pursuits and real examination of important social issues. The projects described are worthy for curriculum inclusion within K-12 and higher art education as subjects of study, discussion or adapted replication and/or as inspiration for other teaching and learning plazabilities. As the article unfolds, learning
contributions and specific ideas for application within K-12 or university art education teaching are shared.

Provocative questions suggested by these examples include: What if art education regularly included community-based interactive art that generates social participation? What if it became typical within art education curricula to provide learning experiences to connect people to one another in a larger community context through the creation, display and character of an artwork or cultural exhibition? What if art education consistently addressed cultural identity, civic participation, and the creation of lessons, programs, or projects that fight for social justice?

Connections to Plazability in Community Arts & Art Education

There is much discussion in the community arts practice-based literature (Baca, 2002; Cieri & Peeps, 2000; Cleveland, 1992) exploring projects that create or reclaim the lost and free spaces of interaction in the United States. Work that uses the arts to manifest social change in part is dedicated to the subtext of creating or reclaiming free spaces for dialogue, meeting and interaction. Similar to the creative potential of the plaza, Baca (2002) and Kilkelly & Leonard (2003) indicate, both literal physical spaces and metaphysical free spaces are created in projects involving parks, murals, theater and other places through arts processes.

Although, within the formal field of art education, theoretical and practical interests within art education relating to community connections and partnerships¹, community arts², community-based art education³, arts-based community development⁴, and community pedagogy⁵ have steadily increased over the past fifteen years, myriad opportunities for increased adoption, utilization and exploration of these types of art education practice for all age levels are still largely untapped (Keys, 2007).
Building a Theory of Plazability

The historical nature of the public square is to intermix persons and diverse activities (Sennet, 1978). In the United States of America, however, as Baca (2002) notes, these public spheres of activity are seemingly limited. During the mid to late twentieth century citizens began to become isolated and faced a gradually unbalancing private life and an empty public life in part due to formation of a new capitalist, secular, urban culture (Sennet, 1978). As increases in material wealth began to develop among immigrant families and communities—and individuals relied more heavily upon capitalist systems, community dependency greatly lessened. The once prevalent and extremely diverse “multiplicity of contact points by which people entered into social relations with the city” soon withered as upward movement in material wealth was matched by social withdrawal (Sennet, 1970, p. 56). Greater financial security led to the extreme independence of the family structure and creation of self-support systems no longer in need of sharing resources of all kinds with community members. Additionally, the family appropriated the social functions and contacts ounce sought out in the greater community and city (Sennet, 1970). Earlier demands for sharing resources and constantly negotiating space, rules and social behavior ensured an active system of lived community (Sennet, 1978) among people living in close proximity. This guaranteed that daily life was indeed a journey between various diverse groups dependent upon open connections with one another even in non-harmonious or warring times (Sennet, 1970).

Conversely, the increase in the “physical arrangement of life in suburbia is viewed as promulgating extreme privatization and a dysfunctional public life, scattering residents without providing central places that encourage social interaction” (Talen, 2000, p. 345). Gradually, social interaction and forums for social exchange in society were simplified as technological and bureaucratic systems became readily available and accessible (Sennet, 1970).
In contemporary times, Trend (1992) cites the continuation of a “precipitous erosion of communal spirit” (p. 82) based in part on the rise of corporate capitalism in the 1980s and its equating of wealth with virtue. This reality leaves less vision for civic responsibility in our society, and “[w]hen public life and public space are lacking or neglected, people become isolated, eroding any sense of communal spirit and cohesion” (Slessor, 2001, p. 36).

In New urbanism, the American urban design movement arising in the 1980s, the need to revive civic importance in urban planning principles by creating public space (Hochstein, 1994; Kunstler, 1996) is stressed and “many of its design prescriptions are predicated on the role of public space in promoting resident interaction and sense of community” (Talen, 2000, p. 347). In addition to offering proximity to others and opportunity for contact in an appropriate space for interaction, public space “provides a venue for chance encounters, which serves to strengthen community bonds” (p. 347). The provision of shared open spaces, pedestrian walkways and other gathering places (such as plazas) play a strong role in once again strengthening the cultivation of a “living community” (Christoforidis, 1994). Additionally, Hayden (1995) posits that provisions of good public space help to foster a sense of cultural belonging while also leading people to acknowledge and respect diversity.

In planning for cosmopolis, which involves a revival of inquiry about and appreciation for the existence of the city as sites for memory, desire and the spirit or sacred, Sandercock (1998) suggests the:

need for a diversity of spaces and places in the city: places loaded with visual stimulation, but also places of quiet contemplation, uncontaminated by commerce where the deafening noise of the city can be kept out so that we can listen to the ‘noise of the stars’ or the wind or water, and the voice(s) within ourselves. (p. V)
The field of art education can work in myriad ways toward building plazability by simply stepping out of the classroom or inviting others into our teaching and learning worlds, to reclaim or create new literal and metaphorical plazas where social interaction, the building of community, a return to communal dependence may start to take shape. Innovative pedagogical approaches similar to those shared here use art to work for social change, recreate a multiplicity of contact points in and around art making with the community, and reinvigorate a sense of communal spirit for those involved.

Community-Based Interactive Art Generating Social Participation

What if art education regularly included community-based interactive art that generates social participation? Projects sponsored by grants and other fundraising efforts from the Black Rock Arts Foundation (BRAF) must carry this goal of interactive and artistic social participation. One recent literal physical space making and metaphysical free space creation project was David Best’s Hayes Green Project-Temple.

From June until November of 2005 an ornate Thailand inspired temple lived at the center of the new Hayes Green, a brand new and previously empty plaza in the Hayes Valley area of San Francisco. Funded by BRAF and the San Francisco Arts Commission, David Best and his crew built this temporary installation in the spirit of previous temples created by Best at the annual Burning Man festival in the Black Rock desert. “Best’s 30’x30’ gazebo-style temple structure placed in the center of the green space was made largely from recycled materials, and offered a focal point at the center of the Green for community celebration and reflection” (BRAF, n.d.).

Temple held a certain aesthetic majestic power and actively drew people in as they encountered it. Quickly after its installation, people made marks and tags, left messages and favorite quotes, and wrote
poetry or lines from songs with markers or pens onto the simple wood-like surfaces. Some participants also built small mixed media altars within and on the uneven layers of the temple structure.

On an initial level the project emphasized community, environmental stability and art made from recycled materials which in turn echoes the city of San Francisco’s commitment to sustainable, livable communities. As time passed and *Temple* continued to serve as a nexus for free and creative expression, it became mainly cherished or despised as a new local community landmark. Many residents in Hayes Valley did not appreciate it as a work of active community art, but even more residents and countless visitors saw *Temple* in other exciting ways.

**Plazabilities of David Best's Hayes Green Temple**

The plaza metaphor is easy to contextualize here as the project quite literally took place in and assisted in the physical development of a new plaza. During the project people interacted with the space, through it and with each other. People perused the markings, drawings, collages, and offerings left by others and presumably left some markings themselves. *Temple* stood on the Hayes Green intensely encouraging the public to participate in this collective and celebratory artwork. It brought layers of peacefulness, intrigue and joy into the space.

David Best's work achieves plazability by focusing its energies on possibilities rather than limitations. It convincingly communicated that we are all creative and welcome to create. Best provided an accessible blank slate where the spirit, intentions, and creativity of participating people were housed in a single structure. Additionally, the work challenges the obstacle of artistic production norms in our society. For many, this was the first time they had entered into a free creative situation in which results would immediately be viewed by others. It may have been the first time they encountered an invitation
to join into a creative practice or to freely examine artistic responses made by others outside of established gallery or museum structures.

Best's project calls us to repeat and build on his foundations. To actively create temporary and permanent plazas of creative production, to enliven space with cross-communal communication, and to provide encounters with the delightfully unexpected. It would truly be amazing if the sharing of collective creative and exhibition space became habitual or commonplace. The results being that young people saw this activity as usual, expected and a baseline within art education for building communal and creative activity.

**Temple Applications**

Moving beyond a “build it and they will come” philosophy art educators need to stretch themselves further than the making of murals as community projects and think of new ways to build metaphorical or literal plazas for collective art production. Educators also need to embrace organic processes and uncontrolled endings in community related works—waiting with others to see just what could and will happen in projects like *Temple*. Facilitating the subversion of maker and viewer in community may yield true unfettered collaboration. Teachers may take these ideas one step further and facilitate community and collective design and decision making throughout the entire project—rather than just in an invited process or response.

**Curatorial Plazabilities**

The innovation of a communally shared curatorial impulse is ripe for experimentation in many art education contexts. Art educators (Ballengee-Morris & Keys, 2001; Blandy & Congdon, 1993, 1988) have theoretically and practically explored and engaged in local community oriented curatorial practices within the realms of the university gallery or museum environments. The next two
plazability examples broaden and deepen the idea of community as both collaborator and curator and lend great ideas for continued art and cultural education practice for all levels by inviting the community to fully participate in exhibition visioning, planning and implementation.

**Connecting through Creation, Display and Character**

What if it became typical within art education curricula to provide learning experiences that connect people to one another in a larger community context through the creation, display and character of the artwork or cultural exhibition?

**Harrell Fletcher**

In 2004, artist as public intellectual (Becker, 1995) Harrell Fletcher, asked two intriguing questions making a ripple in the norms of a high art world tradition. “What if the artworld were based on a socialist system instead of a capitalist one? What if the goals we were shooting for were sharing, equality and mutual support, instead of competition, rarefication and celebrity?” (Fletcher, 2004). He answered these provoking questions with his contributions to the 2004 Whitney Biennial Exhibition.

His artistic response in addition to two displayed videos was the facilitation of ten small exhibitions in and around the burroughs of New York City in cafes, a drug store, a boutique, a library, and other unusual locales. The artists were people who had never exhibited their artwork or readily identified themselves as artists, and the curators who had only a month to organize each small show were university student volunteers from Fletcher’s course at the Cooper Union School of Art. In the actual Whitney Biennial Exhibition space a generously sized, Fletcher-published newspaper entitled, *This Container Isn’t Big Enough: A Project for the Whitney Biennial and Socrates Sculpture Park*, containing a map and listing of all the community exhibition sites
throughout Manhattan, Roosevelt Island, Brooklyn and Queens, was printed for exhibition attendees’ perusal and potential use in what some might call a Whitney Biennial alternative gallery hop.

A New York Times reviewer and “hop” participant captures the essence of Fletcher’s unique project:

After a day of trekking around the city, looking at modest drawings on notebook paper, it occurred to me that the art on display—as charming as it is—is not the point of this project. Rather, these off-site exhibitions were catalysts for a chain of social interactions between the students, the artists and local residents who might otherwise dismiss contemporary art. (Fineman, 2004, p. 48)

In direct relation to Fletcher’s own artistic research questions above, this collaborative work exemplifies an art education pedagogy tied to social justice investigations. In an active sharing of resources, Fletcher keeps an up to date website complete with free, open and shared chronicling of his artistic ideas for new projects as well as documentation of his various and intriguing completed projects, exhibitions, and videos.

**Plazabilities from Harrell Fletcher and This Container...**

By simply teaching students about the open and intensely creative and community oriented artistic practice of Harrell Fletcher, young people are exposed to an artist who approaches art making and exhibition in important innovative ways. By jumping the shark of the staunchly traditional context of the Whitney Biennial, he has at least temporarily shown us all that there is indeed more room in the world for art by ordinary people. Here he illustrates the point also that there is more to art than what is in the museum. The plazabilities evident in Fletcher’s work include sharing resources, dialogue, community interaction, and collective production. Within
the specific Whitney Biennial project—Fletcher extended the potential plaza of the Whitney Museum out of its doors and into the community. The Whitney Biennial also becomes his collaborator in building a broader—freer plaza. He added the consideration of other citizens’ visual works to an extended mapping of art making that should be honored and considered regularly.

Fletcher’s *This Container*... project achieves plazability by focusing its energies on possibilities rather than limitations. In his process he shared the curatorial power and exhibition spaces with many, collaboratively facilitating a web of exhibition throughout NYC—building up rather than containing, inviting people in rather than shutting them out or reinforcing the normal barriers of entry into the New York artworld. From Fletcher’s honest and non-pretentious approach to art and life, educators and young people can learn to build plazas and communities, to get the work out and to do really ingenious things in the spirit of sharing creative ideas and celebrating artistic production and working with the community as collaborator.

**This Container...Applications**

Inspired by Fletcher’s work, educators may facilitate the scouting by students of any and all forms of creative expression in their school, neighborhoods and community. Next, alternative ways to display these expressions in alternative venues beyond the gallery and museum could be determined. Pushing further than shows in the local coffee shop, downtown windows or the library, students could investigate opportunities to curate exhibits with and for people at the laundromat, car wash, grocery, barbershop, dry cleaner, pet shop, etc. This subversion of traditional gallery and museum protocols by the Whitney Museum and Fletcher negates the idea of individual artist as genius and instead commits to sharing the exhibition stage with ordinary people—serving as a reminder about the importance
and existence of creativity in our society.

With older students, educators may challenge classrooms to propose compelling new collective approaches and artworks to local or regional juried exhibitions in more formal venues—to again reverse the roles of curator, artist and audience.

Cultural Identity, Civic Participation, and Social Justice

What if art education consistently addressed cultural identity, civic participation, and building programs or projects that fight for social justice?

Ron Chew and the Community as Curator

Recruited in 1991 to direct the Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle, Ron Chew was recognized in 2004 with the Western Museum Association’s Director’s Chair Award and as The Ford Foundation’s, “Leadership for a Changing World” award winner. In addition to making significant gains in the organization’s fiscal health over the past fifteen years—Chew’s now seemingly institutionalized directorial vision has included an innovative approach to curatorial practice. This method for visioning, planning and implementing cultural and historical exhibitions is based largely on the importance of oral history and the stories of the local people from Seattle’s International Chinatown district. The approach combines “cutting-edge presentations with a locally oriented emphasis on social justice” (Swarzer, 2004, para. 5). In several recent oral history based exhibitions, Chew invited the local community to the curatorial table. This invitation was not just for local citizens to participate in a steering committee or a brainstorming session, but rather to fully engage in cultural exhibition curatorial processes. These community members were invited as full and equal partners not just as assistants or to occupy an advisory board. Chew facilitated large scale ongoing local community generation and implementation of an exhibition
vision for the 2001 *If Tired Hands Could Talk: Stories of Asian Pacific American Garment Workers* exhibition. He set up a volunteer committee of current and past women garment workers and their children who “collected oral histories, gathered display materials, and designed an exhibit to illuminate the untold story of Seattle’s hidden past, the legacy of its immigrant garment workers” (Swarzer, 2004, para. 6). Surfing the exhibition archives of the Wing Luke Asian Museum website one finds documentations of numerous amazing community curated cultural exhibitions.

**Plazabilities from Ron Chew and the Wing Luke Asian Museum**

The work of Ron Chew and the Wing Luke Asian Museum actively navigates a reversal of cultural loss and erasure of once greatly endangered oral histories and local knowledge by seriously collecting stories of the people. As an added layer—it is the local people who are learning to do the collecting and the sharing cultivating new traditions of voicing, shared empowerment and strong cultural identity and pride. Ways of life, stories and experiences are brought to life and vividly shared in the exhibition process and in the actual ongoing museum exhibitions. In these ways, Chew and his staff actively build and continually enlarge a plaza formation expanding possibilities, building community, and using art and cultural exploration to work for social change.

Ron Chew’s example achieves plazability by focusing on possibilities rather than limitations. His recently earned high profile awards solidify hope that others may follow in his footsteps in making these cultural plazas even richer, stronger and larger. Indeed by mentoring and training a veritable generation of young museum leaders who have all worked or interned at Wing Luke Asian Museum, he has both institutionalized this process and formed this approach as habitual for many emerging cultural workers.
Ron Chew and Wing Luke Asian Museum Applications

Inspired by Ron Chew and the community curatorial approach of the Wing Lake Asian Museum, educators for all levels may consider involving students in issue and oral history research with community informants. Important skills can be learned by facilitating community decisions about what is important to explore, create artwork for or about, and to exhibit in relation to collected research. Pushing further, like Chew, students may invite community members into their planning and investigations and count them as equal partners in the community project at hand. Final work could be displayed at school, local community centers or other alternative locations—and stress the importance of narrative, life story and oral history collection among diverse generations.

Reflections on Subversions and Reversals of Power

The three examples reference cultural workers who are working from positions of power as funded community artist, director/curator, and established contemporary artist. In the accounts of their recent work, interesting instances in which power relations and expectations have been overturned or reversed, when things that are normally not done, are done readily exist. Each cultural worker implements a system of shared authority and power in contexts in which this does not usually happen. These approaches are also key to building plazability in art education.

In addition to the engendering of community, New Urbanist writers (Sandercock, 1998; Whyte, 1980) reference the freedom from social controls and hierarchical power, the opportunity for anonymity, and possibility of becoming a stranger in city public spaces as other strong points. Brill (2001) adds that:

[i]f Public life offers a freeing from control by the social structure of kin, neighbors, institutions and the state, it is also a social leveler, an equalizer of power inequities, at least
temporarily and locationally, and because access is relatively free, it is a generally accessible freedom. (p. 54)

Brill (2001) discusses that state, corporate and or other social control mechanisms [such as museum protocols and the education system] oppose one another in the public sphere, but stresses that this “can only happen when citizens have and welcome a wide diversity of opinions, can confer in an unrestricted fashion, have freedom of assembly and association and freedom of expression and publication of these opinions” (p. 54). As hooks (2003) articulates, when we stop analyzing along traditional lines of socialized hierarchy, and “can value rightly all members of a community we are breaking a culture of domination” (p. 37). The three explored examples echo this break in cultural domination by allowing new answers to emerge regarding questions such as, Who can be an artist? Who can exhibit in the Whitney Biennial? And who can make and curate culture and cultural history exhibitions?

In a call for educators to foster a transfer to collective authority and combat the tendencies of traditional art education to over emphasize individuality and competition and thus artistically alienate students, Trend (1992) calls on teachers to instead cultivate a consensual environment in the classroom. “When youngsters receive collective authority for the execution of work, art class can become a laboratory for the practice of democratic decision making” (p. 92-93). All three cultural workers exemplify consensual environments in the presented projects and provide forums for community decision making.

Trend (1992) also suggests:

[O]ne needs to ask how cultural producers can evaluate ways of working that dislodge conventional roles of maker and viewer, in effect encouraging audiences to be active producers of texts rather than passive receivers of them. How can artists and writers help validate the culture that people produce in the
course of their daily lives? (p. 137)

By asking the general public to use their own experience to create, contribute to, or curate community art or cultural documentation places them in positions of collective and shared power and leadership. The shared examples reverse the traditional artist/audience, and curator-director/audience dialectics by positioning the audience as collaborating artists, educators, and curators. These good examples and best practices of making the transfer to collective authority in art and cultural settings, show us it is also possible to facilitate this shared power into formal educational environments.

New Visions for Art Education Practice

Checked against the plaza metaphor and criteria for achieving plazability, these examples remain inspirational for art education. Educators can take ideas or approaches to create plazability in their own teaching. Educators need to go outside the venue of the traditional art classroom and/or invite a collaboration with the community inside school walls to encourage plazability. Educators can work to create similar discursive public spaces with K-12 as well as pre-service art teachers to subvert or reverse the traditional roles of artists, curators, and directors in community art projects. Staying informed about local, national and international current community arts endeavors and arts based community development projects (Keys, 2007) can provide additional resources and glimpses for art teachers into what is possible.

Art teachers for all levels should embrace facilitative approaches to reverse, subvert, or otherwise question traditional power relations in art making, viewing, teaching, and learning whenever possible. Creating opportunities for roles of maker/viewer, curator/receiver, and teacher/student to be reversed—or taking steps toward establishing collective authority in art class for project beginnings, process, decision making and final display or exhibition is paramount. It is
“incumbent upon radical educators and artists to assist reconstituting an arena for civic dialogue by validating the significance of a people’s culture and recovering the public function of art” (Trend, 1992, p. 105).

Conclusions

The aforementioned examples from David Best and the Black Rock Arts Foundation, Harrell Fletcher’s Whitney Biennial project, and Ron Chew and the Wing Luke Asian Museum illustrate the idea of generating plazabilities within art and cultural work and likewise provide new visions for plazability within art education practice.

Communities, art teachers, artists, scholars, and other cultural workers are challenged to rework the presented examples of community as participant, community as collaborator, and community as curator into innovative curricular designs and implementation at all art education levels. David Best and BRAF call for art education to regularly include community-based interactive art that generates social participation. Harrell Fletcher’s work encourages art education curricula to provide learning experiences to connect people to one another in a larger community context through the creation, display and character of exhibitions, and Ron Chew and the Wing Luke Asian Museums’ curatorial approaches suggest that art education address cultural identity, civic participation, and the creation of lessons, programs or projects that fight for social justice.

Working for an art education yielding plazability is a worthwhile endeavor for facilitating socially relevant learning in classrooms and communities. The characteristics of the plaza as free, unencumbered and as an aesthetically intriguing space which expands possibilities, builds community, and uses art and culture to work for social change are intensely desirable for art education tourists, residents and students alike.
Endnotes

1 Community connections and partnerships: Irwin & Kindler, 1999; La Porte, 2004; Marche, 1998.
6 http://www.harrellflletcher.com
7 http://www.wingluke.org

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Maya Paintings as Teachers of Justice: Art Making the Impossible Possible

Kryssi Staikidis

This article examines Maya paintings as historical documents, political platforms and conduits for cultural transmission in two local Maya communities. Particular attention is paid to the recent history of genocide of Maya peoples in Guatemala and the production of paintings as visual reminders of cultural loss and regeneration, as well as visual means to protect Maya future generations. Collaborative ethnography and decolonizing methodologies (Lassiter, 1998; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) are used in this study; thus, Maya artists speak through written dialogues and interviews in first voice regarding massacres that were kept clandestine for three decades. This paper addresses the potential and capacity for paintings to relay concepts of social justice. In two Maya contexts, paintings are seen by artists as didactic works that express outrage and concurrent hope. Art is used to transform that which feels impossible into possibility(ies).

As a female, narrative-based painter, I wanted to study painting outside of a formal setting primarily influenced by a European-American teaching model. I was interested in the idea of mentoring that sprung directly from studio practice, in a studio setting, with painters whose work was predominantly informed by personal and cultural narratives. Therefore, I went to study with two Maya painters, Pedro Rafael González Chavajay, a Tz'utuhil painter from San Pedro La Laguna, Guatemala, and Paula Nicho Cúmez, a Kaqchikel painter from San Juan de Comalapa, Guatemala. Over a period of four years, I was mentored in painting within each of the artist's studios. Initially, when I began my studies in Guatemala, I knew that there were political problems and that the country had endured warfare, but I had no idea of the severity, nor of the actual terror that gripped the nation, especially the indigenous peoples.

As an art educator in the United States, it is natural to reflect upon
the theme Im/possibilities from within the context of the academy where North American education often squashes controversy and represses social justice issues as a means to comfort the status quo. The call for JSTAE submissions states:

The strikethrough in possibilities concerns the slippery routes taken by the ingenuity of art educators who have navigated censorship, erasure, and obstacles in social theory orientations to art education in today’s socio-political climate. Those who achieve the “impossible” tend to focus their energies on possibilities rather than limitations. Possibilities encompass the big picture, and what the future holds for our profession (Knight & Wightman, 2006).

As a painter, student, researcher and art educator, I went to study art in two informal settings – Guatemalan Maya artist’s studios. Therefore, I would like to take the opportunity, in this instance, to expand the framework for examining the journal theme, Im/possibilities, moving it out of the academy, and into rural Maya indigenous community contexts. What happens when Maya painters, who are also teachers, experience three decades of genocide of their peoples and attempt to navigate “censorship, erasure and obstacles” and “focus their energies on possibilities rather than limitations” through making paintings as a means of illuminating atrocities that have taken place, so as to liberate, in some form, their communities?

In San Pedro La Laguna and San Juan de Comalapa, Guatemala, life and the surrounding visual culture function as textbook. This text is not separated from lived experiences, the artwork, the artist, the teacher or the teaching methods. Therefore, when indigenous peoples in the numbers of 200,000 have been exterminated at the hands of a tyrannical government, unfortunately backed by the U.S. government (NISGUA, 2007), then education is not only urgent, but activist out of necessity. In fact, education rooted in social justice becomes essential for survival. There is the prospect that through
revealing, art can liberate, teach, and create possibility, where otherwise there is none.

The Maya Painting Movement in Context

A Brief Overview of Guatemalan History

Maya populations have been under siege since the Spanish invasion of the 1530s. This state of siege has affected Maya indigenous communities in all of their aspects, including art making. The following brief description of the last four decades in Guatemala might serve to lend some perspective to the growth of the painters’ movements in the Lake Atitlan and highland regions of Guatemala. During the course of my conversations with the painters living around Lake Atitlan and San Juan de Comalapa (Staikidis, 2004, 2006), I received accounts, actually horror stories, about life during the recent war. They told of children not being able to go out for days on end due to the army’s occupation of the streets, young men being forcibly recruited into the army after leaving an early evening Mass, relatives being physically tortured and brutally murdered in front of family, and all manner of personal losses suffered at the hands of the Guatemalan army and clandestine death squads.

In the epilogue, written in 1999, to Jennifer Harbury’s book, Searching For Everardo: A Story of Love, War and the CIA in Guatemala, she writes that the Truth Commission in Guatemala report concluded that the Guatemalan military had carried out a thirty-five year campaign of genocide against the Maya peoples and was responsible for 93 percent of the atrocities committed. A total of 200,000 civilians were murdered or “disappeared” and more than 600 massacres occurred. In thirty-five years of war, not a single army prisoner survived. One million Maya were forcibly incorporated into a civil patrol system that was required of all rural males. The scorched earth operations, particularly in the early 1980s, resulted in entire villages being wiped out - men, women and children. Extreme
brutality was directed against Maya women, who were tortured, raped and murdered. Large numbers of girls and boys were victims of extremely violent killings (Friemoth, 1999). Seventy thousand internal refugees were corralled into permanent containment areas under military control; thus, the Guatemalan military ensured its domination over every aspect and facet of everyday life (Friemoth, 1999; Kinzer, 2006; Sanford, 2003; Simon, 1987). Harbury (1997) notes, “the United States was found to have contributed to the repression by funding, training and closely collaborating with the military” (p. 329). Government repression in Guatemala reached its peak in the early 1980s (Simon, 1987, p. 13). The final 3,600-page United Nations’ Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) report blames the 200,000 deaths on the “racist” policy of the Guatemalan government and holds responsible the country’s military and paramilitary forces for the killings, tortures and disappearances. It also accuses the US of directly and indirectly supporting a “fratricidal confrontation” by providing sustained training, arms and financial aid. Although the US role peaked in the 1981-1983 period, it did not end until the peace accords were signed in 1996 (Friemoth, 1999).

This has had horrific consequences for Guatemala’s Maya indigenous populations who number 60% out of 15 million inhabitants. By 1985, 440 Maya villages had been wiped out (Harbury, 1997; Manz, 2004). And in its final report, in 1999, the CEH (Guatemalan Truth Commission) concluded that army massacres had destroyed 626 villages, 1.5 million were displaced by the violence, and more than 150,000 were driven to seek refuge in Mexico (Sanford, 2003). The army went after the villagers, knowing very well that this uprising was deeply rooted within the Maya peoples themselves. Many villagers were forced to betray their neighbors by becoming informants in order to pay for food to feed their families. Simon states:

Present day counter-insurgency has probably done as much
to alter Indian life as the Spanish Conquest and its aftermath, and one cannot help but wonder if the culture that the Mayas have sustained since the sixteenth century will endure even fifty more years. (1987, p. 15)

Since the Spanish invasion, Maya indigenous peoples have systematically been denied their land, then been forced to work it for pathetic wages by Spanish landowners, the Catholic clergy, eighteenth century coffee barons and, later, by the Guatemalan army. Harbury (1997) compares the situation in Guatemala to apartheid South Africa where the ruling white minority made indentured servants out of the majority. But she also states that the Mayas’ blood ties that have bound them together have kept their hearts and minds alive during the cruelest times. She states:

Even now the Mayas clung to their own languages, some twenty-six ancient mother tongues, they wrapped themselves in their own hand woven fabrics, and they worshiped defiantly in their secret temples hidden far up in the volcanoes...Battered and starving and ridiculed, they have never surrendered. (p. 9)

Since 1995, there have been more than 200 exhumations of other clandestine cemeteries of massacre victims in Guatemala. Each of these exhumations has included the filing of a criminal case with forensic evidence against the Guatemalan army and its agents (Sanford, 2003). Although the war officially ended in 1996, people who work for unions and human rights, and are otherwise politically involved are still unsafe. On March 21, 2003, this statement was issued by “Rights Action”:

Witnesses claim that on March 8th, National Civil Police shot a CUC land activist in the back, then the leader of the paramilitary group shot him at close range as he lay injured on the ground. The police then captured a fellow farmer and land activist, now imprisoned, and charged him with
murder and illegal weapons possession. (p. 2)

Violations of political, economic, civil, and social rights and threats against activists who seek peaceful solutions are on the rise. “Rights Action” states, “we fear and predict more illegal and violent evictions and other acts of repression in the near future” (Org #5 Guatemala, 2003, p. 2).

A Brief Description of the Maya Painting Movement

The term “Arte Naif” is often used to describe a movement of Maya artists who began to paint in the 1920s. The predominantly male movement began in Maya communities towards the west coast of the country. The first artists were farmers, carpenters or sign painters who felt the need to express their visions of life through painting. Pioneer painters sprang up simultaneously in five communities: San Juan de Comalapa, San Pedro La Laguna, Santiago Atitlan, Totonicapan and Patzicia. Since that time, a painting movement has also emerged in a community called San Juan La Laguna. The painting movements in Guatemala seemed to arise from a similar simultaneous need to represent and support the Maya cultural roots of the artists’ communities. At the time of the birth of these painting movements, in the 1920’s, the towns were isolated from each other. Most Maya traveled to other communities on foot. Very few tourists visited San Pedro on Lake Atitlán and even fewer had reason to travel to San Juan Comalapa. This relative isolation permitted very different Maya painting styles to evolve (Johnston, 2006). Since the end of the genocide and the commencement of the peace accords (mid 1990’s), a large tourist movement has taken hold of the Lake Atitlán region. This tourist movement has most definitely impacted the Maya painting movements, but its results are too far-reaching to discuss in this paper. However, there is no doubt that the damaging effects of cultural tourism merit further discussion and will be dealt with in a later paper.
The painting movements may be seen as groups of artists who perceived, and still perceive, their missions to be those of documenting Maya cultures, preserving community values and creating historic memories for posterity. According to Johnston (1999),

As the Maya peoples enter the twenty-first century, with computers and television, many of their traditions are disappearing or threatened. These paintings visually document those traditions. Some of the subjects painted by artists are not traditions they know of personally, but traditions which they have been told of by their parents and grandparents. (p. 2)

Thus, the themes of the founding artists are still being painted by their descendants. Although the Maya indigenous peoples of southern Mexico and Guatemala were invaded by the Spaniards, they never surrendered. They adapted to the new situation, still managing to preserve their cultural heritage in whatever ways possible. Johnston (1999) notes:

Their painting is important because it is an art form, albeit of recent origin, of an ancient indigenous culture which has survived to the present. The Mayas may have borrowed the technique of painting in oil, but the style of this art came from within their own culture with little influence from Western schools of art. It is a style entirely unique in the world of art. (p. 2)

There has been virtually no writing done on the possible connections between the birth of the Maya painting movement in Guatemala, its flourishing, especially from the mid-eighties onward, and the continual onslaught of horrors the Maya populations experienced during the past three decades of genocide. Although weaving has been an artistic tradition for thousands of years amongst Maya women, its functions have been very different from those of painting. Prior to the Spanish invasion, weavings were read as graphic
"messages." Later, woven guipiles (traditional woven blouses) that Maya women and men wore originated as a means of identifying plantation owners’ human property. There are two hundred different guipil patterns that have served as regional identification for each indigenous community (Simon, 1987). Weaving, then, is multifunctional for Maya societies, related most directly to clothing for daily living, embellishment for ceremony and a signifier for community identification and pride.

In contrast, it appears that the painting movement was born out of a need for creative expression in another medium, and a desire to hold onto, as well as glorify trampled-upon and threatened Maya histories and traditions. I suggest that its growth has in part been an effort to preserve Maya cultures, in addition to a need to thwart the sense of doom caused by the massacres being perpetrated against Maya populations. Painting has been a vehicle to present and commemorate the identities, as well as the atrocities, experienced on a daily basis by Maya populations. In other words, painting has served as a platform for protest.

The triad of three closely located Tz’utuhil communities where the painting movement has flourished was also one of the hardest hit areas during the time of the army massacres. The last massacre in Guatemala in the early nineties took place in Santiago Atitlan, the town next door to San Pedro. In fact, Santiago Atitlan was the first and only community in the country to successfully demand that the army be withdrawn after it opened fire and killed thirteen townspeople. This scene is depicted in Pedro Rafael González Chavajay’s painting, *The Massacre in Santiago Atitlan* (see Figure 3). While studying painting in this area, and hearing stories told by the painters themselves, as they described the iconography in their paintings and the devastating events that had occurred in recent times, I came to feel that a connection exists between the attempted violent destruction of Maya cultures and the flourishing of Maya
Maya Paintings as Teachers 127

painting (Staikidis, 2004).

Questions Call for Close Attention to Individual Voices

Adapting apprenticeship-mentorship in an indigenous context as a method of inquiry was a conscious way for me as researcher, artist and student to examine my own positionality within the research process. In the field of art education, Desai (2002) speaks of ethnography that focuses on discourse and practice dealing with particulars rather than generalizations, and that gives attention to the subjectivity of the ethnographer. Artistic mentoring as an ethnographic model creates a two-way relational dynamic in which the autobiography of the researcher is present at all times. The art lessons become interchanges within which skills in addition to transcultural viewpoints are exchanged. This study was based upon Tuhiwai-Smith’s (1999) inquiry model, which includes mentoring, and is designed for researchers working in an indigenous context who are either indigenous or non-indigenous, and who share a concern for using research methods that are non-invasive.

A word of qualification here before I go on: speaking of cultures as isolated entities is not part of a postcolonial ethnographic or postmodern construct. Lassiter (1998) states that cultures can no longer be defined by outsider anthropologists as isolated entities, rather “questions call for close attention to individual voices, ‘other countries’ rarely made active in conventional ethnography” (p. 8). Certain areas of anthropological thought have been inspired to work on “relations of inequality, forms of dominance, political mobilization, resistance movements, the critique of ideology, and the practices of everyday life” (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 108). In speaking of the definition of culture, Ingold (1994) notes,

What we do not find are neatly bounded and mutually exclusive bodies of thought and custom, perfectly shared by all who subscribe to them, and in which their lives and works are fully
encapsulated... The isolated culture has been revealed as a figment of the Western anthropological imagination. (p. 330)

Therefore, concepts such as cultural "cohesion" and "transmission" that I dare to bring up may be considered unorthodox and inaccurate in the light of current ethnographic investigations. Paintings in Maya contexts do embody "relations of inequality, forms of dominance, resistance movements and the practices of everyday life" (Rosaldo, 1993). And they also transmit traditions of Maya cultures. The Maya artists that I spoke with saw their cultures as separate from the dominant culture. Maya youth are moving to cities to study and earn a living, and in so doing, discarding, at least superficially, the customs of their families living in the more rural areas. Family structures are breaking apart due to migration. The majority of Maya men in San Pedro la Laguna and San Juan de Comalapa do not wear traditional clothing, but the women do as a matter of pride. The speaking of Maya languages in rural areas is maintained within households in specific regions, but maternal languages are endangered in less rural areas; hence, the demand on the part of Maya indigenous peoples to establish bilingual programs that teach Maya first languages in the schools.

Although art educators and ethnographers working outside of cultures have studied them and speak of cultures as no longer being entities unto themselves (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Clifford, 1988; Desai, 2002; Geertz, 1973; Myers, 2001), Maya artists perceive that their cultures are being lost and there is a felt need to visually represent community values. Adelina Nicho Cúmez, a painter from San Juan de Comalapa states,

The colonizers have ripped us apart, they have attempted to break us during this era of colonialism. In the schools we are at level zero in terms of culture. They have never included our cultural values in their curricula, and now on the cultural level we must salvage these
values and demonstrate them to our children. (Personal communication, June 24, 2003)

Thus, independent of ethnographic assignations regarding cultures, questions arise that reflect the loss or maintenance of Maya cultures.

These Images are Fused to the Canvas and Fused into Peoples’ Hearts

As a student and painter, I found that Tz’utuhil and Kaqchikel paintings are shaped in response to personal and cultural narratives. What I also realized was that the way that a painting is constructed both formally and contextually is linked directly to the histories that it reveals, to the places, and to the clothing. Because I was studying with two master painters, they also taught students with whom I spoke and interacted. Pedro Rafael’s students were numerous and became my teachers based on a novice-expert structure that naturally led them to teach me or work directly on my paintings over time to transmit skills and spirit involving color, place and story. In the midst of community life, I talked with painters who were my teachers, and they told me their stories, hidden at first, but shared over time as trust was established. We exchanged many stories, but this writing will specifically refer to what I was told by the painters about a genocide that took hold of the Guatemalan Maya peoples from the seventies through the nineties.

I have permission to share these stories now as the all-pervading terror has subsided. For the Maya painters with whom I spoke, the author of a painting is its narrator, both visual and vocal. Paintings are visual recollections, comments, prophecies, histories, teachers, and cultural edifications that reveal the concerns of the artists and their communities. Paintings are also direct platforms for expressing outrage, protest, and feelings about injustice in the face of terror and persecution. The male and female painters with whom I spoke
considered themselves to be carriers of cultural traditions that they preserved in the form of paintings, realists who had a profound mission and responsibility. As I became close to my mentors, their lives opened up, as did mine, and I realized that T'z'utuhil and Kaqchikel Maya artists living in communities that were victims of genocide over the past three decades had developed strategies of self-protection and community preservation that were manifest in individual paintings.

Our Values Must be Salvaged and Presented to Our Children

As previously noted, the Maya painting movement began simultaneously in the 1920s in three highland communities in Guatemala. At that time, in all three areas, the iconography of the artworks dealt with festive colors and community events or Maya ceremonies that reminded the viewers of the prime points of Maya life whether religious, agricultural, culinary or celebratory. At no time is a Ladino person (a non-indigenous Guatemalan) depicted in any painting as part of a daily life or celebratory scene. Within the paintings presented in this paper, the only Lados are represented as the army assassins in *Massacre en Atitlan* and *The Last Recruitment of 1995*. Otherwise, only Mayas are depicted in their traditional clothing and occupations. The fact that only Maya cultures appear in the paintings, after five hundred years of invasion and indentured servitude, might signify that each painting serves as a means of cultural protection, a way to assert cultural identities, a voice to speak out on behalf of indigenous independence, a vehicle through which cultural knowledge, integrity and continuity might be in some way preserved. Antonio Vasquez, a painter from San Juan la Laguna, and Pedro Rafael's student, notes that art functions to leave a record for the future. Adelina Nicho Cúmez notes that not only does a painting leave a record for the future, it serves as a means to transmit values:

This is very important. We must aim at leaving the future
generations with a record. Teachers or parents can take students on a trip to the museums to see what the typical dress was that the ancestors wore, students may be brought to see paintings to understand the past. (A. Vasquez, Personal communication, May 21, 2002)

Since the peace accords, there has been talk of respect toward cultural diversity and so we must demonstrate our Maya spirituality. Colonialism has attempted to destroy us. Our values must be salvaged and presented to our children. We must consider that painting is an ancestral talent that is transmitted from generation to generation. (A. Nicho Cúmez, Personal communication, June 24, 2003)

Additionally, the encroachment of new technologies and cultural tourism are perceived as threatening institutions for Maya artists because the Maya ways of life as they have been lived for thousands of years are threatened, so the desire to paint one’s history and one’s life results. Pedro Rafael observes:

The colonization was an attempt to destroy our culture. When I was a young boy, I had a teacher who wrote on the wall on a sign that it was prohibited to speak in Tz’utuhil [my maternal language]. The Ladinos marginalized us; they assaulted us; they imposed their clothes and language upon us. The paintings enable us to remember that these are our roots [points to coffee harvest]. They help us to reflect on our customs and traditions and give us a sense of pride. We do not want to deny them. These paintings say “We are.” and “This our culture.” (Personal communication, July 10, 2003)

Paintings can capture, and perhaps crystallize, the essence of Maya life for generations to come. Pedro Rafael stated that his community does not have historians who have written about Tz’utuhil life,
and so believes that paintings are a self-defined, accurate means of representing Tz'utuhil history. Therefore, paintings become unique documents for recording truths and histories, thus acting as forums for authentic self-definitions:

Paintings are histories that are truths. When such cultural truths are conveyed to canvas, the painting becomes the document which does not disappear. The history stays permanently transmitted to and fused with the canvas and then whatever doubt, one need only refer to the painting for verification. Whenever consultation is needed, the work may be consulted to ascertain truth. (Pedro Rafael González Chavajay, Personal communication, June 5, 2002)

**Paintings are Histories that are Truths**

All painters, whether of the older or younger generation, spoke first and foremost as representatives of Maya cultures. Luciano Sitan Sicay comments:

What can I do, I asked myself, to represent my culture? I loved art. So I thought I will represent my culture through my paintings in order not to forget the richness of what our ancestors have lived. And from there I had to walk slowly to learn what I had to learn in order to be able to fight for my culture’s representation. (Personal communication, May 29, 2002)

Estela Nicho Cúmez, observes:

The message of all my works is that I want to leave evidence. Each *guipil* often only has a life of ten to twelve years, and then it’s left to history. The story of each *guipil* disappears and this is what I want to preserve through making paintings of them. (Personal communication, June 30, 2003)
And Paula Nicho Cúmez states:

Why am I making these works? Because this culture is being lost and this is what hurts me. One must leave painted what our people have lived, how they began their lives. For the elders, all has its spirit, all is alive, all has feeling. This is what I want to conserve through my paintings, and this is what I must preserve for my children. Mothers and fathers are not told their own stories, the stories of their culture; this is what I see and observe. The stories are lost. Since we were little, my parents and my grandfather educated us so that we have held onto our culture. Our culture must never be allowed to disappear.

(Personal communication, July 23, 2005)

Figure 1. Baptism of a Child by Paula Nicho Cúmez.

Image Description: This painting captures the moment when a Maya Kaqchikel family comes together by the river to
baptize the Kaqchikel infant. Many Maya families have adopted Christianity brought to them by European and North American missionaries.

I asked each painter whether he or she believed that a painting was a story or a history and how he or she viewed his/her role from these two distinct vantage points. All painters with whom I spoke felt that their role was that of historian. Stated simply, a painting is a history to which later generations can refer when they want to know how something actually happened and what a certain culture actually wore, what they did, how they did it, what their culture produced and so on (see Figure 1). Each artist was distinctly aware that it was up to him or her to communicate the traditions of Maya cultures, to capture them in paint. Adelina Nicho Cúmez states:

I believe that painting is a medium, a means, a platform through which we must fuse what the Maya culture was before, what it is now, and what we want to leave for our children. I believe that the same happens with a writer, someone who writes histories, with letters instead of paint. I feel that painting is also a means, although not written, rather a graphic form that conveys what we see with regard to our culture. Looking back at the culture that our grandparents had, which isn't seen or practiced today, we want to retrieve it in all of its aspects in order that our children and our grandchildren will be able to realize what our culture is. (Personal communication, June 28, 2003)

A Need to Fight for Justice

Certain painters also spoke of exploitation of the Maya by the Ladinos and the need to express their concerns
about the many ways that the indigenous peoples are utilized "as animals" (Mario González Chavajay, Personal communication, July 16, 2005). I arrived at Mario’s studio and he brought out a large painting, *Invasion of the Farms* (see Figure 2). He said that:

This is an important issue for indigenous peoples; they are treated abominably. Were it not for the indigenous peoples who work the land that belongs to others, there would be no food produced in the country. I cannot be silent about these injustices. My paintings seek to communicate the injustices that have taken place against the indigenous peoples of Guatemala. (Personal communication, July 18, 2005)

![Figure 2. Invasion of the Farms by Mario González Chavajay.](image)

**Image Description:** In some cases, Maya people have moved onto Ladino farms or become squatters in areas that are not cultivated. As shown in this painting, lands are taken over by Maya people because they have no
other place to live.

Painters also discussed the feelings of indignation about the previous decades of massacres, which were perpetrated against the indigenous populations, and stated that it is the responsibility of artists to document these atrocities as a form of recording historically what has taken place at the hands of the Guatemalan army:

I paint about tragedies that occurred here in the seventies, eighties and nineties, in our Tz’utuhil area, the murders in Atitlan. This is history. At that time, they murdered people unjustly; they killed innocent people. For the artist this is extremely painful and he is able to express all of this in his works. It’s dangerous, but it is important and it helps us to remember what happened during that time. I have said many times to my family that if one day I don’t come home, if I don’t return, it is because something has happened. Because as we were saying, many things happened. And there are still problems lurking. (Personal communication, June 19, 2003)

Pedro Rafael González Chavajay told me:

I made a painting called *The Massacre in Atitlan* [Figure 3]. I had to leave something behind that all could see. That was my objective in making this painting [he gestures toward the canvas]. The painting is a way for people to witness what happened. This wasn’t documented in a book, but I as an artist had to leave a document of this incident in a work of art. (Personal communication, July 16, 2005)

In order to paint *The Massacre in Atitlan*, Pedro Rafael traveled abroad because he had reason to believe that his life was in danger. He went to San Francisco in the United States in order to finish the painting. He felt he had to paint *The Massacre in Atitlan*, because he had experienced firsthand the tyranny that was taking place in his
town and surrounding community. He also felt that he could not remain silent in the face of such violence. He thus sought safety to finish this painting that he began in San Pedro, but dared not finish there (see Figure 3).

![Image Description: The people of Santiago Atitlan went to an army base to protest an incident that had taken place. The army opened fire killing thirteen Maya people ranging in ages from ten to sixty-five. This incident caused an international furor. As a result, the army removed its base from the town. A month later, the army wanted to return and the townspeople denied them entry, a first in the history of Guatemala.

So we see that paintings are vehicles for activism and education.
They involve taking risks and represent political acts that are life threatening. Although visual objects, they are seen as texts that exist to inform and awaken. It might be useful here to refer back to the JSTAE call for submissions:

The strikethrough in possibilities concerns the slippery routes taken by the ingenuity of art educators who have navigated censorship, erasure, and obstacles...Those who achieve the "impossible" tend to focus their energies on possibilities rather than limitations. Possibilities encompass the big picture, and what the future holds for our profession. To predict the future, we must actively create it.

The Maya painters who dared to represent the terror in their communities were striking through in ways that navigated not figurative but literal censorship, erasure, and obstacles that threatened their lives. They could have kept quiet, but as artists and educators, they felt a necessity to raise the awareness of both cultural outsiders and the members of their own communities. This was not only a defense against the onslaughts of the dominant culture, but a reminder of what had so recently happened. The acts of these painters are indications that courageous protest ushers in hope; hope for change, and hope for survival. These paintings proclaim that all peoples are entitled to live, and live justly.

And I Said, I Will Not Lose This

One day while talking with me, Pedro Rafael describes a ceremony much like that taking place in Ixtamer's *Pascual Abaj* (see Figure 4), and I said, 'I will not lose this.' 'I must see it.' 'We will go,' he said. And all of the people arrived in a circle, they started to pray, to talk with the Maya gods. The people came with offerings: fruits, corn, and the ceremony around the fire. They do this in the night. (Pedro Rafael González Chavajay, Personal Communication, July 10, 2003)
Image Description: The Maya family has gone to an ancient sacred rock to perform a ritual for blessing their family and they have brought some candles and a chicken for sacrifice. Perhaps they brought a basket of seeds blessing the seeds for a good harvest the following year before planting.

And in speaking with me while discussing Ixtamer's work, Johnston (2005) notes,

This painting of Antonio Ixtamer's is titled *Pascual Abaj* [Figure 4]. It seems as if it's an archetype for the relationship of the Mayas with the Spanish culture. Ixtamer expresses a very important feeling. You see the church, it's
all lit up, it’s white, it’s the dominant culture. Yet there are Maya people who have gone to the site, it’s dark, it’s hidden, but it’s their ancient Maya culture that they’re respecting there, and it’s frowned upon by the Catholic church. Yet they’ve continued with this custom, so it’s kind of hidden. And it’s dark and they’re hiding in a way to kind of protect their culture. To me it kind of exemplifies the whole relationship of the Mayas with the dominant culture. (Personal communication, January 5, 2003)

Attempts at extermination of indigenous cultures worldwide have been relentless. Indigenous peoples have been forced to adapt to the invading culture’s religions, politics, dress, traditions and educational philosophies. Marginalization has forced Maya indigenous communities into states of poverty. It is not surprising that one way to fight back has been through the use of visual art.

The paintings themselves are much more than salable entities as becomes apparent in the conversations with Maya artists. Paintings are platforms for celebration of culture and protest, ways to resist domination and to express cultural values, customs, as well as ways to reiterate power in the face of racism and destruction. As Desai (2002) notes, “narratives that speak about resistance and domination make visible the ways knowledge through experience can lead towards social change and these narratives therefore may be empowering” (p. 312). In this way, Desai advocates reading of artworks based on peoples’ experiences that take place within particular historical contexts and so must be acknowledged as reflective, critical and political. Maya paintings are vehicles for political activism and communications about the genocide that took place against indigenous peoples within Guatemala:

Hitler was responsible for the genocide of the Jews. Well, what took place in Guatemala was the genocide of the Maya. They pitted us against our own people recruiting
us off the streets, kidnapping us, and making us fight a war against ourselves. These were the actions of the army and the dominant Ladino culture against the indigenous peoples. (Pedro Rafael González Chavajay, Personal communication, June 2, 2002)

The process of piecing together my observations with the views of my mentors enabled me to revisit my original contentions that the growth of the Maya painting movements were in some way connected to the era of violence that threatened and destroyed Maya communities. When presented with the idea that there was a link between massacres of indigenous peoples and the growth of the art movement, painters were not convinced that there was. Some attributed the growth of the movement to tourism. Yet, when asked about the reasons they painted about the massacres, no painter declared that the paintings were made to sell to tourists, nor were they for sale to tourists. In fact, the paintings were hidden from view and only came out to be shown when the subject was carefully touched upon with someone whom they knew and trusted. It was then that painters declared it was their responsibility to reveal the atrocities committed against their cultures in the form of paintings. In other words, painters dared to paint themes that revealed the horror of their times. In this way, paintings became pathways into a world that was secluded from the public eye for many decades while indigenous peoples were slaughtered by the army and clandestine forces. Below is the second of Pedro Rafael’s paintings (see Figure 5) depicting women’s grief at the violence wreaked upon their innocent husbands.
Figure 5. Tragedy by Pedro Rafael González Chavajay.

**Image Description:** Between 1980 and 1990 death squads operated in the highlands. This painting, in Santiago Atitlan, shows women returning to find their men murdered and their homes ransacked. Using the pretext of someone being “a subversive,” the army killed many innocent people.

In 2007, healing is still not complete. Art works that portray injustices suffered by Maya indigenous cultures provide a means for excavating the barbarous acts and exposing them to the world.

Simultaneously, art making is an act and a vehicle for the regeneration, re-affirmation and reiteration of cultural identities. Paula’s reflections upon her painting *Certeza* (see Figure 6) encapsulate both views:

Rigoberta Menchu speaks a lot about the indigenous peoples and our human rights, and so this idea came to me to fuse the following images to the canvas. All of the faces in the sky are
spirits, spirits of people that died in the era of violence in 1980 in all of the towns of Guatemala. There were people who were abandoned, who were left without families. One speaks of human rights, one speaks of who or what we are; then, another class of people comes to tell us that we must do this or be this or they will kill us, or they will murder us, because that's what happened here. And we see that this part of the painting is dead, but it has flowered once again over here. Like Rigoberta has said, pull out all of our roots, pull out everything that we have been and are, go ahead, yet a day will arrive when everything that we are will flower again. These images are fused to the canvas and fused into peoples' hearts. That is the meaning of this work. (Personal communication, June 25, 2003)
historical document? Where did this happen? One must investigate. The artist must do research. Paintings must be investigated works. Otherwise the new generation will only look at them like paintings, they will learn nothing.

(Personal communication, July 12, 2005)

The “postcolonial age” supposedly creates room for a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints, yet indigenous cultures across the globe continue to be influenced, exploited and eroded by dominant cultures’ attitudes and actions. Reactions to such persecution and marginalization manifest in many ways. One of them, in Maya Tz’utuhil and Kaqchikel cultures, is the flourishing of art movements that ratify the beauty of their “ripped apart” cultures. As Ballengee-Morris (2000) notes when speaking of the significance of art for the Nandeva tribe of the Guarani Nation of Brazil:

Art is the physical manifestation of the culture, the ultimate tool to explain cultural, social, spiritual identity, and to unite the cultural/ethnic groups for social reformation. Art is a visual language that is capable of transmitting messages to its people...The arts are viewed as a social reformation tool that can educate both the indigenous and the non-indigenous about the Guarani’s history, heritage and culture. (p. 109)

Maya painters who express the realities of massacres against Maya indigenous peoples during what they call “the era of violence” are social reformists who attempt to educate both the indigenous and the non-indigenous about this particular time period which is still experienced by painters as an open wound. One day, while we were painting, Paula Nicho Cúmez told me the story of her mother’s arthritis and paralysis:

My mother watched the army shoot her brother and his son, her nephew. She was doubled over on the street and she saw them shot with her own eyes. She was frozen
watching, fearing for her life and waiting to see if the soldiers would break into our home next. All the children were inside. She was frozen in fear. From that time on, her hands and arms became paralyzed. She is now an invalid.

(Personal communication, July 19, 2003)

When Paula described the painting (see Figure 6) she made in which the living mourned the dead, the spirits of their ancestors floating above in the sky, she did not want to elaborate. This horrific time period seems to be sealed off from discussion. Works of art reflecting the genocide of the Maya then become visual treatises, or educational documents, teachers that both portray and tell of the injustices suffered by Maya indigenous cultures, as well as relaying the beauties and philosophies inherent within them.

Author’s Note: Thanks go to Joseph Johnston of Arte Maya Tz’utuhil for his insights regarding the narrative contents of the paintings.

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