Un(precedent)ED

The 30th Volume of The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education is unprecedented, in many ways. First the theme is unprecedented, or, rather, Un(precedent)ED. This typographical wordplay, quite common throughout the history of JSTAE, troubles habitual readings of the term, allowing for interpretations that open up possibilities, however brief, for new forms of research, theorizing and artmaking.

Unprecedented. Having no previous example.\(^1\)

Un-presidented. The potential for shifts in power as Americans vote for a presidential candidate every four years.

Unprecedented. The election of Barack Hussein Obama as 44th President of the United States (having no previous example).

Un-precedent-ED. That which has no previous educational example.

Un-ED. Uneducational.

These are just a few of the interpretations of the volume theme, which each of the authors addresses in a unique manner. Some approach the theme head on, while others choose a more oblique angle of analysis and exploration. Some deal with unprecedented events and actions, while others discuss historical examples, analyzing the development of precedence in art educational practice, and offering suggestions for novel forms of research, pedagogy, and artmaking.

Ed Check offers the reader a historically rich reading of class distinctions, in *A National Labor Project: Recovering Unprecedented Numbers of Working Class Lives and Histories through Art*. He discusses the lack of previous examples regarding class distinctions in art educational practice, while identifying possibilities for making these histories visible. His essay includes a number of strong images that speak to many aspects of working class life, and documentation of artwork that does the same.

In *The Promiscuity of Aesthetics*, Paul Duncum offers a provocative reading of the pleasures to be found in aesthetic philosophy. Duncum offers the reader an overview of many precedents of aesthetic philosophy in art education, and in doing so invigorates a subject that is historically depersonalized. He also adds a nuanced layer to the argument over aesthetics that has been engaging art educators for a number of years.

Jan Jagodzinski writes on the unprecedented (and potentially uneducational) nature of the philosophy of Alain Badiou, in *The Unprecedented Event: Acknowledging Badiou’s Challenge to Art and Its Education*. It is the nature of the event, as theorized by Badiou, that may, in fact resist the very notion of precedent, as the event is unique at each instantiation.

The effects of disruptive technologies upon political art precedents are discussed by Karen Keifer-Boyd, in *reStAGE: Activist Art/Disruptive Technologies*. This essay provides the reader with numerous contemporary examples of art activism, utilizing the hypertextual nature of the online journal format in an appropriate manner. This text, embedded with hyperlinks that provide

\(^1\) [http://www.thefreedictionary.com/unprecedented](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/unprecedented)
additional information to the reader, represents a form of the disruption discussed by Keifer-Boyd, marking possibilities for scholarship in a networked age.

Ryan Patton presents *Obstructing the View: An Argument for the Use of Obstructions in Art Education Pedagogy*. This essay presents pedagogical notions that may be thought of as un-educational, as they introduce limitations into spaces that have often been constructed around notions of ‘freedom,’ ‘expressivity,’ and ‘creativity.’

Strategies for indigenous artist led inquiry that break academic precedence are described in *Decolonizing Development through Indigenous Artist-Led Inquiry*. Written by Christine Ballengee-Morris, James Sanders, Debbie Smith-Shank, and Kryssi Staikidis, this collaborative piece fuses a wide-ranging analysis of ethnographic research strategies with authoethnographic writings, resulting in a rich (un)scholarly read.

Mary Stokrocki, with Bianne Castillo, Michael Delahunt, Laurie Eldridge, and Martin Koreck presents the reader with an analysis of the predominant visual culture of the Southwestern casino. *Casino Capers: Exploring the Aesthetics of Superfluidity* expands the notion of aesthetics as analyzed by Duncum, acknowledging the influence that spaces designed for rapid consumption have on our perception of how we view the world, each other, and ourselves.

Matthew Sutherlin and Amy Counts present an unprecedented scholarly mashup of Deleuzian philosophy and K-12 art education, in *'image'/'I'/'nation': A Cultural Mashup*. This essay explores the interstices between words, images and their cultural associations, describing the process of constructing national identity in the K-12 art classroom.

And, finally, the book review *(PR)*Obama Art & Propaganda, by Kathleen Keys, also builds upon typographical alterations that relate to the journal theme. Keys reviews four books that document the recent street art forms that promoted the 2004 presidential campaign of Barack Obama, which, in many ways also pushed for the un-presidenting of George W. Bush.

The second way in which this volume of JSTAE is unprecedented is that it is being presented in an online format, for the first time. The shift to an online format is one that many academic journals are currently undergoing, for a variety of reasons, some economic, some conceptual, and some political. The move to an online format for JSTAE represents a bit of each of these. This new format allows readers to access information free of charge; the philosophical underpinnings of the journal are in line with the open source movement in many ways; authors publishing in JSTAE agree to a Creative Commons contract which allows them the power to determine how the work can be reproduced.

Additionally, the online format allows for a variety of content to be embedded in the texts. Pieces like *reSTAGE: Activist Art/Disruptive Technologies* make use of hypertext links, providing immediate access to references and artist projects. Other authors are able to link to video clips, as seen in *Decolonizing Development through Indigenous Artist-Led Inquiry*, and *‘image’/’I’/’nation’: A Cultural Mashup*. The possibilities for incorporating additional media will only increase as the journal develops its online presence.

Last, JSTAE Volume 30 is unprecedented because of the ability for you, the reader, to not only access information and media, but also to participate in the process of adding to the journal. You can, of course, submit manuscripts for the annual call for papers, posted at www.bluedoublewide.cstae.com. You can volunteer to be a reviewer for JSTAE, posted on the
CSTAE site, under caucus bylaws. You will also post responses to the articles at the upcoming JSTAE blog site; follow links from the jstae.bluedoublewide.com site. It is in this way that the content of the journal is constantly updated, contested, and remixed, creating the unprecedented at every turn.
A National Labor Project:
Recovering Unprecedented Numbers of Working
Class Lives and Histories through Art

Ed Check
Texas Tech University

To be working class is to be in a place of relative vulnerability—on the job, in
the market, in politics and culture. (Zweig, 2000, p. 13)

Introduction

I have always worked. While in third grade in the early ‘60s, I helped a brother with his
paper route for 25 cents per day, six days a week. I eventually bought it from him. That
route wasn’t a moneymaker; I could barely pay my monthly paper bill. From that time
on, I remember buying my own clothes and always working—working through high
school, college, summers, graduate school and then summers as an elementary art
teacher. My hands and body were rarely still.

In HANDS: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work, author Janet Zandy (2004) asks,
“How much are two hands worth” (p. 7)? She and others (Jamakaya, 1998; Sherlock,
2007) document the often miserable realities of working people in the United States.
Workers have been treated brutally as a class and rarely are rightly/justly compensated
or appreciated for their work (Livingstone & Ploof, 2007; Zandy, 2004; Zinn, 2007;
Zwieg, 2000).

Howard Zinn (2007) describes in A Young People’s History of the United States, Volume
One, the struggle between the classes in 19th century U. S. history as the “Other Civil
War” (p. 147). I had purchased the two-volume set from Syracuse Cultural Workers
curious as to how Zinn wrote history geared toward adolescents. I was not prepared for
my intellectual and emotional reactions to Zinn’s description and naming of class
relations as the other civil war. He legitimated struggles and feelings I had experienced
as a white artist educator activist, raised working class. Through his writing, he
revealed/redeemed lives of relatives and neighbors. He helped legitimate and galvanize
my imagination to continue an idea I have been thinking about for years—a National
Labor Project that could recover/record the past and present lives and achievements of
workers.1

I initially based my idea of a Workers’ Center off the America’s Black Holocaust Museum
in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. James Cameron’s (the founder of the Black Holocaust
Museum) idea of conceiving the lives of African Americans through a holocaust lens
seemed appropriate, though few white people visited his Museum.2 Cameron and Zinn’s

---

1 This would be a Center that archives and celebrates the lives of workers and not corporations.
2 I met James Cameron in the late 90s. He gave me a personal tour of his museum. He was excited that a
white professor was interested in African-American social justice issues. Keep in mind that Milwaukee,
Wisconsin has been criticized as being one of the most racially polarized cities in the country.
ways of activism and perception helped me piece together a possibility for the representation of working lives.

Outside scant references to workers in art education scholarship, workers are overlooked or when referenced in scholarship, are described as problems to be solved—not people or lives worth remembering or contributing as important members of culture. As an anti-bias social justice educator and artist, I look to critical texts for fair and accurate information about workers. But I have had to look outside of the discipline. Even *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education* (Cahan & Kocur, 1996) disappoints. Another popular text in Texas is Ruby Payne’s (1996) *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. She cites rich, middle class and the poor and ignores working people in her text.

It has been in obscure, yet groundbreaking, texts like Joanna Kadi’s (1996) *Thinking Class: Sketches from a Cultural Worker*, Alfred Lubrano’s (2004) *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White Collar Dreams*, Janet Zandy’s (2004) *HANDS: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work*, and Livingstone & Ploof’s (2007) *The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production* that workers are described as human beings worthy of stories being told about them. It is also curious to me that all of these writers use an auto-narrative style in their texts to describe their relationships with workers and working class issues. They either were raised working class or had developed allied relationships with workers during their lives.

It is through these sources that I found out more information about workers like myself: painter Ralph Fasanella and poet and essayist Audre Lorde; and how their art and politics were firmly rooted in their lived experiences as members of the working class. I had known Audre Lorde had died of cancer, but never knew her cancer was directly related to her working class life where she was exposed to X-rays.

I consider this essay an initial mapping where I reconstruct multiple ways of knowing and understanding the lived realities and plights of workers, whether they are manual workers, teachers or artists (Zandy, 2004). I use autobiography from a perspective of Standpoint Theory where I use the lives of working people as theory, method and evidence. I speak from my standpoint of my experiences as being raised white working class and my shift in salary and education to middle class.

In my 13th year in Lubbock, Texas, I have been privileged to meet artists creating art on working class themes/issues. All of the artists cited in this essay are struggling through life. They have all incurred huge college or credit debt as they negotiate through middle class academic environs. I situate their work throughout my essay, trying to thematically match their work with a specific section of this essay. It’s a clumsy write in many ways. I am still configuring ways of organizing artists and knowledge I have accumulated to this point on this topic.

*National Labor Project: Heading/Healing Home*

As I headed back home to Manitowoc, Wisconsin (population, 32,000) from Lubbock, Texas during the Christmas holiday in 2006, I had one thing on my mind—to begin a dialogue with my four brothers and my sister about an idea I had about establishing a
physical entity that could house a Workers’ Center in our hometown that would document and celebrate the lives of working people: people like our parents and relatives who lived rich and ethical working class lives (Kadi, 1996; Zandy, 2004). Initially, I envisioned the Center as a physical space, a simple storefront, that could house art, archives, artifacts, a reading room, coffee shop, organizing rooms, and galleries for local histories.

I designed my stay to accommodate four dinners and/or late night chats talking about the Center with brothers and their wives. I also spent my days visiting elderly relatives, some in nursing homes, as a sign or respect to their lives and contributions, but also to inquire about their lives.

On a previous visit to my hometown in 2004, I took photos of worker homes, places my aunts and uncles had lived. As I drove around in a rental car documenting my past, I realized for the first time in my life, how “working class” this city, one of America’s aluminum capitals, was.
I was a visitor/voyeur in my own hometown. I drove around and documented industrial wastelands within the city limits. Former aluminum factories (on multiple sites), cement companies, shipyards, foundries were eerily quiet, ghosted testimonies to a rich working past. The former Mirro main factory in the center of the city sporting over 1,000,000 square feet had been empty for years and had been recently sold for $200.00. My hometown had the second highest unemployment rate in Wisconsin. Even churches were closing and consolidating. Former ways of doing economics and religion created ghosted neighborhoods. I heart sank as I drove around. My hometown was just another one of those dying factory towns.

Contrast this with my recollections of rich working traditions I remembered growing up in Manitowoc. The visual sites/sights of Manitowoc Cranes throughout the city, especially in the shipyards, were evidence of a once healthy economy. There were many social traditions as well: for example, the Manitowoc/Sheboygan working class winter holiday custom of “treeing.” From after Midnight Mass through January 6th, we visited neighbors’, friends’, and relatives’ houses for the purpose of viewing their Christmas tree. Relatives or neighbors showed Christmas presents neatly positioned beneath their Christmas trees. We drank and ate light to heavy snacks consisting of herring, cookies, cold cuts, summer sausages, sweet and dill pickles, ham sandwiches, chips, dips, homemade cookies, chocolates and other candies (Brachs and Russell Stover were premium). Bernstein’s, a local chocolate shop, was a special favorite. I recalled as a child waiting politely on pins and needles at an uncle’s house without kids, listening to adult conversation (we were to be seen and not heard), knowing that our next stop would be an uncle that had children our age and plenty of new toys. I also fondly remember our kid’s Christmas tree in our basement with 22 lights (sets of 15 and 7) and some homemade paper decorations. As kids, we sang around those trees. There was magic, community and memory in these and other rituals. To this very day, the scent of evergreen and gas (our tree was stored in our garage until set-up indoors) puts me back to my youth.

Socially, my family was a haven for cousins as we grew up in the 1960s. Arriving one at a time and staying for one or more weeks, some of my cousins sought safety and food at our house--respite from their hellish home lives. I learned lessons of hospitality and community-building from my parents. My dad’s small carpentry shop became a community center for retired workers in the community who visited his shop on Saturday mornings. These old men helped sweep the floor, repair things, tend to the garden, or just visit. I never missed an opportunity to stop by “the shop” on Saturdays.

---

4 See Janet Zandy’s (2004) theorizing ghosted work and sites.
when I was visiting. I grew up around painters, welders, butchers, custodians, electricians, store clerks, carpenters, and factory workers.

As an artist, I tried to capture some essence of white working class joy and struggle in the pieces *Domestic Saints* (2002) and *Sun Dress* (2002). In *Domestic Saints*, I honored with glitter sainthood to working class women in my life. Powerful and wise, they raised families and participated in local and church organizations. These women were matriarchs in their families, kitchens, basements and laundry rooms, in their sewing circles, raising children, and working outside their homes. *Domestic Saints* reveals the joys of friendship and community, in all places a kitchen. In *Sun Dress* or *In Honor of Working Class Women*, I used traditional fabric materials that would wear, tear, fade and disappear just like the lives of millions of working class women who remain nameless, invisible or forgotten. Physical and emotional struggle were never far from their lives.⁵

Unprecedented Numbers and Possibilities

Michael Zweig (2000) argues that approximately 62% of the American workforce self-identifies as working class. In spite of this dramatically high percentage of the population, Zweig suggests that politics, popular culture and the media represent a nation of mostly middle class persons--their needs and values. This disproportionate middle class wash is evident everywhere—in Hollywood movies, in art classrooms, in

⁵ Sundresses, like in the image, were popular in the Midwest in the 60s and 70s with working class women in my life.
libraries and museums and especially academe. I recall political candidates in the 2008 national election addressing the struggles and hardships of the middle classes, as opposed to working-poor and working class groups that were truly struggling. Zinn (2007) reminds workers that “...both parties represented the classes that held most of the power in the country” (p. 147) and continue to do so today. If the United States had proportional political systems, there might be labor parties in this country. Oftentimes, labor unions and workers organizing are linked to mobs and mischief by the popular press. In schools, labor histories are often ignored or maligned. In September of 2009, when I asked an Introduction to Visual Studies class what Labor Day was, only one out of sixteen students knew. Most of the students thought it was a holiday to not work and shop.\(^6\)

Post, Texas artist Jane Lindsay is attracted to working people as subjects for documentary photography. Jane comes from farming and ranching people. Jane is attracted to oppressed groups, people who get “shit on.” Of her Regular Series, Jane comments, “These are just interesting working class people.” In Charlie (from part of a series titled The Regulars) Jane documents the social aspect of the complex lives of Texas Hill Country workers taking in a drink at a local bar. Jane enjoys the aspect of really getting to know people and their issues before respectfully asking them if they would like to be a part of a current project. Social justice and social change are important goals for her. Her McCarty Project, photo documenting the lives of families of inmates living on death row (many unjustly incarcerated) and a series interviewing and photo documenting war veterans and their experiences with Veteran Administration hospitals and clinics are a few more examples of her social justice work.

Privilege, Entitlements, and Arrogance and a Justified Anger

Many middle class people don’t understand the value of working class (read as entitlement and privilege) histories. These histories are not their lived realities. For example, a white middle class colleague once remarked how poor she was. Her husband is an independent environmental filmmaker and she was supporting them. I reminded her she owned rental property, had a great salary and was likely cash poor, but was not poor. I respect the attempts of allies who speak, not from their experiences of being raised working class, but offer their intellect and action to help raise an awareness of

\(^6\) Ironic that many working people, if connected to tourist or hospitality work, end up working on that day.
working class conditions and inequity (e.g., Ehrenreich, 2001). But these are few and far between.

Recently (on December, 12, 2009), I had lunch with a colleague and her daughter, both who are middle class. Sonia, the daughter, lives a privileged life where her father (a surgeon) has paid for her undergraduate and graduate educations. Her mother pays for gas and shops with her daughter (Sonia is 28 years old). It is not uncommon for her parents to send Sonia air tickets to fly home or visit relatives in Mexico or Canada. Sonia has traveled all over the world. In five days she will visit Africa with her father for two weeks. Within her middle class environs, Sonia has accomplished a Fulbright year of study in Africa and has applied for and received numerous grants. I am not sure whether or not Sonia recognizes her entitlement and privilege. I listen carefully to her stories and comments about others. Sonia has never had to worry about health coverage or money, ever.

Sometimes, when handled by middle class academics, research objectifies workers (Ehrenreich, 2001; Payne, 1996) and renders workers as aimless and ignorant when in fact workers are intelligent but have little access to capital or equality. A few years back at a Chicago NAEA conference, a middle class friend/colleague suggested to me that if single middle class female academics started to have children, we could raise the gene pool in this country.

Working class realities are rarely talked about in art education. The discipline assumes that most people are middle class or at the very least are trying to be. In art history, for example, Western Eurocentric middle class art is not only the theory/norm but also the method. Some academic colleagues are surprised to find out they have working class roots. At a 2004 National Women’s Studies Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I had an attendee ask me: “How do I know if I am working class?

Self-identifying as gay in the mid-1980’s, I went into debt purchasing Ralph Lauren shirts, usually on sale, in order to pass as educated and middle class—only to find out later that powerful class differences prevented me from dating middle class men due to chasms in our ethics, values, histories, and material conditions (Kadi, 1996). I couldn’t pass for middle class on my teacher’s salary. I knew that it took money that I didn’t have to afford books, travel, drinks, and graduate education. I worked my way through college, for all three of my degrees. One result of my trying to pass and join the middle was that I assumed a huge credit debt. It has only been recently that I have become credit card debt-free for the first time in my life. Much of my success is because of my realization that the acquisition of things is not the best way for me to live my life. Consider my friend Hans Turley, who grew up white and middle class in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and whose parents owned the downtown hotel. His question was not whether he would go to college, but where—and even that was predetermined. When I met Hans in 1996 in Lubbock, Texas, where we both embarked on our first assistant professor tenure-track jobs, I was amazed at his positive self-esteem. He had an entitled air about himself. He regaled us with stories of journeys and his positions on all sorts of topics. Hans typified the entitled, arrogant, and privileged station of the middle. I, on the other hand, was reserved and cautious. When I started college, I started out at a local

---

7 Ehrenreich’s work seems to satisfy middle class persons as a valid important text that educates many middle class people and others, while many working class folks are much less impressed with this work.
two-year college in my hometown to save money and then transferred to a larger four-year institution. I worked my ass off to pay for college and attend classes. And I couldn't do it on my own. I had to secure college loans. I was puzzled how friends could do three to six-month internships in New York City or Washington, D.C., for no pay (i.e. privilege and access to money).

Many working class college students experience unprecedented struggle as they endure through university educations. I encounter many working students who can barely keep up in course work and part-time or full-time jobs. Many are not eligible for enough financial aid to help them focus solely on school work. One architecture student commented that when he only did school work, his grades were high but he had no money and often went to bed hungry. I hear this over and over as an undergraduate advisor, young people with no resources trying to struggle through school, blaming themselves for not being able to do it all. Many are tired and drop out. Not because they are not smart, but because they can not compete fairly and endure the constant absence of money in their lives. From not affording simple art supplies, to tuition, unforeseen fees, parking tickets, food, and rent. Many of these students are not prepared for the lifetimes of incredible debt they will accrue.

Lubbock, Texas-based artist and graphic designer Roberta White tackles issues of entitlement and privilege in her art. Raised white and working class on a farm in Plains, Texas, Roberta incurred a high college debt pursuing advanced art degrees and struggles with an underpaid art job. She worked as a free-lance window designer for Bergdorf’s in New York City for a time. She returned to Lubbock in 2000, to care for her dying mother and found a graphic design position that paid slightly above minimum wage.

Roberta’s focus in her art is size—she notes that “everybody hates fat people.” We are all brainwashed into thinking all fat people are unhealthy and that they are doing something to make themselves fat. Eating too much, not exercising enough. (Personal communication, October 4, 2009) Roberta says that people need health at every size. Roberta notices this attitude at work in many of her white middle class successful designer colleagues. “Even though they are size 2s and 4s, they are all dieting.”

Roberta applied to do post-graduate work in 2006 and focused on issues of size and women’s health issues. “Women hate their bodies. We are enculturated to do so,” states Roberta. She notes that people are perceived as a lower class and unhealthy if they are fat. She has noticed that people who have the best attitudes about their bodies that she has met personally are Black working class women. “They have other things to worry about, like paying bills.” Many diverse Black women of all different sizes in Lubbock reflect this positive body image sentiment.

Roberta comments that present-day fashion models look like skeletons. She’s appalled at what constitutes healthy female bodies. Part of this was reflected in a November 2006 performance at a Genderland Exhibition in Lubbock. Roberta challenged her audiences to rethink weight. She performed as a nurse using a Marilyn Wann (1998) Yay! scale that she had purchased online. A Yay! scale came in various plush colors and instead of numbers registers compliments: Attractive, handsome, cute, pretty, etc. During her performance, Roberta weighed in over 100 persons, many of which initially ran from...
her with her scale. Dressed as an alternative nurse, she wrote their compliments on a nametag with size-positive websites and gave a piece of candy (a red hot) as medicine.

**Leaving Working Class?**

I have had the opportunity to experience the great American dream or nightmare—my socio-economically moving from working class to middle class. Leaving working class is leaving home. It is more of a nightmare as I constantly struggle throughout my conversion; resistance is futile. The middle doesn’t allow for my working class values and ethics. There is lots of capital in the middle. The contrasts in histories, values and ethics could not be starker.

So, to be successful is to leave working class. My mother’s friends at her wake warned me in 1996 that “I shouldn’t feel I am too smart to talk to them” and “to remember to come back and visit.” Lubrano (2004) articulately describes/defines a straddler as a worker moving from working to the middle class and the problems of having to leave home and working class. Middle class persons will never know this feeling. They grow up in middle and will probably die in the middle, unaware of the social and cultural struggles of being a worker.

I have great difficulty accepting middle class rules and values. Middle class people seem so unaware of so much to me—especially working people. There is extreme pressure for me to jettison my working ways of knowing and being and conform to the histories, knowledges and practices of the middle.

In 2007, I was invited to a lowrider club annual dinner in Lubbock. A Ph. D. student, with middle class roots, had joined the club as part of his research of lowrider bikes. He had built a bike to show and had connected with local lowriders. When I was introduced as Kyle’s professor to the club members, I felt awkward. I policed all of my actions and words. Though everyone was kind, I felt out of place. Kyle had little problem adjusting.

Born and raised in West Texas, Lubbock, Texas artist Katy Ballard investigates working class drag queens who live and prosper in what she describes as conservative and homophobic West Texas. Katy understands the pull of home and what it means to call a place home. She knows that West Texas is home to many working class gays and lesbians who have chosen to stay in their hometowns. They do not leave for Dallas or Austin or San Antonio. Many of these performers are not closeted in their lives or at work and have blended their identities of worker and performer. Thomas/Lady Adonna has been participating in drag shows for many years. He is a hair stylist. Thomas is an example of a local drag person, born and raised in West Texas, who likes it here and is very close to his family.
Lady Devon was born in East LA and moved to Lubbock as a child. She is a manager at a local food court. Though harassed at work, her family supports her in her drag work. She is a mother to a few local drag performers. She started in Ballet Folklorico as a young boy. She goes to work as a female (and at times ambiguous, slightly more female than male).

Working Class students and artists don’t need ways out of their culture, but visual art and scholarship that honors and records the contributions of millions of working people in the world. Many struggle economically, yet continue to create art and scholarship about working class conditions.

Lubbock, Texas working class artist Veronica Mora exemplifies attempts of social action and justice. While watching the coverage of Katrina on CNN in 2005, she wanted to do something to help. She called the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce and asked what are we doing to help? They told her to contact the American Red Cross. Veronica met almost every single New Orleans family that came to Lubbock because her assignment was to enter everyone into the Red Cross database. She assigned people to a large aircraft hanger or dorms at the former Reese Air Force Base.

One working class family was upset with accommodations because their daughter was diabetic. Veronica not only changed their accommodation, but established a friendship with them, driving them back to New Orleans that October, just so they could check to see if their home was okay. Veronica took some initial photos. Seven months later, Veronica drove back to New Orleans to visit her friends. She photo documented the aftermath of Katrina. Later in 2008, we both were in New Orleans for an NAEA conference. Veronica stayed with her working class friends and I stayed with wealthy friends. The contrast was stark and uncomfortable for both of us on many levels. Veronica’s interest in photo documentary that portrays the living conditions of working people continues.
Conclusion

Lilia DeAnda Cabrera grew up, lives and teaches in the Valley in South Texas. Her art and teaching practices reflect her working class upbringing. Lilia’s artwork and pedagogy are based on recycling and reusing materials. With few resources and under-funded as an art teacher, Lilia “dumpster-dives” to find materials for her classroom. Lilia even scrapes excess acrylic paint from students' palettes to use in her own art, mixed media pieces--meditations on recycled materials and recovery patterns.

Currently, Lilia is part of an art coop that sponsors monthly art shows, local cultural events, and provides affordable studio space for community artists through the reclamation of rooms in a closed elementary school. For Lilia, art continues to be a primary outlet for her to continue examining her cultural and working class issues in her life and community while trying to help change living conditions and lives for many people in her community. Lilia and her coop serve as a model for my National Labor Project.

When I arrived in Lubbock, Texas, like many other newcomers, I was at odds with the local conservative cultural terrain. Eventually, I sought out and met local working folks not associated with the university to help me create saner and safer places for myself. Like so many working people, I struggle to get this project off the ground. I'll be happy to die with a small storefront space anywhere stating Workers Center.

But it's been hard working and living in middle class environs where much is taken for granted. As colleagues return from summer research or holidays, they nonchalantly ask...
in elevators—what did you do this summer? That is code for where did you travel? Their question is a mere prompt for me to return the favor of asking them, so they can testify to their middle class values and research.

In August 2005, I sent a letter about this project to the Mayor of my hometown (see appendix). I also sent the same letter to Marge Miley who printed a comment about the letter in her History column of the local newspaper. One person contacted me offering some old photos about his father. I have been saving artifacts for years. Recently, a sister-in-law gave me a red Manitowoc Company jacket that an uncle had proudly worn for years. These artifacts and accompanying stories or testimonies will fill the virtual pages of the initial leg of this project.

I have realized that this National Labor project is unprecedented in its theme and potential. It will start out virtual before physical space is acquired. I was asked why I couldn’t conceive of a worker center in Lubbock, Texas. I can, and it needs one. Although Lubbock, Texas has been my home for the last 13 years, my heart lies with my hometown. But it is evident to me that the National Labor Project will have entries from cities from across the country, including Lubbock. Workers are everywhere.

It was during my chats with my brothers and their wives in 2006 that I realized how complicated even a storefront idea would be. If people started bringing in artifacts, where would they be housed? I have read many local history journals and have contacted many educators, artists, local historians and allies. I have also talked to many neighbors and relatives about the idea that virtual space is an appropriate first step. I’ll close with one more story that occurred December 14, 2009 with a middle class colleague. We ate lunch at a recently reopened restaurant under different management. As we sat down at the counter, my colleague and friend said, “This place isn’t as classy as it used to be.” Under previous management, there was a university coffee house atmosphere with tattooed wait staff and a middle class owner. Now, all of the wait staff, management and new owners appeared to be working class. The menu had changed. As I talked to the wait staff (because my colleagues comments bothered me), I found out that not only have they changed the food but anticipate receiving a bar license soon, so they can serve alcohol. Then these working folks talked about keeping the art on the walls for sale, bringing in live music/bands and poetry readings, serving specialty meals, and ended with: “Wouldn’t it be great to have drag queen bingo? I think that could draw in another clientele of people to the place.” She said this with sheer joy on her face. And that is how I feel about establishing a Workers’ Center—to celebrate the diversity of working lives—both contemporary and historic—sheer joy.

---

8 Jamakaya is a wonderful labor historian. Voyageur is a bi-annual historical review from Northeast Wisconsin, and there are so many more zines, websites, local folks.

References


Voyageur. Published by the Brown County Historical Society, 1008 S. Monroe Avenue, Green Bay, Wisconsin 54301-3206 www.uwgb.edu/voyageur


All artwork is used by permission of the artists.
Appendix

August 29, 2005

The Honorable Kevin Crawford, Mayor
Manitowoc City Hall
900 Quay Street
Manitowoc, WI 54220-4543

Dear Mayor Crawford,

I am wondering if anyone has ever talked about establishing a museum or study center(s) based on the histories of working people in the Manitowoc area? The recent national exposure of the Season’s Gleaming (Shimon & Lindemann, 2004) book demonstrates to me the powerful histories of working people and the interest in those histories. I took special note of a USA Today (Tuesday, November 20, 2004) newspaper article where a former employee described her difficult job making branches for the trees and how rarely such histories are published. Jamakaya’s Like Our Sisters Before Us: Women of Wisconsin Labor (The Wisconsin Labor History Society, 1998) (Wisconsin Press) is one of a few examples of books that examines the lives of everyday workers. Product diversity that historically comes from Manitowoc: the aluminum industry, shipping, boat manufacture, furniture, aluminum trees, car ferry service, and breads, just to name a few, gets me to thinking of all of the stories out there yet to be told.

I recently gave a talk at my university about an art installation I constructed (circa 2002/3) honoring working class working women (see enclosure) in my life. In that talk, I showed slides of old Mirro plants, the Manitowoc Company, The “Bud” beer bottles, shipbuilding, the sub, and the now old St. Mary’s Church (my hometown parish), explaining the importance of my roots on my art. My interest lies in developing a memory of workers in the area. Mirro products (a small skillet and cookie press-stamped in Manitowoc), some Red Owl seasoning containers, and other items, are exhibited above my refrigerator in testimony to my pride of hometown products. I recall years ago visiting Rudy Rotter’s studio and in conversing with Dr. Rotter, finding out that one of my cousins was his receptionist for 15 years. I spent four hours with him that day. And I wonder, is anyone documenting these histories? (I am aware of the writings of Marge Miley, retired managing editor of the Herald Times Reporter, and some of the efforts of the Manitowoc County Historical Society.)

I received my Ph. D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Curriculum & Instruction in 1996 and since then have worked at Texas Tech University. In the past, I have belonged to a working class academics email list, where former working class kids (like myself) straddle our new identities as middle class academics—confronting different values and histories. It’s not easy growing up working class, moving to the middle, forsaking any ties with working values and ethics. I and many other working class academics are trying to change that and preserve the values and memories of working people.

There exist numerous possibilities to raise funds for scholarship and possibly a study center or museum. Area employers and state and federal funds are available. With the demise of Catholic parishes, and other changes, I feel the need for documentation is great, so future generations will know the industry of working people who do and once populated Manitowoc. Part of the urgency is that people who can tell stories are dying. Of other importance is that these former workers house items that could be used in such an endeavor, items that they may feel has little value in today’s world, but that have great historic importance. Having come from a family of carpenters,
welders, electricians, painters, janitors, etc., I know there is great potential for success in such a venture.

Any information, concerns or advice on developing a center is greatly appreciated. I am proud of my hometown and the impact it’s had on the world. I want to make sure some of those working histories get told.

Sincerely,

Ed Check
Recently, art educators have debated the value of aesthetics in art education (Duncum, 2007; Tavin, 2007; Tavin, Duncum, Lankford & Parsons; Barrett, Tavin & Duncum, 2007). Kevin Tavin initiated the debate by arguing that aesthetics, as it is used in art education, has so many meanings, which are often contradictory, it is often difficult to know what is meant by it. His solutions are to either drop the use of the word *aesthetics* in favor of the language of representation or always to make its use problematic.

I support Tavin’s espousal of representation and his contention that the multiple and often contradictory meanings of aesthetics is confusing. The original aesthetic proposal that emerged from England and Germany during the course of the 18th century was highly ambiguous (Eagleton, 1990), and art educators, on the one hand who attack it for being elitist and reactionary (Tavin, 2007; Jagodzinski, 1981) or on the other hand defend it for its socially progressive values (Barrett, 2008; Freedman, 2003; Stewart, 1997), echo its origins as a deeply conflicted concept.

Notwithstanding these complications, I contend that the concept of aesthetics lies at the very heart of the art educational enterprise, albeit significantly reconfigured. I begin by offering a highly potted, historical overview of aesthetics that while it supports Tavin’s view of aesthetics as a confused and confusing concept, demonstrates how important it remains. My intention is not to support aesthetics as part of a progressive socio-political agenda, as many art educators do, but because the word *aesthetics* is today used extensively beyond our specialized area of art education to conceptualize the sensuousness of contemporary cultural forms. A brief investigation of books and articles on today’s cultural forms indicates that, as Williams (1976) noted 30 years ago, apart from its specialized use in art and literature, “aesthetics is now in common use to refer to questions of visual appearance and effect” (p. 28). This usage is freed from Modernist associations of formalism and transcendence; rather, it echoes the original Greek origins of aesthetics as *aisthesis*, which meant sense data in general. For the Greeks, *aisthesis* was a very general concept meant to distinguish between what could be seen and what could only be imagined (Eagleton, 1990). This very broad meaning of aesthetics as sensation is implied in the opposite idea of anesthetic, the deprivation of sensation.

In what follows the tone is playful, but the intention is serious; I seek to embrace contemporary cultural life insofar as it is being conceptualized as aesthetic in disciplines beyond our own specialized area (Mitchell, 2005), and thereby situate art education as crucial to today’s cultural life. Because aesthetics is central to a consumer society, art education can by such means engage with the world of our students.

**Promiscuity to the Max**

No less an authority on aesthetics than Immanuel Kant (1764/1965) described the two main aesthetic categories of his time, the sublime and the beautiful, in clear-cut gendered
terms. For Kant, the sublime was masculine, the beautiful, feminine. Shortly after Kant wrote the sublime fell out of favor; it was almost completely sidelined by beauty (Gilbert & Khun, 1953), and today ordinary language dictionaries often define aesthetics simply as beauty and usually fail even to mention the sublime. In consideration of this I had thought of referring to aesthetics as feminine, but considering some of the things I am about to say about aesthetics this seemed open to serious misrepresentation. So, I will refer to aesthetics as androgynous. Aesthetics as androgynous is further to be preferred because today in both institutional art making and contemporary cultural critique notions of the sublime and the beautiful are equally fully back in favor (e.g., Brand, 2000; Mirzoeff, 1999). Yet I make this point about the original, dual gender of aesthetics because gender is only one example of where he/she deals with both hands at once. Aesthetics is virtuous, but also full of vice. He/she has played many parts: a virgin, but equally a whore. A prophet, priest/priestess, and a prostitute, aesthetics has been all of these, and all at the same time.

Politically, he/she has served equally both the left and the right (Eagleton, 1990). Aesthetics was a progressive liberal, a conservative, and a reactionary, and he/she was each simultaneously. Aesthetics was a liberal serving the middle class in their fight with the aristocracy. Aesthetics was a conservative in helping the middle class to find a sense of themselves as refined, possessing taste, and appearing liberal. And aesthetics was a reactionary in binding together the middle class in their opposition to the working class, helping the middle class to demonize the working class as rude and crude and unworthy of sharing power (Eagleton, 1990). For many years aesthetics was staunchly undemocratic, though more recently he/she has been reborn as a democrat (Barrett, 2008). But then he/she has been reborn many times. There is no social cause, political regime, or economic system to which aesthetics has not taken a shine. He/she is willingly co-opted by them all. As a philosopher aesthetics has focused upon him/herself: what is aesthetics, he/she has asked, what is his/her significance, and what does he/she think of him/herself, all of which he/she has done in ways far too numerous to enumerate here (Beardsley, 1958). The problem is that aesthetics thinks too much of him/herself; aesthetics is a classic narcissist uninterested in others.

Aesthetics has been exclusively concerned with form, totally preoccupied with emotional empathy, and completely committed to symbols and icons, and, again, all simultaneously, and for each he/she has claimed the imprimatur of Kant (Mundt, 1959). Aesthetics has been omnipotent, a universal taste setter, though managing this as did Kant (1764/1965) himself only by excluding the tastes of most of the people of the earth. Aesthetics has been appallingly racist, but now finds him/herself deeply committed to multiculturalism. While of both genders, aesthetics was once utterly sexless, sensual yet not sexual. This is now all in the past. Today, aesthetics is hetero, queer, and trans-gendered. Above all else, aesthetics is a survivor.

Aesthetics has been utterly disinterested, as uptight as a Puritan caricature, yet today he/she lets it all hang out. A servant of global, corporate capitalism and every government instrumentality, aesthetics is selling for all he/she is worth. Glossing social policies or consumer products - it is all the same to aesthetics. Aesthetics is busy everywhere, promoting every worthy cause, propping up every corrupt regime, available to everyone with an issue, service, or product to sell. Aesthetics is ever reliable, there for everyone and everything.
Appearing good, true and proper, aesthetics simultaneously serves everything that is ugly and evil. Once aesthetics championed feudalism and monarchism; today it is capitalism, socialism (still), totalitarianism (still), plutocracy, democracy, and every possible hybrid. It is not as if aesthetics was schizoid; it is more a matter of a very serious case of multiple personalities. Continuing a polymorphous life, aesthetics remains near hidden in obscure philosophical debates - and arguably even more marginal art education journals - while also out in the most public of domains, as seductive as Eve with the apple, a femme fatal, and as brutal as an axe wielding, laser destroying cyborg in a wide-screen, multiple-speaker Hollywood spectacular. Consider what aesthetics does for a living today. Aesthetics describes everything from Buffy the Vampire Killer to parking.

**Aesthetics Today**

Let me list the ways, or rather, just some of the ways the word *aesthetics* is used in books and articles today beyond the specialized use it has in art, literature and art education – in each case a way of describing specific visual characteristics and their effects:

The aesthetics of the everyday, which include the aesthetics of sport, the aesthetics of weather, the aesthetics of shopping malls and department stores, and the aesthetics of violence.

The aesthetics of everyday life
Commodity aesthetics
The aesthetics of consumerism
An aesthetics of marketing
The aesthetics of merchandise presentation
An aesthetics of product design
The aesthetics of carnival
The aesthetic of the grotesque
The aesthetics of loss
Manga style aesthetics
The informal aesthetics of cell phones
Information aesthetics
The aesthetics of self-taught art
An aesthetics of cool
A post-soul aesthetic
Female bodily aesthetics
African and European aesthetics
Black and white aesthetics
A Light-skinned, straight-hair aesthetic
Aesthetics politics
Incendiary aesthetics
The aesthetics of organization
New urban aesthetics
The aesthetics of poverty
An aesthetic of homelessness
A domestic aesthetic
The anorexic aesthetic
The masochistic aesthetic
An aesthetic of decadence
The aesthetics of kitsch
Trash aesthetics
The aesthetic of Japanese lunchboxes
The aesthetics of stage lighting
Queer aesthetics
An aesthetics of power
Nazi aesthetics
An aesthetics of evil
Media aesthetics
Hyper-aesthetics
Aesthetics of comics
Animation aesthetics
Video game aesthetics
An aesthetics of the environment
Aesthetics of natural environments
Aesthetics of ecology
Aesthetic medicine
Aesthetic surgery
Aesthetic lazar surgery
Aesthetic nasal reconstruction
Reconstructive aesthetic implant surgery
Aesthetic dentistry
The aforementioned
The aesthetics of Buffy the Vampire Killer
The aesthetics of parking

And, not least, there is the aesthetics of beauty, not as a general category, but as a series of specific visual characteristics.

**Conclusion**

Today aesthetics is one of the central means by which much of the world – local, national, and global - conducts its everyday business. This is quintessentially true of economically advanced societies. Aesthetics is an essential ingredient in how the economy is maintained, how politics is conducted, and how everywhere people struggle to negotiate, resist and offer their own points of view. There is a need to examine the ideologies offered through visual forms, as well as multimodal forms that include the visual, but the task of addressing seriously the sensuousness of the forms in which ideologies come wrapped is central to art education. There are other concepts as important as aesthetics - ideology and representation are immediately obvious - but no concepts more important.
References


Given the number of uses of aesthetics listed references to them are not given here, but they can be obtained from the author. The uses are given in no particular order.
The Unprecedented Event: Acknowledging Badiou’s Challenge to Art and Its Education

jan jagodzinski
University of Alberta

In terms of this year’s journal theme, “unprecedented,” there is no other contemporary philosopher who has a more radical notion than Alain Badiou when it comes to theorizing the new; that is, the emergence of an unprecedented Event *ex nihilio*—not novel or innovative, but free of the authority of any prior example—to make a truth claim. For art educators, especially for the Social Caucus, Badiou offers a challenge to what has largely captured the theoretical writing in this journal — namely aesthetics and representation. As well intentioned as these theorizations have been concerning identity politics and critical theory stemming from Paulo Freire, who seems to be ever-present in the Caucus’ fundamental imaginary, both aspects, if Badiou is taken seriously, are challenged if the “social” in “social theory” is to be rethought for future transformative directions.

The burden of this essay is to introduce Badiou’s philosophy concerning art and “inaesthetics” to the Social Caucus readership since his importance to art and its education, I predict, will only continue to increase. A leftist thinker, with Maoist roots, who studied with Louis Althusser, but rejected his theories, Badiou remains a leading contemporary philosopher, slightly younger than that famous cadre of French philosophers who were politicized in the ’60s and have now passed away. He has deep psychoanalytic roots, drawing on Lacan’s register of the unconscious Real. This is what interests me most for art and its future education.

**The State of an Educational Emergency**

Before I introduce Badiou’s theory of the Event (capitalized throughout) as he developed it in *Being and Event* (2005b, designated as BE), and why such an Event can only be theorized from an “unprecedented” position, it is necessary to begin with a detour to talk about the state of the contemporary educational Imagination. I think this is necessary because *creativity* as art educators have theorized it has been hijacked by designer capital to produce a never-ending innovative array of fantasies for consumption. It will be necessary to grasp the nature of unprecedented creativity from Badiou’s perspective so as to grasp the importance of creativity *proper* for art and its education. So, let me begin with a brief sketch of the current *hegemonic position* of the educational Imagination within what Deleuze (1995) called a “society of control;” that is, an information society where global capitalism and the ‘democratic state’ are intimately intertwined with one another, engaged in what Foucault (1990), along with Agamben’s (1998) revisionism, has called biopower. The distinction between life as *zōē* (bare life *(nuda vita)*, which is the energy that is attached to the survival of every form of life) and *bios* (life lived under the protection of the sovereign state) retains its separation in control societies through what I call *choreographed modulation*, (or *choreographed padules*)—patterns and schedules together constitute a ‘padule’). Such seemingly random bio-flows of movement are managed as information through *complexity theory*.
in designer neoliberal capitalist societies, making it appear that choice and movement within a society of the 'pass' (or signifier) is a free act. The open access to designed environments is possible if one has the institutional right to pass through its barriers—such as a passport, a PIN number, a credit card and credit rating, an educational degree, a driver’s license, and so on. The panopticon of disciplinary societies has now inverted itself into what I call a synopticon; the many watch the few in a screen society, while surveillance is used to keep people out rather than in. Identity is liquid in such a neoliberal democratic capitalist state, which can assert itself as a ‘universal all’ by reducing all possible individual differences to a fundamental meritocratic system based on achievement alone. The demand by the superego in consumer capitalism is that you be ‘counted’ in the triple sense of that word—confirmed as an identity, included in society and evaluated by that society—so that you may enjoy the privileges and entitlements that this form of representational ‘counting’ in democracy brings: besides the obvious consumerism, certain rights and freedoms.

The hegemonic management of life (bios) for the ‘good’ of the citizen by such a democratic state (as biological survival that staves off death) is made possible by what Slavoj Žižek (1999, p. 185) has usefully identified as the recognition and exploitation of a population’s fantasies of “authentic longing.” For the ruling class, as Gramsci (1959) wrote, to present itself capable of representing ‘everyone’ under its own cultural and economic levels and interests, the state has to become “an educator.” Rancière (1991, pp.119-143) described this as the “pedagogizing” of society. This is the “myth of pedagogy” where there is “the general infantilization of individuals that make it up,” or as Ivan Illich (1971) maintained, schooling becomes an agency that ascertains the universal educational deficiencies of its citizens as to who is and isn’t educated, like in former generations where it was decided which law was sacred or profane. In a society of control, education works on the distinction between those who have ‘passed’ the test and those who have failed it to the point where a ceiling has been reached in terms of institutionalized competence.

To maintain the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism today and the democratic state that politically supports it as the ‘general will’ of its citizens, the perceived benefits of education have to appeal to the longing desire of the populous to assure consent; it must proffer a way out of exploitation. Its citizens must be convinced that the state’s educational policies are in their best interests. In a society of control, where the production and management of knowledge and information has become primary, the hegemonic Educational Imagination has the structure of a ‘learning society,’ where ‘learning to learn’ is the master signifier that enables a flexible subject ready to maintain the flows of capital. The adolescent of the institutionalization of high school that eventually became institutionalized during the first quarter of the 20th century, a necessity for the emerging forms of industrial international capital, has been extended into the post-adolescence of colleges and universities, to what I refer to in my work as simply youth (jagodzinski 2004). Youth refers to 1) the disappearance of any clear boundary distinctions between adolescence and adults necessary for designer capital, 2) the biopower attached to the energy of the body and the creativity of the mind that are put to ‘work’ for capitalist design, and 3) the sense of the ceaseless drive (Trieb) of production and consumption. This ‘type’ of citizen desired by state education for the education of ‘all’ is couched in the rhetoric of a democratic ideal that caters to the trope of individualism and difference. ‘Learning to learn’ is now extended throughout one’s life (learning is living, living is learning).

Education in control societies operates on a managerial model supported by cyber-technologies where the teacher is a facilitator and mentor while the student is an active and responsible self-seeking learner, an agent of her own ‘sense-making,’ catering to
unique differences that yield new creative possibilities for growth. The student is placed in an open environment where time is flexible; he or she is open to new ideas, dialogue, co-operation and a community of shared judgment necessary for human survival. The quality and accountability of such education is assured through monitoring and assessment. This is an open system theorized by enactivism, constructivism and most recently, complexity theory.

To ruin this utopian idealization, in a society of control there is no opting out of such an educational Imaginary. It is a form of soft totalitarianism and fascism, the sadism of which remains unacknowledged. Youth who do not comply to the state’s vision—that is citizens who belong to society by virtue of birth or immigration but are not as yet included within it—are punished for not having participated in the state’s ‘offer’ to become a productive citizen. They find themselves subject to abandonment, falling into what Agamben (1998) has theorized as a “state of exemption.” The dropouts, the at-risk kids, the kids on ‘suspension,’ the kids sent to boot camps, the street kids, the addicted bodies, the suicidal bodies, the self-mutilating bodies, the depressed bodies— have to survive on their own with little or no state help. This is a body-without-organs (BwO), as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), where libidinal energy finds no creative outlet. An inversion takes place from youth to freak. Freaks are those who must now dwell outside the legitimate institutions of support. The body of youth becomes split in two, each subjected to a different affective regime. On the one hand, there is a body that is legitimated to consume life (bios), as demanded by the superego of capitalism—simply enjoy! This satiates the body in the desired direction of edutainment. On the other hand, there is an illegitimate satiation of the body, the body of ‘pure’ enjoyment of excessive life (zöe). This freak body moves towards a desired inertness; the heroine addict being the apotheosis of such a BwO of complete non-productivity, reduced to bare survival.

The obscene supplement of this managerial system of education begins to show when differences can no longer be contained easily through well-established test procedures. The sociological experts of organization and class management come to help, reminding teachers that they should recognize the other’s ‘baggage’ (to be more sensitive to cultural differences); or to receive extra training to provide a smoother delivery of material (the cyber-gadgets); or how to deal with inappropriate behavior by understanding different personality types; perhaps a school needs a long term business plan and a mission statement of values to get its act together?; or pastoral programs should be instituted to help with interpersonal relations—like homework clubs, antibullying programs, courses in anger and time management and the like. The worse the student the more ‘education’ is demanded. More generosity and resources are given toward ‘exceptional’ students where it is obvious they are unable to meet curricula requirements—the kids with disabilities (the hard of hearing, the blind), the ‘slow’ learners, autistic children and so on. Attempts are made to cater to their differences, not only on humanitarian grounds, but also to find a place for them in the social order. These exceptions make it appear as if the system truly cares. For those youth who do not ‘pass’ in the sense of not earning the master signifiers, who find themselves shutout as ‘freaks,’ they begin to lead zombie lives, turning to crime if need be, or prostitution, drug dealing and out of work loitering. Many end up in jail, even more depressed, addicted and hardened. It is the geeks who have benefited most. The new ‘normal’ is what was once considered abnormal, the full compliance as a productive citizen whose creativity is usefully capitalized. The freaks are now like the barbarity of the underclass, uncivilized and uneducated. An ‘ugly’ picture to be sure. Looking at it too closely turns it into an anxious object. However, our educational Imaginary that supports flexible capitalism is failing all of us.
A Decision Needs to be Made

I certainly may have overstated my case, but the educational imagination always covers up its most ‘ugly’ ob-scene side. Badiou’s social and political intervention into such a state of affairs of education is, quite frankly, absolutely nothing! He has no curriculum, no methodology, and no content that he insists on getting across. He is explicit when saying that he is not “founding” anything (BE, p.35). What use is he then to education, yet alone to art education? He has no use in the conventional sense; rather Badiou first asks us (as educators) to make a decision—a difficult one at that. What do I mean? The response to this technological educational imagination that I have outlined above by those who have tried to worry its structures—like many members of the Social Caucus—has been to point out its fallacies, and to try to mitigate its worst effects through a practice of neo-Gramscian politics, as well as forms of democratic materialism, such as Frankfurt-style ideology critique. Many have tried to do away with the distinction of high and low art, especially in the aesthetics of popular culture, and placed an emphasis on difference (even if that difference most often falls into identity politics). Others have argued for sex-gender equity, and doing away with truth with a capital T, replacing it with situational ethics bound by the operations of micropower so as to rid of grand narratives and the stench of universalism. The best that is allowed, following Ernesto Laclau (2007) is a “particular universal” (a populist-democratic impulse) with a stress on impurity and hybridity rather than any movement towards purification. The stress has also been on the equality of values through various schemas of multiculturalism. This list of critical interventions can go on as they push toward issues of relativism, heuristics and in situ knowledge production, and so on. Badiou dismisses most of, if not all of these! So the decision he asks critical theorists and educators to make is as radical, as it is outrageous in the impossibility of its request—which is precisely what?

There is only one place throughout his vast body of writings (that I am aware) where he explicitly, but cryptically addresses education, and that is found in the opening chapter, “Art and Philosophy,” in his Handbook of Inaesthetics (2005, designated as IN). In his opening essay, first written in 1994, he states in no uncertain terms: “the only education is an education by truths” (p.14). This then is the demand of his impossible request. To make sense of what stands behind such a demand, for me at least, is an intuitive grasp that he is right, but that would mean the dissolution of pedagogy as we know and understand it, certainly in the way I described it above. It would be a doing away of any form of mastery of knowledge, whether human or machinic. Knowledge only emerges after the Event. In the end of this essay, I shall conclude that Badiou is providing us a form of “becoming-child” in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) sense where creativity proper for [art] education lies.

Introducing Badiou

One of the extraordinary difficulties with Badiou is how to get his complex ideas across in such a short paper. My remarks are directed mostly to the creativity that surrounds the Event as it relates to art and aesthetics, since it is the field of art education that interests us most. However, first some quick and obviously glossed moves that everyone knows about Badiou’s philosophy; that is, anyone who has taken an interest in his position. I list four important aspects about his general theory of ontology before turning to his theory of the unprecedented Event.
1) Badiou outlines four fundamental procedures of truth: art, science, politics and love (but why not theology or economics?), which is the toil of his most comprehensive system discussed in Being & Event. He devotes time to each of these fields, but it is the truth of art that concerns me here, as developed in his Handbook of Inaesthetics.

2) At 71 years of age (b. 1937), Badiou’s Maoist and contestatory Althusserian roots (he was his student) make him a materialist dialectician of an extraordinary kind. Badiou’s philosophical axiom is rather basic given that it is an attempt to retool Plato, to offer a new Republic as it were, along materialist lines. His first premise is to claim ontology, the science of being qua being, as nothing other than mathematics itself (BE, p.49). It is through set theory that the pure multiple can be thought—that is, multiplicity as pure difference as opposed to the ‘one and its multiple’ that plunges us into sameness and representation. Badiou follows Parmenides by maintaining that Being—thought as multiplicity—belongs to a void. This void is infinitely multiple; it bounds the inconceivable; it forecloses itself from any other relation, including its own self-identity. The paradox is that the void is infinitely multiple, yet it remains fundamentally unchanged. It becomes the paradoxical beginning/non-beginning of the system as a mathematical zero where the “negativity of the infinite” can be thought. So, Badiou’s ontology is a form of “subtraction.” This is to say that the Event generates an element that does not ‘count’ and is added to the void once its appearance is known. The primordial site of Badiou’s ontology is therefore discordant, a random flux of atoms and void—multiplicity. The void can be infinitely divided and this is the way Badiou secularizes infinity—by formalizing it through the axioms of set theory. Philosophy is disconnected from Being. Being is reducible to pure multiplicity. Being qua being is nothing but the multiple as such that can be configured mathematically.

3) Supplementing Being is the Event. Mathematics can say nothing of the Event. It is the Event that is the most interesting for it is truly unprecedented. Few of us can follow the intricacies of set theory, but the Event feels intuitively ‘right.’ Being and Event are like Thought and the Unthought, so one would think that the ‘true’ sense of education must remain faithful to the ‘unthought’ that the Event brings. An Event constitutes a hole (un trou) in the existing forms of knowledge. Badiou associates it with the Lacanian psychic Real—the unrepresentable realm beyond both the signifier of language and imagery. The Event as truth forces a break with the everyday discourses of knowledge. As such, it is a supplement to the existing multiplicity as articulated by set theory. Truth, as it unfolds from an Event (from an “abolished flash”) is an irreducible singularity that calls forth a “subject” marked by a continued fidelity. It is the subject who constitutes the site of that truth of this unprecedented event.

4) The initial Event is followed by a second moment of truth. Fidelity now becomes a continuing commitment by the subject to bear witness to the Event, to relate from the perspective of the Event, to think according to its radical truth, and finally to find a new way of being and acting in the situation. Truth is therefore productive, radical, creative and placed in the future anterior as “the coming-to-be of that which is not yet” (BE, p. 243). Thus, I would say that truth is directly related to creativity proper. It is ‘that’ which has ‘already happened,’ but must be recognized as such by the person affected by it, like the Biblical conversion of Saul to St. Paul, one of Badiou’s (2003) main examples. Truth is always universal for Badiou; a truth is true for all. It is never confined to a ‘single’ subject, although it may begin this way. It becomes a collective subject where a particular ego is not invested in any selfish way; rather the investment is with the ‘truth’ of the Event. It seems to me, the uncertainty and risk that (must?) come with the ‘shock’ of the Event cannot be decided right away—an unfolding of its “configurations” (Badiou’s term, IN, p.12) must take place. For example, the Nazis claimed an evolutionary break but this was not an Event. The universality of the void was
The truth did not emerge for everyone. Such truth was displaced onto an exceptional set of particular elements—namely the Jews, who needed to be ‘voided’ so as to assert a plentitude for the German people. With any Event, the difficult question remains on the decidability of the judgment. When does one know of being duped by the Event? When does one know an Event has occurred? Obviously, this must remain an undecidable that is never free of risk and error—like the urgency of justice and judgment itself.

The Unprecedented Art Event

The art Event, as I grasp it, emerges from the void of an earlier situation. Situation is a key word in Badiou’s lexicon. There is a situated void around which everything is organized. In Lacanian terms, we can call a situation the symbolic order along with its obscene supplement (all those aspects of the social order that happen without being acknowledged by the Law). It becomes possible to transform (dissipate) the structure into a new principle or architonic by this unprecedented Event, at the level of structure within a particular domain. Obviously, the Copernican Revolution was an Event, as was the invention and explosion of the Atom bomb. They caused the fundamental global ontology to change, although not right away. There had to be a fidelity to both these Events. One of Badiou’s favorite examples is the music composer Joseph Haydn whose Event inaugurates a Classical style from out of the void of the Baroque. Badiou is, however, weak on visual art and admits it. Most of his examples are theatrical (Artaud, Beckett) and of course poetical—Mallarmé being his key figure. Badiou has been criticized for his lack of being able to deal with visual art and trashing film as an “impure” art form because it incorporates other art forms within itself.

This criticism has since changed. He has attempted to address contemporary art (Badiou, 2004b, 2005c). However, his analysis leans towards conceptual art. One possible reason is that his mathematical set theory of Being lends itself to structural abstraction. Conceptual art follows suit in this regard. Crucial for art education is that of the four truth procedures art is given the privileged place for the Event. It is the literary arts, especially poetry, that lend themselves to structuration as a pure matheme (formulae of symbolic ideas in Lacan’s lexicon). More complexly put, if art thinks the Event at the precise point where mathematics falters, it does so only by virtue of its relation or non-relation to the matheme as the mathematical form of literal transparency and the poetic norm of singularity and presence. Poetry is the art form that comes closest to being a ‘pure’ art form in Badiou’s system.

Thinking of visual art, we would say that Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (1907) would be an initial Event articulating a direction toward a particular truth, in the way Cubism is eventually able to grasp an aspect of the Real of the void. Badiou takes Lacan to be one of his mentors and so the Real as the psychic register of the unconscious plays a profound place in his thought. Badiou’s concept of truth procedure does not imply a denial of external reality. Following Lacan, he points to the Real to designate the space of existing but unsymbolizable reality that can only be thought retroactively through the four truth procedures. Thus, while a truth procedure is required to access the Real, the Real also serves as an external limit as to the possibility of the production of truth. Badiou’s system is virtually impossible to grasp without an understanding of Lacan’s psychic register of the Real as the unrepresentable void that co-exists with the Imaginary and Symbolic (linguistic) psychic registers.

Badiou reminds me of Kuhn’s (1962) well-known conceptualization of the structure of a scientific revolution. The Event is not unlike a paradigm shift that gets filled out by
others who are seized by the revolutionary truth. Knowledge and truth are subsequent developments by many subjects who are engaged in the Event. Badiou maintains that the subject is "immortalized" through the Event. It is the same truth for all to bear witness. The Event proper is certainly contingent and unpredictable. Harry Garfinkle (in process) has identified the political surround of the 'history of ideas' as Events that are immanent and singular as Badiou would identify them—unprecedented. When we think of this educationally, the bulk of what goes on in schools is simply representational knowledge, not comparable to the status of an unprecedented Event. But perhaps there are other lessons Badiou might offer art educators as we move to grasp the full implications of his challenge, especially concerning creativity and transformative change based on it?

**Truth of Art**

The truth of an Event implies an ethics in the way a subject must remain engaged, continuing to bear witness to the truth by remaining faithful to an Event's impact that has long since passed. Commitment and anamnesis is involved through a series of "subject-points" (*IN*, p. 13) that are referencing back, swerving, twisting, weaving through compressed time and space—perhaps in the manner of a Deleuzian (1993) *fold*. But now, I am waxing poetically, when indeed the initial Event is *traumatic* in the sense that not only is a hole (*tou*) pierced in the order of knowledge, it also pierces all those who remain faithful to it. There is no rest when this happens, no contemplation of the beautiful. The force of the seizure generates the energy for continued exploration. Intuitively, one knows that is indeed what happens in the *becoming* of creativity when energy (*zöe*) seems to come from ‘nowhere.’

A work of art, however, is not an Event — a work is a *fact* of art; nor is a work of art a truth. “A truth is an artistic procedure initiated by an event. This procedure is composed of nothing but works.” (*IN*, p. 12, author’s emphasis). Truth, however is not manifested in any one of them. A work is only an instance, a “differential point of a truth” (ibid.) that forms its subject. “An artistic truth is a (infinite) generic multiple of works,” that “weave together the being of an artistic truth only by the chance of their successive occurrences” (ibid.). An artwork is therefore a “situated inquiry about the truth that it locally actualizes or of which it is a finite fragment” (ibid., emphasis added). The work of art is submitted to a principle of novelty [contingency, accident]. It is retroactively validated as a “subject-point” within the trajectory of a truth. The validation after the fact identifies an articulation that something ‘further’ has been accomplished to filling out the truth. So works of art compose a truth within the dimension of the post-event, which institutes "the constraint of an artistic configuration" (*IN*, p. 12, author’s emphasis). A truth is an artistic configuration initiated by an Event (an Event is a group of works—a body, a "singular multiple of works") that unfolds through chance as a series that serve as its subject points.

Thinking of Picasso again, *Demoiselles d’Avignon* would be a “subject-point” of a larger truth that Cubism formed by all those who were caught by its potentiality: the French art critic Louis Vauxcelles, who coined the movement, along with Braque, Guillaume Apollinaire, Robert Delaunay, Marcel Duchamp, his brothers Raymond Duchamp-Villon, and Jacques Villon, Fernand Léger, and Francis Picabia and so on. This would be the creative dispersion that opens up a new plane of human existence, not canceling what was already in place, but creating a new ‘line of flight.’ Perhaps Badiou would maintain that Cubism is a “subject-point” of the many -isms that radiated from a much more profound Event—the reorientation of space and time as “mechanization took command” at the turn of the 20th century in Sigfried Gideon’s (1969) terms, in leagues with
international capitalism and imperialism. I think it is useful here, pedagogically speaking, to maintain that the creativity (Spieltrieb) of the Event is the driving (Trieb) necessity to articulate the full implications of the truth to a point of possible obsession. Picasso could not ‘help himself’ to do otherwise.

The truth of art is therefore immanent and singular. It is not the work, nor the author, but the artistic configuration initiated by an eventual rupture that (in general) renders a prior configuration obsolete. So the configuration possesses neither a proper name nor a proper contour and not even a possible totalization. It cannot be exhausted—only imperfectly described. It is an artistic truth—for there is no truth of truth. Cubism’s truth is a particular way of conceptualizing temporality within visual representational space. However, there emerges a point where such a truth becomes exhausted, its component works succeed less and less in bringing forth any new insights. This is a Hegelian move on Badiou’s part. Like Hegel there is an “end of art,” a moment when the ‘spirit’ has been drained away and art now becomes a caricature of itself—kitsch. Or, to moralize this process—degenerate. So, as I see it, artistic truth has three moments. The first is the moment of the unprecedented Event as a rupture in knowledge. This is followed by the subject’s fidelity to this happening. Truth comes to a certain end in the third moment when its configuration has become saturated and exhausted in its own infinity. As Badiou puts it, “A truth begins with a poem of the void, continues through the choice of continuing, and comes to end only in the exhausted of its own infinity” (IN, p. 56).

Configurations as Truth—Confrontations with the Real

An artistic configuration remains crucial in Badiou’s system; it seems, to grasp this unprecedented truth of art. It is not an art form, a genre, nor an ‘objective’ period in the history of art; nor is it a “technical” dispositif (device). “Rather it is an identifiable sequence, initiated by an event, comprising a virtually infinite complex of works [...] that produces [...] in a rigorous immanence to the art in question—a truth of this art, an art-truth” (IN, p. 13, author’s emphasis). It is not philosophy’s task to think art, instead “a configuration thinks itself in the works that compose it” (IN, p. 14, author’s emphasis). A configuration is obviously an unconscious process. So, a crucial point is that an artwork is an inventive inquiry into the configuration. Such an inquiry works out what that configuration will have been; that is, when it has been completed and exhausted in the future anterior. The configuration ‘thinks itself,’ if I can put it this way. Again, it as though the artist is possessed by that configuration and must come to terms with it. The object continues to beckon and call, to which a response is demanded. When this configuration (say Cubism at a specific historical point) ceases to ‘think itself,’ no new possibilities are produced; the truth has come to a standstill. Duchamp, for instance, said that Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2, painted in 1912 was the end of Cubism for him. He moved away from representational space. Artists who have distinguished themselves through their oeuvre, must go through such a self-reflexive process. They must identify “subject points” of becoming so that the truth emerges. Where the ego of the artist must be ‘shelved,’ so to speak, is when others continue to disperse the Event, if I can put it like that, so that a collectivity emerges and perhaps eventually the institutionalization of its ‘life-form’ takes place.

The subject that is called to truth is a collective one in Badiou’s terms; the artistic configuration requires many attempts to fill out its potentialities (like a paradigm shift). I think ‘potentialities’ would be the right word here, and not possibilities, to keep the future anterior of the Event’s trace open. Badiou maintains that the subject becomes immortal with this loss of ego. A ‘disinterest’ occurs. When the object looks back an
excess beyond the self is felt—perhaps like at a Barak Obama rally where one feels something special is being called forth? By the ‘object looking back,’ I am thinking of Lacan’s notion of an encounter with the Real (in Seminar XI, *Four Fundamentals*, 1977) when an uncanny moment happens and ‘time is thrown out of joint.’ This is crucial for grasping the unprecedence of such an Event. The subject is *riven* by it. “Being struck by lightning,” meaning being hit by a creative spark, would not be far off from what Badiou means by Event as creativity proper.

Unlike the Romantic interpretation where the theatre-goer/art spectator is held captive by the work in an encounter, spellbound like some religious event or ritual, caught by the awe of the work, in the encounter of an Event there is a puncture, a trauma, and a realization. The subject is ‘eclipsed.’ It appears in the flicker of a subject’s own vanishing or void (and one never knows when this happens). In the Lacanian sense, when the object ‘looks back’ this means that a *summons* has been issued—a summons to give oneself over to, dispose oneself to, or to think according to ‘its thought,’ instead of or according to the pursuit of one’s interest. So, when Badiou is writing of the “hermeticism” of Mallarmé’s poetry (*IN*, pp. 28-29) as being enigmatic of a “presence” of the world (thereby skirting Romanticism), he is calling for a Real encounter. For that to happen, art must arrange an oblique operation of capture. Such an oblique operation suggests looking at the artwork anamorphically and being open to its enigma. The encounter with the Real of the poem must take place before anything happens. We may ‘enter’ a poem, rather than being immediately seized by it. For the moment of the poem to become an Event needs not happen immediately. However, *an encounter with the Real has to happen*. Badiou follows his master, Mallarmé here. You have to find the “pure notion” as “the reflection of the pure present in itself, or the present purity” (Mallarmé, in *IN*, p. 29). That moment of pure presence dissolves the object. A poem’s “hermeticism” is its “momentary being.” This is its “point of presence” signaled by its enigma (the Real of its Being, the void within itself). This is not to posses the keys or to interpret the poem so as to ‘unlock’ and make sense of it. Rather, “the poem demands that we delve into its operations. The enigma lies in this very demand. The rule is simple: To enter into the poem—not in order to know what it means, but rather to think what happens in it” (*IN*, p.29, my emphasis).

Badiou is making a distinction between poetry, which is the poeticization (the arting, if you will) of what comes to pass, and the poem (the art object), “which is itself the place where it comes to pass, or the pass of thought” (*IN*, p. 29). This art/arting distinction is very useful to think through pedagogically. Art is representation, whereas ‘arting’ as a gerund is the creative becoming of art. Further, such ‘becoming’ cannot take place without an Event, and that Event must encounter the Real, which through a series of works, yields the truth of the *configuration*. When the object *looks* (metaphorically) back as the first instance of the truth event, it is distinctly *traumatic*. The ethics of fidelity requires a commitment by the artist to sustain a certain relation to this originary traumatic eclipse of the subject—what I call in my work the moment of self-reflexivity—the X marking the contingent moment of the encounter (jagodzinski, 2008). The Event, then suspends, punctures, ruptures (traumatizes) the Imaginary frame of the ego, placing the body “into pieces,” in Lacan’s terms, affecting the flows of unconscious libidinal energy—that is, the body of *jouissance*. In Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) lexicon, this body-without-organs (*BwO*) releases a new potential into the actual world. This would be a description of an artistic encounter of “becoming” that Badiou seems to be advocating by the configured Event.

So, the encounter has to happen at the limit of the Symbolic and ‘beyond’ the Imaginary psychic registers. It is an intense experience as well as the annulment of the ego. Only then can we say it is unprecedented in the strongest sense of that term. Nevertheless, it

---

is a particular “I” that undergoes such trauma, an “I” that is suspended, broken, annulled and dis-interested. The particular “I” of the Imaginary is the frame of altogetherness, the self-assured biography existing in a “situation” with all its complexity. This is the state of oneself—or the ‘oneness’ of all the multifarious elements that constitute the world for that person, somehow all logically combined in their contradictions to make ‘sense.’ The Event always poses the question of what lies outside such a seemingly closed jurisdiction. Like Lacan’s méconnaissance (misrecognition) of the Imaginary, this closed frame is never questioned unless it can be shaken by the Real. The Oneness of the Imaginary situation is disrupted by some unrepresentable and supplementary “thing,” that occurs within the closed-field of the situation but counts as ‘no-thing.’ This ‘nothing’ or ‘no thing’ of the situation lies at the very heart of the artistic configurations of the Event—as an impasse or impossibility. It is the void that conscious thought cannot grasp, a ‘beyond’ the realm of thought—where paradoxically thinking of the unthought happens. This would be pedagogy in the ‘truest’ sense, and why it is that—ultimately—art cannot be taught as is so often exclaimed in exasperation.

As Badiou further explains, “Every situation implies the nothing of its all. But the nothing is neither a place nor a term of the situation” (BE, pp. 54-55, added emphasis). This “phantom of inconsistency” existing in the Real (not transcendentally, but immanently within it), which, although not ‘counted’ is, nevertheless, always found in the ‘all’ of the situation. I love everybody means that there is one person I hate. The person I hate is not ‘counted.’ Perhaps, I have repressed her or him. All is not possible without an exception that exists in the void. This void cannot be brought under positive knowledge. There is no consistency to the void of the Real—let us call it chaos or simply pure difference. So, an [art] education based on Real encounters already takes us outside the current educational situation. Even intuition lies under the rule of a situation, and a situation (by definition) has no laws capable of discerning (or ‘counting’) anything in excess of itself.

**Romantic Misdirection**

In this encounter with alterity, the poets since the Romantics have tried to present what can’t in fact be presented, to say what in fact can never be said, as if the ‘fullness’ of being might be approached through art. Transcendental fullness (holism) was somehow to be captured, a glimpse of the Real caught, banishing for a small moment the phantom of inconsistency through the face of God—calling on the sacred with all its theological trappings of Gaia, New Agism and so on. Romanticism wanted this indiscernible Real, this void, this Nothing. to assume a visible consistency. But, the question of human finitude always haunts art. In our field of art education, this route of post-Romanticism and its encumbered spiritualism has been paradigmatically taken up by Peter London (2007). Heidegger’s nostalgia for lost presence and the desire to incorporate that presence in art is hardly over. Romantic spirituality is a strong force in art education programs, having its champion in Kenneth Beittel right from the start of the first issue of the Studies journal in 1959 where he wrote on creativity.

The finitude of the self brings with it an alienation, pathos and nostalgia when contending with the void and the incommensurable, infinite truth. The ego-inflated Romantic fills up that void through the truth of art. The seduction of truth as a-letheia, as “disclosedness” (lethe as forgetfulness) that first appears when something is seen or revealed is the Romantic trap. The phenomenology of care (Sorge) follows this path educationally. It dramatizes the ego in its splendor of being able to discern the good. Badiou seems to say, “beware of the self-claimed certainty” (Ethics, p. 56) and the claims...
to the ‘good.’ The aim should be otherwise: to recognize the Real of the Other, the impenetrability and unknowingness of the void that is there.

The claim that radical alterity of the Event constitutes a hole in the order of the symbolic (in language) by shattering the Imaginary is an extimate occurrence in Lacan’s terms. The Real is an “extimate relation,” situated in the traumatic nucleus governing the syntax of the subject, utterly interior and intimate to the subject, yet, at the same time, radically supplementary by being exterior and excluded from it. To use again a racial example: the Jew was the extimate object of the Nazi Socialist Party, the object of anxiety and hate. The Jew was this ‘object’ that was strange to them, yet it was the Jew who lay at the very heart of their differentiated identity. The ethics of this truth is the ethics of the Real, and it is certainly another aspect of pedagogy that tangles with the becoming of a knowledge not-as-yet-found, marked by a truth not-yet-certain, but releasing the affirmation of desire for such knowledge yet to come.

The Event cannot be ‘named.’ It remains indiscernible and hence it’s not like the subject as artist ‘knows’ the truth or now ‘adjusts’ to the truth. In the local situation the artist can only approach the truth generically. “The subject believes that there is a truth, and this belief occurs in the form of knowledge. I term this knowing belief confidence” (BE, pp. 396-397). There is a confidence that something in fact “new” has happened to one’s situation, but the subject can only speak nonsense in relation to the Event. There are no signifiers; neologisms and new images have to be created for the Event to ‘show’ itself. It is a kind of babble-point since one has to displace established significations. Antonomasia is perhaps the adequate description. We speak of an Einsteinian Universe now that there are equations and an imaginary in place to grasp that particular dimension of reality. In this sense Einstein’s configurations were an unprecedented Event, but in the start they were just scribbles.

Badiou further explicates on this experience: “The fidelity of the subject is exposed to chance, grounded in nothing, unsupported by knowledge, and nonsensical to the eyes and ears of outsiders” (BE, p. 407). If this sounds like a religious event, it is not surprising since Saul/St.Paul form a paradigmatic Event in Badiou’s oeuvre. It is a commitment to a chance, a risk, and a wager. The artist always works to the fidelity of the chance event. The subject is “that which decides an undecidable from the standpoint of an indiscernible” (BE, p.407) with an ethics that demands: “Decide from the standpoint of the undecidable” (BE, p. 197). Risk means to contend to the situational anxiety of the void. It would mean a courageous artistic pedagogy, would it not? Or, “Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you” (Ethics, p. 47). The ‘good’ becomes “the internal norm of a prolonged disorganization of life” (Ethics, p. 60). Pedagogy along these lines asks one to suffer patiently—no?

The subjective destitution that the Event brings need not be horrific as Žižek (1999) maintains in his critique of Badiou. Although fidelity to the Event, as an encounter with the Real, may leave the subject babbling and riven, nevertheless it becomes possible in the ethics of that fidelity to reach something that exceeds his or her own finitude. But, it need not turn to Romantic proportions of a Naturphilosopie. The suffering body or victimhood can be escaped and in fact can turn to love. Love, as we know, is an encounter with the Real as well, and it is another place of truth for Badiou. It is perhaps here that love in the classroom can open up the solipsism of the One (the student) when meeting the teacher as the Two. This numerology is that of infinity, as Badiou maintains, opening up an infinite world of sensibility. The production of truth about the Two pertains “ultimately to difference as such” (TW, p. 146). “Love is a riving of the One of solipsism in an encounter with the Two of the amorous couple that pens, like a passage
upon the plethoric infinite of the sensual world so as to bring out the event as ‘the coming-to-be of that which is not yet’” (Ethics, p. 27).

My Lessons from Badiou

What does visual art do if not cause a mutation in seeing enabled by the Event? What does visual art do if not ‘steal’ back the eye from its enslavement to spectacularization of designer capitalism? What does visual art do if not preserve the place of ‘freedom’ through creativity proper? Is there creativity in “learning to learn”? Certainly, but this is not the creativity of the Event that potentially transforms—a far more dangerous proposition. An impossible one—not entirely, but certainly rare.

Art and its education as a truth Event is an encounter with the Real that cannot be measured or counted. Transformation in the ‘true’ sense takes place in the interval of becoming through what I refer to as self-reflexivity. The X marks the spot of what I take as an inhuman event, where the strangeness that breaks the frame of imaginary knowledge occurs as a contingent and accidental moment. This may be sudden, but not always. It can happen ‘after’ the traumatic exposure when another ‘world’ begins to open up. Education as self-reflexion, what Badiou refers to as the fidelity to the Event, requires an ethics of commitment, courageously allowing the Imaginary ego to fade as the struggle to define the new is followed in the trace of the Event. The counter with the Event is the dimension of ‘aesthetics proper.’ By that I mean ‘aesthetics’ in its original Greek sense of the force of affect. Properly, this should be termed aisthesis as opposed to aesthetics that is already at the level of the signifier. A pedagogical encounter has to ‘force’ a dis-organization of the imagined body—Lacan’s “body in pieces” or the dis-organized body of affect (BwO). This takes discipline “to pick up the pieces” after facing the Event, but it is precisely how a stylistic artistic oeuvre emerges unconsciously, which gives us access to unprecedented new ways of coming to terms with existence.

The pedagogical Event is therefore always immanent and singular. This is difference in-and-of itself as a particular development of an artistic sensibility through artistic configurations in Badiou’s terms. The curriculum is forever emergent only in the sense that it is always after the fact, and there needs to be always a vigilance as to when the Event happens for it remains an unpredictable occurrence. It may never come, like someone who has never experienced love. There is something of the “becoming child” in this process as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) play with it in Thousand Plateaus. Childhood is always marked by the limit of sense making. The outside world transforms the child through affective confrontations that are not in the realm of representational learning. As adults, we forget the risks of curiosity, and the anxieties of the unknown that must be faced. Thus, I am thinking here of the notion of Spieltrieb (play drive) that Friedrich Schiller (1967) developed in his The Aesthetic Education of Man. This concept is close to what characterizes an unprecedented artistic Event. This ‘drive to play’ is the creative force of life itself—life as zoë and not bios. The former is free of the shackles of the signifier, while the latter is not. It remains a pseudo creativity marked by the innovations of designer capitalism. There is a sense of the child about freedom that characterizes Spieltrieb. It is a ‘newness’ that continues to thrive and survive—not in any Romantic way of ‘growth,’ or modernist notions of progress, but in the radical questioning of the order of things, a questioning that is not caught by the dictates of “learning to learn,” but the self-reflexive questioning that an Event enables. In that Event ‘someone’ or ‘something’ calls us, makes us hesitate, frames us, ‘forces’ our ego to fade. The appearance of this Other is never in the order of representation (which is what our schools are good at), but hits us on the order of affect—aisthesis not aesthetics. This is why Badiou’s only explicit statement on education remains a challenge—“the only
education is an education by truths." We should recognize its importance, for ultimately art as an unprecedented Event cannot be taught!

References


Badiou, Alain (2005c) "The Subject of Art" (transcribed by Lydia Kerr), The *Symptom*, Issue 6 (Spring). Available at: [http://www.lacan.com/newspaper6.htm](http://www.lacan.com/newspaper6.htm) (cited as SA)


Garfinkle, Harry (in process). *Paradigm Shifts and the New Oekumena.*


The 'X' is self-reflexivity refers to the unconscious. I have developed this concept more fully elsewhere (Jagodzinski 2008).
reStAGE<deep breadth>activist art/disruptive technologies

Karen Keifer-Boyd
The Pennsylvania State University

Figure 1. reStAGE<deep breadth>

SAGE: refers to being wise, and is also a green color that suggests thriving beyond survival even in harsh [desert] conditions. It is a color denoting environmental consciousness.
STAGE: to set-up and restage; no original, only actions materializing invisible systems. Stage with the curtain shaped like an M creates a space like an envelope to be unfolded, opened, and entered.
REST: as in taking a deep breath, a pause for time to reflect, refresh self, re-invent self and society.
AGE: as in growing older, reflection, sage or elders’ wisdom, and is a reference to the reality that there is only a finite time to take action, to enact change.
BREADTH (according to dictionary.com)\(^1\) is “freedom from narrowness or restraint; liberality: a person with great breadth of view,” going beneath surface appearances, and this is also a reference (with creative spelling) to taking a deep breath to see broadly and deeply as symbolized by the letter M.

\(^1\) http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/breadth

In this article, I explore, with you, artists’ socio-political disruptions with communication technologies to inspire political action and social change, and how such art can be environmentally and socially useful. How does art function politically? What is activist art? What non-violent forms of dissent or disruptions to harmful practices are possible today with digital technologies, and how do artists manifest political perspectives in their practice?

Art activism in the 21st century uses Net global reach for mobilizations that extend the activist art practices in the last quarter of the 20th century conveyed in Martha Rosler’s (2004) 1975 to 2001 essays collected in Decoys and Disruptions; and in Annemarie Chandler and Nori Neumark’s (2005) anthology, At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet, which documents activist art in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. There are several other texts documenting art activism, such as The Interventionists: Users’ Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life (Thompson & Sholette, 2004). In order to respond to the questions I pose above, I draw from my participation in activist art using disruptive technologies, and from what I have learned from many other activist art/disruptive technologies projects. From this research, four predominant strategies emerge in the use of disruptive technologies for activist art. Activist art:

- LISTENS to disenfranchised voices and entangled histories
- BARES witness to power structures that control people, cultural narratives, and worldviews of a society
- STOPS traffic of harmful activities and products
- ENVISIONS global ecological well-being

This article offers art education curricular content by discussing each of these activist strategies that contemporary artists, often under collective names, use with communication technologies to disrupt or stop injustice, and to envision global ecological well-being.

**LISTENS to Disenfranchised Voices and Entangled Histories**

Shalini Randeria, a social anthropologist, argues that societal change involves the particularities of historical entanglements as interrelationships of systems. In her critique of Eisenstadt’s (2003) scholarship on multiple modernities, which concerns analysis of social change from overlapped units of cultures, belief systems, and political institutions, Randeria (2006) posits that rather than analysis of units, understanding societal change requires the study of uneven entanglements of...
interrelationships, irrespective of how one has compartmentalized these units, (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, nationality). In her 2006 Holberg Prize laureate presentation, she shows William Blake’s 1796 sketch of the entanglement of Europe with Africa and the Americas as a visual portrayal of the uneven power entanglements of people in the production of society as a claim-making enterprise (Randeria, 2006).

The nature of what is considered knowledge depends on the system used to present the knowledge. Nonlinear narratives can present entangled histories from disparate cultural, political, and economic systems for depth of understanding of power dynamics and complexities of an issue. Picture Projects was launched in 1995 to create online spaces for voices traditionally overlooked by mainstream media. Picture Projects is renowned for blurring the lines between art and documentary with technologically savvy websites and installations that are immersive, nonlinear narratives. For example, akaKurdistan, is an online archive of images and stories by and about Kurdish people. RE: Vietnam — Stories Since the War, is another of their interactive digital projects. Picture Projects’ mission is a “commitment to creating innovative web-based tools for social and political reform” (Cornyn, 2009, ¶ 6). Alison Cornyn and Sue Johnson are founding partners of Picture Projects. “The team has experimented with the Web as a space for presenting alternative points of view and complex and in-depth perspectives. Participatory storytelling is at the heart of much of the studio’s work” (Cornyn & Johnson, 1995-2009, ¶ 7 history).

Another interactive artwork by Picture Projects, 360degrees: Perspectives on the U.S. Criminal Justice System, is an outstanding example of an activist strategy of listening to disenfranchised voices and entangled histories. Considering the increase in the number of U.S. prisons, operated by corporate enterprises, there is a need to examine critically the criminal justice system (Schmalleger & Smykla, 2007). Picture Projects define the mission of their 360degrees project, an interactive and dynamic website, and call for involvement by communities, schools, and educators.

It is our hope that this site will challenge your perceptions about who is in prison today and why. We also hope that it will generate ideas, big and small, about how we can reduce crime and strengthen our communities without continuing this unprecedented rate of incarceration. Over the next two years, we are continuing to work with educators and students to develop local dialogues in schools and communities. We will be partnering with radio producers and journalists across the country to tell stories about how crime and incarceration affects not just the people who are directly involved, but whole families and communities. Let us know if you would like to be notified when we add new stories and updates. (Cornyn & Johnson, 2009, “about” section)

There are many other Internet activist artworks concerning different issues that provide multiple perspectives including perspectives from disenfranchised individuals who have not been able to present their stories to news media without ideological and political editing.2

Sometimes, providing diverse perspectives in interactive and dynamic art takes the form of

360degrees, which presents views from victims of a crime, the person incarcerated for committing the crime, family members of both, prison workers, community members who knew people involved or witnessed the crime, and others. Other times, artists as researchers, or working collaboratively with researchers, seek to communicate perspectives on a series of events that have been missed by mainstream news media. For example, Lynn Stephen's (2009) Making Rights a Reality: Oaxaca Social Movement 2006-present is a digital ethnography that gives voice to teachers on strike in Oaxaca in 2006, who were tortured and imprisoned by Mexico’s police and paramilitary. The interlinked testimonies of the teachers are contextualized with other witnesses who give testimony, and with descriptions and analysis of events (i.e., three decades of different social movements in Oaxaca) that led to the teacher strike in 2006 and their brutal imprisonment from those who experienced and witnessed these events.

BARES Witness to Power Structures that Control

Alfredo Jaar’s artwork bears witness to military conflicts, political corruption, and imbalances of power between industrialized and developing nations. His community-based art involves installations in physical and Internet public spaces. He informs us in his 2007 digital animation, EMERGENCIA, that 22 million people are infected with HIV in Africa as of 2007, and each day the spread of AIDS grows in the world’s poorest places. A chart that compares the death toll from AIDS on different continents shows 22.7 million deaths in Sub-Saharan Africa. The textual imagery conveys staggering statistics of AIDS orphans and infants infected with AIDS at birth. A note states that statistics for 2008-2009 will be released in 2010, thus the intention is to keep the site updated and to include resources and strategies to change the AIDS epidemic trajectory of suffering and death.

Witness and revealing injustice and power imbalances of resources has laid the foundation for mobilizing large numbers of people to take action. However, to be effective, protests must stop traffic.

STOPS Traffic of Harmful Activities and Products

Activist journalist, Naomi Wolf (2009, 2008, 2007), looks at histories of social change and concludes that for activism to be effective mass protests must stop traffic in non-violent ways. By stopping traffic she is referring to dissent that disrupts business-as-usual. Virtual sit-ins, using computer programs such as FloodNet, are stop traffic strategies involved in activist art of some artist collectives (e.g., Critical Art Ensemble, Coco Fusco in Operación Digna, and Electronic Disturbance

Theatre). FloodNet effectively stops traffic to a targeted website due to the congestion when masses of people access the site simultaneously. The website freezes and is no longer accessible because the FloodNet application requires a reload each time a person tries to access the site. Postings of upcoming virtual sit-ins and an archive of the purpose and impact of previous ones are listed at the Electronic Civil Disobedience (2007) website.

Today, one of the most impactful activist strategies involve computer hacking, code scrambling, logic bombs that halt computers or damage circuitry at crucial moments, botnets that disable websites, or website duplication and parody (e.g., The Yes Men, 1999; Organization of Corporations Against Coöperation, 2002) to stop, question, or redirect Internet traffic from government and large corporate powers. According to a December 12, 2009 article in The New York Times:

In the last two years, Internet-based attacks on government and corporate computer systems have multiplied to thousands a day. Hackers, usually never identified, have compromised Pentagon computers, stolen industrial secrets and temporarily jammed government and corporate Web sites. (Markoff & Kramer, ¶ 1)

While terrorists use these stop-traffic strategies to gain power of particular ideologies and control of resources, art activists use disruptive technologies and cyber strategies to stop such ideological and resource controls and other harmful environmental, political, social, and economic policies and practices by governments and corporate conglomerates.

Activist artists in collaboration with social science researchers, and others, can use communication technologies to build accessible databases to address “the global in our everyday lives, our everyday realities, and [when many take action, this] creates changes globally by making changes locally” (Shiva, 2005, p. 4). GoodGuide is a disruption to consumption in which a product typed into the interface will reveal its health, environment, and social performance. The website GoodGuide (O’Rourke, 2008) states that it has ratings for over 65,000 food, personal care, toy, and household products; and if the product is not included to let GoodGuide know so they can research and include that product’s ratings in the interactive database. Similarly, the Environmental Working Group (2007-2009) has created SkinDeep in which products for skincare entered into the search engine are rated for their environmental footprint.

When art students learn about the products they use with GoodGuide and SkinDeep performance data, and compare the performance ratings of the products to the marketing strategies for those products, they will have an awareness that provides content from which to create activist art. For example, they can make public service announcements (PSA) that are parodies of the social motives elicited by the marketed product image. The student-created PSAs can be posted in FlickR, or other Internet public spaces, and tagged so that when people shop with browser searches the students’ activist artworks are discovered.
Disruption—Changing Narratives

Virtual world interactions can fuel self-hatred, and hatred of others\(^3\) (consider the recent news on heavy traffic to religious extremist Internet sites).\(^3\) These same tools, strategies, and online spaces can be used to circumvent, intervene, or provide alternatives to self-hate and hatred of (and violence toward) others different from oneself. HOW to do this is the focus of virtual world activism toward social, environmental, political, and economic justice (see e.g., Sholette, 1999).

Two artists who use the Internet as their art medium, Joan Heemskerk from the Netherlands and Dirk Paesmans from Belgium, collectively formed Jodi. Their early work looks like scrambled code or computer malfunctions, in that they modified old games to create games as art. Their intention is to create a spoof of the original game. This is one example of culture jamming, which is a disruption to prevalent hegemonic cultural narratives, often through montaging or appropriating from the visual manifestations of the cultural narrative. Video montages of news broadcast clips to show absurdity of the news story, and biases of news reporting, is an example of culture jamming common on the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. Culture jamming art activism attacks cultural narratives of this-is-the-way-things-are, i.e., ideas of normalcy, or a seemingly powerless feeling of not being able to change the future trajectory of war, poverty, consumerism, pollution, violence, and hate.\(^5\)

The Barbie Liberation Organization (BLO) operations, begun in 1989, involve circuit board surgery and re-engineering of Barbie dolls and G.I. Joe action figures so that Barbie yells “Vengeance is mine!” and G.I. Joes fantasizes “Let’s plan our dream wedding!” The altered dolls returned to toy store shelves, when purchased a second time for child play-acting with dolls, had stickers on each to “call your local TV news,” which brought the attention of the news media.

Lowtech is an arts education project, based since 1997 in Sheffield in the U.K, by the arts group Redundant Technology Initiative. This group creates art with discarded technology and provides a lab for others to use and learn how to be creative with discarded computers. Their workshops and exhibitions drew attention to rapid consumption of technology, and growing waste hazards of discarded technology. They set up Access Space, as a freely accessible online creative media lab, and they teach others how to create community-based technology reuse projects. Art educators can change the cultural narrative of new is better, and educate future generations to re-envision technology sustainability.

---

\(^3\) For example, Stormfront, a hate organization with the slogan “White Pride World Wide,” was launched in 1995 by former Ku Klux Klan leader Don Black. It is currently available in 13 languages on the Internet with content aimed at children and with links to other racist organizations.

\(^4\) For example see the archive of Rachel Maddow (2009) shows.

\(^5\) Sniggler.net provides an encyclopedia of culture jammer’s activism.

ENVISIONS Global Ecological Well-being

FORA.tv is an ever-growing database of videos on “people, issues, and ideas changing the planet.” For example, on October 20, 2009, I searched FORA.tv with the terms “art & environment,” and 92 videos were listed, each linked for full-viewing. A search of “visual artists & environment” resulted in eight videos. FORA.tv is a dynamic resource for art teachers to guide students to envision global ecological well-being. Films range in length from 20 minutes to 1.5 hours. Art teachers can set up a profile and save short segments to show. They can also download the videos, if Internet access is unavailable.

EcoArtTech works with digital, networked, and sustainable technologies and contemporary environments to create art that assesses and makes visible environmental conditions. Cary Peppermint and Leila Christine Nadir (2005) founded EcoArtTech as their collaborative platform for digital environmental art. Their 2009 project, Eclipse, an Internet-based work commissioned by Turbulence of New Radio and Performing Arts, is a participatory-driven, artwork-application that alters and corrupts photos of United States parks posted on a photo-sharing website FlickR. The alterations in the photos are based on real-time particle pollution data. To activate the artmaking process, you make a selection from the list of U.S. national parks, forests, monuments, or state parks. The program then searches for a recent photo posted in FlickR that has been tagged with the park’s name by nature enthusiasts who share on the Internet their travel, sight-seeing photographs. The artwork is programmed to obtain real-time pollution data from the nearest city via an application developed by the U.S. government (airnow.gov). An image is then produced that corrupts the original photograph “through a set of programmed algorithms that affect color, saturation, and contrast and that impose intermittent mirroring, deletion, or cropping of the file’s data” indicating the level of pollution (Peppermint & Nadir, 2009, ¶ 2).

Human Futures, directed by Mike Stubbs (2008), is a resource of innovative works by internationally renowned artists whose artworks transcend the borders between the physical, virtual, biological, and digital in response to three questions: “What does the future have in store for our children’s children? What choices could we make? What futures do we want to create?” (Stubbs, 2008, ¶ 1).

To envision the global, ecological well-being in the future, art teachers can facilitate critiques of the prevalent cultural stories in visual culture. Diigo, is a free application that individuals or groups can utilize as a way to critique content on any website. Diigo enables the layering of virtual post-it or sticky notes on a website, in which, similar to a blog, many can comment on each others’ comments. The “floating sticky notes” when closed look like a cartoon speech-bubble with a number inside, which indicates how many people have commented on that particular post-it note. Diigo also enables annotations by highlighting text on another’s website to draw attention to a particular passage for discussion, and like Delicious, a community of learners can share bookmarked sites.

For example, since most people learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media, I have asked

---

students to search the Internet for art that embodies feminist theories and practices. Bookmark it. Add a Diigo post-it note to the group regarding why this artwork embodies feminist theory or feminist principles in practice. Visit each of the sites the others have bookmarked and comment in what ways this artwork does or does not embody feminist principles. The responses are then used to inform their own artworks as speculative visual trajectories into the future from asking similar questions as posed in the art by Human Futures concerning making choices today to create the future.

For another example, in art teachers working with students in Uganda and the United States, student bookmarked sites are set-up to feed into a blog. Students are asked to bookmark visual culture that conveys how they perceive those in the other country, and to comment on a Diigo sticky note why they selected the particular representation that is bookmarked. Each student is also asked to look at what is bookmarked regarding their own country, to read the rationales for why the representations were selected, and comment in response on the same sticky note regarding if and how the representation relates to their life. This content becomes the source for collaborative artworks using Dabbleboard combined with non-digital art making process, in which images are uploaded and collaboratively developed in Dabbleboard. Collaboratively created artworks in various configurations of cross-cultural groups, can then be uploaded into VoiceThread, with questions as prompts for voice commentary surrounding the artwork. This particular example is intended for transcultural critical dialogue about visual culture with emphasis on cultural identity and local and global injustices.

Activist artists in the 21st century use communication technologies to listen (360degrees, Making Rights a Reality), witness (EMERGENCIA), and stop harmful practices (Operación Digna, GoodGuide, SkinDeep, LowTech), as well as to envision (EcoArtTech, Human Futures) new social, political, and environmental practices in artwork that is openly participatory, globally performative, and collaboratively created. Many contemporary artists create participatory platforms for mobilization of actions that make visible entangled histories and ideas. Such artwork and artmaking processes are relevant content and skills in teaching art in schools and societies that promote informed engagement in social, political, environmental, and economic change for a just world for all.

---

7 Diigo, Flickr, Dabbleboard, and VoiceThread are computer programs that are freely accessed without purchase.
8 Some suggestions for questions include: How is subjectivity constructed in the image, and whose subjectivity is constructed? What prior knowledge is assumed?

References


OBSTRUCTING THE VIEW:

AN ARGUMENT FOR THE USE OF OBSTRUCTIONS IN ART EDUCATION PEDAGOGY

Ryan Patton
Pennsylvania State University

I've [Jorgen Leth] done films about games. What I like with games is that there is this uncertain outcome and the element of chance. You cannot know what a bicycle race leads to, so it's an uncertain story. I like to apply storytelling methods and techniques to try to frame the story in an interesting way, but you can never control what's happening. When I make films, I'm very conscious about leaving space for this uncertainty, and for some unexpected things. So filmmaking is also a game. (Kaufman, 2004.)

In the film The Five Obstructions (2004), Lars Von Trier challenges his mentor Jorgen Leth to remake his 1967 film, The Perfect Human, five times, removing Leth's filmmaking comforts and conventions as part of the agreement. The Five Obstructions is a documentary of the barriers that Von Trier implements and the films that resulted. This paper will look at The Five Obstructions and the implications of creating obstructions as both a pedagogical approach to art education, and a foundational approach for a game-based pedagogy.

In the first obstruction, Von Trier (2004) challenges Leth to remake his 1967 film The Perfect Human in Cuba, without camera shots longer than 12 frames (approximately .5 seconds), answering questions Leth posed in his original film. The difficulty of this obstruction was a technical problem for Leth, forcing him to use a very fast-paced and unusual filmmaking style. Leth answered by repeating and reversing film segments to create his narrative.

For the second obstruction, Leth was told to film a dinner scene from The Perfect Human in a "miserable place" but "not show it" (Von Trier, 2004). His new scene takes him to the brothel district of Bombay (now called Mumbai). Von Trier requires Leth to film himself eating a meal in the open air of the brothel district, yet hiding its existence. Leth anxiously begins filming, unafraid of the blighted area itself, but of his appearance as a white western man imposing himself in this place of need. Seeing Von Trier's obstructions as a psychological game, Leth musters up the ability to distance himself from his feelings of sympathy towards those in the brothel district, circumventing Von Trier's austere calculation by filming the scene with a translucent screen between Leth and those living in Mumbai, providing a frame of reference to his original film's message of the perfect and the human, partitioning himself as inhabiting a separate space, a perfect space, yet challenges the viewer to recognize the real world conditions of Mumbai's brothel district through the partition.
Von Trier, unpleased with Leth’s framing technique, poses two options for his third obstruction: a reshoot of *The Perfect Human* in Mumbai as Von Trier described, or film *The Perfect Human* with complete freedom. Complete freedom poses as challenging an option for Leth as a total reshoot. Rather than return to Mumbai, Leth chooses to remake the film in Belgium, filming in a noir style. Von Trier wanted Leth to be “like a tortoise on his back” struggling with the process, but finds his mentor “unmarked” by the exercise (Von Trier, 2004). In *The Five Obstructions* DVD commentary Leth describes taking a defensive position to Von Trier’s obstructions. For Leth, exposing his methods and approach to each obstruction, he is defying Von Trier’s bait to be labeled as a cool and unfeeling, or a “perfect human.” Von Trier has also created obstructions for Leth that he himself cannot perform. Because of personal phobias like his fear of flying, Von Trier is incapable of traveling. Cuba or India are places Von Trier would never be able to visit and is incapable of personally experiencing, obstructions to which he could not complete for his own challenge.

While Leth is strategic in his approaches to directing, restrictions open up the possibilities for chance and change. Von Trier admits that whatever he says to Leth as part of their process of critique, inspires Leth to continue on. Yet Von Trier has made discipline and rules as a focus of his life and work (Macnab, 2006). Von Trier known to be strict and rigid in his methods as a director as a way to expose a rawness to his films (BBC News, 2005). Further evidence of his support for rigid filmmaking can be seen in his involvement with the Dogma 95, an avant-garde film movement developed as a response to the major film studio production model (Dogma 95, 2008). Leth sees Von Trier using rigid rules and obstructions as a romantic device for creating raw emotion, where Leth finds those obstacles as a way to free up his creative process (Kaufman, 2004).

The fourth obstruction requires Leth to remake *The Perfect Human* as a cartoon. Both Von Trier and Leth dislike cartoons and Von Trier believes Leth will be unable to make a “good” film using animation as the medium (Von Trier, 2004). With help from a rotoscoping animator, Leth uses his film footage from the earlier obstructions to make his animation. Both Von Trier and Leth are impressed with the final result and Leth appears to gain confidence as the challenges continue.

In the fifth and final obstruction, Leth must claim film footage made by Von Trier as his own. Using footage and a voice-over narrative written by Von Trier, Leth must speak Von Trier’s words as if he wrote them, editing the footage to tell Leth’s narrative. In this final film, Von Trier reveals the rationale for his methods (Von Trier, 2004). Von Trier was affected by Leth’s method of obstruction limitations wanting to get his mentor back to directing film after a long absence. Rather than exposing Leth as a cool, unfeeling filmmaker, unable to relinquish control of the film production, Von Trier exposes his own inabilities to relinquish control and accept chance and randomness.

Through these examples of the making process shown in *The Five Obstructions* (2004), a project-based curriculum for art education can be developed. This project-based curriculum using obstruction-based methods for teaching and discovery forms a game-based pedagogy. The focus of a game-based pedagogy are not the particular obstructions found in games themselves, like having the letter ‘x’ in *Scrabble*, hordes of zombies in the video game *Left 4 Dead*, the secret ingredient on *Iron Chef America*, or having to perform at an advanced level of difficulty in a game of H-O-R-S-E; but to use the idea of obstructions as an artistic method for creative output.
Artists and game designers Eric Zimmerman and Katie Salen describe in their book *Rules of Play* (2004), that games are free play within a larger structure. To develop a game, game designers determine the obstructions or rules that limit the scope of play in the game. Obstructions are a way for artists/game designers to create their work using specific parameters to work around as was described in film *The Five Obstructions*. These artistic obstructions are similar to what you would find in games such as out-of-bounds, penalties, and rules. In basic drawing assignments, obstructions are found in technical skill activities like upside down drawings, or using the non-dominant hand, but have also been found in the creative process of art in Duchamp’s musical score Errata Erratum (MOCA, 2002) and psychogeography theory of Guy Debord and the dérive (Debord, 1958).

The obstructions of Duchamp and Debord follow the structures of games like rules and chance, also forming the limitation to how one can play the game. This scheme-like activity can also be used as a methodology for art making and art teaching. In game-based pedagogy, obstructions form rules, boundaries, or ways to think about the making of artwork. This method is not bound by focusing on materials or methods, but can come from the project idea. This game-based pedagogy is not designed to detract or confuse those who are more familiar with pedagogical approaches like process over product, questions over answers or experimentation over replication. Rather, a game-based pedagogy is designed to use those types of approaches with a structure for students to work against. The format of a game provides a commonly understood objective for students who work concretely, while the openness of play within that space gives the freedom to those students who desire more personal expression.

**Freedom in restrictions**

Although there are a number of definitions of the word “game,” I am focused on defining game as a type of activity using the adjective word form, “eager and willing to do something new or a challenge”(Oxford). In this description, the focus of the word “game” is not as a competition at the expense of others, but a way for an individual to approach art making and critical thinking. In *The Five Obstructions*, the obstructions were not blockades for Leth, but obstacles that were incentives for the challenge. Through obstructions, students developing artwork can limit their focus without restraining their possibilities. Like puzzle games, designed to test ingenuity or knowledge, the mind searches the slippages of the puzzle’s construct so resolutions can be found. It is in a puzzle's complications and entanglements that leads a student/player through a process of problem solving, a line of questioning that asks the student/player: “What is being said and how am I interpreting it?” “Is there a logic or system that can be denied or accepted by what I am investigating?” The interpretation and one’s own values can be questioned and challenged based on the conditions of the puzzle as found in critical literacy (Tavin, 2008). Games are a common and popular construct to use with students as a way to investigate how systems work and how to find one’s way within the limitations of those systems.

Typically a video game environment provides information to the player about the obstructions found in puzzle games like *Minesweeper*, *Tetris*, and *Portal*, where visual clues assist the player to problem solve. Video games often use prescribed logic to make the games easier to navigate such as moving left to right, bottom to top, or different colors and textures to tell the player what are solid or breakable structures. By using these familiar tropes players become engaged in the challenges that are clearly defined by the games objectives. The video game *Syobon Action Game* addresses notions of player logic and critical thinking by its playful use of obstructions. *Syobon Action Game* appears to the player...
as a replica of the video game *Super Mario Brothers*, the most popular platform video game in history, having sold over 40 million copies ("Super mario sales," 2001). Referring to the visual cues of the *Super Mario Brothers* scenery as game convention, players begin to play by using their assumed knowledge and experience from *Super Mario Brothers*. However the creators of *Syobon Action Game* considered those assumptions, creating obstructions based on the traditional play of *Super Mario* (Bogost, 2008). As a player learns, the assumed knowledge of how the game world operates is tested and the player must devise alternative solutions, working around the obstructions to finish the game. *Syobon Action Game* works like Von Trier’s methods in *The Five Obstructions*, created to get the player/Leth out of his comfort zone, stretching the conventions of thinking and practice as a gamer/filmmaker. Challenges that use puzzles and obstructions have been used in the self-esteem studies of Carol Dweck’s theory of motivation (1999), citing that too much praise and easy tasks for children hurt their self-esteem and motivation more than help it (Dweck, 1999). Leth is driven by the challenges that Von Trier gives him, citing that constraints liberate his imagination, and motivating Leth more to produce a film he is happy with (Kaufman, 2004). It is with this form of motivation that a game-based pedagogy has possibilities in an project-based art curriculum.

**Making as learning**

The creation process and implementation of obstructions within games causes students to analyze the necessary and unnecessary components from the game-like assignment. It is through the making process of examination, experimentation, and revision that also describes game development as prototyping, testing, and redesign. Solutions in this process are emergent rather than planned because the “problems” are learned through the creative process. It is through this process of making that students learn the nuances of the “problem” they are solving. The assessment of the making process can include the history of the students’ idea, the limitations of materials and complications of making. It is through the making process that the assessment of learning occurs and can be documented.

**Promoting the role of the audience**

The utilitarian advantages of using obstructions to generate ideas and develop projects as part of a game-based pedagogy have been described above, however, a game-based pedagogy also requires makers to have a critical awareness of the viewer. As students make art by playing the game set up by the teacher’s obstructions, they are also making artworks for the viewer to respond to. By thinking about the audience as player/participants to a work of art, a game-based pedagogy proposes that students consider the feedback loop between the artist and audience, where viewers are asked to navigate and be involved in the work or idea, as found in interactive works of art like the flash mob Improv Everywhere’s *Frozen Grand Central* (2007), installations like David Rokeby’s *Very Nervous System* (1986-1990), and Stelarc’s telematic piece *Parasite* (1997). It is important for students to understand that by removing the audience out of the artistic or game process, the work has a self-indulgent quality to it. When an instructor uses a project-based curriculum within a game-based pedagogy they should responds to student work as a viewer with the studio critique, and as the project facilitator, receiving feedback from students about the instruction and how the obstructions were received and responded to by students to retool assignments for future play.

From this description of obstruction and game-based pedagogy, this section of the paper looks at examples of research in art education that use obstructions and project-based work.
as a pedagogical method. I argue that using obstructions and project-based work as pedagogy could have included game-based pedagogy as a framework to achieve critical learning.

In 1997, Sydney Walker wrote about Sandy Skoglund directing the production of an installation as part of a colloquium at the Wexner Center for the Arts on the Ohio State University campus in 1995 (Walker, 1997). Over a three-day period, the students were taught about Skoglund’s work, met with the artist, and helped install the new piece at the Wexner. Skoglund, known for her surrealist tableaus, brought in a collection of unrelated everyday objects painted orange as part of the monochromatic color scheme. As students installed the work, some began have difficulty making aesthetic decisions of where to place the disparate objects in a way that “made sense.” Walker noted that there was a general belief that “greater control and overt direction” was needed for a unified meaning that was lacking (Walker, 1997).

These participants were looking for the product to form the meaning for them, tying in being labeled as collaborators with Sandy Skoglund, rather than meaning coming from the process of the project. Walker writes that as students thought more about their process, and the objects they had to work with, more meaning and questions came to them as to what was being presented by the artist. By providing limited direction and information, Skoglund wanted the participants to create their own meaning, not recreate her meaning, and by doing so removing some of the Skoglund “brand”. Although students were obstructed by choice of materials, the unified color system was intended to provide a gateway to combining the unconnected objects. Walker notes that often studio activities are designed around the teacher’s ideas or artist’s being studied. She sees that this prescriptive model can restrict student responses, creating derivative work rather than allowing for student concepts to be materialized. Likewise, an unstructured problem does not necessarily produce critical thinking, rather places a premium on personal expression.

Skoglund began with an open-ended situation yet created constraints for the students with the monochromatic material. When asked about her process, Skoglund responded that the meaning was to be created during the process rather than through a predetermined outcome. Walker observed that Skoglund’s ideas registered with participants at the time of discussion, but later the students’ responses centered on creating rationality to the composition.

Skoglund’s created obstructions for the students working on the installation. By limiting the work to the monochromatic items, Skoglund gave the students an obstructional structure as a point of departure for their involvement in the installation process. Unfortunately, there was not enough information given in the instruction as to whether or not students were to develop their own ideas and connections or connect to what they knew and understood of Skoglund’s process and methods. Although the obstructions were clear with the use of orange, little else was provided to give structure to the obstructions for participants other than the direct references to Skoglund. If Skoglund or the art education organizers had stated that the installation process was to be playful, using the orange objects as the guiding rule to how the students could play, and the photographs of the installation were documents of their play, it is possible that the students would have had a stronger sense of purpose in their participation.

Using guided obstructions as part of the creative process in installation art or in game design focuses the limitless possibilities to an assignment, rather than limiting the
assignment to a specific result. Eric Zimmerman, game designer, calls these obstructions “limitations” when he’s making a game (Lantz & Zimmerman, 2009). This process of obstructions is designed to create a critical awareness of the dynamics between the teacher and student, attempting to transparently state expectations. Response to meaning in the assignment is shaped by how the assignment is framed and how the task is done rather than solely on the end result. Students critical thinking emerges when they must focus on the limitations of the process as it effects the end result. They must be reflective within their methods as to how the game could work; they must pause to consider what is required in order to move past each obstruction. In essence, this is a process of negotiation: students must adapt their abilities to the creative process or style required.

Obstructions can also be used as a procedural model rather than a game-model, negating choice. Cynthia Bickley-Green and Phil Phillips “Using Visual Arts and Play to Solve Problems and Foster Resiliency” (2003) shows an example of a project-based curriculum using obstructions with a procedural structure.

In developing a program based on creative play and visual art, the Eastern Carolina University educators knew that the student population liked working with clay, taking pictures of themselves, developing visual ideas on computers, and creating videos. Students were asked to create clay props and computer advertisements for a video about controlled substances using theatrical play as their description of play.

The article (Bickley-Green & Phillips, 2003) describes how the students would be able to play in this project: they were told to make clay props for the film, being taught about brains and then made clay brains. Students were also asked to make self-portraits as a “playful” visualization of the future using photographs, using the photos to create a collaged self-portrait. Finally the students made video plays of what they had made and learned about controlled substances. This study looked at play very narrowly, defining it as something that students did with the material, not how the material could be used, or in the manner in which the assignments could be done. For example, the authors noted that students were to design new warning labels for controlled substances. The instructors were surprised that many of students “stereotypically” made the “universal no” pictogram (circle-slash symbol) (Bickley-Green & Phillips, 2003). Rather than focusing on creating “more original visual images” the curriculum could have focused on creating obstructions to the use of the “universal no” pictogram, either in how the curriculum was developed by starting the discussion with a variety of ways “no” can be articulated, or by obstructing conventions within the projects the students made. This addition to the curriculum could have directed the conversation to how new representation can be developed and what it means when your vocabulary has been censored, to provide a gateway into critically thinking about the reasons for access and denial. Further, the obstructions used in this study became limitations to what the students could do rather than what they couldn’t do. Obstructions used as limitations for what students can do rather than as a game gives students clearly defined assignments, but offer little opportunity for self-expression or critical thinking. Counter to this, in The Five Obstructions, Von Trier told Leth that he must film in certain ways for each obstruction: using short cuts film, animation, demanding film locations, and collaborative authorship. However within those limitations, Leth was allowed to execute his ideas with complete freedom. Viewed as a game, the obstructions only creating boundaries for the space Leth could play freely in.

**Power dynamics of player and game**
There is power in the process of creating, whether it is a house, game, cup, letter or song. Limitations of power exist for in the artist, their medium, and their idea(s). These challenges or obstructions are part of the making process. As Foucault (1977) talks about how power is exercised, the dynamics of the center of power is in flux between the game and the player, with the actual power, perceived power, and the power of the game interface. This can be exemplified in games like poker where the game has carried a currency of epic proportions, including life and death ("Killed over a poker game", 1885). Knowledge of how the game system works outside of the game space is also a kind of power. The idea that through the critical thinking process required to move past those obstructions, shifting the power dynamic from the person who created those obstructions to the person employing their own means to get around them (de Certeau, 1997).

Mckenzie Wark describes in Gamer Theory (2007) that “triflers”, are those that focus on the rules of games and don’t care about the game goals, while “cheaters” focus on the goals and don’t care about the game rules (Wark, 2007). I would argue that “triflers” may lack criticality towards games and systems because of their inability to question the rules, while “cheaters” question rules, yet may lack a criticality towards consequences. In The Five Obstructions, Leth is closer to a “cheater” than a “trifler”, testing the boundaries of Von Trier’s obstructions to in order to maintain a level of quality in his films. For Leth, the consequences of cheating would appear to be minimal, conceding defeat to Von Trier, or to remake a film as Leth did after using the screen in the brothel district of Mumbai. However, the effects, rewards, or consequences of cheating can be engaged through critical discussion within the parameters of a game-based pedagogy. It is through the process of play, where one experiments with the structure of rules and questions the value of goals that a game-based pedagogy comes into focus.

This experimentation, or playing with the limitations of a game or rules, separates a game player from a game designer. In order for a game to be successful, the game designer must have an observant and critical eye towards the experience of the player. In other words, in creating rules for others to follow, the designer has to be flexible and open to the needs of the game and its players. The same can be said for creating art curriculum, where the instructor has to be flexible to the needs of the individual students, the classroom, the school, and community.

The instructions or methods of game play are particular to each game similar to a teacher’s pedagogical stance of creating obstructions for their students. This pedagogical stance may be understood in art education as design problems where students are given a limited set of materials, colors, methods, or mediums to work with to complete an assignment. A creator always has limitations to what they can accomplish. By recognizing those limitations and questioning them at the same time, new ideas and innovations will occur. Through the use of obstructions, students will be able to demonstrate their ability to navigate those limitations. Game designer Eric Zimmerman notes that obstructions are not designed to stop creativity, but to push creativity into new directions (Lantz & Zimmerman, 2009). The books Flow (1991) and Creativity (1997) by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi delve into aspects of how artistic and scientific minds thinks and processes their work. By being able to give concentrated attention to their passions, fully immersed, being active investigators, and having lifelong curiosity, these artists and scientists interviewed showed an ability to excel in their given fields. Flow has been integrated as a concept in video game design, balancing the combination of challenges of a game to player’s abilities to constantly keep the player’s interest in the game but not so difficult that the player gives up (Chen,

Most successful video games are designed this way (World of Warcraft, Guitar Hero, Super Mario Brothers, etc) to have easier levels early in the game, building the skills of players and providing interesting new content over time, encouraging people to continue playing the game and be fully immersed.

**Pedagogy and Problem Solving**

Recent research from Eliza Pitri (2002) focuses on project-based curriculum and the role of artistic play in problem solving. It is in this model that game-based pedagogy can be developed where through artistic play, aspects of problem solving, experimenting, and risk taking are used to develop students abilities to reason. In contrast, Walker’s description of the Sandy Skoglund installation, the students did not know how much they could play with the installation because they did not understand the obstructions; rather they were averse to taking risk with Skoglund and collaborating with her work.

Citing Howard Gardner, Pitri (2002) claims that learning is situated, where particular features and purposes initiate them. This is like a game where the learning experience is unique to each time, place, and the people with whom the game is played with. United States football fans would recognize that each Super Bowl has unique qualities and conditions that determine the narrative and outcome every year. Pitri states that projects must have relevance to students if they are to promote deeper understanding and significant study. In Pitri’s research she finds that a project-based curriculum strengthens and extends current behavioral knowledge and uses abstract representations as schema for learning are the best designed. As described earlier, Bickley-Green and Phillips study had students make projects with components of art that were significant to students like clay, photography, and video, however the obstructions given to the students were restrictive and did not promote deeper understanding of the topic of substance abuse or ways to use the art materials provided.

Game-based pedagogy performs these same functions described by Pitri by using the behavioral knowledge of games and play, combining them with the abstracted representation of what is being learned. The Situationists, a international Marxist avant-garde organization, suggested alternative life experiences that artistically united play, freedom, and critical thinking such as the dérive, a playful exploration of the environment, without following preconceived rules of how to navigate the space (Debord, 1958). Vito Acconci’s Situationist *Following Piece* (1969), was a dérive-like performance structured around Acconci following people until they were out of public view, and then began following the next visible person. This performance used the structure of chance to guide the playful exploration of the city. It is through type of structured play and curricular obstructions that a game-based pedagogy can be used in the art classroom.

Through the use of obstructions we can see how a project-based curriculum can promote very different results. The obstructions that Sandy Skoglund gave the colloquium class at Ohio State were not presented as opportunities for play. Although Bickley-Green and Phillips allowed for play in their use of obstructions, the type of play described was prescriptive and limiting. Pitri’s use of play as a form of problem solving that also allows for personal expression advocated in this paper. Clearly identifying obstructions as game-like challenges for students, they can be used for growth and critical awareness.

---


Decolonizing Development Through Indigenous Artist-Led Inquiry

Christine Ballengee-Morris
The Ohio State University

James Sanders
The Ohio State University

Debbie Smith-Shank
The Ohio State University

Kryssi Staikidis
Northern Illinois University

In this article four university art educators explore theories of self-determination and describe decolonizing, approaches to research that are built on mutual trust. As researchers we recognize that (re)presenting the stories of others—especially across international and transcultural boundaries—is both problematic and an ethical challenge. We acknowledge the risks that participants assume when sharing their stories, and follow the culturally sensitive strategy of having collaborating indigenous artists lead the research. In Decolonizing Methodologies (1999), Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, advocates specific approaches for ethnographic research that can be ethically employed by non-indigenous researchers. The mentoring model (tiaki) is one in which the authoritative indigenous person guides the research. The adoption model (whangai) posits that researchers are incorporated into the daily life of the indigenous people, which eventually enables them to “sustain a life-long relationship which extends far beyond the realms of research (p. 177).

Over the past eighteen months, as a group, we have exchanged our thoughts as arts educators researching with indigenous populations—delivering position papers and performances at conferences in the Americas, Asia and Europe. Working across transnational settings, we have deepened our inquiries into ethically sound research practices—at times being humbled by the passionate commitments, visionary efforts and powerful testimonies of arts educators working to address critical social, cultural, economic and ecological challenges. We address pedagogical practices, curricula, cultural policies, administration, and research methods and are interested in recent programmatic and theoretical transformations unfolding in museums, universities, community-based settings, and electronic media that cross international borders. These changes
require “un-thinking” commitments to Western European formalist values, disciplinary territorialism, and the unquestioned conservation of existing cultural institutions.

The patchwork of stories stitched together in this paper challenges readers to create approaches to learning in and through the arts that serve the self-identified needs of communities and individuals. Co-authors include Christine Ballengee-Morris, an Eastern Band Cherokee who reexamines her work with Guarani leaders in South America and Appalachian populations in the late 20th Century and discusses issues of self-determination. Kryssi Staikidis recounts work with her Guatemalan Maya Tz’utuhil painting mentor (whose anonymity will be preserved), and shares video interviews she produced with him—discussing ethical challenges in making one’s collaborating artist’s stories known. These structured texts call attention to the ways researchers (un)intentionally create their stories. Debbie Smith-Shank foregrounds her misgivings and discomforts about releasing research that is constructed from less than in-depth engagement with communities other than her own. She foregrounds the importance of storytelling and shares insights gleaned from conversations with Aboriginal women about art and life issues. Jim Sanders addresses his dis-ease at working with three middle and working-class white women graduate students researching Fair Trade with artists in Peru and Bolivia, and developing a fair-trade curriculum for an undergraduate writing course addressing multicultural issues. Sanders also explores his revisions of Museum Education and Management courses for an on-line Masters graduate specialization for Native American Indian students under the direction of Pat Stuhr and Christine Ballengee-Morris.

Seeing art education research as a process through which we might more deeply explore forms of social and cultural production, enterprise, engagement and interaction, we ask how arts education can serve the critical social, political, ethical, and moral challenges facing troubled and constantly evolving (inter)cultural contexts. And through what research methods, rituals of speaking, and/or forms of engagement can such causes be advanced?

According to presentations at the 2005 international symposium, *Vision, Space, and Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity* (sponsored by the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI)) there is a noticeable lack of art/art education programs in the United States that prepare museum personnel and teachers in postmodern/postcolonial understandings and/or sovereign methodologies and practices. A primary purpose of this paper is to explore theoretical models and arts-based research practices that have challenged and changed how indigenous artists’ works are studied, (re)presented, and taught to multiple populations.

While Denzin and Lincoln (2008) insist that non-indigenous scholars learn to “dismantle, deconstruct, and decolonize Western epistemologies from within” (p. ix), we agree that the term *postcolonial* itself is unavoidably a construct of academe. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005) reminds us that indigenous peoples trained by the Western academy struggle with the “demands of research, on one side, and the realities they encounter amongst their own and other indigenous communities with whom they share lifelong relationships” (p. 5) on the other. Given this conflict, how then are non-indigenous scholars and researchers to begin dismantling and deconstructing the Western epistemologies on which our communities of academic scholarship have been constructed? The first-person narratives that follow explore our individual experiences with decolonizing
methodologies while working in South and Central American, Australian and/or United States research settings.

**Kryssi’s Story**  I consider artistic mentoring as an ethnographic model that creates a two-way relational dynamic between my outsider autobiography and an insider’s self-determined and negotiated narrative. The collaboratively created video interview with my Tz’utuhil Maya mentor demonstrates the evolution of our research process over time. This approach recognizes the complications that always arise from talking about people, rather than facilitating their own talk about themselves. As a non-Maya cultural outsider, artist, and ethnographer working with an indigenous artist in a postcolonial age, my research is unavoidably haunted by the destructive trail left by 20th century researchers who cruelly objectified, misrepresented and harmed indigenous cultures around the globe (Battiste, 2008; Dion, 2009; Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Madison, 2005; Tuhuiwai-Smith, 1999; Te Awekotuku 1991). This work has two objectives: first, to examine the possibilities and limitations of a cultural outsider’s work with a Guatemalan Maya Tz’utuhil artist and painting mentor over the course of eight years, and second, to examine the ethics of qualitative inquiry in an indigenous context using video as a visual tool to foreground the voice of the Maya artist.

For indigenous communities, the era of the postcolonial is a phantom. As Grande (2004) notes, “…the project of decolonization centers on issues of land, labor, resources, language, education and culture as they relate to issues of sovereignty and self-determination” (p. 153). The issues that Grande addresses are present in this artist’s discourse surrounding his painting’s narrative themes and those ways in which he attempts to resist acculturation, preserve Maya Tz’utuhil traditions, and advocate for social justice. I worked as a student under the artist’s tutelage as the artist guided my researching process and we shifted the locus of authority from that of traditional Western ethnographic models. Working through cycles designed by my Maya mentor fostered our collaborative process and created bridges of understanding.

I aim to present a holistic overview of the work we undertake; one reflecting multiple viewpoints and relying on the perceptions of the teacher as a consultant (Lassiter, 1998). As a cultural outsider, I acknowledge the impossibility of completely understanding the epistemologies informing my teacher’s painting and pedagogical practices, but hold that shared creative and artistic languages and meanings embedded in our art exchanges allowed us to speak in new ways.

As researcher, I received art lessons, conducted interviews, wrote field observations, and painted visual field notes. The study used participants’ constructs to frame definitions of art, spirituality and pedagogy. After years of building trust, we deliberated about ethical ways to present our work together, and my mentor asked that I, as researcher, student, and friend, record his story of the army massacre that took place against the Maya in his neighboring town, Santiago Atitlan in 1990. We came up with video interview questions, and he asked that the co-edited final product be distributed outside of his country. Affirming how he desired to be represented to an academy so distant from his life, the resulting collaborative video privileges his views, his voice and his paintings as a Maya artist and scholar who struggled to capture the destructive impact of a genocide against his Maya communities in Guatemala. The artist mentor risks retaliation so that
viewers may serve witness to suffering inflicted by a racist tyrannical regime. This research thus foregrounds the value of the visual as an important tool for qualitative inquiry (Pink, 2001).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOcD-J-rUBA

[Figure 1. Movie clip situating the danger a collaborator confronts in sharing his stories]

Across continents, indigenous peoples have united to contest injustices perpetrated against them. Begaye, in Grande (2004), observes:

The history of Indian education often neglects discourse about colonization and genocide and acculturation and instead focuses on the survival of identity, community and culture. However, in recent times, Native American people have increasingly begun to empower themselves with the very tools of colonization that have been used against them. They are exercising their sovereignty, revitalizing language and culture, and becoming legitimate contenders in the political arena (2004, p. vii).

Christine: My story is about a Guarani tribe in Brazil, a relationship I first entered in 1994. Although the histories and timelines towards assimilation were different in many ways, as collaborating researchers we shared common journeys. Government agencies implementing relocation programs sent thousands of indigenous people to the city to face difficult challenges in unfamiliar environments. As in the case in North America, many Native peoples are generations removed from their homelands, as well as newer immigrants to unfamiliar lands; forced to work toward making sense of the tensions produced by and reactions to colonialism such as racism, suicides, assimilation, and poverty. It is the arts that provide common threads among many tribes and a connection to the processes of identity development and maintaining tribal affiliation. For the Guarani, this meant dealing with racism, a 70% suicide rate, and ten times higher unemployment rates than other Brazilians.

[Figure two, Carlos and Author Two at his reserve in Brazil. Photograph by Christina Rizzi]
A government program called FUNAI (National Foundation for Indians) set up an arts program, which exchanges art items for social or material services such as land right protection, schools, and health care. This has not been successful according to UNESCO (1995), because schools were not built, health care was not consistent, land right issues were not addressed, and suicide rates continued to grow. Karai, cultural leader of the Guarani in Sao Paulo, believed that his tribe needed to address the suicide and poverty issues in a self-determined way. Through guidance from teachings by Paulo Freire, Karai and tribal members began creating strategic plans. The first was to make and sell items such as feather and bead adornments, carvings, and baskets to generate funds, and to develop a theatrical production that educates non-indigenous people about the Guarani. They believed that once people understood their culture, traditions, and needs that they could reduce racist actions. This tribe continues to find ways to be self-determined. According to recent suicide statistics the rates are still climbing (Brazil Magazine Newsroom, 2009). The report states that due to almost no land, alcoholism, small reservations where hunting, fishing, and planting are impossible, and resistance by non-indigenous populations to recognizing land rights create strong prejudice, racism, poverty, and suicides have increased.

Debbie: I spent time in Australia in 2008 with a community of Aboriginal women. They and their artworks direct me to share their experiences and stories with you but I am challenged. I am challenged to teach about their culture, objects, stories, and histories sensitively and without privileging my white, western, and hegemonic historic research trajectory. While I was there, I listened to their stories and songs, and I made art.

Contextualizing my visit to this community was the historic “Sorry Speech” made by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on February 13, 2008. He apologized for to the "Stolen Generations,” the 100,000 Aboriginal children, mostly of mixed blood, who were taken from their parents between 1910 and the early 1970s to be raised by non-Aboriginals under a government sponsored political assimilation policy. He said:

I move: That today we honour the indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history. We reflect on their past mistreatment. We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were stolen generations - this blemished chapter in our nation’s history. The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia’s history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

I was moved to tears amid white and black Australians and visitors as I watched the looped video of this speech in an art gallery, just weeks after the event. I reconsidered my own positionality and my Outsider status. I continue to be at a loss as to how to communicate my experiences without perpetuating the violence my hosts have endured from those in “power.” In the words of Patti Lather (2007), “In theorizing distinctions between loss and lost in working toward research practices that take into account the crisis of representation, how can writing the other not be an act of continuing colonialization” (p. 13)?

As I was contemplating this paper, I heard another “Sorry Speech” by Mr. Rudd. On Tuesday, November 17, 2009, Mr. Rudd addressed a new apology to around 500,000 Australian children, called the "Forgotten Australians" who suffered physical and emotional abuse and neglect in the state-run orphanages and foster care system during approximately the same time period as the “Stolen Generations.” These “Forgotten Australians” were part of the Child Migrant Program:

The Child Migrant Program was initially begun in the 1920s with the idea of providing British colonies with a supply of white workers and to establish certain religious denominations. It has been estimated that over 150,000 children were forcibly emigrated to former colonies including areas in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. It is believed that between 7,000 and 10,000 were shipped to Australia alone between 1947 and 1967. <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase/2009/11/australia-pm-issues-apology-to-migrant.php> Retrieved Nov. 18, 2009

Does saying “sorry” help to heal residual scars? These thoughts were doubly resonant in my mind during my sojourn in Australia. My family was in crisis and Northern Illinois University (my academic home) had just survived a shooting spree during which six students died, many were hurt, and the delusional shooter took his own life. My agenda for the trip to central Australia was not research, but healing.

Jim’s Story: My research collaborations with graduate students conducting cross-cultural/international arts-based studies works toward the ends of human rights, economic, ecological and social justice, and considers arts education as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. As scholarly works, these studies gesture toward the need for exploring how power is multiply reproduced and distributed across race, gender, class and ethnicity in the design and conduct of transnational research, and in the promotion, consumption, sales operations, and laws governing inter/national fair trade of cultural properties. Surveying some of the varied research methods employed by students engaged in collaborative and cooperative, co-learning research one becomes acutely aware of alignments of research questions, philosophic and political standpoints, and the need for sensitivity toward the self-determined interests of indigenous collaborators. These studies reconfirm the value of U.S. researchers’ sustained commitment to respectful cultural exchanges; those that can lead to social transformation. Reflexively reconsidering both individual and group work toward rethinking the ends of arts education, we weighed the potential benefits and dangers of engaging in openly ideological research, and troubled our positions of power and privilege.
Over the past decades American education researchers in the arts have increasingly acknowledged the ethical, moral, economic and cultural challenges unavoidably encountered when conducting research across international boundaries. In the Americas, both hemispheres are experiencing intensified fiscal and ecological disparities, and class, gender, sexuality and race-based polarization (Madeley, 1992). The ever-widening gulf between those with and without power, access to education, health or basic service infrastructures poses political, social and ecological challenges for researchers, educators, neighborhoods, related social institutions and groups, while implicating producers and consumers engaged in cultural trade and commerce (Blowfield, 1998; Kocken, 2003). With the expansion of the policing functions of governments, from US preoccupation with national security and protecting borders and industries, to the forms of protectionism enforced by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Free Trade Agreements treatises, and GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), local, state, federal, and world government responses at times create new problems. These responses appear to largely ignore demands for key social services, not unlike those that remain unaddressed in the U.S. (e.g., universal healthcare, or human rights for citizens of all sexualities). These needs may be even greater in Nations still struggling to recover from centuries of colonial exploitation (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Coote & LeQuesne, 1996). Given these challenges, local, state, federal, and international aid and development funding remain important policy consideration (Hage & Powers, 1992), and the social and political performances of individuals and corporations (Maignan, 2002), inevitably impact the contexts in which scholars research.

When directing graduate students engaged in participatory action studies and field-based research with indigenous populations, it is essential that faculty in higher education consider the methodological and philosophical lead of indigenous scholars in the field (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Te Awekotuku, 1991; Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001); those who are committed to the development of ethical research conduct. As a gay Caucasian man, I consider it my civic duty to examine, discuss, and develop strategic plans for local change, and to applaud advisees’ work toward developing economic and cultural infrastructural supports that collaborators contend could advance the well-being of peoples across hemispheres. Sustainable responses to these challenges can emerge from collectives and communities across cultural sectors. Such collaborative inquiry requires researchers to reiteratively reexamine the (in)formal structures advancing or frustrating shared goals and objectives (e.g., ecological, economic, and social justice), and demand the development of sound rituals of speaking.

**Speaking With, Not For Or About Others**

Recent advisee research has considered fair trade’s commercial practice, history and grounding in both religious and political social change initiatives (Shaw & Clarke, 1999). Fair trade characterizes practices of (inter)national commerce that value sustainable development, equitable and transparency exchange, rights and better trading conditions for marginalized producers and workers (especially in the southern hemisphere). Fair Trade Organizations actively support producers, engage in educational initiatives designed to raise consumer and producer awareness, and campaign for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade. Students developed interventions that expanded the Fair Trade movement’s commitment to public
education. Researchers’ sites constitute spaces for communicating the value of developing ecologically sustainable and economically equitable cultural exchange. Each questioned how fair trade could be integrated within educational efforts in schools and communities, retail operations, fairs and festivals, and on-line commerce through actively involving producers in North and South America. These studies were grounded in (auto)ethnographic (Denzin, 2003) and participatory action research (Stringer, 2007). One used survey (Herman & Renz, 1997), and narrative research methods (Bakhtin, 1981; Casey, 1993), the second employed philosophic inquiry and self-study, and the third, a case study (Stake, 2000) methodology. These students were encouraged to collaboratively explore how their findings fit within the collective’s shared research agenda and social change commitment involving fair trade. With their advising professor guiding the work, they pre-negotiated the unfolding of information and queries to be explored, set the stage for conference presentations designed to review historic colonial exploitations of populations that fair trade gestured toward redressing.

We collectively cross-examined this work and the risks of romanticizing the “native” other through commercial marketing practices, or mindless participation in self-marginalizing performances of indigenous cultural producers. Contending that through understanding potential patron’s perceptions and values, Fair Trade advocates could more effectively lead consumers into action, one student began by exploring literature surrounding Fair Trade’s inception, growth, principles, and context. Key among her findings was an acknowledgment that price and convenience (easy access to the fair trade product) were first among variables influencing consumer practices. These findings inspired a second study of the ways marketing reasonably priced fair trade cultural products on-line could eliminate the need for consumers to physically travel to a destination where those goods were being sold. This participatory action research now underway involves Peruvian artisans in Cajamarca co-designing their business model and web-based sales vehicles.

[Figure Three: Graduate Student Researcher & Cajamarca Artisan]
A second advisee sought to improve the practice of Fair Trade education through the design, execution and assessment of a participatory action research study (Brydon-Miller, 2004; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005), of local staff development processes. She developed a "civic, publicly responsible [auto] ethnography that addresses the central issues of self, race, gender, class, society and democracy" (Denzin, 2003, p. 259, and demonstrated how a localized study of a transnational development effort could further the growth of Fair Trade in the United States. This study’s framework of hope viewed activist pedagogy (Friere, 1999) as engaging majority populations in redressing unjust distributions of power and authority. The study focused on the economic needs of artists in developing regions and marketed their work by connecting craft products to their makers' life-histories, and illustrating how story telling itself functions as a key component in successful marketing, sales and social consciousness raising efforts.

The third study researched students’ responses to curriculum and pedagogy that addressed economic, social and environmental injustice. After reviewing a range of strategies for dismantling personally and culturally constructed barriers that diverted students' attention from the existence of unjust trading practices, an ideological framework was constructed from the social justice

literature (hooks, 1994 & 2003; Kumashiro, 2004; Goodman, 2001; Adams, Bell & Griffin, 1997, among others), and worked toward transforming the curriculum of a secondary writing course. Considering student reflexive writing and responses to viewed film(s), sampling of Fair Trade chocolates, and handling of Fair Trade craft and arts products as data, she demonstrated how the use of multi-sensorial experiences in the classroom could be an effective tactic for making the at-times difficult knowledge (Britzman, 1998) of students’ participation in the maintenance of the problem known. The graduate student theorized that by making the concept of unfair trade more tangible, students could begin to grapple with their power and choices as consumers—a process of self-examination that was integral to her teaching and student learning—a pedagogy that translated into direct action for social change.

The Recounting of Tales, Myths and Readings

The power dynamics of such actions unfolding transcultural contexts is a matter to which we now return, understandings recounted in tales, myths and their readings.

Debbie: My journey was one of navigation across cultural and racial identities and skin groups that caused my aboriginal friends and me considerable epistemological and ideological reflection. Because folk tales and myths are important to Aboriginal cultures as touchstones for passing knowledge to others, it seemed appropriate to use stories as our common language. I shared Smith family tales that evoked a lively call and response, eliciting laughter and tears. But my understanding of stories is not the same as theirs, and during listening times, I was often cautioned not to “steal” their stories. Aboriginal women’s stories have passed from mothers and aunties to daughters since the beginning of time, and a particular story is owned by a particular lineage. Only part of any story may be shared with Others, and with this caveat, Delores, an Aboriginal artist based outside of Alice Springs, shared her story of the Seven Sisters because I am an art teacher. While I wasn’t given the whole story, she did present me with a painting she made called “Ancestral Spirits” which she told me to share with my students. This painting and her other artwork based on her family story and her ancestral lands are her legacy and her gift to the world.
The Seven Sisters are the stars in the Pleiades and there are multiple versions of this story throughout Australia. One story tells of a group of seven sisters who visited Earth. They looked for their favorite plateau to land on, but it was covered with little men. They called to the men to get out of the way, but the men refused so the sisters landed upon another hill. The men saw where they landed and decided to capture them, but the sisters ran and eventually the men grew tired of the pursuit, except for one. He kept following them. One of the sisters left the group to find water and the man followed her. She was drinking the water when she heard a faint sound. She looked up, saw the man, and raced off. He charged after and finally caught her. She yelled and screamed. He picked up a stick to quiet her and swung it. The woman jumped out of the way. He swung the stick again and again and missed and missed. The marks of his stick can still be seen on the side of a hill in that country. Finally the woman escaped back to the hill, looked up into the sky, saw her six sisters, and rose to join them. The man followed and became Orion. When the Pleiades are seen at dawn, it is said that this is a sign that the cold season is coming.
Kryssi: Because my Maya mentor guided the research process through creating the lessons for my learning, had a voice in the content of the writing, and took me into his home and world, we have developed life long bonds (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). As a student, my teacher set me up seated behind him in his studio, and modeled each part of the painting process for me - from color mixing to drawing to chatting about proportions, perspective, and traditional Maya courting rituals. This process enabled me to break through my own preconceptions about right and wrong ways of teaching (Behar, 2008). Such a dynamic where my Maya mentor guided the teaching and research process while I lived in his home and studied under his expertise was described by Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) as one way that a cultural outsider might work within an indigenous community.

My role as student enabled me to dismantle absolutes within Euro-American art pedagogy such as rendering from observation in nature which was not part of my mentor’s conceptual framework. The site of power in a traditional ethnographic study shifted through this teacher-student dynamic. Nevertheless, power differentials were always in place, influenced by centuries of intrusive anthropological studies directed against indigenous subjects by white ethnographers, ‘first world–third world’ inequities, and the weight accompanying those who disseminate information and represent others in the academy. At one point, my teacher asked me to leverage that power for good. One day in the studio, he turned to me and began to speak of the terrible genocide that persisted for two decades in Guatemala, perpetrated against 200,000 Maya. He then asked me to record him making this information public so that this story could be heard by the world. Although leveraging my power at his request was complicated, as noted earlier, it also seemed essential. Jim Sanders asserts that I am now wrestling with my own angels - one asking that I oblige the artist’s request for recounting the tale, and another maintaining that the protection of the collaborator is my responsibility as a researcher.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kgosdp09Do

[Figure 6: Kryssi’s teacher Testimonial]

Christine: As a Native scholar, I recognize tensions, negotiations and biases described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005). I find these necessary to acknowledge, given when writing or speaking about indigenous issues or topics, as the tendency is to speak in absolutes and to be heard as an authority and representative of all First Nations. Although I am indigenous, I was an outsider among this tribe. We found that a relational collaborative process helped us to expand beyond ourselves, our tribal memberships, and work toward global-thinking (Smith 2005). Self-Determined Indigenous Theories (Smith 2005) and practices connected us.

Self-determination is a political space where tribes have the ability to be free to act without external compulsion, to determine their own political status and to be self-governed without the influence of other countries. This status requires legal recognition by external powers to claim the right to self-determination. The American Indian Movement considers American Indian sovereignty necessary for shedding the shackles of colonialism.

Once Karai Mirin (Guarani) and I decided to work together, we negotiated our processes to be aligned in self-determined ways. Through long conversations, we decided to write an article about
decolonizing through the arts. Each word written was collaboratively chosen. This was the
Guarani’s story, not mine, and it was necessary that protocols approval were met. Tribe members
met me and we talked about what they hoped to gain by telling their story and what they could lose.
I recognized that these ramifications could be serious.

In 1996, I went back to Brazil to complete this project with Karai. I attended presentations that he
made in Sao Paulo and we reviewed our work. Shortly after I left for the United States, he was
arrested and accused of treason due to his public speeches about self-determination. I too was
charged with using state funds to support a coup. The case was dropped. Through many
conversations, the article, their story, was published in Studies in Art Education in 1999 (Ballengee
Morris, 1999). Karai believes he is an example of what happens when indigenous people decide to
speak for themselves. The recurring theme is resistance that is both positive and requires change,
and is often met with negative resistance built on ignorance.

**Approaching Arts-Based Inquiry With Eyes Wide-Open**

A part of decolonization involves the development of a critical consciousness for social/cultural
change (Freire, 1972). A central point of this project was to model how the arts develop leadership
skills, embrace collaborative practices, and create coalitions. The tribe members applied a
consulting collaborative approach by interviewing and researching multiple view points/people
and carried that method throughout the planning of the theatre performance and marketing of the
arts. Smith (2005) states this process encourages reflective thinking and practice. Consulting
collaborative approach includes critical forms of reflective experiences, cultural studies, and
research experiences that can challenge established ways of thinking and acting by encouraging a
re-examination of one’s own values and practices. This process can build learning communities,
which will support communities’ lifelong successes and achievements through practices that
question social problems, policies and ethical dilemmas.

Drumming, dance, and art exhibitions had provided educational fodder, entertainment, and political
posturing for the first couple of years and then due to conflicts regarding land rights, which has
often been interconnected with mineral or water rights, the non-indigenous did not respond well.
Attendance to events slumped and venues were no longer available due to fear of riots.

The Guarani people believe that during artmaking, individuals become the closest to the
fundamental and universal essence of life, reaching transcendental values through images that are a
reflection of their feelings. Making art is creating and their highest deity is a creator; therefore, to
create is to be at one with their creator. This is why the arts, the cosmos, metaphysics and
mathematics are considered the foundation of their lives and educational curriculum. The arts are
viewed as a social reformation tool that can educate both the indigenous and non-indigenous about
the Guarani’s history, heritage and culture.

Debbie: By situating myself as a curious and willing learner, I attempt to distance myself from
colonial power spaces. However, I am clearly other with very white skin, Western university
degrees, and only limited time within the community. The stories I hear are oral traditions; the
paintings are visualizations of a culture that I cannot even hope to understand except tangentially.
Through their artwork, Aboriginal people express multifaceted relationships with their country, their understandings of the larger world, how it came into being, and their responsibilities for maintaining and reproducing their traditions. Each of the varied styles of artwork reflects a group’s culture, historic journeys, and personal visions. Traditional Aboriginal society is a closely knit and interdependent unit where every member has responsibilities and social activities that are established through an intricate set of laws based on gender and age. The strength of each society lies in the strength of their broadly defined family groupings.

I have seen only small glimpses into these stories, so I can’t tell them. I can however, tell mine. The methodology of autoethnography seems especially appropriate for interrogation of my experiences with Aboriginal artists. Autoethnography is “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. It privileges concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scene, characterization, and plot” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix).

My entry into this community at this particular time in history and with my own agenda assumed a political stance through the contexts of history, race, and traditions of artistry. It was a time for a different type of educational, research, artistic, and life journey. “Methodologically assuming no privileged signifier, no exclusivity no priority or predominance, here is where the journey of thinking differently begins: moments in the politics of truth (Lather, 2007, p. 9).

Kryssi: As I continued to read about the ethics of research and issues of representation (Battiste, 2008; Dion, 2009; Jones, 2008; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2008), I grew uncomfortable speaking at conferences and writing articles that reflected my perceptions of my Maya mentor’s views. And although I referred to and acknowledged my own subjectivity as part of the research process (Behar, 1996; 2008; Desai, 2002; Ellis, 2004), that did not seem enough anymore. The nagging question was, Whose discourse is privileged? And as I struggled with how to present this work justly in the academy, I realized that Luke Eric Lassiter (2005) was right: the gap between academically positioned and community-positioned narratives is essentially about the politics and power of representation; about who has the right to represent whom. But how might my presentation of this research respond to such issues of representation?

I felt that video as a medium for recording my mentor talking uninterruptedly could allow for his self-representation. In the video, his paintings inspire dialogue about the events of his life. Yet still I am the one who presents this work at conferences, and although he benefits as an artist whose work is widely seen, promoting the exposure of his Maya community, I benefit from the research as it becomes associated with my work as an art educator. My justification is that I recirculated the rarely heard narratives of a Maya artist whose work has not been much seen or appreciated in North America, and that I attempt to broaden the methods for teaching and researching art outside of a European model. The question remains: “How can I truly repay the artist whose work has contributed to my status as a professor?”

My Maya painting mentor allowed me to publicize his work, and he thanks me for doing so. Nevertheless, we are part of a power dynamic involving ‘first world,’ and ‘third world, both
societies which discriminate against indigenous peoples. And, will I not distort his true intentions through an inaccurate translation?

Crazy Bull (1997) notes that reciprocity is critical in the research endeavor. As a student, I paid for all lessons and gifted the families with art supplies. I brought the artists copies of the videos that document their professional lives, the lives of their parents and grandparents. I give them copies of the journals that publish their works and pay for professional translations of those articles so my Maya mentors can read them. Is this enough? As much as I might convince myself that I am non-paternalistic, the research process is riddled with inequity. But, we have formed friendships for life. In the end, I tell myself that the intersections of cultures exist on multiple levels that form at best contestable sites.

Jim: I advise my students to un-naturalize colonizing practices of objectifying, naming and cataloguing subjects when assuming the role of research entrepreneur, ethnographer, historian and art educator, and to use the collaborator’s categories, naming protocols, and frameworks. Further, fair trade graduate researchers have been asked to question by whose standards of fairness that their international commerce was being conducted? Opening up transcultural exchanges, while an educational opportunity, still requires all collaborators to sustain involvement in planning and self-critique. Presenting findings and sharing the collaborative research methods developed with colleagues in multinational contexts can extend the impact of fair trade, and help develop more equitable researching arrangements.

**Researching In Ways That Might (dis)Serve Multiple Populations**

I (Christine) contend that the selling of traditional cultures and arts has become profitable and has placed FUNAI in a position to decide who gets financial support and who does not. The paradox is that individuals from dominant cultures become experts and judges, who redefine culture and the arts through institutional policies they set; those that determine who and what will be a part of their institutions. In Brazil, these institutions select indigenous groups that demand the least and ignore those that want a voice. The struggle for power is the same whether it is for land, life, or arts. As a member of the Oneida Nation, Pam Colorado states that non-Indians will have “complete power to define what is and is not Indian, even for Indians” (Colorado in Churchill, 1992, p. 91). This is viewed as cultural genocide and as powerful as the smallpox filled blankets given to Native Americans in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Physical or cultural extermination that serves those who are in power and, no matter what the stated intentions, such acts are unforgivable.

From 1994-1998, two specific types of Guarani art were observed. The first, tourist arts, is made within their cultural traditions such as all feather art items that are made in the central spiritual house but which uses colors, shapes, and material determined by the market. The second type of items is also made within their cultural traditions; however, colors, materials, and usage are determined according to cultural, spiritual purposes. The children are taught the differences
between the two types by the process of making. Cultural items are made during preparation of rituals. The tourist items are made outside of those rituals in a factory-like atmosphere.

Karai Mirin stated that one of their goals is to remain traditionally rooted “to always remember that the arts provide us with that opportunity to survive” (personal communication, 1994). A Guarani community near Sao Vicente in the Atlantic Rain Forest is located close to their ancestral lands. Because they are still connected to place, their materials are closely related to their heritage; yet, they have chosen to make a division between what they sell to tourists and what they personally use everyday and for rituals. In an interview (2002), Carlos, the chief, explained their situation and perspective.

We are using our natural resources to sell to make money. We are trying to survive in both worlds—Guarani and dominant. We want to live and it is understood to survive now we need money. But the concept of rich is a dominant cultural concept and is not Guarani; therefore, it [being rich] is rejected. The dominant culture encourages the Guarani that money is a very good step forward, but to what, I ask? Our resources are depleting due to the demands being greater than our farming abilities. Times are getting hard (Ballengee-Morris, 2003).

Debbie: I am an art teacher and a teacher of art teachers. For decades, I have been proud of my ability to find images of artwork to enhance the art lessons I present to my students. I have been especially proud of my inclusion of the work of women artists and people of color as well as non-Western art exemplars in my various classrooms. I have always done my best not to trivialize other cultures and to look at them with lenses alert to the shifts in stance required when discussing art that may have its roots in spirituality. I thought I was doing a pretty good job until I found myself in an aboriginal community in central Australia in the Spring of 2008. Taking postmodern liberties I question voice, authority, honesty, and agency:

The red dirt’s seductive whispering came to me with a fortunate encounter and invitation for a grand adventure. I couldn’t say no to a visit to an art community in central Australia. I had absolutely no intention of conducting research or making artwork. I went to lose and heal myself in the heart of the Australian landscape.

Silence then talk. Silence then song. Isolation. Community. Song and a slammed door. Yelling. Silence. Numbness and thinking. And the stories in the paint and in the air. I am Other here. I laugh along with the other women when 12-year old Mary performs me-the-Other to the group of women. I wondered then, and continue to wonder how I must have misrepresented other Others over the years. Is it possible to adequately represent the verbal and imagic voices of Aboriginal artists to my students in U.S. art classrooms?

My students are primarily white and middle class. They have always loved looking at Aboriginal artwork – and of course it’s usually “dot paintings.” “So what is the difference between pointillism and Aboriginal dot paintings,” I asked my students in the past. Geez.
I am lost in a red sandstorm dry as a bone and as burning hot as an orange flame. I sweat in buckets. I am alone but part of the group.

To work through this complex self- and other-directed process, I returned to Vladimir Propp’s (1928/1968) as a template for understanding my immersion in Australian Aboriginal culture. The tale becomes a primary signifier but it is autoethnographic. I cannot tell their story, but I can tell mine. I was very self-conscious speaking about them, and recognized that in Aboriginal communities you do not speak for another.

I left home in tears and with holes in my heart. I was as a babe, curious and unknowing in a landscape both strange and comforting. Like a seeker in Propp’s morphology, I received well intended interdictions, “Don’t go there by yourself!” “Be very cautious!” as if the middle class, middle aged, white American could not be safe with Aboriginal women. “They are not like us. They don’t think like us.” Like the protagonists in many of Propp’s folk tales, I violated interdictions, was tested, met donors, acquired talismans, and I was led to answers I still don’t fully understand. Like Propp’s protagonists, I was marked physically and emotionally by the journey. I grew in strength and wisdom from the gentle teaching of my guides. I returned home transformed.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggest that when researching personal experience, one’s focus may be inward, outward, backward, or forward, a “temporality, past, present, and future” (p. 417). I must consider how to say what they wanted me to understand without speaking for them. As Myers discovered when he was asked to talk about his experiences with Aboriginal artists, “...in relying on my personal experience, I enacted a mediating position, speaking to what I had been told and how I had learned it, sharing my experience with the audience...” (p. 524).

I am Other. I speak their art and stories, but in the end I speak my own incomplete story of loss, finding, and renewal. I can’t know the trials of the Stolen or Lost Generations or what it means to them to hear “sorry.” My only recourse is to attempt research that does not cause more hurt even unintentionally.

Conclusions

An integral part of this collaborative writing project has been to both support and challenge each other in developing decolonizing methods for arts educators and writing up research conducted in transcultural contexts. We have turned to each other as we have collaboratively written up our research concerns in the form of an article. Most of us have also experienced new depths of discomfort and anxiety in critically interrogating our own actions, and engagements in academe.

Kryssi notes having awakened during the night prior to our group SKYPE conversation with anxiety thinking about subjecting her Maya friend and mentor to danger: “As I deliberated these issues, I decided that I would ask Christine to advise me the next day. She had worked with the Guarani community of Brazil and faced similar concerns as she served those with whom she collaborated, being asked to protect their families, even at times, putting her own family at risk. I confessed that initially, when presenting this work at conferences, fleeting public attention and limited access to lived-experiences lowered the levels of risk. When our conferences are over, there are few concrete
traces left. But regarding this on-line journal, where video clips can be integrated and posted on the internet, new risks and ethical issues again rise.

The next day on SKYPE, others confirmed the absolute need to consult with my teacher to clearly explain how the world would have access to his face, his words, and his views, once this video clip was published. Jim interjected that this conversation was exactly reflective of our writing and our concerns connected to the ethics of representing others and the power differentials inherently present when deciding what ‘to do’ about another person’s life. Deb said I should do nothing without consulting my collaborator. I responded that even if my Maya mentor had initiated these video interviews to publicize the atrocity of such a genocide, because of his lack of contact with the internet as a site, could he fully know what this might mean for his life or that of his family?

As a group we recognize that Institutional Review Board’s insistence that researchers not subject study participants to discomfort – but as researchers mustn’t we protect our participants from our own well-meaning but potentially paternalist practices – ones that assume that a brown collaborator could not be fully aware of the dangers (s)he faced. As the conversation continued, Kryssi decided to play the video clips for her teacher on the phone so that he could decide if he felt comfortable with segments of those interviews going up for view across cultures. During this conversation he emphatically stated that he wanted his declarations made public at all costs. Assuming responsibility for her collaborator’s well being, Kryssi reconfirmed his stance, despite knowing of the publication’s expanded visibility.

At the 2009 National Art Education Association conference we performed our patchwork of narratives, ending the presentation by posing the following questions:

When can we know our students have heard the Other?

How do we know whose stories we are hearing?

What might it take to find the right words?

And how will we know we’ve found them?

Nine-months later, however, a new question has arisen; one regarding researchers’ acknowledgment of the risks and dangers to which we subject collaborating co-researchers when we encourage their engagement in social struggles – knowing full-well that we advocate such political action from our safe spaces in U.S. ivory towers and pages of peer-reviewed journals.
References


Casino Capers: Exploring the Aesthetics of Superfluidity

Mary Stokrocki
Arizona State University

with Bianne Castillo, Michael Delahunt, Laurie Eldridge, Martin Koreck

Casinos are fast becoming sites for display of new Native American (NA) Arts. In such a context, casinos re-represent themselves and their communities through various visual forms and thus change their meanings. In her study of Wisconsin casinos, Stuhr (2004) challenged art educators to consider these visual culture displays as they accommodate new markets. Art in the casino phenomenon is worth investigating and how art educators can explore and/or make sense of this phenomenon is important. Casinos are using artworks as spectacles of pleasure.

According to a casino gambling survey conducted by Harrah’s Entertainment, approximately 40 million Americans played slot machines in 2003 (Rivlin, 2004). People are attracted to the glitz and the chance of winning money. Such things are phenomenal—highly sensual and impressive, and there lies the attraction. The gambling experience dates back at least to the casting of lots in the Bible. Experience always has an aesthetic component. An aesthetic experience resides not so much in a thing’s appearance, as in its life-like substitutes. “In an age in which desire is inculcated even in those who have nothing to buy, the metropolis [casino] becomes the place where the superfluity of objects is converted into a value in and of itself” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 405). So what aesthetic qualities draw people to the casino?

What is a Casino?

A casino is a private establishment that provides an environment for playing games of chance, wherein successful players win money. These point-scoring games usually involve card games, a combination of matching or adding cards exposed on the table with cards in their hands. A casino however offers much more nowadays. It offers an environment in which people can converse, eat, drink coffee/alcohol, play, swim, and enjoy entertainment. Many casinos in Las Vegas, for example, also include gift shops, supermarkets, fashion boutiques, art galleries, and nightclubs. The establishment aims at the visual, gustatory, aural, and taste senses. In all, the environment appeals to all of the senses. With the 1988 passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, the intervening decades have seen the rapid proliferation of regulated casino gambling and state-run lotteries in the United States. The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act mandated that state governments enter into good-faith negotiations with Indian tribes seeking to operate casinos and high-stakes bingo games. Worried about municipal revenues, states allowed for the expansion of gambling in non-Indian jurisdictions including the so-called interstate games (like Powerball), with multimillion-dollar jackpots (Rizzo, 2004). Such policies thrive on the aesthetics of superfluidity that which is excessive.

Aesthetics of Superfluidity
Aesthetics is a field that incorporates many art theories: expressive, representational, formalistic, and functional, to name a few. In many ways, aesthetics deals with the sensory and emotional experience of “making special” (Dissanayake, 1988). The idea of superfluidity is borrowed from Mbembe (2004), who discusses aesthetics in analyzing/interpreting the new architecture in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa. He associates superfluidity “with luxury, rarity, and vanity, futility and caprice, conspicuous spectacle, and even phantasm” (p. 378). He discusses the exploitation of a mass of human material in the city. In South Africa, gold was the superfluous raw material and symbol of wealth. The rush for gold, an amazing paradox, was not as significant initially as the pursuit of coal, iron, or rubber (Arendt, 1966). Today, in other casino cultures, the rush is for “the rush itself”—the blast of thrills and escapism that the atmosphere provides.

**Phenomenological Gambit**

This paper is a phenomenological inquiry, the study of an experience and its layered meanings (Van Manen, 1984). It is an “attempt to somehow capture a phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 39). Stokrocki collected data via questionnaire, interview around dinner in a casino’s restaurant, email exchanges, and follow-up phone calls. The description started with heightened sensory awareness and proceeded with findings about the casino’s artwork and other cultural components. Discussion of issues associated with casino culture and implications for teaching resulted. Findings are arranged around the major interview questions.

**Players.** Participants were art teachers and senior adults who gave pseudonyms: Luckylou (F60); N8tivgrl (F43); Bobo (F43); Dinny (M57), and Marty (M75). Two players were Native American and three players were Caucasian. Three females and two males participated and were members of the Arizona Art Education Association.

**Location and time.** Casino Arizona is a perfect location, next to Scottsdale, a Southwest tourist haven. The location was easy for us to maneuver since we come from different directions within the desert valley. It has two locations on the Pima/Maricopa Indian Reservation. We chose the casino closest to the university and the highway. The time of day was 6:00 p.m. — after working hours. We were ready for a relaxing time in the air-conditioned building after a long, hot (110˚F) summer day and excited about exploring the casino’s aesthetics by discussing the questions below.

**Questions and Findings**

**What are initial reactions to the casino?** We each remarked that we were otherwise unlikely ever to visit the casino. Since the Arizona Art Education Association decided to host a conference at a casino this coming fall, we decided that it would be worthwhile to explore the casino’s aesthetic possibilities beforehand. When asked why we went to the casino, we responded: for entertainment, birthdays, professional meetings, or people observation. Luckylou responded that she went to this casino in a limousine provided by the casino for the annual summer “Women’s Night Out” in her community for adult living.
What is the design of the casino and what are its surface materials? The casino site is laid out in what we decided is an attractive, circular design. The colors emphasized in the building are earth tones, and the most common material is cast concrete, for an appearance similar to adobe. Both smooth and rough stonework contrast each other at the entrance. A constructed waterfall wall prominently screens the entrance. Four medallion relief sculptures mounted on the exterior walls present symbols of life, the four directions, and the man in the maze, the latter of which is the official emblem of the Pima/Maricopa Tribes that own the casino. “The casino is a kind of vernacular oasis, with entrance facing east and a central kiva, according to my architect husband,” explained Bobo. See Figure 1.

Initial reactions were hyper-sensory. Bobo loved the outside desert oasis that she described as “not too flashy, with willows and even fish.” Later she remarked on its “lush, tropical” charm even though Phoenix is a desert (See Figure 2). The complex had a well-integrated design, we concluded.

What is your impression of the ambiance of this place? Inside the casino, we first noticed a giant guitar sculpture and thought of Elvis immediately (Figure 3). This sculpture, called *Tribal Caster: Tribal Languages Rocks by Randy Kemp*, was part of “Guitar Mania,” a competition/auction to raise money for the Boys and Girls Clubs. It promised us lots of entertainment.

Down the hall, a Harry Fonseca (Maidu People from around Sacramento, California) acrylic, mixed media painting on canvas, called *Leopard Spots*, (2003), attracted Luckylou with “its bright colors and glitter and foil papers.” See Figure 4. *Leopard Spots* celebrates Coyote and his partner Rose as jackpot winners. The coyote is a trickster in many Native American cultures. The casino inspired him and commissioned this piece, based on a popular reel slot machine game, according to Cheryle Vavages, (Personal correspondence, April 12, 2006, Casino Arizona sales representative).
N8tivgrl loved the baskets made of natural local fibers (willow and devil’s claw); some of which were just outside the door. She discovered that Pima basket weaving is recognized worldwide as a highly respected tradition. Noteworthy was the man in the maze basket designed by Rikki Francisco, who learned this miniature weaving style from her mother (Casino Arizona’s Cultural Arts Collection, Map & Guide, no date). See Figure 5. “Like a prettily wrapped present, we were impressed by its potential to please,” remarked Dinney. The subdued lighting immediately relaxed us.
What artwork inside the building is special? Players may not be conscious of the artworks on the walls. My informants, in contrast, willingly shared their perceptions. The textured artworks caught the attention of our group. Bobo liked the smooth “square-shaped bodies” of the 1997 butterfly ceramic figures by Nora Naranjo-Morse (Santa Clara Pueblo). She appreciated the form because “it was different.” Lucklou admired Richard Boone’s Rose Parade Saddle, c. 1965, by Mervin Ringler (Pima), a master saddle maker. The saddle consisted of hand-tooled cowhide, suede, and sterling silver See Figure 6. In 1991, he was described as a “living treasure” by the State of Arizona. His intricate construction and custom design is unique in the Cowboy and the Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage, according to Casino Arizona’s Cultural Arts Collection Map & Guide.

Dinny loved the built-in wall vitrine containing old Navajo rugs, baskets, and Pima jewelry. On display was Angie Reano-Owens’s mosaic shell necklace (Figure 7). The Pima People resurrected the ancient Hohokom-style of piercing and stringing brilliant turquoise stones and ocean shells that continues today.
The artworks lend an atmosphere of “high quality” to the place, whispered Dinny. The Casino Gift Store also sold some of the local Maricopa pottery and featured a local artist online. Later, we learned that “this is one of the largest casino collections of Native American art in the United States (Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, 2000-2001).

What pleasures does the casino offer? The possibility of winning big, entertainment, and lots of stimulation in the meantime usually were main casino attractions. Stimulation included “the noise, flashing lights (BB), and air conditioning in the summer which offered a “cool respite” (Luckylou). Dinny suggested, “It's usually a din of jangling sounds and active light displays at slot machines.” A security guard explained how a person distinguishes the levels of slot machines. She noted, “The red lights are nickel machines; the yellow denotes quarter slots; and the blue lights are dollar games.” Dinny considered the slot machines as art objects consisting of “chromed metal/plastic, back lit signage, high gloss enamel paint, moving parts that include a pull lever and buttons to push, and rolling cylinder markers with symbols to match up for awards.” He pointed out that the casino interior emphasized variegated bright color and metal, high gloss, and reflective surfaces.

What were favorite slot machines? None of us cared about “the slots.” We discovered from random players that the one arm bandit, playing two machines at times, and bingo were favorite casino games. Playing Bingo brought back memories of family games and church bazaars. Similar to television viewing, Wheel of Fortune, based on powerful gambit of “the near miss,” is the most popular slot machine with senior citizens (Rivlin, 2004). The center of attention in this slot machine hall was a Wheel of Fortune extravaganza with a horizontal spinning table, swirling wheels in the middle, two vertical spinning wheels on the either side, and lots of lights flickering at different speeds. See Figure 8.
Players sat around it and a chorus of noises accompanied this machine. Onlookers surrounded this area as they might at a carnival. Slot machines are the undisputed king of casino gambling, according to Bill Eadington, Director of the Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming at the University of Nevada, Reno (Rivlin, 2004). Poker and black jack, however, are the most popular card games because they challenge participants’ diagrammatic reasoning or spatial mapping abilities involved in card playing.

What entertainment is featured? We learned about the weekly entertainment that consists of Showstoppers Live—musical impersonations of such America’s superstar legends as Elvis, Madonna, Tina Turner, and The Temptations. The Calendar of Events included Tanya Tucker (May), Little River Band (June), and Restless Heart (August), 2006. Lucklou found the Italian ventriloquist with his talking parrot “delightfully raunchy.” Special Events consisted of the Chippendales, Indian Art Market and Powwow, Monday Night Comedy Cub, Polka Night with a Touch of Chicago, Boogie Nights, and tons of giveaways. During the summer, the casino offered several spectacular events (Arizona Player Gaming and Entertainment Guide, 2006).

What is tasteful/tasteless about the casino? The group discovered the food was tasty and well presented in the circular-shaped restaurant, painted with pleasant desert green colors. Luckylou ordered a pasta salad that consisted luckily of a lot of greens and tomatoes for a healthy diet. Bobo really enjoyed her steak, which she rarely eats otherwise. No doubt about it—the food was an inexpensive, gustatory delight. At dinner, we appreciated the low “Cool Jazz” music in the background. Yet we bemoaned the act of gambling itself and the waste of resources and money, the food waste, the ubiquitous tobacco smoke, and the money drain. Other seductions were embedded or hidden. On another occasion, one of my colleagues noted the slot machine “Risky Business” at an entrance that featured a stripper in full view of the crowd. She commented, “I’m not a prude, but this is flamboyantly crude.”
Conclusions and Discussion

Our weekday visit to the Casino Arizona proved to be relaxing and educational, so its timing may have resulted in a reduction of noise, smoke, and we can only speculate, other unappealing behaviors. We concluded that in this casino there was not much superfluidity, such as high-stakes craps or roulette or extravagant merchandise at the gift shop.

No one gambled, but we learned about classic forms, such as Baccarat, Blackjack, craps, War, Roulette, including those online (Real Vegas Online, 2006). Luckylyou remembered her dad teaching her and her sisters to play poker as children. We discovered that the site was surprisingly appealing to us as art educators with its muted lighting, regulated noise, and cool atmosphere. This trip turned out to be an exception to the view that casino experience is superfluous. Then too, we remembered that there is more here than meets the senses. A major contrast existed between the earthy traditional Native American arts and the contemporary flashy casino chromed arts. The animated chromed slot machine installations contribute to the lure of the spectacle (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2004). Behind the scenes, complex psychological calculations control gambling. The idea of superfluidity denotes loud and bright as opposed to passive and restrained. The system is highly complex and not as simple as it seems.

Several health problems are related to gambling. Participants complained of smoking as the major unpleasant problem with casinos. Many sites now have no-smoking sections and smoke extractors to control the problem. Of course, alcohol is a second problem we noted and bouncers and undercover agents watch players for signs of aggression. Casinos even offer to pay for cabs so that players will not drive while intoxicated. Psychological problems of addiction are fluent. And slots are the “the crack cocaine of gambling” (Rivlin, 2004). Therapists watch people for “telescoping—a shortening of the period of time that it takes for someone to get into trouble,” according to Volberg (2001), President of the National Council on Problem Gambling. Even the gaming industry is worried that its players are burning out too fast. Gambling has become one of the fashionable psycho stimulants.

Dinny found a news article on the brilliant design of slot machines from a behavioral psychology perspective. Petry (Rivlin, 2004), a professor of psychiatry at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine notes, “People who are making these machines are using all the behavioral techniques to increase the probability that the behavior of gambling will reoccur” (p. 7). She referred to intermittent reward as “second-order conditioning” -- the trigger lights and sounds that go off when a player wins. When two cherries in a row appear on the screen or stereo speakers project satisfying clink of cascading cash, they signal to people that they’re getting closer to winning. “It is the dumbing-down of America, because gamblers won’t try to figure out the game strategies any more,” complains Marty. Colleagues of Shaffer have compared the brain scans of people high on cocaine with those of people while gambling: similar neurocircuitry lights up in both sets of images (Rivlin, 2004). All this points to the aesthetics of speed that gives one a heightened sense of perception and a restless, voracious, and transformative passion for a high-speed life-style, “where love is a motion faster than light and the paradoxes of empiricism swamp science in motion without mobility’ (Virilio, 1991). Gambling is reversing roles—a stimulant for some and a relaxant for others that poses physical, psychological, intellectual, and even existential problems.

Racial Distinctions

The predominant race of gamblers was Caucasian, but it was our observation that about...
20% of the local Pima/Maricopa people played the slot machines or worked there because the casino was on the Pima-Maricopa reservation. In addition, N8tivgrl noticed other distinctive signs of "Indianness" at the casino. She noted, "The staff who wore Indian beadwork lanyards are Native People." Later, she remarked, "The Native American message I think that is being sent is 'We are strong, we are moving forward into the future'." The display of traditional and contemporary Native art was deliberate to suggest that the tribe has deep roots in the past, but is vital and growing into the future. Also, the elegance of the casino was a way to combat stereotypes held of Native People as "dirty, unintelligent, and without culture." She summarized, "We have our culture, but we also have the ability to work our culture successfully with what is considered 'refined and cultured' by mainstream society." Oneidan Ernest Stevens, Chair of National Indian Gaming Association, mentioned some successes of Indian gaming as elderly and day care facilities/programs for kids and the spread of new golf courses on the Gila River Indian Community, south of Phoenix. In reference to helping Native People become self-sufficient, he said, "If it's good for Indian Country, it's good for the states, and good for the nation" (Gibson, 2007, p. 48).

**Gender Peculiarities**

Females seemed to be attracted to the slot machines that featured “flashing lights, bells and whistles,” according to an anonymous player. Marty confessed that the classic and plain slot machines, like *Red, White, and Blue*, were just fine for him. Luckylou noted that gender was separated with females mostly on the slots and males at the card games and poker tables. In fact, the typical male seemed to be oblivious to the artworks. One anonymous male gambler, sitting on a stool at the casino, responded incorrectly that the artwork was traditionally Asian. Obviously, people of both sexes usually ignore the artwork, but pay attention to the multi-sensory stimulants.

**Age Differences**

On the Tuesday night that we visited this casino, we noted that most of the people were senior citizens. Rivlin (2004) called casinos “day care for the elderly,” or adult arcades. We would have to come on a weekend to discover the younger “working class crowd, “and the fights over the slot machines.” The problem for people is not only in the casino, but online gambling, where families and friends can spend hours playing and drinking in the comfort of their own homes (Krigman, 2000). Different forms of gambling, even as art works [slot machine design], are creeping online and into our lives. Online gambling is becoming a competitive sport because of its speed of delivery and fast movements. Art educators will need to pay attention to the aesthetics of superfluidity at all levels.

**Art Education Implications**

Similar to Stuhr (2004), we agree that art education now deals with lifelong learning and the casinos are rich sites for the display of Native People's traditional and contemporary art works. Like Stuhr, we discovered that the Casino failed to display local Native artworks. Most of the works were from several native groups. Putting Native People’s [NP] artwork in their casinos is supposed to give them more exposure, but we noticed that casino players fail to attend to the artworks and their explanations are of poor quality. Is this positioning of the Native Americans a kind of mere decoration or cultural tourism with its museum-like façade without the original context? The aesthetics of superfluidity is based on the idea that
more is best, but there are differences depending on the socio-economic conditions of time, place, race, gender, and age. Our experience at the casino of the NP artwork was rich because of our preparatory backgrounds, but the casino voyeur seems to have a cursory exposure and will pay little attention to the artworks. Even though the aesthetic of superfluidity demands close attention to card numbers and matching icons, casino visitors’ attention does not seem to transfer to NP artworks.

Because artwork in casinos usually is fake; e.g., the casino art in Las Vegas (Congdon & Blandy, 2001), participants may question the authenticity of the art pieces. Freedman (2003) spoke of the transformation of art influenced by context. She referred to casinos where “every cultural citation is fake so real things feel out of place” (Hughes, 1999 p. 51). An exhibition “Exotic Illusions: Art, Romance and the Marketplace” at the Heard Museum (1991) in Phoenix showcased several definitions of authenticity; namely the anthropological view. When taken to its extreme, every work is ‘authentic,’ as it is a cultural artifact. Native people can decide for themselves what is authentic in their eyes. Art educators need to help students of all ages become more attentive to NP artworks, enable them to problematize their contexts [former and present], and find alternative ways to engage Native American artworks, even in the casinos, lest they remain superfluous for most people. The casino experience may deal with superfluous things, but the artworks are not the objects getting the attention.
References


pedagogy. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press,


List of Figures
Figure 1. The casino logo we discovered denotes two rivers (Salt and Gila) and three elements: river, land, and wind.
Figure 2. Later Bobo remarked on the casino's “lush, tropical” charm even though Phoenix is a desert.
Figure 3. This sculpture, called Tribal Caster: Tribal Languages Rocks by Randy Kemp, was part of “Guitar Mania,” a competition/auction to raise money.
Figure 4. Harry Fonseca (Maidu People from around Sacramento, California) acrylic, mixed media painting on canvas, called Leopard Spots, 2003.
Figure 5. Pima basket weaving with man in the maze basket designed by Rikki Francisco.
Figure 6. Saddle consisted of hand-tooled cowhide, suede, and sterling silver by Mervin Ringler (Pima).
Figure 7. Angie Reano-Owens's mosaic shell jewelry.
Figure 8. The center of attention in this slot machine hall was a Wheel of Fortune spectacle.
‘image’ / ‘I’ / ‘nation’: A Cultural Mash-up

Matthew Suthernlin
Maryland Institute, College of Art

Amy Counts
Nacogdoches High School, Nacogdoches, TX

THERE was a child went forth every day;
And the first object he look’d upon, that object he became;
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day, or for many years, or stretching cycles of years (Whitman, 1921, p. 135).

Introduction

The term Un(precedent)ED conjures ‘images’ that have never been seen before in education. Too often in the classroom we focus on the classification of objects and practices. The metaphysical question “what is?” is important only in that it must be continually revisited. Through continual re-visitation, the question becomes “what can it be?” Unfortunately, the process of becoming through imagination is a practice that is often relegated to childish whimsy. Un(precedent)ED practice requires the (re)imaging of the current apparatus of education. Precedent is a standard or model that comes before a particular event or moment; components, such as sound, written text, sight, and thought, are pieced together to create the event or moment that collapses in on itself to create the ‘images.’ Precedent, as it will be described in the following pages, refers to the construction of myth perpetuated by ‘images.’ The ‘image’ in imagination is “more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing” (Bergson, 2004, p. vii). We are immersed in a spectacle culture in which ‘images’ transform and become reality. Therefore, tremendous power lies in the ability to facilitate the use of one’s imagination to (re)interpret, (re)(con)textualize, and (re)define. Such practices become a mash-up of cultural understanding in which dominant discourses are remixed. These new imaginings require work and a belief that change can occur. Transformation or change is

not a task that one should undergo without the realization that such change will require a
tremendous amount of effort - physical, mental, and emotional. The purpose of this paper is
to (re)imagine literacy practice based on the layering effects already taking place within our
technologically driven culture. Through the process of remix, the apparatus of social
interaction (i.e. literacy) becomes transformed. The ability to imagine something greater
than that which preexists allows for the invention of new modes of practice in teaching and
learning in the public school setting (Barthes, 1974; Debord, 1994; Derrida, 1976; Foucault,
1978; Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008).

**Becoming I(l)iterate**

As educators, we construct new models for literacy practice all of the time. We give them
names such as visual literacy, new media literacy, computer literacy, technological literacy,
etc. Yet as jagodzinski (1997) points out, “Madeline Hunter that avatar of efficiency
education has given us the blueprint to retro education of the 50’s. But print is dead; our
illiterates roam the streets, unable to read or write or deal with bureaucracy” (p. 70).
Writing and the letter are no longer significations of self. The structuralist belief in the
importance of the form or structure of the apparatus has given way to poststructuralist
discourse in which representation has been transformed into a metaphysical question. The
question “what is?” can be (re)imagined through the concept of embodiment in an ‘image’
which takes into account the situation, objects, and (con)text of the event(s) (Deleuze &

“What is literacy?” Interest in this question is situational. Currently in education, we
address the form of literacy but not the form’s status as literacy; literacy functions as an
apparatus, a social machine. As an apparatus, it forms a rhizomatic relationship of
interdependent dimensions that includes technology, institution, and identity; it had its
beginning with the Greek invention of the alphabet and institutional practice stemming
from Plato’s Academy as the first school (Ulmer, 2005). Traditionally, literacy is envisioned
as a centralized structure in which the physical text contains the meaning; through
rhizomatic discourse, dialogue becomes the text through which new understandings of
identity and institution are appropriated. The machine or apparatus can connect and
disconnect in each situation as a means of creating knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987;
Fernandez, 2001).

Circulations of self are produced through the practice of literacy according to Ong (1982)
and Havelock (1982). However, teachers and administrators alike reinforce the
predominance of a language-based understanding of literacy practice. Traditional language-
based literacy practice is about indoctrination into the dominant culture, a hidden literacy
system to encourage independent thought and critical thinking. Our colonial literacy model is designed to domesticate in order to enable the ‘manufacture of consent’" (p. 36). The consent produced is accomplished through the production of ‘image.’ What Macedo points out is that literacy practices, as they stand, are a perpetuation of the dominant culture. Fernandez (2001) states:

If we think of the term literacy as a semantic field of contradictory and repressed notions, opening the semantic field and revealing its structure, revealing what has been devalued and repressed, will help us to understand how the ideologies of literacy have limited us and how breaking open the discourse around literacy offers constructive promise. (p. 19)

(Re)imaging the Apparatus

The ‘constructive promise’ offered by Fernandez (2001) involves a deconstruction of the current understanding of the apparatus as a method of social control as presented by Foucault (1977) and a (re)envisioning of the apparatus through the eyes of Deleuze (1989). For Deleuze, the apparatus is not the text, but the virtual or physical device that is utilized to infinitely remix the text or in this case ‘image.’ This concept was put into practice in two English I classrooms. Two facilitators,’ Amy Counts, a teacher at Nacogdoches High School, and Matthew Sutherlin, an art educator instructor at Stephen F. Austin State University, and 35 ninth grade students participated in the process of the (re)defining of the idea of nation through the remixing of ‘images.’ The traditional role of teacher was altered, and in its place, teacher and student roles became intertwined and reciprocal, student/teacher – teacher/student.

Through practice, we (teachers/authors) have sought to invent a neologism of our own: ‘image’/ ‘i’ / ‘nation.’ Each of these words has quotation marks encasing them; the question that resides in the words is what “they” evoke. What is to come in the consecutive sentences comes only from “our imagination.” The apparatus of ‘image’ / ‘i’ / ‘nation’ is a play on the word imagination. It evokes the creative aspects of the process that ‘image’ interpretation and creation require. The concept of ‘image’ serves the purposes of both mental and physical presencing or pre-sensing. It is an artifact of the physical and virtual realms, a product of the culture and the individual. The concept of ‘i’ refers to the self and its decentralization. The ‘i’ is also a prosaic reference to the human eye. The small letter ‘i’ serves the purpose of inverting the emphatic ‘I.’ Furthermore, it is a reference to interpenetration, the collective i that existed prior to my birth and born(e) through the ‘image’ of the event(s). The last appropriated component in the new apparatus, ‘nation’ references a group of people claiming a shared history, either real or imagined and who reside in a specific geographic territory. It has connotations that can be both global and local. The concept of ‘nation’ is a de-territorialization of nation, the (de)construction of the
(his)story of a nation through a new narrative, not through the introduction of a new mythos (Ulmer, 1994).

‘[I]mages' are starting place for inquiry. As students and teachers engage with an ‘image,’ they can begin to see how the virtual and/or physical attributes of the ‘image’ can be remixed to create something altogether different. The interpretation therefore leads to appropriative invention. The ‘i’ is what allows for dialogue to occur through interaction. In dialogue with that other person or group of people, we become better able to understand and appreciate viewpoints which differ from our own. Engagement with the 'i' requires that I look and see. Dialogue is not simply talk or conversation. Dialogue is conversation provoked by an interaction with the ‘image.’ The ‘image’ by itself, an incomplete circuit, is useless without the presence of the viewer. In the case of ‘image’ / ‘i’ / ‘nation,’ the physical and virtual associations are the means by which each of the three terms can be mashed together. It allows the remixing of an ‘image’ through multiple lenses as a (re)definition of ‘nation.’ Through the process of remix, students and teacher are not producing a copy of the original. Instead, they are appropriating concepts and techniques into their existing repertoire for inclusion in the process of their becoming complex ‘images’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

The (re)envisioning or (re)imagining of the apparatus of literacy and education by proxy begins with the concept of art as pedagogy / pedagogy as art. Meaning resides neither in the object, viewer, or artist, but in the interaction, the precedent before the creation of ‘image.’ To create an ‘image’ is to enter into an interaction with the world. According to Nicolas Bourriaud (2005), through relational aesthetics, art can “reprogram the world.” Any work of art that a viewer chooses not to engage with collapses into surface just as any concept that a student refuses to engage within a course of study is also prone to the same fate. The richness of pedagogy and art lies in the layers of meaning. Understandings and (mis)understandings within any learning experience or artwork must become part of the dialogue; information and (mis)information contribute to the understanding of the ‘image’ and its importance to the culture as a whole (Derrida, 1976; Eagleton, 2001).

To state “I am an artist” is to proclaim nothing in relation to a fixed state; the dialogue of being is in constant flux. Hermeneutics is the interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions, and the hermeneutic circle facilitates the circulation of meaning through the creation of flow. In traditional hermeneutics, the artist’s intent has long been perceived as the defining attribute of a text whether print or visual. Contemporary hermeneutics sees interpretation as the point of interpenetration of artist and reader (Eagleton, 2001; Ulmer, 2005).
Figure 1. Envisioning the hermeneutic circle as a möbius strip.

Each tracing of the hermeneutic circle illuminates the concepts of fantasy and myth through the identification of both omissions and propaganda. Fantasy and myth can be measures of control that function as blocks of discourse. However, there is a space for unknowability in terms of an/other and the grand meta-narratives that govern praxis (Lyotard, 1984). Those concepts that are automatically engrained in an individual’s consciousness as “the way things are” can be unveiled through continual retracing. The hermeneutic circle can be interpreted as a möbius strip. Each time the circle is traced, the meaning is allowed room for change. “I could interpret this sentence forever” (Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1978).

Dialogue as a Creative Act

Over the course of two weeks in November and December of 2009, teacher and students, students and teacher dialogued about the meanings of a series of words: utopia, dystopia, domino effect, capitalism, communism, myth, propaganda, and nation. Traditionally, these would be vocabulary words to be written in a notebook with definitions copied from the teacher’s notes or a dictionary. Instead, the classroom teacher began this unit by proposing only two of the terms listed above, utopia and dystopia. All other words and concepts emerged from classroom dialogue during this block of time and were expanded throughout the year.

Students were first asked to create a definition for the word utopia. They could utilize the dictionary, past notes, or each other as resources before writing down their understanding of the word. When finished, the class discussed their findings/understandings of the word or concept. The class repeated the process with the word dystopia. They were asked to come up with past/present and real/fictional examples of both utopias and dystopias. Through their discussions, they developed a series of references to a variety of cultural ‘images.’ These included Hitler’s Germany, the rise of Communism, the founding of America, Stepford Wives (2004), The Matrix (1999), Surrogates (2009), Artificial Intelligence: A.I. (2001), V (2009-), Family Guy (1999-), and many others. Each cultural ‘image’ circled back to the concepts discussed. Control and manipulation were common themes that reappeared in all of these examples as described by students. Students watched the theatrical trailers for Stepford Wives and Surrogates and discussed the themes suggested by the images and words presented. Each film presents what at first appears to be a utopia
while asking the viewer to recognize what is hidden under the “perfect” surface. Beneath the facade of beautiful smiles and clothes, this utopia is only achieved through the manipulation and controlling of an other (Ferris & Brancato, 2009; Levin & Rudnick, 2004). In these scenarios, utopia and dystopia exist simultaneously.

**Conduction of the Classroom Situation**

*Conduction* deals with appropriation of classroom materials, while making reference to the conduction of electricity and its flow (Ulmer, 2003). Beyond student introduced material, the class also engaged in the deconstruction of teacher presented cultural artifacts through reading “Sound of Thunder” and a passage from *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. These readings were the only two required elements in this unit that explored the concept of nation. After reading Bradbury, the class discussion turned to the domino effect, and how one action can alter the course of history; the killing of a butterfly during the prehistoric age can change the outcome of a political election or how the simplification of knowledge leads to the destruction of all knowledge (Bradbury, 2000; 1995). Through a dialogue, (con)text was illuminated in relation to the concepts. By tracing the hermeneutic circle, students and teacher discovered information that was omitted, (mis)represented, and (mis)understood.

To further explore what information was omitted, (mis)represented, and (mis)understood, students looked at both fictional and nonfictional examples of cultural artifacts. Students interacted with a hypertext web constructed by the instructor using Visual Understanding Environment software from Tufts University. In the hypertext they made connections to terms and ideas discussed among each other. This hypertext, which included images, news reports, maps, and artwork from each decade, traced history from the Russian Revolution and the rise of Communism to World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Students were able to see how one event in history led to another, reinforcing the concept of the domino effect. Students were asked questions by the instructor such as: Why did Communism become such a popular idea? What was America’s role in the 1950s? What information were we, the people, not told?

To expand and reinforce this classroom discussion, the instructor showed cinematic and historical clips from films and historical news events that the students had listed during their brainstorming sessions. *Pleasantville* (1998), directed by Gary Ross, and the theatrical trailer for *Equilibrium* (2002), directed by Kurt Wimmer, were shown and discussed, comparing and contrasting these examples with “The Sound of Thunder” and *Fahrenheit 451*, as well as juxtaposing them with depictions of Nazi book burnings from the late 1930s and original informational programs from the 1940s that discussed capitalism verses communism. These cultural artifacts depicted societies where extreme measures were
taken to maintain order and balance. The extreme nature of the measures taken to produce balance forces individuals into an understanding of the world as black and white. By the tracing of the hermeneutic circle, a w/hole or space for the production of new meaning is left. W/hole becomes both “whole” and “hole.” What is left out of the tracing becomes fodder for invention (Ulmer, 2005).

**Mythologies**

When the students explored the concept of myth, the discussion revolved around what they knew and the questions they had. Their discussion was an open dialogue in which students were given the agency to determine the content through teacher facilitation. The purpose of this type of discussion was to help students understand the ways in which 'images' construct the reality in which we all live (Debord, 1976).

With all of these cultural artifacts, students were asked to critically analyze and dialogue about what they observed and heard in relation to myth. A key component of the definition of myth is that it is only part of something else. Details, facts, and information disappear from the stories of myth as they have been reinterpreted and retold countless times, changing with each reincarnation (Barthes, 1972).

The classroom teacher then posed the question: “What is your perception of life in America during the 1950s?” The general consensus from the classes was that it was a happy time, but that understanding is only part of the retelling of the 1950s, a myth perpetuated by television shows such as *Happy Days*, advertisements, and film. Students were then reminded of the scenes from *Pleasantville* that depicted this “happy” time. In this film, David and Jennifer, a present day a brother and sister, were transported into a 1950s television show titled *Pleasantville*. Here they were known as Bud and Mary Sue, part of the Parker family. This world was comprised of only two colors, black and white, the two extremes of the “value” scale, the complexities of life reduced to binary opposition. This seemingly perfect community was turned upside down as David and Jennifer introduced knowledge and conflict. Within the film the sitcom’s characters questioned their existence and felt alive for the first time as their black and white world gradually turned into vibrant color and blank books were filled in with words and paintings. Not all the citizens were happy about this domino effect and the rapid change which followed. The angry, frightened citizens proceeded to burn books and art and, eventually, to put David on trial for causing this chaos (Ross, 1998). Were the characters living in this utopia really happy and satisfied? Did book burnings or metaphorical book burnings occur in this country where citizens strongly believe in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Blank faces and tentative answers followed those questions. This myth of America, during the 1950s, omitted some key events, such as McCarthyism, the Hollywood Ten, and the Black List.
Students then discussed the word propaganda. What is it, does it still exist, and what is its connection to myth? Within the framework of the concepts, propaganda and myth, the viewer is only receiving part of the information, partial truths. Myth refers to the ability to build a community through an imaginary bond. Propaganda is not impartial and is meant to influence a community towards a cause or action. As a one-sided argument it limits the possibilities of myth. It was agreed that propaganda still exists today; one example discussed was both historical and current, the connection between the doom's day clock from the Cold War era and the Homeland Security Advisory System's terror alert levels today. Other examples are the two Levi's commercials (2009) featuring Walt Whitman's poem "America" and a portion of his poem "Pioneers! O’Pioneers!" These advertisements center around an iconic piece of clothing, blue jeans; through the use of imagery and text, the viewer is shown an idealized view of America as a nation and a people.

“America”
Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,
All, all alike endear’d, grown, ungrown, young or old,
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,
A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,
Chair’d in the adamant of Time (Whitman, 1999, p. 388).

“Pioneers! O’Pioneers!”
COME, my tan-faced children,
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready;
Have you your pistols? have you your sharp edged axes?
Pioneers! O pioneers! (Whitman, 1921, p. 197)

In these advertisements, the poetry above is paired with a specific set of visuals meant to evoke 'images' of patriotism. The visuals include people of all shapes, colors, and ages interacting with one another, youth running, jumping, and leaping through fields of grain and flowers and around campfires, the American flag unfurling, and fireworks flashing in the night sky. Students and teacher discussed the poems and their presentation of partial
truths. Phrases such as “All, all alike endear’d” and “equal daughters, equal sons,” became starting points for the discussion the mythos these poems reinforced. It is at this juncture that students were presented with the final word for discussion: nation. They were to (re)define or (re)imagine the meaning of ‘nation’ by utilizing the contextual framework they had constructed. They were to create mash-ups using cultural artifacts (advertisements, music videos, film clips, music, informational videos, etc.) as source materials. With this sort of critical engagement, students were given the power to choose what sound, text, and visuals they pieced together in a one or two minute video that (re)defined or (re)imagined what ‘nation’ could be. To create the mash-ups students and teacher worked with an art educator as a form of transdisciplinary practice.

Mash-ups

Mash-ups allow one to (re)assemble songs, video, text, etc., as a means of altering the intended meaning or use of a particular software, piece of music, video, etc. The cutup method, utilized by William Burroughs, in which a text is physically cut apart and reconfigured, and musical sampling, the appropriation of music, as a means of remixing sound are but a few common modes of creating mash-ups. Each of these addresses various levels of the process as collective and individual. The text is diced, spliced, and reconfigured as a means of obtaining a new understanding of the work. Some mash-ups are software based in which two or more interfaces are mashed together to create a new interface. Others are video and/or music based. In relation to ‘image’ / ‘i’ / ‘nation,’ mash-ups enable the intermingling of discourses through the slash or cut and serve as a form of heuretic invention (Miller, 2004; Ulmer, 1994).

In the construction of mash-ups, the myths created through the emblematic structure of television and cinema can be deconstructed by critical analysis of sound, image, and duration. As students engage with the cultural myths inherent to film, they remix those images and sounds to create a new narrative that is at once collective and individual. Common associations exist given the perceived original purpose of the film clips, and at the same time, new associations are made through the perception of the remixed (con)text (Ulmer, 1994).

Mash-ups enable poetic montage. Students interacted with the concept of nation as a means of (re)imagining what nation could be rather than relying solely upon what they were told it “is.” Concepts were presented through a wide range of juxtapositions. Clips chosen for the mash-ups were generated through in-class dialogue. The clips utilized were combined and recombined to re-contextualize both image and text. These activities enabled students to look more closely at concepts they had previously taken for granted. In the (re)envisioned apparatus of literacy, a term used with some hesitancy, information production and usage
in a networked society becomes a folksonomy where the collective has a voice in the interpretation. In the realm of Web 2.0, folksonomies involve the process of social tagging through which users tag or label information with specific semantic tags as a way of classifying. The process can be as simple as adding a simple key word to any image, video, article, or other piece of online information. This is a practice that can transfer to the classroom situation as a means of self-organization of content through dialogue. Like grains of sand dropping from moving water to form a sand bar, individual comments construct a shape that embodies the classroom as a collective, as a w/hole. Meaning is produced and (re)produced through relational interaction of objects, images, ideas, concepts, contexts, and various other elements of interpretation (Bruns, 2008; Ulmer, 1994).

 Appropriated elements utilized in the mash-ups allowed students to construct identity as a complex network of associations created through collaborative dialogue. Instead of following the modernist notion of individualized creativity, many students chose to work in pairs becoming collective incarnations of self in which individuals are embodied in an ‘image.’ Recursive thinking about these artworks become a way of understanding culture as dynamic and multifaceted. Students appropriated notions of community and nation merge to form a w/hole. This will be an ongoing process, allowing students to continually (re)define and (re)interpret (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Mason, 2008).

 The student products varied greatly in style and message. Fireworks, war footage, ads, music videos, movie trailers, civil rights footage, news reels, atomic bomb tests, nature scenes, and 9/11 images, as well as others were all spliced, cut, and rearranged while music and text was added or taken away using Windows Moviemaker™. After completion of the project, students viewed each other’s works. They were asked to explain their process and the ideas they were trying to convey to the viewer. The audience evaluated the validity of the ideas presented in relation to the ‘image’ construction. They were asked to consider, in what ways were the students successful and in what ways were they unsuccessful? During this dialogue, constructive criticism was given to groups whose mash-ups produced confusion rather than a complex message regarding the concept of ‘nation.’ Students were able to rethink both process and product as a unified structure, object as process. Other questions were asked. Was the message being sent considered “politically correct” by today’s standards? Was it necessary that it be “politically correct?” What concepts did the mash-ups evoke: racism, political extremism, binary opposition, etc.?

 On the wiki you will be able to view the embedded videos: http://image-i-nation.wikidot.com/
Heuretics is the flip slide of hermeneutics. While hermeneutics asks what can be made of a given text, heuretics asks what can be made from a given text; it is artistic invention. Gregory Ulmer (1994) reintroduced this concept into the contemporary dialogue. Artistic experimentation is the primary model for heuretic practice; it allows for the circulation between outside/inside, body/mind. A heuretic approach to curriculum seeks to teach the applications of interpretation and invention together noting how meaning circulates through invention. The slash in the formula functions as a means of illustrating both gap and connection. It is the stitch that holds together the interpretations as well as the signifier of a chasm of infinite possibility. The chasm provides an opening through which student and teacher, viewer and artist can produce new understandings of each other and the world (Jagodzinski, 2002).

Shifting Strata of Mythologies

An interesting case of the ability to shift mythologies was brought to light by the entertainment news anchor Stephen Colbert and appropriated into the classroom conversation. In July of 2006, Colbert made the following statement on his Comedy Central show The Colbert Report regarding the Internet information wiki, Wikipedia: “You see, any user can change any entry, and if enough other users agree with them it becomes true.” After completing this statement, Colbert proceeded to erase all references to George Washington’s owning of slaves from the George Washington Wikipedia entry. Slavery as an exploitation of other human beings could have never been a practice of one of the founding fathers. Furthermore, America as a nation could have never been built on the backs of slaves. By erasing this information Colbert aids in the erasure of oppression from the
collective imagination. *Wikiality* (Colbert, 2006) is a form of democratic information; it has become a space where if enough people believe something, it does become “true.” It is the written form of the collective social myth (McCarthy, 2006).

The strength of wikiality was made evident in a very real and literal way when Colbert asked his viewers to change the Wikipedia entry for African elephants to state that the population had tripled in the last six months. Viewers took up Colbert’s request in such a substantial way that the server for Wikipedia subsequently crashed due to the overload (McCarthy, 2006). “While this is a dangerous concept for the uncritical individual, it presents tremendous potential for students as producers of their own culture” (Sutherlin, 2009, p. 8).

At one point, during the discussions in the classrooms, students were asked to write down the name of a historic figure and list six facts about that person. They were then instructed to mark out three of the facts and invent new information. Using these facts, they wrote a mini-biography. Students then volunteered to read the biographies to the class. Both teacher and students were challenged with the task of deciding what was fiction and what was fact. For the more famous historical personalities, students and teacher were able to discern fact from fiction, but for figures who were not as well known such as Clarence Birdseye, an American inventor, the process of separating fact from fiction became almost impossible. Students decided that we, as a nation, can construct, manipulate, and control our own reality until, ultimately, we no longer know what is real or false. Students then watched the clip where Stephen Colbert discussed the term wikiality; a process or place where all information can be constructed, (re)constructed, arranged, and (re)arranged. As long as the majority of people believe it to be true, it becomes fact. Just as in their construction of a new concept of nation through their own mash-ups, if enough people believe it to be true, fact becomes fiction, fiction becomes fact, proving that all fact is ultimately situated in fiction (or story).

**Memory and Perception**

The concepts of memory and perception were discussed in class. From our discussions, we concluded that memory and perception are imperfect, and it is the artifacts of history that serve as our way of making meaning from the past. However, because of the imperfection of memory and perception, historical (con)texts and concepts that are omitted permit individuals, communities, and nations to (re)image the past. The physical relies on artifacts or data collected from the event(s), while the virtual relies on the viewer associations to the event in question. In this way, a trace and a virtual existence of the past is exhibited through the concept of ‘image.’ The ‘image’ allows for the circulation of meanings between the physical and the virtual (Bergson, 2004; Deleuze, 1988).
According to Bergson (2004), every present is a past that is come into being. In his terminology, the past is “contemporaneous” with the present that has been. This becomes a paradox of memory. The past therefore coexists with the present. Bergson’s cone illustration of memory defines the past as AB which coexists with the present S and includes all versions of AB, A’ B’, A” B”, etc. Each section of the past belongs to a being of the past in itself. It is a totality of the past or a collective past that resonates in the present. Contraction memory and recollection memory converge at point S as ‘image’ or the current perception (Deleuze, 1988).

Memory and perception allow for multiple interpretations of the same ‘image’ as a means of creating a new narrative of the event. The Michael Gondry film Be Kind Rewind illustrates the power of a new narrative in the construction of community identity. The film takes place in Passaic, NJ, the supposed hometown of Fats Waller. A video store named Be Kind Rewind is also the physical birthplace of Fats. In the VHS video store all of the tapes are erased in a freak accident. In order to keep the store afloat, Mike and Jerry, played by Mos Def and Jack Black, must create their own versions of popular films. Jerry creates the term “Sweded” to describe this personalization of these films. Metaphorically speaking, the Sweded films become a rewriting of social history. Memory plays a role in the construction of history, and in this case, it is a new memory recreated and remapped in the streets of Passaic. As Kerr (2009) points out, the film functions through the endorsement of memory’s flaws. “Paradoxically, memories – especially when aggregated – are often flawed, incomplete, imperfect, or even inaccurate. However, instead of being considered detrimental, this ‘human error’ is implemental to social memory, as indeed it privileges the common bonds between people and their pasts” (para.1).

Eventually, the Sweded movies are confiscated due to copyright issues since legally, the tapes, as objects, are property of the studios. As the story unfolds, we discover that Fats
Waller was never born in the store. That story had been created to give hope to the character played by Mos Def. His belief in this story was so strong that he made others in the community believe it as well. At a critical moment, the community comes together to create an original film of their own. One of the community members played by Mia Farrow makes the following statement at the beginning of the process, "Hey, our past is ours so it can be whatever we want" (Gondry, 2008).

The personalized films in this movie embody the community of Passaic. Through a process of mash-up, they created a new history for the town and enlivened the community. The power of collaborative art, in this case the remade films, is in its ability to move between the domains of the personal and the communal. It works in the space between the communal and the personal as a way of producing a connection that bonds individuals together. The collective myth of film can be remixed through the collective practice of reflexive making.

**Conclusion**

‘image’ / ‘i’ / ‘nation’ serves as a theoretical model rather than a prescription of practice. Engaging in interpretation and invention as a continual flow of meaning-making gives students the ability to (re)envision previously inscribed notions of self and community. (Con)textual information generated through classroom dialogue as well as teacher appropriated materials enables an UN(precedent)ED change in the way we view and engage with reality. Through the construction of both physical and virtual images, we are able to reshape the world in ways that make openings for change.

We have sought to produce a (re)imaging of literacy that questions the status of what it means to be literate. Myth produces a collective way of seeing the world; these ways of seeing can take on both positive and negative effects. The purpose of ‘image’ / ‘i’ / ‘nation’ is to break apart blocks of discourse and reconfigure them in the spaces between. These spaces are embodied in the slashes of ‘image’ / ‘i’ / ‘nation.’ Through hermeneutic interpretation and heuretic invention, students are better able to make an impact on the world by becoming active participants in the production of culture. This act of cultural production produces new blocks of discourse that enter the flow as incarnations of self or avatars.

Technology allows for dynamic collaborative interpretations of self. Individuals experience the world in different ways, and their interpretations of those experiences are equally different. However, it is important for students to realize that within their individuality, there is a connection to all other aspects of reality. One cannot exist without the connection to the w/hole. In the public school, which is marked by grades and performance tests, these concepts are unprecedented. Teaching and learning allow for multiple incarnations of self
that change depending upon the (con)text and the situation in which the student is placed. As Miller (2004) points out, rapper Biggie Smalls and Walt Whitman grew up in the same borough of Brooklyn and one of them once said, “So what if I contradict myself—I am large I contain multitudes” (p. 65). It could have just as easily been Biggie as Whitman.

References


(PR)Obama Art & Propaganda: Un(precedent)ED Visual Collections of Hope, Progress and Change?

Kathleen Keys
Boise State University

...an onslaught of creative coercion to an unassuming American public... showing the world that the acts of a few can truly move and motivate millions

—Morgan Spurlock

Obama heybama bama bama O bama hey bama Obama... bam O bama hey Superstar!

—Appropriated by the author from the song Hosanna—Jesus Christ Superstar

Yet the art community has responded to the Obama administration’s contradictions, hypocrisies, and distortions with near total silence

—Patrick Courrielche

Three of these books chronicle visual collections celebrating the nomination, candidacy, and election of Barack Obama. The fourth book explores one particular image from this Obama art movement. Together they document the recent outpouring of fine art, street art, graphic design and other visual work presented and distributed by artists, exhibitions, the Internet and other digital means, and establish a foundation for socially concerned inquiry, and for creating related art education opportunities.

Showcasing hundreds of artworks and several participant and observer narratives from arts, cultural, and marketing insiders, these four books catalog the Obama art phenomenon. Comprised mainly of portraits these artworks project qualities of sincerity, idealism, vision, accountability, progressivism, a contemplative nature, and an undying commitment to change. These images illustrate how artists, designers, and organizers resonated with the Obama identity, and serve in its continued construction.

In early 2008, the NAEA’s Women’s Caucus (Anonymous, 2008) discussed the importance of engaging with emerging political candidate imagery. “These pictorial statements are a hot source to motivate critique, to study the formative process of visual culture, and to apply critical investigations to create revisions” (p. 51). Noting the intent of presidential campaign images to
persuade, these suggested questions assist in decoding these images in the classroom.

Do the associations [you make with the images] match the candidates’ plans for the United States? What values are conveyed? What is the intent of the presenter of the image? Was this image conveyed to the public by the entourage of the candidate, or was it intended as a rebuttal of claims or a suggestion of a darker side of the candidate by those who support an opponent? What are the historical and contemporary pictorial referents that subliminally supply additional content and metaphoric associations? How familiar does the viewer have to be with these pictorial devices to “upload” the intended meaning? (p. 52).

Following this initial framework from art education, an exploration of this self-professed and seemingly unprecedented (PR)Obama art movement is relevant, and contemporary content for art classrooms. Just as investigating art as documents of social history (Zander, 2004), visual culture and social reform (Smith-Shank, 2003), visual literacy of graphics, logos and culture jamming (Chung & Kirby, 2009), exploring cultural propaganda (Yang & Suchan, 2009), and political art (Ulbricht, 2003) have come into focus in recent art education practice, so too may imagery of political candidates and figures.

While considering these four resources it is important to remain cognizant of the position of the mainstream art world, the socio-economic status, agenda, and relative privilege of each artist, author, and editor. It is also important to ponder stakeholder’s opinions regarding this movement as being populist, as being an example of actuated democracy, the Obama art movement taking too much credit for election results, and finally, the art cognoscenti’s labeling of this type of visual manipulation, and propagandizing as critical social critique.

Wert (2009) notes that, “Some art critics suggest this art movement marks the beginning of a new paradigm, that the Obama art phenomenon will lead to a rejuvenated American art movement” (p. 151). If indeed this new paradigm is to continue, society will be best served by artists taking their roles as public intellectuals (Becker, 2000) more seriously and ensuring that social and political art asks tough questions of the populace and its leaders. In this way, as Kushins (2006) states, “[artists] would be recognized for producing learning spaces where ideas are discussed, questions are raised, and possibilities are imagined” (np). As Said (1994) stated, a public intellectual is "someone whose place is to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma, to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations" (p.11, As quoted by Kushins, 2006). Conversely as Courrielche (2009) points out, many artists and arts organizations involved in creating art for Obama, are dangerously close to becoming tools of the state.

Added to these concerns, numerous questions guided my exploration of these resources for use by socially and culturally concerned art educators. In general, what were the artists’ motivations for taking part in this action and movement? What ignited and then sustained art making about Obama? Who were the intended audiences for these works? Was this a grassroots, populist or artist
coalition driven initiative or did the official Obama campaign have a hand in orchestrating these projects? Why is exploring the 'unprecedented' visual culture surrounding Obama important? Is it indeed unprecedented? What does this plethora of political art communicate to us about our society? Initial responses to these questions are integrated into the book descriptions, critical discussion, and inquiry suggestions that follow.

Figure 1. *Art for Obama: Designing “Manifest Hope” and the Campaign for Change*, book cover, courtesy of Abrams Image.

*Art for Obama: Designing “Manifest Hope” and the Campaign for Change* (Figure 1) documents the *Manifest Hope* inauguration exhibitions in Washington, D.C., and Denver, Colorado. Instigated by Shepard Fairey, produced by Evolutionary Media Group (EMG), organized by MoveOn.org in partnership with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and managed in D.C. by gallery owner, Martin Irvine, the exhibition was curated by invitation and from an open national call. The exhibition showcased work from approximately 150 artists, with only 5 open call entries included in the final selection. Many works related to three of Obama’s platforms: the Green Economy, Health Care Reform and Workers Rights. Honoring the ‘stay positive’ blessing from the Obama campaign, these preferred frameworks served as a vetting process undermining the exhibitions’ intended populist claims. This mainly invitational approach intermingling primarily two-dimensional works from recognized artists, street artists, and designers holds great potential to incite lively classroom discussion. Additionally these works are contextualized by five brief, yet thought provoking essays providing insider perspectives from a variety of collaborators.

To begin, Fairey seemingly inflates his role in the start of the Obama art movement. The irony of this nemesis-of-law-and-order-renegade-street-artist leading an intense and coercive visual marketing campaign in support of the power structure is not lost on Fairey. He seems quite cognizant of his role and its impact stating, “...with the *Hope* portrait I was very sincerely making propaganda to support Obama” (Fairey in Fairey & Gross, 2009, p. 9).
What separates his propaganda from the otherwise suspicious and/or dangerous visual manipulation of marketing campaigns, in his mind, is that Obama presents an authentic and meaningful product. Fairey notes the creative community’s excitement about witnessing a “…genuine movement where artists felt like there was an opportunity to engage in democracy and use art as a tool of communication” (p. 9). He mentions also the power of portraiture. A portrait he says, “…conjures feelings about a person in a much more visceral way,” and Obama portraits have the capacity to carry “…euphoric association with his charisma…” (p. 8). Thus, much that Obama claims to believe in, stand for, and promise was available to be captured and reflected in powerful portraits. Prolific examples include works juxtaposing Obama with historical transformational leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr, JFK, Fredrick Douglas, and Abraham Lincoln (Figure 2). In this way, portraits become loaded representations of Obama’s constructed progressive identity as do other ‘staying positive’ works relating to his campaign. Fairey explains that portraits make “…the best tool for propagandist manipulation because they can project an essence onto someone that they might not really have…” (p. 9). Fairey of course, and other artists represented say they do believe, however, that Obama is the person they are portraying him to be.

Figure 2: Justin Hampton, The Great Communicator, 2008, archival print and mixed media on panel, 60 x 60 inches, courtesy of the artist and Abrams Image.

Staffers of EMG equate the mobilization into the Manifest Hope exhibition with the unprecedented “revolutionary inventiveness…prevalent throughout Obama’s campaign” (Gross, Seargeant & Rollins in Fairey & Gross, 2009, p. 13). The authors comment on a perceived need for “…a new brand of creativity to be released” (p. 13) in the United States following the near disappearance of dissent during the Bush administration. Witnessing this revived interest by artists in democracy, they state:

President Obama’s election signifies a shift in the national perspective, as individuals take on the responsibility of being part of something bigger than themselves. Though the momentous historical significance of the campaign can never be relived, its revelations will linger forever: Hope is not audacious; youth can make a difference; and collective conscience isn’t defined by party lines...our role as artists, citizens, and patriots is only just beginning (p. 14).

In Laura Dawn’s essay, the unprecedented viral growth of MoveOn.org in 1998 is revisited. Credited with becoming “…the largest grassroots citizen’s advocacy group in the history of the United States,” (Dawn in Fairey & Gross, 2009, p. 18) and an inspiration for believing in possibility, and creating “…a way for like-minded people to reach each other, to band together to stop the insanity that was leading the country into war, corporate oligarchy, and both moral and literal bankruptcy” (p. 18). She synopsizes the participative Obama art movement stating “…through the emergence of the Internet, from the mixture of new ways to communicate and create, people banded together and put a stop to a way of government that was no longer for the people or reflective of the greatness of this country. And now we face, together, the biggest hope of all: the chance to rebuild” (p. 20).

While seemingly inspiring, this culminating resource is limited by its character and content of a mainstreamed exhibition catalog with commentary cleverly marketed to us as an underground, anti-establishment, populist endeavor that critiqued the prior administration, the status quo, and the societal ills of the United States. Laura Dawn overestimates its impact stating that “[f]inally the inequality of the power structure was turned on its head, and the people were back in the process” (Dawn in Fairey & Gross, 2009, p. 18). Rather, the vetting process for Manifest Hope constrained access, artistic freedom, and quashed any initial intention of creating a truly populist exhibition by clinging to Obama campaign platforms. Likewise, EMG’s statement about discovering new roles for artists as ‘patriots’ (an extremely loaded word, post 9/11 and the passing of the Patriot Act) conjures up thoughts of artists and designers becoming active non-critical agents of the state in an assembly line of (PR)Obama art making.

What this resource does offer is nearly 200 high quality reproductions and several artist statements to use as art education source materials on which to develop and base lessons about the intersection of art and politics, art and propaganda, art as a historical document, and the power of portraiture. Useful as well for the socially concerned art educator are the narratives about community (albeit privileged and powered) organizing.

Design for Obama (Figure 3) serves as another “…historical document capturing the energy, excitement and hope…” (Perry-Zucker in Perry-Zucker, Lee & Heller, 2009, p. 9) experienced as people worked visually in support of Obama’s election. In the preface, Aaron Perry-Zucker, a recent RISD graduate, shares his desire to do something for the cause, decides to coalesce support from designers, and quickly implements the Design for Obama website with Adam Meyer. Within a week, this Internet “…venue for displaying posters and providing free and easy means for regular people to print out large-scale, tiled posters” (p. 9) for distribution and posting within their own communities was born. The webmasters feverishly sized and sorted dozens of daily uploads of (PR)Obama posters, graphics, artworks, etc., from diverse artists and designers from across the globe.

Editorial partner, Spike Lee first learned about the website when a staffer brought an appropriated version of the “Do the Right Thing” film poster by Art Sims to his attention. This new version, entitled, “Did the Right Thing” replaced movie characters with Obama and Biden and reworked the text into (PR)Obama language. Lee comments that this collection “…contributed to Barack Hussein Obama becoming the 44th President of the United States and the first African-American to hold the office, [and is] a collection that shows what artists everywhere have always done and will continue to do - change the way we see things” (Lee in Perry-Zucker, Lee & Heller, 2009, p. 15).

Contributing author, Steven Heller, says the works from Design for Obama resonate as examples which are “…as impassioned as any personal or muse-driven expression,” (Heller in Perry-Zucker, Lee & Heller, 2009, p. 21). He notes also that they are pure, “…given the designers’ honest and fervent response to this unprecedented national candidacy” (p. 21). Heller reminds us that although still possessing underground characteristics and the innovative viral approach Fairey took in
designing the social-realist inspired *Hope* poster, that it was indeed sanctioned by the Obama campaign. Conversely, he points out, the artists’ and designers’ works catalogued on the *Design for Obama* website, “did not go through the routine vetting process; the images were unfettered by a canon and command attention because of their freshness” (p. 21). While he does comment on possible needs for art direction and rejection of weaker images, Heller realizes a vetting approach was antithetical to the goals of the website—to gather a truly populist collection. Luckily, they received no negative, non-(PR)Obama, or anti-Obama imagery. He states the creation, upload and subsequent download of free images for potential clandestine posting “…enabled the artists and designers a chance to take part in the electoral process, to make their feelings known, and perhaps even impact others” (p. 21).

*Design for Obama* follows a more traditional graphic design orientation, portraying myriad posters and images using heavy text, iconography, and other rhetorical devices regularly associated with the Obama campaign. While substantial, this approach to the creation of (PR)Obama art is not as compelling as the works in *Manifest Hope*. The image index confirms the majority of the designers are established professionals from art and design fields and institutions—and thus problematizes the idea of this collection as populist. Although ardently professing its populism, it is rather a repository of works by members of a privileged and powerful design field. Additionally, the three short writings in *Design for Obama* appear in English, German and French, and while this tri-lingual approach is laudable, the omission of Spanish, given the languages’ prominence in the United States and that “[f]or the first time Latino voters emerged as a mobilized Democratic voting block in states across the country…voting 67% for Obama” (Preston, 2008) is glaring. Certainly, however, there are still plenty of graphic and visual examples on which to build meaningful conversations in art classrooms. Four works in particular will be intriguing in art education inquiry situations.

![Image of Hope poster](image.png)

**Figure 4:** *Hope: A Collection of Obama Posters and Prints*, book cover, courtesy of the author. Cover art is a detail from the poster, *Grant Park*, by David Springmeyer.
Hope: A Collection of Obama Posters and Prints (Figure 4) is visually and intellectually appealing as Hal Wert, an art and poster collector, and historian shares his aesthetic and intellectual understandings of the movement. Reproductions include his vast personal collection and attest to the eclectic range of content, media and approach among outsider and insider artists contributing work to the (PR)Obama art movement.

Wert chronicles the beginnings of the Obama art movement and the intersecting timelines of other related major projects and exhibitions. He credits the stealth and non-sanctioned poster actions of Chicago-based street artist, CRO (Creative Rescue Organization) a.k.a. Ray Noland as the “…pebble that presaged the avalanche of Obama campaign posters that would flood America ” (p. 11). Thus, Wert names Ray Noland, rather than Fairey as birthing this “...nationwide political art movement” (p. 12). He states, this pebble intersected with the proliferation of work by mostly “…young anti-establishment, skateboarder street artists [as it] was being layered into cities across the country” (p. 12). These renegades used money earned from early limited editions to print and ship thousands of prints to the early primary states for postering. He notes these “[n]ewly implemented agitprop activities used the cutting edge communication technologies that were now integral to the younger generations’ identity [such as] e-mail, the cell phone, video cameras, websites, iPods, YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, podcasts, [and] webisodes” (p. 12).

In the epilogue, Wert presents numerous examples of significant campaign posters from the 1820s to the present and provides context for the inception, decline and revival of campaign posters, throughout this nearly 200 year time period. Obviously as Wert reports, access to printing and the outreach potential of campaign posters mirrored the advancing technology in printing and mass communication in general, and responded to needs surrounding social and cultural movements and events. “The success of the Obama art movement mirrors past examples of other poster revival and street art actions—the difference today is how incredibly advanced our digital communication is, enabling an explosive impact” (p. 147). Wert also asserts that it is precisely these new technologies that are the new communication territory of the left and the young, which formed an overwhelming voting block for Obama (2009).
Given my fascination with and explorations of sticker art, (Keys, in press; 2008) my favorite (PR)Obama inspired image is one of two images repeated in the endpapers (Figure 5). This is a mixed-media sticker and collage work combining images from countless street artists compiled by Billi Kid. In addition to including street art forms, Wert offers a compelling and informative resource with many notable works of art compiled by the discerning eye and mind of a historian/collector and one that inspires inquiry into campaign and activist poster history, advances in technology and communication and the general role of political art in society. This high quality collection of fine art, graphically inclined images and alternative street art alongside the historical research and the generous artist index, push the comprehensive critical educational value of this resource well above the others.

Figure 5: *Untitled*, sticker collage compiled by Billi Kid, courtesy of the author.

Figure 6: *Abraham Obama: A Guerilla Tour Through Art & Politics*, book cover, courtesy of the authors, artist, and Last Gasp Press. Cover art is a detail from *Abraham Obama*, by Ron English.
Finally, Abraham Obama: A Guerilla Tour Through Art and Politics (Figure 6). explores content, meaning, and the adventures surrounding an important controversial image found in all three of the other collections. It chronicles sanctioned and non-sanctioned gallery installations and street art actions of the Abraham Obama image by Ron English. Originally an oil painting, the image which “blends the face of President Barack Obama with the iconic visage of Abraham Lincoln...” (p. i) has been re-printed, pasted and exhibited nationally and internationally in countless color schemes styles, sizes and in single or multiple tile versions, prior to and following the election. This mash-up references English’s interest which is not so much in their similarities, but in the complementary effect where “Obama completes Lincoln's promise. The process of freeing the slaves culminates in a black president” (English in Goede & English, p. 1).

English, like Fairey discusses his usual inclination to make art that opposes something. Normally known for cleverly critiquing corporate irresponsibility, authority, the status quo, etc., he thought “...the idea of supporting Obama through art was intriguing” (p. 1). Similar to Fairey, he mentions, the polite request from the Obama campaign to stay 'super-positive’, comments that any type of vetting is antithetical to his typical approach, but capitulates, and becomes “...in favor of a completely legal, positive effort” (p. 1) in support of Obama. Although English followed the proper procedures receiving gallery invitations or gaining permissions to install mural size installations of Abraham Obama in several locations, threats and attempts at lawsuits resulted around the mass public postings of smaller free images of Abraham Obama handed out at gallery receptions and made available for download on the Internet. One such lawsuit in Colorado Springs citing illegal campaigning “...was dismissed when an arts commission and the city declared the Abraham Obama images were art, not political propaganda” (p. 5).

Critic and urban designer, Mark Faverman further examines the significance of Abraham Obama. His generous essay, Boston ~ Abraham Obama Morphs Art and Politics: Ephemeral Public Art in a Time of Angst, reprinted from bershirefinearts.com, chronicles the adventure of the initial commission and installation of Abraham Obama by Gallery XIV in Boston (Figure 7). He qualifies this image as a “transcendent postmodern visual statement” (Faverman in Goede & English, 2009, p. 11) due to art intertwining with politics and its universally resonant existence. He compares its significance with other great political art by Francisco Goya, Pablo Picasso, and Diego Rivera. Faverman draws intriguing metaphors with the layering and ephemeral nature of the outdoor installations comparing them to the way our society and body politic are formed. He says Abraham Obama is a “…counter-message to the rather buttoned-down post 9/11 lack of criticism fostered by the Bush Administration's national security mantra of no question, no protest” (p. 15). Faverman alone references the possible dangers of the over-elevation of a popular and increasingly powerful figure asking whether Ron English is saying something else through Abraham Obama. He asks, “Is the artist saying that the Obama supporters should beware as well? (p. 15).
Carlo McCormick’s afterword, *Myth & Metaphor*, spends time examining the relational need for a myth of a new American Dream present in Obama resonating deeply with artists who want change, thus striking an implied and almost reciprocal balance between the President and the ‘liberal’ creative community. This quid pro quo development according to McCormick, consists of recognizing two things. The first that Obama knowingly employed the arts, and artists’ status quo interrogation methods as “…masters of coercion and control…” (McCormick in Goede & English, 2009, p. 84) as aesthetic tools of propaganda, and “to speak as surrogates for a dream too abstract for governmental discourse…” (p. 84). The second is that in their reward for work in supporting Obama, artists are energized, reconnected and freshly networked into a new scene of possibility and quasi-liberal community activism. From this new base of power, however, it seems a slippery slope until members of the progressive arts community build enough influence to become a full-fledged lobbying group. Do these larvae stage activist-lobbyists feel like Obama owes them something? The recent NEA and arts community ‘conference call’ scandal (Davis, 2009a, 2009b) in which arts organizations and groups eligible for federal arts support were seemingly agreeing to push the three aforementioned Obama administration platforms in their upcoming artistic work have borne the appearance of impropriety and have surfaced some of these similar fears.

*Abraham Obama: A Guerilla Tour Through Art and Politics* is an important resource and the one ranking second of these four offerings in its value for art educators. Serving as documentation of a larger than life art and propaganda project, this is an example of the kind of books we need to share with our students about becoming serious about art making. Regrettably, the brief comparisons drawn between Obama and Lincoln provide the foundation for English’s thought provoking artwork, but leave much more for the rest of us to explore.

Overall within the (PR)Obama art and propaganda movement the mobilization of certain members...
of the arts community in support of a progressive cause in Obama is impressive and has resulted in a surfeit of artistic and graphic works. I am not, however, without concerns about where this claimed and enacted empowerment in support of a newly elected power base that has now become the state will lead. We cannot name this artistic support as critical protest or questioning of the prior administration or status quo politics, or even as actuated democracy. Rather, it is emphatic and intensified (PR)Obama propaganda. In fact, signs of a ‘group think’ mentality implying a ‘you are either for us or against us’ stance among fervent Obama supporters was evident during and following the campaign. I suppose this is expected in any kind of plot to get ‘like-minded’ people together. However, as Courrielche (2009) reminds us, an artists job is to speak to power, not on behalf of it and “…regardless of political affiliation, the art community must embrace all rational dissenters. Art must not exclusively serve the interests of any presidential administration” (p. 2). And yet in these four cases, it seems clearly to do just that.

Examples of defensive and hypocritical responses surrounding visual works perceived to be non (PR)Obama or anti-Obama are important to review. Consider Blessing, by David Cordero, a School of the Art Institute of Chicago student's figurative sculptural and neon work displaying Obama as the Messiah complete with halo, robes and the comforting gesturing of a deity. Or the once mysterious Obama Joker image, now attributed to Firas Alkhateeb. There was outrage from both religious groups and (PR)Obama supporters citing the audacity of artists to suggest these righteous (biblical) or harsh (fictional) comparisons. More drastic perhaps, are the recently surfacing collections of anti-Obama paraphernalia and visual culture surrounding the term coined Obamunism—a word play in response to the Obama administration’s continuation of two wars, and a misconception by conservatives of its assertive movements toward healthcare reform with visual symbols of socialism and communism.

Adding to the mainly traditional media of the (PR)Obama movement represented in these four resources (with the exception of alternative street art and its actions), is a book exploring quilt making around fervent support of Obama as artistic content (Mazloomi, in press). Or consider the diverse approach of multiple praise paintings honoring Obama by Ghanian artists (Cosentino, 2009). Additionally while odd, surprising, and sometimes humorous we must also welcome and consider the visual culture exemplars of the Obama Chia Pet, Obama LSD Blotter Paper, and Barack Obama Ecstacy pills, and most recently, heroin, because “oh What a long, strange trip it’s been” (Garcia, Weir, Lesh & Hunter, 1970, track 10) and will continue to be as we wait for the next (PR)Obama art manifestations to appear and evolve.

The plethora of ostensibly progressive political propaganda from these four primary sources clearly communicates to us that our society is undoubtedly ready for change and promise of a different approach to leadership. More specifically, it attests that many artists were ready enough for change to visually advocate for it. As such, I am logically inclined to believe that this outpouring of (PR)Obama artwork was orchestrated within several communities by a complex layering of players, organized events and strategy built in part by grassroots, populist and artist coalition driven initiatives. But, furthered mainly by powered and privileged art world stakeholders—some which were intermixed with interest or at the very least, response and blessings from the official campaign to move forward ‘positively’. Outlaw turned insider art star, Fairey led the coalition of the
progressive fine art groupings, Perry-Zucker called forth to the professional graphic design community, Hal Wert affords us with a broader and more historical contextualization of this movement stemming collectively from fine, graphic, and street art, and Ron English and Don Goede document the journeys of the seminal Abraham Obama artwork.

Perhaps however, this Obama art movement is not so unprecedented after all. Obama as brand and showing support for the ‘change’ candidate is easy for the ‘liberal’ or ‘progressive’ artist and viewer. And, the desperation and disillusionment some feel about the state of the United States is easily coddled and assuaged by social-realist or activist inspired artwork because it gives off a sense of clear (and right) vision and direction. Creating the next painting/print of Obama alongside progressive leaders from history, or restating text from his speeches also seems is too easy. As Fairey and English demonstrate, it is very easy to believe you are right, when you finally believe there is something or someone worth believing in. This attitude, however, exemplified by self-proclaimed renegade artists all too willing to take up a role in visual coercive actions themselves rather than critically investigating them, is similarly way too easy. In fact, given the variables of a perceived silencing of questioning and social critique during the Bush years, the easy content and selling factors of brand Obama to ‘liberal’ and/or ‘change’ seeking artists, and the technological advancements in fast and mass communication—would we expect any less to occur?

Upon reflection, I posit that the development of this art, propaganda, actions and exhibitions, was indeed the absolute least those involved could do from their advanced place and power of privilege. And, to be perfectly honest, I expect more from artists, organizers, educators, our society and myself who claim they want to work for social change in unprecedented ways. My main and most ardent critique of these resources is that the artists and organizers documented did not commit to making art or organizing events that asked more significant and complex questions of our society, politics, candidates, and elucidate possibilities for change, and instead chose to produce propaganda that pushes singular ideas. What are these artists for other than Obama, and the three proposed Obama campaign initiatives?

As Carlo McCormick suggests, this visual outcry asked us to suspend our belief in Obama (Goede & English, 2009) or in other words trust him. Many influential people have thus stepped onto the proverbial bandwagon with their artistic production, and organizing. As a result they manipulated and/or reinforced inclinations for many to suspend belief and faith in Obama. I worry that as time moves forward, this suspension may actually stall the rebirth of critical, socially and politically engaged and activist artwork, (not just propaganda) that may indeed influence progress toward social justice and the vital discourse surrounding it. In relation to recent reactions to Obama’s orders sending more US troops to Afghanistan, and his untimely and simultaneous acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, this suspension of trust and belief may be dislodged for many. I wonder what indeed the artwork of resistance and referencing broken promises looks like and frankly, this is the type of ‘progressive’ art I look forward to, art and propaganda that speaks to the government rather than for it, and from and to the people for the greater benefit of all. Art that motivates rebuilding, and actually is successful in changing the way we see things. Art that makes people create coalitions to persuade their neighbors, elected leaders and government to address the real humanitarian needs of society. Artwork that can inspire leaders and a citizenry to recognize and seize the
challenge to complete all of the hard work that still remains undone.

The discussion of universally resonant historical and contemporary examples inciting change are beyond the purview of this review, yet a sampling may be investigated within Exit Art’s exhibition entitled, *Signs of Change: Social Movement Cultures 1960s to Now* from late 2008. Additionally, reviewing the art, lessons, and actions brought about by activist artists of the recent past that are as Lippard (1999) reminds us, awkwardly and almost entirely left out of the history of art, is extremely important to future artistic practice and societal growth as it pertains to change. It is precisely these types of continued issue and social context-based works and practices that are needed to alter the course of our societal evolution.

Even though the artists and artworks do not meet my rigorous expectations for the role of artists (activists) in society and the production of social change related artwork, the four resources reviewed do provide visual and contextual starting points for building further inquiry within socially and culturally concerned art education practice. Although this review negates the unprecedented nature of the outpouring of visual support for Obama as documented in these resources, in favor of calling for more critical work from artists and organizations, nonetheless their exploration generates multiple new questions for our reflection upon society, the political system in the U.S., and tolerance for visual support and dissent related to such matters. Additionally, their review greatly assisted in the development of the questioning strategies and activity ideas below.

**Suggested Questions for Critical Art Education Practice**

As a potentially informative qualitative pre-and post-test for various levels, ask students to write a paragraph about what they know or believe to be true about Obama and his campaign platforms, prior to viewing and exploring these images?

Then after reviewing, consuming, and spending time with the visual examples ask students to complete additional writing about how their original beliefs were challenged, loosened, confirmed, or otherwise changing after viewing the images. Make room for current events and other Obama related visual culture examples to be considered.

*How may images affect support for or against a political candidate, figure or other individual?*

*How has technology formally and informally influenced political campaigning? What analytic strategies do we use to decode these visual languages? What are the messages of specific images? Are these images art, propaganda, or something else?*

*What do you think the role of this type of visual work was in retaining, changing or encouraging votes for Obama? How do you think that the works helped undecided voters? Who actually viewed this work prior to the election? How do you feel about consuming visual propaganda?*

*In what ways do artists’ style and use of media reflect or connect with younger, more progressive and possibly ‘liberal’ or ‘alternative’ citizens?*

*Will artists continue to assist in the visual casting of a progressive vision in support of Obama as campaign promises are broken or adapted? When does a continuing yet unrequited platform of hope,*
change and progress become the status quo?

What may happen in the ‘liberal’ creative community if patience for the fulfillment of Obama’s promises starts to fade or run out, and what will art that expresses these sentiments look like? Will these be considered positive, or blasphemous or anti-American? How will they be received by the mainstream media?

Will dissenting art work or work that does not ‘stay positive’ appear? Will it be discussed, or silenced?

How can we learn about (PR)Obama images be applied to our general understandings of the Obama administration or to other presidential administrations?

How do you see these or other artists working within this movement as serving either as public intellectuals and/or as tools of the state?

How might you individually or collectively create socially responsive art that deals with difficult issues and suggests changes for our society?

References


(PR)Obama is an alision coined by the author to suggest the intensity and fervor of the pro-Obama visual art movement.

Notable works from: *Art for Obama: Designing "Manifest Hope"and the Campaign for Change:
  Hussein, David Choe (pp. 74-75).
  Kenyan-American, Tatyana Fazlalizadeh (p. 37).
  Obama Portrait, Herb Williams (p. 81).
  Tears of Hope, Andrew Bannecker (p. 35).
  The Great Communicator, (That One) Justin Hampton (p. 147).
  The Hopeful Hearts Club, Michael Cuffe (p. 173).

To access Fairey's *Hope*, go to: http://mediacontender.com/images/posts/shepard-fairey_hope.jpg

Justin Hampton maintains that the correct title of this artwork is *That One*, referencing John McCain's derogatory comment toward Obama in the 2008 2nd Presidential debate.

Notable works from: *Design for Obama:*
  Barack Star, Nick DeCarlo (p. 27).
  Obama Superman, Mr. Brainwash (p.48).
  Untitled, Patrick Gallo & Mike Pintar (p.36).
  In Progress, Gordon Sang (cover art & p. 169).

Notable works from: *Hope: A Collection of Obama Posters and Prints:*
  Untitled-collages, Billi Kid (endpapers & p.14).
  American Presidential Wrestling Heavyweight Championships, Kevin Bradley (p. 27).
  Progress, Scott Hansen (p.56).
  Obama Extended, Matt Dye (p. 81).
  Warrior Politics, David Macaluso (p.121).

To see *Blessing* by David Cordero go to: http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-04-02-obama-statue_N.htm

See http://www.ktla.com/news/landing/ktla-obama-posters,0,940643.story

See http://www.ep.tc/obamunism.html

See https://www.chiaobama.com/flare/next

See http://www.boingboing.net/2009/12/02/obama-acid.html

See http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2009/12/02/crimesider/entry5864845.shtml

Go to: http://www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/years/2009/0123091obama1.html

To review the latest in (PR)Obama art movement manifestations visit: http://obamaartreport.com/ OR:
  http://www.artofobama.com/

To review the latest in (PR)Obama art movement manifestations visit: http://obamaartreport.com/ OR:
  http://www.artofobama.com/

*Signs of Change* presented hundreds of posters, photographs, moving images, audio clips, and ephemera that brought to life over forty years of activism, political protest, and campaigns for social justice. (www.exitart.org)

For examples of activist artists who create issue-based please review: Enrique Chagoya, Sue Coe, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Mel Chin, Barbara Kruger, Guerrilla Girls, and myriad activist artists, collectives, and organizations discussed by Lippard (1999).