

# De(Fence)

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## Editorial

The idea of a moving and critical voice is a metaphor for the Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education (CSTAE) and the role that it has played for the members of the National Art Education Association (NAEA). The inception and founding of the Caucus by a small group of art educators sprang from the felt need to bring a critical social theory perspective to art and art education ([cyberhouse.arted.psu.edu/cstae/25<sup>th</sup>-anniversary/CSTAE25history.htm](http://cyberhouse.arted.psu.edu/cstae/25th-anniversary/CSTAE25history.htm)). Over the course of my participation in NAEA for the past eight years, the annual conference meetings of the CSTAE have functioned as a site for contribution, dialogue, criticality, discussion, dissent, debate, deliberation, concurrence, and liberation. I believe the Caucus has been a safe haven for many of us, a resting ground where we feel we can be ourselves, both seen and heard, where our individual and collective voices have a chance to be justly represented. We often introduce *The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* (JSTAE) as the official journal of the CSTAE, which serves as an alternative voice for the field of art education through the promotion of scholarly research that addresses social theory, social issues, action, and transformation as well as creative methods of research and writing. Likewise, for the past three decades, the Caucus itself has served as an alternative voice for art education, promoting social theory, issues, action, and transformation. A heartfelt thank you to all CSTAE founding members and coordinators, journal editors, reviewers, and authors, working before and with us all of these years. Thank you for the traditions you have fostered and the legacy of the CSTAE that we inherit with you.

## De(Fence)

As Caucus members, we traditionally develop an annual call for the *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*. In the evolution of each call, the participants at the annual general business meeting generate ideas that reflect the time, the year, and the coming theme for the National Art Education Conference. Members gather for discourse on topics that emerge in a completely collaborative manner. Ideas are written down as they are raised, prompted by what those before have offered in conversation. In the generally cold and sterile rooms of conference centers and hotels, Caucus members have convened year after year, making the rooms warm with their commitment to social theory and critique, a collaborative spirit, and a priority to represent all voices. The evolution of a theme becomes somewhat of a call and response, a means to sift through multiple viewpoints and perspectives until the collective 'we' decides what most matters in art education at that particular moment in time. The theme for this issue, JSTAE Volume 32 **De(Fence)**, is no different. The year 2011-2012: economic stress; Wisconsin and the impending loss of unions and the negotiation process for teachers. People, especially art teachers, feel the crunch as jobs diminish across the nation. How to respond? And how to respond without augmenting a state of fear?

Ideas for themes that arose during our conversations at NAEA 2011 were varied: Appeasement Doesn't Work; Class; Negotiation; Marginalization; Research in the Service of Commerce; The Elements and Principles of Democratic Life; The Standards of Social Theory; Playing with the Gap Between Theory and Practice; Teacher: Endangered Species; Proof; How Will We Save Art Education?; Bargaining for the Collective; and De(Fence). One person commented that art education students were now being trained to defend themselves as part of their teacher education programs and actually felt compelled to do so. Another noted that student teachers back away from such engagement. Someone said that they felt that teachers were experiencing a full-on assault. Another suggested that we create a call to allow for these kinds of conversations, open-ended and provocative. Someone added that whatever the theme is, we should aim for cross-divisional work to try to serve K-12 teachers, promoting co-authorship and multi-authored pieces. The idea of building coalitions arose. It was proposed that the title of the theme should invite ambiguity and play. After much deliberation, we voted on the theme De (Fence) for Volume 32 of the JSTAE.

It is with this same collaborative spirit that we developed the call for this issue of the journal. Many discussions ensued between Editor and Associate Editor as we pursued agreement. We wanted to ask questions rather than make statements. We agreed that we wished people from all walks of art and education to feel welcome to respond. We also wanted those reading the call to feel free enough to respond unconstrained by our parameters. We included both questions and an accompanying poetic narrative, which we hoped would invite articles that reflected liberating possibilities for writing styles and thinking. Because many of the authors in JSTAE Volume 32 excerpted the call directly in their articles, I include the call here:

De(Fence)  
 Defending  
 Proclaiming  
 Persisting  
 Desisting  
 Entering, Finding entryways

De(Fence)  
 To take away fences, walls, imposed boundaries.  
 To resist fences, borders, barriers, bulwarks.

De(Fence)  
 Of schools, the arts.  
 Convince. Equip by placating.  
 Interject, interact, intersperse.  
 Keeping visible; keeping important.  
 Teach defense, teach offense, teach adaptation, rigidity, safety, teach policy.  
 Collect, bargain, negotiate, persevere, explain, rationalize, give way, give away.  
 Strengthen, collect, maintain, create, de (fence).

Are we separated? Do we separate?  
 Must we defend, certify, specialize?  
 As we create a defense, are we impacting pedagogy?

De(Fence)  
 Pushing tradition.  
 Complicity in little silos. The recourse?  
 Fence, the noun.  
 Fence, the verb.  
 Defense. Being compelled to take a stance.  
 Restriction. Restrictive. De-fence.

De(Fence)  
 Can I resist fences, borders, barriers?  
 Need I defend against the in/visibility of my discipline?  
 How can I resist imposed boundaries that fence in the arts?  
 Or impose a set of expectations, which dilute their singularity?  
 Is de(fencing) the act of collecting, collaborating, strengthening, supporting, envisioning, protecting, liberating?

## Call for Papers JSTAE Volume 32 Journal Theme: De(Fence)

In light of recent and dramatic changes in our local and global economies, policies and job markets, are we as artists/scholars/educators/arts advocates compelled to take a stance in defense of our fields, jobs, and personal politics?

Are we standing alone or do we feel alone in our positions or vulnerabilities?

Are we divided or fenced in/out from the possibility of sharing any collective efforts to realize a collective vision, and if so, what are the divides?

On the other hand, what are the challenges or benefits of creating, studying visual culture, or teaching art in this uncertain time?

Can we create, innovate, reshape spaces, opportunities or works that engage people or bring us/them from the margins to the center?

We hope that this collaboratively developed call for Volume 32 of *The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* will not inhibit potential contributors but will encourage submissions from any possible author, poet, artist, writer, researcher, teacher, whether in higher education, K-12, administration, policy, or general education. We include prompts and prose associations with the hope that contributors will address this call from a broad range of perspectives. For this reason the editors of JSTAE and membership of the CSTAE hope to inspire individual or collaborative responses related to the theme: **De(Fence)**.

The spirit of collaboration that is embodied by the Caucus seems to me to be the essence of what it means to De(Fence), to remove fences, to acknowledge difference, and difference's corresponding ideas. Thereby we create crossings, paths in, and dialogues. But not without thought, attention to justice, equality, rightness. In its truest sense, to defend means to include, rather than exclude; it means to protect, to represent the under-represented; to make visible that which has been kept invisible by a structure that seeks to homogenize and control. And so in the hope of de-fencing and defending with a rigorous collaborative spirit, we -- the editorial team, the reviewers, and authors -- have carried through with this volume.

### **JSTAE Volume 32: De(Fence)**

In pondering the potential for multiple meanings of the JSTAE theme De(Fence), consensus does not seem necessary. The articles in Volume 32 represent a variety of ways to make sense of and understand the theme. Consistent throughout these interpretations is the critical and uplifting authors' voices informing each article in this issue. I have grouped the articles in what Eldridge terms a "collaged reflection" (p. 71), interpreting and loosely connecting their content.

### **Defend and De(Fence)**

**"Are we divided or fenced in/out from the possibility of sharing any collective efforts to realize a collective vision, and if so, what are the divides?"**

**"On the other hand, what are the challenges or benefits of creating, studying visual culture, or teaching art in this uncertain time?"**

In "Defending and De-fencing: Approaches for Understanding the Social Functions of Public Monuments and Memorials," Melanie Buffington and Erin Waldner brilliantly interpret the theme De(Fence) in dual ways, examining both a traditional monument, the Lee Monument, that defends and idealizes the past by perpetuating the metanarrative that dominant culture ideology promotes, and *Shoes on the Danube Bank*, a monument that presents an underrepresented event and so becomes a counter narrative that functions as a "counter monument" (p. 10) that de-fences by questioning those same metanarratives. Interventions to monuments, like graffiti and yarn bombing, create multiple interpretations of historical 'truths': "In contrast to the Lee Monument that functions to control and limit interpretations, we think of de-fence as removing fences, taking away boundaries, and opening up monuments (and history) to multiple interpretations" (p. 8).

In his own way, Jan Jagodzinski both de(fences) and defends. Jagodzinski speaks to two problematics in "The Terror of Creativity: Art Education After Postmodernism," using as his vehicle, *Waiting for Superman*, the documentary film that lambasts public schools, teachers, and unions. The film serves as Jagodzinski's means to underscore the emergence of a 'creativity' he situates within the broader context of neoliberalism and designer capitalism, as well as the second problematic he defines, 'after postmodernism,' a state caught between the rejection of modern universalism and postmodern relativism. Jagodzinski de-fences our myopic vision, or deconstructs these two problematics for us, "terrorism [of creativity] and 'after postmodernism' [which] feed into one another in a continuous loop, what the social activist and journalist Naomi Klein (2008) has identified as one aspect of its repeating cycle: 'the shock doctrine,' where capitalism profits from disasters, both natural and (let's say it) man-made. The other aspect of this endless loop...is creativity as the appropriation of 'life'

itself by the industries of designer capitalism in their thirst for constant innovation to keep globalized capital in motion” (p. 17). In contrast, the author defends another side of art education that escapes the reins of utility by representing the fundamental antagonism between art and design. The ‘force’ of this other side can be affective, disruptive, rhizomatic, alternative – offering us ‘escape attempts’ and a commitment to resistance.

## Defense

**“Are we as artists/scholars, educators, arts advocates compelled to take a stance in defense of our fields, jobs, and personal politics?”**

**“Are we standing alone or do we feel alone in our positions or vulnerabilities?”**

Ed Check courageously reflects upon his life and experiences as a gay artist, professor, and activist in West Texas, living in a part of the United States where gay is “wrong/strange.” Check uses autoethnography as a narrative method to describe and reflect on his experiences that become a testimony as he documents stories often untold. “In Fenced In/Out in West Texas: Notes on Defending My Queer Body,” Check writes, “It is important for me to tell some of my lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) fenced in/out stories. It is precisely these kinds of stories I search for from students, educators, and artists as I record my own and make art and writing about them. My internalized homophobia, fear of job loss, and demonization of my character are three of the many reasons I have chosen to remain silent at times and I assume why others follow a similar course of action” (p. 20). Check’s essay describes the historic complexities of living and practicing as an openly gay art education academic as he reflects upon ways he has experienced being fenced in and out professionally and personally. He also describes how he has defended himself by strategizing to create emotional and intellectual safety. He uses his own art making as a tool to break the silence and publicly honor his LGBTQ community. Through “defending his queer body,” he gives art teachers and students the opportunity to hear his story as he helps to counter cultural homophobia and violence and allows other gay students and teachers to know they do not stand alone: “Stories can assuage and possibly heal some of the brutality that occurs in schools. I offer this as one of many testimonies” (p. 19).

Like Jagodzinski, Nadin Kalin contends that knowledge production in education has been subsumed by market ideals associated with neoliberalism, thereby systematizing academic work into comparable predictable outcomes. She cites Aronowitz (2000) who posits that education is undergoing the institutionalization that redefines practices of teaching. In “(de)Fending Art Education Through the Pedagogical Turn,” Kalin advocates for the defense of education as art, a re-practiced form of critique, insisting that education be experienced as alternative cultural practices. Kalin proposes that the educational or pedagogical turn embraces a shift in artistic and curatorial practices: “As such, pedagogical practices as art practice or artist-driven education projects embrace self-education as they concurrently confront interrelations among education, institution, power, and market capitalism” (p. 43). Dematerialized mediums, lectures, talks, knowledge exchanges, classes, reading groups, educational projects “act as artwork” (p. 43). The author shares these ideas within the context of an art education graduate seminar through “(dis)organizing a course at the juncture of art and pedagogy” and permitting “the generation of alternative ways of knowing as well as the critical interrogation of norms and sites within the university” (p. 45).

Like Kalin, Melissa Crum also relies on critically looking, this time as a method to consider alternative ways of conceptualizing marginalized cultures and ethnicities in “Reasserting Humanity Through the Liberatory Gaze.” Such “liberatory practices work in defense of marginalized people by defending and proclaiming their humanity” (p. 57). Using Barthes’ 1977 theory of the photographic message, Crum uses alternative texts in unique ways to restructure art spaces, making interactions with images political acts. These acts then become “border crossing opportunities” (p. 57) for spectators to centralize those who have traditionally been made to stand on the periphery socially, politically, economically. In this article, the objectification of a Black female subject within a 19<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian photograph is deciphered through examination of the double meanings of photographs and text. Like Buffington and Waldner, Crum explores the notion of public “universal” signs, but in this case, from the perspectives of race and gender. Here, Barthes’ connotation procedures frame and question supposed universal understandings of Afro-Brazilians and other women of African descent. A bold reimagining of representation that asserts humanity unfolds. Crum defends the insertion of educators into the curriculum through their willingness to be self-reflective as they confront their own limited perspectives, so that they can “assist students’ in their border-crossing learning experience...with artists who vicariously take their observers on a journey of inquiry and social discomfort through visual and performative experiences...” (p. 65).

In an insightful piece called “A Collaged Reflection on My Art Teaching: A Visual Autoethnography,” Laurie Eldridge confronts the complexities of teaching art in a public elementary school as she deals with a high-stakes testing environment. “I write in *defense* of teaching that is based on social justice and visual culture theory. I take the theme of this issue, *de(fence)*, literally as a need to defend” (p. 70). Her collaged work of art prompts reflection on curriculum and teaching practice. Eldridge calls her writing a visual autoethnography. Like Check, she hopes that her work inspires other art educators to “find their own voices and provide their own addition to the creation of a rich, thick description of the professional lives of art educators as they increasingly have to *defend* even the basic need for art education in public schools” (p. 70). And like Buffington and Waldner, as well as Crum, Eldridge questions her public school’s dominant Western viewpoint as the unwritten but overt philosophy most often presented as neutral.

## **De(Fence)**

**“Can we create, innovate, reshape spaces, opportunities or works that engage people or bring us/them from the margins to the center?”**

**“Is de(fencing) the act of collecting, collaborating, strengthening, supporting, envisioning, protecting, liberating?”**

Steve Ciampaglia bravely asks that art educators “assist students to de-fence the currently cordoned cultural commons. In order to do this, it is crucial to understand how American copyright laws have evolved and how they affect cultural production” (p. 83). In “De(fencing) the Cultural Commons Through a Deconstructive Media Art Curriculum,” Ciampaglia makes the case for providing students with the ability to “re-open” and deconstruct currently closed media texts by using the PC and other digital devices to reconstruct malleable parts of visual language into new texts. Such new texts, according to the author, have the “potential to transgress the cultural demarcation erected by big media’s successful lobbying of the US Senate for restrictive copyright legislation” (p. 83). Ciampaglia convinces us that PC and digital media technologies are potential tools of cultural, educational, and political

liberation. Art educators “can encourage their students to use these technologies to tear down the DMCA-erected fence that encloses the cultural commons and unlock the media texts entombed within” (p. 92).

In “Graffiti Walls: Migrant Students and the Art of Communicative Languages,” Fernando Rodríguez-Valls, Sandra Kofford, and Elena Morales use an interdisciplinary methodology with migrant high school students as they poignantly explore what they call an “intellectual commute” (p. 99) from text, oral, and written language to visual expressions – sketching, drawing, painting, spraying and tagging – and back to text. It is the authors’ conviction that the visual arts create communicative actions between teachers and students, so in this project the object was to create a common ground between migrant students and the teaching team who together analyzed poetry, short stories, movies, and graphic novels. Later, students created visual expressions reflective of their cultural identities. “Departmentalized education *fences* the voices of migrant students within the areas comprised of Language Arts curricula” (p. 97). Instead, authors suggest that de-fencing communicative action takes place when teachers and students listen and adopt each other’s languages, developing a common language without excluding each other’s perspectives, a process that involves constant dialogue, participatory pedagogy, communicating across difference, and a curriculum that de-fences.

In her analytical piece “‘Silencing’ the Powerful and ‘Giving’ Voice to the Disempowered: Ethical Considerations of a Dialogic Pedagogy,” Adetty Pérez Miles interrogates her own teaching practices by questioning the counter-hegemonic voices her curriculum embodies and its challenges to her students’ world-views. She asks, “Am I using dialogue as a rhetorical device to persuade?” Again, and like Kalin, Rodríguez-Valls, Kofford, & Morales, Pérez Miles explores the content of her curriculum by utilizing critique and dialogue as possibilities for de-fencing the limitations and function of dialogue and dialogism in pedagogy. She observes, “For me, authorizing student perspectives and decentering authority do not mean shying away from asking hard questions, analyzing controversial topics, or challenging social practices complicit with oppressive norms. In fact, doing so is necessary to stimulate learning environments that forge connections and relationships across difference in which multiple worldviews and differing perspectives are understood and valued” (p. 120). Pérez Mile’s headings intrigue: De(Fence): The Interjection of Poetic Language; De(fencing) the Hegemonic Common Sense: Agonistic Re-Workings; and De(fencing): Finding Entryways That (Re)Authorize Student Perspectives.

All of the articles in this section illustrate that when curriculum deconstructs, communicates student voice, and involves interdisciplinary and collaborative practices, it has the transformative power to de-fence, or blaze trails. Last in this section, “De(Fencing) with Youth: Moving from the Margins to the Center,” Ann Tobey and Kate Jellinghaus empathetically examine how the positive power of relationships serves to implement collaborative art projects to put teenagers at the center of the art making process. Tobey and Jellinghaus describe four projects that involve teenage youth, orphans in Bulgaria, quilters for earthquake survivors in Haiti, girls in a locked detention setting, and students in an urban high school. The authors examine the terms “ ‘margins’ and ‘center’ through the lens of interpersonal connectedness [leading] to the universal human experiences of being valued and belonging...These examples reveal that much of the leverage to create opportunities for De(fencing) lies in our relationships with one another, in the reciprocity that happens in the ‘spaces-in-between’ (Wilson-McKay, 2009)” (p. 129). Refreshingly the authors point out that if we wish to play a role in de(fencing) with youth, adults must act on

the belief that “teens have something to offer – that their ideas and voices have a place at the center” (p. 129).

## **Unfence**

### **“Can I resist fences, borders, barriers?”**

#### **“How can I resist imposed boundaries that fence in the arts?”**

In an engaging historical narrative, Clayton Funk traces the social and cultural traditions of American department store retail in the gilded age to new current forms of retail marketing. In his article, “The Gaze Across the Aisle: Architecture, Merchandising, and Social Roles at Marshall Field and Company, 1892 to 1914,” Funk examines Marshall Field and Company as a cultural and retail institution of artistry and popular education. What he terms “the drama of shopping” holds social and cultural implications connected to class, gender, and race. The departmentalization of merchandise according to expense and luxury literally sorted Field’s clientele according to their social status, establishing a metaphorical distance between those who longed for and those who had, contributing to what Funk terms “the gaze across the aisle.” Although Funk points out that today’s store patrons continually negotiate the fences of their identities and tastes within the material culture of merchandising, he also advocates for the removal of invisible fences as he examines the educational approach of department stores and the social consequences and contradictions in them. In this way, Funk resists imposed boundaries and places the department store in an educational context with schooling and museums. He notes, “Indeed, serious and open-minded attention to the fanciful drama of retail marketing would reveal relationships between retail marketing and shoppers’ perceptions that could expand the critical role of art education in research and practice” (p. 156).

Laura Reeder intelligently confronts either/or professional identities in art education in “Hyphenated Artists: A Body of Potential.” She states that multi-faceted personas are “unfenced” to “navigate spaces of artistic, educational, and cultural production without having to pause for identification at borders. In this form, pedagogies for inventive social change emerge. Dialogue among fields of artists and educators links either/or, artist/teacher qualities in holistic and interdisciplinary descriptions” (p. 160). Reeder observes that the hyphenated association has become shorthand for “both/and.” She suggests removing the hyphen from professional identities to erase the boundaries of what is artistic and what is educational by ushering in heterogeneous and supportable cultural identities. She addresses “third spaces” that defy definition and “form bodies of learning and potential” (p. 171).

Last, “Both/And: A Response to De(fence)/Defense” was accepted as a commentary by Jonathan Lee and Laurel Lampela that responds to the concept of division as reflected in the field of art education: “We see these divisions throughout, from the K-12 art teachers in the schools to those in higher education writing in journals, and we wonder how things might be different as we choose to focus our attention not on the fences but on the space both inside and out” (p. 177). Lee and Lampela propose a paradigmatic shift away from the dual mind to a non-dual awareness in art education and they examine how the waltz may be seen as a metaphor for non-dualism. Their definition of non-duality is associated with Eastern religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. “In effect, we propose to honor the fences and what is beyond the fences and to respect both in an acknowledgment



of their inseparable and codependent relationship” (p. 177). The authors note that art can help to transition from dualistic thinking to non-dualistic thinking.

In closing, I want to thank Patty Bode for her leadership as the Coordinator of the CSTAE and her constant support in the reviewing and publishing processes of JSTAE Volume 32: De(Fence). I also want to thank the editorial review board, Bob Sweeny, Senior Editor, for all of his counsel, and Sharif Bey, Associate Editor, for his collaborative spirit, keen insight, and consistent support. I especially want to thank Kelly Gross, the editorial assistant who has worked very hard to see this issue through with me. Special thanks also to the diligent, smart review board whose names are listed on the journal website. And, of course, many thanks to the contributing authors, whose hard work and talent make this an outstanding issue. Finally, thanks to my institution Northern Illinois University for supporting my work as editor of this journal.

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# 1

## Defending and De-fencing: Approaches for Understanding the Social Functions of Public Monuments and Memorials

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### Abstract

This article explores two possible meanings of de(fence) as related to historical monuments and memorials. By interpreting this term as both defense (defending and idealizing the past) and de-fence (taking down fences and opening narratives about the past), we develop ways to understand potential social functions of monuments. Through the specific examples of the Lee Monument in Richmond, Virginia and *Shoes on the Danube Bank* in Budapest, Hungary, we describe how the ideas of defense and de-fence function. Further, this article also touches upon temporary interventions to monuments including graffiti and yarn bombing.

## Defending and De-fencing: Approaches for Understanding the Social Functions of Public Monuments and Memorials

*Melanie: I was surprised and excited to see that someone spray-painted “no hero” on the base of the Lee Monument. Knowing that it was not likely to last long, I raced home to grab my camera so I could record the graffiti intervention (See Figure 1).*



Figure 1. Lee Monument with graffiti.

*On the same day, a local yarn bombing artist installed a piece along the same street that altered a cannon (See Figure 2).*



Figure 2. Yarn bombing of a cannon on Monument Avenue by the artist Knitorious M.E.G.

These interventions on works of art functioned to subvert the monuments' sacrosanct commemoration of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee and the firepower of the Confederacy. By employing contemporary art practices including juxtaposition and recontextualization (Gude, 2004), these artistic interventions provided a contrast to the commemorative artworks' original positions and functions.

## Introduction

In this article, we analyze similarities and differences of how monuments and memorials reflect and shape attitudes toward history and commemoration. We consider ways that monuments and memorials affect people and explore the stated and unstated social purposes of monuments. We are especially interested in instances in which monuments and memorials function socially to maintain or remove barriers.

Through analyzing public artworks loosely described as monuments and memorials, we develop a conceptual framework for potential ways to understand them. We examine the social function of monuments through studying historical monuments in Richmond, Virginia, temporary alterations to these monuments, and a contemporary memorial in Budapest, Hungary.

## Monuments and Memorials

Many times the words *monument* and *memorial* are used interchangeably. But to some these words connote different shades of meaning, with monument connoting celebration and triumph versus memorial connoting solemn remembrance and tragedy (Young, 1993). We use the word *monument*<sup>1</sup> to describe a significant permanent public sculpture created to commemorate and glorify an event, a person, or even a concept. We use the word *memorial* in reference to public art objects that are not so much intended to glorify as to cause us to remember or recall something, often related to the loss of life.<sup>2</sup> In making this distinction, we looked to Arthur Danto's (1985) writing on the topic: "Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests, perpetually present and part of life. The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead. With monuments, we honor ourselves" (p. 152). Though not all scholars agree, Danto says that the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial functions as a memorial through its explicit remembrance of the dead.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, we view Mount Rushmore as a monument, a monumentally scaled tribute to the legacies of four American presidents. A work like Claus Oldenburg's *Clothespin* sculpture in Philadelphia is a large public sculpture, but neither a monument nor memorial because it does not commemorate a significant event or person.

Another scholar, James E. Young (1993), disagrees with Danto's distinction. He notes that "A statue can be a monument to heroism and a memorial to tragic loss, an obelisk can memorialize a nation's birth and monumentalize leaders fallen before their prime" (p. 3). In other words, Young believes that many physical sculptures and objects of remembrance perform both functions as outlined by Danto. Therefore, Young chooses not to separate a memorial from a monument, but rather to think of a monument as a subset of the category of memorials where monument refers to the specific physical object, such as a statue, and memorial is an umbrella category including a site, a day, or an activity among others (Young).

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<sup>1</sup> We have found that the words *monument* and *memorial* are sometimes used interchangeably. For a longer discussion on the terminology, please refer to Young (2006) and Danto (1985).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this article, we focus on public monuments and memorials dedicated to well-known people or events.

<sup>3</sup> As is the case with many art works, we recognize that the social function of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial as well as its meaning may be disputed by various scholars.

Sanctioned monuments built by municipalities or civic groups, unlike other public sculptures, ask the audience to remember something deemed significant from the past, are often meant to be permanent, and are frequently designed to appeal to a wide audience. There can be monuments to commemorate specific events that happened on one day or events that spanned years, such as the Civil War. There are monuments commemorating famous individuals including Joe Louis in Detroit, Michigan or a group, like the nurses of the Vietnam War in Washington, DC. There are also monuments that commemorate abstract concepts, like peace, such as the Children's Peace Memorial in Hiroshima, Japan. Occasionally, an object takes on meaning to become a monument over time, as was the case with the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Though this bell was created in 1751 to honor the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original constitution of Pennsylvania, it did not have iconic status until it became the symbol of the Abolition movement. Previously known as the "State House Bell," it was renamed the "Liberty Bell" by an anti-slavery publication. An image of the bell first appeared in Abolitionist literature in 1837; soon the bell became the symbol of the Abolition movement and eventually a monument to the important concept of liberty for all people (The Liberty Bell, n.d.).

### **Monuments Defend**

Some monuments are built to transmit or defend values. The erectors of permanent monuments usually intend their monument to impress, or even instruct, people of that time as well as people of the future. Monuments ascribe authority to the values they represent. As permanent features of the landscape, monuments also tend to make values they assert seem natural—something one might not think to question (Loewen, 1999). Monuments function to defend the values of the time they were erected against current counter-narratives or changes in thought that might threaten these values in the future.

#### **Defense: The Lee Monument in Richmond, Virginia**

*Erin: Today I made a visit to the Lee Monument. It is a site I have passed both walking and driving innumerable times during my daily travels through the city, but today I was here intentionally to stop and take a fresh look. I circled the monument on foot, nervous to cross the street onto the grassy plot surrounding it. Finally I crossed and slowly walked around the base. I noticed the smooth hard granite, the exquisite craftsmanship, and the material language of power and grandeur. I looked upward at Lee's bronze likeness from below, a vantage point that gives a sense of the statue's heroic scale. Across the street, a man was standing to have his picture taken with the monument in the background. I wanted to sit and take notes, but I felt hesitant to make a spectacle of myself. Would people think I was visiting my hero, paying homage to a revered figure, or scoping the scene and taking measurements to plan an act of guerilla art intervention?*



*Figure 3. The Lee Monument.*

### **Context and History**

Erected in 1890, the Lee Monument stands proudly on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia in the middle of a large park-like traffic circle. It was sculpted by the French artist Marius-Jean-Antonin Mercié and was exhibited briefly in Paris before being shipped to Virginia. The Lee Monument Association formed to sponsor the funding of the monument; their choice of a French sculptor reflects a desire to imbue the Southern position with class and refinement (Driggs, Wilson, & Winthrop, 2001).

The context for this monument today is within the heart of a mostly affluent neighborhood of large Neo-Victorian houses and student apartments called the Fan. Some streets in the Fan, including Monument Avenue, are paved with attractive paving blocks, intended to conjure the historic cobblestone that once surfaced the road. The Lee monument was originally erected on an empty tract of land west of the city of Richmond. The city later expanded to envelop the land on which the monument stands. This development included the grand boulevard design of Monument Avenue as well as historical monuments to other Confederate icons, including J.E.B. Stuart, Jefferson Davis, Stonewall Jackson, and Matthew Maury, and much later, one contemporary monument to the humanitarian and tennis star, Arthur Ashe (Driggs, Wilson, & Winthrop, 2001). Also along this road is the cannon in Figure 2, as well as other historical markers, many related to the Confederate perspective on the Civil War.

The monument to Robert E. Lee was dedicated in 1890, 25 years after the end of the Civil War during an era in the South known as the Lost Cause Era (Leib, 2006). For many Southerners, Robert E. Lee was an icon of Southern gentility (Savage, 1997). Statues of Lee,

like the one in Richmond, were intended to defend Lee's memory as a great Southern hero and reframe the history of slavery and the Civil War to make the South look more favorable. According to a tour guide at the Museum of the Confederacy, supporters of the Lost Cause movement, including former president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, travelled throughout the South, delivering speeches supporting the movement's ideals. Its mythology included the ideal of a Southern Gentleman and nostalgia for the antebellum South (Leib, 2006; Savage, 1997). Additionally, the Lost Cause included the belief that the South lost because soldiers from the North did not behave like gentlemen; that the Civil War was not actually about slavery, but states' rights; and that slaves were relatively content working on plantations where their needs were met (Gallagher, 1995; McPherson, 2007; Nolan, 2000).

### **How is the Lee monument "defense"?**

The Lee monument was intended to promote the specific historical narrative of the Lost Cause and increase the significance of Robert E. Lee. It uses conventions of hieratic scale, such as heroic size and lasting materials (Loewen, 1999) to support a narrative that praises the heroic nature of Lee and his wartime actions. Because the Lee monument resists a variety of interpretations, but continues to be a significant visual presence in Richmond, the monument is controversial. To many citizens, it is an offensive symbol of inequality because it functions as an affirmation of the Southern attempt to secede from the United States and to maintain the institution of slavery. To others, it is considered a treasured object of Southern heritage (Green, 2012). As a piece of political art, it functions similarly to propaganda, instructing viewers to remember history in a certain way. In this way, the statue takes a defensive position—defending the values of the defeated Confederate States, ensuring an ongoing victory of values, even in the face of military defeat.

### **Another Approach to Monuments**

Though the confederate monuments in Richmond stand defensively, some activist artists nevertheless approach the sculptures with an action-oriented mindset through temporary interventions. Although authorities remove most actions within 24 hours, we see these temporary artistic interventions as an important way to demonstrate that the meaning of seemingly static monuments changes over time. While considering reasons that artists choose to intervene with traditional monuments, we conducted an email interview with Knitorious M.E.G. and asked her some questions about how and why she chose to place a yarn bomb on Monument Avenue. She stated:

I usually stay away from statues or monuments and look for more everyday and neglected subjects. But I was in the mood for a very Richmond target and since Lee and the rest of the boys are too high to reach, I knew picking one of the cannons would be doable. I've driven down Monument loads of times over the years I've lived in this town and I know how proud lots of Richmonders are of Monument Ave and also, oppositely, how it is offensive to others. I felt the cannon was an unexpected and a bit of a paradox location to brighten up with yarn. Also, I like the idea of 'bombing' something that, in fact, bombed things. (personal communication, August 6, 2011).

Though temporary, her work was intentionally designed to disrupt the dominant narrative of Monument Avenue. She stated that her goal was the same with this work as with her other yarn bombs: "to surprise people and make them smile" (personal communication,



August 6, 2011). This yarn bomb lasted less than 24 hours, but it certainly changed the narrative of the street and added another point of view to those already well represented there. Her intervention illustrates Young's (2006) observation that people tend to bring their understandings of the world in their own time to their interpretation of the events and story represented by a historical monument. This interaction of messages from different time periods (the present, the time the monument was built, and the time the monument refers to) can affect how people's views perceive the significance of the historical monument to the contemporary community where it stands. Thus, static memorials of the past continue to evolve through new understandings of the present. In the case of Knitorious M.E.G., her artistic intervention added additional layers to various interpretations of the narrative of this cannon and Monument Avenue.



*Figure 4.* Knitorious M.E.G.'s 'signature' on the yarn bomb she installed on the cannon on Monument Avenue.

Though we have not been able to locate the person who sprayed "no hero" on the base of the Lee Monument, this anonymous action, which the city removed within 24 hours, functioned to intervene with the monuments' sacrosanct message. The graffiti on Lee's monument effectively changed the monument's meaning for a day. Additionally it affected the meaning of the monument in the memories of Richmonders who saw or heard about this intervention. At any given time, the monument may look the same as in the past, but viewers may retain traces of layerings of counter-narratives and counter-interpretations in their memories and thoughts. Through an unsanctioned action, the graffiti artist asked viewers to reevaluate who is a hero. Actions such as this may not remove metaphorical fences immediately, but each intervention is an illicit climb over the fence that may gradually call the fence's authority into question.

### De-fence.

In contrast to the Lee Monument that functions to control and limit interpretations, we think of de-fence as removing fences, taking away boundaries, and opening up monuments (and history) to multiple interpretations. For instance, *Shoes on the Danube Bank* (see Figures 5 and 6) in Budapest, Hungary and the Civil Rights memorial in Montgomery, Alabama are two contemporary memorials that work to de-fence. Although the time period a monument or memorial was erected does not inherently correspond to whether it functions to 'defend' or 'de-fence,' we have noticed that those which function to de-fence often utilize the language of contemporary art in their scale, materials, promotion of interaction, and openness to a variety of interpretations.

#### De-fence: *Shoes on the Danube Bank* in Budapest, Hungary

*Melanie: It was quiet along the river and during my visit, only one other person stopped to look at the sculpture. The life size bronze shoes were clearly women's, men's, and children's styles and some were tilted to the side as if the wearers had just slipped out their feet.*



Figure 5. *Shoes on the Danube Bank* sculpture.



Figure 6. Close-up shot of *Shoes on the Danube Bank*.

*The humanity and uniqueness of each individual shoe was a meaningful element that reinforced the loss of life commemorated by this work. The worn surfaces, the laces that were askew, and the varying sizes and styles of the shoes all added elements of humanity to the sculpture. I read these differences as representative of the individual personalities of the people who were killed. I wondered if each pair of shoes stood for an actual person or if the shoes were more generally meant to represent all the people who died along the river.*

### ***Shoes on the Danube Bank***

*Shoes on the Danube Bank* is a public memorial created in remembrance of Jewish residents of Budapest, Hungary who died at the hands of the Arrow Cross, Hungarian fascists during the Holocaust (Nahshon, 2008). It was created by Gyula Pauer, a conceptual artist and set designer, and Can Togay, a film director, actor, and poet. The idea for the memorial originated in response to the opening of The House of Terror in Budapest in 2002, a museum concerning “fascist and communist regimes of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungary.” The exhibits in this museum were criticized by some for their “overemphasis on Hungary’s victimhood and minimization of the role played by Hungarians” (p. 31). Togay believed that a memorial remembering the killing of Jews by Hungarians on the banks of the Danube would educate the public about an aspect of Hungarian history that was being omitted in the popular history presented at the House of Terror Museum (Nahshon, 2008). Essentially, the artists wanted to expand the historical narrative of Hungary’s involvement in WWII presented by the House of Terror Museum with this sculpture that directly addresses the complicity of some Hungarians with the killing of Jews. At a representational level, the artists chose to use shoes because the people who were shot into the river were required to remove their shoes first. Shoes were valuable at the time, and the Arrow Cross militiamen wanted these valuable items. It was considered efficient to shoot people into the river to save the time that it would have taken to dig graves.

### **Historical Context**

Though Hungarian Jews were not treated as equals, they became subject to institutionalized discrimination in the form of unfair laws and regulations starting in 1938. Unlike the situation Jews faced in many other European countries, the lives of Hungarian Jews were somewhat protected from the Nazi regime because Hungary was not invaded by the Nazis until relatively late in WWII (Rozett & Spector, 2000). When the Nazis invaded on March 19, 1944, there were approximately 200,000 Jews living in Budapest, and after the Nazis came their lives changed dramatically. Though the Nazis invaded, Hungary’s leader, Miklos Horthy, worked with the Germans and was able to remain in power. Across Hungary, thousands of Jews were deported to concentration camps, but these deportations were temporarily ended by Horthy on July 7, 1944 due in part to pressure from Western governments (Rozett & Spector, 2000). However, in October of 1944, the Germans overthrew Horthy’s government; gave power to the Arrow Cross party, a group of Hungarian fascists (Karsai, 1998); and life for Hungarian Jews rapidly deteriorated. Approximately 600 Jews from Budapest were lined up, shot, and their bodies fell into the Danube in October of 1944 (Bauer, 1980). On November 1, 1944, forced marches began to send Jews to Germany as military laborers with 25,000 Hungarian Jews leaving on this day with Arrow Cross troops as their ‘escorts.’ Though Germany wanted 50,000 Jews, the Arrow Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi only sent 25,000 because he needed them for digging trenches in Hungary (Karsai, 1998) due to the threat of the Soviets. Later the shooting of Jews increased to include 20,000 shot into the Danube River by Hungarian Arrow Cross militiamen from December 1944 to January 1945 (Rozett & Spector, 2000). Also at this time, Jews in Budapest who had paperwork known as protective passes and passports were directed to live in a series of designated houses. However, these arrangements made it easier for the Arrow Cross to find them and kill them (Karsai, 1998). Though the Germans planned to empty the Budapest ghettos, the Soviets came first and conquered both sides of the Danube by the end of February, 1945. Of the 200,000 Jews in Budapest in March of 1944, only 120,000 survived (Rozett & Spector, 2000).

### ***Shoes on the Danube Bank as an Act of De-fence***

This artwork is monumental in different ways from many commemorative public sculptures. Because it is made of 60 pairs of human-sized shoes, it impacts the viewer in terms of the number of lives lost and the relatable human scale of each individual element. Its monumentality comes less from its physical size and more from its visual power as a work of art. Like Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, where each name signifies a person and the sheer number of listed names is profound, the quantity of shoes has a similar effect. Further, both pieces function as adaptable spaces (Savage, 2006) that allow for many types of human interaction. The shoes symbolize the individuals lost by being shot into the river, the approximately 80,000 Jews of Budapest who were killed during the Nazi occupation and Arrow Cross rule (Rozett & Spector, 2000), and also refer to the Holocaust itself.

*Shoes on the Danube Bank* is a permanent public memorial, but rather than taking precedent from the tradition of hieratic scale in public commemorative art, it takes a cue from contemporary installation. Nahshon (2008) writes that "the aim of the artists was 'to create an object that would raise questions *in* and present questions *to* the observer,' be that a native or tourist who strolls down the popular Danube bank" (p. 31). This relates to Desai's (2010) point that contemporary artists seek to challenge "the idea of 'objective' representations of history" (p. 49); likewise, this piece does not seek to tell one finite linear story.

*Shoes on the Danube Bank* functions to invite dialogue, a hallmark characteristic of postmodern art. By presenting a historical event that is underrepresented in popular history, *Shoes on the Danube Bank* functions as a counter-monument (Young, 1999), a representation different from the collective memory of many Hungarians. *Shoes on the Danube Bank* takes the stance of de-fence to offer an additional perspective on Hungary's history concerning fascism and the Holocaust. It also works to remove a symbolic fence that separates concepts of victimhood from guilt, and the idea of one "true" history from multiple experiences and individual stories. Furthermore, by allowing the viewer to interpret the artwork more freely, the sculpture works against the fence separating the knowledge and understanding of the artist from the knowledge and understanding of the viewer. By suggesting a more open-ended interpretation, and by being placed on a popular walkway along the Danube River, the sculpture also breaks down fences by inviting dialogue among viewers, including local visitors and tourists.

### **Comparing and Contrasting Works that Defend and De-fence**

As we considered the Lee Monument and *Shoes on the Danube Bank*, we were continually struck by how different their functions seem to be, but how similar they are in other ways. Both the sculptures of Lee and *Shoes on the Danube Bank* use lasting materials (bronze and iron, respectively), are representations of the past, and employ a realistic style of art (Barrett, 2008). However, their placement, the stories they tell, and how they tell these stories give them vastly different social functions.

The Lee Monument and *Shoes on the Danube Bank* function differently both artistically and socially. Whereas the Lee Monument exists on a grand scale and depicts an idealized 'truth' designed to convey a single version of history to make the South proud, *Shoes on the Danube Bank* is quite different. Created on a human scale with pieces that look worn and tired, *Shoes on the Danube Bank* presents an introspective depiction of a significant and horrific

event from Hungary's past. The Lee Monument presents a fixed interpretation of one man, whereas *Shoes on the Danube Bank* is open to myriad interpretations and represents many people. Though both recall history, they have dramatically different social functions in this way.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

Monuments and memorials are features of the built environment that inform our understanding of history and place. As teachers, artists, and citizens, it is important to be aware of the messages and subsequent social functions encoded in our built environment. If a monument takes a defensive stance, working to reinforce the values of the sponsors of a monument in the time it was erected, we must ask ourselves if the monument continues to represent values still worth defending. Likewise, monuments and actions that function to de-fence can bring to light issues and responsibilities that deserve careful consideration. Art education can be a pathway toward a more thoughtful understanding of social functions of the built environment. By understanding these functions of defense or de-fence in the built environment, citizens may be empowered to react to these functions with greater intentionality.

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## The Terror of Creativity: Art Education After Postmodernism<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This essay addresses two problematics. The first concerns the question of creativity, which has become a key signifier for art and its education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I try to situate this interest in creativity within the broader context of neoliberalism and capitalist designer capitalism. The second problematic addresses the term 'after postmodernism,' which has left us in a state of relativity by rejecting universality. My interest is to show how these two problematics are at play in the well-known documentary film, *Waiting for Superman*, directed by Davis Guggenheim. An attempt is made to expose the structure of this film for its melodramatic effects, which have become a way to address the uncertainties of pluralism and the need for the state to establish an 'immaterial' workforce for the information society.



## The Terror of Creativity: Art Education after Postmodernism

The title, *The Terror of Creativity: Art Education after Postmodernism*, is addressed around two central *problematics*:<sup>2</sup> the first will demonstrate why the contemporary emphasis on creativity belongs to a larger problematic—the Idea<sup>3</sup> of terrorism as the *innerer Klang* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that is heard/herd around the globe. Terror has become actualized within the very fibers of daily life: from airport travel to a pervasive surveillance that continually charts, registers and eventually markets our electronic bodies. *Innerer Klang*, written in German, refers to a bell tone warning—the silence of a siren that causes the tinnitus of anxiety, an unexplainable ringing in the ears, the very opposite of Kandinsky's '*innerer Klang*' translated as the 'inner sound' of spiritual transcendental harmony. The discordance as the shadow side of the supposed harmony of neoliberalism is slowly creeping over the earth. The 'Occupy Wall Street' phenomenon is one actualized symptom of this *Klang*, now seeded globally around the world in many major cities. Authorities will eventually tear down these campsites, but the impact of the event will remain as part of the cultural history of struggle.<sup>4</sup>

The second problematic—after postmodernism—refers to the myriad of proposals for change that have emerged in the social sciences as the euphoria as well as the melancholy of postmodernism now undergoes a psychic change and reevaluation in a globalized society where questions concerning the geopolitics of trading bloc agreements, stock market instabilities, Middle East crisis, North African unrest, and floating currencies ('virtual money' or xenomoney) have led to a resurgence of a call for more conservative agendas: the rise of nationalist socialist parties in every country in Europe, the general globalized trend of closing national borders to immigrants escaping from the terror perpetuated in their own countries hoping for a better future, and a turn to more fiscal restraint shrinking even further the strained job market both in North America and Europe. The system is developing major crevasses. One need only look at the European Union crisis to grasp the anxiety that permeates the *Zeitgeist*. The iconic figures of the veiled woman and the bearded turbaned man have become the objects of suspicion that define the transferences of difference of both culture and religion. Facing sexual scandals, Republican presidential hopeful Herman Cain continues to maintain that most U.S. Muslims have extremist views (*Global Post*, Nov. 14, 2011), while one out of every five Americans still believes that President Obama is a Muslim. This fear of infection is indicative of an underlying paranoia deep in the psyche of a nation that is slowly losing its capitalist spearhead and global leadership.

### The *Klang* of Terrorism

The terrorism that surrounds the 'disappearance of man,' not as a Foucauldian call for further egalitarianism, but as the very question of ecological human survival—the Nietzschean prophecy of the 'last man' where only comfort and security are sought in response to nihilism—has fallen into what Alain Badiou in the closing pages of his book *The Century* (2007, p. 177) calls 'animal humanism:' a state of affairs where the "age of ecology and environmentalism is disavowed by new forms of neo-Romanticism," the escape velocity to transcendental spiritualism now calling on angels and crystals. If God no longer has 'truck' with us, we should now turn to the gentle coaching of Helen Schucman's *A Course in Miracles* (1975) to achieve peace of mind or read perhaps Esther Hicks' *The Secret* (2007) for financial improvement by 'attracting' money. Should that fail, we can always turn to Oprah Winfrey's spiritual guru Eckhart [Ulrich Leonard] Tolle's in his quest for *A New Earth*

(2005) via a new form of religious relativism. While this may all sound cynical on my part, there are many believers who would tell me otherwise.

The search for psychic health through numerous alternative body practices, from hot yoga to healing hands therapies, not to mention the myriad of physical activities complete with personal trainers and diet experts, is symptomatic of a globalized fatalistic anxiety within the stasis of postmodernity. Such 'escape attempts' try to push back the increasing toxicity of overconsumption of every kind through these forms of transcendentalism, a meditative trance to take the world away by those who can afford to do so. Ignorance, fanaticism, and anxiety vibrate to the *Klang* of this terrorized global order, which underlies such symptomology.

The other side of this, of course, is the barrage of 'reality shows' touted as therapy, meant to cure all the ills of overconsumption. The state of Hawaii and numerous tropical islands seem to be the place of choice to go for such escapes, as well as being 'reality' tests (*Survivor Series*), where cruise ships unload the newlyweds, the well fed, and the nearly dead. You can become 'organic' there—as well as shop. Shopping is more and more tied into the ridiculous claims of charity. By consuming, poor countries are being 'helped.' When you buy *Starbucks* you support their 'coffee ethics,' that is, fair trade, improvement of coffee crops, helping coffee farmers in have-not countries and so on. With 'cultural capitalism' you buy your own redemption (Zizek, 2009). Under the hegemony of 'animal humanism' everything now has to have its 'natural balance,' whether it's the market economy, sustainable eco-systems, or a balance "between the fortunately inevitable millionaires and the unfortunately innumerable poor" (Badiou, 2007, p. 177). What is dreaded and must be foreclosed is the monstrous and inhuman, which is neither natural nor amenable to categorization.

Some have called this new condition 'pseudo-modernism' (Alan Kirby, 2006) where the individual appears to have a say in matters, seemingly interacts with screen media, and claims to be a free and flexible self defining his or her own parameters through technological innovations. Everything is slowly becoming 'on demand' and touch operative, as a realm of executive directives. You ask for it, you can get it. Just touch it. Book publishing is drifting towards this 'flexible' model, remaining a virtual manuscript until someone 'demands' it online. It is then 'published' and sent to you, or finds its way in the growing virtual library. The nomadic individual seemingly 'rules'; his or her world—one phones, clicks, presses, surfs, makes choices, downloads, moves, flies—just look at the travelling businessman as ironically profiled in the movie *Up in the Air* (2009) and more brutally in *The Company Men* (2010).

Deleuze and Guattari (1980), quite some time ago, maintained that criticism, contestation, and radical shock, part of the modernist legacy, would become central strategy for deterritorialization by capitalism to produce the new. The FCUK campaigns, for instance, are based on a glance aesthetic of misrecognition. They are perceived to be *confirmative* rather than *conformist* signs of freedom and choice. You can now wear any logo you want—whether it's 'saving the whales' on your chest to support the Pacific Whale Foundation or display the EXX[C]ON logo as a sign of belonging and loyalty to the corporation. The two gestures, in effect, cancel each other out as each is an exercise of a democratic right, a vote one way or the other. Even a punk anti-logo of the late 70s that juxtaposes a Nazi SS logo with a communist sickle (scythe) exercises the same right. You are not necessarily what you wear.

It has become all too obvious that the affective unconscious mind is rapidly being colonized by corporate capitalism to further consumption (Lindstrom, 2011). The consuming public, however, does not believe it. Its right to choose appears unaffected, like the water temperature rising in a fish tank. Affect, as the 'life' of the intrinsic body (or *zoë*), is being harnessed to hold our 'attention' by tapping into the primordial responses of fear and anxiety, and of course libidinal sexual energy. We have reached a new level in neuro-marketing where the fMRI scans will up sales. *En masse* niche marketing is no longer an oxymoron. Transsexuality, once the leading edge of sex/gendered protest, has now been smoothly worked into the design fashion industry. The transsexual man can now pose in the submissive comportment of a girl as postfeminism continues its claims of pluralist democratic gestures. Emancipation, resistance, and alienation, concepts that have been legitimated by critical theory in the name of social justice, have become emptied, impotent in their affects, managed through neoliberalist rhetoric. All these leftist agendas have been hijacked: postfeminism, postcolonialism, green capitalism.

The problematic 'after postmodernism' is caught between the rejection of modern universalism and postmodern relativism as orchestrated by one of the names for modernity itself: capitalism, where the investment of desire is for infinite enrichment by a ceaseless will that channels creative energy into specific outcomes. In this sense, capitalism has become a figure, which is not 'economic' nor 'sociological' but metaphysical. In capitalism, infinity is posed as that which is not yet determined, as that which the will must indefinitely dominate and appropriate. Capitalism territorializes and deterritorializes, breaking all laws, and inventing new laws as it reinvents itself; its criterion of technicity as the rule of performance requires the endless optimization of cost/benefit (input/output ratios), which has been harnessed to the cybernetic and genetic sciences that are themselves invested in the infinite desire for knowledge.

These two problematics—terrorism and 'after postmodernism'—feed into one another in a continuous loop, what the social activist and journalist Naomi Klein (2008) has identified as one aspect of its repeating cycle: "the shock doctrine," where capitalism profits from disasters, both natural and (let's say it) man-made. The other aspect of this endless loop, which I will address more specifically, is creativity as the appropriation of 'life' itself by the industries of designer capitalism in their thirst for constant innovation to keep globalized capital in motion.

### **Waiting for Superman**

To bring all this home to education and then more specifically art education, I would like to start by referring to a documentary film that stirred a lot of controversy and almost made it as an Oscar nomination: *Waiting for Superman*, directed by Davis Guggenheim, also the director of *An Inconvenient Truth*, which received the US Audience Award for Best Documentary during the 2010 Sundance Film Festival. This reference is an oblique move on my part to show just where 'creativity' begins to emerge in this web of relationships of what might be understood as an assemblage of terror|creativity|education|art.



Figure 1. *Waiting for Superman*.

If you haven't seen this film, what follows will be perhaps less fulfilling. It is also meant to make you skeptical of its claims. We might call what happened in the state of Wisconsin today with Governor Scott Walker's 'union busting' initiatives a direct experiment related to what this documentary claims to be the state of education. Its message appears simple. U.S. public schools are sinkholes of failure and in shambles. The country's economic future has been jeopardized, and students are kept from being internationally competitive because of incompetent teachers and their obstructionist unions. The solution is also given: reward those teachers who raise student standardized test scores, fire those who don't, abolish tenure, and close the low-performing schools. Above all, break the unions and open up more charter schools.

The documentary is strangely consistent with Obama's "Race To the Top" (RTTT) grant-initiative program as sold by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in its support for charter schools, as you will see. *Waiting for Superman* confirms once again that the force of media rhetoric is able to mobilize resentment in the name of factual information so that a certain public affect can be mobilized in the name of school reform, to rally the conservative troops and stop the insanity of the failing report card on education. The difficult question that remains for those who still believe in public education is precisely how does one go about dismantling a very powerful representation that claims to be showing you the way things are: The film screams, "Can't you 'see,' stupid? Here's the solution."

There is of course the academic approach that can offer counterfactuals: Green dot charter schools, which are praised in this documentary, are also unionized. This simple 'fact' is not mentioned in the film. In 2009 Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes maintains that there is a 2-1 margin of bad charter to good charter schools. A different set of numbers rolls out than the one in the documentary: Stanford's Center claims that "only 17

percent of charter schools do better on math and reading tests than their demographic peers in regular public schools. Thirty-seven percent do worse, while 46 percent of charter school kids, almost half, perform at approximately the same level as their traditional public school counterparts” (CREDO online).

According to this Stanford report, the ideological commitment to charter schools by the Obama administration, especially by Education Secretary Arne Duncan, requires the closing of 5,000 public schools, firing slacker teachers, and forcing the establishment of more charter schools. While charter schools are not private institutions, they are seen as the route to educational ‘reform.’ Most are run by “for-profit organizations,” less often by universities, educational non-profit organizations, or coalitions of teacher and/or parents.

Charter schools provide competition for the more traditional schools despite these statistical claims. On the average, their educational outcomes are no better, and in many cases worse, than in the regular public schools. The only remaining rationale for charter schools is to break the unions and move closer to privatization of public education. In *Waiting for Superman*, inner-city public schools are given the worst report cards, while many urban public schools, which disproportionately serve minorities and have a disproportionate number of uncertified or incompetent teachers, are underfunded and overcrowded, another missing fact. However, pitting one set of numbers against another doesn’t do much to change the force of the documentary, which is meant to bolster the perception that charter schools are the best solution to cure educational ills.

*Waiting for Superman* is presented in a genre that has become the gold standard in the stasis of the ‘postmodern aftermath’ of relativism—namely, melodrama as the popular cultural narrative par excellence that structures political discourse and national identity in contemporary post-industrialized societies. The melodramatic form shapes the morals in black and white terms to return to a stable world order where one knows just what side of the fence to belong to. It distinguishes the good guys from the bad guys. The villains and the heroes are clearly separated. There are clear designations of victimization, heroism, and villainy. Emotions of passion, sorrow, tension, and tragedy are easily mobilized for purposes of identification and sympathy.

As a documentary that purports to be offering us the truth through empirical claims (primarily through the economy of numbers), *Waiting for Superman’s* utilization of the melodramatic form within its genre is a clever way to gain sympathy for one side over the other through the mobilization of ‘facts.’ Melodrama has become a common ploy throughout many media forms as the indirect way pedagogy operates outside the classroom in this period I am referring to as ‘after postmodernism’. For instance, as Elizabeth Anker’s (2005) remarkable study of the events of 9-11 has shown, within eight hours after the attack, the Fox News network had already packaged the traumatic event as a melodrama and sold it to their conservative viewing audience in their 5:00pm and 6:00pm EST timeslot: America is a victim engaged in a battle against evil. *Waiting for Superman* is no different. It sets high emotions into play. We have the villainous union leaders like American Federation of Teachers Randi Weingarten, who defends incompetent teachers, the slacker teachers shown loafing around through vintage newsreel, and of course the innocent children, Anthony, Francisco, Daisy, and Emily that are featured in the documentary, whose future depends on a lottery draw to enter into a charter school because they are oversubscribed. By law charter schools must accept a certain percentage of those in waiting.

The disappointments or rejoicing in their faces makes the drama between life and death, failure or success up close and personal.

The heroes are forwarded like DC Superintendent Michelle Rhee, whose reforms are blocked by bureaucracy and those damn unions. The stasis of postmodernity—that is ‘after postmodernity’—has enabled the melodrama, as the embedded structure of this particular documentary, to become the perfect genre to polarize emotions, offer simple solutions as a way of continually making the elephant in the room invisible. That elephant is profoundly simple as it is impossible to eradicate in a capitalist competitive meritocracy: persistent poverty and insufficient funding of education in all states. The untold story of corporations making their investments in charter and private schools is the silence that rings tinnitus in the ears of many. How can one point fingers at corporations, the very pulse of capitalist life? It simply becomes finger wagging like Oliver Stone’s *Wall Street II: The Money Never Sleeps*, where Gordon Gekko gets to redeem himself by investing in the fantasy of cold-fusion energy. On the one hand, the Wall Street CEO’s become the fall guys to shake a finger as well—CNN brought you the ten worst offenders of corruption made responsible for the stock market bubble; the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is eventually forgotten as the media leaves the site and the cash is paid out. No one can easily recall the CEO’s name [Bob Dudley] as accountability is settled by dollar sign figures. Like GM, BP will soon make up the short fall in profits given the trouble in Libya. It will all balance out. Watch Charles Ferguson’s *Inside Job* some day. It will bring this home.

On the other hand, the CEO’s somehow remain the good guys. As in the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, there were only a handful of rotten apples that had to be thrown out of the barrel. Everything is back on track toward ‘economic recovery,’ provided that you begin to lean to the center of right so as to not lose your way. Melodrama will continue to help here. The recent 2010 November election results have already sent the message to the White House. Government workers’ unions are under attack as exemplified by New Jersey’s Republican Governor Chris Christie and Wisconsin’s new Republican Governor Scott Walker. On the whole unions across the US are under siege.

The extraordinary disparity between inner-city schools and the affluent suburbs is not mentioned in this film either, nor does the film distinguish troubled schools in impoverished areas from the vast majority of public schools where students are doing well despite the budget cuts. It is poverty and underfunding that contribute more than anything to low academic achievement, as well as crime. *Waiting for Superman* ignores or disputes any correlation between poverty and dropout rates. What becomes sensationalized is the high dropout rates, failing test scores, and poor performances compared to other countries’ rates in math, language, and sciences. In countries such as Korea, where the test scores are high, no one speaks of the high suicide rates of their young people; or Finland, which led in the PISA scores, no one mentions that the poverty gap is relatively small because of the country’s tax (the dreaded socialism that frightens the right wing) or that the teachers are unionized and free to structure their curriculum.

Melodramas generally confirm the long forgotten bourgeois family of contentment and bliss, despite the various sitcoms that identify the changed family relations—like *American Family*. Dropout rates are associated with bad teaching. In the film the parents of Daisy, who want her to get into Charter school, tell Davis Guggenheim that they dropped out of school not because of teaching incompetence, but the need to find work to support their families. The charter card is played once more by the charismatic figure of Geoffrey Canada, who

states that if they just opened up charter schools and got good teachers all would be OK. What is not shown well enough is Geoffrey Canada's insistence on providing an entire educational ecology of social services in the surrounding neighborhood to ensure success by setting up a social safety net. That takes money and time.

Who then are the spokesmen in the film? There is Eric Hanushek of the right-wing Hoover Institution at Stanford University, who claims that the per pupil spending has nothing to do with academic achievement since money on education has doubled since 1971, yet the US reading scores remained flat. What's not said is that in this same period the percentage of the GNP spent on education declined while wages remained flat. There is also Bill Gates, seen here with the director and Geoffrey Canada, who has become a hero. By profiling him and his wife as magnanimous charity contributors, a more popular profile has been smartly created. Gates maintains poor academic performance is ruining the economy, whereas the true culprit is finance capital itself, of which he is part. Before the global recession and costly wars, United States productivity outstripped Canada's. The parity of currency between the two trading partners indicates that Canada's natural resources have become lucrative trading commodities, while the perception by investors appears to be that the U.S. economy is slipping into an impossible debt crisis.

The aim in this film flatly assumes that the goal of education is to prepare kids for jobs. More specifically one of the planks of Obama's "Race to the Top" is [quote] "to adopt standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy." [end of quote]. In his State of the Union Address Obama alluded to a key concern of a "Gathering Storm"—35% of the younger scientists and engineers with doctorates working in the US today are foreign-born and most are on work visas. Many, if not most, are prepared to return to their home countries with their knowledge and capabilities to establish technology-based industries that will compete with US businesses.

In harmony with Obama's position, *Waiting for Superman* equates test scores with learning and teacher quality and proposes that charter schools know how to insure good test results and provide the way for your child's future. Everyone wants in on the lottery to succeed. Capitalist economic demand in an information industry requires more specialized education. The addition of years of schooling goes hand in hand with the demands of the changing fluctuations of capitalism. Elementary school eventually was not enough to train a workforce. Adolescence emerges with industrialization when vocational education is introduced; high schools, which were the elite institutions of the nineteenth century, came into prominence after WW2 with the emergence of post-industrialization, and now it is charter schools, which are heralded as what is needed for globalized capitalism. We are now at the point where masters degrees are more like undergrad work, undergrad more like high schools, high schools more like junior high, and so on. On the upper end, post-doctorates have become the new holding pens, offering a way into the blessed life style of scientific research.

The equality of schooling in industrialized countries is not based solely on unions and good teachers; there are many more insidious factors at work. The divide is between prep schools for the rich (like Sidwell Friends that Chelsea Clinton attended, and now Sasha and Malia Obama attend; or like the prep schools attended by John Kerry, John McCain, George Bush; or like Hotchkiss and Lawrenceville Academy, attended by the sons and daughters of the CEO's at Goldman Sachs) and an education for the job market given to the poor.

Between this divide are the so-called middle classes who are left wondering what it is they can do for their children so that they too feel successful; and this is where the corporate and private school begin to play into that gap, encouraging what I am calling the 'terror of creativity.' And this is where art education comes into play.

### **T(error) of Creativity**

So why 'terror of creativity?' What's all this to do with art education? Quite some time ago, in the mid-90s, the social critic, educator and author of *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban Educational Reform*, Jean Anyon (1997) made the point that art education, when it was included in a school's curriculum, was taught differently depending on where it found itself within a range of schools. Art education in elite schools across the United States for children of executives, those earning 250,000 dollars or more in the mid-90s, did no art projects what so ever! They learned to critique art since their parents bought and sold art like a business investment. They were its collectors. Anyon noted that as one moved down the scale to middle class and then working class schools, the rope allowed for the type of expressive projects became shorter and shorter. In working class schools the art projects tended to be prescribed, while moving up the ladder, where parents had management and professional jobs, the art projects were more and more exploratory. While class as a differentiating factor has lost its critical edge in sociological circles, covered over by the claims of consumerist spending by all classes through the enslavement to credit, life chances and opportunity for children remain as desirable ends as the very title 'waiting for superman' indicates. In an information society where global capitalism holds the agenda for competitiveness, creativity has become the key selling point for the flexible subject. The desire of middle-class parents has steadily increased to have their children become involved in what the conservative economist Richard Florida (2002) calls the 'creative industries,' which fuel the entertainment and consumerist markets. In a general sense then, public education as envisioned on a meritocratic basis with its grading structure to let in so many students into higher education is not providing what the middle to upper class professional parents want. This is typified in the movie by the parents of a grade eight student Emily Jones who desperately want their daughter to be out of the ZIP code that places her in Woodside High School, a school that has been ranked by *Newsweek* to be in the top 6% of high schools in the US. Rather, they want her to attend Summit Preparatory Charter High School, in Redwood City, California because there is no tracking policy there. In the film, Emily is one of the lucky lotto winners.

Charter schools open up the possibility of the teacher and student as flexible workers. In this new globalized matrix, art education as we once knew it is effectively dead when it comes to this reorientation of arts implosion with technology and science. School boards now hire inspirational speakers such as Sir Kenneth Robinson, who makes the (now) obvious claim that a paradigm shift is necessary to find one's talent within. He is billed as an international advisor on education in the arts to essentially anyone who will hire him: governments, non-profit, and profit organizations. Widely publicized through the TED lecture series and a travelling salesman of humor, he compares his own technological ineptness (Robinson is 60) with his technologically savvy children to make his point that a shift to creativity is essential. Robinson speaks directly to the aspirations and desires of middle to upper class parents who want their children to succeed in a technologically oriented information society. Such presentations as "Do schools kill creativity?" is answered with a resounding "yes" as Robinson outdates public school curriculum by juxtaposing it to essentially a curriculum of innovation already embraced by many charter schools. It should



be no surprise that this is taking place in an environment where the division between work and play has effectively disappeared as long as productivity is maintained. Julian Dibbell (2007) has called this *ludocapitalism*. This is the price that professional people are willing to pay, me included. One has the flexibility to travel and be mobile as long as productivity for the corporation (university) is maintained.

Contemporary corporations and institutions (like the university) begin to conceive of work qualitatively, as a sphere of creative activity, of self-realization, the idea of fulfilling an infinite will whose desire is driven by lack; like capitalism one always wants more. Just go to Cosco sometime to see consumerism in action as lack. The bigger the shopping carts, the more they will be filled. The ‘connectionist man’ or ‘networker’ is delivered from direct surveillance and paralyzing alienation, thereby loosening hierarchies, to become the manager of his or her own self-gratifying activity, as long as that activity translates at some point into valuable economic exchange, the *sine qua non* for remaining within the network. The harnessing of productive creativity enables what Deleuze (1997) and Guattari (1995) called a control society.

In designer capitalism the flows of movement are choreographed so that it seems that movement and freedom are available, which is why design has imploded with technology and science to become the key marketing strategy. Aesthetic environments are manipulated to create the customer. Biopower is achieved by establishing the psychological, sensorial, and communicational horizons of the customer’s experience. One should read Bernd Schmitt’s (1999) *Experiential Marketing* to see how this all works. Biopower at this level is an attempt to orchestrate vital creative energy (that is *zoë*) to channel it for a managerial labor force. The subtitle of Schmitt’s book, “Sense, feel, think, and relate,” covers all the basic human capacities. Within designer capitalism, charter schools have become the bridge to corporate education. Art has to be harnessed to become ‘useful,’ to be recognized as pulling its load—designed engineering. Art education is *terrorized* into moving into this direction. If it doesn’t, it will not survive. It has to retool itself as a ‘useful’ subject as more and more digital-screen technology invades the classrooms. It is simply a question of time.

### Neurological Imagery and Art

To make this innovative curriculum effective, creativity is now theorized within complexity theory and neurosciences to move toward mapping a creative subject of cognition—more specifically a subject of ‘pure performative will’ that is needed to fuel the desire of globalized competitive demand, something that China and countries like East India, Korea, as well as the Northern countries, such as Norway, Sweden, Finland, have already effectively done. fMRI brain scans are becoming a tool for marketing and the emergence of the ‘neuro-image’ in digital inspired movies and popular culture is preparing the ground for the new nanotechnologies, which will be launched in the future.

We see this creative performative subject being pushed and displayed everywhere, especially in the competitive talent shows, such as the globally franchised television series *Idol* (and the myriad of shows like it), that are tied to the global entertainment industries. It has spread into virtually all the post-industrialized nations of the world, confirming the need for a global performative self. And, we see this repeated on YouTube with myriad attempts of kids displaying themselves, performing, trying to get attention and an audience, blogging, doing web pages and so on, clamoring for a spotlight, terrorized by the possibility of failure, worrying about finding their place in the social order. Recently, Lady Gaga

skyrocketed a ten-year old Canadian girl, Maria Aragon from Winnipeg, to fame after listening to her rendition of 'Born This Way' on YouTube. As in *Waiting for Superman*, or *American Idol*—it's a lotto mentality. Someone will win big.

So precisely how does complexity theory work when it comes to creativity, especially in charter schools, which are preparing students to become the needed flexible subjects of globalized capitalism capable of repeating the benefits of a technologized world order? 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 are assured through monitoring and assessment. This is an open system theorized by enactivism, constructivism, and most recently, complexity theory. 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 receive extra training to provide a smoother delivery of material (the cyber-gadgets); or learn 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, anti-bullying programs, courses in anger and time management, and the like.

Parents are held hostage to this model. If they want their children to find their place in this globalized capitalist world, they need to seek out schools that shape such a subject position. Art education is forced to move in this direction also if it is to survive. Little of what I have said is going to change this demand by national and state governments or by parents whose anxiety for their children will not just disappear if the life-chances for their children remain blocked. Charter schools and the privatization of education are the managed direction middle to upper class parents are forced to take. My personal story regarding my son Jeremy is no different. I want him to succeed, to have his future open through commitment to a cause that gives him satisfaction, to have a meaningful life. But, I am already addressing a privileged life, a life where there are financial resources that may well be drained, but nevertheless are available. Such is not the case for the majority of people globally. The terrorism of creativity of designer capitalism leads to a do-or-die mentality where parents, like their children, are held hostage to performativity and flexibility in the stasis of 'after postmodernism.' Basically, art education must follow this managed direction.

There is, however, another side of art and its education that escapes the clutches of utility, what I have identified as a fundamental antagonism that exists between art & design (Jagodzinski, 2010, pp. 41-58). This 'line of flight' 'leads to post-Situationist art and what I refer to as an 'avant-garde without authority' (pp. 109-126). It is my attempt to show how the 'force' of art can still be affective through various strategies that are its 'work.' Four strategies are presented, which I believe escape the clutches of designer capitalism: disruptive forcework, rhizomatic forcework, the forcework of productive reassemblage and the forcework of alternative information. There are many artists and art educators who have not bought into the trend of creativity as usurped by the globalization of designer

capitalism. They offer 'escape attempts.' As Gilles Deleuze (1988) comments in his review of Foucault's oeuvre, "resistance comes first," and it does so only through a creative act proper, which is itself a *rare event*. There are many who remain resistant. I hope I have persuaded you to consider exercising your own form of resistance given the state of terror and the packaging of creativity for consumerist ends to keep ludocapitalism alive.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This is a version of the Manny Barkan Award presentation given in Seattle's NAEA Annual conference in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The term *problematic* is specifically used here rather than 'problem. I am drawing on Deleuze's (1994, 177-181) distinction between problematics and problem in the sense that the former refers to virtual Ideas that are yet to be actualized, while the latter refers to possible solutions that already have an array of resolutions at some time in the future. Problematics points to a future not as yet determined from an array of different virtualities. Problematics therefore deals with potentialities rather than possibilities.

<sup>3</sup> The capitalization of Idea(s) refers to a transcendental virtual realm as Deleuze reworks Kantian transcendental idealism into a transcendental empiricism.

<sup>4</sup> One should watch the satirical action thriller *Gamer* by Neveldine and Taylor, to view a future that is, as the opening credits of the film say, "Some years from this exact moment." The terror that feeds the anxiety of 'Occupy Wall Street' is not difficult to imagine in the near future.

## Fenced In/Out in West Texas: Notes on Defending My Queer Body

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### Abstract

In this article, I utilize autoethnography to describe and reflect upon my experiences as a queer artist, associate professor, and activist living in West Texas (1996-2012). To date, I believe there exist too few testimonies in art education that document how queer educators/artists manage myriad social, political, and everyday issues in their lives and workplaces. Such stories are necessary if I am going to equip present and future art teachers with anti-homophobia classroom strategies. I believe such stories are also necessary to counter cultural homophobia and violence and let queer students and teachers know they do not stand alone. Stories can assuage and possibly heal some of the brutality that occurs in schools. I offer this as one of many testimonies.

## Preface

I am apprehensive about writing an article that is so personal about my professional life. Like autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis (2009), I write to better “understand [my life], become more aware of what [I] think and feel, and live for a more ethical and caring existence” (p. 17). I write to preserve my sanity. This writing is partial and incomplete, a mixture of memories growing up white, queer, and working class. This essay is also fractured, memories pieced together, messy at times.

I came to Lubbock, TX over fifteen years ago in 1996, full of courage, vision, and hope. And, I arrived queer.<sup>1</sup> My mom died in late July of '96 and as I helped my five siblings prepare to sell the house I had called home since 1956, I packed my belongings for a new chapter. The death of my last parent, moving to West Texas, leaving everybody I knew for a new home and a new life were at times overwhelming. I left Madison, WI, a city known for its friendliness towards gays and lesbians, for Lubbock, a city marked by homophobia. Upon arriving in Lubbock, I slowly made new friends and allies. However, I felt fenced in, scrutinized, and demonized by many local and state art educators, some who characterized me as a predator.

It is important for me to tell some of my lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) fenced in/out stories. It is precisely these kinds of stories I search for from students, educators, and artists as I record my own and make art and writing about them. My stories reveal parts of my journey toward my own continued self-acceptance. My internalized homophobia, fear of job loss, and demonization of my character are just three of the many reasons why I have chosen to remain silent at times and I assume why others follow a similar course of action. (For example, white-collar professionals in Lubbock are overwhelmingly closeted, including university professors and instructors.) When co-editing *From Our Voices: Art Educators and Artists Speak Out About Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Voices* (2003) with Laurel Lampela, I found it nearly impossible to locate LGBTQ art teachers who were willing to not only talk about their professional lives but write about them for the book.

## Introduction

When I accepted a tenure-track position in art education at Texas Tech University (TTU) in Lubbock, Texas, in 1996, many of my friends literally feared for my physical safety due to West Texas's reputation as a hard-shelled, intolerant area. H. G. Bissinger's (1995) *The Killing Trail* described Texas male high school teens killing gay men on violent weekend sprees from Houston to Lubbock. Having spent seven years in Madison, WI rethinking my teaching, making art about autobiographic gay moments, and experiencing the benefit of participating in multiple LGBTQ community activisms, my decision to move to West Texas was for the job—my only job offer.<sup>2</sup> Initially, I feared for my physical safety because my friends did, but in retrospect I believe I have suffered much more emotionally and intellectually.



The purpose of my essay is three-fold. First, I will describe my historic complexities of living and practicing as an openly gay art education academic. Second, I will reflect upon ways I have felt fenced in/out professionally and personally, and third I describe how I have strategically created my own emotional and intellectual safety. Very few autobiographical testimonies exist in art education that witness the professional and personal realities of being LGBTQ in art and education. I believe that art teachers and students can benefit from such testimonies that describe how LGBTQ academics/artists/teachers/activists attempt to work and live and practice.

Much of my past and current art is partially inspired by experiences in my dad's carpenter workshop and in studying queer working class artists and writers such as Rae Atira-Soncea (<http://raeatirasoncea.com/>), bell hooks, Joanna Kadi, Helen Klebesadel, Audrey Lorde, David Wojnarowicz, and Janet Zandy. As I make art, I continue a bond that ties me to my working class roots (Kadi, 1996; Zandy, 2004). Therefore, this essay is autobiographical in nature: imagining; naming; and defending my queer body with my art/teaching/writing. I use auto/biography (Chapadjiev, 2008; Lubrano, 2004; McNaron, 1997) and autoethnography (Ellis, 2009)—my stories—as both theory and method. My memories and art serve as field notes. Through such personal examination/reflection, I answer important questions such as: What is my art for? Why do I teach the way I do? Why does working class or queer matter? What are some personal and professional impacts and/or repercussions of queer activism? It is the answers to these and other questions that form my teaching and art practices.

### **The Harsh Realities of Academe: “Why Is Check the Only One Doing This?”**

When I arrived at TTU, I was told I was a controversial hire.<sup>3</sup> Years later, colleagues regaled me with stories of what was said and how fearful many people were of me and for me. Many peers had never worked with an “openly” gay person. My reputation was immediately degraded within Lubbock art education circles through rumors spread by an Ivy League-educated colleague that I was a predator, although I had successfully taught elementary art for ten years prior to graduate school. An initial result of these rumors was that I was prohibited from supervising elementary art student teachers. (The colleague lying about me had never taught in an art classroom.)



Figure 1. Self-portrait.

To deal with these traumatic realities, I sought out a lesbian psychotherapist, thinking I had somehow brought all the slander upon myself (see Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> My self portrait as a WW II warship revealed my fear and defensiveness. I felt as if I was being blown to bits by lies. Every article I wrote (Akins, Check & Riley, 2004; Check, 1992; 2000; Check & Akins, 2003; 2004; Check & Lampela, 1999; Fehr, Check, Keifer-Boyd, & Akins, 2002; Lampela & Check, 2003), art piece that I made, or outreach I developed/co-developed,<sup>5</sup> about being gay in those early days simultaneously made me cautious about my identity. Rather than reach out to others, I slowly withdrew into myself, foregoing collaborations with allies and friends for about four years. I felt fenced in/out personally and professionally, emotionally and intellectually, as if I were being held captive (Herman, 1992). Captive in the sense that I felt I couldn't leave my job or flee because, as Herman describes, I was in prolonged contact with others who had coercive control over my life. My own internalized and historic homophobia worked overtime.<sup>6</sup> This was and still is the convoluted climate in which I work.<sup>7</sup>

On October 2, 2011, an art education colleague phoned me to let me know that some members in the Texas Art Education Association (TAEA) office were threatening to write a letter to the TTU President because I helped hand out some left over *¿Y QUÉ?: Queer Art Made in Texas* (2007) exhibit catalogs at the 2010 annual TAEA conference in Austin. "Why is Check the only one doing this?" questioned an association representative. Her accusatory stance was directed at my LGBTQ advocacy and my open sexual identity. (I had made the *¿Y QUÉ?* catalog along with about eight other art catalogs from past exhibitions available at a TTU School of Art Masters in Art Education recruiting booth I co-personed at the conference.) My colleague steadfastly challenged the representative's homophobia, but her attempts to elicit tolerance were met with incredulity. "I" "was putting it [i.e. the catalog--subversive materials] in the hands of our youth," declared the representative. (But there

were no youth there. This was a conference for adults and we warned everybody there was mature content in all of the catalogs.) Whether it was handing out the catalog, being active in LGBTQ issues, or just living as an openly gay academic, I was demonized as a social threat.<sup>8</sup>

Ten years earlier, in 2001, a part-time Lubbock art teacher and I volunteered to be the local co-chairs of the TAEA fall conference that was to be held in Lubbock. We tried to create a conference that would house positive wellness opportunities (healthy food alternatives and studio practice), an anti-homophobia panel, and other amenities like photo-copy access, diverse studio access, and healthy food and beverage vendors. A “Sexual Identities and the Art Classroom” panel was cancelled only days before the conference and removed from the conference catalog by request of the TAEA President.<sup>9</sup> The 2011 incident with entrenched homophobic attitudes and re/actions flies in the face of what’s currently happening to LGBTQ youth and adults across the U.S. and Texas: the 2011 repeal of *Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell* in the military; national increases in gay youth suicides and murders; Dan Savage’s *It Gets Better Project*; and the forming of hundreds of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Chapters and Gay-Straight Alliances in middle and high schools. I personally receive occasional email requests from students studying about art education and from art teachers who ask me questions about possible LGBTQ strategies for inclusion in art classrooms.

### **Ways for Me to Heal**

Judith Herman’s (1996) recovery paradigm from traumatic life events involving childhood and domestic abuse survivors, war vets, terrorist victims (and I would add LGBTQ persons) plays out in my mind and my daily-lived experiences. Remembering high school threats and violence, figuring out how to self-identify as gay in the 1980s, living the realities and health dangers during the AIDS epidemic, watching friends die of AIDS, writing a dissertation about gay identities, and now living in a part of the United States where gay is wrong/strange, I use Herman’s recovery strategies as templates for my teaching and making art: 1) establish safety; 2) remember and mourn; and 3) reconnect. I focus heavily on creating safety and use memory as a recovery strategy in my art and teaching. Reconnection is both a process and a goal for me. Reconnection is partly me reconnecting with myself to say my experiences are real. It is me creating community through witnessing to people who can hear me, and me standing up to people who can’t hear me. Reconnection is both process and goal (not simply connecting with people who have gone through similar terror or trauma, but reconnecting with myself, speaking out about my terror/trauma and looking at my survival tools in a conscious way).<sup>10</sup> As far as I can remember, and that would include childhood memories, I have always felt shame/fear for being queer. I learned to fear the violence that happens to queers. Additionally, I learned others feared both queer and straight working class people. Workers are often debased in myriad media and cultural representations (Vanderbosch, 1997). Even though I am an associate professor, I identify as working class.<sup>11</sup> It is through writing, making art, and outreach activism that I experience any sense of playfulness and hope—my chance to heal into something different. But even in these spaces of hope and play, memories still haunt (Wojnarowicz, 1991; Zandy, 2004): my

being shamed and ridiculed in high school for being a “faggot;” my learned self-hate and low esteem that hampered my attempts to come out as gay and as an elementary art teacher in the 1980s; and my self-policing gestures, behaviors, speech, stories and histories.

When I make art, I get lost--for the moment--in my ideas. My art often begins with trauma: isolation; disconnection; fear and loss. My recovery is enabled and sustained by my actual making of art. I use collage/mixed media and recycle images. Most of my friends can sense my uplifted mood when I am making art. With my joy of making come ghosts from the past haunting me to be cautious. I rarely exhibit locally or online. I fear reprisals from local school administrators.

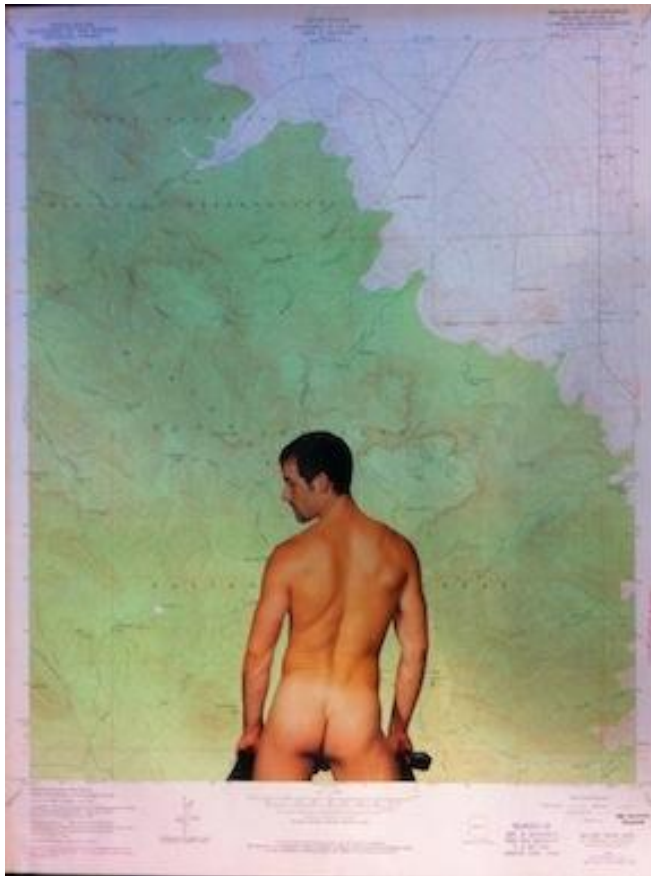


Figure 2. Untitled/boyfriend.

*Untitled* (see Figure 2) was part of my making 100 pieces of art before the end of 2003. I found a stack of county topographical maps being thrown away on campus. I call this my *Boyfriend Series*—I used iconic and ubiquitous pornographic images/objects to create two dozen pieces. I cut and glued these centerfolds/boyfriends/fantasies on the maps.<sup>12</sup> Even in fantasy work, I felt fenced in/cautious as I mapped my sexuality. It was safe only in my studio. I rarely exhibited these pieces.

With creating/establishing safety in my life through making art, eroticism becomes a possibility again. And yet, I do not have a website, mainly because of homophobes who complicate my academic life, inferring I am a predator because of my erotic content. Historically, I have always felt a sense of safety in making and using my hands. Starting

as a newspaper carrier in the third grade and working myself through three degrees, I realize what I do best, and what many working class people take great pride in, is working with my hands. My dad (1915-1992) was a cabinetmaker by trade, and I often built things with wood--mostly cities and cranes, while he stoked the basement furnace of his shop in the fall and winter months. I remember building cities in our working class backyard garden out of scrap pieces of wood and creating battle scenes with model ships (see Figure 1). The basement furnace room was my safe space of my imagined world of Plasticville, USA model railroading. I spent childhood and teen lifetimes in that furnace room imagining all kinds of

lives and possibilities. Whether in ongoing and never-ending house projects or making art, I feel safety and a sense of accomplishment and community especially when I share the fruits of my labor with others. It is these inherited tools and work ethic, coupled with a dose of working class hospitality, that I utilize in teaching.

It has taken me years to understand my positions, privileges, and responsibilities as a white working class male who has achieved a formal education. I owe many allies and friends for their support and compassion. My writing documents my trajectory as artist/teacher/activist. I become another witness in a white queer working class drama. I find myself returning to the past stories and fears to create contemporary means of safety, no matter how temporary. It is very important for me to know people's stories, where they have come from, and why they do what they do (Lippard, 2010). For me, that means drawing upon mostly working class artists and theorists whose backgrounds are similar to mine.<sup>13</sup> As an academic, I find safety in commonalities I share with allies.

My lens for knowing and creating, whether as a teacher, artist or community member is ostensibly white, male, queer, and working class. My ethics and values are steeped in the early lessons I learned and witnessed as a kid and young adult (Kadi, 1996). Those histories and traditions are part of the lives of over two-thirds of Americans who self-identify as workers (Zweig, 2001). I believe in using my hands, emotions, and mind to create and build (Zandy, 2004). I set out to do a job and do it well, whether artistically, teaching, or writing.

Wojnarowicz's (1991) recollection of his childhood curiosity and its implications is similar to some of my professional decisions about what to write and what to exhibit:

I remember reading Archie Comics when I was a kid and being bored because they dealt with a world that had no correlation to my own. I remember having curiosity about sex and wondering why there was no sex in the world of Archie—the world of Riverdale. I remember taking a razor and cutting apart some Archie comics and gluing pieces of their bodies in different places so that Archie and Veronica and Reggie and Betty were fucking each other. A close-up profile of Jughead's nose on page five make a wild-looking penis when glued on Reggie's pants on page seven. After hours of cutting and pasting I had a comic that reflected a whole range of human experience that was usually invisible to me. But at the first sound of the key in the front door I'd throw everything away. I was curious, but I was not stupid. (pp. 156-157)

A good example of this tension are the gay male pornographies that influence my own self-sex education and art making. Pornographies/cultural taboos became source material for several art series. Tom Bouden's *In Bed With David & Jonathan* (2006) and *Queerville* (2007), *Diseased Pariah News* series, David Wojnarowicz's *Seven Miles a Second* (Wojnarowicz & Romberger, 1996), and Wojnarowicz's (1992) *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline* are examples of normalized and progressive gay male influences that help me culturally contextualize and re-imagine sex. White middle class gay ways of imagining and

representing gay sexualities are limited and narrow for me. I struggle to find contemporary representations of working class queer men in media that are life affirming for me. Using humor and pornographic images/objects, I try to create saner realities, only to find myself re-noticing the huge discrepancies in class relationships in the gay male sex industry and its actors/workers--many of whom are working class or working poor gay and straight men. I redeem many of these images of working class gay males in my art, often canonizing some. In the '80s and '90s, these actors were dying of AIDS at an alarming pace. In *A List* (1997/8), I created a poster documenting the deaths of popular gay male sex workers to AIDS, murders, suicide, or drug overdose (see Figure 3). I, and millions of gay and bisexual men, had fantasized about these bodies. This was one way for me to acknowledge and honor the lives of these working class and working poor actors.

<b>Keith Ardent</b>	<b>Bill Harrison</b>	<b>Al Parker</b>
<b>Ben Barker</b>	<b>John Holmes</b>	<b>Paul Pellettieri</b>
<b>Scott Bond</b>	<b>Daniel Holt**</b>	<b>Jaap Penrap</b>
<b>Brad Braverman</b>	<b>Kurt Houston</b>	<b>Brad Peters</b>
<b>Tony Bravo</b>	<b>Jamoo**</b>	<b>Rod Phillips**</b>
<b>Jeremy Brent</b>	<b>Thom Katt</b>	<b>Christopher Rage</b>
<b>Arthur Bressan, Jr</b>	<b>Steve Kennedy</b>	<b>Tyler Regan</b>
<b>Chris Burns</b>	<b>Jon King</b>	<b>Lee Richards</b>
<b>Buster</b>	<b>JW King</b>	<b>Zeff Ryan</b>
<b>Luc Colton</b>	<b>Jesse Koehler</b>	<b>Lee Ryder</b>
<b>Dave Connors</b>	<b>Tim Kramer</b>	<b>Nick Rogers</b>
<b>Jake Corbin</b>	<b>Steve Kreig</b>	<b>Jason Steele</b>
<b>Joel Curry**</b>	<b>Chris Ladd</b>	<b>Marc Stevens</b>
<b>Pierce Daniels</b>	<b>Alan Lambert**</b>	<b>Eric Stone</b>
<b>Mike Davis</b>	<b>Lance</b>	<b>Bob Shane</b>
<b>Johnny Dawes</b>	<b>Jeff Lawrence</b>	<b>Joe Simmons</b>
<b>Melchor Diaz</b>	<b>Richard Locke</b>	<b>Glenn Steers</b>
<b>Ken Diamond</b>	<b>Clint Lockner</b>	<b>Joey Stephano</b>
<b>Glenn Dime</b>	<b>Steve Loignon</b>	<b>Eric Stryker</b>
<b>Ed Dinakos</b>	<b>Lucky Luc</b>	<b>Scott Taylor</b>
<b>Casey Donovan</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>Steve Taylor</b>
<b>Nick Elliot</b>	<b>Andy Mategna**</b>	<b>Chet Thomas</b>
<b>Lon Flexx</b>	<b>Craig Markle</b>	<b>Jim-Ed Thompson</b>
<b>Christian Fox**</b>	<b>Kurt Marshall</b>	<b>Kip Tyler</b>
<b>Steve Fox**</b>	<b>Leo Masters**</b>	<b>Frank Vickers</b>
<b>Roy Garret</b>	<b>Kyle McKenna**</b>	<b>Jon Vincent**</b>
<b>Matt Gunther</b>	<b>Jim Moore</b>	<b>Darryl Weld</b>
<b>Fred Halsted**</b>	<b>Wade Nichols</b>	<b>Brandon Wilde*</b>
<b>Ryder Hansen</b>	<b>Scott O'Hara</b>	<b>Chris Williams</b>
<b>Rydar Hanson</b>		<b>Joey Yale</b>

No asterisk means AIDS-related death; \*sex worker murdered; \*\*death related to drug overdose or suicide

Figure 3. A list.

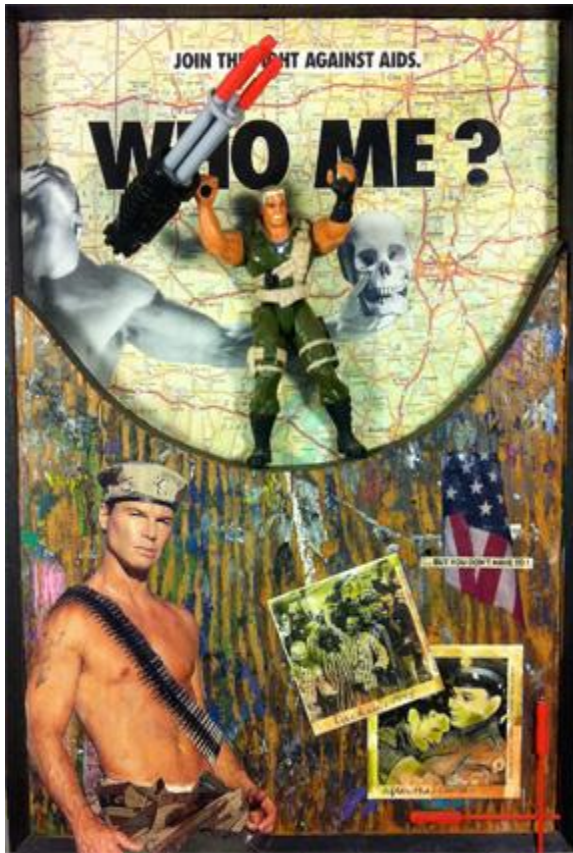


Figure 4. Fight against AIDS.

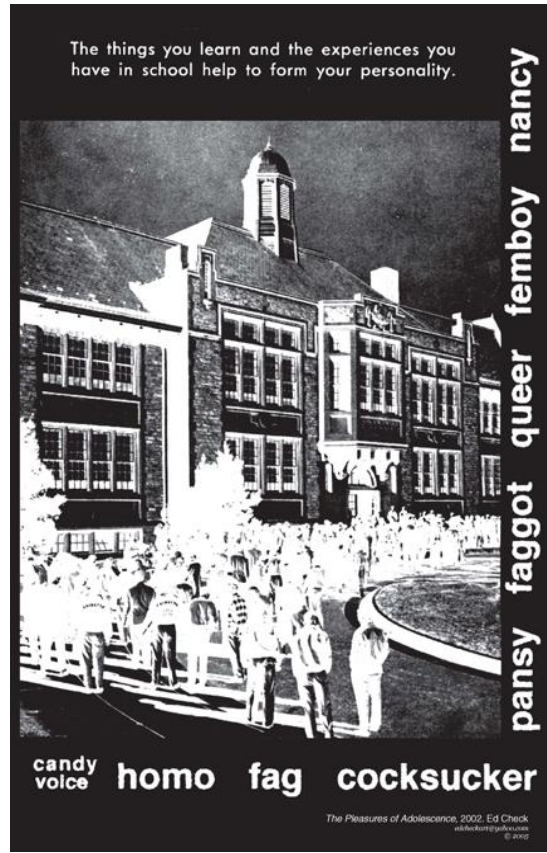


Figure 5. Pleasures of adolescence.

In 1998, I created a piece for a fundraiser for our local South Plains AIDS Resource Center (SPARC) called *Join the Fight Against AIDS: Who Me?* (see Figure 4). I recycled a gay porn pseudo-military image, a West Texas map, and military toys to create a story of the war against AIDS that many West Texans were losing. Persons living with HIV or AIDS in West Texas tend to be closeted about their status and marginalized in their communities.

In 1999, my *Pleasures of Adolescence* poster was selected to be in the *Outwest* Exhibit in Santa Fe, New Mexico (see Figure 5) by curator Harmony Hammond. (Hammond (2000) is an international lesbian artist, curator, writer, and feminist.) It documents how my personality was partially formed by my school experiences. What I learned, at a reception for the participating artists at Harmony's home in Galisteo, NM, was that many of us LGBTQ artists have stories that I believe need to be told in terms of how we came to our art, our individual struggles with material and representation, how our personal and professional fears interfere with artistic production, and other personal and professional compromises made in order to make the art (McNaron, 1997).

In the fall of 2001, I was accepted into an art exhibit called *Making Art Matter: Artists Transforming Society*, in Madison, WI. I exhibited my *Mother of AIDS* (see Figure 6) and my *Pleasures of Adolescence* poster. I used a virgin image to express support for those afflicted with HIV and AIDS. My brothers and sister and other relatives drove three hours to surprise me at the opening. I watched nervously as my brothers looked at and read my poster. We had not had that many talks about the impact of homophobia and violence on my life. Later, we had dinner at an eastside working class Madison eatery and talked a bit about my art. Both of these art pieces represented wounds: my psyche and self-esteem and ways I heal by telling my stories. That weekend, though artistically satisfying, was personally incomplete for me in so many ways. How do I catch-up with siblings about important gay events in my life? How does my silence aid me or work against me? Why can't I better integrate all my lived selves into a better whole? Part of my answer was that I was interested in creating safer spaces for myself and remembering and mourning my past but I was still unclear as to how to reconnect with it.



Figure 6. Mother of AIDS.



## Boy in a Brownie Dress: **Terror and Shame**

1963 Sue Owart, my sister, mom, and me.



**1956** I'm born into large working class Polish Catholic family in Manitowoc, WI. Dad's a carpenter. Mom works raising us six kids. I enjoy hanging around the kitchen helping mom.

**1960** Christmas. Santa gives me a toy mix-master that really works.

**1963** I really want to wear a dress. Mom borrows my neighbor Sue Owart's brownie dress. I run and bike around the neighborhood. A cashier at the Red Owl Grocery Store calls me "Nancy." I think it's a cool name. I find out later it isn't.

**1967** With my younger sister Mary Lou and our friends, all girls, we play dolls and stage pageants. I'm jealous that Mary Lou gets a cheerleading package from our older cousin, a high school Physical Education teacher.

**1970** For Halloween, I wear a flowered house dress and high heels and go trick-or-treating alone. On my way home boys from my seventh grade class push me around. The next day, I get teased at school. Later that year, my older brother John stops two boys from bullying me after school.

1971 Ed Check, 8th Grade Class Photo



**1971** Eighth grade. I'm in hell. I lie awake terrified of tomorrow. The first day of junior high school—someone might call me names at morning assembly. During study hall, a football player calls me "candy voice." In Math class, in front of everyone, a friend says I like to cheerlead. In Citizenship class, in front of everyone, a girl calls me "femboy." I attend first track meeting. I am ashamed I'll stick out and don't go out for track.

**1972** In high school gym class all during the year, two boys yell "faggot" and "homo." I try to avoid them and it doesn't work. I hang around the house and sleep a lot. Mom and dad wonder why I don't go out more.

**1975** I am terrified someone will yell "faggot" at me during high school commencement—don't think anyone does. I am too ashamed to have a senior yearbook portrait taken.

**1976** I start at a local two-year college, living at home. I run for Vice-President of Student Senate and find "Check is a fag" carved in the counter in student lounge. I feel sick to my stomach.

2002 "Memories of Adolescence," 14" x 14" Poster



**1978** I work as a summer playground leader in Milwaukee inner city. A little girl says I "walk like a girl." For months, I practice walking "like a man." I start to avoid family events for fear that someone will bring up the brownie dress story.

**1980-9** I teach elementary art. I struggle with being gay. Students think I'm cool, but I have low self-esteem as a teacher. An emcee at a teacher breakfast tells Rock Hudson jokes. I am attracted to masculine men, though one boyfriend acts effeminate. I find out that he is HIV+. I am scared of getting AIDS and losing him.

**1985** Spring. While driving with my best friend Sue to an elementary student art show, for the first time in my life I tell the story of the brownie dress—my deepest most shameful secret. Recalling making her younger brothers wear dresses and makeup when they were kids, Sue laughs and asks, "Is that it?" I cry.

**1989** I decide to go to graduate school for a PhD. In my classes I study politics, sexualities, genders, and feminisms. I begin to question how I was conditioned to hate everything "feminine, feminist, and female" (Elaine Showalter) about myself. I take seven years to finish.

**1992** I volunteer at The United, a gay and lesbian agency, with Jane Vanderbosch. My dissertation is about two gay artists, David Wojnarowicz and Keith Haring. With Jane's encouragement, I include myself in my dissertation. My dad dies in June.

**1996** Spring. I can't finish my dissertation. I go see Omie Baldwin, a campus therapist who is Native American. She asks why I don't want to graduate? I end up talking about core issues—low self-esteem, shame, terror, and the brownie dress. Omie asks me to re-imagine the pleasure of wearing the dress—how it feels, the joy I feel, what it feels like on my body. And she asks what I would like to say to the people who taunted me. I cry.

**1996** In mid-July, I finish my dissertation, *My self-education as a gay artist*. At the end of July my mom dies. I never thanked her for letting me wear the brownie dress.

**1997** My friend Gail Linsmeier tells me one of my aunts remembered me wearing the brownie dress and said my mom shouldn't have let me because it made me gay. Shame briefly returns.

**2002** I drape house dresses, like my aunts and mom used to wear, over chicken wire attached to huge branches quick-kreeted into the ground—three in front of my house, one to the side, three in the backyard. My two-and-a-half-year-old neighbor tells her mom: "I like Ed's dresses."

**2004** Hollis Sigler's art inspires me to hang dresses in my trees. After forty years of living with the brownie dress, I feel less terror and shame.<sup>2</sup>

2007 "Sun Dress," life-size, Mixed Media



<sup>\*</sup> Special thanks to Rose Lapiz for her editing and June White for her graphics expertise.

<sup>1</sup> Showalter, E. (1977). *A literature of their own: British women novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Herman, J. (1994). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. New York: BasicBooks.

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Figure 7. Boy in a Brownie dress: terror and shame.

Also in 2001, I was awarded a small Texas Tech University College of Arts and Sciences Research Enhancement Fund grant to create some original posters about advocacy and arts outreach to LGBTQ teachers, artists, students, and allies. It took me four years to develop and publish *Boy in a Brownie Dress: Terror and Shame* (2005) poster (see Figure 7). That poster tells an abbreviated and partial chronological story about how I remembered my

own internalized homophobia and misogyny haunting me for years—most importantly, the shame I carried into adulthood about wearing a brownie dress when I was five years old. My story revisits some of my gender and sexuality ghosts. I noted I never got to thank my mom for letting me wear the dress. I continue to hand out the *Boy in a Brownie Dress: Terror and Shame* and *Pleasures of Adolescence* posters at conferences and workshops.

In 2007, I suggested to an artist friend who is lesbian and closeted that she approach Harmony with a proposal to curate an LGBTQ exhibit in Lubbock using queer Texas artists. Harmony accepted and the *¿Y QUÉ? Queer Art Made in Texas* was a result. I was involved in planning and advertising this exhibit. Through email requests to local university programs and departments, I co-raised thousands of dollars to publish the catalog. Other academics involved with the planning were fearful of all kinds of reprisals; from shootings, to bombings, to firings, to local anger; there was no end to the precautions talked about in meetings. Not one negative incident occurred, but there was a palpable psychic fear that descended upon many of the planners.



Figure 8. Waiting series.

For *¿Y QUÉ?*, I used HO-scale railroad model buildings from my youth. In previous collages, I relied on images of gay porn actors to create a sense of homoeroticism. (I could not get friends or acquaintances to model for me.) So, in this piece, I created subjectivity/subjects using HO-scale people miniatures. Creating subjects in the *Waiting Series* (see Figures 8 & 9) was transitional for me. I used toys from my childhood to tell adventure sex stories in an otherwise literally whitewashed Plasticville, USA. The *¿Y QUÉ?* exhibit was quantified as a success. I visited the exhibit daily during its run, as religiously as I went to Polish Catholic Church as a kid. I planted myself in the exhibition space, sat there and just took it all in.



Figure 9. Waiting series. Detail.



In *One New Year's Eve in the Life of One Gay Guy* (2010), which was included in an exhibition called *Doll*, (see Figures 10 & 11), I re-enacted a recent break-up with a lover.<sup>14</sup> Though we stopped being lovers, we remain friends. During the exhibition opening, I watched and listened to people react to the piece. Some laughed. Some were shocked. Others were intrigued that boy dolls danced with boy dolls. A florist, setting up for a reception in the gallery space, recognized the night and commented, "I was there...and that was me."

Figure 10. One new year's eve in the life of one gay guy.

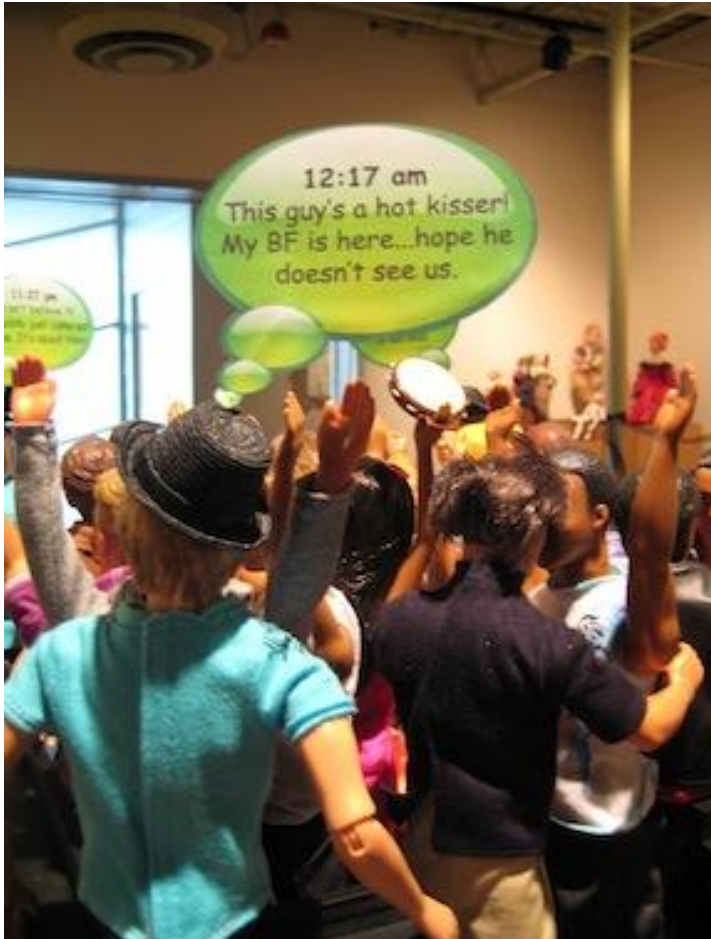


Figure 11. One new year's eve in the life of one gay guy. Detail.

This piece is an example of safety, mourning and reconnection as I recall an evening of traumatic events including a betrayal of my boyfriend. My former boyfriend and I co-created the piece. I applied life knowledge and wisdom and decided to continue a friendship with my former lover. As tough as it was, that was the past and we both had reconciled our differences; a personal recovery and reconnection for me as the events almost felt humorous in retrospect.<sup>15</sup>

### Connections to Teaching Practices

I rely on allies to keep me sane and safe. My friends Rose Lapis and Jane Vanderbosch warned me to never work in isolation. This is difficult for me as like my father, I go within myself rather than rage against people during times of stress. By closing down and withdrawing, I make fewer mistakes but the isolation can be daunting for me. But I do this for my personal safety. It is a temporary and constant strategy to maintain my sanity. I then strategize recovery possibilities of remembering and mourning. When do I reconnect? And/Or do I? I don't. I am not interested in reconnecting. Ally and Lubbock artist Future Akins-Tillett reminds me daily of the connection of my teaching/art/activisms to my stories. I listened as art historian Phoebe Lloyd grieved for her past by telling me stories of her gay brother in New York City who had died of AIDS in the '80s. Her brother died in virtual isolation in a hospital ward in the early days of the AIDS pandemic. For years, I listened to *The Kathy and Judy Show* on WGN AM radio Chicago via the Internet. These two white

straight queer friendly women, one middle class and one working class, integrated queer social and political issues into their everyday radio conversations. Kathy often talked about her “inner lesbian.” They made me laugh and helped me heal. They modeled and reinforced for me one public way of connecting queer experiences to everyday life.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of my own insecurities, I try to co-create safer spaces with and for students. It’s not only imperative that I invite my students’ lives into the classroom and their art (Christensen, 2001), but that I invite my life into it as well. (I’m getting better at this, but historically I rarely share my scholarship or art with students. I usually rely on other writers and artists.) In university classes I teach, undergraduate students are interested in how to introduce LGBTQ issues into curricula. Many understand and also fear the repercussions, losing a job or homophobia. They look for role models and curricular examples as many schools continue to be places of intellectual, emotional, and physical violence for many queer youth. (No citations here—I witness this in schools I visit and in conversations I have with students and teachers.)

Stories are one place for me to begin; discursive spaces for adolescents and adults to talk about and better understand our bodies, feelings, and fears. I encourage such dialogues in classes and with friends about the social realities for gay and straight youth. When I experience homophobic attacks because I appear to be the only person talking about queer topics in Texas, I look to allies and others for vision and reassurance.<sup>17</sup> Rhoades (2011) examined the role of digital media in art classrooms to engage LGBTQ issues. She documents how dominant discriminatory discourses maintain anti-LGBTQ environs in schools. I also experience and witness these in Texas schools.

In the 70s and 80s, I was not aware of the multiple already existing blueprints for me to follow in art and teaching. It was as if little was written about gay or lesbian artists. I knew of no “out” educators or artists. The few courageous role models I knew of in mid-1980s Milwaukee were drag performers. I knew about ridicule and harassment, but I was unaware of the depressing histories and stories of gays and lesbians and LGBTQ academics committing suicide, being brutally beaten, murdered, or forced out of their jobs (McNaron, 1997). I experienced my gay sexuality as a war zone - from my first sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as a closeted elementary art teacher in the 1980s to the contemporary dilemmas facing queer teens and adults today. I found out about David Hockney’s sexuality by accident. A painting professor had me study his style. Naked young men in Hockney’s paintings (Hockney, 1976; Webb, 1988) had me searching for books and information about him.

Herman (1992) points out to me that safety is key in living and learning situations. Sadly, safety is still not available to many LGBTQ people in West Texas. I have listened to many conversations of local professionals: doctors, lawyers, professors, teachers, nurses, and sales clerks—all closeted and afraid. It saddens me being one of a few openly gay persons. Yes, I attract more than my fair share of vitriol and hate that have at times had me doubting my self, my intuition, and my truths. Our Visual Studies students at Texas Tech University

have LGBTQ friends and seem to carry less shame, guilt, or fear than my generation. But even so, they have little idea of what to do in the classroom. And it is here where exciting dialogues and work continue.

In spite of homophobia in the TAEA, I experience moments of change and support. For example, at the 2009 conference in Dallas, I gave a presentation titled *Examining Trauma in Our Lives and Classrooms*, where I talked about my experiences with homophobia in West Texas and shared my posters. I included sexual identity as one of many traumas impacting students and teachers. Teachers attending that workshop testified about their worlds of homophobias and other fears facing them in their classrooms and personal lives. At the 2010 TAEA conference, we handed out remainder *¿Y QUÉ?* catalogs, unaware of a storm of homophobia that was brewing. Concurrently though, a TAEA official was telling teachers who had questions about LGBTQ issues to stop at our booth and request a copy of the *¿Y QUÉ?* catalog.

I notice as a teacher that when I fence myself in and manage my sexuality and my histories, I am not my authentic self and often feel as if I am a failure as an educator. When I am criticized for being biased because I bring sexuality as a cultural and educational topic into the classroom, especially my own, I must constantly remind myself that inviting myself into the classroom is as essential as students inviting their lives into the same classroom. My story becomes one of many. And yet, after teaching at the university level since 1989, as open as I am, I cautiously temper my stories in my courses.

In fall 2010, a gay graduate student requested to do an independent study with me on gay themes in art and education. Sam is an incredible painter, beekeeper, gardener, quilt maker, and house-builder. He has a life partner of 14 years, and though openly gay in our program, is closeted in his school district. He feels that if anything gets out about his sexual orientation to his school district administration, he will be fired. Though intelligent, he is not stupid. He knows his environs and trusts his intuition. When I taught elementary art in the '80s, at one fall teacher breakfast, an emcee cracked multiple jokes about AIDS and Rock Hudson. Like Wojnarowicz, and like my graduate student, I was not stupid. I suffered silently that morning in the midst of LGBTQ ignorance and homophobia. Much needs to change in Texas, in its rural and urban areas.

Years ago, I blended many aspects of my personal gay life in my dissertation (Check, 1996). It was a challenge for me to write myself into my dissertation and to tell some of my stories. When asked at my dissertation defense how this blending of autobiography, pedagogy, and art impacted me, I broke down and wept. I remember leaving the room in tears to compose myself.<sup>18</sup> Those visceral feelings are still with me today. I have learned that to feel is just as important as to think. That continues to be a life-long learning lesson for me.

I have worked hard to educate my West Texas university community about LGBTQ issues in art and teaching. Though some are supportive, it's similar to teacher support in public schools that is unpredictable and varied. In fall of 2011, I showed some of the art in this

essay to an Intro to Theories and Practices in the Visual Arts (Visual Studies) class. I also talked about a research piece I am developing about five local working class artists as *Beautiful People*. When I asked for questions or responses, I was met with silence. At that moment, silence felt like an emotional/educational death. I didn't know if I fenced myself in or was fenced out/left out as a gay person by the students. But the following week, the class was engaged...and talked...commenting they liked this class because this is a space where they felt safe, where they can talk and be heard.

I have been told by current and former students that my being on the front lines and being "out," and their hearing my stories, and my asking them about their stories, though overwhelming at first, gives them the courage to be who they are and talk about things that are really important to them. As teachers, it helps them create and/or provide space for their students to tell their stories through art.

### **End Note**

And now that I have revised and edited this essay, I wonder if what I have written matters? I realize how partial and incomplete my stories are. I feel the need to tell the stories from the trenches that I cannot forget so that readers will know that problems arise. I look for three things in writing and scholarship, especially if I intend to read it: are working people addressed, are queer people mentioned, and does the author disclose her or his background and privileges? I need these to begin to trust the writer's words. That's what I have given to you. I have many self-doubts and rely on my lived experiences and intuition to guide me in my teaching, making art, and community activism. My portfolio of art is my gentle reminder of past and current struggles, and how I need to extend to others the courtesies and assistance that were extended to me. With that, I humbly submit this partial and somewhat messy essay of notes, of memories, of how I defend my queer body in West Texas.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The 2005 documentary *The Education of Shelby Knox* (Lipschutz et al.) beautifully describes the conservative social climate in Lubbock, TX.

<sup>2</sup> During my last years writing my dissertation, I would often remark in professional conference settings that the more I wrote my dissertation, the more jobs I felt I was writing myself out of.

<sup>3</sup> When I interviewed for my position in the spring of 1996, a few people talked about LGBTQ issues or LGBTQ people. One closeted gay studio faculty member took me on a tour of local neighborhoods and flea markets, in response to my request to see a bit of Lubbock up close. As Dick got into his pickup and we were finally alone, his intonation, hand gestures, and stories radically changed. He was effusive, campy, joking, and lighthearted as he shared his stories. He described the professional and personal compromises he had made to exist in Lubbock. When I arrived in Lubbock in August of 1996, he invited me to a reception in my honor to meet his circle of mostly closeted white middle class lesbian and gay professionals. Though they were very nice and successful people, I didn't see myself fitting in as closeted or middle class. Admission to this professional group of kindred spirits meant keeping quiet about one's sexual identity.

<sup>4</sup> My therapist asked me how I saw myself. I said I felt like a WW II heavy class cruiser with my bridge and decks afire. I had a few guns to return salvos, but was turning away from the conflict, moving toward safety and dry dock for repair.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Hans Turley and I established an LGBTQ and Allies faculty and staff social group that met on Fridays at local bars. We were also co-advisors for our university's Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Student Association (GLBSA). I helped co-create Day Without Art/World AIDS Day Observances and installations (1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002), talks about LGBTQ artists at Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG) local chapter meetings, talks about my art to fine arts dorm members, to an LGBTQ Amarillo Outstanding audience, and to local museum audiences, and served as an "out" gay panel member in countless psychology and education undergraduate and graduate courses. I also helped co-found OutwestLubbock.org, an online community center for LGBTQ persons in Lubbock, TX and surrounding communities. Its main purpose is to confront the relentless homophobia in West Texas with LGBTQ-positive local programming and support for LGBTQ persons in the area.

<sup>6</sup> I am referring to historic and present internalized homophobias that surface. When I was young, people made fun of my voice, physical attributes (e.g., stating I had eyelashes like a girl or walked like a girl), and yelled out words in school calling me a faggot. This resonates to the present day when persons on the phone think I am female and say "Ma'am."

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout my years in Lubbock (1996 to the present spring 2012), it has been the kindness of lesbian social networks that has sustained my emotional and intellectual sanity. I had the privilege of meeting and working on a local election issue with author Julia Penelope, who lives in Lubbock. Local lesbians, out and closeted, have opened their lives and homes to me. When I was the sole male at a lesbian party in 2002, the host Joy commented about my presence to a lesbian's surprise about who that man was at the party; Joy remarked, "That's not a man, that's Ed." I learned a lot about lesbian lives and fears and how difficult it was for many of them to be "out" in Lubbock. Most chose the safety of the closet.

<sup>8</sup> The exhibition itself was supported by Cultural Activities Fees administered through the College of Visual & Performing Arts and the Ryla T. and John F. Lott Endowment for Excellence in the Visual Arts. The publication of the ¿Y QUÉ? catalog was supported by The President's Office for Diversity, The College of Visual & Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Doctoral Program in the College of Visual & Performing Arts, the College of Architecture, and the following Texas Tech University programs: Center for Campus Life, Housing & Residence Life, The Women's Studies Program, and the Student Counseling Center. There was additional local community support.

<sup>9</sup> A short list consisted of a wellness session, activist general sessions speakers, one LGBTQ workshop (developed from an email request from an East Texas high school art teacher's experience of the high amounts of homophobia and violence she witnessed at her school), and practical things like where to shop and sightsee locally, experience West Texas hospitality, to access plenty of water and photocopies. The pre-conference TAEA Star magazine had published the workshop "Sexual Identities and the Art Classroom" that featured a four-person panel exploring LGBTQ issues in the classroom. A few weeks prior to the actual conference, we were vilified and condemned by the President of TAEA for our proactive LGBTQ stance and workshop. The LGBTQ workshop was cancelled, and we were warned by the President of TAEA that we were jeopardizing every Texas state art program (Fehr, Check, Keifer-Boyd, & Akins, 2002). The local Lubbock Independent School District administration got involved in preventing any of their art teachers from taking off school days to attend the conference. In spite of the workshop being cancelled, we held it at the Tech campus, driving participants from the conference site to the university in a van.

<sup>10</sup> For many persons dealing with terror and trauma, a total recovery and reintegration or reconnection to community is not possible nor desirable. See Herman (1992), pp. 196-213, for an extended discussion on this topic.

<sup>11</sup> I agree with Joanna Kadi that in spite of my teaching at a university, my ethics, values, practices and histories continue to be working class.

<sup>12</sup> This piece was auctioned off at a September 2011 Outwest Lubbock art fundraiser at a local lesbian-run restaurant.

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<sup>13</sup> Theorists and writers include: Dorothy Allison, Meta Berger, Beth Brant, bell hooks, Jamakaya, Joanna Kadi, Audre Lorde, Julia Penelope, Jane Vanderbosch, David Wojnarowicz, Janet Zandy. Working class artists include: myriad gay porn actors, local drag queens and kings, Rae Atira-Soncea, Ralph Fasanella, Helen Klebesadel, and David Wojnarowicz.

<sup>14</sup> What inspired the piece was a night of firsts for my boyfriend. That night at the bar, a friend “came out” to him and shocked him; he saw a former lover, whose mother had said he had died, dancing on the dance floor, and my lover made out with another man on the dance floor.

<sup>15</sup> I had learned from lesbian and gay friends that a scorched-earth relationship policy wasn’t fruitful. I point-blank asked them how they could be friends with former lovers. They reminded me that they could not be the people they are without the experiences with former lovers.

<sup>16</sup> Their type of progressive cultural talk and questioning eventually got their show cancelled after twenty years. (They once called the hotel room of the runner-up of a Mr. International Leather contest held in Chicago one weekend to talk about the lives of the contestants.) As women in their early 60s when their show was cancelled, reportedly due to lower ratings, they were role models for me on how to perform difficult cultural work.

<sup>17</sup> These allies include the many friends, peers, and students who influence me: the work of Laurel Lampela, James Sanders and Deb Smith-Shank in the NAEA; and the ongoing work of the NAEA LGBTQ Caucus and members; performance artists I’ve seen like Holly Hughes and Tim Miller (we invited Miller to Tech); the work of people in PFLAG (Lubbock local Betty Dotts); GLSEN; Jim Sears’ work in the AERA; local and state drag people; Harmony Hammond; queer educators from Kumashiro to Jennings; state and national HIV and AIDS activists; countless straight allies (historically Blandy, Congdon, Hicks and untold others in NAEA); all too numerous LGBTQ historians and theorists; and also all of the straight and LGBTQ art teacher allies in Texas.

<sup>18</sup> Initially, I thought I had failed. My committee members were wise women who knew how direct connections in real life, writing, and art are deeply felt and emotionally charged.

## (de)Fending Art Education Through the Pedagogical Turn

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### Abstract

This article reviews the current state of higher education in light of the pedagogical turn in contemporary art. It starts with an overview of higher education and its current struggles, followed by an outline of some of the features of the pedagogical turn in art, which is both critical of institutionalism and symptomatic of the current state of higher education. These ideas are discussed within the context of an art education graduate seminar. Finally, the argument is made for possible critical practices that take place inside the institution and that are inspired by priorities inherent in education as art projects aligned with the pedagogical turn.

## (de)Fending Art Education Through the Pedagogical Turn

In this article I lay out how engaging with the issues and practices of the pedagogical turn in art, a significant shift occurring in art practice in recent years, invited and echoed my re-practicing of current curricular, pedagogical, and structural aspects of art education at the postsecondary level. I begin with a survey of art projects using educational forms as a medium along with some examples, pulling particularly from the free university movement. Then I reconsider the educational turn from within the institution as an alternative to projects that have worked alongside higher education. This reconsideration leads to an exploration of possible ways we might rupture naturalizing discourses and practices in art education within academia.

### Pedagogical Turn in Art

“The straitjacket of efficiency and conformity that accompanies authoritarian models of education seems to beg for playful, interrogative, and autonomous opposition. Art is just one way to release this grip” (Bishop, 2007, p. 89).

Knowledge production within higher education has been subsumed by the market ideals of neoliberalism, systematizing academic work into predictable outcomes that are comparable. Higher education has been undergoing an institutionalization (Aronowitz, 2000; Readings, 1996) that redefines our practices of teaching, organization of time and space, definitions and valuation of activity, assessment of learning, and accreditation of teachers. As Larrosa (2010) notes, “[w]hat we have is an attempt to make the logics of the internal performance of the university strictly function in accord with the economic logics of capital and the governmental logics of the state” (p. 693). These changes are in response to the forces, structures, and ideologies of our larger society.

What many are referring to as the *pedagogical turn* in art is symptomatic of these institutional struggles (Krauss, Pethick, & Vishmidt, 2010). In this current rendition, education as art is being re-practiced as a form of critique focused on the institutionalization of education within the knowledge economy. Perhaps it is possible, as artist educator Bert Stabler shares in a recent interview (Ngo, 2010), “[b]y remaining at the margins of culture, fine art has ... managed to open up possibilities that education has not” (p. 213).

The educational or pedagogical turn—a shift in artistic and curatorial practices—embraces a diverse range of projects using education as form and pedagogy as medium that reflects the current move away from media-based to distributive practices (Allen, 2011). This shift in focus takes education out of a supporting role or the position of afterthought as simply an addition to an existing exhibition structure, “towards a situation in which educational structure has been developed as a semi-autonomous project in its own right” (Gillick, 2010, p. 168). Moreover, these projects are not beholden to existing educational and institutional structures, freeing them up to experiment with education as alternative cultural practices. As such, pedagogical practices as art practice or artist-driven education projects embrace self-education as they concurrently confront interrelations among education, institution, power, and market capitalism.

Through dematerialized mediums such as talks, lectures, classes, discussions, knowledge exchanges, reading groups, schools, and so on (Podesva, 2007), educational projects act as

artwork. Further, knowledge production comes about through the project and does not exist *a priori*, so learning within open forums of idea exchanges occurs without a student or master, but through equality in roles. These projects focus on the processual and the open-ended in self-organizational education within a *pedagogical aesthetics* (Rogoff, 2008, n.p.). In surveying art projects using educational forms as medium, Podesva (2007) posits these shared concerns and characteristics:

1. A school structure that operates as a social medium.
2. A dependence on collaborative production.
3. A tendency toward process (versus object) based production.
4. An aleatory or open nature.
5. An ongoing and potentially endless temporality.
6. A free space for learning.
7. A post-hierarchical learning environment where there are no teachers, just co-participants.
8. A preference for exploratory, experimental, and multi-disciplinary approaches to knowledge production.
9. An awareness of the instrumentalization of the academy.
10. A virtual space for the communication and distribution of ideas. (n.p.)

Projects such as the *Copenhagen Free University* (2001-2007), *Playshop* (2004), *Momentary Academy* (2005), *School of Panamerican Unrest* (2006-2007), *The Paraeducation Department* (founded in 2004), *Manifesta 6*, *Documenta 12*, *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y* (2005-2006), *unitednationsplaza* (2006-2007), and the New Museum's *Night School* (2007-2008), among many others, present a variety of models of learning/education/pedagogy, most of which take institutional failures, including the bureaucratization and standardization of the knowledge-economy (such as the Bologna Accord reforms and standardization of European higher education emphasizing comparable outcomes across programs and national borders), as their starting points for a reinvention of the academy, pedagogy, and schooling. For example, Copenhagen Free University (CFU) opened in 2001 by Danish artists Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen in their apartment. Howard Slater, in his 2002 *Communiqué* to the Copenhagen Free University (Berry, Heise, Jackobsen, & Slater, 2002), claimed education involves the reproduction of what are already known and conformist subjectivities, following syllabi that amount to manufacturing blueprints both students and educators labor to complete on time. Knowledge in education systems becomes bureaucratized, an object hardened into certainty, measurable, and alienated from volition, emotion, intuition, or corporeality. In contrast, the free university movement welcomes not-knowing, exposure to error, subverting the commercial value of knowledge, along with curriculum and syllabi-free gatherings. By using the name *university*, CFU positioned themselves "as antagonistic to the 'normalising academy' in enabling different forms of teaching and learning and knowledge production" (Lambert, 2011, p. 32). CFU relocated knowledge production from the institution and back into the everyday life of residential space, dissolving borders of the private and public (Podesva, 2007), making its walls porous because the walls of the normalizing academy are so impervious that you must "leave your desires with your coat in the cloakroom" (Berry, Heise, Jackobsen, & Slater, 2002, n.p.). In 2007, CFU closed and was then, rather ironically, outlawed in 2010 along with all other self-organized and free universities by the Danish Parliament so as not to "disappoint" students (Norman, 2001).

To explore the insights I've gleaned from these art projects as a university professor



“working within the often ‘impervious walls’ of the Un-Free University” (Lambert, 2011, p. 32), I share how (dis)organizing a course at the juncture of art and pedagogy may permit the generation of alternative ways of knowing as well as the critical interrogation of norms and sites within the university.

### **Ghosts in the Machine**

As the free university phenomenon attests, education is currently a site of contestation on exhibit. Not only are artists “staging pedagogy as a visible encounter” (Verwoert, Scott, Elms, & Cahill, 2010, p. 182), but through exhibiting pedagogy, there may be a chance to reset the terms of formal education by leaving the academy’s door open to these pedagogical possibilities within the dust-bunny filled corners of unglamorous art education seminar rooms (Spivak as cited in Sternfeld, 2010).

I agree with Graham (2010) that the pedagogical turn is, more often than not, reliant on limited understandings of education that are elementary and populist with the educator cast as toiling public servant without agency bound by the regulations set by the state.

The implication here is that artists, curators, and arts intellectuals are in a better position to produce—or at least imagine—alternative models (academies, night school, art schools) than those encumbered by the daily practices and instrumentalised demands of education. The other line of thought suggests that the academy (the university, the art school and its expanded network of museum, gallery and corporate networks of “knowledge transfer”) is a space in which to resist the incorporation of art and creativity into the excessively technocratic exercises and forms of standardization that have become customary in higher education. (p. 126)

This view sets up a strong dichotomy between the educator as toiling public servant constrained by the state and the artist or curator as autonomous cultural producer with unique abilities to expose power, unburdened by the controls of neoliberal institutions, which I know is, in large measure, also a fallacy. Perpetuating this separation does not help the struggle, doing relatively little to speak back, change institutional structures, or create sustainable initiatives. These were concerns surfaced by directing the culture of accountability toward the pedagogical turn in asking (and borrowing Rogoff’s [2008] questions) if such a turn “can be seen as capable of resolving the urgencies that underwrote it in the first place?” (n.p.). Further, do these efforts address education “at precisely the points at which it urgently needs to be shaken up and made uncomfortable?” (n.p.). In order to consider these questions, Aguirre (2010) recommends a re-assessment of both educational art and education “focusing simultaneously on their convergences and differences. We cannot look solely to the current range of art-educational projects without analyzing and monitoring the educational system of art as a whole. To do so would be to risk remaining stuck in a self-absorbed conversation without exits” (p. 175).

While it might seem paradoxically both discouraging that we are under critique and at the same time comforting that artists are taking up our cause, Fraser (2005) claims it is no longer viable to take a position inside or outside of the institutions as we are all the institution whether we are taking action against the institution or maintaining the conditions for its continuation. We are the institutions of education and art as art educators in schools and universities. We need to take responsibility for our roles in creating and

perpetuating the conditions of the institutions we are complicit in, benefit from, and take action against through our compromises, self-censorship, critique, and the rewards we are driven by (Fraser, 2005). Ultimately, critique and subversion of educational structures need to occur from both the outside in and the inside out of the institution, for artists and educators alike are in a struggle to (re)activate the institution of education as a site of critique, a place worth protecting and subverting for this very reason.

So, how might we pursue such critical work within schools and universities? One possibility is inspired by Verwoert, Scott, Elms, and Cahill's (2010) contention that, "[t]here needs to be a ghost in the machine, a person who works inside an institution, against its standards, to make the conditions which the institution is supposedly for actually happen" (p. 184). It is likely that this is what art educators are already undertaking, individually or in small groups. While I would like to see forces of educators, curators, and artists across contexts combine more often for greater collective mobilization, I also believe art educators in higher education have a particular ethical obligation or pull. I think we need to consider how we might inspire future art educators and researchers to creatively respond to tightly governed curricula and regulated pedagogies in their current or future art classrooms and research sites.

Educational art projects such as free universities provide us with opportunities to examine the very structures of art education we are wrapped up in. Indeed, through these works we may undergo consciousness-raising and potential transformation of the varied contradictions in practice and contexts we encounter daily in higher education. The consideration of these artistic efforts might inspire us to view our institutional practices as performance texts, projects, installations, and interventions that might performatively undermine authority as institutionally constructed. Again, what moves might we make from the inside out and from the outside in?

### **Hauntings Practices within Ruinant Utopias**

In the context of late capitalism any progressive pedagogy is now questionable as we are attempting to maneuver as an "act of realizing a certain practice is haunted by the impossible" (Sternfeld as cited in Krauss, Pethick, & Vishmidt, 2010, p. 256). This maneuvering as necessarily temporary and ephemeral cannot dismantle or resolve the unmalleable problems of education, but still might provide ways "to bear them and to act on the basis of them" (Krauss, Pethick, & Vishmidt, p. 256). Lambert (2011) claims to be seeking optimism within such pessimistic realms as higher education wherein utopia encompasses dissensus and ruin. I am partial to the phrase *ruinant utopias* (Lambert, p. 30) that are imbued with anxiety and contradiction, committed to endless questioning and critique that require the malaise of the contemporary condition for reconstruction.

Wild (2011) describes schools and art classroom spaces as possible Foucauldian *heterotopias* wherein culture is represented, contested, and reversed through allowing alternatives to be explored that may counter the normalizing effects of the school as *panopticon*. As educators we are under surveillance, just as we observe our students within our classrooms, and such ongoing scrutiny promotes conformity and curtails innovation. In contrast Wild in declaring the classroom to be a heterotopia, asserts, "teachers and students entering will not be disciplined, silenced and put under observation. Instead, worlds of difference will be opened up, resistance will be encouraged and individuals will be given voice" (p. 429). Borrowing from Bey's (1991) *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Wild

(2011) suggests we act as pirates in creating temporary heterotopian-spaces through interventions as a strategy to resist the powers and subvert the rules of the school without objectives or assessments or permission turning our classrooms into installations (see also Horn, 2006; 2008; 2009). These events wherein communities of practice come together and then disperse are “minor forms of resistance to the narrative that the panopticon imposes, though by themselves they may not change how learning takes place” (Wild, 2011, p. 429). In what follows, I will describe a few such minor forms of resistance that I experimented with in a graduate course titled *Trends in Art Education: Contemporary Art and Theory for Art Education* (hereafter, *Trends*).

### **Syllabus-as-Intervention**

While the sharing of a syllabus at the start of a course and the setting of a curriculum is something the free university movement avoids on purpose, it is something most of us have to do in universities. I find the practice of syllabus creation—the naming of my priorities in advance of what might happen in any given course—always problematic and farcical. Yet, at the start of every course, the opportunity to critically analyze the ethical, pedagogical, and social ramifications of a given curriculum’s agenda also presents itself. These are difficult issues that could be shared with students in an effort to publicly breach the natural state of affairs within the audit culture that is higher education. The artifact of the syllabus can rupture the circle of power and powerlessness that is ubiquitous in education. We can mark and make visible how the syllabus announces inequality.

In this I am inspired by Sprague’s (2011) edited volume, *Imaginary Syllabi* and Bailey’s (2010) *Other Syllabus* that challenge pedagogical structures through the syllabus as imaginary, critique, and intervention, unsettling expected notions of education-as-usual within universities. Bailey considers Britzman’s (1991) call for vulnerability, ambiguity, and doubt in the performance of authority in education. Within her graduate seminars in feminist pedagogy, Bailey created two syllabi, one fulfilling the requirements of the university and the second unsettling the first. The second syllabus illustrates the taken-for-granted power and authority behind the structure of the first syllabus embedded within institutional contexts by asking explicitly: “What are the real objectives operating here?” (Bailey, p. 147), and also foregrounds doubt and ambiguity by exposing typically unspoken comments and queries associated with a syllabus and course schedule, in effect disrupting her own expectations, priorities, and authority.

In the graduate course *Trends*, I began with a regular syllabus and then attempted to make the familiar strange by peeling back the official curriculum with a supplemental syllabus titled *Dangerous Syllabus* that aimed to engage students in the study of the agendas shaping their educational experiences or *the hidden curriculum* (Giroux & Purpel, 1983) of the course. This provided a form of intervention or point of entry to interact directly with these hidden structures that perpetuate order and power relations within universities, but are not regularly brought up and engaged with critically as they are not articulated within the official curriculum.

In the *Dangerous Syllabus* I shared how the course was coveted among faculty in the following sentence:

Required course status ensures that the faculty member teaching this class will have a full course and won't be susceptible to having a course dropped at the last minute at the beginning of a semester due to low enrollment.

Under **Readings** I stated:

**READINGS:** You will be reading a lot in this course and it all may mean little to you until years, decades later, or it may never cross into your teaching of art but inform other areas of your life, or not. Additionally, you may sell your textbooks as early as week 13 when required reading stops.

Additionally, I inserted uninspiring statements such as "Did you know? I am supposed to know more than you?"

Under **Objectives**, I shared:

**What This Class Won't Do:**

This class will provide no easy answers

I will not tell you how to know.

It will likely raise more questions than it answers.

Ontological transformation isn't comfortable.

In explaining **Evaluation** I specified:

**STUDENT EVALUATION:** How your performance of learning will be commodified, measured, and compared as if this is all that matters.

Grades will measure your transformation or appearance of surface compliance within the limits of our course only, thereby ignoring and invalidating the learning that occurs outside these assignments or the length of our time together in this course.

Under **Assignments** I described the expectations for course readings:

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

**Weekly Readings and In-Class Engagement:** Engagement is rarely safe within social and institutional hierarchies of the graduate seminar. Instructor and students may disagree, stifle, and restrict the speech of others. Likewise, student expressions of transformation might sometimes be no more than an acquiescent façade. This surface compliance presents as engagement and productivity. It can be a mode of survival for disempowered or disgruntled students and faculty that wish to remain free from persecution and harassment. Silence or self-exclusion is also symptomatic of these issues.

Reading reflexively and practically still involves a self-editing in deciding how much to reveal and to whom as one assumes there is one right way to interpret, throwing this weekly requirement into crisis. Personal feelings are rarely shared until the teaching evaluations at the end of the course when I am assessed for how much knowledge I produce, how well I entertain you, and/or how I demonstrate surface compliance with you.

Finally, I clarified the preferred mode of address in the following:

When you email me I want to be addressed as “Dr.” because you are typically asking something of me and this reminds me of my power. In person, my first name is fine because I enjoy the illusion of cultivating friendships with my students—I like to pretend I am on equal footing with you, except in email. The schizophrenia that ensues is intentional.

The *Dangerous Syllabus* revealed the invisible institutional systems in place that we negotiate in the roles we take on as student and/or professor. We discussed the discomfort, humor, and astonishment at what was revealed as well as a general sense that we all already knew these unspoken rules and thoughts, but never talked about them, let alone with each other—professors and students. Students new to university teaching revealed how they are now on the other side of this as graduate teaching assistants and how easily they took on this whitewashing of reality through the creation of their own official syllabi in line with university rules. It implicated all of us in how we internalize, demonstrate surface compliance with, and attempt to resist these structures. As artist Annette Krauss reflected on her 2008 project with school youth titled *Hidden Curriculum*, “[a]uthority, dependency, pressure to perform, role models, and standardized thinking are taught and learned, without this necessarily being made explicit or noticed” (Krauss, Pethick, & Vishmidt, 2010, p. 253). But as den Heyer (2008) acknowledges, “[s]uch inquiry is, however, dangerous. It requires a shifting of the terms of engagement by both teachers and students and such shifts are personally challenging, professionally frowned upon, and systemically discouraged” (p. 254), especially given the current climate in higher education towards accountability and the façade of corporate rationales for education. *Dangerous teaching* (a play on Lacan’s notion of *dangerous knowledge*) then, according to den Heyer, “is premised on a belief that what is needed to deepen democratic inquiry is not more knowledge, but knowledge dangerous to that already present in curriculum” (p. 258).

“How can you bring a classroom to life as though it were an artwork?” (Félix Guattari as cited in Bishop, 2007, p. 86)

One feature of the course that occurs each week is an *arting event* requiring a student to lead the class through an art activity. In line with the participatory turn in contemporary art, the main stipulation for these interventions is that the students (through walking, dialoguing, role playing, collaborating, intervening, learning, etc.) are the medium for these ephemeral situations. While this is not the first time this sort of intervention has entered the walls of the university or schools (see for other examples Irwin & O’Donoghue, 2012; Krauss, Pethick, & Vishmidt, 2010; Springgay, 2011; Watson, 2012), for most of these students it was the first time they had conceived of art as a participatory or even relational practice that is at odds with more traditional perspectives of art as object and medium as paint or clay, for example. As such, I made the first move and offered up two arting events within the first series of class meetings, thereby setting the scene for the risk-taking that followed throughout the course. The first event was the sharing of the *Dangerous Syllabus*, and the second, a collaborative installation, is described below.

### **Room to Maneuver**

Another aspect of the free university movement that stands in opposition to the normalizing academy is a permeability in relation to the merging of spaces, such as domestic and institutional, private and public, and how this facilitates the generation of alternative ways of knowing. A possible local example of this spatial merging has captivated me for some

time. The Free Museum of Dallas ([www.freemusuemofdallas.com](http://www.freemusuemofdallas.com)) was opened in 2010 within the office of Michael Corris, artist and Chair of the Division of Art at Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. As Corris shares,

The Office of the Chair is the site of administration, a place where permissions are granted or denied. It is a site of dialogue, of negotiation.... However, the Free Museum of Dallas is about denying the warrant that traditionally accrues to the Office of the Chair. It is the seat of administrative authority, but also something else. This something else is not just a supplemental field of practice over which the Office of the Chair holds dominion; rather, it is a counter-practice or counter-sociality that registers a kind of contempt for the entire notion of a seat of administrative authority. So, the Free Museum of Dallas aims to free the Office of the Chair from itself. This is not to say that the business of the Chair is necessarily prevented by the coincidence of the Free Museum of Dallas. But if something of the authority of the Office of the Chair is not changed in some way—that is, if something is not lost and gained at the same time—then the Free Museum of Dallas is nothing but a bit of decorative frippery. (Corris as cited in Ruud, 2010, n.p.)

Corris aims to turn the academy inside out by considering what art might be possible embedded in academia. As such The Free Museum of Dallas acts as a fly in the ointment as its location and existence as *free* oppose the politics and ideologies at play within educational environments that mirror the forces of society at large. This challenging of existing structures inspired me to offer up my office as an installation site for *arting events*, events in which I did not participate *in situ*, until I was invited back into my office by students for dialogue. I thought the space and my absence might expand the students' "room to manoeuvre" (Krauss, Pethick, & Vishmidt, 2010, p. 254) within the institutional setting.

The first *arting event* held in the space was facilitated by me during our third class meeting. After introducing relational aesthetics in the readings for that session, I asked students to spend some time in my office responding to the prompt "What types of relations are possible here?" by tagging the space in some way. After 30 minutes, I was invited in, and we all gathered in the space to debrief as a group. The floor entering my office was covered in bubble wrap so that anyone entering or passing by would be announced by the sound of popping bubbles. My books were all placed backwards, so when I looked at my library, all I saw were pages not the identifying spines of books. Under my nameplate, my academic accomplishments were listed as if to brag. And on it went. One tag on a sticky note left in the center of my desk asks, "Is this what you wanted?" which I carefully keep in place to this day. Like Watson's (2012) upside down classroom (and the interventionist tactics of the Situationist International of the 1950s and '60s before him), these *arting events* acted as creative disruption through transforming spaces of the institution in order to "disrupt the ritual of the everyday" (p. 33). In the case of my office, I (too) was left initially "slack jawed" (Watson, 2012, p. 33) at how it (and I) were disrupted from the "'habitual impulses' with which we understand and occupy educational spaces" (Lambert, 2011, p. 36).

My office briefly functioned as a minor heterotopia in that it allowed deviance and juxtaposed unrelated worlds while suspending routine (Wild, 2011). (Ironically, the second collaborative installation in the office weeks later attempted to create a utopian space out of excess that is still on display, months after the event, surrounding me, visitors, and my actions.) It acted as a site "of antagonism in relation to the dominant ideologies of the neo-

liberal institutions in which they are embedded: an antagonism which generates spaces of potentiality” (Lambert, 2011, p. 42). Situations of creative resistance within higher education may problematize the norms and structures we labor within, thereby opening them up to critical dialogues about the nature of these loaded spaces. They also allow us to amalgamate both an inside-outside positioning with our students in solidarity, if, in the case of my office, only after the fact.

### **Player’s Choice**

In the artists of CFU’s contention to maintain “imaginative expectations of what people are going to experience here” (Berry, Heise, Jackobsen, & Slater, 2002, n.p.), the Free University claims perviousness in its welcoming and validation of participants’ desires and experiences in the creation of knowledge. This

stands in stark contrast to the pre-ordained modes of learning and knowledge inscribed in much of the curricula we frequently (are obliged to) “deliver,” complete with its pre-set learning outcomes and prescribed methods of assessment. In the “normalising academy” (and this also applies to schools, colleges and work-based learning) students are routinely characterized by ignorance and lack: both conditions of deficit which will, it is hoped, be redressed via educational provision. Indeed, this is not just a matter of individual teachers’ presumptions but it is the assumption around which the entire formal educational system is structured. Whilst powerful, this system is not, of course, monolithic. (Lambert, 2011, p. 32)

The assignment *Player’s Choice* is one I typically include in graduate seminars under different titles wherein students choose what aspects of a course’s topics they wish to investigate further based on their needs and experiences and in dialogue with me. While I like to delude myself that this assignment edges towards the (im)possibilities of self-education within the university, with students devising their own objectives and self-assessing their work, I still okay their projects and have the final say on their grades. Nevertheless, I’ve begun to also consider how my curriculum and this assignment present and create the conditions for a multitude of paths and openings toward meaning-making and inquiry not unlike contemporary examples of installation art requiring active spectatorship (Bishop, 2005; Reiss, 2001) as explored by O’Donoghue (2010). For example, within Reece Terris’ installation *Ought Apartment*, objects and spatial arrangements “required viewers to engage in a dynamic process of meaning-making that was contingent upon searching for and making connections between what is represented, what is suggested and what is imagined” (p. 409) that provided myriad openings for interpretation. While O’Donoghue considered how classrooms and classroom photographs as installations might be a productive framework for educational researchers, I have been inspired to consider a curriculum as an installation offering opportunities “to imagine it as a space of relations, as a place of encounter, as a place of exchange and interaction” (p. 411) requiring student participation to function and interrogate our complicity and compliance within objective-based schooling. Like classrooms, curricula are constructed with particular uses, experiences, and paths in mind. When the end points are not established in advance by the teacher-as-expert, the students are an integral part of the directions for the course as they set objectives of learning for themselves in reciprocal relations with classmates and professor. The curriculum becomes open to interpretive possibility and (re)connection beyond the professor’s imagination. Within the curriculum-as-installation, self-directed learning can become a medium (Irwin & O’Donoghue, 2012).

### Changing Impossible Spaces

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (as cited in Sternfeld, 2010) advocates for the “unglamorous pedagogy of the seminar room,” one that although it is

[i]ndirect and maddeningly slow, forever running the risk of demagoguery and coercion mingled with the credulous vanity and class interest of teacher and student, it is still only institutionalized education in the human sciences that is a long-term and collective method for making people want to listen. (p. 8)

In a continual undoing of what we take for granted and think we know, art projects associated with the pedagogical turn in art offer alternatives to rethink and re-practice the public dimensions of art education from within institutions of higher learning. Even as we are swept up in an era of standardization, institutionalization, and instrumentalization, I believe we still need to insist on “education as an alternative practice, instead of a reinforcing practice, as a crucial basis from which to start” (Krauss, Pethick, & Vishmidt, 2010, p. 260). The pedagogical turn in art resonates deeply with this quest. In the preceding, I have called for us to make more visible what is assumed, but not spoken, practiced, but intangible, in an attempt to focus greater criticality on our contexts and ourselves within those contexts by exploring power and position. It is hoped that the sharing of my local practices on the micro level within the “impossible spaces” of the university (Larrosa, 2010, p. 698) might echo with others and be a faint response to Atkinson’s (2008) call for pedagogies that “become commensurate with difference and change and at the same time politically tough and astute enough to see through their inevitable limitations when the time comes” (p. 240).



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## Reasserting Humanity Through the Liberatory Gaze

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### Abstract

The act of critically looking can be a method used to consider alternative ways of conceptualizing marginalized cultures and ethnicities. By engaging in a series of inquiries about the subject of an image, the spectator can form a more comprehensive representation of the subject, thus preparing post-secondary students to discuss and interpret visual culture. From the perspective of an African-American female artist and educator's travels to Brazil, this work proposes that a self-reflective educator's personal narratives and insight can assist in creating an arts-based critically-thinking learning atmosphere. Such an atmosphere encourages students to move beyond the realms of their cultural experiences by utilizing a pedagogy that troubles social power relations and the narratives students may have been taught and socialized to internalize.

## Reasserting Humanity Through the Liberatory Gaze

The spectator's gaze can be used to create alternative stories that humanize marginalized bodies. The purpose of this work is to help educators and students to push their reflective practices and apply those critical thinking skills to interactions with individuals. By creating alternative texts, students and educators restructure arts spaces and make their interactions with images a political act. Such acts are border crossing opportunities for spectators to bring to the center those who stand socially, politically and economically on the periphery. Liberatory practices work in defense of marginalized people by defending and proclaiming their humanity.

Using Barthes' (1977) theory of the photographic message, this work discusses how deciphering the double meaning of photographs and text critiques the objectification of a Black female subject within a 19<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian photograph. Barthes explains his theory in relation to journalism photography where the image is privileged and seen as factual evidence that substantiates information contained in accompanying text. Conversely, Barthes argues that this former image-text relationship has been inverted and the value of the text supersedes the image and can alter how the viewer connotes the photograph. This juxtaposition of image and text and recognizing how one informs the other may be most apparent in museums and galleries. However, in these spaces the image is not supplemental but the main focus. The theory of the photographic message explains the importance of considering the text used to describe the image and where the artwork resides in order to understand how text can transform the meaning and purpose of the image.

I am interested in how Barthes' (1977) connotation procedures can assist viewers in thinking deeply and broadly about the potential intent of the creator/artist and possible unintentional meanings of the artifacts and contemporary artwork. Within many cultures, race and gender can represent ahistorical "universal" signs. Blackness and womanhood (together and separately) have unique narratives. Often those narratives are fixed ideas of Blackness, womanhood, and/or Black womanhood. However, using Barthes' connotation procedures as a framework, we can question the supposed universal understandings of Afro-Brazilians and other women of African descent and use the process for other seemingly natural signs of identity and history. Here, the goal is to use Barthes to reimagine representation that asserts humanity.

### Liberatory Gaze with Artifacts

I will revisit a photograph I experienced entitled *John Arthur Gomes Leal Ferreira Villela with the Wet Nurse Monica* (1860)<sup>1</sup> in the *Museum of Man in the Northeast* (*Museu Do Homem Do Nordeste*) in Recife, Brazil. (From this point forward, I will refer to the photo and the female subject as "Monica"). The *Museum of Man* is a compilation of archives from three formerly separate museums, each with a designated space: The Museum of Anthropology, the Pernambuco Museum of Popular Art (MAP), and the Museum of Sugar. The purpose of the Museum of Sugar collection is to demonstrate the interconnections of the social challenges, agricultural process, and technological innovations related to sugar production in the region. However, these archives appear to attempt to re-present Brazilian chattel slavery under the auspices of sugar production. Paintings of Africans laboriously producing sugar with salvaged industrial tools of the time period and a wall dedicated to chains and metal restraints forced upon African bodies speak of the brutality of the institution without its designated space being overtly named as such. This seemingly covert maneuver is apparent

with the placement of this large imposing photograph of Monica, a Black woman and John Arthur, a young white boy.

To discuss the messages within this piece, the image and text must be analyzed. Barthes (1977) asserts that a press photograph carries a message with two distinct elements: the image and the caption. Among those two elements are two types of messages: denoted or “literal reality” (p. 17) and the connoted message which communicates society’s norms. The image works as a rebus with its own language independent of the image’s production [“structural autonomy” (p. 15)] or how the image is received by the viewer. Describing the basic material and visual elements of the photo is the denotation process which is the first step in the signifying practice. For *Monica*, the denotation is a photograph with an estimated size of thirty-six by twenty-four inches displaying a seated Black female figure in a dress with a small white child standing next to her.

Meaning does not *reside in* this photograph. It is *constructed and produced by* a signifying practice that “makes things mean” through a language system (Hall, 2000, p. 24). The meaning is in its symbolic function because the image stands for (or signifies) a concept outside of itself.<sup>2</sup> We use this signifying practice to generate representations. Representation “is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer to*” things (p. 17). The meaning of a sign is constructed and fixed by a code. Meaning is dependent on varying culturally-based codes and the relationship between a photograph (signifier) and its meaning (signified) is arbitrary. As a result, from culture to culture, meaning can never be truly finite or universal.

Connotation is the second stage of the signifying practice. The connotation procedure describes in order to “change structures, to signify something different to what is shown” (Barthes, 1977, p. 19). For the connotation procedure, we use the first set of signifieds gathered from the denotation process: A full body sepia photograph of a seated older Black woman dressed in elegant European clothing with a young white boy standing to the right of her. The assumed universal meaning of women and children would tell us that Monica and young John Arthur connote maternal love or an intimate union of sorts. The second set of signifieds are linked to the first –the domesticity of Black women during Brazilian slavery in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. When joined, the two sets of signifieds produce a more elaborate message: Enslaved Afro-Brazilian women were well-taken care of, loved by the children they nursed, and were a necessary and accepted part of White Brazilian households.

We also take into account the title of the work because, for Barthes (1977), the image is in communication with the caption. They work together but are separate. The photo is a “continuous message” (p. 17) always offering information without a fixed code. Because of this “analogical plentitude” (p. 18), interpretations can be endless. To satiate the desire to decode, viewers use “a stock of stereotypes” (p. 18). Barthes’ work questions cultural assumptions and values contained in “universal” cultural signifiers and seeks to expose their manipulation and unnaturalness. These assumptions can be understood as myths.

Denotation is pure objectivity. According to Barthes (1977), the image is the perfect objective analogon for reality. Connotation is not immediately comprehensible like denotation. In order to effectively “read” an image, the viewer must be conscious of the signs within the image and the codes created from each of those signs. The challenge of objectivity is that it becomes vulnerable to mythical interpretations. Barthes explains that

cultural myths are “second-order signifieds” (p. 25) or connotations which impose bourgeois values on image consumers. In Brazilian political, fictional, and abolitionist literature, Afro-Brazilian women’s enslavement was romanticized for the upper-class literate public. An example is a story of an enslaved wet-nurse who is denied access to her newborn child as a punishment from the plantation owner. When given a white child to breastfeed, instead of hatred and revolt, she adores it as if it were her own (Roncador, 2006, p. 56). According to Roncador, the myth of the Afro-Brazilian wet-nurse or Black Mammy “served the sociologist’s goal of advocating in favor of the presence of Black slaves and, in particular, the wet-nurse’s role in the plantation owner’s home” (p. 63). As a result of the invention of photography and the mass circulation of photographs, the image of Afro-Brazilian wet-nurses served as one of the most effective tools in the construction of “a benign view of slavery in the old sugar plantations” (p. 63). We can assume that Monica was denied care of her own children to take care of young John Arthur, the plantation owner’s offspring. Historian Luiz Felipe de Alencastro (1997) describes Monica’s photo as

[t]he image of a paradoxical union but admittedly so. A union founded on love in the present and past violence. In the violence that split the soul of a slave, opening the affective space being invaded by the son of his master. Almost all of Brazil fit this picture (pp. 439-440).<sup>3</sup>

Alencastro tells us how visual culture can signify information beyond its visual limits.

Barthes (1977) uses six structural terms for the connotation process that will assist in further investigating those limits: trick effects, pose, objects, photogenia, aestheticism, and syntax. Of the six, “pose” and “object” are most useful for this example. Barthes encourages us to question what the subjects’ poses say about their relationship. Monica’s piercing stare is toward her spectator. While she sits next to a standing young child, her body language implies that the child’s affection for her is not reciprocated. The child embraces her while her arms remain in her lap. She faces forward as the young child’s body is turned toward her.

Using a Socratic method to push students away from stagnant and trite cultural narratives of Blackness, womanhood, and the institution of chattel slavery, teachers could help students to consider the state of many Afro-Brazilians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the culture and traditions Monica and other Africans brought to Brazil, and the body language in the photograph to generate alternative narratives for enslaved Black women. These critical perspectives of the educator and student spectators should be used as teachable moments. Students learn to discuss art in a more comprehensive way that constructs numerous potential narratives for the subject of the artwork in hopes that the student spectators transfer those humane narrative possibilities to real bodies. For Monica, this critical gaze enables the construction of an inhumane narrative about Black female subjects within artwork. How might we consider Monica’s gaze as the grounding of an alternative text? She was the caretaker of her enslaver’s child. The child that embraces her will mostly likely be the future enslaver of her children. Yet, the livelihood of this child is dependent on the nutrients from her body. How might that make her feel? Since she is a wet nurse, that means she was once pregnant. Was her child neglected in order to feed her enslaver’s child? Did being a wet nurse limit her abilities to be a mother again? How do her gaze and a critical analysis of the image help us to consider alternative texts?

Second, Barthes (1977) asks viewers to give importance to the objects photographed. But in this example, it is the objects surrounding the image that assist in disrupting the myth. Objects are “accepted inducers of associations of ideas” (p. 22). Therefore, because Monica’s image is surrounded by chains used during enslavement, the myth of the faithful “slave” with unyielding maternal love is subverted. The willing “symbol of unconditional fidelity and absolute servitude to the master’s class” (Roncador, 2006, p. 56) within 19th century Brazilian literature is no longer a fixed code. Taking the pose, objects, caption, and historical context into consideration for interrogation, we are able to disrupt the myth.

Unsettling myths is dependent on the spectator’s knowledge of the signs. “The link between signifier and signified remains...entirely historical” (Barthes, 1977, p. 27). Barthes argues against the assumption that there are natural trans-historical feelings and values connected to images unless those values and feelings are given contextual specificity. The signification process resolves the “contradiction between cultural and natural man” (p. 28). The process of finding the continuous code(s) connotation would be to “isolate, inventoriare and structure all the ‘historical’ elements of the photograph, all the parts of the photographic surface which derive their very discontinuity from a certain knowledge on the reader’s part, or ... from the reader’s cultural situation” (p. 28). The reader gathers information from the image and the associated text, then attempts to create meaning from these two forms of communication based on his or her knowledge.

The photographic paradox is the co-existence of the two messages: the code-less image and the coded text accompanying it displace the image’s assumed neutrality. It is through the “mode of imbrication” (Barthes, 1977, p. 20) that we are able to attempt to comprehend and take apart the photographic paradox. Within this paradox Barthes privileges words: “the image no longer *illustrates* the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image” (p. 25). For *Monica* the text not only informs the viewer of the relationship between Monica and young John Arthur, but (in relation to the objects surrounding the image) gives us clues about their tenuous relationship. The text rationalizes the image.

Two elements of this practice are particularly important: semantics and the gaze. Primarily, students are to question the semantic choices used to describe the subject. Although the word “slave” is not used in the caption for the photograph, viewers are to interpret Monica’s position as a slave. “Slave” is often used to identify those transported from Africa to the Americas. But the term does not allow for alternative texts. It is not “problem-posing” (Freire, 1970/2010, p. 84) or demythologizing but rather finite. Historian Deborah Gray White (1999) asserts:

The increased focus on brutality and resistance has shifted the historiography and language of slavery. African and African-American women were not born degraded but rendered so by enslavement...The noun “slave” suggests a state of mind and being that is absolute and unmediated by an enslaver. “Enslaved” says more about what *happened* to Black people without unwittingly describing the sum total of who they were. “Enslaved” forces us to remember that Black men and women were Africans and African-Americans before they were forced into slavery and had a new and denigrating identity assigned to them. “Enslaved” also nudges us to rethink our idea about Black resistance under slavery (p. 8).

Word choice affects students’ understanding (or misunderstanding) of cultural groups. Therefore, phrases such as “bonded African,” “displaced African,” or “enslaved African” are



ways for students to see that their occupation or the product of their circumstance does not determine their identity. In addition, including “African” in the term reminds students that people like Monica came from a variety of nations with previously established knowledge and traditions.

The goal of Socratic “problem-posing” methodology is to bring the subject’s humanity to the forefront. Using the term “Slave” does not allow for the conceptualization of shared power, rather, it reemphasizes the economic power and imperialistic force of certain European entities of that time period. That continued emphasis allows for what Wynter (2003) calls an overrepresentation of the “Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom” (p. 260). By asserting the Black subject’s humanity, students begin to unsettle the “Western Bourgeois conception of human” that was the foundation of “colonial difference... on which the world of modernity was to institute itself” (p. 260). By scrutinizing the word, we scrutinize the labels and the histories attached to the word, and we allow for a theoretical revisionist history through an arts-based liberating practice. It is important, though, that the educator does not mislead students into believing they, alone, have the power to liberate. They are simply acknowledging the humanity already present. This recognition is the *liberatory gaze*.

The liberatory gaze is similar to bell hooks’ (2010) *oppositional gaze* in that they both confront domination and trouble myths. Hooks asserts that “by courageously looking, we defiantly declare... Even in the worst circumstances of domination the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency” (p. 116). The oppositional gaze “looks” to document and looks to assert agency by claiming and cultivating “awareness” (p. 116). It works to remove us from the confines of “normalized” socialization that detract us from the possibilities of “border crossing”<sup>4</sup> (i.e., purposefully and critically stepping out of our cultural comfort zones and into others’).

The liberatory gaze actively looks and interrogates to change reality. It is an act of resistance that re-humanizes the subject in the face of images and structures that attempt to marginalize, dominate, and exclude. Here, the liberatory gaze critiques the stares of Monica, the child, the photographer, and the photograph’s intended audience. It requires students to look at Monica in her historical context and to consider her mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual state in order to create alternative narratives that take into account the oppositional gazes of the marginalized.<sup>5</sup>

Franz Fanon (1967), an Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist and the seminal theoretician of postcolonial politics, culture, and identity, offers a narrative expressing the power of the gaze. Fanon, explains an encounter with a European child:

“Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked me over as I passed by. I made a tight smile. ‘Look, a Negro!’ It was true. It amused me. “Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened! Frightened! Frightened!” Now they were beginning to be afraid of me....My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, re-colored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it’s cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is

quivering with rage, the little White boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up (pp. 113-114).

Fanon (1967) contends that colonized people are forever "overdetermined," "sealed in objecthood" and "...abraded into nonbeing." He asserts that Black people are at a disadvantage when trying to develop a bodily representation that removes the colonizer-imposed objecthood. The Eurocentric creation and perpetuation of Blacks' subjugated status and Blacks' internalization of this inferiority have created a compromising position for Blacks as the definer of Blackness without enough agency to disconnect themselves from their empirically derived overdetermined state (pp. 109, 12-14). Fanon's theory of the overdetermined state functions similarly to Barthes' myths. Both relay assumptions of cultures contained in signifiers. To be overdetermined is to be always already: always already understood, spoken for, abilities and values always already predetermined. It is blanketed assumptions that cover ethnicities, cultures, or other groups of people. Fanon addresses the specific signifier of Blackness.

Ahmed (2004) uses Fanon's (1967) experience as a way to describe the power of the gaze during an encounter of bodies where the misreading of the "other" is done from the surface of the body. As affect moves among bodies, it incites emotions from the spectator and the subject being gazed upon; in fact, affect is a way to describe the conscious or unconscious transfer of emotions from one body to another (Fanon's body incites fear in the child; Fanon feels the child's fear, and his body responds with anxiety). These emotions, fostered by previous knowledge and/or assumptions about the subject being gazed upon (the child believed that Fanon was dangerous), can predetermine how the spectator will interact with the subject. As stereotypes continue to be associated with bodies (e.g. danger and fear with Black males), affect circulates and produces emotions that accumulate over time.

According to Ahmed (2004), the traits and emotions connected to the stereotyped body become reinforced. Because of the repetitive circulation of affect, the attributes the spectator places on gazed-upon subjects become what Ahmed calls *sticky*. This stickiness is what makes stereotyped bodies overdetermined. The contrived and ahistorical characteristics learned by spectators (the child) become stuck on real bodies (Fanon and other Black men). For the child, the gaze removed Fanon's humanity and became an observation of an overdetermined state of objectification. Putting artworks in context, like *Monica*, serves to avoid such assumptive encounters among learners, artworks, and the bodies those artworks may represent.

According to Fanon (1967), overdeterminedness forces Blacks to live triply as "the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared" (p. 112). My narrative as an African American female artist and educator who relates to *Monica* and can express a narrative of an overdetermined existence offers a perspective that can construct alternative texts for the dominant Eurocentric narrative placed on works containing non-European subjects. Standing in front of the photograph looking at *Monica* looking at me, I felt "a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness" (Du Bois, 1903/2003, p. 9). At that moment, I understood that *Monica* knew she had to be able to see herself through the eyes of others who look at her in "amused contempt and pity," (Du Bois, 1903/2003, p. 9) but also had to recognize that abolitionist literature, other media outlets, and her enslaver's perception of her are not accurate. Although Du Bois's (1903/2003) double-consciousness is helpful here, it does not take gender into account: I felt not just a two-ness standing there, but a three-ness. I am an African North American woman, and she is an African South

American woman whose authentic narratives keep us grounded, but we must navigate through spaces that do not acknowledge our authentic intersectionalities (Crenshaw, 1991).<sup>6</sup> A gaze from the perspectives of the intersections of Blackness, womanhood, and (North and South) American identities follows Dubois' (1903/2003) theory of double consciousness. These identities represent the paradoxical interaction of "[three] souls, [three] thoughts, [three] unreconciled strivings; [three] warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 9). Both of our societies require us to be "continually accompanied by [our] own self image," within an allotted and confined space controlled by what hooks (2004) calls an "imperialist White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (pp. 17-18).<sup>7</sup> A liberatory practice asserts humanity in response to such hegemonic forces.

Such a practice is based on Freire's (1970/2010) *problem-posing education*, which utilizes a Socratic methodology of teaching that encourages students to think beyond dominant narratives. This process of the liberatory gaze is a way to expand upon ideas that assist in preparing students to read, comprehend, discuss, and interpret visual culture. In an arts-based problem-posing practice, the educator would not simply tell the students the date and title of the work and identify Monica only by her occupation as an enslaved woman. Instead, through a problem-posing practice, students look intently with great curiosity, interest, and wonder to recognize that her body may have been enslaved, but physical enslavement is not an automatic reflection of her intellect and abilities.

The image of Monica is the myth of Afro-Brazilian womanhood. "As with every myth, that of the Black Mammy has the task of hiding a reality under a false pretense of visibility" (Roncador, 2006, p. 65). She is central to the population gains and the livelihood of Brazil, yet she is rendered insignificant by her overdetermined state. Gonzalez (2008) sheds light on how the Afro-Brazilian female body encompasses a unique position of duality: visible yet invisible. Afro-Brazilian women are inconspicuously rendered as central to the maintenance and creation of Brazil's diverse society, while conspicuously presented as objects of sexual desire and servitude in domestic life and popular culture. "Combined with the pervasiveness of anti-Black aesthetics in popular culture," Gonzalez notes, "this has resulted in a negative imprint on Afro-Brazilian female bodies" (p. 223). This "imprint," like Ahmed's "stickiness," causes overdetermination. It is an imprint of stigmatization the child saw on Fanon, and it is how certain Brazilian literature presented her. "The degree to which miscegenation is at the core of national identity has made Afro-Brazilian women the necessary physical providers of pleasure, comfort, and wombs...Afro-Brazilian women are positioned as 'the altruistic caretakers' of White Brazilians, rather than full citizens and equal participants in Brazilian national culture" (Gonzalez, p. 223).

The regurgitated story of a downtrodden, passive, bonded existence without fluidity, change, or exceptions disallows her authentic story from being considered. Monica may not incite fear (like Fanon and the child), but feelings of pity, shame, worthlessness, dehumanization, and paternalism often associated with slavery can be transferred from her image to other Black female bodies by the spectator. Our ability to recognize those affective feelings is associated with our consciousness. Thus it is important for educators to understand that consciousness is multi-leveled and unique to each person. Acknowledging this helps us to understand and determine goals for the classroom, our students' perceptions, and the material we choose to introduce.

## Liberatory Gaze in Contemporary Art

Several contemporary artists create alternative texts for overdetermined bodies, such as Catherine Opie, Shirin Neshat, Wangechi Mutu, and Kara Walker. Their theoretically multi-layered works offer insight into their multi-consciousness, and their images are a manifestation of ideas that allude to looming socio-political issues. Of these, Walker's work aligns particularly closely with Monica, as her inspiration is formed from stories like Monica's: "Through her works, we come to reconsider how representations of Blackness are a reflection of (art) history –a fabrication informed by fantasy, fascination, nihilism, narcissism, and pathology" (Joo, Keehn II, & Ham-Roberts, 2011, p. 36). Works such as *Cut* (1998) can be interpreted as alternative narratives of enslaved women's resistance to slavery. In Walker's paper-cut silhouette style, *Cut* presents an African American woman jubilantly suspended in the air with a razor blade clinched in the left hand and two broken wrists with blood spewing from the openings. Other works use descriptive titles pulled from actual events, such as *Bureau of Refugees: May 29 Richard Dick's wife beaten with a club by her employer, Richard remonstrated –in the night was taken from his house and beaten with a buggy trace nearly to death by his employer and 2 others* (2007), referring to events outside of the artwork. Walker explains, "One theme in my artwork is the idea that a Black subject in the present tense is a container for specific pathologies from the past and is continually growing and feeding off those maladies" (Joo et al., p. 222). Here Walker asserts that the Black body is a "container" for static and pathological narratives that support the White supremacist patriarchy power structure. Circulation of these imposed pathologies is how they continue to grow, feed, and remain "stuck" on contemporary bodies.

By implementing the liberatory gaze, we invoke plurality in our reading of images. In Walker's manuscript "A Proposition by Kara Walker: The object of Painting is the subjugated Body," the painter is the colonizing entity. Her questions of "How do Paintings understand the concept of liberty? And who will teach them?" reflect the practice of the liberatory gaze upon the subjugated overdetermined body. She likewise asks:

Can this canvas, sub-subaltern that it is [yes, and worse, inanimate object], give voice to its own needs? Where do paintings locate themselves in a universe of objects and ideas? ... Do all paintings contain within them the damaging history of their captivity or can they, like victims of state-sponsored suppression and violence, resist the systemic damage that has been done to them? Paintings need allies, they will need influence (Joo et al., 2011, p. 40).

The liberatory gaze is a look of resistance. It is a resistance that works to change present and past falsities/realities. To educate a generation of artists and appreciators of art is to have them recognize that contemporary art work involves contemporary art practices from both artists and spectators. Accordingly, both students and educators must employ theory, writing, history, and other elements in order to comprehend fully the breadth and depth of old and new images.

As an African American educator in a majority European American context, I work to express my alternative texts to students so that they will have the opportunity to question possible limited narratives about me, people who look like me, and others who don't look like them. I have recognized that exposing my mainstream post-secondary students to alternative texts for multicultural subjects shakes their world in ways that, for many of them, hasn't happened before. I challenge them to stop the dilution of multicultural subjects

(e.g., *just Black, just Native, homosexual, or poor*) just as I do not accept their position of being *just White*. They are thus required to be exposed to and use new perspectives for seeing themselves and those around them, and they aren't quite sure what to do with their new found perspective.

The liberatory gaze resists conscription into overdeterminedness for all marginalized subjects by consistently finding entryways to advocate for the marginalized subject's empowerment through empowering words. It resists the "Imperialist imperative" (Joo et al., 2011, p. 39) that limits the complexity of marginalized bodies with pathologies. The liberatory spectator and educator critique the myth of overdeterminedness and require its removal. The liberatory gaze "unsticks" the disguise through an analysis of stereotypical narratives. It considers the authenticity of who Monica was or may have been.

That students recognize and advocate for Monica's (and other multicultural subjects') authenticity is crucially important to the problem-posing pedagogical practice of the liberatory gaze. However, educators must exercise caution. The students' gaze should not simply replace the Eurocentric upper-class male gaze the image was intended for. We do not want to encourage a paternalistic gaze, one that looks with "contempt and pity" (Dubois, 1903/2003), p. 9). Its antonym, the liberatory gaze, pushes students to "imagine a painting [or any medium] using the raw flesh of itself as a savage instrument for change" (Joo et al., 2011, p. 40). It demands that artists and art educators require nothing less than their students' work to contribute to the morality of society and not to paralyzing benevolence.

But educators' efforts to avoid the paternalistic gaze and provoke critical-thinking arts-based pedagogy must be deliberative and must value our varied consciousnesses. An educator's personal narratives and unique insight can provide a basis for a holistic and multi-faceted learning atmosphere, but the educator must be willing to be self-reflective. Educators have to be able to determine their gaze, confront limited perspectives, and embrace their multi-consciousnesses. It's an ongoing, ever changing learning process for willing participants. As educators insert themselves into the curriculum, they can assist students' in their border-crossing learning experience. This process is often most productive with artists who vicariously take their observers on a journey of inquiry and social discomfort through visual and performative experiences: Kerry James Marshall, Coco Fusco, Guillermo Gómez, Wafaa Bilal, James Luna, and Michael Ray Charles are just a few more ideal candidates. As we challenge ourselves, we challenge our students in the hope that we all challenge the world around us.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *João Ferreira Villela Artur Gomes Leal com a ama-de-leite Mônica*

<sup>2</sup> Concepts are mental representations of things within our mind that allow us to interpret the world. The system of representation consists of different ways of organizing and creating relationships among individual concepts (Hall, 2000, p. 17). Signs are words, sounds or images that carry meaning for the concepts and conceptual relationships in our heads. Signs are up for interpretation through individuals' unique conceptual maps. "The relation between 'things,' concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The code connects meanings to signs via language and is grounded in culture. The process which links these three elements together (code, sign, and concepts) is 'representation'" (p. 19).

<sup>3</sup> See Alencastro (1997) for original Portuguese version.

<sup>4</sup> Giroux (1991) offers readers a process called border pedagogy that analyzes how educational institutions regulate moral and political "norms." Border pedagogy digs deeper into what multiculturalism has the ability to interrogate: "Whose history, story, and experience prevails in the school setting? ... [W]ho speaks for whom, under what conditions, and for what purposes" (p. 507)? Giroux argues, "Students need more than information about what constitutes a common culture, they need to be able to critically assess dominant and subordinate traditions so as to narrate themselves" (p. 508). He continues to say that students need to

understand how cultural, ethnic, racial, ideological differences enhance the possibility for dialogue, trust and *solidarity* [emphasis mine]....The pedagogical and ethnical practice which [he is] emphasizing is one that offers opportunities for students to be border crossers; as border crossers, students not only refigure the boundaries of academic disciplines in order to engage in new forms of critical inquiry, they also are offered the opportunities to negotiate and translate the multiple references that construct different cultural codes, experiences and histories. (p. 508)

<sup>5</sup> bell hooks (2010) argues that for African Americans, from childhood to adulthood, the gaze is political, and the mass media have given a new level of power to the gaze. Reflecting on her childhood, hooks argues that the gaze was controlled by parents who chastised children for looking adults in the eye and by law enforcement who arrested Black men who, by Jim Crow law, could not look at White women in fear of being lynched for "eyeball rape." The gaze equated to punishment for certain groups of people, and the punishment was administered by those who had the power to gaze at will. For hooks, agency becomes the center of power. Hooks discusses how cinema provided a way for spectators to freely gaze upon widely circulated taboo and tolerated images in the United States mass media. There were images of bodies (such as White women) that could not be gazed upon in reality. The repression of the African American gaze, according to hooks, produced an overwhelming desire to look. The gaze became a stare of resistance used to change reality, a resistance she called the "oppositional gaze."

<sup>6</sup> See Crenshaw (1991) for more information on the politics of intersectionalities of race and gender.



<sup>7</sup> My narrative and Monica's show that our multiple consciousnesses have been created in response to discovering that it is necessary to learn how we see ourselves and how the world conceptualizes our presence. Such acknowledgment allows for a multi-angled perspective that can disrupt the looming hegemonic patriarchy. For a more in depth explanation of "imperialist White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy," see hooks (2004):

Nothing discounts the old antifeminist projection of men as all-powerful more than their basic ignorance of a major facet of the political system that shapes and informs male identity and sense of self from birth until death. I often use the phrase 'imperialist White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy' to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation's politics. Of these systems the one that we all learn the most about growing up is the system of patriarchy, even if we never know the word, because patriarchal gender roles - are assigned to us as children and we are given continual guidance about the ways we can best fulfill these roles. Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (pp. 17-18).

## A Collaged Reflection on My Art Teaching: A Visual Autoethnography

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### Abstract

In this article I begin to unravel some of the complexities of being a visual art educator who teaches in a public elementary school: while dealing with an increasing high-stakes testing environment, I write in *defense* of teaching that is based on social justice and visual culture theory. I take the theme of this issue, *de(fence)*, literally as a need to defend. To do this I use visual autoethnography, where I create a collaged work of art, then use that collage as a prompt for my reflection on my curriculum and teaching practice. My reflection is woven into the wider culture of art education, and distinctions between the cultural and the personal become blurred as I change focus from looking backwards and forwards, inwards and outwards. In creating this visual autoethnography, I hope that other art educators are inspired to find their own voices and provide their own additions to the creation of a rich, thick description of the professional lives of art educators as they increasingly have to *defend* even the basic need for art education in public schools.

## **A Collaged Reflection on My Art Teaching: A Visual Autoethnography**

In this article I want to unravel some of the complexities of my practice as a visual art educator who teaches in a public elementary school. I want to reveal my personal struggles in order to convey my understanding of my lived reality in this period of time in art education. To do this I have used a form of visual autoethnography (Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd, 2007) where I have created a work of art using the medium of collage and then used that collage as a prompt for my reflection. My reflection is woven into the wider culture of art education, and distinctions between the cultural and the personal become blurred as I change focus in looking backward and forward to inward and outward. At the center of my visual autoethnographic study is my own self-awareness and the reporting of my experiences and introspections as a primary data source (Dyson, 2007). To present my self-analysis I used the tools of collage, metaphor, and expanding narrative to re-think and re-conceptualize parts of my professional life as an art educator and defend aspects of my teaching. Personal reflection is about developing a commitment to sound pedagogical practices through a process of unveiling and representing different complex layers of one's practice in order to transform the teaching experience into a learning experience (Duarte, 2007). In this way this visual autoethnography becomes a form of arts-based educational research.

### **A Definition of Autoethnography**

Autoethnography is a form of research that connects the personal to the cultural (Duarte, 2007; Dyson, 2007; Mizzi, 2010; Starr, 2010). It is a qualitative research method that utilizes data about the self and context to gain understanding of the connection between self and others within the same context (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010). Autoethnography allows the researcher to use the nontraditional research practice of telling his or her stories in narrative research as a method to reclaim marginalized and self-reflective space in the research. Narrative research methodology embraces multiple way of representing lived experiences discursively and is a multi-layered form of investigation (Xu & Connelly, 2010; Craig, 2009; Fox, 2008; Clandinin, 2006). Traditional forms of ethnography tend not to value the connected life experiences of the researcher; autoethnography finds a place and presence for the researcher's life experiences (Mizzi, 2010). Attention to this kind of discourse helps us understand how people experience everyday life and explore ways of making sense of life and expressing this knowledge (Mitra, 2010). Interpretation and creation of knowledge is thus rooted in the emic context; an autoethnographer reveals the 'voice of the insider' rather than the voice of the 'seeker of truth' (Dyson, 2007; Mitra, 2010). Autoethnography recognizes that all research is subjective, research is an extension of researchers' lives and realizes that knowledge construction is not so analytical or linear that answers to questions are absolute (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010; Starr, 2010).

Autoethnography is self-focused. The researcher is the center of the investigation. Autoethnographic data provide the researcher with a window through which the outside world is understood. Although the blurring of the researcher-participant relationship has become a source of criticism for the methodology, access to sensitive issues and innermost thoughts makes this research method a powerful and unique tool for understanding (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010). The credibility of autoethnographic research is established through the 'ringing true' of the story revealed (Dyson, 2007).

For the past twenty years a number of scholars have sought to answer the question of how to name the intersection where art and research overlap (Williams, 2009).

Autoethnographers pay varying levels of attention to narration/description and analysis/interpretation of autobiographical materials. Some lean more toward art while others lean more toward scientific analysis. Autoethnography is a mix of artistic representation, scientific inquiry, self-narration, and ethnography (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010). Visual autoethnography combines visuals with autoethnographic narrative.

For over 100 years art education has asked the questions of how works of art and the work of art making develop the learner and what curriculum best facilitates learning. Arts-based research becomes arts-based educational research, a tool for developing art education programs when it addresses the problem of shaping curriculum (Rolling, 2010).

Arts-based research is pluralistic: one doesn't state that "I am a writer" or that "I am a visual artist" or that "I am a researcher." Instead one has the freedom to generate mixtures of methodology and audience, inaugurating fresh perspectives, visions, and insights and making available new spaces of inquiry (Rolling, 2010). Arts-based research, like autoethnography, is a controversial methodology, called to task for its unreliability and often idiosyncratic and vague processes (Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd, 2007). On the other hand, it has been stated that arts-based research broadens traditional research paradigms, allows for wide-ranging and participatory conversations, and that art is a way of knowing and can be considered a kind of research (Finley, 2003; Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd, 2007; Vaughan, 2004).

Arts-based research can focus on art as a mode of personal research that is motivated by the desire to explore and carry out a project with the research addressing first her- or himself and then interested audience members. Collage, derived from the French for glued work, is built upon the juxtaposition of fragments from multiple sources whose piecing together creates resonances and connections which can form the basis for discussion and learning (Vaughan, 2004). In this way, collage can be considered a form of arts-based research. I feel vulnerable as I put forth this visual autoethnography mixture of collage and self-reflection, but I do so in the hope that my particular situation can lend some significance to similar situations faced by other art educators. I write in defense of art educators who wish to teach a curriculum based on social justice and visual culture even in the face of increased high-stakes testing.

### **My Collaged Reflections**

When I create collages, I allow myself to become susceptible to the shifting patterns and colors of the collected ephemera that I deconstruct, then reconstruct into new images. With that vulnerability comes a silent, unconscious response to the images as they merge to make something new. I try to disassociate myself from the context of the images and let them work together in ways that I can't anticipate. When I feel that a collage has reached resolution, I sit back and try to see what meaning emerges from the assemblage of images.

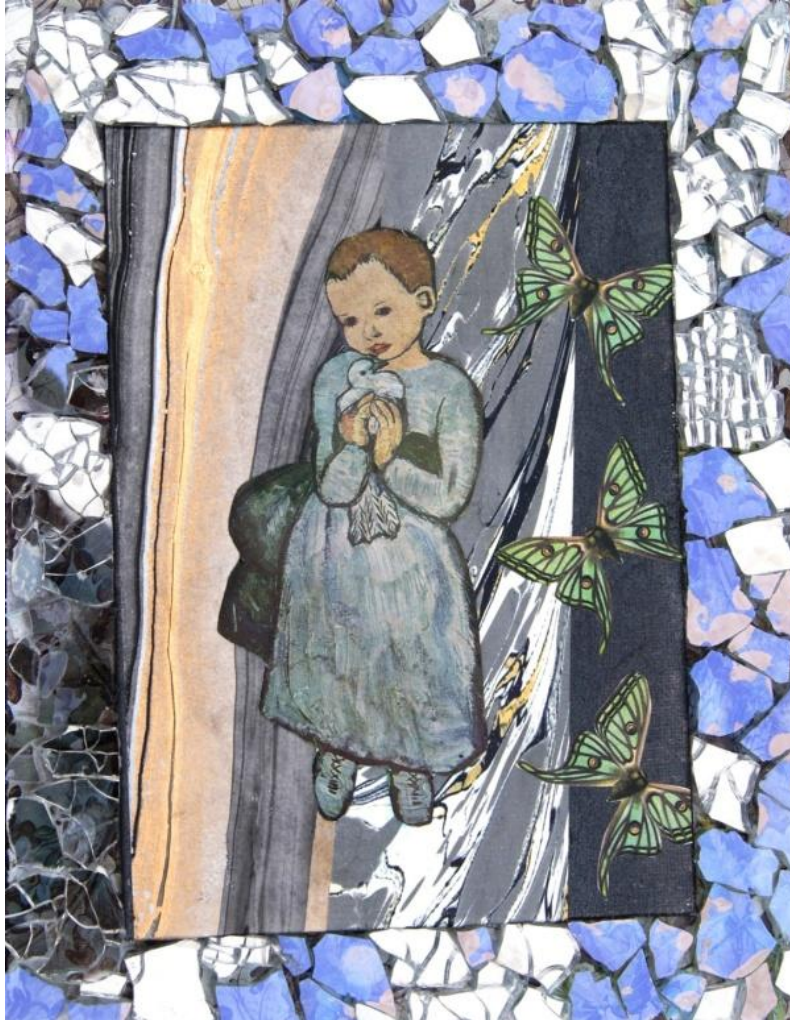


Figure 1. Untitled collage by the author. Photo by the author.

Within this collage, which as yet is untitled, I initially saw images of transformation, innocence, and vulnerability in certain elements of the work. In the image of a young child holding a dove cut from an old museum postcard, I imagined I saw my students, innocent of the current situation in which art education finds itself, having to defend itself once again in the face of budget cuts. The butterflies spoke to me of the intellectual currents that are constantly shifting and changing in art education. The broken glass surrounding the central image made my heart ache for the art programs that have been shattered due to ignorance in the face of our current economic crisis, yet it reminded me of the reflection necessary to do the work of teaching while sometimes feeling overwhelmed at having to be curriculum writer, instructor, guide, disciplinarian, and motivator as the lone art educator in my practical situation (Quinn & Calkin, 2008).

A deeper look at this collage inspired me to make connections to the current curriculum that I teach my students, which I believe shows my shifts in thinking about teaching art to children. I teach visual art to kindergarten through eighth grade students in a school in an urban area of the Southwest. Approximately 75% of the predominantly Hispanic student body receives free and reduced lunch. I feel a deep connection with my students, as we have come to know each other over the seven years I have taught there. I have learned about

their different personalities, differing circumstances, their needs, wants, and desires. I have come to understand them as individuals, not just students, and that is what keeps me motivated to teach art in this sometimes difficult and needy, but always rewarding, environment.

I see in this image the need for my students to locate themselves in what I teach. My students, who are primarily of Mexican origin, seem to be impressed with the fact that Picasso was Spanish. His work, although some of it seems rather strange to them, always generates one or two remarks from students about his ancestry, which students understand as being connected to their ancestry from the days of the conquistadors. I am attentive to the fact that students want to see themselves reflected in my curriculum and thus am happy to include the work of other Spanish, Mexican, and indigenous Mexican artists in my curriculum where I can, though these connections have recently become more limited.

In this collage image I also perceive the dominance of the Western canon in much of what I teach. This is a change from my earlier years as an art educator, when my curriculum was more multicultural. I began my art education career learning about Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE), then teaching in an elementary classroom in the American Midwest according to the precepts of DBAE. I earned a master's degree during the 1990s and with it came a lifetime license for that Midwestern state. If I had wanted I could have taught the same way for the rest of my career. But there was much freedom in what I chose to teach, so I chose to teach from a multicultural educational standpoint. I made this choice partially because my professors were themselves multiculturalists, but mainly because I am a Native American woman who was educated in mainstream public schools and had experienced firsthand the difficulties of growing up 'other.' I taught about the art forms of different cultures and the contexts in which they are created. Additionally I taught about artists who worked within the precepts of the Western canon but were themselves from diverse populations. I saw my role as an art educator to enlighten my primarily white lower middle class students about the diversity of the world, preparing them to become engaged citizens.

Now, in the 2010s, my curriculum is in the process of changing in ways with which I am not always comfortable. The Southwestern state where I now live and teach has effected a law which states that at least 35% of a teacher's evaluation must be based on test scores. The large school district where I currently teach, which is extremely supportive of the arts, asked selected art teachers to develop two benchmark tests, one for third grade and one for sixth grade. Each test covers what some art educators call "the nuts and bolts" of teaching art: perspective, shading, color theory, the elements and principles of design, and other basic knowledge used in understanding and creating Western art.

My curriculum for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades has changed: instead of embedding the basics of art into a focus on artworks from multiple cultures and eras with lessons ranging from studio to art history to aesthetics, I am now expected to teach units rooted in the basics, repeated in various forms so that students remember the content and can pass the benchmark tests. I do include studio work in each unit; however, I now also include worksheets to monitor my students' knowledge. Teaching through worksheets creates the anxiety that I am doing my students a disservice. This anxiety also translates into anger about being forced to teach in a way that I believe is inauthentic. In undergraduate and graduate school I was taught that the nuts and bolts of art teaching were overemphasized in many elementary curricula and that educating students for a changing, global society was our duty and first priority as art educators. Using worksheets was seen as promoting lower level thinking. Instead, we were

encouraged to write curriculum units that were focused on using art making and understanding to investigate “big picture” concepts important to society and to students. Authentic learning took place when students wrestled with these concepts and created works of art that expressed their ideas and understandings of them.

In teaching to the test, I find that I am now forced to focus more on the Western canon, imposing formal constructs such as the elements and principles of design on the description of non-Western works of art. Western aesthetics and ways of understanding artworks are not always synonymous with art forms from multiple cultures. Nevertheless, I attempt to capsulize contextual meaning that I present along with looking at artworks, so that students still are getting a small amount of this kind of information, but unfortunately it is no longer an important element in my teaching to these grade levels. My hope is that I can convey contextual approaches to teaching art to my students at different grade levels in their education.

The butterflies in my collage, which I interpret as images representing change and growth, can be seen as a metaphor for how my ideas about art education have changed over the years. Now, having earned a doctorate in art education, I am reading about art educators’ efforts to include visual culture and social justice in their teaching, which is influencing my thoughts about what I should be teaching. Although prescriptive in what is taught in third and sixth grade, the current school district where I teach allows an openness in teaching the other grade levels. Here I am able to begin to alter the required DBAE curriculum so that my teaching can reflect more current art education practices. I am finding ways of incorporating the visual culture of my students into my lessons, such as having a graffiti artist lead seventh and eighth grade students in a graffiti writing workshop. Additionally, in a beginning effort to incorporate social justice issues into my curriculum, I had my students participate in the Fundred Dollar Bill Project. The Fundred Project is an ongoing work by conceptual artist Mel Chin that involves having people, including students, create their own version of currency that will be used to awaken politicians to the importance of funding the cleaning of lead from soil in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina (<http://www.fundred.org>; <http://www.melchin.org>).

My explorations into teaching visual culture and about social justice are tentative, as I teach in a public school where the unwritten but overt philosophy is that we educate all students and should teach from a neutral viewpoint (although a Western viewpoint is not neutral), and that we should not unduly influence students about any political persuasion or situation as such influence is the parents’ right and responsibility, not the teachers’. This creates another tension in my teaching as I believe that teaching is not neutral. I feel that I stand alone in my school district as the single art teacher in my department who has a PhD, and as the only person who seems interested in teaching about something other than the “nuts and bolts” of art education. I believe there will come a time when I must defend my position as an art educator who believes that teaching only the “nuts and bolts” of art education is a disservice to our students. I believe that making connections to students’ lived experiences through social justice art education and visual culture theory is necessary in this time of high stakes testing. Will I be able to persuade administration that teaching only to the test is actually detrimental to our students’ education?

Finding ways to involve students in thinking about social justice is tricky because how this is presented can be seen as influencing students unduly. I reflect a great deal about this topic. Can social justice art education be taught in the public school situation where I

practice? If so, how should I teach about social justice in ways that elementary students can understand? Will I be able to make more connections to my students' lived experiences with a social justice teaching methodology? This continues to be a conundrum that challenges me as I search for ways to change my curriculum to include teaching elements of social justice and visual culture to elementary public school students. Like butterflies that struggle to leave their chrysalises, my emerging attempts at teaching visual culture and social justice are just beginning to materialize as I take away the boundaries of DBAE (defencing my curriculum) and open up my curriculum to new possibilities that I will probably need to defend.

The broken glass surrounding the central image of the collage is somewhat reflective. Metaphorically, reflection is important in the work of teaching; as a reflective teacher I am constantly examining what I teach and how I teach so I can better reach whom I teach. These reflections often occur in the few minutes between classes, or in the few moments I have to speak with a colleague about my classes; thus I can easily see my reflections about my teaching as a series of collected fragments. The spaces between the fragments of reflection form pathways for other kinds of meaning to work their way into my curriculum. I am trying to make some kind of sense of visual culture that will work within the limits of the culture of the school district where I teach. Additionally, I find that I am concerned that my students are focused on images from the mainstream and are not looking at the visual culture found in their own homes and communities. I am becoming aware of the visual culture of minorities and am currently exploring conduits for bringing my students' attention to images other than those found in conventional media and spaces.

The transparency of the broken glass makes the space surrounding the central image ambiguous, imperfect, like life itself and thus like teaching. Although one can see oneself in the glass, the reflection is like a translucent kaleidoscope—a blurring of images. I see myself as whole, yet awkward, fragmented and messy as I reshape my practice as an art educator, considering what to keep, what to jettison, what to modify, what standards and expectations I have to meet while I open space for growth. I anticipate experiencing joys, sorrows, development, and challenges as I will possibly need to defend my changes to my curriculum. I plan to be present to possibility, comfortable in knowing and not knowing, while caring about my students and what they learn from me.

### **Conclusions**

As I created my collage and then wrote about the evocations of meaning the collage created in me, I found myself working through tension, fear, anxiety, and anger at how my teaching practice had been changed not by me but by powers beyond my control, and how I am changing my teaching as I look at and reflect upon my practice to find better ways to connect to my students and their lived experiences. Yet, I seem to have more questions than answers.

In creating this visual autoethnography, I hope that other art educators are inspired to find their voices and to see if their experiences resonate with my own. Additional work in visual autoethnography can create a rich, thick description of the professional lives of art educators. It can be a method for art educators to look at ways to take down the fences erected by lawmakers who advocate high-stakes testing and to defend teaching beyond the test.



Arts-based research can span a broad spectrum from research that uses the arts as a form of data representation to research that is generated as art is created (Vaughan, 2004). Visual autoethnography as an arts-based research form may simply be one among many nontraditional systemic studies of phenomena undertaken to advance human understanding (Finley, 2003). It is not quite art and not quite science but has potential for possibilities of change and imaginative discourse.

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## (De)Fencing the Cultural Commons Through a (De)Constructive Media Art Curriculum

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### Abstract

Rampant consolidation in the media industry has led to an ever-increasing push to extend the breadth and scope of copyright law. A deliberate and systematic effort to restrict access to cultural texts that were previously accessible has led to a creative climate that is increasingly intimidating to young artists. The personal computer provides students the ability to re-open these texts and reclaim their right to fairly use the cultural artifacts of their surroundings as building blocks of expression. The personal computer can deconstruct closed media texts into malleable parts of visual language that students can reconstruct into new texts. These new texts have the potential to transgress the cultural demarcation erected by big media's successful lobbying of the US Senate for restrictive copyright legislation.

## Introduction

Two primary developments in art education over the past two decades have been the proliferation of a visual culture approach to art instruction and the integration of digital media technologies into the culture and the classroom. As the field of art education struggled to define the purpose and worth of these emerging digital media technologies, it was visual cultural art educators who continually suggested and examined ways that these technologies could inform critical exploration of visual cultural forms in the art classroom. However, the specific ways in which the productive capabilities of digital media technologies could be explicitly used to help achieve this criticality have been underexplored as the discourse has focused primarily on critical analysis of popular media texts.

For example, Keifer-Boyd and Maitland-Gholson (2007) encourage art educators to have students examine films in the classroom so that they can uncover how they transmit dominant ideological messages. Briggs (2009) describes how she had students critically analyze the *Star Wars* films to learn how their visual effects contribute to the aesthetic characteristics that produce meaning. Taylor and Ballengee-Morris (2003) suggest that analysis of music videos and episodes of sitcoms would assist students in developing critical interpretive media skills. Taylor (2007) advocates that art teachers screen music videos in the classroom so that students can critically interpret them for meaning.

These research studies have been instrumental in expanding the breadth of art education to include popular and emerging media as legitimate art forms worthy of exploration in the field. These studies have also demonstrated that the art classroom can be a site for critical explorations of contemporary media. The current ubiquity of digital media making technology now allows art educators the ability to build upon the groundwork established by these innovative art educators. The accessibility of the personal computer (PC), iPad, and digital video editing software now allows art educators the opportunity to focus on the critical production of media texts in addition to the critical analysis of media texts.

Media educators Buckingham (2003) and Gauntlett (1997, 2005, 2007) believe that young people can understand the media by producing media texts in the media forms they are learning to critique. This approach of teaching *through* the media aims to “develop young people’s *understanding* of and *participation* in the media culture that surrounds them” (Buckingham, 2003, p. 13) and utilizes a “more reflective style of teaching and learning, in which students can reflect on their own activity both as readers and writers of media texts, and understand the broader economic and social factors that are in play” (p. 14).

Some art educators have presented approaches for teaching *through* media production. Chung (2007a), Black and Smith (2008), Nadaner (2008), and Trafí-Prats (2012) encourage the use of video in art education. Their approaches to video instruction are rooted in the practice of video art and therefore focus on the time-based medium as a poetic form of reflective, personal narrative and expression. These approaches to student media production are valuable as they provide for students a personal and reflective encounter with the media that is rooted in contemporary media art-making practice. With the exception of Chung (2007b), these approaches are not intended to assist students in developing the media skills they need to deconstruct the massified and consolidated forms of popular commercial media. As such, their focus is not to demystify for students how the seductive quality of commercial media texts, such as movies and music videos, is produced

through the deliberate arrangement and sequencing of formal elements. One way to do that is through a comprehensive and deconstructive media curriculum that encourages students to use the PC to tear apart and dissect popular media texts to interrogate them for meaning. This deconstructive process gives students access to the building blocks of media texts; these are the formal elements that comprise these texts and through which meaning is constructed.

In this approach, students analyze media texts and then build on the critical analytical skills they have developed by critically dismantling media texts. They use editing software to dissect scenes from movies or music videos into discrete shots and then rearrange those shots to create new media texts that critically comment on the construction of meaning in commercial media texts. Through this deconstructive media practice, students learn how meaning is constructed in popular commercial media texts through the process of media production.

What has been the impediment to the development of this type of media curriculum? Perhaps the culprit is another force that has been steadily and clandestinely gaining influence upon art education in the past several decades, media consolidation. Copyright law contains fair use provisions that allow individuals limited use of copyrighted texts for the purposes of education, critical commentary, scholarship, and the production of transformative and derivative artworks. Rampant consolidation in the media industry has led to an ever-increasing push to extend the breadth and scope of copyright law and diminish these fair use provisions of copyrighted texts for artistic, critical, educational, and research purposes (Boyle, 2008; Demers, 2006; Lasica, 2005; Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012; Vaidhyanathan, 2004). This deliberate and systematic effort to restrict access to cultural texts has led to a creative climate that is increasingly intimidating to artists and educators (Boyle, 2008; Demers, 2006; Lasica, 2005; Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012). This effort is an affront to the creative process and denies the long heritage of cultural appropriation that is central to creativity and cultural renewal (Boyle, 2008; Demers, 2006; Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012).

The most restrictive of these copyright legislations, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998, prohibits users from accessing material on any DVD containing copyrighted material for fair use provisions. The DMCA allows for a digital lock to be encoded within the software of a DVD that prevents users from copying the material from the disk to their computer to create a derivative and/or critical work from that media material, even though this is provided for in the fair use provisions of copyright law (Boyle, 2008; Lasica, 2005; Lessig, 2004; Vaidhyanathan, 2004). The prospect of apparently breaking the law, or encouraging students to break the law, is an off-putting proposition to most teachers. Therefore, it is not surprising that media art teachers would be reluctant to crack the so-called “copy protection” software on DVDs so that their students would have access to commercial media textural materials for critical deconstructive media production purposes.

Not surprisingly, students have found a way to do this on their own. The preponderance of mash-ups and tribute videos featuring copyrighted material on YouTube is evidence that many young people have found ways to circumvent copy protection software. The proliferation of these videos on YouTube may be seen as a fissure in the prohibitive copyright fence surrounding the cultural commons. But here too, the DMCA flexes its prohibitive muscle in the guise of the “notice and takedown” provision that compels

YouTube to remove any videos that copyright owners claim violate their copyright (“A Guide to YouTube Removals,” n.d.; Guo, 2008). Since its inception, over 9760 videos have been removed from YouTube for alleged copyright violation under this provision (“YouTomb,” n.d.). The ones that are allowed to stay—the mash-ups and tribute videos—do not overtly challenge or critique the form and content of the commercial media texts they appropriate. The media giants tolerate the supposed copyright violations contained in these videos because they consider them tacit promotions of their products.

Through their aggressive lobbying for passage of the DMCA, the media giants have successfully erected a digital fence around the cultural commons, enacting a cultural shift that is in the process of effectively transforming any remaining open-source cultural texts into closed *read only* texts. Essentially, the media giants can use the provisions of the DMCA to deny access to media texts or allow entrance to the cultural commons to those individuals willing to exercise their fair use provisions to produce works that conform to and uncritically promote the commercial media forms disseminated by the media conglomerates (Boyle, 2008).

As art educators, we must assist students to de-fence the currently cordoned cultural commons. In order to do this, it is crucial to understand how American copyright laws have evolved and how they affect cultural production. It is also necessary to understand how these restrictive laws can be circumvented through the use of the PC and other digital devices to provide students the ability to re-open and deconstruct these currently closed media texts into malleable parts of visual language that can be reconstructed into new texts. These new texts have the potential to transgress the cultural demarcation erected by big media’s successful lobbying of the US Senate for restrictive copyright legislation.

### **From Copyright to Copywrong**

The concept of copyright is particularly germane to the art classroom as it is predicated upon the premise of intellectual property. According to the law, intellectual property is a product of the mind. This product can manifest itself in the form of information, ideas, concepts, or other intangibles as expressed in textual form. Under copyright law the creator of intellectual property is granted limited rights of exclusivity concerning the ownership and usage of that intellectual property. Most people mistakenly assume these limited rights of ownership are equal to those rights associated with the ownership of material property (Boyle, 2008; Lessig, 2004; Vaidhyanathan, 2004).

But intellectual property is not material property. Material property is incarnate in finite, limited form. Therefore, if someone takes another individual’s material property, the person who originally possessed that object ceases to have it. The law obviously considers this theft since the original owner is now without the material property that was taken. Intellectual property is not finite or limited in form and cannot be stolen in the same manner as a material object (Boyle, 2008; Lessig, 2004; Vaidhyanathan, 2004). For instance, if an adolescent writer decides to write a short story derivative of the *Harry Potter* series of books, J.K. Rowling, the author, still has ownership of her library of *Harry Potter* books. The adolescent writer’s act of appropriation has not denied Rowling ownership of her intellectual property. The *Harry Potter* catalog of books will still exist as they did before the adolescent wrote one single word. Ultimately, the writer of that *Harry Potter* derived text has not taken the original text from its creator and so a theft in the conventional material sense has not occurred. Rowling, however, may feel that the author of the *Harry Potter*

derived text has compromised her ability to profit from her series of books by stealing away potential sales. In defense against this charge, the adolescent writer can claim that her text was created solely for personal amusement and that she used material from Rowling's books as mere inspiration for her own work.

Copyright law attempts to reconcile these competing perspectives of ownership by making intellectual property tangible, yet acknowledges the inherent limitation of granting ownership over that which cannot exist in any tangible form. It does so by granting the creator of intellectual property a copyright that guarantees the right to profit from her intellectual property for a limited amount of time. Profit can be made through sale and distribution of the text, and the copyright owner generally has the legal right to control how and where her work is distributed and utilized. These rights, however, are limited, and copyright law does allow for fair use of copyrighted texts. The principle of fair use stipulates that limited portions of a copyrighted text can be copied and used for the purposes of parody, criticism, scholarship, education, and personal use. This ensures that copyrighted texts remain open sources for examination, criticism, and elaboration as benefits the continued cultural growth of society (Boyle, 2008; Demers, 2006; Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012).

In order to further ensure unfettered access to all cultural texts, copyright law limits the amount of time a copyright holder is granted exclusive ownership of her text. After the limited period has expired the text enters the public domain and can be utilized by anyone free of charge in whatever manner she wishes. Essentially, copyright law was conceived to strike a delicate balance between the rights of the creator and the rights of society (Boyle, 2008; Demers, 2006; Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012; Vaidyanathan, 2004).

Legislation to maintain this balance was necessitated in 18th century England by the rapacious publishing practice of the Conger, a small, elite group of publishers that controlled bookselling. The Conger claimed a perpetual right to control and copy texts that it had acquired from authors. This monopoly allowed the Conger to charge prohibitive prices for the texts of such British literary giants as Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, and so forth. Access to these texts was effectively closed to all but England's wealthiest citizens. Culture was thus consolidated and maintained in the hands of a few mercenary publishers and the upper classes (Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012).

A landmark ruling by the British House of Lords in the 1774 case of *Donaldson vs. Becket* wrested monopolistic control of the British publishing industry from the Conger. The court ruled that ownership of a text would be granted only for a limited amount of time after which the work would enter the public domain and become available for anyone to publish, reproduce, or use as they wished (Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012).

Following the decision of *Donaldson vs. Beckett*, a slew of publishers in the British Commonwealth started publishing inexpensive editions of texts recently placed in the newly sanctioned public domain. For the first time in English history, the works of some of the greatest British authors were made available to the common classes (Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012).

In order to prevent the monopolization of culture as had happened in England, the United States Congress enacted the first American copyright law in 1790. The law was patterned after the British legislation and mandated the creation of a federal copyright that was



extended to authors for a length of 14 years. At the expiration of this term the author could renew the term of copyright for another 14 years. If the author was not alive at the expiration of the initial 14-year term, then the copyright could not be renewed and the work would enter the public domain (Lessig, 2004).

The terms of American copyright legislation remained as such until 1831 when the initial maximum term of copyright was extended from 28 years to 41 years. This was achieved by doubling the initial copyright term from 14 to 28 years. In 1909, Congress doubled the 14-year renewal term as well, extending the maximum copyright term to 56 years (Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012).

Limiting terms of ownership provided against the development of a cultural monopoly and encouraged creativity by providing that authors be able to profit from their creations for a set period of time before rights reverted to the public domain (Lessig, 2004; Vaidhyanathan, 2004). The development and rapid growth of the broadcast and motion picture industries profoundly altered this arrangement.

When motion pictures and audio recordings debuted shortly after the turn of the century, the limited rights granted to written texts were applied to these media texts as well. The proliferation of radio broadcasting and the advent of television broadcasting after World War II put the demand for these cultural texts at a premium. The ever-increasing number of radio and television stations could not afford to produce enough original programming to fill all of the programming hours in a day. To compensate, radio stations increasingly broadcast pre-recorded music produced by the recording industry, and television stations filled their airtime with broadcasts of old Hollywood movies. The motion picture and recording industries profited handsomely from this arrangement, and both set about protecting this most lucrative new revenue stream by lobbying Congress to amend existing copyright law (Brown, 1998; Walker, 2001; Lessig, 2001).

At their behest Congress has extended copyright 11 times since 1962. The most radical of these legislative amendments was passed in 1978. This legislation stated that for all texts created after 1978 there would be only one term of copyright, the maximum one. For “natural” authors the term was to run the length of the author’s lifetime plus fifty years. For corporations, the term was 75 years. In 1992, Congress abandoned the renewal requirement for texts produced before 1978 and extended the then maximum copyright term of 75 years to those texts. In 1998, Congress passed the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act that effectively increased the maximum term of copyright by 20 years, rendering all existing texts a maximum automatic copyright term of 95 years (Lessig, 2004).

These changes in copyright law significantly altered the breadth of the public domain. In 1972 only 15 percent of copyright owners elected to renew their copyright. That placed the average amount of time these texts passed from private ownership into the public domain at 32.2 years. After the elimination of the renewal requirement and the extension of the maximum copyright term, the average tripled from 32.2 to 95 years. Furthermore, since copyright is now automatically bestowed upon all created texts for a maximum of 95 years, it is unclear if it is even possible to produce a text exclusively for the public domain, no matter what the creator’s intention (Lessig, 2004).

The Bono Act prevented an estimated 400,000 books, movies, and songs from entering the public domain until 2019, provided Congress does not further extend the maximum length

of copyright before then (Lasica, 2005). The Bono Act ensured that these 400,000 texts would remain closed systems, unable to contribute to the cultural commons that has been the lifeblood of cultural invention and creative renewal in American society. It was a radical reinterpretation of copyright drastically favoring a business minority at the expense of the public good (Lasica, 2005; Lessig, 2004; Vaidhyanathan, 2004).

While the media conglomerates were successfully lobbying Congress to restrict access to their copyrighted texts, the leading PC and electronic media manufacturers such as Microsoft, Apple, Hewlett-Packard, and Sony started introducing digital media products into the consumer marketplace at a rapid pace. A key component in the marketing of these products was the promise of participatory media (Johnson, 2005; Lasica, 2004). With very little training, the manufacturers suggested an individual could produce films, videos, websites, posters, audio compositions, blogs, and podcasts by using the latest generation of PCs, digital capture devices, and media production software. It was the supposed dawning of a technologically mediated democracy of culture and creativity as brought to you by Bill Gates and Steve Jobs.

Fearing the potential of participatory media to encroach on their cultural stronghold, the media conglomerates successfully lobbied Congress to pass the DMCA. The DMCA granted media and technology companies the right to equip copyrighted media and digital media capture devices and PCs with so-called copy protection software. This renders it technically impossible to use your PC's DVD burner to make a copy of the latest Hollywood blockbuster once it is released to DVD. It also prevents you from importing copy-protected VHS copies of motion pictures and TV shows to your PC or digital camcorder. The media conglomerates claim this prevents wholesale piracy of their media products, but it also prohibits individuals from exercising their right to the fair use of copyrighted texts (Boyle, 2008; Lasica, 2005; Lessig, 2004; Patry, 2012; Vaidhyanathan, 2004).

The 1978 copyright act reiterated the right of individuals to fairly use a limited amount of a copyrighted text for the express purposes of parody, criticism, scholarship, education, and personal use. But the DMCA effectively challenged these provisions by making it illegal to crack the copy protection software used to restrict access to copyrighted texts. Copy protection software cannot distinguish between wholesale pirates and a user who is invoking her legitimate right to a copyrighted text for fair use purposes (Boyle, 2008; Lasica, 2005; Lessig, 2004; Vaidhyanathan, 2004).

The DMCA was intentionally conceived to curtail fair use of copyrighted texts and compromise the creative potential of participatory digital media. So while digital media technologies proliferate, the media conglomerates dictate the terms and conditions for the use and distribution of the vast majority of media texts these technologies can access for fair use purposes (Boyle, 2008; Lasica, 2005; Patry, 2012). The conglomerates will determine how, when, and why individuals can access, utilize, or critique the media texts they produce. They will control the terms of cultural exchange and in effect create a top-down system of culture dissemination with media texts issued at their discretion to be consumed on the ever-growing list of copyright protection software enabled digital media delivery devices.

## Media Consolidation, Copyright, and Culture

As the media companies were in the process of restricting access to cultural texts, the sheer volume of media texts they produced grew exponentially. Media consolidation in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in a handful of corporations controlling over 80% of cultural content and distribution channels (Dretzin & Goodman, 2001; McChesney, 1999). The monolithic structure of these corporate behemoths necessitated increased revenue flow via the production of voluminous amounts of media texts targeted directly at newly segmented demographic markets (Turow, 1997). The most lucrative of these new markets has been the teenage demographic. The current generation of teenagers is the largest group of adolescents with the most disposable income ever in the history of our consumer culture. Accordingly, they are viewed as the single most lucrative revenue stream to sustain the bottom line of the media giants (Dretzin & Goodman, 2001).

Have prohibitive changes to copyright law impacted the creativity of these media-saturated young people? A November 2002 *Newsweek* cover story on this so-called “Spielberg Nation” of adolescent “we” media producers typifies the techno-utopian sentiment prevalent at the time. The story trumpeted the supposed astonishing media fluency of this tech-savvy generation of young people who came of age during the rise of participatory media technologies. The future success of these do-it-yourself media makers was evangelized *ad nauseam* throughout the article; their rise to stardom a *fait accompli* (Levy & Wingert, 2002). Similar prognostications have been bandied about since the dawn of the digital age. Most famously, in 1991 filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola emphatically declared:

To me the great hope is that now these little video recorders are around and people who normally wouldn't make movies are going to be making them. And suddenly, one day some little fat girl in Ohio is going to be the new Mozart and make a beautiful film with her father's camcorder and for once, the so-called professionalism about movies will be destroyed, forever, and it will really become an art form. (Pikethly, 2000)

Coppola's statement predated the copyright legislation of 1992 and the passage of the Bono Act and the DMCA, both in 1998. If Coppola could have foreseen the drastic changes these legislations would have on copyright law, he might have held his tongue. If he had known, he might have realized how difficult it would become for that “little fat girl in Ohio” to make that great movie.

In Coppola's generation, filmmakers borrowed liberally from classic Hollywood movies to create dynamic and vibrant works of cinematic art. Coppola and his baby boomer peers, known collectively as the “film brats,” heralded a new golden age of American cinema in the 1970s by reinterpreting and revising traditional filmic conventions. Coppola and Martin Scorsese have freely admitted using Howard Hawks' 1932 film *Scarface* as the main textural inspiration for their gangster films. George Lucas reworked the stylistic and thematic tropes of classic war movies in his *Star Wars* franchise. John Carpenter spent a career evoking the metaphysical ruminations of good and evil as depicted in the Hollywood westerns he grew up watching. And Brian De Palma directed numerous psychological thrillers patterned after the films of Alfred Hitchcock (Pikethly, 2000).

If these filmmakers had been working under the copyright restrictive environment that exists today, they may not have been able to make the films for which they gained such

acclaim and notoriety. Also highly unlikely would have been the creative and financial success of another young filmmaker, Walt Disney (Lessig, 2004).

As a fledgling animator in 1929, Walt Disney created the first motion picture synchronized with sound. This cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, featured an animated character named Mickey Mouse. It was a parody of the previous year's motion picture blockbuster *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, which starred Buster Keaton. The buoyant motions of Mickey were synchronized to a popular song of the day written and recorded in tribute to Buster Keaton and *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (Lessig, 2004).

*Steamboat Willie* was an unmitigated sensation that catapulted both Disney and Mickey Mouse to stardom. Disney owed a large debt to fair use provisions in copyright law for the cartoon's success. If the right to use copyrighted material for parody had not been stipulated in copyright law, Disney would have been legally prohibited from referencing *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* Furthermore, the song he used as *Steamboat Willie's* soundtrack would have also been in violation of copyright for referencing *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (Lessig, 2004).

*Steamboat Willie* was the first in a long line of animated films produced by Disney that appropriated material from existing cultural texts. *Cinderella*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Jungle Book*, to name a few, borrowed liberally from texts available to all via the public domain (Lessig, 2004).

Denied the ability to liberally appropriate, adapt, and transform the content of the original texts from which he was borrowing, Disney may never have achieved the omnipotent level of success that continues to live on in the corporation that still carries his name. Ironically, The Walt Disney Company has been one of the most outspoken proponents and lobbyists for the extension of copyright and the diminishment of fair use provisions.

Walt Disney was not unique in his penchant for appropriation and elaboration. He was just the most obvious and notable artist to give electronic textural form to an oral folk tradition of cultural appropriation that predated electronic media.

Folk tales were orally transmitted from generation to generation and region to region. With each successive transmission and retelling, these stories were liberally adapted to suit the particular cultural conventions indigenous to each region and era. These textural adaptations begat similarly derivative texts that were successively adapted and transformed once again (Davidson, 1969). As incarnated in musical form, this folk music eventually evolved in America to become country and western, blues, and rock music (Van der Merwe, 1992).

This evolution can be traced by following the cultural history of one particular American composition, variously known as *To the Pines*, *In the Pines*, or *Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* Since it was first committed to tape in 1936 by Bill Monroe as a country and western dirge, this American folk traditional has variously been recorded by the likes of Leadbelly, Joan Baez, The Grateful Dead, Dolly Parton, and Nirvana. In the process the song has evolved from a solemn country ballad to a plaintive blues to a post-punk nihilistic screed. In each successive recording of the song, the artist quotes and references previous interpretations of the song while simultaneously imprinting the song with his/her own indelible style (Sound Opinions 02-18-06 footnotes, 2006).

This process of emulation, adaptation, and reinvention is the means by which individuals learn the grammar of any given media or form of cultural expression (Patry, 2012). Brian DePalma learned the art of composing a shot and constructing a narrative from copying and adapting the stylistic conventions of his cinematic hero Alfred Hitchcock (Pikethly, 2000). The Rolling Stones learned to play the blues by performing and recording cover versions of blues compositions by African-American blues artists Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and John Lee Hooker (Deane, 1995). Rap artists RUN-DMC, The Beastie Boys, and Public Enemy helped to create a new musical art form by creating dense sonic collages from samples of 1960s and 1970s rock, funk, and soul records (Boyle, 2008; Demers, 2006).

The process of constructing expressive meaning in any particular media is predicated upon the ability of individuals to access, interrogate, and deconstruct previous texts in the same media. When access to these texts is limited, so is the potential for creativity and artistic innovation. By systematically denying today's adolescents access to cultural texts, the media conglomerates are curtailing their participation in the continuum of creativity by limiting their media literacy skills.

### **Deconstructing the Consolidated Form**

The targeting of teenagers as the most lucrative consumer demographic has provided contemporary youth with an unprecedented array of media texts to consume (Dretzin & Goodman, 2001; Rushkoff, 1999). Concurrently, electronics manufacturers have marketed an ever-increasing list of participatory digital media devices to these adolescents (Johnson, 2005; Rushkoff, 1999). The proliferation of these devices and the explosion of peer-to-peer media distribution Web sites, such as YouTube, that feature user-produced content incorporating copyrighted material, would seem to counter the idea that big media is stymieing the creative freedoms of young people. However, a closer look at the user-created texts that populate YouTube reveals that users are allowed to use only copyrighted material deemed appropriate by the media conglomerates that hold the copyright for these materials.

The "notice and takedown" provision of the DMCA compels YouTube to remove videos at the request of a copyright holder. The claimant does not have to actually prove how the offending video violates the copyright she holds; the claimant just has to submit a claim via e-mail to YouTube requesting removal of the video. YouTube then removes the video and notifies the user who uploaded the video that her video was removed for copyright violation. No further information is provided ("A Guide to YouTube Removals," n.d.; Guo, 2008).

Through the "notice and takedown" provision of the DMCA, the media conglomerates can request the removal of any YouTube video that contains portions of media texts for which they hold the copyright ("A Guide to YouTube Removals," n.d.; Guo, 2008). Yet, re-cut trailers for major studio motion pictures, mash-up music videos featuring major label recording artists, and tribute videos featuring copyrighted footage of celebrities such as Justin Bieber are allowed to proliferate on YouTube as long as they do not parody those copyrighted texts in a manner that is perceived by the studios to be damaging to their brands. According to the contours of this tacit agreement, YouTube users can employ their technical savvy to appropriate copyrighted material as long as it assists in the promotion and marketing of commercial media texts. When this appropriation veers toward trenchant criticism of these media texts, it risks crossing a threshold of corporate acceptability and removal from YouTube (Jenkins, 2006). This sends the message to young media producers

that there is a *proper* way to appropriate copyrighted texts. Through this process the media giants ensure that the consolidated grammar of forms that create meaning in commercial media texts are the de facto language of the media. (It should be noted that YouTube is in the process of removing itself from its focus on media conglomerate endorsed user-generated videos and moving toward even more commercial media forms. It was recently reported in the *New York Times* (Sisario, 2012) that YouTube has hired former MTV and VH1 producers to create 100 new channels of content, including a channel dedicated to promoting the products of the Warner Music Group.)

Devil's bargains that offer limited media participation in exchange for an illusory loosening of copyright restriction are instrumental in the creation of a generation of technically savvy young people literate enough in digital media production to create texts that mimic commercial media texts, but not fluent enough in their knowledge of media production to critically analyze and deconstruct the texts they mimic. Quite often, in my opinion, the texts these young people produce simply regurgitate conventions absorbed from commercial media. This regurgitation reinforces big media's conglomerated monopoly on culture and assures the perpetuation of these uncritical commercial media forms for future tech savvy, yet indiscriminate generations.

It is easy to see how this incomplete form of media literacy could be mistaken for true media fluency. After all, the ability of students to effortlessly create and upload videos to YouTube appears impressive. However, the facile ability of students to create slideshow tributes to Demi Lovato and re-cut trailers for the latest *Twilight* movie should not be applauded for their mere existence and assumed as evidence of a critical media consciousness.

In his groundbreaking literacy text *Education for Critical Consciousness*, educational theorist Paulo Freire cautioned educators against making such assumptions. He warned against mistaking incomplete, naïve or transitory consciousness for true critical consciousness. According to Freire, the individual who has developed a naïve consciousness is semi-literate. She has a superficial understanding of words and language, yet is not literate enough to comprehend how these words can be utilized to manipulate and control. Freire warns that a society filled with semi-literate individuals is likely to fall into a state of massification (Freire, 1973).

Freire obviously correlates literacy to language. But his concepts of literacy can be easily related to electronic media as well. Every media has its own set of grammatical rules that facilitate the construction of meaning (McLuhan, 1965). A superficially media literate individual may be able to process enormous volumes of media texts per day and produce facsimiles of these texts with great technical facility, but until that individual understands how discrete components of cultural data are arranged and contextualized to create meaning, she will lack the critical faculties necessary to develop a truly critical media consciousness. To do that she must learn the grammar of media at an advanced level so that she can develop the faculties to understand the entire process of mass cultural production and hegemony.

Critically conscientious art educators can facilitate this process. However, they must realize that the development of the ability to comprehensively read and write the media is a slow and gradual process. First, the student must learn the meaning of images, sounds, or other formal textural components that are the primary conveyors of information in media

communication. Next, the educator shows the student how to assemble (edit) these components to express ideas or concepts that are greater than the individual components. The components utilized and the means of assembly grow more sophisticated as the student advances. And the educator introduces progressively more sophisticated constituent components and assemblage strategies. Through this scaffolded process, students can progress from producing indiscriminately re-cut movie trailers toward sophisticated critiques of the structure of commercial media-making practice.

The PC can expedite this process. Its ability to process culture into malleable bits and bytes of information allows for the deconstruction of media texts into discreet chunks of grammar. This deconstructive capability allows students to interrogate texts in a manner previously unimaginable. A scene from a film can be downloaded into a PC, disassembled into individual shots, and then reassembled again. A popular song can be input into a PC and then remixed and re-edited to critically highlight formal or thematic elements of the recording or composition that were previously buried in the text.

These activities allow the student to free media texts from the limited forms they have come to inhabit from years of commercial massification and copyright prohibition. When a student uses the PC to break down a film or song to its base components, she is wresting that text from its linear narrative. Rather than passively experiencing the text in the ordered sequence of beginning to end, she has pulled it apart from side to side and top to bottom. The text has been opened up for interpretation from all perspectives and is accessible in its entirety (Landow, 2005; Rushkoff, 1997). The student is now free to scour the disassembled chunks of textural data for meaning and recontextualize them to produce an original text. The student is no longer just a consumer of the text, but a co-conspirator in the construction of meaning and culture that the text embodies. She has re-claimed that previously prohibited text and its associated means of production. She has learned and exploited the grammar of media production to her own ends and produced a critical text that challenges the cultural didacticism of big media. (To view examples of critical media texts from a class I taught with media artist Kerry Richardson in 2003, see <http://artplusmedia.net/art+media/cut+paste+video.html>.)

It is through this technologically mediated process that students can truly achieve a critical media consciousness. Media art educators such as Chung (2007a), Black and Smith (2008), Nadaner (2008), and Trafi-Prats (2012) whose pedagogies are based upon fine art conceptions of media art—such as video art and the personal narrative video essay—use the PC and digital media to engage students in reflective and expressive encounters with and through the media. This manner of media engagement is extremely valuable for students as it allows them to use familiar technologies as tools of empowerment and expression, rather than instruments of consumption and distraction. I suggest taking the process a step further in order to fully exploit the truly unique aspect of the PC and digital media: their innate ability to reduce all cultural information to reproducible and malleable bits of information that can be rearranged and recontextualized for the creative purposes of scholarship, criticism, and textural production.

As an art-making tool, the PC has no set usage. It is multimodal and does not distinguish between high art and low art, fine art and popular art, video, audio, photo, illustration, etc. (Duncum, 2004). All media input created on the PC are equally incarnated as series of binary numbers. This numerical data are the new building blocks of culture. Their fluidity and elasticity challenge the locked-down, read-only brand of *hard* culture promulgated by

big media. The polymorphous nature of bytes and bits dissolves the rigid borders of media texts ossified by decades of increased copyright prohibition.

Art educators can facilitate this process by embracing the PC and digital media technologies as tools of cultural, educational, and political liberation. They can encourage their students to use these technologies to tear down the DMCA-erected fence that encloses the cultural commons and unlock the media texts entombed within (Nelson, 1987; Stallman, 2002). Doing so would provide students a critical, participatory, and transformative encounter with the media that pushes beyond You Tube's illusory promise of equal participation and fulfills the potential of the "we" media generation.



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## Graffiti Walls: Migrant Students and the Art of Communicative Languages

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### Abstract

Visual Arts help to create communicative actions between teachers and students. In this article, we explain the interdisciplinary methodology –Visual Arts and Language Arts– utilized by three teachers and one faculty member at San Diego State University. The purpose of the project was to create a common ground and a shared agreement based on linguistic codes utilized in the classroom. For four weeks, forty-five high-school sophomore migrant students and the teaching team discussed and analyzed poetry, short stories, graphic novels, and movies. They later created visual expressions –Cultural Tags and Graffiti Walls –that reflected students’ views about their cultural identities. The outcomes of this project stressed the importance of preserving Visual Arts Education as a pivotal element for the development of students’ communication skills.

## Introduction

Human communication takes place at two levels, at the same time: a message is expected to have a meaning *and* the message is expected to contain information (Leydesdorff, 2000, p. 275)

Language is one of the vehicles through which high school students express themselves and make sense of the deeds and words of others. Students talk *with* and listen *to* their peers while playing outside, having lunch or simply when they move from classroom to classroom. Most of these interactions are created to establish or to maintain a social link between the individuals as well as to share meaningful information. There is consent among the students on the codes and tones to be used in these conversations. Without being instructed, students develop communicative actions that use language to actively build understanding; while talking and listening, they compare and contrast their individual ideas within a shared world, developing contentions that can either be acknowledged or denied (Habermas, 1985). Languages within this context are tools equally owned by participants who share significance and knowledge.

In contrast, when students enter the classroom, human communication often turns into strategic exchanges between teachers and students. Teachers talk *to* the students rather than *with* the students, which somehow impedes the students' partaking in the language (Appleman, 2009; Copeland, 2005). Here, the languages used by teachers and the ones used by students differ from each other; hence, there is a struggle on the students' side to master and to understand the teacher's language; and there is a challenge on the teacher's side to build shared agreement with students about information acquired and meanings communicated (Gallagher, 2009).

The struggle depicted above increases when students who are participating in these communicative interactions are from migrant populations. Their constant mobility from school to school, from state to state – following the harvesting seasons – and the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) of these students add an extra difficulty in the attempt to reach a common ground where students and teachers might “speak the same language.” Moreover, Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Chu Clewell (2001) note that “the organization of secondary schools into subject departments (mathematics, sciences, social sciences) created barriers to integrating language and content learning for students with LEP. The departmentalization of secondary schools also effectively barred language and content teachers to improve im[migrant] student outcomes” (p. 4). Departmentalized education *fences* the voices of migrant students within the areas comprised in the Language Arts curricula. Most subject area courses focus on the transmission of content, thus limiting solely to Language Arts classes the space where students can refine and enhance their language. When communication is the exclusive property of English class, then art, science, history, music, and many other subjects become voiceless subjects (hooks, 2009).

Instead, as stated by Kozoll, Osborne and García (2003) in their analysis of research on migrant students, in order to create communicative actions teachers must “accept students as they are, with the language they speak at home and the value systems they live within” (p. 579). Communicative action, within this context, is defined as the capacity and willingness of teachers and students to listen to and adopt each other's languages, and from there, develop a common language without excluding each other's perspective (Habermas, 2001). Moreover, communicative action avers that constant dialogue between teachers and

students nurtures a Participatory Pedagogy, in which both groups are equal heirs (Ochoa & Ochoa, 2004). Participatory Pedagogy implies the “informational efficiency of pedagogic communication” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000, p. 71) to link teachers’ rhetoric and students’ utterances. Moreover, Participatory Pedagogy is a new way to reach migrant students, who, though often silent, have powerful voices within themselves waiting for an opportunity to dialogue with their teachers about who they are and how they see themselves in their communities. Boler (2006) supports this need for dialogue when she poses and answers the question, “What is this desire for dialogue? The commonsense answer is that it has to be a good thing to be able to communicate across difference” (p. 57).

Following this concept of creating communication across difference (i.e., across instructors’ discourse and students’ voices), three teachers –Loreta, Esmeralda, and Celia<sup>1</sup> –and Farabundo, a faculty member from the Division of Education at San Diego State University-Imperial Valley (SDSU-IV), designed an interdisciplinary curriculum that combined various artistic expressions – poetry, photography, drawing, painting, tagging, and graffiti –with Language Arts skills. They designed this curriculum to de(fence) the voices, often silenced by schools, of forty-two sophomore high school migrant students attending the 2011 Migrant Summer Academy (MSA) co-organized by the Migrant Program at the Imperial Valley Office of Education (ICOE) and SDSU-Imperial Valley. The main goal of this summer academy is to enhance incoming sophomore high school migrant students’ learning processes with a non-traditional, student-centered curriculum that fosters communicative actions between teachers and students by using multidimensional language(s): visual language, written language, spoken language, and cultural language among others.

Each teacher was in charge of a group of twelve students. The faculty member supervised the teachers, provided small group coaching to students in need of extra support, and facilitated the pre-teaching and post-teaching dialogues. For four weeks, students and the teaching team a) wrote and drew their bio-poems that describe their personas and responded to the question, “Who am I?”; b) created “Cultural Tree Collages,” with pictures taken by them with disposable cameras; c) drew “Cultural Tags” that depicted in a single signature their cultural identity; and d) assembled these tags to create “Graffiti Walls.” These activities and artifacts are explained more fully in subsequent sections.

To analyze how the aforesaid assignments nurtured communicative actions between teachers and students as well as to empower students’ voices and ideas, the teaching team --the three teachers and the faculty -- met twice a day: before they began to teach and after the three hours of teaching and learning. The meeting before teaching was set to provide the space for all four members to share their ideas on how they would be working with the students on the core assignments (i.e., bio-poems, cultural tags). It is important to underscore that although the project had common-core assignments, every team member had the freedom to create her/his own way to develop communicative actions. The meeting after teaching was a debriefing session where each teacher talked about how assignments engaged students and themselves in communicative actions. The main goal for both meetings was to constantly review practices in order to refine and reshape communicative action across interdisciplinary teaching practices.

During these daily meetings, the faculty member took fieldnote descriptions of what was shared by every teacher during the meetings. The faculty member also recorded fieldnote

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<sup>1</sup> People’s names in this article are pseudonyms.

descriptions to document what he observed in the three classrooms and outdoor activities when teachers and students were working on the core assignments. In both scenarios, writing fieldnotes was much more than “passively copying down ‘facts’ about ‘what happened’” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 8). The faculty member was involved in “active processes of interpretation and sense-making” (p. 8). These processes of constructing meaning were extended when once a week he discussed with the whole team his thoughts and understanding of what he had observed and recorded in the field: meetings, classrooms, outdoors activities. Finally, after the Migrant Summer Academy concluded, every teacher wrote a final reflection on the whole project around two main themes: how the interdisciplinary curriculum ‘bonded’ students and teachers in communicative actions and how the Migrant Summer Academy had transformed her views on teaching and learning. All these sets of data framed the thematic narrative included in this article, which is a response to the general topic or question: Can a curriculum that fosters communicative actions by combining oral, reading, and writing skills with visual expression enhance students’ language skills, critical thinking, and creativity? What follows is the analysis of common-core assignments and how those provided a place to construct communicative spaces between students and teachers.

### Establishing Art: We Read, Therefore We Create

Students participating in the Migrant Summer Academy come from high schools where Visual Arts are overlooked subjects. In many cases, as they expressed throughout the Academy, Visual Arts were not even part of their curriculum activities. As Mel, a student, said, “Drawing and painting is something we did when we were in elementary school. We like to do it but now we just read and write” (personal communication, 6/21/2011). Thus, teachers and faculty, in order to set the ground for communicative actions, meticulously scaffolded an ‘intellectual commute’ from the text to oral and written language to visual expressions – sketching, drawing, painting, spraying, tagging – and back to the text (See Figure 1).

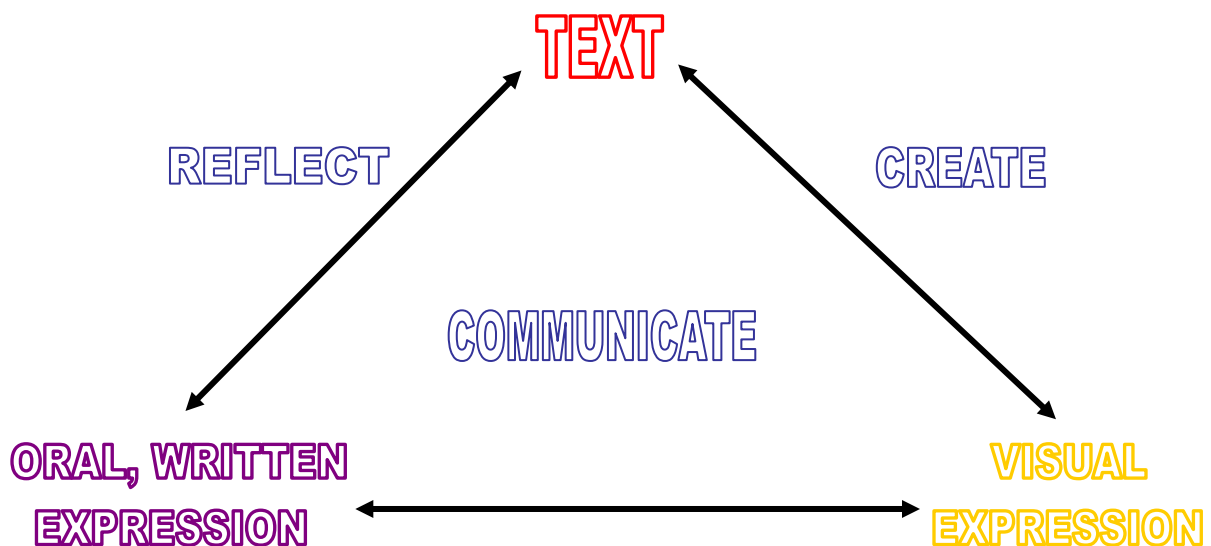


Figure 1. Intellectual commute.

The first component of this intellectual commute included a dialogic reading and analysis of contemporary written texts: Tupac Shakur's (1999) poetry, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, Gene Luen Yang's (2006) graphic novel *American Born Chinese*, Sandra Cisneros's (1984) short stories in *The House on Mango Street*, and the cinematographic version of Ned Vizzini's (2006) novel *It's Kind of a Funny Story*. Migrant students and teachers read extracts of those texts and proceeded, following Barrett's (1999) continuum when interpreting art: to reflect on what was read; to wonder about the author's purpose; and to respond to the opinions of others. These three activities "broke the ice" for those reticent students who struggled to share their thoughts. Etienne, a student, explained, "When I am reading and talking with you [his teacher], it does not feel like I am forced to learn. I feel like I can write like Tupac. I feel more like asking questions than answering" (personal communication, 6/23/2011). Etienne's words portray some of the features, as mentioned before, that Habermas (1985) describes when talking about communicative actions. He declares that the uses of language are "... reaching understanding ... relating to a world ... [and] reciprocally rais[ing] validity claims that can be accepted or contested" (p. 99).

The second step was to expose students to the concept that a reflection and/or a literary analysis could take the form of a drawing, a tag, and/or graffiti. The challenge at this point was two-fold: first, to convince students that everyone was able to produce a visual reflection; and, second, to stress the power of visual arts to position themselves within the students' culture and community. Some students, when they were asked to add an image to their initial written reflection, felt somehow skeptical and insecure: "I do not know how to draw," "What do I draw about?," "Draw, to express my ideas?" These reactions reflect some of the weaknesses of our current schooling, which primarily asks students to report rather than to create (Lutz Klauda, 2009; Morais & Kolinsky, 2004). Hence, as Hetland, Winner, Veenema, Sheridan and Perkins (2007) explain when describing the benefit of visual arts education, the key task for the teaching team was to explicitly show students that visual arts and language arts share common skills "that comprise high-quality thinking" (p. 1). High quality thinking in this project was defined as first, the students' ability to abstract and synthesize by using visual images what the author (i.e., Tupac, Sandra Cisneros) was communicating through their written texts; and, second, their capacity to compare and contrast their own interpretations with their peers' in order to cooperatively create productive responses (Rothstein & Santana, 2011).

The last step in this commute connected the students' visual expression back to written text. At this point students and teachers reflected on how their drawings, paintings, and/or graffiti represented their understanding of the text, as well as how much of their visual expressions were a portrait of who they are, how they think, and why they respond in certain ways. As Marshall (2008) points out in her research of cultural identity and creative processes, "We all have a cultural identity that is formed by family, community, country and the world in which we live" (p. 1); thus students should be given a chance to reflect critically on their cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, Buffington and Muth (2011) stress the importance of creating links between visual arts and literary work as a "coalition" to analyze the lives and experiences of students.

The next two sections describe how students and teachers traversed this intellectual commute by constructing a path of communicative actions nourished by oral, written, and visual reflections.



### Cultural Tags: 'Depicted Me'

If graffiti is a window of culture, as has often been stated, then it is the same window that people use to look in on themselves as they actively construct the guidelines and concerns of their lives. (Phillips, 1999, p. 21)

In the Imperial Valley, like in many other places, tagging, used as group identification, is associated with gangs and street groups. Within this context, tagging is used to communicate territoriality, identity, and sentiments and often connotes violence.<sup>2</sup> Yet, tagging, utilized as an individual identification, can be a form of human art used by political activists to make statements or by individuals who want to be heard by their society (Gastman & Neelon, 2011). This idea of communication between individuals or individuals and their society framed the Cultural Tag Project. However, before students and the teaching team began to conceptualize how different artists “tag” their cultural voices and social opinions through different forms of expression, they talked about how/if tagging defined their communities and how their families, friends, and neighbors reacted to this phenomenon. The goal of this quick exercise was to demystify views on tagging by openly discussing why certain groups used this form of expression. It was important to cover this aspect because most of the students, as expressed during the dialogue, linked tagging with *cholo* [gang] activities. As Ramon said, “Tagging is for *cholos*” (personal communication, 7/6/2011). Ramon’s comment and many others are the outcome of an educational system that educates students to assume without evidence rather than to think, research, and contextualize answers.

To break this cycle of assuming without thinking, the teaching team initiated the first stage of the intellectual commute, previously described; first, by dialoguing on how individuals define and distinguish their cultural tags; second, by reflecting on and identifying the key elements that tag/depict their individuality; and third, by designing their own individual tags to communicate and express their identity.

Dialogues were framed by what Hamamura, Heines, and Paulhus (2008) call dialectical thinking, which occurs when dialoguing/communicating with others. Students and the teaching team read, discussed, and reflected on four sources:

- “Family Tree,” a poem by Tupac Shakur (1999), that starts with this stanza:  
“Because we all spring/from different trees/we are not created equal . . .” (p. 115).
- “Those Who Don’t,” a short story by Sandra Cisneros (1984), explaining how safe we feel when we are surrounded by those whom we know, and yet how afraid we feel when we go to places where everyone looks different from us: “All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight” (p. 28).
- An excerpt from *American Born Chinese* (2006) in which Gene Yang portrays how a Chinese high school student (CS) refuses to be friends with a newcomer from Taiwan (TS):  
CS: “You are in America, speak English”  
TS: “...Eh... You-you-Chinese Person?”

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<sup>2</sup> Hector Tobar, 10/10/2009, A former tagger searches for a new means of expression:  
[www.streetgangs.com](http://www.streetgangs.com)

CS: "Yes"

TS: "...Eh...we-b-friend?"

CS: "I have enough friends" (pp. 37-38).

- And a scene from the movie *It's Kind of a Funny Story*, (2010, Anna Boden & Ryan Fleck) showing the main character, Craig, a clinically depressed teenager, talking with his psychiatrist about the pressures that teenagers experience to be successful even before they begin college.

Moving from poetry to narrative, from graphic novels to cinematographic expressions, students and the teaching team searched for how all these artists – poets, novelists, cartoonists, and actors/characters – face the process of constructing their personal cultural tags/marks by challenging the views others might have about their culture, language, personality, and/or behavior.

During the analysis of cultural tags/marks, Martha, one of the students, said, "It is amazing to see how all these artists use their own voice to express who they are. Tupac hip-hops. Sandra writes. Yang draws fun cartoons. And Craig draws buildings to express his feelings" (personal communication, 7/6/2011). Following Martha's comment, Araceli added, "More than that, they found a way to talk with us about themselves and we enjoyed reading and knowing about them" (personal communication, 7/6/2011). And Seraphim, in one of her written reflections stated, "They all seem *como si tuviesen un problema que resolver* [as if they had a problem to solve]. I think they write and draw to feel better about themselves" (personal communication, 7/6/2011).



Figure 2. Fatima's cultural tag "Mask".

After reflecting on the expressions created by other artists, students began to construct their Cultural Tags by drawing a Tag that symbolizes who they are, their voice, and their view about today's society. Fatima, one of the students, sketched a Cultural Tag (See Figure

2) titled “Mask,” which portrayed rephrasing her words: how people hide behind their masks, never unveiling their true feelings or their true selves. Presenting her Tag, she depicted herself, “You think I am quiet and shy. But I am not. I have thousands of things I want to share with you. There is a person behind the mask” (personal communication, 7/7/2011). Moreover, when connecting “Mask” with the readings, she expressed in a written reflection that Tupac, Sandra Cisneros, Yang, and Craig taught her to be proud of where she comes from and to value her past because “in the end that is what makes me, ‘me’” (personal communication, 7/7/2011).



Figure 3: Alexia's cultural tag “Believe”.

Another student, Alexia, focused her Cultural Tag (See Figure 3) on the word *believe*. Describing her tag she said,

My parents came to this country because they believed that it would be better for us. More opportunities, a chance to be successful. I also believe that I can be successful. My tag shows who I am, a believer like Tupac who felt like a rose growing in concrete, but he was strong enough to show everyone that he was smart. I am like Esperanza, a strong woman who wanted to have her own house. They always have a positive attitude *aunque se les tuerza* [even though things do not go their way]. I would like to think my community sees me as a positive person. (personal communication, 7/7/2011)

The two Cultural Tags (See Figures 2 and 3) and the others created by their classmates are examples of the communicative actions created by migrant students and teachers. Drawing provided students with the opportunity to voice their cultural identity. Shifting from the written word to visual expressions lowered the affective filter LEP students have when attempting to use their new language in academic settings (Cummins, 2000). Moreover,

linking language and art wherein language can be displayed empowered students by providing them with a new tool to depict their thoughts. As Toto, one of the students, said, “It is the first time I used drawing to answer questions. My teachers always ask me to answer questions repeating what they told me before. Drawing makes me think and I like it” (personal communication 7/6/2011). Cultural Tags reinforced the foundation of a Participatory Pedagogy, which underlines the idea of communication between students and teachers as the core for meaningful, cooperative learning across the disciplines of language arts and art.

### Graffiti Walls: Me in We

Following the Cultural Tags Project, students designed Graffiti Walls including all the Cultural Tags created by the students in each class. To connect the Cultural Tags and the Graffiti Walls, students and teachers visited The Goffen Contemporary at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles to see *Art in the Streets*. This exhibit “traces the development of graffiti and street art from the 1970s to the global movement it has become today, concentrating on key cities where a unique visual language or attitude has evolved.”<sup>3</sup> Observing and analyzing the art work displayed at the museum exposed students to artists such as Lee Quiñones, Margaret Kilgallen, and Shepard Fairey, who have used graffiti and street art to voice their thoughts, as well as to the work of other artists, like Keith Haring and Jean Michel Basquiat, whose pieces also reflect the art made within a community.

Jaro, one of the students, was surprised to see these art pieces in a museum: “I always imagined a museum like a dark, quiet room with old people watching portraits of kings and queens. Here everyone is talking and having fun” (personal communication, 7/12/2011) Listening to Jaro’s words, it was obvious that for most of the students this visit to MOCA was their first time in a museum. Beyond the goal set by the teaching team, which was to connect and to provide a frame for the Cultural Tags and the Graffiti Walls, visiting the museum revealed to the students that art is a human, communicative action used by people who want to share with others how they relate to their world by visually expressing claims –art work – that can be accepted or contested (Habermas, 1985).



Figure 4: Cultural tags into graffiti walls.

<sup>3</sup> MOCA-Pressroom, 3/9/2011, *Art in the Streets*: <http://www.moca.org/audio/blog/?p=1522>

The teaching team developed the Graffiti Walls Project in order to extend the socio-cultural relation between students and their environment expressed in their Cultural Tags by combining these individual expressions in a communal piece that embodied the idea of shared language across personal statements. Starting with an empty piece of butcher paper (See Figure 4) students connected their individual expressions by talking and analyzing how these pieces better fitted together to construct a stronger common claim. While drawing, coloring, painting and spraying the Graffiti Walls, students and teachers continued reading and analyzing poems by Tupac Shakur: “Where There Is Will There Is Way”; short stories by Sandra Cisneros: “The Three Sisters,” “A House On My Own,” and “Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes”; and they finished reading Yang’s graphic novel *American Born Chinese*. As Cummins (1994) explains,

Language is always used for some purpose, and thus, we must examine what purposes of language are promoted in the classroom interactions that students experience. Language is also never devoid of content, so the nature of the content that students are exposed to in learning [it] must be considered. (p. 33)

Maintaining the intellectual commute by reading, reflecting, expressing, and connecting was key when showing evidence that art could be a vehicle for students and teachers who challenge themselves to equally own and use academic language and its content.

Little by little the empty paper became a colorful wall displaying students’ cultural tags that were enriched by connecting all the individual expressions. As can be observed in Figure 5, when Fatima drew her tag “Mask” on the graffiti wall, she added drawings around the mask representing an imaginary forest that protects her. Then, she drew a big eye after one her classmates told her that even though she tries to hide, somebody is always looking at of her. These dialogues are examples of the artistic synergies conveyed in the graffiti wall. Teachers working in the Migrant Summer Academy highlighted the transformation students showed throughout the academy. Esmeralda, one of the teachers, said,



When they [students] came, they were quiet; nobody wanted to talk. Now I am looking at them drawing and spraying at the graffiti wall and they do not stop talking. They are always asking questions. When I am coloring with them, I do not even feel that I am teaching, but I am. (personal communication, 7/13/2011).

Figure 5: We, the graffiti wall.

Loreta and Celia, the two other teachers, were amazed by the skills their students displayed when constructing the graffiti wall. In one of the debriefings they both shared, “They [the students] are unbelievable. They spray like professional graffiti artists. But the most incredible thing is that those who were quiet during our reading activities are now talking non-stop about their drawings, the readings, and most importantly about themselves” (personal communication, 7/13/2011).

Every project – Poems, Collages, Tags, and Graffiti – designed by the teaching team for the Migrant Summer Academy promoted communication between students and teachers. Moreover, the graffiti wall was a comprehensive activity to fuse all the communicative actions spawned throughout the session. As Nino, one of the students described, “Every project was amazing, but the graffiti wall was just so different that it captivated me” (personal communication, 7/14/2011). Pamela, his classmate agreed: “It was nice to see that despite everyone’s own vision on the graffiti wall, we were able to pull off an awesome piece that represented all of us” (personal communication, 7/14/2011).

### **Conclusions: Art, Communication and Education**

At the beginning of the 2011 Migrant Summer Academy when the teaching team asked the students to share their views on reading, writing, and visual arts, most of them responded that reading and writing were boring and that the required classes to graduate from high school did not include visual arts. Mario, a student, summarized it when he said,

We read to answer questions. We write to explain what the teacher said. We are not asked to write about what we think. Forget about drawing. The funny thing is that when we are bored in class listening to the teacher talk, the first thing we do is to draw something.  
(personal communication, 6/22/2011)

Reading through Mario’s words and other comments shared by his peers, it is obvious that high school students typically spend most of their language learning time in passive activities. Though it is extremely important that students learn how to construct and present arguments, to comprehend a text and/or to write an essay, it is equally important that students be exposed to visual and performing arts and also acquire competency and skills when responding to a reading or when expressing their views about themselves and/or social issues.

The 2011 Summer Academy provided students with the space to combine oral, reading, and writing skills with visual expression. Art enhanced students’ language skills because they were able to do the following:

- a) Experiment with different forms of expression: “All the activities gave me the freedom to complete an assignment fulfilling my own vision, rather than a set of instructions that demanded to be followed” (Lupe, student, personal communication, 7/14/2011).
- b) Own their work: “ Art allowed students to take ownership of their learning, and when they do that, they want their work to be their absolute best” (Celia, teacher, personal communication, 7/12/2011).
- c) Empower themselves: “Through language and art I learned to appreciate the strange and the unspoken, the underground work of those who hide in the shadows.

I embraced my culture, my roots. I'm a new person who is no longer ashamed”  
(Fatima, student, personal communication, 7/13/2011).

To obtain these outcomes, teachers challenged themselves by seeing and analyzing with different eyes, they challenged students to create new ways to voice their thoughts and ideas. Teachers and students engaged in art and communication that transcended departmentalized approaches to instruction. Students in the 2011 Migrant Summer Academy learned that meaningful education – teaching and learning – becomes an art of communicative languages. This art of communicative languages informed the art exhibit (See Figure 6) created by students and teachers, which included the graffiti walls, cultural tags, their poems, and cultural collages among other pieces.



Figure 6: We de(fence)d and communicated.

### Implications: Communicative Schooling

In *L'escola contra el món* [School against the world], Luri (2008) describes an encounter between Socrates, the Greek philosopher, and some of his pupils:

*Un dia que Sòcrates dialogava amb un grup de joves . . . es va fixar que n'hi havia un que no obria la boca. Tots els altres li feien preguntes, li donaven respostes . . . però aquell continuava immutable . . . Finalment Sòcrates el va mirar i li va demanar: 'Parla, perquè et vegi'* [One day Socrates was talking with a group of young people . . . he saw that one of them was completely quiet. Everyone else was asking him questions, answering questions . . . but one remained quiet . . . Finally Socrates looked at him and told him: 'Talk to me so I can see you']. (p. 213)

Nowadays, schools have thousands of students like the one described above. They come to class and sit quietly; perhaps they have nothing to say; maybe they do not understand what

the teacher is saying; or they do not know how to express their thoughts. Whichever the case, they are missing an important aspect of education, which is to communicate with peers and teachers. The challenge for schools is to find ways that teachers and students can effectively communicate, which enriches learning (Castells, 2011). In order to be able to listen, read and write, it is important that students use, on a daily basis, other forms of expression – drawing, painting, dancing – to create communicative actions with their teachers and peers when analyzing texts and/or expressing personal experiences and feelings.

The model described in this article is presented as a tool for fostering critical and creative thinking, a multidimensional skill that equally feeds from every subject – Language Arts, Art, Math, Science, Social Studies –taught at school. Privileging one subject over others tracks and delimits students' thinking. Rather, let students talk, draw, write, paint and tag so we can see them.



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## “Silencing” the Powerful and “Giving” Voice to the Disempowered: Ethical Considerations of a Dialogic Pedagogy

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### Abstract

As an educator who is committed to social justice, I bring certain values and political commitments to the classroom. The counter-hegemonic voices that I bring into the classroom in the form of constructs, readings, assignments, discussions, and visual culture challenge more often than confirm students' world-views and assumptions. The question that arises for me is whether I am silencing students' voices through my teaching practices. Does my support of dialogic articulations and interests constitute privileging one “truth” or discourse over another? If so, am I using dialogue as a rhetorical device to persuade or to indoctrinate my students according to beliefs that I personally find emancipating? These are certain beliefs that, frankly, some students in my courses have met with various acts of resistance, ranging from disapproving silence to outright rejection. In this investigation, I reflect on the limits of dialogue in tension within my own teaching, and explore the function of dialogue and dialogism in relationship to pedagogy.

**“Silencing” the Powerful and “Giving” Voice to the Disempowered:  
Ethical Considerations of a Dialogic Pedagogy**

As an educator who is committed to social justice, I bring certain values and political commitments to the classroom. The counter-hegemonic voices that I bring into the classroom in the form of constructs, readings, assignments, discussions, and visual culture challenge more often than confirm students’ world-views and/or assumptions. Influenced by Paulo Freire’s theories of education, Ronald David Glass (2004) has written extensively on the potential of education as a practice of freedom. Yet, he concludes that educators consistently silence certain voices and amplify others through the selections they make for the curriculum, the structure of assignments and assessments, and the overall classroom environment. Similarly, Nicholas C. Burbules (2004) observes that the commitments of socially engaged teachers often determine what is discussed and which views are heard and validated. The question that arises for me is whether I am silencing students’ voices through my teaching practices. Does the support of dialogic articulations and interests constitute privileging or defending one “truth” or discourse over another? If so, am I using dialogue as a rhetorical device to persuade or to indoctrinate my students according to beliefs that I personally find emancipating? These are certain beliefs that, frankly, some students in my courses have met with various acts of resistance, ranging from disapproving silence to outright rejection. In this investigation, I use Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1984) theory of *dialogism* to reflect on the limits of dialogue in tension within my own teaching and explore the function of dialogue and dialogism in relationship to pedagogy.

The stories or pedagogical encounters that I *remix*, i.e., recollect, interpret, recreate, and retell to use Lev Manovich’s (2005) term, are composite narratives<sup>1</sup> that I hope capture the essence of my teaching experiences at two different universities. For me, interrogation and contestation of controversial issues are processes that are needed for dialogic teaching and learning. In this, I am compelled to take a stance or defend the idea that as educators we must not only accept but also embrace education as a contested space. Sites of contestation are not inimical to dialogue but vital and constitutive of dialogic relations. In fact, tension-filled places of learning offer valuable working spaces to *de (fence)* or transverse barriers. By transversal, I am referring to a stance that claims a critical middle ground. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) characterize the middle as a place that gets its strength and energy from the oppositional forces that surround it.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, I encourage students to raise questions, voice reservations, and discuss disagreements in relationship to course content through written journals and during class discussion. There have been occasions when students’ dissenting voices have openly and categorically condemned difference and diversity (ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) in a highly negative way—a position that in my teaching experience is most often used to support what students identify as conservative political and religious worldviews.

In my university teaching experience, particularly in courses geared toward elementary education and art education majors, students are primarily female and Caucasian. Most

often, the students self-identify as middle-class, holding conservative political views, and as supporters of conservative Christian values. The multiple subject positions that shape my personal and professional realities, for the most part, are historically, politically, and culturally different from my students'.<sup>3</sup> In addition to identifying with the political and Evangelical Right, during class discussion, students in my courses often named reality shows with plenty of partying, semi-nudity, and intimacy scenes (e.g., *The Kardashians* and *Jersey Shore*) as their favorite television programs. Paradoxically, the same students wrote in their journals that some of the course content was “offensive,” and perhaps worse, “irrelevant.” Some students were especially opposed to topics that dealt with gender and sexuality and with artworks that depicted nudity. The intent here is not to evaluate the choices students make regarding visual culture but to point out perhaps the obvious: multiple and contradictory subject positions shape students’ perspectives and agency. Yet, students in my courses often failed to recognize that these multiple discourses are not separate but rather competing ideological systems and subject positions that are inescapably connected, however distant or incompatible they might appear to their common sense. I now turn to these conversations.

### **De (Fence):**

#### **The Interjection of Poetic Language, Picking up Speed in The Middle**

Despite the blizzard-like weather, only a few students were late to my Introduction to Women in the Arts and Humanities course. For this particular class, I asked students to write down the names of female visual artists whose work they admired. Out of a class of almost thirty, only one student was able to recall the name of a female artist—a local artist from her community. The following weeks we delved into a unit of study titled: “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists,” inspired by Linda Nochlin’s (1971) canonical essay by the same name. In response to our analysis of feminist art interventions in the art world, a student complained in her weekly journal that viewing Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979), Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum* (1973), and Katherine Opie’s *Self-Portrait/ Nursing* (2003) might be acceptable for art or women’s studies majors, but as an education major, she did not feel the work was “appropriate” or “relevant.” Alison (pseudonym) was especially “offended” by the nudity and the “sexual nature” of the artwork. Nudity, sensuality, and sexuality seemed to be a concern in relationship to class content, but not the media culture that was part of the students’ everyday lives, which students often and openly discussed in class. Following our investigation of gender-based oppression in the art field, via *The Guerrilla Girls’ Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* (1998) and *The Guerrilla Girls’ Art Museum Activity Book* (2004) the class examined the influence of visual culture, in particular, the impact that movies and music videos have on young girls.

In addition to written assignments, for instance, weekly journals and critical response papers, the students had the opportunity to create visual response in relationship to course content. Visual responses could take the form of photos, collages, paintings, performances, and short videos. Alison, the same student who complained of the inappropriateness and the lack of relevance of the course content, specifically, the images shown in class, created

for the semester final a very personal five-minute video. Her video told the story of the love/hate relationship that she had with her body and her struggles with eating disorders and standards of beauty.

Video projects started out with a short written proposal and storyboard that delineated the theoretical, conceptual, and visual concepts of the project. To my surprise, Alison used Jenny Seville's and Catherine Opie's work to ground her analysis. In fact, she discussed artwork that had not been analyzed in class, such as Catherine Opie's *Cutting* (1993). What had changed? I asked her why these particular artworks were important and relevant to the narrative she was proposing. She replied that our class examination concerning the impact of the media on young girls made her realize how attuned young girls are to visual culture and how early they begin to think about their body image. This inquiry made her reflect on her struggles with her own body and the complex relationship between body image and self-esteem. She remarked that Seville's and Opie's works were related to the pain and self-hate that women sometimes feel about their bodies. However, she stated that she did not think their artwork was "beautiful" and that she could never show her body in the way that these two artists depict their bodies. Alison's altering views suggest a dialogic process of "mutual interillumination," whereby utterances "throw light on each other," i.e., when one language sees itself in the light of another language (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 12). For instance, the way in which Alison begins to see her experiences through the language of young girls and filters those experiences anew through feminist art, simultaneously confirming and contradicting the various discourses that she encountered.

Julia Kristeva (1980) writes that Bakhtin's theory of *dialogism* does not allow for a "logical system based on a zero-one sequence or (true-false, nothingness-notation)" (p. 70). Contrary to the binary logic of authoritative discourse, which she represents by the integral 0-1, Kristeva emphasizes that dialogism or poetic language is doubled. It works on the principal of 0-2. For Kristeva, poetic language is "both 'A' and 'not-A'; here '0' equals 'nothing,' while '2' equals an element which is at least 'double,' that which equals a single element, '1'" (Allen, 2000, p. 45). The implications of moving beyond a zero-sum paradigm are highly significant for pedagogy. I am arguing that when the utterances of individuals are doubled, the intersections between one's words and the words of others become fluid. Thus, the language of the other can be apprehended through a relationship of limits and possibilities (both/and, A and not-A), and not strictly through an either/or, us/them, or monologic lens. For example, Alison's simultaneous assimilation and rejection of feminist art is a double movement (both/and, A and not -A). At the beginning of the course, Alison unequivocally rejected the validity and relevance of feminist art practices for her own life and academic interests. Yet, during the video production of her final project, she entered into an agonistic process of negotiation with Opie's and Seville's discourses on sexuality and the body. By concurrently confirming and contesting multiple and disparate narratives in relationship to her own voice, Alison shifted from a binary logic (0-1) to the double (0-2) continuum of dialogic communication. In so doing, Alison is answering dialogically. Answerability entails becoming conscious of the self in relation to another. Consequently, ontological intersubjectivity is a way to decenter one's own language through the language

of the other, which is a significant tenet of dialogism and feminist thought. It is in this double movement, in which the accepted common sense, when buttressed by the “true-false, nothingness-notation,” can begin to be deconstructed and reconstructed (Kristeva, 1980, p. 70). The struggle to center and decenter one ideology over another refracts different ways in which power relations are produced and reproduced. The production of power that leads to transformation is a complex phenomenon that cannot easily be explained or readily measured, especially because dominant ideology is often used to rationalize abuse of power and structural and systemic oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, poverty, and homophobia).

### **De(fencing) The Hegemonic Common Sense: Agonistic Re-workings**

Educational theorist Megan Boler (2004) observes that when students are confronted with information that suggests radical alternatives to the accepted common sense of thinking or dominant ideology, they resist in myriad ways. Many semesters later and at a different university, it was unsettling to receive an email from a student to let me know that the course content was “highly offensive” to her moral values. Her letter concerned me for many reasons. Student resistance can be manifested through what students do not say or say with their actions, which can take on multiple forms. In my classroom, almost invariably topics that dealt with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) concerns were often occasion for students to question what they perceived as an inversion of “acceptable” socio-cultural mores and values.

This was my third year teaching a course that covered concepts of current art education theory and practice for the elementary teacher. As part of my commitment to socially responsible teaching, I select course content that both focuses on issues inhering in diversity and difference and offers ways to critically analyze the power structures that create social inequality. For this class, I asked students to read articles by art educators Dennis E. Fehr and Karen Keifer-Boyd (2000), Laurel Lampela (2001), and Ed Check (2004). In addition, as part of course requirements, the students screened the film *Ma Vie en Rose* (*My Life in Pink*), directed by Alain Berliner (1997).<sup>4</sup> About a half hour into class discussion of the readings and film, a student, Yvette (pseudonym) started out with the all too familiar, “I don’t have anything against gay people,” she paused and continued, “but according to the Bible it’s a sin.” There was another pause, and then she said: “That is why homosexuals are going to hell.” Although I anticipated contentious debate on the subject, the bluntness, force, and conviction of Yvette’s statement made me quiver, a reaction that I am sure was clearly visible. Earlier in the semester, in response to course readings, students, including Yvette, had written reflections that were especially sensitive regarding bullying in schools, and in particular, cyberbullying. In thinking about this along with a thousand other jumbled thoughts, I stated:

Yvette, let me ask you a question. If a student came to you because he or she was being bullied, whether verbally taunted or because he or she had become a victim of physical violence based on his or her sexual identity, how would you respond to the student?



Yvette: I was not talking about bullying [she was by now visibly upset].

There was a long period of silence before I reiterated:

My question was: how will you personally respond to students? What is the role of the teacher? Let me open this up to the rest of the class. What is the correlation between discrimination based on gender and sexual identity and bullying? How do the course readings address these concerns? What are your thoughts?

I felt out of breath; I was still thinking about what the student had said, and no one was responding. I felt queasy. I wanted to say:

As future educators should you be concerned ... is violence acceptable under some circumstances, for instance, due to sexual orientation or gender? Or is this not a concern because gay people are "going to hell" anyway? Yvette has judged and declared this to be the "truth" in accordance with her belief system. Are teaching and education all about you, about what you believe, about your personal comfort zone, or are they about the students you will be teaching? Are they about both?

In essence, these are questions regarding the role and function of pedagogy. For me, these are also questions about the limits of dialogue. As I work to fulfill the idea of socially responsible teaching, a central question arises: As part of my commitment to democratic dialogue, do I have the responsibility to passively listen to voices in the classroom that manifest oppressive ideology? Glass (2004) asks the same question and answers with a resolute, no. Specifically, in Glass's view, students who express hegemonic ideology "in effect resilience subaltern or counter hegemonic voices that have already been silenced by ideological structures imposed on the poor and the working class, people of color, and women, for example" (p. 18). In light of this, Glass (2004) suggests that it is sometimes necessary to "mute" or "selectively silence" particular dominant discourses (p. 20). A similar conclusion can be found in Boler's (2004) proposal that "an affirmative action pedagogy seeks to ensure that we bear witness to marginalized voices in our classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting, dominant voices" (p. 4). With James H. Sanders III, Karen Hutzler, and Jennifer M. Miller (2009), Christine Ballengee Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr (2001), Vesta Daniel (2007), and Jennifer Eisenhauer (2007), I hold the opinion that any expression of racism, sexism, homophobia, or ableism in the classroom, must undergo critical analysis within the classroom. What is not always clear is the best way to actively negotiate with the competing discourses that students bring to the classroom. And though I hold that one must not respond passively to oppressive or injurious language, to borrow Judith Butler's (1997a) term, affronting students from an authoritative position creates an environment that closes down communication and reduces, rather than enhances, the students' willingness to participate. Thus, I remain highly skeptical of any pedagogical practice, as Burbules (2004) argues, that would deliberately "silence" or "mute" the voices of students (p. xvii). In fact, giving priority to social justice over dialogue, whether to "give" voice to or

“silence” certain opinions can create serious pedagogical, ethical, and political problems (Burbules, 2004; deCastell, 2004; Jones, 2004; Matusov, 2009).

Struggling to find my composure, attempting to quiet down the internal monologue/rant in my head, and with what felt like unsteady hands, I wrote on the board a series of questions that we (as a class) would consider throughout the following weeks. In many ways, and I believe in much more productive ways, we addressed slowly and gradually, the students’ contestation regarding diversity and difference. Specifically, we examined a series of questions about sexual identity, the status of religion in public schools, and the role of the teacher in education.

### **De(fencing): Finding Entryways That (Re)Authorize Student Perspectives**

Laurel Lampela (2007) has written eloquently about the need to include sexual identity in the discussion of culturally inclusive curriculum, a discussion she sees as seriously lacking in art education. She proposes that sexual identity needs to be integrated holistically into multicultural education. I agree. In my teaching experience, I have found that students are more likely to make the connection between discrimination and violence based on race and ethnicity, in part a result of multi-cultural education, but less likely to make the same connection when it comes to sexual identity. For instance, Yvette saw bullying and sexual orientation as two separate issues.

The first step to understand how difference is codified and used to support dominant norms and abuse of power is to contextualize difference as part of a large set of socio-political ideologies. Ideologies carry actions that have a direct impact on people’s lives (Butler, 1997b). Through various readings related to gender and sexual identity (Check, 2004; Keifer-Boyd, 2003, Lampela, 2001; Sanders, 2005; 2007), class discussions, and written and visual culture assignments, students examined the correlation between verbal and physical violence based on sexual identity. They analyzed how oppression based on sexual identity, for instance, bullying, has contributed to the high rate of suicide among gay youth. These are connections that students had not explored before. Critical awareness of difference is a way for members of society to make sense of diversity and a way of understanding that can potentially lead to working productively with students’ cultural, economic, gender, and social diversity.

The class also delved into new topics, such as the separation of church and state. Although many of the students in my courses mediated class content through the lens of the religious values they espoused, they often failed to consider that in the U.S., as afforded by the First Amendment, there exists the separation of church and state. Through various course content, I encouraged students to examine the discourses of religion and public education, which had recently come to the forefront with the debates about whether creationism or intelligent design should be taught in public schools.<sup>5</sup> I believe this process opened up a space for students to locate themselves in relation to contemporary discourse in education, to how their worldviews impact what they teach, and to how they relate to others and

themselves. From the perspective of feminist epistemology, self-reflexivity does not imply that one's worldviews remain unexamined. On the contrary, one must continuously struggle to decenter one's own authority, i.e., locate one's position of power in relation to another person's worldviews and social experiences, dialogically (hooks, 2000, 2004; Weir, 2008).

Another question that students considered was: What is the role of the teacher? Is the role of the teacher to guide, train, learn, facilitate, or collaborate with students? How this question is answered has direct implications for how educators address and respond to students. One of the objectives for entertaining this question, from my perspective, was to stress the opportunity for reciprocity, for becoming polyphonic authors, and co-experiencing relational knowing. This would entail that students and teachers abandon the position of omnipotent voice or all-knowing author deciding in advance what counts as knowledge and what the outcome or fate of others will be and on the basis of their own interests, values, and belief, making moral judgments that affect students' lives.

### **The Act of De(fencing) or Envisioning Reciprocity: Towards Dialogic Pedagogy**

A dialogic or intra- and inter-personal approach to education is not possible without reciprocity, or Bakhtin's (1990) concepts of addressivity and answerability. A pedagogical relationship based on responsive understanding entails a complex process of negotiation between the teacher and student. For example, when the teacher constructs an utterance (curriculum), s/he presupposes the student's response. Thus, the utterance is created in response to the teacher's perception of the student's conceptual horizon, i.e., the student's needs, likes and dislikes, experience, and knowledge. Additionally, addressivity entails anticipating the force that the student's responses will exert on the text. Consequently, addressivity and answerability can be used as a method to structure content; however, more importantly, it is a specific way to respond and relate to students ontologically. Stated differently, the instantiation of addressivity involves locating the anticipated expectations and responses of students and guiding the curriculum with that presumed audience in mind. This requires a willingness to modify, rectify, or completely change for oneself, as much as for students, what is being taught and how it is being taught. Answerability entails ethical responses to students that ultimately have an impact on whose voice gets heard or silenced in the discourses of school.

I return to the notion of dialogue to trouble the disjuncture between "silencing" students' voices and "enabling" the voices of those who are marginalized by social inequalities. A dialogic view of language emphasizes that silence is a form of communication. Non-verbal communication has the potential to be dialogic or monologic, depending on the contextual particularity, intonation, body language, and other factors that enable each utterance. From a Bakhtinian perspective, silence is not the opposite of speech. This is a view consistent with Western cultural bias evidenced in the privilege given to speaking over listening, to written over oral communication, and to sound over silence. It is also important to point out that dialogue is not value-free. Dialogue makes very dissimilar demands on different individuals, e.g., men and women, dominant and marginalized students, parents, and teachers (Boler,

2004; Glass, 2004; Jones, 2004). Furthermore, a word is not “a neutral media that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; [this media] is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). Words should belong to no one. Thus, making space for discourses in the curriculum that emphasize counter-hegemonic perspectives and critical analysis of dominant ideology, though important, in and of itself does not necessarily either silence or empower students (Boler, 2004; deCastell 2004; Glass, 2004; Jones, 2004; Matusov, 2009).

In consideration of monologic (i.e., authoritative) and dialogic communication, Bakhtin demonstrated that there are two potential drawbacks to creating internally persuasive<sup>6</sup> discourses: excessive monologism and excessive dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981; Matusov, 2009). Excessive monologism presumes that through the epistemological and institutional authority of my position as the teacher I have the power to silence students’ voices.<sup>7</sup> Excessive dialogism suggests that this same position accords me the power to give voice to and empower those who are marginalized and disempowered. Excessive monologism and excessive dialogism are uncritical and dichotomous; one posits the authority figure to be wholly powerful; the other sees this figure as wholly powerless (Bakhtin, 1981; Matusov, 2009).

Bakhtin’s (1981) ideas are significant to a consideration of uncritical reflections on dialogue and relationships of power. From the perspective of *dialogism*, voice is not given but posited. This means that voice is realized in the process of active and responsive understanding. In relationship to my own voice, I must register a paradoxical position. In advocating for those who are marginalized in some way, I am attempting to shift relations of power, which necessarily makes what I am doing a personal and political endeavor. However, such an agenda does not furnish an excuse for creating a classroom that engages teacher and students in anything other than respectful, ethical, and dialogic or counter-point relationships (Bakhtin, 1986; Burbules, 1993; 2004; Glass, 2004; Matusov, 2009). At the same time, though being self-reflexive requires constantly monitoring oneself in order to decenter one’s authority, it does not mean that one should become paralyzed by the process. “Education as a practice of freedom recognizes that perfection is impossible. It requires neither tragic suffering nor heroism” (Glass, 2004, p. 24). For me, authorizing student perspectives and decentering authority do not mean shying away from asking hard questions, analyzing controversial topics, or challenging social practices complicit with oppressive norms. In fact, doing so is necessary to stimulate learning environments that forge connections and relationships across difference in which multiple worldviews and differing perspectives are understood and valued. From a dialogic perspective, it is equally important to draw attention to convergences and similarities explicit in self-other relations or the simultaneity of interdependence and individuality. Mindful of the theoretical and material limits of dialogue, I have argued that dialogue can be understood in terms of a process that needs to be critically interrogated or realized in the practice of active and responsive understanding.

## Reflections

In reflecting on the limits of dialogue in tension within my own teaching, and in exploring the function of dialogue and dialogism in relationship to pedagogy, I have argued that it is not the role of the teacher to impose ideologies or knowledge on students, and neither is it her place to convince students of the rightness of any given position through the institutional, epistemological, personal, and professional authority inhering in the role of the teacher. What is important from a dialogic point of view of communication is not to privilege dialogue as an instructional method to improve, create, or transfer knowledge, but to awaken the student's internally persuasive discourse (Matusov, 2009). Authorizing student perspectives is crucial because it positions students to construct and negotiate their own learning in connection to social others. Furthermore, as Elizabeth M. Delacruz (2011) suggests, teaching ethical behavior, or responsive understanding, entails that educators "excite students about the notion of being a globally connected and ethically charged citizen as a means of facilitating our creative, educational and civic goals as a society and as world citizens" (p. 8).

In sum, I have proposed that excessive monologism and excessive dialogism obscure relationships of power. Monologic discourses cease the dialogic function of dialogue and impede dialogic communication and ways of being. Authoritative discourse, no matter how well intentioned, produces inflexible boundaries between the discourse of the speaker and the discourses of others. Authoritative discourse demands that individuals either categorically accept a certain discourse or categorically reject it (zero-one sequence). Though its purpose is to control all other discourses, authoritative discourse, try, as it might, cannot shape them. Presented as the definitive and irreversible truth, authoritative discourse cannot be shaped by other discourses, or by the context in which it exists, at least not without becoming something else.

In contrast, dialogic communication is dynamic in that it continuously responds to its changing context and grows in meaning. "Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Considered in the present inquiry through the concept of internally persuasive discourses and addressivity and answerability, dialogic communication acknowledges the relational concept of the self, in which subjectivity is achieved by forming relationships with others. Moreover, it understands that the words of others are closely interconnected with one's own words, as Alison's encounter with feminist art demonstrates. Dialogic communication is based on answerability, which "responds first and foremost to the social other, rather than responding to or through an abstract system of ethical rules to be followed" (Nealon, 2003, p. 141). When classroom discussion became embroiled in harmful and dichotomous pronouncements (Yvette's statements regarding sexual identity), I attempted to open up entryways for students to consider answering to the social other dialogically, rather than through an intolerant system of norms and values. Influenced by Bakhtin's (1984) theory of dialogism, I have proposed that a critical understanding of the

complexities and ambiguities inherent in dialogue be undertaken. I conclude with the suggestion that a dialogic communication, pedagogy, and Being indicate the necessity to attend to the oscillating, active, counter-point, and interconnected relationships between the speaking subject, the addressee's responsive understanding, and the relationship and territory shared between the two.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I use composite stories, a collection of real teaching experiences, and change the students' names to protect confidentiality and the students' identity.

<sup>2</sup> "The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25).

<sup>3</sup> The multiple subject positions that shape my personal realities are historically, politically, and culturally different from my students': I was born in Northern Mexico; I am a non-native English speaker; I got my post-secondary education in the U.S.; I belong to the professional middle class, I am center-left to far left politically inclined (depending on the issues at hand), and hold multi-faith and non-fundamentalist views of religion.

<sup>4</sup> The plot of the film revolves around Ludovic, a seven-year-old boy who cross-dresses (boy-to-girl). At first, Ludovic's parents are understanding and consider his actions as a developmental stage or simply child's play. His parents become increasingly vigilant of Ludovic's continued desire to dress like a girl and talk of marrying another boy. Cinematographically, Ludovic's fantasies are depicted as innocent, beautiful, and colorful dreamscapes. Toward the end of the movie, Ludovic's family pressured by their community (neighbors, the parents' co-workers, and school) find Ludovic's behavior intolerable and deplorable. Ludovic is confused about the adults' reactions and rejection, and he attempts suicide by locking himself in a freezer (Also see Jennifer F. Eisenhauer: *What is a girl? Producing subjects in feminist and visual culture pedagogies*, PhD dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Matusov (2009) writes of a similar experience with his students.

<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin argues that language is internally dialogic. It is constructed through and within social relations. Consequently, he contends that language is history- and context-dependent. In the struggle to "make the words of other's one's own, words become part of one's own thoughts" (Allen, 2000, p. 28); but as I hope it has been shown in this article, this does not happen without first going through a selective and agonistic critical process.

<sup>7</sup> Alison Jones (2004) and Susanne deCastell (2004) contend that in reality, no matter what arguments educators assemble, teachers, particularly women and minority teachers, are seldom able to quiet speech actions that are both aggressive

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and ignorant, when uttered by dominant voices (deCastell, 2004). Art educator Dipti Desai (1997) takes this argument one step further. Reflecting on her personal teaching experiences, Desai observes that the “voice of white students often silence [her] as person of color” (Check, Deniston, & Desai, 1997, p. 50). In an article published in *The National Education Association (NEA) of Higher Education Journal*, a group of scholars make a related argument. These authors write that ethnicity and race play an important role in how faculty of color in predominantly White classrooms experience the classroom environment (Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar, & Griffin, 2009).

## De(Fencing) with Youth: Moving from the Margins to the Center

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### Abstract

Practices that combine the positive power of human relationships with art making can serve to De(fence): “create, innovate, reshape spaces, opportunities, or works that engage people or (and) bring us and them from the margins to the center” (JSTAE, call for papers, volume 32). In this paper, we explore ideas, techniques, and strategies used to implement four collaborative art projects with teenage youth. These projects aim to create a safe and generative context within which collaborative art-making practice can put youth and their ideas at the center of the process. Projects include an exploration of school climate utilizing sculpture in an urban high school art class, an intensive personal journey for orphans in Bulgaria using photography and travel, storytelling, and sculpture with girls in a locked detention setting, and an international service learning project with high school students using printmaking and quilting to benefit earthquake survivors in Haiti. We argue that the interdisciplinary and collaborative practices utilized create rich opportunities for learning and growth.

### **De(fencing) with Youth: Moving from the Margins to the Center**

This issue of JSTAE asks us to consider the theme of De(fence). We respond by showing that practices that combine the positive power of human relationships with art-making can serve to De(fence): “create, innovate, reshape spaces, opportunities, or works that engage people or (and) bring us and them from the margins to the center (JSTAE, call for papers, volume 32). In this paper, we explore ideas, techniques, and strategies used to implement four collaborative art projects with teenage youth. The projects were created and implemented by one or both of the co-authors (Ann Tobey and Kate Jellinghaus) and aimed to create a safe and generative context within which collaborative art-making practice puts youth and their ideas at the center of the process. These examples reveal that much of the leverage to create opportunities for De(fencing) lies in our relationships with one another, in the reciprocity that happens in the “spaces-in-between” (Wilson-Mckay, 2009). When we are willing and able to connect with others as resources and partners in the spirit of exploring our common humanity, our sense of who we are and what is possible shifts as well.

A consideration of the meaning of the terms “margins” and “center” through the lens of interpersonal connectedness leads us to the universal human experiences of being valued and belonging. These social-emotional experiences are central to human identity and are created and mutually defined across infinite settings by the on-going reciprocal interactions between and among individuals, cultural sensibilities, institutional structures, and other environmental factors.<sup>1</sup> For an individual, a feeling that I am on the margins (regardless of the context of reference) implies that I am powerless, that I have little value, and/or that I don’t really belong. Alternately, a sense of being in the center arises from knowing that I belong, that I am valued, and that I have the power to transform myself and others. Engendering these feelings of value, belonging, and reciprocity is at the heart of work that aims to De(fence).

Those with a positive youth development focus have posited that youth are often undervalued and objectified at a great cost to their growth and to society (Delgado & Staples, 2008). Groups of teens are often seen as problems, and even among those who tend to see teens in a more positive light, there has been a tendency to think about them in terms of what they need, thereby positioning them as the recipients of services or teaching (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). More recently, young people are being acknowledged as powerful resources (Curtis, 2008; Delgado, 2006): they are makers, knowers, and teachers themselves – each with valuable ideas and abilities.

It is crucial for adults and youth to embrace a philosophy that transforms “young people from their traditional roles as consumers, victims, perpetrators and needy clients...” (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). To play a role in De(fencing) with youth, adults must take the next step and act on the premise that teens have something to offer -- that their ideas and voices have a place at the center. When young people are respected and involved in this way, they will know that they belong and that they have the power and responsibility to make a difference, that they can “be agents in their own personal and community development” (Wong, Zimmerman & Parker, 2010, p. 100).

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<sup>1</sup> See Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2004 for further discussion of bio-ecological/contextual systems theories of human development).

Art making projects with youth can be especially powerful opportunities for learning through participatory action. Youth can be actively involved throughout the process of reflection, conceptualization, critical thinking, and making. When the creative and generative process of art making is combined with a collaborative and supportive context, the opportunities for enrichment in the form of meaningful developmental experiences are heightened for all participants. In her essays on education, the arts and social change, Maxine Greene (1995) asserts, “imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible” (p. 3). The social and artistic combine beautifully to create an expanded awareness of self and our reciprocal connections to others.

In addition, research now supports the notion that programs that combine youth development principles (see Lerner, Fisher & Weinberg, 2000) with culture and art in an effective way are powerful contributors to the healthy development of young people (Skillman Foundation, 2007; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). For instance, youth engagement in enriching projects leads to the development of intellectual and social skills and abilities, allowing youth to play an active role in the positive transformation of both themselves and their environments (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, Sheridan, & Perkins, 2007). And, although an in-depth discussion of the additional benefits of engaging youth in collaborative art-making is beyond the scope of this article, the developmental rewards of this practice have been documented elsewhere (see Cooper & Sjoström, 2006; Harding, 2005; Sickler-Voigt, 2006).

In order to engage youth at the center of the project, adults must work to deconstruct the hierarchy that typically resides in relationships between youth and adults. Swanson (2009) warns us to beware of our complicity with the status quo as she describes the importance of fostering a “humbling togetherness” (p.13) and “listening collaboratively” (p.18), which allow us to be better attuned to opportunities for transformation and transcendence. It is up to adults to find the gate in the hierarchical “fence” and invite youth to access control and authorship of the project (Ivashkevich, 2012). Working collaboratively in a side-by-side relationship conveys to both youth and adults that youth belong, that they are valued and valuable. This is one way we can bring teens from the margins to the center -- by engaging them fully in the process.

As we strive to build art-making contexts that provide key ingredients such as generous support, safety, self-expression, and full participation, the adult role becomes increasingly multi-faceted. Adults must be flexible enough to both take charge and let go. It is this conscious and reflexive action of *stepping in* and *stepping back* that is essential for fostering a deep level of youth engagement, youth participation, and youth voice. When we step in, we are aware of the need to create a safe and enriching space, organize and plan, motivate, facilitate, mentor, teach, share knowledge, and share ourselves. Alternately, when we step back, we create openings for youth to step into these roles. We must make the leap of faith necessary to yield responsibility and control of the project to the youth. As youth become more trusted participants, their ownership of the project increases, thereby increasing the potential meaning and power that the experience holds (Andrews, 2010).

### Case Studies

In the following four case examples, we nudged aside real and perceived barriers to create working relationships with peers and teens across institutional boundaries. Although these “interdisciplinary coalitions” (Buffington & Muth, 2011) were time consuming to create and

sustain, the benefits of working together maximized the impact of our efforts. When we combine a diversity of talents, skills, and backgrounds, we increase our ability to connect with the group and to bring valuable human and material resources to the project.

An overarching goal present in each of the projects was to create a generative context—a personal and artistic space in which rich experiences could be had, positive growth could happen, and relevant art could be made. In each case, adult mentors facilitated a collaborative youth art-making project with an intentional theme and a final product. Each project emphasized the importance of art-making skills, studio habits of mind (Hetland et al., 2007), strong artistic products, and public exhibition of the finished works. Each project also explored the importance of creating a safe social context for the art-making group, in which empowering attitudes and themes could facilitate a positive sense of connection and growth. With such a “secure base” (Bowlby, 1988) as a foundation, the projects were further designed to engage and empower youth. We asked youth to work together to critically reflect, analyze, and take creative risks as we actively elicited and listened to their ideas. We stepped back to make room for youth to take ownership of the concept and implementation of the projects and to ultimately experience the satisfaction of collective authorship and recognition.

Thoughtful use of themes adds another layer of relevance to a project’s capacity to De(fence). Although each project engages participants to explore themselves, their environments, and their relationships to others, the themes -- uncovering identity, sharing our stories, challenging the status quo, and connecting through service -- represent a continuum along an expanding sense of self-in-social-context. The students in the Alternative Doorways project explored their sense of belonging and value as they challenged the status quo within the context of their school system. Our Bulgarian youth explored the immediate realms of identity and personal relationship in their lives. For the girls in lock-up, the focus on belonging and mutuality was strongest through the sharing of personal stories in the group context. Finally, for students in the service-oriented Haiti Quilt-Making Project, the perspective broadened to include a sense of interconnectedness and reciprocity with others on a global level.

### **Case #1: Alternative Doorways Project: Challenging the Status Quo**

In 2010, over 40 art students (ages 15-18) at Charlestown High School in Boston, Massachusetts envisioned alternatives to the metal detectors that they were required to walk through as they entered the school each morning. Kate Jellinghaus initiated the project, organizing student teams to design symbolic entryways that expressed how they would want to feel and others to feel as they passed into the school. Instrumental adult mentors included the Charlestown High art teacher, Maurice Lane, and several art education student volunteers. The project lasted six weeks and involved students building monumental sculptures out of recycled materials. These sculpted archways reflected the teens’ ideas about school, values, profanity, community, diversity, adversity, prayer, travel, and celebration – themes that they chose and developed themselves. At this large urban public school the “Alternative Doorways Project” challenged the status quo by offering participants a chance to critically analyze their surroundings, develop original and innovative ideas about school climate, and construct public art that expressed radically different alternatives to the existing entryway. As such, the project offers an example of social justice art education that is also based on a “pedagogy of possibility” (Desai & Chalmers, 2007).



Figure 1. Rise above the system.  
Alternative Doorways Project, 2010.

The idea stemmed in part from a reaction to the particular atmosphere of the school building. New to the school, Kate was struck by the starkness of the school's 'brutalist'-like architecture with its lack of natural light, sterility of the foyer, heavy concrete cinder blocks, and lack of clear lines of sight. Metal detectors, in particular, expose the experiences that many of our American schoolchildren face regarding issues of security, safety, and protection. As such, the metal detector seemed an apt metaphor as a mandatory passageway into the school building. As a visual and sculptural form, the metal detector led to the idea of creating our own, "open" or "alternative" monumental doorways – something that might challenge the status quo and represent a qualitatively different type of entry into school.

The project began with students in art class sharing their thoughts and feelings about entering the school building each day, and, specifically, about passing through the metal detectors. Through discussions and writing exercises, students were invited to express their feelings and opinions about the metal

detectors and the general school climate (e.g., How do you feel about the metal detector that you walk through every day as you enter the school? What are the most important things that hold us together as a community?). Students were also urged to envision alternatives and to look critically at the school environment (e.g., What values would you want people to embrace when they walk in the school? If you could make a different kind of entryway/doorway, something that represented anything you wanted, what would it be? Why?).

Responses were varied. Students described the metal detectors as both "a necessity" and "an annoyance." They described feeling "uncomfortable," "embarrassed," "hating it," and like "a statistic." While one girl wrote, "I feel it's cool because I honestly feel someone would get killed if they didn't have them," another countered, "It makes me late and it's pointless because people still get things into the school." Students envisioned alternative doorways that represented concepts such as "serenity," "unity," and "respect," as well as alternative styles "heart-shaped" or "gold-plated and Victorian-looking."

This preliminary brainstorming served to set a context for our creative work on multiple levels. It gave the participating adults direct feedback from students about their thoughts on school and school climate. It created a safe space in which students were both challenged to begin thinking critically about their school environment and allowed to express their ideas.



It established the entryway/doorway of the school as a metaphor for the attitudes we carry with us into the school community. In this way, the early stages of student input helped construct those meaningful connections among people, materials, and ideas that would be necessary for the overall success of the project.

During the design and building stages of the project, certain activities were scaffolded and supported by adults more than others, depending on the needs of the students at each given juncture. We began thinking three-dimensionally by building small paper models. We then measured the metal detectors, discussed contemporary monumental art, such as Christo's Manhattan "Gates," and talked about how our 'gates' would each be symbolically different and unique. The young people then organized themselves into design teams and were given access to large quantities of materials from a local art-recycling center. Students were not given specific guidelines for using the materials, although they were given pragmatic support throughout the stages of building. They were responsible for establishing the final design, content, and meaning of their specific doorways.

In instances where things stalled, an adult would "step in." In one case, one of the design teams gave up and refused to move forward. Stepping in for the adult in this case meant talking to the students to see what the source of their frustration was. The students seemed to think that they would not be allowed to create a doorway that expressed the depth of their anger. Once heard, the students felt confident to continue. The art educator also saw this as an opportunity to invite them to make a visual connection between their feelings and the materials (colors, properties) they chose for their sculpture. Their final artwork incorporated trashcans, black duct tape, and neon paint, and was entitled "Rise Above the System Doorway."

Their artist statement read:

When we say "system," we mean the school system. We're frustrated that the system is not inspirational enough. There aren't enough extracurricular activities and kids aren't inspired to stay in school. There's not enough school



Figure 2. No profanity at school doorway. Alternative Doorways Project, 2010.

spirit and professionalism. So, when we say “rise above” the system, we mean we want to change things.

The finished doorways, along with the design teams’ artist statements, stood in the foyer of the school, forming an open tunnel that all students and staff could pass through as they entered the building. They were later exhibited in the Arnheim gallery in Boston. In addition to the sculpting and teamwork skills developed, the value of this project lay in its challenges to the status quo. It asked students to look at their local environment in relation to themselves, to think critically about their surroundings, and to offer their own alternatives to the existing ones. However, it also provided adult educators the opportunity to learn from their students and to become flexible mentors. This type of critical and reflective thinking, reciprocity, and creative adaptation are important skills for both young and adult artists alike.

### **Case #2: Bulgarian Photo Project: Uncovering Identity**

In this project eight young people (aged 16-21) from a state-run orphanage in Bulgaria each created their own photographic series on the subject of personal identity. With the help of adult volunteers from Bulgaria and the United States, over a two month period in 2007, young participants chronicled their lives and the relationships important to them.

The project built upon previously established relationships between the young people and their adult mentors. It was our intention to provide an opportunity for them to develop their self-confidence, self-understanding, sense of belonging, and critical thinking skills as they transitioned to adulthood and independent life beyond the orphanage. In addition, children from the orphanages were often depicted as victims and objectified by the media in one-dimensional ways that highlighted the horrendous conditions of their lives. By using photography to express their reality as they saw it, the young people had the potential to change their perceptions of themselves as well as the preconceptions of wider audiences.

The idea for this project was the result of an interdisciplinary collaboration between Kate Jellinghaus in the role of teaching artist, and art therapist Dr. Alexandra Ivanova. The work was supported by a CEC Artslink grant. The youth participants were chosen based on their need, availability, and interest. Seven were ethnic Roma Bulgarians and one was of Vietnamese background. All the young participants had been together in the state-run orphanage in the town of Ugarchin from approximately age six. The adult volunteers were social workers and artists who had developed relationships with the children over the course of almost a decade of working on various projects organized through a loose network of church and community groups that marked a new flourishing of civil society in post-communist Bulgaria.

The conditions at the orphanage, called the “Home for Children Without Parental-Raising – Zdravets,” were extremely dire during the years the young people were growing up, years marked by widespread poverty and hardship for Bulgarian society as a whole. In a series of autobiographical interviews conducted by Kate Jellinghaus in 2008, the youth participants in the Photo Project described their memories of life growing up. Ngyuen Thi Chung, remembered the Zdravets orphanage as “A wreck. People were living like animals – there were broken windows; everything was broken...Children were always insulting each other and the staff” (personal communication, August, 2008) A boy, Naiden Iliev, stated: “I was shocked when I first went to Ugarchin. There was little order or discipline...The kids beat –

no everyone beat each other up -- both kids and adults” (personal communication, August, 2008).

The desperation of these conditions compelled the adult volunteers to reach out to the children at this orphanage, and over time relationships of trust and friendship developed between them. As young Sasho Hristov recalled: “I was astonished that the attitude of our visitors from Sofia was so much more personal and direct than what I had experienced before – as if these people were my older siblings– they were very friendly and curious about us” (personal communication, August, 2008).

Because the adults had laid the groundwork of building trust, this group became a safe place for the youth to experience creative freedom and explore their lives. An initial weekend retreat was arranged to build a cohesive group and provide technical training in photography. After a picnic and art activities that encouraged mutual sharing and visual thinking, we divided into teams for a competition: Youth participants had 2 hours to take pictures around the city of Samokov and we reconvened later to view and judge the work. The theme was: “Who can take the most comic picture and the most tragic picture?”

During this exercise the youth took pictures randomly, of anything and everything, but upon looking at the work as a group, most of them concluded that the results were “boring” with “too many babies and small animals” and that “it’s not easy to take a good photograph.” This led to a conversation about “what makes a good photograph,” and suddenly the task ahead, of creating a strong photographic series, seemed more challenging and less straightforward. The young artist/participants were developing a critical stance!

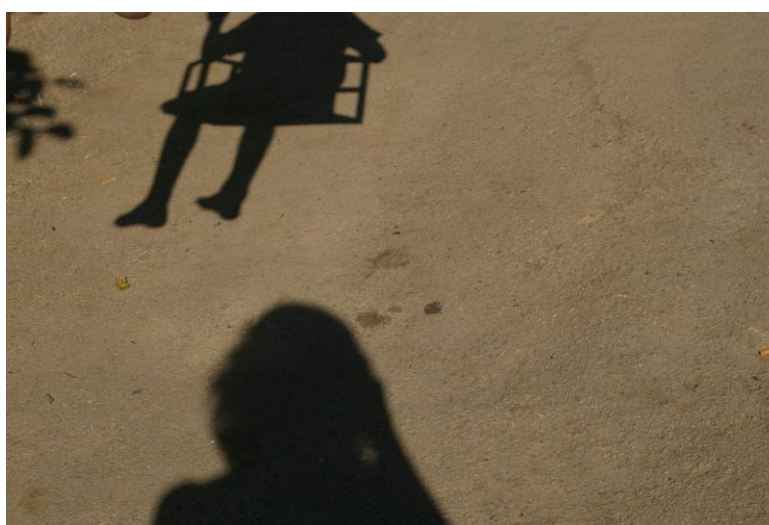
At this point, the group split up into pairs—each youth with an adult mentor. Mentors helped their youth participants articulate answers to the questions: “If you could document what’s important to you with the camera, looking out at the world, what would you shoot, and why?” “If you could go anywhere in the country, and photograph anything or anyone, what would it be, and why?” The adult role was to be flexible and to support the youths’ creative inquiry, wherever it led them. Mentors helped their partners to develop a theme, while also encouraging the youth to be open to the recording of spontaneous moments and experiences along the way. This combination of guidance and open-ended structure allowed the creative ideas of the youth participants to emerge and to develop in complexity over time.

As the project evolved, the participants were not simply snapping pictures anymore -- they were grappling with meaning, including relationships with significant people and places. In the process they were developing their own sense of personhood, identity, and belonging. Photographer Ivaila Angelova’s work (age 16) involved intensely personal portraits of both the young children playing at her old orphanage and older people who took care of her when she was little. Many of her photographs also explored physical movement. She talked about the role of movement in her series as follows: “As a kid, I loved to teach the younger children how to break dance. I loved playing with the younger kids and break dancing came to me from within: It has a fast rhythm and movement and creates the overall feeling of a party” (personal communication, August, 2008).



*Figure 3.* Photos by Ivaila Angelova. Bulgarian photo project, 2007.

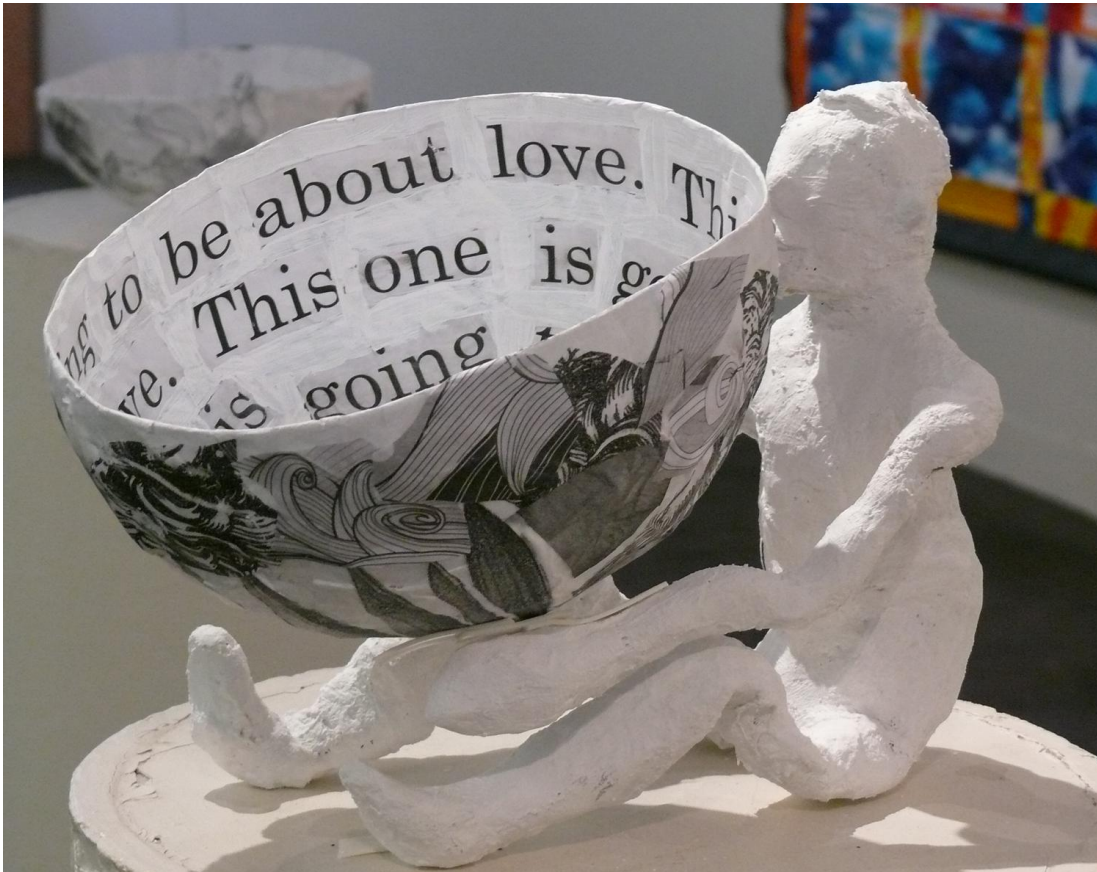
The intimate process of self-discovery combined with the public exhibition of the photographs was empowering for everyone involved. The culminating event of the project was the exhibit at the Ministry of Culture Gallery “Sredets” in Sofia, where many of the photographs were purchased by members of the Bulgarian parliament. Exhibiting allowed the public to see the world through the eyes of the youth and to learn more about their lives in Bulgaria. All of the participants commented on how exciting it was to see their work in a prestigious gallery and to see their photographs being sold. As Naiden (age 20) said: “I was happy to be interviewed by Bulgarian National Radio and I also spoke at the opening of the exhibit. It was interesting to see what pictures were bought and sold. We felt famous! I’m very happy about it” (personal communication, August, 2008).



*Figure 4.* Photos by Ivaila Angelova. Bulgarian photo project, 2007.

### Case #3: Memory Vessels Project: Sharing Our Stories

In 2010, 15 girls, aged 13-17, in a locked female juvenile detention setting in Boston, MA, worked together over 9 weekly sessions to create “memory vessels”-- sculpted bowl-shaped containers made from papier-mache, each of which held an idea or the essence of a girl’s story. The completed vessels were held by small figures made from plaster strips and wire, which offered up the girls’ stories and memories.



*Figure 5. This one is going to be about love. Artistic Noise collaboration, 2010.*

The Memory Vessels project aimed to give voice to the stories of incarcerated girls by fostering an atmosphere of shared experience through storytelling, listening, recording, reflecting, creating, and exhibiting. Inspired in part by the independent non-profit StoryCorps, the project created a safe forum within which girls in juvenile lock-up could share personal stories as a way to “strengthen and build the connections between people, teach the value of listening, and weave into the fabric of our culture the understanding that every life matters” ([www.storycorps.org](http://www.storycorps.org)). For young people who have had traumatic experiences or who have trouble verbalizing difficult feelings or ideas, the arts may provide another avenue for communication, one that is powerful, direct, and immediate. Padgham (2007) describes the significant healing power in the process of group art-making with detained women and children. Furthermore, in the creative process there exists an element of play that can serve as a catalyst for positive feelings, often enhancing young peoples’ willingness to learn and lightening the load for girls in lock-up who face daunting hurdles.

This project was supported by Artistic Noise ([www.artisticnoise.org](http://www.artisticnoise.org)), a non-profit arts program for youth in the juvenile justice system. Kate Jellinghaus served as lead artist for the project along with a young-adult staff mentor, Minotte Romulus, who had first come in contact with Artistic Noise as a teen in lock-up. Minotte's presence as an adult collaborator helped create a sense of safety for the girls and connected them to the project in many ways. The project was implemented and exhibited in collaboration with Ann Tobey's college-based initiative, Ubuntu Arts ([www.wheelock.edu/ubuntuarts](http://www.wheelock.edu/ubuntuarts)), including ongoing support and facilitation by undergraduate student, Sarah Albrecht.

The project began with trust building and concept building activities, and we then divided into pairs and set up a fun "story-telling competition" which included prizes. The girls came up with the following categories: "The best love story," "The saddest story," "The funniest story," and "The most accident prone story." For the story-telling, each person held the digital recorder, while the others listened as we shared deeply personal stories – about a disappointment in love, a difficult relationship, a favorite dog, a bad day with a series of mishaps. Individuals listened to each other, laughed together, and responded thoughtfully to the stories, as people do among friends. Each of the adults also participated in the group storytelling. This participation was an important act that served to flatten the hierarchy within the group, in that all members experienced the same level of vulnerability that sharing something personal demands. In addition, we have observed that sound-based mediums are received enthusiastically by teens who may feel intimidated by certain drawing, painting, or sculpting processes, and therefore these mediums can provide a more effective way to reach personal content and meaning during the initial stages of a visual project.



Figure 6. Memory vessel project, Artistic Noise, 2010

Sarah facilitated a group discussion about Ubuntu by using quotes and asking the girls to find connections between Ubuntu and their stories. Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa has described Ubuntu as a term that represents a central feature of the African worldview, the meaning of which is loosely translated in the saying “A person is a person through other persons” (Tutu, 1999, p. 31). Exploring Ubuntu was a very powerful experience, as the girls began to expand their perspectives and find new meaning in even the most tragic of stories. Davia (age 16) said: “Ubuntu is a strong word. To me it seems like togetherness – like say me being locked up, my family stays by my side, like we’re in it together” (personal communication, February 7, 2010). The group then edited the stories, listening together to find the narrative essences for use in their sculptures. We all wrote down what we thought was the “gem” of the story – the crucial moment. These textual story “essences” were incorporated into the interior design of the sculpted vessels. In this way, the final product was as much about listening, mutual validation and respect as it was about artistic output.

While most of the youth could not be released from the locked detention setting to see their work exhibited, it clearly mattered to them that their artwork would be seen by others. Collaborating with additional partners to find new venues to exhibit the works extended the reach of the girls’ stories. The Memory Vessels have been exhibited numerous times at galleries and public venues, and those viewing the artwork often express surprise that incarcerated girls created such meaningful and stunning pieces. When the public has the opportunity to develop more positive impressions of this population, and when the girls receive this feedback, they move a little closer to the center.

#### **Case Study #4:**

#### **Haiti Print and Quilt Project: Connecting Through Service**

In 2010, Kate Jellinghaus led a project with art teacher Maurice Lane and over 60 art students from Charlestown High School, in which students, staff and community volunteers, including co-author Ann Tobey, worked together to make two elaborate quilts to sell in order to raise money for artists and their families working at a collective in Port Au Prince, Haiti devastated by the 2009 earthquake. The artwork from this collective had initially inspired the students’ print designs, which were later used in the quilts. In this way, there was a direct artistic reciprocity between the student artists in Charlestown and the artisan collective in Haiti.

This collaborative and service-oriented art project was intended to show collective support of the 50+ Haitian-American students at the Charlestown High School and of those suffering in Haiti. In addition, it provided a means for youth to become personally involved and develop connection to others by responding meaningfully to this crisis. The finished quilts were displayed in several public galleries and venues and were sold for \$1500 each. The money was sent directly to the Haitian artists along with a video letter from the students.



Figure 7. The Haiti Print and Quilt Project, 2010.

The project began as part of a required unit on printmaking in which students were asked to cut linoleum block designs inspired by the images found at the online site of the Haitian art collective ([www.haitimetalart.com](http://www.haitimetalart.com)). The second phase of the project was voluntary, and students understood that by choosing to participate further they would be devoting many hours of their time and energy to make artwork that would not receive course credit and would not remain theirs. Students who chose to participate in the quilt-making phase of the project printed their linoleum cuts onto squares of fabric and then embellished their designs with embroidery and beads, which were then assembled into quilts by teachers working with Ann Tobey.



Figure 8. The Haiti Print and Quilt Project, 2010.



When we first began the project, we invited Josette Teneus, the school's Haitian-American guidance counselor to lead a discussion on the situation in Haiti. Although many students seemed uncomfortable and chose not to engage in this discussion, through the course of the art-making process many of the same students became enthusiastic participants. For example, even though the quilt-making portion of the project was voluntary, there was almost 100% participation, and students, boys and girls, often stayed after school and asked to take the embroidery home to continue their work.

Students voiced their feelings of accomplishment in a final video letter (translated into Haitian Creole) that was made by the group to greet the Haitian artists, show them the quilts, and explain the project. Students addressed the Haitian artists in a very direct, supportive, and emotional way, an attitude that had not been apparent in the early stages of the project. Students expressed sentiments such as, "I give my condolences out to all the people who got lost in the tragedy in the earthquake." "I would like to wish everybody that you guys are not alone, we are here to help." One student, Levie Fernandes, said, "I worked on this project a lot and I enjoyed doing the beadings a lot. I hope that this project – the quilt and the money – helps people to rebuild their studio faster" (personal communication, May, 26, 2010).

The students were very pleased that their work was exhibited, and they took great pride in the high price paid for their artwork. It was also touching that both buyers went on to give the quilts as gifts to others; one recipient was a surgeon who had made repeated trips to Haiti after the earthquake. We later learned that many of the Haitian artists had chosen to use the money to help their children cover their school expenses. These poignant facts furthered the sense of purpose and connection engendered through the project.

This service-oriented project demonstrated how collaborative art practice can foster a sense of empowerment within a group as well as a sense of connection and mutuality across groups. The project was initially offered to students in art class but soon brought in students and staff from throughout the school. Teachers came by to donate fabric, a sewing machine, and an extra pair of hands. One proverb stitched on the border of the quilt captures this community-wide effort, "*Men anpril chay pa lou: Many hands make the load lighter.*" Often young people in our cities are labeled "at risk" and seen as the recipients of charity. Opportunities to give of themselves and to engage in service to others are rewarding and fulfilling and create contexts where young people move from the margins to the center, as individuals who have something to offer society.

### **Conclusion**

The process of De(fencing) requires us to temporarily or permanently "take away fences, walls, imposed boundaries" (call for papers, JSTAE, volume 32,). We have proposed that when we reach across socially constructed fences to engage with others, we are, in essence, engaging in a process of De(fencing).

In developing art projects with youth, we seek to leverage the potential of relationships to create opportunities for reciprocal learning and growth. These interdisciplinary and collaborative practices challenge the status quo by creating new contexts, meanings, and experiences. Meaningful collaboration often involves re-examining our own attitudes and perspectives about traditional roles so that we may work to reverse oppressive

relationships. A willingness to be self-aware and to shift perspective is essential when creating empowering contexts with youth.

The process of making art is particularly suited to imagining possibilities and generating creative solutions to social problems. The arts inherently broaden our understanding of ourselves – our sense of identity and belonging – by placing a value on people, context, and history. Projects like these can provide opportunities for our youth to become conscious of both their inner experience and their value in a democratic society (Gude, 2009). When thoughtfully conceptualized and accomplished, the benefits reach much further than the initial circle of intended recipients. This approach to art education places young people squarely in the center of the creative process, engaging them in opportunities to become critical thinkers and problem-solvers – as artists and agents of change.

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## The Gaze Across the Aisle: Architecture, Merchandising, and Social Roles at Marshall Field and Company, 1892 to 1914

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### Abstract

Marshall Field and Company was a cultural and commercial anchor in Chicago's downtown area known as 'The Loop.' By 1914, it had expanded into the largest department store in the world at that time. This article illustrates Field's as a cultural and retail institution of artistry and popular education through a trope I term "the drama of shopping." Using merchandising strategies adapted from the aesthetic movement, Field's produced the drama of shopping with social and cultural implications about class, gender, and race in three ways: First, the architecture of the store served as a carefully designed theatrical space for seeing and being seen in the drama of shopping. The departmentalization and arrangement of merchandise by degree of expense and luxury differentiated and sorted Field's clientele according to their social status and what they could afford to buy. Elite shoppers who purchased luxuries did so under the gaze of other shoppers, who watched from across the aisle. Second, Field's merchandising and marketing followed trends of the new profession of domestic science. It served as the script for the drama of shopping, through which customers negotiated the cultural hierarchy of artistry and new technology. Third, merchandising resembled the subculture of the aesthetic movement, but without its controversial gender roles, while it privileged predominant Anglo-American culture and rendered other social groups, including people of color, invisible. Today, the social and cultural traditions of American department-store retail that began in the gilded age remain present as new forms of retail marketing. In turn the gendered cultural fences that divide retail patrons remain in the present day, though with different names and locations.

**The Gaze Across the Aisle:  
Architecture, Merchandising, and Social Roles at Marshall Field and Company,  
1892 to 1911**

Neil Harris (1990) observed that in the two decades before World War I the knowledge most Americans had about art and style came from three places where artifacts were displayed: museums, worlds' fairs, and department stores. In Chicago, commercial magnets and city officials in the Chicago Commercial Club (CCC) built commercial and cultural institutions like banks, museums, libraries, theaters, and concert halls, located in the urban center, known as "The Loop." The museums, department stores, and even the street were places where mostly elite and middle-class individuals came to browse and learn by looking at displays of artifacts, as well as at each other, creating the drama of seeing and being seen. The department store Marshall Field and Company (Field's) was unique in that it marketed to all classes, creating a complicated drama of wishing, envy, and desire among mostly women shoppers from the upper, middle, and working classes. Shoppers seeking self-improvement watched other shoppers purchase luxuries that, perhaps, they could not afford. Thus, the drama of shopping in The Loop is characterized as a vast "promenade of huge glass windows in which mannequins stood as mistresses of taste to teach people how to embody their secret longings for status in things of great price" (Duncan, 1965, p. 116). Such "secret longings" were part of every shopper's experience, for desire and envy were present, whether shoppers purchased what they saw or not.

In keeping with the Journal's theme of De(fence), it is important to point out patterns of social exclusion, which varied depending on the institution. The social climate of museums and schools differed from that of department stores: working-class individuals were not expected to associate themselves with the fine arts and were unwelcome in museums and galleries. Since they were places where the wealthy cultivated their tastes and since they were dominated by the wealth of benefactors from these same groups, art museums and galleries were usually socially exclusive. Even in Chicago's public high schools, art education for the working classes was segregated by social fences. In a system supported by the CCC, of which Marshall Field was a member, school administrators tracked high school students into vocational strains of art education called manual training, while they tracked privileged high school students to professional and college prep programs where they studied the fine arts (Anonymous, 1910; Anonymous, 1914; Wrigley, 1982). Though art educators like Henry Turner Bailey (1914) promoted fine arts as a source of social uplift for all students, Chicago's school administrators followed technocratic strains of Social Darwinism and scientific management, claiming that most working class students could become good technicians, but did not have the potential for academic study or gaining social refinement from the fine arts and fenced them into vocational programs (Spring, 2005; Wrigley, 1982).

In the spheres of the department store and the rest of popular culture, however, things were different. Working class individuals, especially those from Europe, knew the value of the fine arts from their lives in Europe. Though the fine arts would have been mostly out of their reach in Europe, in coming to the United States, they held new aspirations of self-improvement; and they sought out the art forms they wanted in popular culture. Working-class individuals tended to frequent dime museums operated by such impresarios as P. T. Barnum and Sylvester Poli, where the division between fine arts (high art) and plebian visual, musical, and dramatic forms was unclear and theaters programmed entertainment for mixed-class audiences, from working-class on up. Entertainment included anything from freak shows and wax sculpture exhibits to lantern slide shows of art at the Vatican, which

played on working-class religious and political sentiments (Oberdeck, 1999; Weil, 2002; Weir, 2007). Social and economic fences in these establishments were set according to the locations of expensive and cheap seats. Marshall Field also put out a variety of merchandise, from the most expensive luxuries to the most common items, which were sorted into departments according to the degree of expense and luxury they represented, separated by aisles that served as invisible fences. Their customers were informed middle- and working-class individuals, who read newspapers and advice manuals (e.g., Bunce, 1884; Reed, 1878) to familiarize themselves with American culture and to educate themselves in everything from the English language to artistic sensibilities on decorating, deportment, and etiquette. These texts were usually saturated with the term ‘artistic’ (as in making an artistic parlor) all of which they could see at Field’s (Blanchard, 1995 Harris, 1990; Richardson, 1911; Twyman, 1954). Thus, the same savvy consumers who knew where to find the classical and folk entertainment they saw in vaudeville (and which section they could afford in the theatre) also knew that Field’s was a place to see elite culture and the latest technology. Shopping at Field’s was as much learning from window shopping, as it was buying merchandise, as shoppers learned from their *gaze across the aisle*.

Field’s was a cultural and educational institution of artistry and popular education through the drama of shopping. Using merchandising strategies adapted from the aesthetic movement, Field’s produced the drama of shopping with social and cultural implications about class, gender, and race in three ways: First, the architecture of the store served as a carefully designed and segregated theatrical space for seeing and being seen in the drama of shopping. The departmentalization and arrangement of merchandise by degree of expense and luxury differentiated and sorted Field’s clientele according to their social status and what they could afford to buy. Elite shoppers who purchased luxuries did so under the gaze of other shoppers, who watched from across the aisle. Second, Field’s merchandising and marketing followed trends of the new profession of domestic science. It served as the script for the drama of shopping, through which customers negotiated the cultural hierarchy of artistry and new technology. Third, merchandising resembled the subculture of the aesthetic movement, but without its controversial gender roles, while it privileged predominant Anglo-American culture and rendered other social groups, including people of color, invisible. Today, the social and cultural traditions of American department store retail that began in the gilded age remain present as new forms of retail marketing. In turn the gendered cultural fences that divide retail patrons remain in the present day, though with different names and locations.

### **Modes of Popular Education and the Subculture of the Aesthetic Movement**

To understand the educational approach of department stores is also to understand the social consequences and contradictions within them. This section reviews research on popular education and the aesthetic movement in the United States, thereby placing the department store in an educational context with schooling and museums. The trope of “the drama of shopping” pulls together the entities of a department store as a mode of education. Shoppers acted out rituals of shopping and examples of what they could learn from the material culture of retail merchandising (e.g., Clausen, 1985; Grier, 1988; Harris, 1990).

Historians of the broader field of education have defined education as the transmission of “culture across generations” (Baylin, 1960, p. 74). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, education in the United States extended beyond schooling, across a configuration of museums, libraries, the mass media, and popular culture (Cremin, 1988). We know that drawing, book arts, and

various crafts were taught in the elementary grades in Chicago Public Schools, but as mentioned earlier, in Chicago's public high schools before World War I, students were tracked to either vocational or professional or college-prep programs, fencing out many from learning cultural knowledge that, they believed, would lead to social advancement.

Behind all the palatial architecture of Field's store was a social scientific framework that pervaded education and most human services in the entire city, a system of scientific management that sorted individuals from disparate ethnic and racial groups into social classes. Class divisions, however, were troubling, because the differentiation broke along gender, ethnic, and racial lines, and created systems of social closure by monopoly and exclusion (Murphy, 1988). Considerations of gender, ethnicity, and race expose the creation of social inequality.

First, predominant gender roles among elite and middle-class White Chicagoans placed women at home or, following the example of leading community women, in charity work, while predominant roles for men came from scientific professionalism in business and commerce. Many working class individuals would aspire to these roles as forms of self-improvement, and this article will show that department-store customers who did not fit these predominant gender roles were marginalized or fenced out.

Second, European immigrants at the turn of the century were mostly working class, who struggled to advance socially without a working knowledge of the predominant Anglo-American culture. For these individuals, Field's provided these opportunities as forms of popular domestic education, enabling working class immigrants to negotiate the invisible social fences that segregated the space of the store.

Third, race turns up particularly troubling issues, however, simply because African Americans were marginalized or even rendered invisible at Field's and few, if any African Americans were likely to shop or be employed there. Before 1900, 90% of African Americans lived in the Southern United States. Because of worsening social and political conditions for Southern Blacks and word of economic opportunities and jobs in the North, a movement to Northern cities called the Great Migration expanded African American populations in Northern cities. In addition, employers needed to hire African Americans, as World War I and immigration restrictions disrupted their supply of European immigrant laborers. Though the North offered better conditions and pay than the South, Blacks still faced a groundswell of racist resistance as their presence increased. Very few African Americans ever worked in retail. In fact, only .03% of Black males and .02% of Black females in the entire nation had sales jobs, compared to 4.2 White males and 4.1 females (United States Census, 1975). Laws in the South prohibited Blacks from trying on clothes in a department store, let alone allowing them to sell clothing to white customers. Amid these conditions, the democratic gospel of shopping-for-all at Field's fenced out people of color.

Promoting department store shopping as popular education in artistry might seem odd to 21<sup>st</sup> century ears; but from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, merchants like Marshall Field packaged the latest household wares and artistry as a culture of conveniences and daring fashion to heighten shoppers' desires. The educational aim for the department store shopper was to negotiate her personal tastes toward self-improvement and social advancement. Shoppers purchased new appliances, gadgets, and furniture; attended an art exhibit, a concert, or read a fashionable magazine in the store's elegant library. These activities were meant to associate the retail business with a sensibility of



cultural sophistication to attract patrons (Richardson, 1911; Twyman, 1954). There were also contradictions, however: the so-called artistry that merchants promoted was made to resemble the subculture of the aesthetic movement, while it was actually the direct opposite, reduced to the amusement in the drama of shopping.

Until the 1890s the subculture of the aesthetic movement was as much about freeing individuals from the fenced in spaces of puritanical Anglo-American cultural and social conventions, as it was meant to elevate beauty in everyday life. Blanchard (1995) summarized aestheticism as originating in England, in the 1850s and 1860s as a reaction to urbanization and industrialization. The aesthetic movement was influenced by John Ruskin, William Morris, and Henry Cole. In 1876, when exhibits of handicrafts from the movement were shown at Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition, aestheticism caught on in the United States as the 'aesthetic movement,' or the "new American art craze" (p. 22). Blanchard also observed that many women of the aesthetic movement were as enamored of science as they were of art. Uncorseted, they wore what were called 'aesthetic dresses' as an art form adorning their bodies. Their participation in physical fitness was a transgression across the gendered fence into the male sphere of physical fitness, higher education, and the professions. Feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for example, tutored girls in drawing, painting, and gymnastics (Gilman, 1935). It is also important to note that the aesthetic movement included men who sought an escape from the scientific professional male role that predominated American culture after the Civil War. Men practiced their own artistry, ranging from decorating parlors to dressing sometimes in flowing velvet and silk robes, at times with implications of homoeroticism and transvestism. George Chauncey (1994) observed that the heterosexual-homosexual binary that exists today was already present among the middle and upper classes in the gilded age, but it did not define working class thinking. For example, "*bisexual* referred to individuals who combined the physical and/or psychic attributes of both men and women. A bisexual was not attracted to both males and females; a bisexual was both male and female" (p. 49). Most puritanical minds would have associated these social roles and the aesthetic fashions that went with them with being radical and immoral.

By the 1890s, things changed and social and gendered fences shifted. The strictly defined social roles of science and professionalism (discussed previously) predominated business and commerce, and aesthetic sensibilities were marginalized. Also at this time, department store merchants co-opted the aesthetic subculture as a sanitized ethos and extinguished women's and men's controversial gender roles. They marketed aesthetic dress as high fashion and provided men with plush, parlor-like library and club spaces. The cultural agency for the men and women of the subculture was buried under the structure of merchandising as cultural refinement and artistry for women. The homoeroticism of aesthetic dress that some aesthetic men and women practiced was replaced in traditional minds by the clinical designation of "the homosexual" and "the abnormal." The remnants of the aesthetic subculture "became marginal and suspect by the turn of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century" (Blanchard, 1995, p. 50). Aesthetes were eventually fenced out as isolated Bohemian cult groups in high schools and universities. What was left was beauty as entertainment and aesthetic education as puritanical and moral uplift promoted as education in the department store.

## **Department Store Architecture and the Drama of Shopping**

In 1892, the drama of shopping was part of grand efforts of the city of Chicago to transform its urban center, known as 'The Loop,' and the Lake Michigan shore into the fairgrounds for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. In the Loop, an earlier development of State Street as an elite shopping district was underway, with the largest store, Marshall Field and Company, under construction and set to open for the World's Fair. The discussion of Field's as a space designed for education begins with the department store architecture itself, which was the physical embodiment of the conceptual 'fence' into which aesthetic culture was contained as a shopping experience. The palatial architecture with classical ornamentation, wood paneling, and casework masked the building designed to support the specialized administrative and technical tasks that supported the production of drama on the sales floor. The mezzanines, wide aisles, mirrors, and several atria provided the elegant space for strolling and shopping. The centerpiece was a central atrium, which featured a mosaic glass dome by Louis Comfort Tiffany. The store was designed as a theatrical playground for the self-presentation of shoppers who customarily dressed in their best attire as if they were spending their day in a palace. Late 19th-century buildings such as department stores were organized to accommodate large volumes of business and traffic flow. Social fences were invisible as the store building design directed patrons to the merchandise they could afford while tempting them to roam the vast space of the floor and see more expensive things from afar.

In order to keep shoppers in the store longer, architects designed the buildings to 'teach' shoppers how to navigate the store's invisible social fences: First, uniform and effective wide aisles and displays brought customers together with services and artifacts. Second, wall directories had to be easy to find and served as an index arranged by floor. Even the floor walkers, guides, clerks, and custodial personnel were fundamental extensions of the communication systems of typewriters, pneumatic tubes, and telephones. Third, mechanisms 'taught' users how to find the departments they wanted by way of automated dynamic information displays like position indicator boards that tracked elevators as they moved from floor to floor. Marshall Field's predecessor, Potter Palmer, saw many of these innovations on his buying trips to Paris, France and he incorporated those strategies in his own store (Harris, 1990; Twyman, 1954).

### **Stores in Paris**

The department store building type evolved from earlier mercantile organizations and expositions in 17th- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Paris. By the 1820s and 1830s, what were once centralized open markets had been reorganized as arcades that housed many shops under one roof; and many producers joined forces to increase production in mills and factories (Clausen, 1985). The department store was a specialized building, made to promote convenience, novelty, and bigness that drew upon a psychological ploy of desire. Meredith L. Clausen (1985), a historian of department store architecture, notes that the first building in Paris to be designed and built as a department store was for Aristide Boucicaut's Bon Marché. Boucicaut's building was a departure from earlier ones that were made by remodeling or combining smaller stores. It was the first significant example of architecture designed to be a department store from the ground up. Shopping was a continuation of the European social ritual called 'the promenade.' Shopping had become a social custom where patrons could stop at a department store to observe, relax, use a 'comfort station,' or dine in the store. The store was designed as a theater for the artistic self. The merchant and the

architect thought like dramaturges, designing a store building “as a stage set in an elegant theater for the public” (Clausen, p. 24). Bon Marché's double revolution staircase was like the one at the recently opened Paris Opera. It drew patrons to the upper floors and to the iron footbridges that spanned the sales floor. These vantage points elevated shoppers above the crowd in the drama of seeing and being seen.

### **Origins of Marshall Field and Company**

From what Potter Palmer observed in Paris, he knew that for Chicago to boast of a world class downtown, an elite retail establishment was needed to attract women in great numbers to the area. Such a new store would have to be located away from the current retail area on Lake Street, not regarded as a proper area for a woman of means. Knowing that women shoppers would linger on well-lit and clean streets, Palmer chose a location at State and Washington Streets for the new, marble-faced Palmer's Emporium. This choice anchored State Street as the new downtown shopping area. Despite the dirty conditions at the old location on Lake Street, Palmer's dry goods store, P. Palmer & Company, was known for the largest variety of merchandise in the city, with many items imported from Europe. Service was very important because traditionally a woman would not be acknowledged in public places and receive service unless she was with a man. At Palmer's store, however, women could enter on their own and expect good service whether they bought anything or simply browsed (Miller, 1996; Twyman, 1954).

In Chicago's climate of fast-paced growth and commercial development, Palmer's Emporium successively changed management and ownership. Palmer's Emporium was soon taken over by Marshall Field and Levi Leiter, only to be consumed in the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. While recovering from the fire, Field and Leiter conducted business from several temporary locations. They re-opened the store in a leased building at the Washington and State Street location in 1873. After an expansion, this store was also destroyed by fire. In 1879, the store was rebuilt and this time, Field and Leiter bought the building that became the first section of the present store. In 1881, Leiter retired from the partnership, and the store was renamed Marshall Field and Company. In 1887, Field expanded his business into wholesale, in a notable building designed by Henry Hobson Richardson. In 1892, the wealth Field had gained from his wholesale venture enabled him to expand his retail business into a new building by Daniel H. Burnham, at the corner of Wabash and Washington Streets. Meanwhile, the store from 1879 was expanded as a nine-story annex to accommodate the crowds from the World's Columbian Exhibition, which opened the following year. In 1901, Field's expanded into a new 12-story building, along with a third one added in 1906. A fourth building, added in 1914, extended the area of the store across the entire block, between Washington and Randolph, and State and Wabash Streets. Thus, what began as P. Palmer and Company on Lake Street grew into the largest department store in the world (Miller, 1996; Twyman, 1954).

### **Merchandising as Aesthetic Education in the Drama of Shopping**

If the architecture of the department store was the segregated theatrical space for the drama of shopping, the next consideration for this drama was its 'script' of merchandising and sales strategies drawn from domestic science (or home economics). Merchandising was treated as if it were dramaturgy to categorize and discuss the various kinds of art forms (merchandise), their interconnectedness, and their styles. Just as the dramaturge researched the historical and cultural aspects of theatrical production, so did

merchandisers at Field's promote visual, musical, and literary forms as part of the shoppers' experiences, sorted according to degree of luxury. When Field's began to market to shoppers of all classes, including men, to expand patronage (Twyman, 1954), he took the dramaturgy from domestic science, a new profession and one of the few populated mostly by women. Thus, Field's became a place where women could see the latest technologies for the home as science-made-for-them in appliances and gadgets.

Domestic science also pervaded public and private life, beyond retail institutions. It constituted everything from knowledge of food service in school cafeterias to pre-prepared food for the home (Spring, 2005). During the 1870s and 1880s, it also became an increasingly important subject matter for journalists writing advice columns for women readers. One of these journalists was an instructor at the Boston Cooking School, Mary Johnson Bailey Lincoln, who co-founded the *The New England Kitchen Magazine* in 1894. The magazine was later retitled *American Kitchen Magazine*, of which Lincoln was the culinary editor and the syndicated columnist of "Day to Day." Her cookbook, *Mrs. Lincoln's Boston Cook Book: What to Do and Not Do in Cooking* (1884), was the forerunner of the *Fannie Farmer's The Boston Cooking School Cookbook* (1896). On balance, as popular as domestic science was, it was also criticized for assuming that scientific experts knew more about cooking and housework than women who followed their own traditions passed down over generations (Spring, 2005). Yet, being aware of new scientific trends in popular culture became more important for some women at a time when they began to challenge the gendered fences of the male-centered scientific professional realm (Witz, 1992). It makes perfect sense, then, that Field's would appeal to women as a place to browse and purchase the latest homemaking technologies, as well as clothing and decorative fashions.

In another magazine, *Women's Home Companion*, appeared an article by Anna Steese Richardson titled "The Modern Woman's Paradise: Some of the Education and Artistic Advantages that are Offered by the Great Department-Store of To-day" (1911). Richardson's work as editor and syndicated columnist helped shape social and cultural issues for the benefit of women. Her article positioned Field's as an artistic and educational agency for all women, no matter how small their purchase. Richardson noted that the department store represented "certain luxuries which [the shopper had] always craved, and which she may enjoy for a few hours without money and without price" (p. 22). Upon entering the store, shoppers were greeted, and they left their coat and purse at the coat check room. A guide was assigned to the shopper to help her navigate what must have felt like an enormous space. No money was exchanged during the shopping excursion; the guide recorded purchases on a transfer card, and the balance was paid when shopping was done. Once a shopper had found the items on her list, and delivery of purchases was arranged for, she could spend leisure time as if to "give herself up unrestrainedly to the joys of the great store itself," no matter how much or how little she had purchased (p. 22).

Richardson's article portrays Field's as a store that welcomed women from all classes, as they wanted it to appear to shoppers, but the history of department stores has also shown that sales floors were subdivided into departments that catered to particular clientele with social differentiation in mind. Guides and other sales staff would usher shoppers around the store to find what they wanted, but like good real estate agents, they also kept shoppers within their own income zones. Just as in theaters, where more expensive seats went for higher prices and kept those with less spending power away from the wealthy audience members, at Field's customers were matched with the merchandise they could buy, though

they could negotiate invisible social fences and observe more luxurious displays and goods in their *gaze across the aisle*.

Field's stocked seemingly every kind of merchandise and provided every cultural activity in a space where the desire for new technologies and artistry could be easily transposed to educational purposes. Browsing to find new merchandise was as important an activity for shoppers as purchasing it. They would see a range of merchandise from the most affordable to the most expensive, based on the simple idea that a shopper will not know she wants an item until she has seen it. An important sales strategy, for example, was the demonstration of appliances. Richardson (1911) describes the experience of a shopper who cooked at home on a coal stove and who would never consider a modern gas range, because it had only one burner, which would limit her cooking. She came across a cooking demonstration, however, in which the presenter used three triangular pans that fit together in a circle over the single burner. Seeing a solution to her doubts, the shopper purchased the gas stove, a piece of new technology for her home. Owning a gas stove in 1911, much like purchasing a microwave oven in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, would likely have been a show of wisdom and an educated decision.

Richardson (1911) also discusses a merchandising strategy in which merchants displayed items as they might appear in a room at home. By arranging furniture, carpet, and decorative artifacts this way, merchants departed from the convention of sorting furniture into rows by type. Richardson describes another woman's shopping trip to show how she negotiated her personal taste. A woman travels to Field's with her mother, who complains that her parlor furniture is overly formal. At Field's, they find the new craftsman-style furniture set up in a new configuration called a 'living room.' It is likely the women saw the setting advertised as a 'living room,' a term that gradually replaced "parlor" by 1910 (Grier, 1988). Richardson's example continues to describe the mother as having doubts about craftsman furniture, judging by a catalog illustration; but changing her mind when she sees the room display, and buying the furniture. In this case Richardson explains, the merchandising strategy worked: the shopper knew what she wanted when she saw it and was convinced it would be a self-improvement, just as the owner of a new gas stove saw the wisdom of using the new gas stove technology.

Some locations of the store were designed to introduce shoppers to new experiences. Richardson (1911) describes these as opportunities for women with less means to experience artistic and cultural education. In the fully-stocked library at Field's, customers could read most popular books and magazines. An attendant would bring reading materials to them, while they waited in comfortable easy chairs. For well-heeled shoppers, a library made the store familiar, educational, and fun, and for the working- or middle-class shopper, these activities might have introduced them to reading materials or even an upholstered chair they had not used before or could not afford. The store's writing rooms and lounges had luxurious mahogany desks where a patron could sit and write notes to friends on fine stationery and mail them. Lunch was available for a reasonable price in a plush wood-paneled dining room with mirrors and chandeliers, with music in the background that one would expect at a fine hotel. After lunch, a shopper could attend a free concert in the piano department or an art exhibition in the gallery. Given the opportunity to negotiate the store's social fences and range of merchandise, browsing at Field's was most likely a working-class shopper's only exposure to a concert or art exhibit in the downtown area. Shopping as education was a chance for patrons to think about their taste, negotiate their place in the cultural hierarchy, and perhaps, purchase something to improve their lives.

At times, both men and women had to negotiate fences. Richardson's (1911) writing was pitched specifically to women, and not men who might also want to equip a kitchen or decorate a parlor; but advice books about decorating and dress were available to men. One manual written for male followers of the aesthetic movement cautions male readers not to become overly concerned with professional and public duties and to take time to tend to the beauty of their home (Reed, 1878). Though men probably did not shop department stores to the extent that women did, they were present in department stores. Earlier in the century, as a way to introduce Parisian men to the store, Bon Marché provided a billiard lounge for them to use while their companions shopped. Much later in 1914, Field's six-floor men's store opened, along with separate lounges for men and women, which became important social destinations in the Loop. The lounges were modeled after the tradition of gender-specific rooms and seating used for entertaining guests in most middle- and upper-class homes. After dinner, men would retire to a smoking room with easy chairs, while women would use another sitting room with chairs that kept their posture upright (Grier, 1988). Men would enjoy lounges in public but would not likely decorate a room in their home themselves, for such decoration carried the stigma of a feminized man (Blanchard, 1995). Indeed, these public spaces supported the conduct of predominant gender roles associated with the male-dominated scientific professional sphere.

### **The Drama of Shopping – Then and Now**

Field's was a cultural and retail institution that promoted the drama of shopping as artistry and education with its many layers of social roles. Though Marshall Field's is no longer in business, trends in retail that started during the gilded age at Field's and other leading stores have evolved into new forms of those traditions, though names, places and signifiers have changed. The architecture of retail, the drama of retail, and the relation of the drama of shopping to social and cultural issues and to art education have become contemporary phenomena.

#### **Architecture**

Since 1911, Daniel Burnham's architecture was a theatrical space for the drama of shopping. Elements of the department-store building type are expanded today and redistributed across larger shopping malls and the virtual architecture of the worldwide web in contemporary retail spaces. Even though recently many of the influential department stores, such as Wanamaker's, Dayton Hudson, Lord and Taylor, and even Marshall Field's have merged or gone out of business, the concept of the department store is still present as a 'universe' of seemingly every kind of merchandise available. Stores like Wal-Mart exemplify the abundant one-store-for-all. On the worldwide web, Amazon.com has the same pervasive scope. Wal-Mart's new stores carry a reputation of monopolizing retail and extinguishing small businesses (Sobel & Dean, 2008), just as Field's was controversial for taking the lion's share of retail trade in the Loop (Twyman, 1954). But not all department stores have died. Dayton Hudson in Minneapolis successfully re-emerged as Target in 2000, which still carries a whimsical cache of novelty and artistry, but at a lower price than one would have paid at Field's (Anonymous, 2000). Shopping malls such as the Mall of America include theaters and even hotels, located a convenient distance from the Minneapolis International Airport (Gerlach & Janke, 2001), much as Field's was conveniently near Chicago's hotels and rail terminal (Richardson, 1911).

## Drama

The drama of shopping that played out in department store venues out in the public spheres of retail, the media, and the street continues to be the backdrops for seeing and being seen today. Stores still advertise new technologies in kitchen appliances. In 1910, a woman purchased a gas range, whereas today, digitally controlled professional ranges, refrigerators, and other appliances are some of the most expensive purchases a home owner can make, to convey a message that the owner not only values cuisine but wants to be an expert. In 1910, new household products and ready-made food became ways of efficient living to survive the fast pace of urban life, just as they are now. Retail spaces continue to be gendered, though marketing now to women *and* men, selling anything from clothing to shoes and digital devices. Teller and Thompson (2012) have shown that both female and male shoppers today value a mix of retail tenants and elaborate shopping atmosphere more than they value other aspects of shopping. Just as a 'universe' of merchandise and atmosphere was essential to the gilded-age department store, the same qualities of bigness, variety, and spectacle draw customers to retail spaces today.

## Social and Cultural Issues

In the gilded age, Field's merchandising resembled the subculture of the aesthetic movement which I discussed in relation to mainly gender roles with considerations of ethnicity and race. Today almost 100 years later, the fences still stand, but are negotiated differently. A cultural tension remains between artistry as cultural refinement in retail and subcultural gender roles, though names, places, and signifiers have changed. In appropriating the aesthetic subculture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Field's created stereotypes of the aesthetic movement by filtering out associations with the controversial gender roles, the social roots of the aesthetic movement.

Some of these gilded-age social undercurrents have also carried into the present day. As discussed above, the subculture of aesthetic women and men countered the social constraints of predominant trends in urbanism and mass industry. The department store sanitized this subculture as beauty, entertainment, and aesthetic education and sold it as puritanical and moral uplift. In the 1970s, this amelioration of gender roles also set relationships between artistic subcultures and retail, as a new *de facto* guild system emerged in New York's Greenwich Village and the Garment District, which became centers of a late 20<sup>th</sup> - century fashion aestheticism. Gloria Vanderbilt and Calvin Klein produced designs for blue jeans that were soon mass produced in Asia and exported around the world (Cremin, 1988). The subcultural artists became prominent as their identities evolved into names on a designer label; but this time, the gender roles associated with designer artistry were no longer underground; they were were '(de)fenced' prominently along with the outburst of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) life, which surfaced in New York's Greenwich Village and regions beyond. In time, the sexuality and gender roles of designers, retailers, and entertainers, among other figures, gradually surfaced in the ethos of advertising and marketing in LGBT communities in Chicago, New York, and other major cities, which eventually mainstreamed across generations of American culture (Chauncey, 1994; Duby, 1991).

### Conclusion: Art Education

Histories of department stores provide perspective for art education, because of schooling's long association with retail. Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century manual training students in Chicago's public high schools supported retail indirectly by supplying a labor force either for manufacturing or for working in stores (Wrigley, 1982). High school graduates took jobs in factories making everything from shirtwaists to trousers, while other privileged graduates from professional or commercial high school programs could look for clerical and sales jobs (Miller, 1996). Similarly, today's art students move into jobs where they affect the trends of design and merchandising with digital imagery and other computer-assisted design. These students would benefit from studying the social and cultural contours of merchandising and retail to become aware of the popular educational impact they have.

Because of this relation and many others between art education and retail, researchers and practitioners in art education explore visual culture (e.g., Freedman, 2003; Sturken and Cartwright, 2009). They prepare students for understanding how identities are composed, which also applies to perceptions of seeing and being seen, even in the drama of retail merchandising. As advice manuals, for example, were important sources of artistry and social conduct in the gilded age, today's decorating magazines remain important reading. Lackey (2005) shows how these publications reveal complicated patterns of gender and serve as sites for art education that is socially and culturally relevant, for students are also consumers. As shoppers did in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, today's store patrons continually negotiate the fences of their identities and tastes within the material culture of merchandising and at the same time, they reflect on what their tastes imply about their roles as women or men. Indeed, serious and open-minded attention to the fanciful drama of retail marketing would reveal relationships between retail marketing and shoppers' perceptions that could expand the critical role of art education in research and practice.

Across the cultural landscape, learning is ever-present in the notion of department store shopping as popular education in artistry. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the educational aim of the department store shoppers has been to negotiate their personal tastes toward self-improvement and social advancement. Merchants like Marshall Field understood this desire, and Field's promoted the latest household wares and artistry as a culture of conveniences and daring fashion. Coupling merchandise with displays of the fine arts would raise the status of merchandise to luxury-as-art and heighten shoppers' desire. In time, Chicago's vocational public high schools would house grass-roots extracurricular activities in the arts and recreation before World War I; but for the working classes, the trolley ride to the distant Loop to visit art museums, galleries, and concert halls remained unlikely (Gutowski, 1978; Rhor, 2004).

When all is said, shopping is a much more complicated social ritual than simply looking and buying. Shoppers knowing what they wanted when they saw it constituted a densely layered negotiation of social and gendered fences of identity. Field's was where individuals came to browse and learn by looking not only at displays of artifacts, but at each other as well. Department store customers 100 years ago and now participate in the drama, desire, and envy of shopping, wishfully *gazing across the aisle*.



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### Abstract

The author of this article, an art teacher, arts education advocate, teaching artist, pre-service art teacher supervisor and instructor confronts “either/or” professional identities in arts education. Multi-faceted artist/scholar/educator/learner/advocate/personas are “unfenced” in order to navigate spaces of artistic, educational, and cultural production without having to pause for identification at borders. In this form, pedagogies for inventive social change emerge. Dialogue among fields of artists and educators links either/or, artist/teacher qualities in holistic and interdisciplinary descriptions such as artist-teacher, teaching-artist, etc. The hyphenated association has become postmodern shorthand for inclusive “both/and” professional identities that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may be limiting or exclusive. I argue that nimble, socio-critical professional identity can be realized when “hyphenated” artists are prepared to embody pedagogy of intersubjectivity in third space practices.

### A Body of Potential

The streets were not plowed. It was one of those lake effect blizzards that frightened school administrators enough to announce cancellations of afterschool activities before the school day was half over. Eighteen third grade bilingual (Spanish language) students and teachers climbed over snowdrifts and inched single-file through deep and narrow paths for a twenty-minute journey to the art gallery. They were in the middle of exciting research and solidarity as they confronted the storm that transformed the group into a lumpy-but-sinuuous body of possibilities (See Figure 1). Their study involved an exhibit by contemporary artist Rigo 23, whose unique alpha-numeric name they might not remember, but whose work was all about the controversial life and imprisonment of American Indian Movement activist Leonard Peltier. They were working closely with community teaching artists to better understand how an artist was able to tell a life story and formulate a portrait without making traditional art objects like paintings or sculptures of his own. Rigo 23 organized information about Leonard: photos, newspaper clippings, some of Leonard's own paintings, and he synthesized the information over the framework of a timeline. He invited people to come into the gallery space and create their own artifacts, messages, and conclusions about American history and social justice.



Figure 1. Body of possibilities.

This project began as a simple examination of a timeline as a device for conveying narratives and for using historic information to understand cultural events that happen in our own lives. It evolved into teachers, learners, and artists spending weeks gathering and organizing data from the installation by Rigo 23 and from paintings in the installation created by Leonard Peltier. Because the exhibit was intentionally designed to feel like the interior of a prison, the timeline became a small part of the study and the provocative positioning of gallery visitors as temporary inmates became the real object of interest. Some confusion arose about whether we were studying the art or advocacy of Rigo 23 or the art and advocacy of Leonard Peltier because Leonard was intentionally portrayed as both a prisoner and as an artist. Additional confusions emerged about similarities and differences between learner and teacher identities. Assigned roles of child and adult, Latino and North

American, teaching-artists from visual and performing arts disciplines, and arts/humanities teachers from the school were examined in classroom, community, studio, exhibit, and performance sites. The blurred boundaries and interconnected roles were mostly reassuring and logical, but there were times when definition and categorization helped to reinforce confidence and responsibility in our roles.

Artists, learners, teachers, researchers, and advocates in this situation were “hyphenated” (Cohen-Cruz, 2010; Lopez, 2009) in changing combinations each day. No one was required to wear a visible label, but the ambiguity of the roles made it important in many of the activities to sort and identify differences between the labor, work, and action<sup>1</sup> (Arendt, 1958) performed through personal histories, meaningful materials, and collaborative actions. There were many more combinations: Haudenosaunee-warrior-dancers, a music-teacher/jazz-artist, a retired kindergarten teacher hired as a teaching-artist/historian; the combinations were endless, but the two terms that seemed to require frequent distinction were *artist* and *teacher*. A Haudenosaunee dancer explained that there was no equivalent in his native language for the word *artist* because there was no real need to distinguish between form and function or between spiritual or social activities and objects (D. Schenendoah, personal communication, January 14, 2011). Similarly the role of teacher was questioned often as adults and children took turns leading inquiries and learning from each other. The dancer explained that warriors in his clan held a distinct responsibility for teaching and nurturing, but they were not especially named *teacher*, because a warrior was understood to have fluid dimensions and responsibilities.

Over time, we noticed that calling each person by his or her name was more productive than the status or limitations that came with the titles. We paused from time to time to acknowledge the moments when we felt more or less like artistic, educational, historical, cultural, or personal thinkers as a way to check in with the distinctions that vexed us. A hybrid grammar and way of engaging was formed by our shared learning in a third space (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Gutierrez, 2009; Stevensen & Deasy, 2005) that allowed adults and children to contest and transform the status and meaning of work. It was certainly artistic-educational, but it was realized through something uniquely social. The progress and challenges in this situation were not attributable to any one artist, learner, teacher, researcher, or human identity. The professional qualities of artist and teacher were frequently referenced, not because they were most important, but because they were frequently contested.

### **Agency and Border Work**

In the gallery, adults and children examined paintings by Leonard Peltier and referred to him as an artist. When they traced the timeline of his life and the impact of his

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<sup>1</sup> According to Hannah Arendt (1958), labor is judged by its ability to sustain human life, to cater to our biological needs of consumption and reproduction, work is judged by its ability to build and maintain a world fit for human use, and action is judged by its ability to disclose the identity of the agent, to affirm the reality of the world, and to actualize our capacity for freedom.

imprisonment on people in other nations, they decided that he was a teacher at the same time. When it was time to tell his story to their friends and family, they simply called him Leonard. Descriptions of a prisoner, artist, teacher, American Indian, hero, or elder entered into their messages. They found that a category of identity was infinitely less valuable than the interchangeable bundle of actions and artifacts that surrounded his life.

Meaningful learning and cultural concerns came together as factors in what Boykin and Noguera (2011) call asset-focused intersubjectivity. Characteristics that informed the work of artists, learners, teachers, and researchers were exchanged and attached to individual and collective bodies in what Gutierrez refers to as “sociocritical literacy” (2009).

I am conscious of my own intersubjective and sociocritical roles in a world of “certified” teachers when I am in a school between the hours of 8:00 to 3:00. With earned credentials in hand, and history as an art teacher in public schools, I contribute to the construction of a “collective self” (Freedman, Stuhr, & Weinberg, 1989, p. 53) with teachers and their definitions of “other” non-teachers in society: administrators, students, parents, and more. With the subtle shift of a metaphorical fencepost, I become a teaching-artist because I am not on the district payroll anymore. I come and go during the day, affiliated with a cultural organization that resists the institutional constraints of school systems. I now have “other” membership, and there is a tangible distance between teaching-artist and art teacher defined by perceived or practiced agency. On the teaching-artist side of this fence, I am either/or, either special guest or interrupting visitor. On the art teacher side, I am either accommodating professional or constrained institutional worker.

When I perform as an artist, parent, out-of-school-time cultural partner, or as a representative of higher-education culture, just outside of “the room”<sup>2</sup> of instruction and interaction (Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland, & Palmer, 2009), my responsibility to a larger “arts learning ecosystem” (Booth, 2009) is evident. It is necessary to straddle status as artist-student/instructor/employee of a research university in a city where top-down “ivory tower” practices as either/or, inclusive or selective have been distrusted and hotly debated. As an artist-teacher I am an economic entity with valuable creative capital (Florida, 2002) or a burden of costly extras to taxpayers. When I am an artist-teacher on campus, the hyphenated space between art and education sometimes creates a dubious distinction as less rigorous in either world, less artist in schools of art, less teacher in schools of education (Cohen-Cruz, 2011; Lackey 2009).

As a policy-maker in the hyphenated or slashed worlds of public education, campus/community relations, and socio-economic development, I am positioned at a great distance

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<sup>2</sup> “The room” as described in the *Qualities of Quality* report by Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland, & Palmer, is at the center of concentric circles of influence. The influences that immediately surround “the room” come from parents, school personnel, peers, and others who are not immediately engaged in a learning experience. The next circle of influences include local, district, and legislative policymakers who might never have personal interaction with those “in the room.” They operate mostly from a situation of perceived objectivity.

from “the room” of interpersonal learning. In this space, it has been necessary to move in a quirky, fast-stepping dance to maintain the integrity of my history as either artist or teacher. Yet, when I assimilate and accept a less subjective membership in this space, I can be more efficient. I also appear to be more objective, and I can’t help but wonder what happens to the quality of learning way back “in the room” when decision makers choose to leave social and critical concerns at the door.

James Rolling (2010) suggests that the worlds of art education are at the “Turn of the Tide” and that when we engage in “both/and” actions, we can renew social potential endlessly. I agree that “both/and” engagement is proliferative and that the time for “either/or” categories is past. I argue that “hyphenated” or “slashed” identification such as artist-teacher, or artist-researcher in arts education worlds may also be fencing in and dividing the potential of a person to expand socio-critical repertoire beyond an expected role of artist, educator, learner, advocate, or researcher. The questions that I seek to understand include: What are the advantages or disadvantages in adopting hyphenated descriptors in a time of social, educational, and artistic paradigm changes? What can be gained by compounding an identity with social and critical information in educational sites? Where are the spaces of greatest potential for engaging hybrid identities and maximizing their qualities? Why does this matter to our learners?

### **ALTR Ego**

Learners in this situation were beginning to interrogate the identities that they were given by institutions of school and society. They were also beginning to see how artists exercised unique license by questioning institutions and identities with clever and perspective-changing tactics. Artists were less important because they were “famous” and more important because they provided helpful approaches to dealing with challenges. The Rigo-Peltier project was completed by third grade students and teachers in early 2011. In the fall of 2011, when those same students were in fourth grade, they went on a study trip to a history museum. When the docent began to explain what an artifact is, one of the students said, “Oh, we already know what those are. You see, if we did not have art, then no one would ever understand facts about things that happened before us” (R. Jackson, personal communication, 2011). Seeing art or artists in more mundane moments and spaces in the everyday world allowed our learners to appreciate their own contribution to history and the future. De-emphasizing the “art-star” status of artistic work allowed it to be meaningful, but not privileged.

By naming and affixing finite qualities to my life work, making sense of the world through drawing, painting, sculpting, installation, photography, and assemblage, eventually after thirty-some years, I chose to call myself artist. But the distinction as visual-artist limited my navigation to worlds of people who required my work to be exhibit-able or sell-able or folk-, or function-aligned. While I earned money and made people happy when I sold illustrations for publication or crafted works in galleries, the dialogue of ideas often ended at the moment of consumption. Where did I belong if I was an artist who used visual work more to



think and less to express a fixed notion? Hiroshi Sugimoto tried to summarize this conundrum when he semi-seriously called himself, “postmodern-experienced pre-postmodern modernist” (2005), but even as a jest, the hyphenated nature of the label implied even more meaning than could possibly be expressed in words alone.

By attaining certificates and tenure in public art education, I have been able to expand the packaged “work” of art into action and interaction with young people and adults as we grapple with pedagogical systems. But the confined space of an educational system assigns visual art to a category of “school art” (Efland, 1988, p. 518) as “an institutional art style in its own right” (p. 519). There was a time when I was questioned by my school principal because I wanted to bring a Ghanian drummer to school to study polyrhythm and pattern dynamics. He reminded me that I was the “art” teacher and this potentially trespassed onto the turf of colleague artists who taught music classes (F. Misurelly, personal communication, 1996). The music teachers shared my excitement about bringing the drummer into our school, and they too, had to redefine their roles in relationship to the guest artist. He was performing (on stage), and they were not. Amazing and potential-filled learning happened regardless of the identities we applied to our professional roles. We were conscious of boundaries that defined our collective culture “in the room” where the intersubjective labors of learning were inevitable. We wrestled with our identities “just outside of the room” where our work was understood within categories of production. We alternately conformed to and resisted the actions “at a distance from the room” (Seidel et al., 2009) where worlds were defined by our own labor and work or by strangers who crafted policy. Gates were unlocked, and more often locks were picked in order to unfence the potential there.

By entering into the school curriculum either as an independent teaching-artist or artist-teacher with a community/cultural institution, I have interrupted classroom culture with professional peers and students for better or for worse. With these hyphenated and slashed professional identities, we stretched boundaries as teachers, learners, artists, administrators, parents, and social activists. We fused and extended at the same time. The two spaces of artist and/or teacher insufficiently allowed for a third space of ambiguity and contest between those titles. The dimensions of the space between may be understood through the utility of Garoian’s (2010) “prosthetic extension” metaphor. He argues that “slippages of perception in these spaces enable insightful and multivalent ways of seeing and understanding the complexities of alterity” (p. 179). The hyphen becomes much more than a flexible footbridge between artist and teacher. As a prosthetic device, the hyphen or slash extends into many dimensions, providing portals, ladders, telescopes, and many more points of contact for identity.

What once felt to me like cross-dressing and code-switching dispositions of teaching artistry, I understood to be prosthetic assets that have liberated children to be scientists, historians, and artists when I taught at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston as a museum-educator. The code switching also helped teacher-learner-poets to become dancers when I trained artists and teachers for an afterschool program in the Adirondacks. Additionally, teachers became specialized consultants when we conducted teaching-artist/art teacher

research in an urban high school in Niagara Falls. An elementary teacher in Syracuse told me that the “extra-artsy stuff” we were doing with arts integration “made up for things the kids and school didn’t have.” During a video installation exploration at a contemporary gallery with his students, he was shocked to discover that he felt like an artist or scientist himself. He said that “It felt like opening a window into a totally new world that was always there.” (R. Stanton, personal communication, 2010)

I have also been in the room when art teachers have voiced fear that teaching-artists and artist/researcher/teachers (Irwin, 2004) will displace them in school culture. Research proving that there is no such threat (Rabkin, 2011) still lacks the power to reassure many school art professionals. The persistently reductive problem of learning standards assessed for efficacy and required by distant decision-makers is, “establishing boundaries that limit the possibilities of student imagination.” (Freedman, 2008, p.40)

In a fit of desperation and/or rebellion against these limitations, I founded and directed a non-profit organization that offered resources and support to artists and teachers in all areas of the arts learning ecosystem. There was real power in the ambiguous situation of the organization as neither a state nor local agency, neither an arts nor education service organization. By remaining unaligned in our definition as *Partners for Arts Education*, personnel, supporters, and clients were able to scan the fields of overlap and separation between art/arts and/or public/community/higher education. We were able to animate spaces of need and distance with resources from many sources. We were able to understand and participate in the worlds of artistry and education in the broad context of economic, academic, social, political systems. By adopting the language of partnerships, we legitimized a contractual model that requested give and take from parties in shared action. This ambiguous membership was also a weakness, as it resisted confining alliances with powerful institutions such as a research university, a state arts council, and a traditional community of arts presenters. This decision to not explicitly “cite” our social justice intentions as recommended by Therese Quinn (2006) ultimately led to weakened leadership and resources. One of our most nimble funding partners was able to advance the social precedent of our work because he or she had visionary representatives who understood relevant and local identities. Yet, the identity of that partner institution, a multinational bank, is defined in empirical and economic terms far away from the visionary individuals entrusted with locally relevant decision-making.

By participating as a national/international arts education decision-maker with Americans for the Arts, the *Teaching Artist Journal*, and policy projects with the U.S. Department of Education, and public/private foundations, I have been able to understand the limitless dimensions of the fields, worlds, ecosystems, and spaces that I used to want to name, organize, and control with simplest terms and bulleted lists. I understand the qualities of relationships and believe each and every transaction to be essential in the making of new meaning. I understand a “third-eye” (Jordan-Irvine, 2003) pedagogy that could enlighten and transform cultural constraints in education. Unfortunately, this personal and Zen-like perspective is unhelpful to emerging artists who want to belong to a collegial community or

to parents who want their children to perform within systems that will allow them passage to the next level of achievement.



Figure 2. ALTspace Options.

With the new responsibilities of an emerging researcher at Syracuse University, I synthesized my professional identity as an *ALTR ego*. This came from what I considered a clever fusing of Artist, Learner, Teacher, Researcher into an unhyphenated or slashed professional category. I thought that it allowed for unlimited access to all of the bordered institutions of my work. In my policy-making world, the efficacy of the acronym *ALT* provided what I considered to be a contemporary solution to

the artist-teacher conundrum and included a metaphorical homage to the technological world that has hastened our development<sup>3</sup> (See Figure 2).

As I expanded my responsibilities to training a new generation of artists and teachers in varying combinations and institutions, I became conscious of my role as researcher and of the exclusivity of yet another vague textual title. It may be popular and rebellious as an artist to position myself in *ALTERNative* or *ALTR'd* spaces, but it reinforces the fencing of inside and outside status. The self-consciousness of border crossing and the respect that I have for inhabitants in each space push me to find a more meaningful set of actions that may not be scripted in words and letters, but in action and imagination. That question “Why does this matter to our learners?” comes back as a challenge. Who are the learners? Are they third graders or are they thirty-something adults? Are they prisoners of institutions or are they unbounded artists?

### A Body of Lived Data

How are systems reformed when we require learning to happen in predictable analog terms? Another student in the Rigo-Peltier project described how much she loved receiving letters every day from her own “prisoner-mom,” who was “going to be in jail for a long time” (P. Carter, personal communication, 2011). The adults in our project responded to the prisoner identity by saying how hard that it must be to have a mom in prison, ignoring her expression of pleasure at receiving so many letters of love. Her

<sup>3</sup> When you strike the *ALT* key on a computer while holding down the *SPACE* key you have the choice to “restore, move, size, minimize, maximize, or close” your position on the screen.

classmates responded to her by proposing that we make postcards and letters for Leonard and for other people who were in and outside of prisons so that they could help people to understand what it was like. They imagined avalanches of letters and a world of understanding.

If we remove the hyphenated links that bind artist-teacher-other in limited potential, then we confront risks that may emerge from “imaginative possibility” (Gutierrez, 2009) that can happen in third spaces and beyond traditional expectations. The terms artist-educator, teaching-artist, teacher-educator, student-teacher, and so on, have become badges of postmodern workers liberated from the rigid silos of art (as a noun) or teacher (as an authority) or student (as a subordinate). These identities have been fenced into economic spaces defined by: before-, after-, in-, or out-, of school; by artist- or teacher- first; by certified/credentialed or experienced/ practiced as professional and institutional commodities; and by campus/community/creative/ cultural alignment as social status. The -/ symbolism has new assumptions and values to be unpacked. What is the affective prosthetic difference between a hyphen as a joining device versus a hyphen as an extending device? What happens to professional bodies in the binary space that is represented with a slash?

These tiny lines of good intention have formed a new generation of meaning for arts education participants and a new generation of challenges for artist and teacher preparation programs. The hyphenated artist-teacher in-and-out of schools may have been trained as either an artist with a heavy tool-belt of educational instruments or a teacher with cultural citizenship in art worlds (Rabkin, 2011). The slashed artist/researcher/ teacher in campus/community situations may have been trained in art and design school, at the center or in the margins, as neither artist nor researcher. Jan Cohen-Cruz (2010) wrote that such hybrid artist-scholars challenge “a deeply-entrenched myth about artists: that thinking gets in the way of creating” (p. 169). These postmodern hybrids have been climbing through the fence rails of traditional quantitative and/or qualitative research debates as evidenced in the growing literature on arts-based research. By understanding that such discursive -/ spaces are inhabited by infinite combinations of cultural meaning, it may be possible to unfence greater potential by delimiting their use to a few selected words.

### **Third Space**

As I write this article, a new body of third grade students is studying the six blocks that divide or connect their school to a Latino community center. Walking, documenting, and creatively interpreting the physical and social distance from one space to another have revealed a third space that is contested and cherished in so many ways as educational/ cultural, community-school, mine/yours.

In order to make sense of the challenges of -/ identities, I examined the embodied

pedagogies<sup>4</sup> (Wacquant, 2011) of artists, teachers, learners, and researchers through the mediation and contestation of third space as it has been defined by Gutierrez (2009). Third space has been explored by many thinkers as a post structural space (Bhabha, 1994) of language and cultural literacy (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). It is now layered by education and arts education researchers (Stevensen & Deasy, 2005; Gutierrez, 2009) and understood through contexts that are ever-changing with individual histories and shared experiences in a newly formed third space. In spaces that resist written -/ identification of people, the dispositions and imagination inherent to learning and creativity can move with greater fluidity.

Why does it matter if we call ourselves artist/researcher/teacher in a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004) or artist-teacher (Daichent, 2010) in art education, or teaching artist/TA (Booth, 2009) in arts education worlds? In her research in the field of art education, Lara Lackey (2003/2009) combined the “communities of practice” of Bourdieu (1993) and Wenger (1998) with the arts education “network” of June McFee (1986) and emerged with a stance that would help art educators move through their “multifaceted and sometimes unruly and fractious landscape” (p. 201). She proposed that we stretch ourselves to do more than notice the complexities of diverse and relational contexts and that we “challenge each provider” to ask “What are all the things that this setting teaches” (p. 213)? Howard Becker (1982) suggested that we orient the telescoping fluidity of such networks as “worlds” by saying,

The basic unit of analysis, then is an art world. Both the “artness” and the “worldness” are problematic, because the work that furnishes the starting point for the investigation may be produced in a variety of cooperating networks and under a variety of definitions. (pp. 36-37)

Ultimately, Becker still settled on a range of terms for the characters that populated those worlds. His terms were un-hyphenated and did not require either/or distinctions. He called them “modes of being oriented to an art world as integrated professional, maverick, folk artist, or naïve artist” (p. 371). While it might be amusing in this political era to replace our hyphenated identities and consider ourselves all to be mavericks, it would likely reinforce the unreliable profile that is often attributed to artistic thinking.

Eric Booth (2009) and G. James Daichent (2010) have mirrored *artist-teacher* and *teaching artist* identities as taking up spaces that are fenced and fluid at the same time by drawing lines between the terms in two ways. *Artist-teacher*, hyphenated and proposed as a historically complex concept by Daichent is “an adaptation of two fields: artistic ingenuity uniquely applied to the puzzle of teaching” (p. 65). He placed the limitation of his definition within the world of art education and scaffolded it through a history of visual art education

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<sup>4</sup> Embodied pedagogy as presented by Loic Wacquant (2004/2011) defines a bodily or sensual learning experience that defies written description and can only be understood in fleeting and momentary precision. This definition resonates with arts learning where subtle ways of knowing can only be described by aesthetic understanding. Words frequently fail to convey these understandings.

scholars and practitioners who operated primarily in school systems. *Teaching artist*, unhyphenated or slashed, but acronymed as the fused “TA” by Eric Booth (2009), is “a model of the twenty-first-century artist and, simultaneously, a model for high engagement learning in education” (p. 4). He drew on the origin of the term for artists of all disciplines (visual, performing, literary) who would teach as a resident in a school or cultural organization. In the early 1970s, June Dunbar said:

I guess I was the originator of the term “teaching artist”. I came up with the words as a reaction to the dreadful one used by my predecessors at what was then known as the Education Department at Lincoln Center. The words they used to describe the activities of artists in schools sounded to me like a description for a typewriter repairman, plumber, or an irritating educationese term: “resource professional” (As cited in Booth, p. 8).

### **An Ecosystem of Possibility**

When we questioned the “artist or teacher” work of Rigo 23, we found that he was really an activist and trickster who transformed art galleries into prison-like spaces with grey walls, bars on the windows, and limited choices. Visitors could take on multiple identities in the gallery-prison. They could be prison inmate-artists who drew on walls, or they could be learner-witnesses who followed the timeline of Leonard Peltier’s life and drew conclusions about justice. Both *artist-teacher* and *TA* are described by researchers as bound terms that are inclusive of ingenuity, puzzlement, and high engagement activities that belong to neither artistic nor educational worlds alone. Nick Rabkin, in an *Artsjournal* blog exchange with Lara Zakarias (2008), proposed that we drop any either/or distinction and like Rolling (2010) move toward a both/and attitude. Booth (2009) moved to explode the binary of these worlds as being part of what he called an “arts learning ecosystem” where “TAs increasingly work in a variety of settings – from arts institutions to nursing homes to hospitals to corporate boardrooms” (p. 19).

While a more dimensional ecosystem for artists and teachers has been co-constructed by these contemporary thinkers, the learners in our ecosystems have also been confined as similarly hyphenated passengers or inhabitants in the spaces that we research and define. In her 2009 article titled “The Hyphen Goes Where?” Vanessa Lopez confronts the multiplicity of learner identities. We have positioned learners as students or as young people who move through our researched spaces on vertical paths as primary/elementary/secondary or pre/post-service education students or on horizontal paths as at-risk, African-Native-Hispanic-American, special-needs, high/low-achieving, and more. This positioning is problematic as it removes the influence of the learner from the development of the artist, teacher, or researcher. While I do not propose that we ignore the history and cultural capital of adults or young people in our ecosystem, I do propose that we explore the possibilities that are available when we plan for the ambiguity and conflict that are central to artistry and human progress in their lives.

The growing body of third space research argues that there is an increasing need to understand the ecological intersubjectivity of people in time, space, and history. Loic Wacquant (2004/2009) and Michael Cole (1985) argue that embodied pedagogical dynamics increase the need for aesthetic negotiations that may not be available in literary descriptions of experience. I argue that as artists in a world of learning and living, we are positioned to imagine and realize positive systems that will be indefensible as artistic alone.

It might be risky business to remove the hyphen, the slash, and other conceptual or literal apparatus from professional identities in artist and teacher education. An unmanageable lack of definition and loss of identity and motivation could result. Defending the boundaries of what is artistic and what is educational presents a risk of homogeneous and unsupportable cultural identity. The vocabulary of historic inclusion that names the layers of identity information allows us to form or reform new worlds. What would happen if we took on professional identities that were expected to grow new parts with each new context?

In Booth's (2009) definition of an "arts learning ecosystem," his intention was to describe an embracing scope of arts learning as "larger than the school connotations of the word education" (p. 19). I examine dimensions of the term *arts learning* beyond scope, and I find that qualities of intersubjectivity dance into action, and words become insubstantial descriptors. The qualities of social context, the difficult distinctions of critical thinking, the aesthetic moments of praxis, all extend meaning into prosthetic and proliferative form. Walls of distinction that bind or divide artists and teachers are difficult to retain.

Within this ecosystem I hope to identify the artistic and educational qualities of third space where individuality, difference, and shared meaning are contested and collectively formed in creative action. Making up the energy and matter of the entire arts learning ecosystem is the habitus, the embodied habits and ways of learning, of artists, learners, teachers, and researchers (among others) who meet and develop third spaces that often defy definition but form bodies of learning and potential. Navigating this ecosystem, I imagine a hybrid character that can teach outside of a classroom, learn inside of a studio, make art in a laboratory, and research the world through a nimble and embodied pedagogy. Perhaps preparation of the next generation of arts learning ecosystem navigators will include less identity work and more identity action.

### Unfenced Potential



*Figure 3. Sociocritical body.*

Back at the gallery with the work of Rigo 23 and Leonard Peltier, everyone learned, not by performing as learners or artists, teachers or researchers alone, but by bringing shared and solo histories into the tiny and cramped space of an artistically reproduced prison cell (See Figure 3). They gathered visual, emotional, historical, and personal data in the traditionally privileged space of an art gallery. They walked together and constructed a relational timeline of events. The adults and children alike developed their own images of injustice and perseverance while they posed problems about fairness, race, poverty, and difference. Together they hatched theories about how someone can change the world from behind bars. Some students expressed concern and love for people who were unable to travel freely. Some adults confessed ignorance and fears about foreign places and practices. The roles of artist, learner, teacher, and researcher were juxtaposed and swapped, and an ecosystem of understanding was formed and unbound at the same time.



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## 176 Both/And: A Response to De(fence)/Defense

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### Abstract

In this paper we introduce non-dualism and begin by answering the questions posed by the editors of this journal. We address the theme of de(fence) and propose a paradigmatic shift. For many years, art teachers have advocated tirelessly in defense of the field, fighting for funding and legitimacy in an educational landscape that prioritizes other subjects. While the reaction to fight is appropriate, art reveals another way. It aids us in our task of living in the liminal, and it gives us the chance to suspend our judgments and forego meaning in favor of experience. Art can help us transition from the dual mind to a non-dualistic awareness. When we experience art as it is, we stop seeing differences and start to see connections.

## **Both/And: A Response to De(fence)/Defense**

We decided to address the call for submissions from the editors of this journal after reading the questions related to the theme of 'de(fence)/defense' included in the email sent to members of the higher education listserv for the National Art Education Association (NAEA). We are two voices who over the past year and a half have been actively involved in looking at and dialoguing about the divisions within the field of art education. We see these divisions throughout, from the K-12 art teachers in the schools to those in higher education writing in journals, and we wonder how things might be different as we choose to focus our attention not on the fences but on the space both inside and out.

Since the catalyst for this paper came from the questions posed in the call for manuscripts, we will include those with our initial responses. We continue with our premise of advocating for non-dual awareness in art education, and we examine how the waltz can be seen as a metaphor for non-dualism. In effect, we propose to honor the fences and what is beyond the fences and to respect both in an acknowledgment of their inseparable and codependent relationship.

Before we begin to provide responses to some of the questions posed in the call for manuscripts, we want to provide readers with a definition of non-dualism. Non-duality is often associated with Eastern religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism (Rohr, 2009). However, the German theologian Meister Eckhart also embraced the concept of non-duality in the 13th century (Rohr, 2009). The word for non-duality in Sanskrit is *advaita* - simply meaning not two or nonseparate. This is the definition we embrace. There is a website that is dedicated to the connection between non-dual awareness and art (the awakened eye, 2011) and is an outgrowth of research by Alison Catherine Pryer, who studied at the University of British Columbia where she completed her dissertation on non-dualistic pedagogy (2003).

### **The Editors' Questions and Our Responses**

*Are we, as artists, scholars, and art educators compelled to take a stance in defense of our fields, jobs, or personal politics?*

We begin with a response to this question. As art makers and art educators we do not feel compelled to take a particular stance but rather to embrace the situation as it presents itself in its entirety. Take, for instance, a hypothetical situation where a visual arts teacher loses a job so that a math teacher can be hired. The state chooses to focus on math education and hire an additional teacher of mathematics in hopes that students' test scores will rise. Coming from a dualistic perspective, one might take offense at this situation, especially if one sees the importance of and necessity of a full educational experience that would include the visual arts.

Art teachers may begin to rally around the issue and demand to speak to the superintendent and the board of education, protesting that the arts not take a back seat to mathematics and providing evidence of the benefits of the arts to an overall education. And that is a fine and appropriate response. In addition, those who made the decision to hire another math teacher at the expense of a visual arts teacher are adamant in their position that the decision was appropriate because students need to be competent in math to survive in today's economy. Both arguments are sound, so which one is right? Both are. Both

arguments exist and help to fuel the other. The outcome is not the ultimate issue. There is a potent relationship that emerges between math and art in this example, and it is the experience of this relational potency that is of utmost importance.

For many years, art teachers have advocated tirelessly in defense of the field, fighting for funding and legitimacy in an educational landscape that prioritizes other subjects. Many educators and administrators have heeded this call to fight against the marginalization of art in the schools, but in the throes of this advocacy it is difficult to acknowledge that the opposition that seeks to cut art department budgets and eliminate art educator jobs is the foundation of the fight. It is the people and policies that seek to eliminate arts programs that justify and give grounds for defense. Where on the surface it may be seen as two polar opposite sides coming into conflict, we see the deeply enmeshed relationship shared by the two. This is an important paradigmatic shift that, once adopted, dissipates the dualistic qualities of right/wrong and better/worse. Advocacy transforms into affirmation, and vitality comes not from abolishing “the other” and winning but from the experience of the layered, complex, and interactive relationship of all.

*Are we standing alone or do we feel alone in our positions or vulnerabilities?*

We believe that one of the defining characteristics of dualism is an inherent isolation. Creating binary oppositions simultaneously pushes away and quarantines, establishing demarcations that operate by the word “versus.” If this is our perspective, if our beliefs manifest into behaviors that pit us against that with which we disagree, then yes, we shall be and feel more and more alone.

A non-dualistic perspective considers both sides of a fence as parts of the same whole. It is difficult to regard as partners and collaborators in our own work what we abhor, what we spend so much of our time, energy, and resources fighting against, and what we work so hard to label as wrong or unjust. For us, to “de(fence)” does not necessarily mean to take down the divides (for even fences have their rightful places), but to see past them to the common ground on which both and all stand. In *Re-Visioning Psychology*, Hillman (1992) writes, “[d]ualities are either faces of the same, or assume a unity as their precondition or ultimate goal (identity of opposites). Even a radically irreconcilable dualism is merely the struggle between parallel Ones. Monism and dualism share the same cosmos” (p. 170). Similarly, Joseph Campbell writes, “And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world,” (2004, p. 23). It is easy to see opposite sides of a fence as opposing, but opposites share a relationship revealing that we are never alone and we are inextricably tied to one another.

*Are we divided or fenced in/out from the possibility of sharing any collective efforts to realize a collective vision, and if so, what are the divides?*

The fences that create boundaries, even the ones built by our own design, do not necessarily divide. What fences us in/out from collectivity is a refusal to affirm that which resides in domains other than our own. What robs us of collective vision is an inability to experience the connectedness of our relationships by reducing them to an “us vs. them” dynamic. We are divided if we feel a need to defend.

*On the other hand, what are the challenges or benefits of creating, studying visual culture or teaching art in this uncertain time?*

The creation, study, and teaching of art are codifications of our lives and help us navigate through and into our experiences. Our engagement of art in all ways, be it through methods of visual culture or otherwise, unveils the multiplicity and dynamism of our experiences in times both certain and not.

The challenge is, quite literally, to “de(fence).” To fence is to affix into the ground, to say that this is the spot from which I shall not budge. This is a common position in a dualistic paradigm and is the genesis for conflict, fundamentalism, and singularization. The challenge is to not stick with/get stuck on one, or to say that one is better than the rest. Engagement with art provides a chance to know what it feels like to “unstick” ourselves from narrow, singular fixations. Both art and visual culture (in all of the many ways in which both are defined) cannot be reduced to singularities. Our relationships are fluid, our experiences are dynamic, and while we have been raised to find The One Right Answer, art shows us that there is an infinite number of places on which to stand.

Herein lies the benefit of creating, consuming, and teaching art. Art allows us to properly integrate the shifting of uncertainty. It aids us in our task of living in the liminal, and it gives us the chance to suspend our judgments and forego meaning in favor of experience. It also gives us the assurance that what we’re experiencing is real and present, so that we may, in Campbell’s (1991) words, “feel the rapture of being alive” (p. 5).

*Can we create, innovate, reshape spaces, opportunities or works that engage people or bring us/them from the margins to the center?*

Non-dualism is an understanding of the unified and connected nature of all spaces. It is an innovated reshaping of our perception of spaces. It is an understanding that we have been together in *both* the margins *and* the center all along.

*Is de(fencing) the act of collecting, collaborating, strengthening, supporting, envisioning, protecting, liberating?*

For us, the act of de(fencing) is to experience fences in a multitude of ways. This includes collecting, collaborating, strengthening, supporting, envisioning, protecting, and liberating. But this also includes dividing, quarantining, weakening, limiting vision, and imprisoning. The act of de(fencing) is to understand and experience how fences can be more than one thing simultaneously. To consider fences in a singular way is to create aseptic environments that set the stage for opposition and strife. To focus only on the fence is a narrow perspective that locks us into a dualistic way of thinking.

De(fencing) is non-dualism--an experience of the relationship between both and all. It is an act of concentrating on the connections between spaces because of the fences, and an acknowledgement and affirmation of how fences bind together by separating. This is a paradox whose multiplicity liberates us by keeping us from being locked into one way of being. Once we experience this liberation, we shall find ourselves ready, willing, and open to collaboration with and support of those to whom we were previously opposed.

For us, engaging with art is an act of de(fence). Art helps us transition from the dual mind to a non-dualistic awareness because art helps us experience and affirm life as it is, not in the singular, locked-in ways we will it to be. To work with art is to be involved in process, and process is always shifting. Even the nature of speaking about art is an act of process. And so we acknowledge that by speaking of art we are engaging in the act of de(fence).

### **The Waltz as Metaphor for Non-Dualism**

Recently, numerous email messages from various sources including an NAEA listserv appeared in one of our email inboxes as is the daily pattern. We were struck by the dualistic nature of several of these messages. One message focused on being part of the 99 percent or part of the 1 percent. Another focused on being either pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian. In yet another, one is tenured with a pension or out on the street. Is it possible in such a dualistic paradigm to include everyone? It has only been in the past year and a half that we have begun to think about an alternative to dualistic thinking.

Art can help us transition from the dual mind to a non-dualistic awareness. When we experience art as it is, we stop seeing differences and start to see connections. In dualism we tend to want to experience only certain things and those certain things that we want to experience are the positives. When one looks only at the positives, one misses out on the others. There may be good in those things we perceive as negative. When we approach living from a non-dualistic perspective, we can see both the positives and negatives simultaneously and be present in both. One can think of it mathematically. Both a '-4' and a '+4' have an absolute value of '4'. Each exists on a grid. In order to graph a point on a grid, one would need to see both the positive and negative side of the 'X' axis and the 'Y' axis. The positive side and negative side are irrelevant to finding the point on the graph. They are there to get us there.

Another way of looking at living in a non-dualistic paradigm is to think of the waltz. In the waltz, as in non-dual life, we unite opposites. To waltz, one must move left as the other moves right. Each is necessary, and each is moving in an opposite direction from one's individual perspective. However, when we waltz, we are both right (read correct). We have to accept the paradox of doing the exact opposite in order to be in sync with one another.

Non-duality strives for the affirmation of all things; there is no distinction, hierarchy, or delineation. Duality focuses on a singular, limiting point of view that is often accompanied by an obligatory need to defend that singularity against any other points of view. It is like looking at a large painting and creating a dualistic relationship between one area and the rest of the painting. In the case of Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte-1884*, there is an image near the middle right of the painting of a small child running. If one chooses to focus solely on the small child running in opposition to everything else in the painting, one is robbed of the experience of the entire work. There is so much more to discover in the rest of the work. Yet, when one chooses to be consumed by only a part of the whole, there is no room for anything else. That singular focus leads to blindness to the whole.

If de(fence) is what we want, our participation in life and in the field of art education must not be a fight. Rather, it is a waltz. Art teaches us what it feels like to be dancing, and to dance is to experience non-dual consciousness. Non-dualism gives us the awareness that



we are all in this together. It is how we connect to everything--even that to which we initially felt opposed.

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