

## STATEMENT FOR SOCIAL THEORY CAUCUS

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It may well be that the most radical discovery within recent psychology and social science is the discovery of how so many of the most intimate features of the person are socially patterned and even implanted. Within the broad limits of the glandular and nervous apparatus, the emotions of fear and hatred and love and rage, in all their varieties, must be understood in close and continual reference to the social biography and social context in which they are experienced and expressed. Within the broad limits of the physiology of the sense organs, our very perception of the physical world, the colors we discriminate, the smells we become aware of, the noises we hear, are socially patterned and socially circumscribed. The motivations of men, and even the varying extents to which various types of men are typically aware of them, are to be understood in terms of the vocabularies of motive that prevail in a society and of social changes and confusions among such vocabularies.\*

In 1959, when C. Wright Mills made the statement quoted above, the dominant pathway to insight about human behavior was psychological. This situation appears to have been as true in art education as in any other discipline. Our primary conception about what art could do for people was creativity and our pedagogy for attaining this bounty was studio production, uninterrupted by other activities. Writers such as Mills provided us with another dimension for the study of human behavior, and, specifically, behavior in art. It is not that the psychological approach was then, or is now incorrect, but rather that it is incomplete. It might be said that art education has not even yet completely absorbed the implications of this alternative outlook.

Happily, there are currents of change burgeoning among us which move in

the direction of Mills' approach, encompassing a wider and more varied range of methodologies of inquiry, as well as teaching content and procedure. Nor have we had to sacrifice caution or system or scholarship to exploit these newer modes of theory and investigation. Most of them are eminently proper, though highly provocative and some of them build on the kind of intellectual development which Mills was writing about.

Since ideas seem always to be reflected in the practical political world, we can look to our professional activities for evidence of this sociological orientation. In 1979, at the San Francisco conference of the NAEA, Robert Bersson started the movement which has grown to become the Social Theory Caucus. This group presented a well-attended and exciting program element at the 1980 Atlanta meeting and is continuing its development through mechanisms such as this bulletin.

I welcome the opportunity to be a member of this Caucus and share with like-minded colleagues the exchange of ideas which we consider to be vital to our profession. I urge the reader who is interested in this direction of study to join the group and participate in our efforts. It is almost axiomatic that there is much to be learned about art education and this approach may be a fruitful posture for that learning. We have very few answers, but we may have some competent questions.

\*Mills, C. Wright, The Sociological Imagination, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 161, 162.