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Discussion

An open letter to members of the Caucus on Social Theory & Art Education: A remark on Re(mark)!

In the last Caucus

Newsletter, we announced the results of the poll about the name of the *Bulletin of the Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education*. Of thirteen responses received, ten supported the change from *Bulletin* to *Journal*. There were six votes against the introduction of an additional word and flavor into the title: two because they did not like the esoteric nature of the suggested word(s); two because they did not want a greater length to the title. One suggested reducing the name to the *Bulletin/Journal on Social Theory and Art Education*.

Of the seven who voted favorably, preferences distributed themselves : *Re(Marks)* = 2; *Re(Mark)* = 3; *Re(Mark)!* = 1; *Re(mark)* = 1.

Readers with a particular passion were invited to write up their arguments for the Newsletter and so win converts to their persuasion. The following are the results of that invitation: -*Elleda Katan*

Dear friends,

As you know, due to the hard work and continual vigilance and perseverance of such members as Elleda Katan, and Arthur Guagliumi, a tally of the votes for the possibility of the journal's new name **Re(mark)!** *Journal of the Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education* was defeated —by a narrow margin i should add. None of us (i hope i do not misrepresent the membership) felt that the word "bulletin" should be retained because

the submissions of articles have a quality about them that deserve the recognition of a refereed journal. This move helps us to continue to legitimate ourselves at the universities and play the publishing game with some control. More importantly, it has (on some occasions) enabled us to write material normally too political to be published elsewhere. Unfortunately, we need many more such articles that lean over the edge. Nevertheless, we also purport to be a democratic organization and, let's face it, during National Art Education conventions which are attended by those who can afford to go, whose professional development depends on such affairs and who continually band together under the label of this Caucus, there are likely to be Dionysian moments of madness when crazy schemas are cooked up. This was one of them, however i would like to defend the madness of that moment. To suggest that the re-naming of the journal to **Re(mark)!** is to say that it is a remarkably great, nay incredible fortuitous idea. In this letter i wish to remain within the democratic guidelines and argue, nay beg members to reconsider the evocative force and potential role this Caucus might have in a postindustrial, postmodern world. What follows is the type of rational i wish i could have written as an editorial for the new volume of **Re(mark)!**

My primary argument to capture your vote is to consider the incredible play of meaning that the title "**Re(mark)!**" would provide. This play of meaning comes write / rite / right from what many semioticians have written about: the syntagmatic and paradigmatic play of the field of words within the title's horizon. Joyfully, i point out (in the sense to both direct and identify), that the word "**mark**" nesting within the enclosed brackets (), framed, if you like - refers both to the written word and to the drawn visual image. It bridges, what i would argue, to be a false dichotomy between art and writing, the fondness of art educators to quote Susanne Langer's dichotomous views between art as a non-discursive 'symbolic language' and the written language, - which now becomes a discursive, logical form, burdened with fixed association. The postmodernist tenets of *deconstruction* have put such dichotomies in question. Poststructuralists treat both the visual and the written as text questioning the position of the subject as s/he views/reads the text. Dichotomies plague art education. They plague the entire project of Western metaphysical thought. Why should our corner of the market be an exception? Don't artists walk around with only their right brain in tact— their left on a holiday? Aren't art educators antitech? Don't we believe in the more natural and pure studio activities where the classical activities of painting, printmaking, sculpting, visual design go on? Why bother with computer tech, photography, video, film arts? Don't we still dichotomize crafts/art, popular art/high art, kitch/elite art? In each case one term dominates the Other and defines the Other. (Like feminists who argue from a poststructuralist persuasion that in the dichotomization of man/woman, woman is the subordinate term, the Other which is defined in terms of the male signifier. She is non-male, not a man. Her differences are ignored). Art educators attempt to keep the visual experience pure. The work of art is supposed to **speak** on its own; intuitively, transcendently, essentially, - magically. An artwork is self-sufficient, closed, requiring no written documentation; written words

merely get in the way. At their best, they are supplementary for they take away the visual experience of the artwork. Yet, no matter how hard art educators attempt to chastise the written print from the visual, it continues to creep in, in all manner of ways: sometimes directly, as in the work of conceptual artists, as titles (some works are purposefully misnamed to increase the ironical play of the title and the visual), as catalogues where criticism written from a postmodern position is as difficult to decipher as the works themselves. No longer do the art critics find favor with the public. The public becomes annoyed that they are not doing the Deweyian thing - offering helpful explanations to a naive audience about what the artworks mean. Critics are no longer explaining the texts, rather through their criticism they are attempting to re-write/ re-rite/re(right) them. The criticism becomes a supplement to the exhibit in order to de-frame them. Pointing to the **blindness** of a visual exhibition is the height of postmodern irony. Another obvious way which writing creeps in is through the voice of the teacher, the curator, the museum educator in dialogue with students about the exhibition or any individual work. You know, — through the infallible Feldman method. Poststructuralists have really had fun with this one. Derrida was one of the first to point to the phonocentric bias of 'presence' which is claimed to be superior to the silent written text. A written text, of course cannot 'speak' back, whereas a live body can qualify any 'misunderstandings' in the emerging dialogue. It has taken about two decades of his continual deconstruction of the binary opposition of the voice/written word to show how both sides belong to the same linguistic sign system. It is, paradoxically, in the ephemerality of our good intentioned dialogue that children are socialized into the normative modernist belief that art is something private, hung up on walls, in galleries or put out for public display for critique, a product which may also be bought and sold. By freezing the dialogical exchanges when recording the event (through audio tapes, and video tapes) it is possible to rewrite/ re-rite/re-right the event; to expose the blindness of the dialogical exchange. Poststructuralist anthropology is wise to this — why can't we be?

i am delighted by the prefix "**re**" which exists outside the protective brackets of the (**mark**). In this sense the (**mark**) becomes the sight/site/cite of *écriture*. (i thought i would use this word only once. Its special meaning in French poststructuralist lingo is a particular form of writing/rite-ing/righting which exposes the blindness of texts which are essentially 'author'-less. The notion of the 'death of the Author' is a common theme in antihumanist debates who have redefined the subject as being decentered. It is a sobering thought as i write/rite/right this letter knowing that i am blind to my own Self, despite authoring the text with a small *a* and a small *i*. Someone must deconstruct this text to give me insight into myself. i must listen to the Other. For me that is a very humbling experience. — i also know that this is the most difficult thing for me to do, - to swallow my inflated ego.)

The prefix "**re**" positions the *subject* as a re-examiner, a re-reflector, a re-interpreter who comments again, re-reading, re-writing, re-drawing the frames of art and education that **frame** us. And here is what delights me more. The original sense of the Latin use of *re* is 'back'. It is our 'back' which we cannot see - perceive. That is why we need *écriture*, a writing/rite-ing/righting to expose our 'back.' Gasché (i could not resist beckoning another

sight/site/cite) calls this 'back' - the *tain* of the mirror. Tain is tinfoil which is put on glass to make it become a mirror. What is being suggested by writers such as Gasché is that we cannot reflect on our reflection as the humanist tradition thought. We are 'blind' to the tain of the mirror. We are blind to what is making our reflection possible to ourselves. We are blind because of our 'back.' What an irony for visual arts education! If reflecting on our reflection won't expose our blindness — what will? *Écriture* of course. And what does *écriture* do? - Why it exposes the tain of the mirror - our 'back.' In the use of the triple word pun write/rite/right and sight/site/cite it lies between the play of the visual and the written. We are neither left brained not right but use both — fine, but the transformation takes place in the *corpus collosum* which is *absent when we are present to ourselves*. (okay, enough of that medical, physiological crap — too reductive). To make one last jargoned statement - to expose our 'back' we need to turn ourselves around. The fancy word is that *écriture* has to create an *aporia*. Such an *aporia* is in complete contradiction to the identification of what attracts the viewer/reader in the frame. Any chosen *track* should make us cautious, for in the 'hailing' (Althusser) of this *track* our own ideology is enforced and reinstated. No new insight/in-site/incite emerges. If we cannot do that for ourselves, the critic must show us what is 'framing' our 'readings' of the text.

i come now to the exclamation **mark** '!'. The exclamation mark, for me, does two things. First, it is a reminder that writing, that is *script is visual*. Scriptural visuality which is so evident in hieroglyphic writing and continued to be maintained through calligraphy has been lost through standardization by the modern means of reproduction and the belief that knowledge (as information) is found in cognition, in the invention of the book which is a closed text. i could fill out the background of the standardization of spelling, the standardization of meaning through dictionaries etc., — but you know what i mean. Secondly, the exclamation **mark** as a visual remnant, *marginal* to the written text, is a reminder that exclamatory expression is one of an outcry. Exclamatory feeling is emphatic, painful, strong, loud, angry, full of surprise. Such feelings characterize the *aporia* of deconstructive *écriture*. The exclamation **mark** embodies the irony of a visual arts journal which deals in blindness; the reader and the writer/riter/righter are as much the "*marks*" as are the essays - the journal's *exclaimable dis*" contents." They will leave their **mark** on the sight/site/cite of the reader. Too long we have been caught by the positivistic, enlightenment vision of the "book" where all knowledge is still to be found within its "frame." The writing of such journals, done in proper APA style to standardize the 'look' of scholarly information, is dead, not deadly, not *exclaimable*. Life is left carrying the exclamation **mark** under its armpit. But we (you and I) have a chance to en-title a journal which intentionally "*de-frames*," which makes us examine our *borders* and the *policemen* who control them. We (you and I) have a chance to 'scribble,' to use the modern means of computer electronics to implode the visual with the written.

If this journal is to differentiate itself, be different from other journals in art education, i would argue it must turn toward the debates of postmodernism. Journals such as *Art and Text*, and *October* ought to give us some encouragement. So **Re(mark)!** has that wonderful place in the signifying

system of our language to examine the hidden site - to discover our secret hiding places, to become children again at play. Both the visual and the written may be played with in apA, ApA, aPA, PaA, pAA,style/ It is an 'implosive' tie-tell/title, to allude to Lyotard. It collapses and erases the two separate spheres.

i realize that poststructuralism and postmodernism is a preoccupation of mine and many of the ideas expressed above have been explored by many writers and artists. However, the art education journals have only **one** essay on the issue. Absolutely unbelievable considering that postmodernist issues have infiltrated every department that i know (Science has chaos theory and the poetics of micro and macro physics to play with). We, as a Caucus, have a chance to raise the entire critique of modernism which pervades our schools and the intellectual leaders of art education. The time is write/rite/right/ and ripe. New rhetoric is needed to match the rhetoric of strong conservative forces, who wish us to go "**back to the future.**" i would argue it is the wrong 'back' that we should go to. The issues are crucial to countries, like Canada and the United States who have recently elected governments write/rite/right of center in order to continue their support of multinational interests which continue to exploit people and slide Gaia into further ecological disaster. It is often said that an editor, particularly a neophyte like myself, should not take strong sides, should remain neutral, should allow all manners of essays as long as they are "well written" to APA format. It has been said that changing the journal's name to **Re(mark)!** is too gimmicky. i say just the opposite. i am not naive to think that floods of "exclamatory," deconstructive essays shall pour/pour into my desk. But i do believe that many Caucus members have the ability to write/rite/right against the grain. Let us make the initial move towards such a direction by voting for a tie-tell change: **Re(mark)!**

Sincerely yours,



jan jagodzinski
antieditor

PS. i hope you, the member, didn't mind the playfulness of the text. It is serious-as the matter is serious. i further hope you don't mind the intentional use of **we** when i desired to position you on my side, and the conscious use of **you**, when i wanted to address you as Other. The deconstructive space is the "/" which exists between the i/eye. If you want to address that sight/site/cite, please do so through the *Newsletter* or perhaps as a commentary in the upcoming journal itself.