

## **Living the Discourses**

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### **Introduction**

Factors of social class, race, gender, and sexuality are important to any understanding of the social processes of art. Often, art educators discuss these factors in abstract terms, thereby confining discussion in art education to a set of identifiable variables constructed as static, universal, and homogeneous. The particularities of living and working in educational spaces structured along racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic lines remain largely unexplored. Recent scholarship in art education has begun to examine the particularities of these social relations (Garber, 1995; Stuhr, Krug, & Scott, 1995). But the fractures, dangers, and the erasures are not being articulated in ways that highlight the experiences—and the analyses—of those most marginalized by the dominant discourse.

The three of us, “schooled” in the critical bases of our discipline, are troubled by the schism between the institutionalized discourse and our lived experiences in the classroom. In fact, the genesis of this paper was a series of discussions we had about how what we were learning—and forced to teach—often bore so little resemblance to our lives. In this paper, we challenge certain universals in art education in order to interrupt the process of institutionalizing a partial, even distorted, discourse. We present this challenge as three separate perspectives: each of us as individuals giving voice to experiences, reflections, and thoughts that have often gone unspoken. In choosing to speak in our own voices we have tried to present a collage of experience, analysis, and theory. In doing so, we seek to weave a tapestry as much as a statement, one that reveals similarities even as it exposes our differences.

In the first narrative, Deniston examines the social construction of class and taste in women’s art practices, and the social and historical contexts that undermine and undervalue women’s work and art. She challenges the socially constructed and often “invisible” norms of creativity, originality, and making often associated with women’s work and posits broader implications for art teaching and the classroom. In the second section, Desai emphasizes that racism is a social-cultural construct grounded in historical events that are continually rearticulated. Institutionalization occurs to such a degree, according to Desai, that without careful scrutiny racism remains invisible to both dominant and subordinate peoples. And finally, Check examines how internalized and projected homophobia is produced and circulated within art education discourse. Citing literary examples, Check describes and analyzes the problematic relationship of gay and lesbian artists to culture. Grounded in personal and anecdotal experiences, he argues for the construction of art education discourses which reveal complexity and difference that challenge homophobia.

## **Gender and Age: Out of Our Yards, Sight, and Minds**

## Grace Deniston

Exclusion is a very powerful method of producing social inequality. In art, exclusion functions to narrow the critical field of interest by continuously omitting certain work from the realm of “serious” or “high” art. This work, often relegated to the category of craft or kitsch, is treated with dismissal, if not contempt, for its supposed lack of aesthetic originality. This work is overwhelmingly produced by women. An enormous body of work produced by a very large population is, consequently, excluded from attention and research. It is my contention that both art and social justice are greatly diminished by this exclusion. These excluded art forms are particularly transparent. This transparency allows unique insight into the various social meanings contained within art forms, practice, and aesthetics.

### **Researching the Familiar**

My research originated when I began to tape my mother’s stories. She emigrated to the United States at the age of 24 and had a wealth of interesting and unique life experiences that I felt would be lost if they were not recorded. Born in 1902, my mother witnessed tremendous social, cultural, and technological change; and her ability to live through those changes with humor and imagination was of great interest to me. I learned about her neighbors and had an opportunity to meet many of them. Most were, like my mother, elderly women whose lives were characterized not only by great change but also, again like my mother, by the central necessity of “making things.” Wanting to understand what their aesthetic processes meant to them over a lifetime, I began to interview these women.

These interviews allowed me an intimate look at the conditions of aging women, the work of their hands, and the stories of their lives. In the process, I learned how economically fragile many older women become as they outlive their husbands and their children move away. The individuals I interviewed all live in a government-subsidized apartment complex located in the heart of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I became acutely aware of how, in U.S. society, illness, disability, and isolation define the experience of the elderly and greatly limit personal choice. I have witnessed, personally and from afar, how disruption of lives from the illness, death, or divorce of a spouse is capable of reducing many

women to a precarious financial status that makes financial security a challenge. Many women over 60 and many women of my generation gave up earning power, including social security and a retirement fund; during those many years they nurtured young children. The many—often unacknowledged—networks of support that provide safety nets for the privileged are not there to protect these individuals.

As I collected data for my study, I was startled to recognize how, as I grow older, some of these same dynamics have begun to play out in my life, in spite of very different social circumstances. On a social and professional level, I became aware of a pervasive lack of interest in the elderly. This small group of women, in my study, represents a very large population of people in this country: individuals isolated by age, limited economical resources, deflated social status, and misperceived and misrepresented artistic efforts.

Although their aesthetic activities changed throughout their lives, all the women in my study engaged in some form of art making. Art was part of their daily lives and included (but was not restricted to) a substantial amount of needlework and sewing—work characterized by a high level of skill, but not distinguished by great originality. On the other hand, innovation and aesthetic adaptation to numerous technological and cultural changes, challenges, and crises filled their lives.

### **Embracing the Familiar**

In order to understand the apparent discrepancy between the modest aesthetic of these women's art work and the extravagant vigor of their lives, I employed Ellen Dissanayake's (1988) understanding of art as "making special." Dissanayake's analysis of art as behavior helped substantiate the significance of their work as "art work" deserving respect and attention. Although focusing on gender, not age, the research of Georgia Collins and Renee Sandell (1984) was particularly useful to this study in its celebration of multiple art forms and aesthetic practices and interrogations of their social origins.<sup>1</sup> The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in regard to the social distinctions inherent within art practices helped me to locate the source of the aesthetics of the women in my study. I also found his notion of "habitus" to be crucial in interpreting the data that the interviews yielded. As "[h]abitus is a system of shared social dispositions and cognitive structures which generates perceptions,

appreciations and actions” the concept helped me understand the degree to which aesthetic taste is rooted within historical specificities such as birth, gender, and socioeconomic class—as well as their location within a broader social space (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 279). This social space is one in which those born into a more privileged social class are able to retain their privileges by maintaining possession of cultural capital, of which aesthetic taste is a major signifier.

### **History Embodied within Form**

The aesthetic tastes of the women in my study reflect the historical times within which they were born, the impact their gender had upon their choices and expectations, and the socioeconomic class into which they were born. The lack of distinctive originality in the work of their hands reflects all of the material conditions into which they were born. It derives from social and historical contexts that have nothing to do with the vigor, intelligence, and creative natures of the women themselves. However, the discourse of art places extraordinary value on art that bears the mystique of originality. This notion of originality places it outside a social context, as though the artist has exclusive ownership of a facility to project and communicate the intelligence, creativity, and vigor that are reflected within his/her art: as though that work owes nothing to the social ambiance and privilege within which the work was produced.

Further, exclusion of women’s work concerns more than simply giving voice to the particular women in my own or any other study. Giving individual women voice will not fracture the structures of academic discourse that reinforce the mystique of originality and bestow

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<sup>1</sup>Art educators have addressed issues concerning art programs for the aging sparingly. However, the literature within the field is growing, and its many faces reflect the complexity of issues concerning aging, as it impacts on the field (and as the field impacts on aging). Various art educators have laid the foundation for further study in this field (Greenberg, 1985, 1987; Hoffman, Greenberg, & Fitzner, 1980; Jefferson, 1987; Jones, 1980, 1993; Kauppinen, 1987, 1988; Kauppinen & McKee, 1988; Kim, 1980; Taylor, 1987). Kauppinen (1990), Sidelnick (1993), Jones (1993), and Barret (1993) are among those who have contributed recent insights into the unique issues of senior adults and their art activities.

privilege. Rather, it is the discourse itself that requires scrutiny. When we introduce students to an aesthetics of—originality—without providing an accompanying critique—we build a wall that excludes all artistic experiences that lie outside conventional frames of aesthetic reference. We also reinforce the misperception that such art is “unoriginal” or lacking in excellence.

Students need to understand not only the products but the processes of art. They need to see how social and historical forces can secure artistic privilege for some at the expense of many. When paradigms of excellence drive pedagogy and curriculum, not only are these contexts invalidated but students are deprived of an opportunity to understand how art is “constructed.”

### **Out of Our Yards, Sight, and Minds**

As the division between classes increases in this country, I am reminded of the even sharper division by socioeconomic class that I encountered while living in Lima, Perú. There, sharp shards of cut glass edged the walls around private residences in the wealthy districts of the city. The intention behind the construction of these walls was to keep those living in poverty out of the yards, sight, and minds of the privileged. In the United States, many visible and invisible barriers are being built in cities like Milwaukee, isolating people in their misfortune and relegating them to misery because of their race, ethnicity, gender, class, or age. We build such walls around our educational institutions, as the growing diversity in school populations encourages ever more insistent efforts to keep those populations out of our yards, sight, and minds.

When we introduce our students to concepts of an aesthetics of originality and formalism—especially without providing any critical analysis of aesthetics—we build a wall excluding their prior aesthetic experiences. Likewise, when educators seek to change the aesthetic taste and sensibilities of their students to reflect that of dominant western culture, those sensibilities are first diminished and buried in the silence of inadequacy and shame, and then relegated to “craft.” Craft becomes, in turn, one more indicator of these students’ lack of cultural capital, keeping them outside “aesthetic” walls. By educating in this manner, we effectively keep underprivileged populations out of society’s yards,

sight, and minds. By disregarding students' aesthetics and by keeping the social origins of those aesthetics invisible, we ensure that their efforts, informed by the values of popular culture and commerce, but rarely attended by education in our schools except as objects of scorn, will "disappear."

### **The Discourse of Excellence**

Pushed by political pressures demanding accountability, educators are kept busy in schools and universities defining standards of "excellence," "benchmarks," the "outcomes" of education, and the "qualities" of the educated person. Because of this, behavior and process are seen only as means to these never-contested, never-debated ends. Since I believe that the standards of excellence pale next to the wonder of ordinary human beings making, the discourse on excellence becomes another social construction that threatens to diminish the field rather than enhance it. Especially in a pluralist society like the United States, we need to remember that art is for people, not the other way around. We need to be mindful of the social complexities from which aesthetic taste is born. We need to remember that aesthetic practice often has a normative function, one in which "excellence" circulates and secures privilege in a stratified society.

### **The Experience of Oppression, Pain and Desire**

Valerie Walkerdine (1990) made many attempts to establish "the difference between the 'cold' aesthetic of high culture, with its cerebral and intellectualized appreciation, and the bodily and sensuous pleasures of 'low' cultures" (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 202). In her studies on the imposition of cultural values on women, she questioned what happens when educators are efficient in undermining aesthetic tastes and pleasures. Her arena of criticism is the Hollywood cinema, an arena that is applicable to anyone marginalized or erased by mandarin discourse.

What concerns me is how these women, children, whoever, are being asked to deal with their previous enjoyment of such things[i.e., "low-brow" movies]—a pleasure shared with family, friends, and their general social and cultural

environment. It seems that they are being left little room for any response other than feeling stupid, or despising those who are still enjoying these “perverse” pleasures.

What this typically academic emphasis on rationality and intellectualization can overlook are the specific conditions of the formation of pleasures for particular groups at a given historical moment. Rather than seeing the pleasures of “the masses” as perverse, perhaps we should acknowledge that it is the bourgeois “will to truth” that is perverse in its desire for knowledge, certainty and mastery. . . . The crusade to save the masses from the ideology that dupes them can obscure the real social significance of their pleasures and, at the same time, blind us to the perversity of radical intellectual pleasures. (pp. 200-201)

Within this context, Walkerdine explains that the work of academics is dependent upon those whom they study—those whom they hope to enlighten, and those whose aesthetic tastes they hope to refine and civilize. “The alternative is not a populist defense of Hollywood, but a reassessment of what is involved in watching films. This becomes part of the experience of oppression, pain and desire” (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 210). Similarly, it is important to reassess how the aesthetic experience is structured, not only for our students but also the communities in which they teach. That is, whether the experience is named high art or low, art or craft, craft or kitsch.

I derive one final insight from my interviews of elderly women. As I continue to examine how women’s work, like the poor of Lima, is trivialized and ignored, many educators are removed from the much larger world—whose concerns might disturb them, were they not insulated by the privileges of class. Since the connection between class and aesthetic taste has been thoroughly documented by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), I conclude with a statement made by Paulo Freire who devoted much of his scholarship to recognizing this larger world that is populated by people who do not share U.S. privilege.

What excellence is this, that manages to “coexist” with more than a billion inhabitants of the developing world who live in poverty, not to say misery? . . . What excellence is this, that

sleeps in peace while numberless men and women make their home in the street, and says it is their own fault that they are on the street? What excellence is this, that struggles so little, if it struggles at all, with discrimination for reason of sex, class, or race, as if to reject someone different, humiliate her, offend him, hold her in contempt, exploit her, were the right of individuals, or classes, or races, or one sex, that holds a position of power over another? (Freire, 1994, p. 94)

In this quotation he is examining the concept of excellence; one that can be as oppressive to art as it is to the bodies of the old, the female, the non-white, and the poor.

## **Race: Speaking in Diasporic Tongues**

Dipti Desai

My interest in investigating racism is based on my experiences, shaped by a particular history, place, and culture. I am an East Indian woman who moved to the United States as an adult and found myself marginalized as a member of a group constructed on the basis of race. Perceived and “hailed” (to use Althusser’s 1971 term) in the United States in different ways—as “colored,” “foreigner,” “Hispanic,” or “immigrant”—I am taken to embody categorizations that contain multiple, contradictory, and often negative meanings. This forces me to continually reconstruct my identity, constantly aware of the nexus of social relations that encompasses each of these categorizations. I embody the traces of my home culture of India, its history, language, beliefs and values—while simultaneously negotiating those of my adopted country, which is also my home. In the words of Stuart Hall (1993), I am the “product of a diasporic consciousness,” that is, the product of “several interlocking histories and cultures, belonging at the same time to several homes—and thus to no one particular home” (p. 362). Living daily in this space of overlapping worlds has provoked me to address the complexities and contradictions of race as it intersects with gender, social class, and sexuality in my teaching, artwork, and research.

### **Racism as an Issue in Classroom Practice**

The problematics of not addressing issues of race and racism in both classroom practices and in the critical discourses is brutally clear to me when I teach. One of the in-class assignments that I give to my art education majors is designed to initiate dialogue on racism. I teach at a small liberal arts college in the northeast. Students in the art education classes tend to be predominantly Euro-American from New York State. Occasionally I have had one or two students of color in my class. The purpose of the class (which is the last class students take before student teaching) is to explore theoretical and practical perspectives on teaching art as “situated practice.” I use this term to draw attention to the ways all teaching is situated, that it takes place in particular institutions (i.e., in schools, museums, and community centers) in specific historical moments, within particular social structures.

The in-class assignment is a 10 minute anonymous free-writing exercise in which students describe an incident from their lives when they had either faced, perpetrated, or witnessed racism. Though a few white students claimed that race was not an issue in their lives, the African-American student and I shared that we had faced so many forms of racism that one incident could not capture the multidimensional character of racism. He seemed as perturbed as I by the accounts of racism given by white students. A majority of them, in my most recent class, narrated incidents from their lives when they faced, what they termed, racism. They genuinely believed that they were victims of racism, and two of them offered the following as examples: “On numerous occasions, I have been called ‘white bitch’ and have been insulted in other ways by my African-American roommate;” “As one of the few white cheerleaders in my racially diverse high school, I was constantly harassed by the black cheerleaders who felt I should not be part of this cheer leading group as it was composed of largely black students.” These two students, and others in the class, viewed these incidents as “reverse racism.” In their minds there was little conceptual difference between racism and prejudice, other than the fact that racism is discrimination based on the color of one’s skin. Accordingly, the students believed that African-Americans could be racist towards whites. This conflation of racism, discrimination, and prejudice kept surfacing in our discussion. Based on their free-writes, I realized that we had to directly confront the question of what racism is in the United States.

This question was necessary because the students had no notion of race as a conceptual construct, directly connected to the systematic

production and maintenance of social, economic, political, and ideological dominance of white people over non-whites, or that this unequal power relation is embedded in the institutional bedrock of society. Although, I try to provoke students to engage in discussions of the structural nature of race relations, I am compromised as a non-white teacher and the classroom itself becomes a site of struggle. Students express anger, guilt, and powerlessness; they speak of their inability to speak about racism as it is an emotionally charged issue. In all of this, I stand in a contradictory position. Although I hold power as their teacher, the collective voice of these white students often silences me as a person of color. The classroom is no longer a safe space for either my students or myself as we negotiate the boundaries of our discomfort. I view this discomfort as a necessary part of learning to understand the hierarchical structures of racial differences, and more importantly, to discuss how to work across our differences rather than erase them.

One of the most effective ways that the status quo is maintained, in a racially structured society such as the United States, is through the erasure of difference. White people, like my students, contend that they have experienced racism. Such contentions obscure or erase the power relation between oppressor and oppressed. When white people equate prejudice with racism, such as statements made by people of color perceived as reverse racism, who then is oppressed? If everyone can claim some sort of oppression, then is who responsible? Examining how race and racism are fundamentally structured within the discourse of art education and the classroom is central to understanding the way power operates in a stratified society. The work of Stuart Hall (1993), in particular, and the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971) has greatly influenced my understanding and analyses of the structural nature of race relations, both theoretically and in the classroom.

### **Reevaluating Multicultural Art Discourses**

### **Education**

Critical and multicultural art education are discursive spaces where researchers and educators discuss issues of race as a conceptual construct. Despite the development of a more sophisticated understanding of culture in recent years (Freedman, Stuhr, & Weinberg, 1989), much of the discourse is couched in ethnic and cultural terms. Researchers and educators understand race as one component, along with religion,

nationality, culture, and language, that forms people's ethnic identity. I agree with the proponents of the social reconstructivist model of multicultural art education who maintain that acknowledging that certain groups have faced prejudice and discrimination provides the basis for curricula and pedagogical approaches to art education. The recognition of forms of discrimination enables teachers and students to broaden their approaches to art education by encouraging positive role models, examining both teacher and student prejudices / discriminatory actions, and challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of the dominant group (Wasson, Stuhr, & Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1990). Providing the above opportunities in the classroom "enables all students to work past their prejudicial values and discriminatory social actions regarding people with differing physical and mental abilities, socioeconomic status, genders, ages, politics, religion, and ethnic backgrounds and in so doing recognize the inherent worth of each member of a sociocultural group" (Wasson et al., 1990, p. 242). It is equally important, however, to specifically distinguish between racism and prejudice. The problem with equating racism with prejudice or discrimination, is that it inhibits an understanding of the fundamental ways in which U.S. society is structured racially. Instead, racism, like prejudice, is primarily viewed as individual acts of unfair treatment by members of one social group towards another. This attitude (one which my students share) obscures the manner in which racism functions in society through an interlocking web of social relations. The structuring of political, economic, cultural, social, and ideological relations within a complex network of hierarchical relations is important to any understanding of racism. The struggle from one historical moment to another alters these networks of social relations and creates different configurations of race relations which in turn shape different meanings of race.

By conflating racial issues with those of ethnicity or culture, race as a variable socio-historical category remains undertheorized in critical and multicultural art education discourses. Multicultural art education ignores the crucial role of social class, gender, and sexuality in the formation and structuring of racial identity within a historical moment by casting race as one among many differences. Although the term *racism* as a "rational abstraction" (Marx, 1971, p. 18) does focus on certain common social features, it is not useful for theoretical investigation because all abstractions tend to generalize and omit the multidimensional and contradictory character of particularities. Karl Marx (1971), explains the problems with the abstract notion of "production" in the *Introduction to Grundrisse*, a passage relevant to our

discussion on racism. He stated:

Even the most completely developed languages have laws and characteristics in common with the least developed ones, what is characteristic of their development are the points of departure from the general and common. The conditions which generally govern production must be differentiated in order that the essential difference should not be lost sight of in view of the general uniformity. (p. 18)

I argue that an implicit assumption underlying critical and multicultural art education discourses is that racism is the same across different historical time periods and across diverse cultures. Most discussions of racism, as I have already mentioned, are subsumed under culture or ethnicity. One of the few articles that directly addresses racism in art education is "*The Origins of Racism in the Public School Art Curriculum*" (my italics) written by Chalmers (1992). This historiographic article raises important issues regarding race and provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which art educators construe racism. Racism is understood as a static unitary and homogeneous structure with specific identifiable origins. Chalmers draws upon eighteenth and nineteenth century English sources to examine the eurocentric origins of art education both in England and the United States. He ignores the two nations' different histories, and a commonality is implicitly assumed between England and the United States. He points to scientific and biblical ideologies as the original sources of racist ideologies in art education. Although, biblical and scientifically based ideologies determined inclusions and exclusions in what was considered art in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, they do not directly determine some of the current eurocentric ideologies in art education.

There are two major points I would like to raise regarding the problems of charting racism as a simple linear trajectory. First, race is an ideological construct in the Gramscian sense and ideologies are lived relations, that is, they are connected to the daily experiences of people (Gramsci, 1971). Although ideologies carry traces of the past, they have to be continually recreated and are not simply inherited from the 18th and 19th centuries. As Fields (1982) explains:

Nothing handed down from the past could keep alive if we did not constantly reinvent and re-ritualize it to fit our own terrain. If race lives on today, it can do so only because we continue to create and re-create it in our social life, continue to verify it, and thus continue to need a social vocabulary that will allow us to make sense, not of what are ancestors did then, but of what we ourselves choose to do now. (p. 98)

The important issue at hand is not to locate the origins of racism in art education but to examine the prevalent conditions in art education and other institutions that make racial forms of domination an active part of our society today. Some of the prevalent conditions in art education today include the paucity of students of color and faculty of color in higher education, which can not be overlooked.

Second, we must begin to understand racism, as a concept, historically (rather than as a cultural phenomenon) in relation to the political, economic, and social institutions that structure U.S. society. Racism differs within each historical period, and therefore it is important to understand how racism has developed and changed. We must understand the specific development of racism as a political force. Hall explains how racism differs with time and place:

It's not helpful to define racism as a "natural" and permanent feature-either of all societies or indeed of a sort of universal "human nature." . . . It does not always assume the same shape. There have been many significantly different *racisms*-each historically specific and articulated in a different way with the societies in which they appear. Racism is always historically specific in this way, whatever common features it may appear to share with other social phenomena. Though it may draw on the cultural and ideological traces which are deposited in society by previous historical phases, it always assumes specific forms which arise out of the present - not the past - conditions and organizations of society. (quoted in Solomos, Finlay, Jones, & Gilroy, 1982, p. 14)

The equation of race and culture, in critical and multicultural art education, renders meanings of race, borrowing Hall's words, "natural and permanent" (quoted in Solomos, Finlay, Jones, & Gilroy,

1982, p. 14). However, racism in the United States during the 1960s, when multiculturalism emerged as a curricular reform movement, is markedly different from the racism of the 1990s. Since these differences are not addressed in the discourses of critical and multicultural art education, art educators inadvertently perpetuate racial dominance (Omi & Winant, 1986).

We, in critical art education, need to begin the process of disconnecting race with culture. We need to address issues of race as historically linked in particular ways to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and social class in various institutions such as museums, schools, and galleries. By examining our present social and cultural institutions, we can understand the ways specific forms of racism are reconstructed and linked to certain ideologies. Addressing the ways our differences are historically inter-related and hierarchically organized is necessary if we are to change the accepted (and commonsense) understanding of race and racism in the U.S. We must confront issues of race and racisms both theoretically and in the classroom.

## **Queers in the Classroom: Internalized and Projected Homophobia**

Ed Check

My interests in examining the relationships of sexual identity, art, and education have grown out my own personal experiences as a gay male, artist, and educator. Theoretically embedded in feminism and the pro-feminist men's movement, I use autobiography—in the sense of testimony (Felman & Laub, 1992; Felstiner, 1988)—as both a motivation and a theoretical framework. My testimonials recount what I have witnessed in my life, in my art, and in my work as an educator. These stories not only offer insight into context, content, and meaning, but have implications and applications for art and education.

For example, in an art methods class I taught for elementary education majors, I assigned a short reading from the *Village Voice* about artist Keith Haring entitled: "Crossover Dreams: Sexuality, Politics and

the Keith Haring Line" (Deitcher, 1990). As part of that assignment, students also viewed a half hour video titled: "Drawing the Line: A Portrait of Keith Haring" (Aubert, 1989). These assignments were part of a class segment investigating sexual identity as difference in art.

The Deitcher (1990) article examines the impact of sexuality on Haring's public personae and his art through the use of biography and autobiography. Asked, at one point, if kids looked up to him as a "gay role model," Haring responded:

I know a lot of hard-core street kids who would say they hate faggots, but they would never say that they hated me. Right? 'Cause they don't know me as a faggot. They respect me as a person, which is the most important thing. So it never really becomes an issue. (p. 11)

Not wholly convinced by his answer, Deitcher notes that it was in the private confines of the art gallery that Haring put his homoerotic art in view. It was there where "the disparate strands of his identity came together as a tense but *fragile* whole" [my italics] (p. 110). Haring's awareness of institutional homophobia is clearly indicated throughout this article: the power of homophobes to destroy him in a minute, his unwillingness or inability to risk being a gay role model, and the decision not to make "an issue" of his sexual identity. Further, the suggestion that distorted views of pedophilia should not prevent him from working with children illustrates the compromises that Haring was forced to make as a gay male, artist, and educator. Keenly aware of the negative stereotypes of gays in society and the damage gay imagery might have on his career and success in straight culture, Haring chose to silence himself and subvert a gay context for his work.

By contrast, the Aubert (1989) video virtually “straightens” out Haring’s life and art, rendering his sexual identity invisible and unproblematic. The video uses a narrative documentary style, replete with critical “experts” who lionize and historicize the importance of Haring’s public contributions as an American artist. The video defines Haring as a “pop” cultural hero. His artistic style and use of social themes in his art (drug abuse, literacy, animal rights, apartheid, and safer sex), combined with his involvement in children’s and various community groups, exemplifies what the video refers to as his “commitment to the people.” Absent from the text of the video are Haring’s personal commitments, such as his participation in the fight against AIDS, his eventual death from AIDS-related illnesses, and that he was gay. The video’s final frame simply states: “Keith Haring died on the 16th of February 1990.”

During the class discussion, which compared the video, the article, and relevant personal experiences, many students were clearly uncomfortable engaging in an open discussion about the construction and impact of sexual identities on art. Instead, they maintained that it was not necessary for them to know the impact of sexuality itself on their understanding of an artist’s work.

I sensed a general uneasiness in the classroom, and as a self-identified gay person, considered that knowledge of Haring’s sexual identity was essential for an informed evaluation of his art. I presented other opinions, such as Trebay’s (1990), which notes that Haring’s being gay was “not coincidental to his life and death” (p. 116). I suggested to the class that to understand Haring, one must place him within a larger cultural context which is often homophobic, erotophobic, and sexist.

Despite this discussion, students continued to maintain that “it shouldn’t matter what his sexuality was,” and that sexual orientation was irrelevant to the study of art. I realized that I needed to both witness and testify. I spoke of the hostility and homophobia that I encountered and the shame and repressed rage that I sometimes felt as a gay man and as a gay artist.

As a result of this brief act of self-exposure, everyone in the class began to analyze the interplay between homophobia, masculinity, and heterosexuality. During the following weeks, some students

investigated issues of gender, especially masculinity. I asked students for a sketchbook response to the question: "What does masculinity mean to you?" The students then responded in their sketchbooks to the movie, *The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* (Clark & Hamlyn, 1995). These assignments reaffirmed for the class that many straight people have distorted visions of homosexuality, and that gays and lesbians, in turn, internalize these perceptions, as they struggle with their own issues of safety and shame.

In another example, I helped co-curate an art exhibit at a gallery at the University of Wisconsin-Madison entitled, *Drawing Upon Our Experiences*. It was organized as part of the University's Fall National Coming Out Week celebration. Press releases and posters posed the following question to artists: "Where was the last academic setting or gallery space where you were encouraged or felt comfortable to exhibit your work dealing with themes that are important to you as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered person?" We received one thunderous reply—"nowhere."

While interest in and elation over the exhibit ran high, so did apprehension about appearing in such a show. In fact, the experience seemed schizophrenic and dilemmic for nearly everyone involved. On the one hand, many artists were hesitant to participate in the show, and thus identify themselves as lesbian or gay (or as allies). Some refused to give their names over the phone. On the other hand, the artists who did show their work were profusive in their thanks for an opportunity to exhibit their art, art that they had never been able to exhibit anywhere else.

At this point, a brief discussion of a few recent articles on the subject will help confirm what practice reveals. While it is true that critics like Honeychurch (1995) and Lampela (1996) write about the importance of sexual subjectivity and identity in art, the literature in art education is silent, illusive, or misrepresentative. This point is glaringly revealed in the April/May (1990) issue of *Art and Man* (since renamed *Scholastic Art*) which features the art of David Hockney.

The article, which occupies nine of the magazine's sixteen pages, reduces Hockney's art and life to formal principles and elements of design. The text makes no mention of Hockney's sexual identity or

its influence upon his life and work. Since Hockney, a living artist, is quite explicit about the relationship of his sexuality to his art (Hockney, 1976) such silence is deliberative and deforming. For example, the article states that:

When David Hockney first saw Los Angeles in 1963, he immediately noticed the brightness and intensity of the light. He had been used to the rain and fog of England, so California seemed like a tropical paradise filled with sun-drenched houses, palm trees, and bright-blue swimming pools. (*The California Story*, 1990, p. 4)

Contrast this with Webb's (1988) description of what attracted Hockney to California, derived from Hockney's own explanation of his experiences:

Whatever the attractions of New York, Hockney's real purpose in returning to America [in 1963] was to visit California. His fantasies about America centered around beautiful suntanned beach boys, the sort of boys who filled the pages of *Physique Pictorial*, which he had collected avidly in London. The magazine originated in Los Angeles, so that was his destination. (pp. 63-4)

The refusal of a journal in the field to acknowledge both the ordinariness of sexual identity and the sexual identity of a major living artist is not an anomaly. Artists from Michelangelo through Winslow Homer to Robert Mapplethorpe have been either "straightened" or demonized through silence or hyper-sexualization.<sup>2</sup>

Judith Butler (1993) points out the presumption that the male sex is primary in culture. It gets expressed through a privileged masculine gender and a sexuality that is heterosexual. The male, the masculine, and the heterosexual represent the culture's ideal (Mosse, 1993). Men are expected to exhibit power and demonstrate their manhood within such a phallogocentric culture (Abbott, 1991; Kimmel, 1991). Such socially constructed, arbitrary, and tenuous distinctions significantly affect social and economic interactions between men and women. Frye (1983) and Stoltenberg (1989) state that gender affects the ways we think, act, learn, live, adjudicate, remember, and know. This is clearly evidenced in the

depiction of Hockney, a situation where a gay artist—who has publicly announced his affectional preference—is firmly pushed back into the closet to conform to cultural ideals of sex, gender, and identity.

Most men do not even question cultural masculinity. As Porter (1992) points out, “for men to ask such questions in the spirit of personal self-reflection remains itself a bold departure” (p. 4). My own experiences tended to support culturally determined developmental structures. I, like other boys, mimicked the modeling of adult males in order to become a “real man” (Silverstein and Rashbaum, 1994) and learned to “despise ‘faggots’ in order to feel masculine” (Stoltenberg, 1991, p. 8).

Yet I also, like millions of other men—including Keith Haring and David Hockney—simultaneously reinforced and undermined such ideals. While beginning the process of learning to accept and love myself as a gay male, I also despised myself for not being man enough. As a college senior, I practiced walking “like a man” because someone yelled out to me that I walked like a girl. Simultaneously, I was searching for gay culture. Like Haring, I sought acceptance by straights. Like Hockney, the gay part of my identity was both being honored and disappeared.

To articulate myself as more than silence, or to contest myself in the limited discourse that does exist is both a frightening and frustrating experience; not only for me but for other lesbian or gay artists or lesbian or gay art educators as well.<sup>3</sup> As Vito Russo (1990) so poignantly explained it:

As a gay person, one grows up with the people around you, including your parents, assuming you are straight. At some point of course you know different, and so you acquire a kind of double vision. You are able to see both the truth and the illusion. Growing up with this double vision helps you to practice it on art, on cinema, or in writing. You imagine all sorts of things in order to create a world where you exist. (Vito Russo in Bell, Fouratt, Millet, Russo, Weinstein, White & Harris, 1990, p. 136)

In order to create a world where we do exist, gay and straight educators need to reveal the existence of lesbian and gay artists. Artists

such as:

Bernice Abbott, Judith Anderson, Mary Austin, Francis Bacon, Sadie Benning, Ross Bleckner, Deborah Bright, Romaine Brooks, Paul Cadmus, Janet Cooling, Tee Corrine, Imogene Cunningham, Betsy Damon, Charles Demuth, Nicole Eisenman, Louise Fishman, Gran Fury, Gilbert and George, Laura Gilpin, Gluck (Hannah Gluckstein), Della Grace, Duncan Grant, John Greyson, Harmony Hammond, Winslow Homer, Harriet Hosmer, Marsden Hartley, Keith Haring, David Hockney, Holly Hughes, Jasper Johns, Deborah Kass, Marie Laurencin, Sadie Lee, Zoe Leonard, Edmonia Lewis, John Lindell, Robert Mapplethorpe, Tim Miller, Donald Moffett, Frank Moore, Ellen Neipris, Robert Rauschenberg, Marlon Riggs, June Redfern, Monica Sjo, Hugh Steers, Andy Warhol and David Wojnarowicz—to name a few.

The true naming of these men and women, while it would not prevent distortion of the relationship of sexual identity to their work, would eliminate much of the silence that surrounds them.

Because these artists were or are engaged in a highly problematic relationship with their culture, it is critical to examine their sexual identity. Some have hidden their sexual identity, and others have “flaunted it.” Some have named themselves and others have denied their sexual identities. Some have attempted to articulate a vision based on their sexual aesthetic; others have simply struggled to exist. Yet each has attempted to create a discourse, an artistic narrative, that could

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<sup>2</sup>Examples of texts that render sexual identity invisible are: Aubert (1989), *The California Story* (1990), Jansen’s (1995) *History of Art*, Stokstad’s (1995) *Art History*, and Hobbs and Rush (1997). Cahan and Kocur (1996) is an example of a text incorporating issues of sexual identity. See Wojnarowicz (1991), “Do not doubt the dangerousness of the 12-inch-tall politician” (pp. 138-162), for descriptions of the effects of the process of the demonization of queers in society. See Vito Russo’s (1981) *The Celluloid Closet* for a cultural examination of homosexuality as degeneracy in film; Lisa Duggan’s (1990) *Sex Panics* (pp. 209-213) for descriptions of deviance surrounding Robert Mapplethorpe; and the conflation of deviance, gay sexuality, and AIDS in Robert Padgug’s (1987) *More than the Story of a Virus: Gay History, Gay Communities and AIDS*. Also, see Barrett and Rab (1990) for an example of looking at controversial art in

explain the ambiguities and dilemmas of lives that were often lived in exile from their authentic selves. This was a strategy that I myself have employed and understood.

One final example is useful here. When I submitted the first draft of this paper, one reviewer requested changes by stating:

While I am sympathetic to the author for the difficulty of living with discrimination and prejudice and affirm his right and need to talk about his personal experiences, from an intellectual and political point of view, I think the article would be stronger if its tone was [sic] less judgmental toward those who do not currently see how to incorporate the study of the construction of sexuality into the K-12 program.

The conscious intent of this reviewer was undoubtedly benign: he or she simply wanted to alter the tone of a discourse that he or she found either uncomfortable or dissatisfying. Yet, the result was that I, like many of the artists that I have named, felt both shamed and silenced. Shamed because my approach to the issue was not perceived as “intellectual,” and silenced because—however well-intentioned—the reviewer sought to silence not only my articulation of my own life but my critique of the culture at large, a critique that he or she labeled judgmental. I was labeled judgmental, not this culture nor my anonymous reviewer. My attitudes needed changing, not his or hers.

Yet, there is irony here. For in this most recent experience of the dissonance between critical discourse and lived experience, I recognize that every time I “come out,” it is a political as well as an aesthetic act. Sedgwick (1990) described it as one that is filled with complications:

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<sup>3</sup>For further reading of lesbian and gay artists’, teachers’, and students’ concerns about fear and silence see: Deitcher (1990); Hammond (1994); Kanov (1991); Katz (1993); Rist (1986); Sheff (1989); Weinberg (1993); and Wojnarowicz (1991) about artists; Griffin (1992); Harbeck (1992) and (1988); Jennings (1994); Lampela (1996); and Turley (1994) about teachers; and Gordon (1983); Green (1991); Maguen (1991); National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (1991); and Rofes (1989); about teens, schools, and students.

every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people, new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure. (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 68)

Finally, I must inject a note of ambiguity into all the circumstances that I have described. The editor of *Art and Man*, the students in my class, and my anonymous reviewer—like Keith Haring, David Hockney and I, are all living the discourse. All of us, in our words and in our silences, through our rebellions, complicities, and desires, exist as the ongoing creations of our politics as well as in the ongoing creativity of our art. And, as this happens, our discourse will continue to expand and narrow, slow and congeal. And it will continue.

### **Conclusion of the Three Discourses**

Critical discourses in art education rarely examine the complexities and contradictions of living and working in educational spaces. Throughout each of our stories, each of our vignettes, we have tried to provide small windows to view the unexamined. That is, we have tried to interrupt the juggernaut of “art education as usual,” and present an alternative way of seeing and interpreting our lives in relation to both teaching and to art.

Since each of us participates in the discourses within art education that perpetuate misunderstandings of race, class, and sexuality, we are therefore implicated in the problems as much as the solutions. We are not exempt from the perspectives we seek to change. Yet our insistence of the validity of “outsider criticism” invokes what might be considered the best of “outsider art:” a way of seeing old problems with “new” eyes; a way of conceptualizing other outcomes. It also suggests that the disjunction between materiality and discourse is itself one place to begin to come together: to speak, to share and, perhaps, to change.

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