Editorial
Research, Visual Cultural Studies, Programs

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This year's journal explores a number of social issues that continue to reassert themselves on the postmodern landscape. How can social and cultural justice assert itself in *arts based education*? What is our responsibility to "at risk" children when it comes to a critical pedagogy? The first two essays use innovative approaches to arts based research by incorporating a critical autobiographical methodology. James Sanders and Diane Conrad, drawing their theoretical base from critical autoethnographic inquiry, attempt to examine themselves within the context of their investment as administrator, teacher and researcher.

This is followed by three essays, which concentrate, on a *visual cultural studies* approach to art education. Tavin and a company of graduate students (Lea Lovelace, Albert Stabler and Jason Maxam) provide exemplars of a visual cultural studies approach, followed by Jin-shiow Chen's Taiwanese study of comic/anime fandom. I follow by questioning "romantic resistance" in popular culture. To cap off our essays we end with two curricular proposals of innovative art education for the twenty-first century. Stan Horner offers a meta-modernist approach to the teaching of art. He presents a paradigm shift as to where exploration of art education curricular could be heading. Leslie Sharpe follows by describing the challenges of teaching art and mobile technologies critically in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego. What follows is a brief commentary on each of the essays.

Editorial

James Sanders essay *(re)Marking Time/(re)Examining the Social History of a Community of Visual Art*, calls for *a queer inverted look* in the way that well intentioned policy, actions and practices as manifested in school curricula and leadership programs can inadvertently mitigate what they intend to do in the name of social and cultural justice. By examining fifty-five board members oral testimonies, drawing on institutional minutes of meetings, examining promotional catalogs, news clippings teaching artists and students since the mid-1940's of an urban non-profit southeastern art institutional community, Sanders confronts the contradictions between saying and doing. It is a retelling of history as a "polyvocal and self-critical rendering" of fifty-five years of richly sustained and varied standpoints. Sanders' research is complicated by the autobiographical investment he has in the institution he has shaped for over twenty-three years. He recognizes that his voice is inevitably riddled with his own biases, but makes no apology for this. It is a brave and risky exploration with the recognition that as a non-profit agency, the community art institution is dependent on a select group of donors, corporations and funding agencies that assess final reports. The very idea that these reports could be critical is disavowed. Biting the hand that feeds you is always precarious. This was the point Cornell West (1990) made over a decade ago when "cultural studies," as an ill-defined entity, was becoming the new kid on the Arts Faculty's block. How does a cultural worker go about criticizing the institution s/he works for when "racial segregation, patriarchal policies and self-serving cultural elitism serve the long-term interest, " asks Sander? Sanders raises tough questions. The exclusion of students of non-western origin from the community's visual art school, and the failure to hire minority artists or elect them as board leaders, are these to be seen as intentional acts, or the structural consequences of social and cultural practices? Sanders also raises tough questions concerning racial segregation in the Arts and Crafts Association in the first decade of the very institution whose policies he has helped to

shape. Disavowal persisted concerning desegregation and the "Negro membership problem." Many African-American artists and craftsmen made extraordinary sacrifices to insure that the Black community was supported. Sanders conclusions raise more questions, but it is a call for a continued reexamination of institutional history to ask the fundamental question of facing the rhetoric of social justice: whether the institution has lived up to it or only made a symbolic gesture toward the problem that is defined.

Diane Conrad's paper *Unearthing Personal History: Autoethnography & Artifacts Inform Research on Youth Risk Taking*, presents an exemplar of arts research which is innovative in its approach to autobiography and bridging visual art and drama. Performance art combines the body of drama with the visual. Her essay has qualities of both. Conrad interrogates personal artifacts to identify with the "at risk" students that she is working with—to raise the question of compassion as well as difference as a researcher. The artifact plays an ambiguous role in arts education, neither art nor a banal object, but a "magical" object that has been invested with libidinal attachment. Its personal historical experience is embedded in its patina, saturated with personal meaning. Conrad's research raises the question of the desire of the researcher. What are the unconscious autobiographical experiences which draw educators from a wide range of ideological perspectives to engage in researching the "object-subjects" that they do?

Kevin Tavin, Lea Lovelace, Albert Stabler and Jason Maxam in their joint essay *From Bucktown to Niketown: Doing Visual Cultural Studies (Chicago Style),* are also engaged with objects of desire that have passionate attachments. They turn their eye inwards to present the explorations of a graduate course at the Art Institute of Chicago entitled *Critical Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, and the Making of the Cultural Worker*. Like Sanders, Tavin and the company of graduate students

recognize the need to be introspective and thoughtful in what they are attempting to do in the name of pedagogy from a political, social and democratic mind set. Most importantly for the health of art education, they recognize the need to see our field in the broader context of visual cultural studies. This has been an emphasis that the social caucus has been trying to promote in the past—an orientation to popular cultural and media which is where our students "live." The course presents a possible model of what critical pedagogy should be like on the media landscape of postmodernity. It raises the question as to how individuals and groups are affected by forms of discourse which both enable and deny agency. Tavin and company are engaged in a bold experiment to coalesce theoretical inquiry, dialogical exchange and social activism with the added challenge to incorporate a student's personal narrative for social transformation—a tall order. To bring reader, author, critic, and participant together in a viable project offers the needed contemporary challenge for a visual cultural studies approach to art education. To meet the requirements of the course, students interpret a site, text, or a set of images through the lens of the critical literature examined. A class presentation or an outside field trip concludes the course where a critical engagement with classmates takes place.

A number of final projects are described that have taken place around the city of Chicago. Three projects in particular are given close scrutiny. Lea Lovelace discusses her project concerning the representation of disabilities in mass media. Choosing the film genre of comedy, Lovelace describes her attempt to sensitize the class to the way disabilities are represented in mainstream Hollywood by first reading several critical articles that specifically speak to the way people with disabilities are targeted in advertising. Concentrating on the Farrelly Brother's films, Lovelace engaged the class in discussing several scenes in light of the critical literature read, illustrating concerns of (mis)representation and raising questions of possible re-dress.

How might an art curriculum unit be developed which engages the representation of people with disabilities in art history, juxtaposed with more contemporary representations, she asks?

Albert Stabler's contribution as an exemplar of critical praxis is to examine the question of urban gentrification. Art and the built environment has always been marginalized in visual art education, but there are many precedents for building upon this rich area of political and social exploration. Stabler's "quality of life" of the neighborhood is a civic and democratic issue that art students should be engaged in, if they wish to make a difference in the way urban design is perceived in the future. Stabler explored the history of a local gentrified tourist area, Bucktown on Chicago's northwest side attempting to see aesthetic issues of gentrification as not being divorced from their social and economic implications. An example of New Urbanism, Stabler raises the pressing issue of postmodernism, the increasing loss of public space through private interests, the virtual decentering of the public/private dichotomy, class appropriation, and the rise of postmodern architectural style where a relativism persists by quoting architectural history. Stabler suggests that these difficult issues can be discussed with youth through the imaginative building of urban sites where role playing can take place to explore decision making, as well as examining the historical and economic realities that shape their own neighborhoods.

Lastly, Jason Maxam adds his voice by exploring a perennial and controversial subject—media violence. The question whether violence is sublimated by the media, whether the media is a scapegoat to avoid questioning the structural violence in everyday life, or whether the divide between virtual cyber-violence and "real" violence is a firm as some claim, are all questions that a visual cultural studies approach to art education should address. Maxam's particular approach to this pedagogical issue was to create a twelve minute video that consisted of

a collage of violent media images with two controversial voice-overs. This video became a catalyst to discuss media responsibility for violent imagery, questions of censorship, and to raise personal experiences of violence with youth.

Visual Cultural Studies requires that art educators take popular culture and the mediascape that surrounds us seriously. Jin-show Chen provides us with a fascinating look at the sub-culture of ComicWorld in Taiwan as presented through its comic conventions and media presentations. She especially concentrates on cosplay, the performative masquerade that goes on in these conventions, with their play with names and character consuming. Her essay points to the postmodern landscape of fandom as it is found in the sub-culture of Anime comics, and hints at the cultural dominance of Japanese doujinshi (anime comics) that have spread throughout Taiwan. Chen presents a series of seven strategies that fans use in developing their own fantasy life, reemphasizing the point that the distinction between producers and consumers has long past. This is another example of Barthes well-known proclamation that " the author is dead." Fans create a myriad of meanings from the popular culture that they use and create. Chen concludes with the question as to whether this fantasy world is a "temporary mend" of the frustrations in the "real world." She does not perceive doujinshi authors or cosplayers as attempting to challenge the views of society. She concludes that this imaginary play is indeed a utopian escape that is not harmful, but perhaps a "survival" tactic to handle stress and frustration of postmodern living. It would be interesting from narratological point of views which stories merely present technological escape utopias and which provide more critical dystopias of technology. Zines and fanfics, so called "slash stories" because they "slash" two unlikely characters together in a sexual relationship (Captain Kirk/Spock) (Buffy/ Giles), have emerged in the internet to post stories of sexual fantasies that would otherwise

never be shown on public television series or appear in comic books to provide queer readings and critical explorations that are generally by the dominant culture. This is a form of creativity that is generally not recognized by the mainstream (see also Penley, 1990).

Jin-shiow Chen's essay is followed up by my own, *Unromancing The Stone of 'Resistance:' In Defence of A Continued Radical Politics*, which raises this question: whether what is happing in postmodern popular culture of fandom is merely a "romantic transgression." Examining the theories of John Fiske, who (like Jenkins) has a reputation for promoting the "free play" of fandom and creativity for democratic ends, I raise the question if this is simply an imaginary escape; the traumas and frustrations of postmodern living are not structurally tackled but merely provide escape fantasies, survival games that enable us not to critically engage in the world. Video game realities and Internet virtual cities like Neocron provide an obsessional escape where living a virtual life is much more exciting that struggling with the politics of everyday life. John Fiske has been a staunch proponent of popular cultural studies. His position offers an opportunity to question just how radical an approach to media education needs to be taken in order to make a difference in traversing the fantasies that media (stories, artifacts, films, art, television, video games) play in student lives. Where do we as visual cultural studies teachers stand in relation to the glut of images that continue to pour into our classes by the production of designer capitalism's consumerism? We close our complement of essays with two such innovative curricular proposals.

The search for innovative courses and curricula continues. Tavin and the complement of graduate students offer us one continuous attempt to search for a critical visual media orientation. Stan Horner, now artist and art educator emeritus from Concordia University, Quebec, has been developing curricular material recognizes the

postmodern media landscape we are living on. He has developed a visual cultural studies curriculum which is truly innovative, bold, and powerful in its implications. Horner has always been interested in performative experimentation and questioning in visual arts, stretching out visual art's confined meaning to only a narrow view of what hangs in galleries. Thus far he has written three innovative curricular books which articulate his approach as "interactive interdisciplinary education" (iiae). In our concluding essay, Horner tries to make the careful distinction between this interdisciplinary approach and the often-mentioned DBAE, which the Social Caucus has attempted to critique in the past. Horner uses the term Meta-modern rather than postmodern to avoid the usual misunderstanding of postmodernity as a period that follows or displaces modernism. Horner's iiae proposal attempts to set up dialectic between open and closed systems, of infinite games in dialectic with finite games. Horner is essentially updating visual art education to an ecological paradigm that recognizes Ilya Prigogine (1980) notion of "dissipative structures," or in a different context Rupert Sheldrake (1982) "New Science" which deals with the notion of the presence of the past. Developmental theories undergo a paradigm shift with the recognition that the sub-systems impact the entire organism continually. The reader is advised that the diagrams are daunting, however they do articulate the dialectics between his open system iiae curriculum and DBAE closed or finite system's approach.

Leslie Sharpe's essay, *Teaching Critical Practice for Future Technologies*, gives us a glimpse of the challenges that face the teaching of contemporary art practice using new mobile technologies. What is the role of technology in an art curriculum? Should its direction focus on fine arts or direct itself to computer-related industries? Difficult questions. The difficulty of teaching new media is further hampered by the backgrounds of students entering colleges and universities. Many have limited knowledge of technology and lack experience, while others

come from more privileged situations. Sharpe takes the reader through her course entitled "Pace/Place/Interface" which focuses on wireless mobile technologies, a daunting task given the inexpediences of her students, and that no mobile technologies were available for them to use in the lab. Given such limitations, Sharpe describes the ways she managed to teach the course by engaging the students with the work of the Situationists and the contemporary artist Janet Cardiff. She takes us through the projects and maps out future directions. Sharpe's essay gives us a glimpse of what all teachers of art must face in some limited sense in the upcoming future of a wireless technological world.

We have two essays in our commentary section. Donalyn Heise revisits the Social Caucus' concern for the politics of sexual identity that appeared last year in volume twenty-two. "Canceling the Queers" (Keifer-Boyd et al.) discusses the cancellation and censoring of a planned session at a state art education conference that placed lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered issues on the table within the context of visual art education. Heise revisiting raises the difficult question of commitment when it comes to sexual identity, comparing it to the identity formation that emerged when the multicultural movement first got underway. She suggests that "all" of us are democratically poorer when *voice* is denied to those who have been abjected by dominant heteronormativity.

Our last commentary comes from an art teacher, Susan Witwicki who is politically committed and astute, struggling to provide a politicized way to teach technology, but finding the social environment not conducive to engaging students in becoming concerned citizens. Her essay is self-reflexive with no pretense towards erudite scholarship. Rather, Witwicki provides us with the raw realities of keeping up sprit and hope for critical practice in environments which can be very discouraging in their effects on the psyche. Written with ironic

wit, teaching Web Design and Computer Applications rather than her passion for visual art so that she might have a "foot in the door" to continue her career, Witwicki provides a fascinating wink at her struggles. Sudent chat lines and instant messaging (IM), the difficulties with "artsier" students exploring computer technologies, and how to teach Web design are all embedded in her critique of neo-liberalist capitalism. Witwicki ends her essay with a reflection on the loss of materiality that computers provide, as well as their overemphasis on instrumentality at the expense of thoughtfulness ("soft stuff"). Nevertheless she provides us with two photo-montaged images of her own socially critical art using PhotoShop technology. Used reflexively, there is merit to technology after all!

References

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