Editorial

Silence Under Erasure—
The Silence of Silence

jan jagodzinski / Bill Wightman

Author Guagliumi's cover design speaks eloquently to the theme of this year's journal: silence. The fractal spaces of a complex topological landscape—with various intensities of lines that compress and depress throughout—are cut and interpenetrated by blank spaces whose sinuous curves stake out a depthless territory that we know nothing about. The "spine" of the cover becomes an artificial divide where the two sides butt together, as if some giant fault line had been intentionally created. Occasionally a translucent film grows over the force and intensity of these lines, both masking and holding them together to neutralize their force. If the viewer looks carefully, occasionally there is seepage of lines that make their way into the white void. These are interstitial sites where the percipitous "cut" of depthless space softens and there is an overflowing and exchange of boundaries. These are the moments of aleatory events—microscopic and easily overlooked, precisely where transformative change begins through the ever so slight corrosion of time.

Floating above this intense hubris of activity on depthless space are letters—the alphabetization of symbols that are like the non-sense of the unconscious itself. Meaning has not been formed, but exists only as an affective turmoil felt by the body. Like a silent scream that has become iconic of Edvard Munch, these letters are dispersed and
scattered over the intensities and force lines of a landscape that is forming to articulate itself—to find a site/sight/cite so that it might be heard. Munch's deafening scream is echoed once more by Mike Emme's "Visual Editorial" that appears when the reader opens the cover. The paradox of silence is well illustrated by the negative photograph of an organ that mediates the threshold of sound between our inside and outside world—the ear. Its orifice is intentionally held open as if to taunt the limits of what can be heard. The word "silence" remains "visibly inaudible." The visual also presents the paradox of gender as much as it does race for the reflexivity of silence holds no bounds.

In this year's journal, the essays have demarcated various interstitial sites throughout the art, art education and entertainment media landscape and have begun to chart the silences that exist within it. The first three essays address The Silences of War. The events of post 9/11 and the Bush's controversial "war on terrorism" with its unilateral foreign policy have increased the level of anxiety throughout the United States. Code Orange security alert is a cyclical repetition. Rob Nellis' essay on Ridley Scott's film, Black Hawk Down, raises questions concerning the representation of war that silently haunts the film in the background. At what point does such a film, based on an "actual event" that took place in Mogadishu, Somalia, become a propaganda statement of American heroism rather than raising the political controversy that surrounded the American Marines attempt to assassinate the warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid? Nellis's essay raises the political silences that the film refuses to acknowledge. Norm Friesen's "Catching Sight of the Permanent Possibility of War: Images of Totality and Words of Peace" follows up with a discussion of the "visual technologies of war." Here other silences emerge. His essays draws on the ethical work of Emmanuel Levinas and the importance of a phenomenological understanding of an embodied "flesh" bearing eye when it comes to war. In contrast to such a potentially "peaceful
whom? What are the silent assumptions as to the way the world is hegemonically presented? Such questions come under the scrutiny of the next host of authors. Patricia M. Amburgy, Wanda B. Knight, and Karen Keifer-Boyd discuss the identity markers of privilege, and the absences that exist in schools; they question the way that a binary complex of closed system differences define identities and label categories. In what ways can these categories be deconstructed? How might students become aware of the marks of privilege that are written on their bodies? The authors offer a number of strategies that they and others have put into deconstructive practice. One example of such practice that surrounds the history of African art is raised by David Gall in his essay, "African Art: What and to Whom? Anxieties, Certainties, Mythologies." It is only recently that the representation of African art by a Eurocentric racist colonial past has been overturned—the differences and complexity of discourses that were homogenized under the label ‘African Art’ have become undone. Gall succinctly claims that the recognition of plurality and difference, which is fashionable in postmodern theorizing, is not enough, and leaves art educators with the hypercomplex issue of the need to grasp and struggle for a deeper understanding of African visual manipulative traditions. Laura Fattal’s essay, “Piercing Gaze: Public Art in Schools” is also about the question of representation to fill a missing silence. This time the question of representation is centrally focused on the African American and Latino Diaspora. Fattal describes a public art project initiated by the superintendent of a high-poverty school district in the town of Plainfield, New Jersey. To celebrate its community-building mission the newly built Washington Community School (grades preK-5) was chosen as the site for such a project. Fattal describes the trials and difficulties that were encountered when Lorenzo Pace was given the commission to do a stairwell installation on two sidewalls of the school, which would integrate ten portraits each of important African American leaders/dignitaries/heros. The essay describes the complexities of the representational process itself—identity politics presents some unexpected difficulties as well as triumphs.

Schooling Silence, our next section, looks inside art classrooms. In an innovative and self-reflexive essay, Bob Sweeney draws on the theoretical writing of Deleuze and Guattari, William Burrough’s notion of “viral language,” and John Cage’s claim of the “impossibility” of silence to meditate on the way the “performativity” of silence is used both affectively and effectively as a form of resistance by students. In “Three Silences: Infection . . . Abjection . . . Art Education,” Sweeney brings the reader to a space where art educators are called on to attend to the in-between zone that opens up between the verbal-nonverbal dichotomy when students in class perform what might be referred to as a “deafening silence” as an ethical act. As a university supervisor, Donalyn Heise carries this theme into the broader issue of pre-service teachers as they fulfill their student teaching practicum. She raises the question how can student teachers raise silences that the curriculum usually avoids such as the threat of terrorism, abuse, oppression, isolation, fear, racism, prejudices and intolerance, what Paulo Freire called a “culture of silence.” Heise shows how schooling unintentionally silences the voices of individual students. Drawing on a social reconstructivist perspective she argues for a curriculum as developed by the Prairie Visions Nebraska Consortium for an Arts Education that gives voice and empowers students so that they may be heard through their own commemorative events that explore their experiences and take notice of special people and significant memorable events in their lives. Katie Roberts continues this discussion of curriculum building that gives voice and overcomes silences by drawing on the Deleuze and Guattarian notion of the rhizome so as to deconstruct the voice/silence dichotomy. Roberts explores the nuances of the ampersand
“anding” to create an open-system dynamic art curriculum. The ampersand’s significance is the promise that art education as a field comes to recognize the changed reality of postmodernism. Silence in this model is explicitly recognized since, it is argued, a dynamic rhizomatic model recognizes multiple viewpoints, questions ownership, and redefines creativity not only as product but also the processes of art. Closed system curricular models, which are static, fail in this regard.

Our last section looks at Media Silences. Media is a rich area of exploration that plunges us immediately into a visual culture that frames perceptions in any number of differentials, a point the Deleuze always stressed when developing his views on virtual reality. Two of the three essays in this section deal with the Japanese art of anime/ manga. Both essays complement one another in the way they explore the question of sex and gender identity formation of fans that take place through costume design (Cosplay) and narrative identification with the anime/ manga characters created. Jin-shiow Chen’s “Meditating on Voiceless Words from the Invisible Others: Young Female Anime Fan Artists—Narratives of Gender Images” provides an insight into the fantasy formations that are at play at ComicWorld conventions where Japanese anime/manga comics are marketed and the costumes are in full display. Chen interviews several fans attempting to grasp the sorts of identifications that are taking place both on the unconscious and conscious levels within the Cosplay world of anime/manga. Here, a certain silence emerges within each fan-participant herself as to the forms of desire that remain elusive as to their own sense of conscious identification. Marjorie Manifold’s “Imaged Voices - Envisioned Landscapes: Storylines of Information-Age Girls and Young Women” furthers this exploration through an in-depth study of cyber-space storylining made possible through her daughter Josephina, who was involved in a cyber-community of female friends called The Trinity Group. Manifold adroitly and carefully teases out the questions of identity formation of adolescent girls. She does this through her understanding of the collaborative processes that takes place on-line between the female participants as they create their characters. Storyline authors create fictive characters whose bios present a rich fantasy life that mixes their personal histories with that of their characters within specific contexts that enable them to work through their individual issues and struggles as in any fiction writing. Here, however, the image of the characters is of primary importance. Their art presents a psychological profile that becomes rich for exploration as to the character’s relationships, motivations, and actions. Manifold is able to explore this fantasy life through the various artistic genres (Shōjo, Bishōnen, and Yaoi) of her participants and present to her reader the dialectics of contradiction in the involvement of such identifications: on the one hand, personal feminine autonomy is made possible, at the same time, Manifold is also aware of the silences in these narratives as well. Issues of racism, ethnic conflicts, and ageism are missing from the narrative/illustrative storyline repertoire.

This leads to the last essay, “Questioning Fantasies of Popular ‘Resistance:’ Democratic Populism and Radical Politics in Visual Cultural Studies” by Jan Jagodzinski. This essay is a complementary rejoinder to an essay that appeared in last year’s journal. The silence it addresses is essentially a plea for a radical politics in visual cultural studies. He argues that neo-liberalist pluralism has produced a form of “democratic populism” which is paraded as being inclusive and multi-perspectival. The essay critiques the question of “pleasurable resistance” as it manifests itself in popular cultural forms as examined mostly by John Fisk, who is an exemplary left-leaning critic. The essay ends with a call not to overlook the political economy and a materialism that has dropped out of favour in cultural (visual) studies.