The Anxious Now
& the Next Big Thing

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Editorial

Articles

The Anxious Now and the Next Big Thing

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Editorial Note

We are living in a strange era where the change artists, educators, policy makers, and activists have been working towards over the past century are coming to fruition in the form of globalization, multiculturalism, and critical thinking, along with the backlash to them by orthodoxy.

The problems of racism, hetero-patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism have not gone away but vigilance around the loss of power they cause to traditional cultural and economic gatekeepers, and the consequent resistance to this loss, is strong and evident globally. This has created increasingly tenuous ground of what is acceptable and what is not, in discussing these fraught issues and how we in art education address these issues.

The anxiety of being facilitators of learning and of social and cultural change, in the middle of rapidly shifting social rules and dynamics, is clearly a Big Thing in art making, research and teaching, with different nuances than we experienced even ten years ago when multicultural, social justice, and visual culture art education were   becoming normalized in North American art education. The articles in this issue reflect this and provide food for thought about how we need to (or already are) shifting focus on the purpose and function of social theory in art education.

We seem to be at a moment in time where awareness of the importance of equity, diversity, inclusion, and access is somewhat established in art education discourse, along with an encouraging amount of active practice of critical thinking, if the various journals, books, webinars, conferences, and seminars etc., are taken as evidence. However, this growth has in turn created a freshly unfamiliar space of needing to re-learn the difference and line between offense and harm. Conversations about

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offensive habits can be offensive themselves, in that they include offending references and collective memories. How do we, artists and educators as cultural workers, discuss the re-negotiations of problematic language and social practices, without erasure of their histories and local/global contexts? A significant role of the arts, after all, is to investigate the boundaries and limits of what is and can be offensive and to whom while still communicating recognition of where care, love, creativity, and connections lie. How do we then navigate fearless truth-telling while finding a balance between offensive and defensive strategies that reflect the hyphenation of art and education?

A large aspect of the Anxious Now, and the Next Big Thing appears to be figuring out: How do we activate social theory in solidarity with adjacent theories without conflating (and thus diluting) their goals and ideals in artistic, research, and teaching practice? And how do we acknowledge our own vulnerabilities as art educators, researchers, and social beings and practice self-care while doing this difficult work?

Ward, Quintero, Russ, Dell heim, Fallon, Vann-Womack, Crawford, and Valbuena-Lopez, in their article *Othermothering Encounters with an Anxious Now*, for instance, perceive the anxious now in terms of linguistic minefields and cultural references in classroom encounters (in this case the use of the N-word) that become tense to the point to being perceived as points of crisis.

Using Pryor's "point of encounter" or Flashpoint methodology, and a theoretical framework of Othermothering, Ward et al. offer insights into the delicate process of ethically activating theoretical frameworks with specific racial-cultural groundings, in practice. Ward introspects: "Is it enough—or even possible—to de-center whiteness when theorizing othermothering practices, knowing that White power is historically and contemporaneously entangled with Black survival?"

Ward et al.'s article also brings questions of centering and de-centering hegemonic national contexts for art and research production. For instance, it raises inquiry around how much art educators should lean on international students and scholars to view and present content (including language) within the specificities of North American and European social, political, and cultural contexts and prompts us to consider what this does to globalized learning.

Shin, Lim, Lee, Koo, Hsieh, Gu, and Bae write *A Critical Discourse on Asian American Stereotypes and Pedagogical Strategies Against Anti-Asian Racism*, in which they share the anxious realities of anti-Asian racism and violent exclusion through three derogatory stereotypes and tropes present in American society. They advocate for Asian American inclusivity through teaching strategies based on a Sense of Belonging, Resistance, and Coalition Building. In terms of social theory, Shin et al. provoke us to consider the creation and maintenance of the idea of 'perpetual foreigners' within multiracial nations through cultural behaviors and identity politics and suggest Asian futurism as a lens through which to move towards inclusivity through anti-racist action. Their framework is a Western one, in that the scholarship is largely produced within Western geographies. However, intersectionality is a consideration, since it presents the perspectives of non-western origin minorities living and working within these geographies.

The problems articulated in this article ask us to consider not only the connection between non-Western ideology born and functioning in Western geographies, but also how it changes our perceptions of what Western theorizing looks like, now and in the future. How do we allow this phenomenon of multicultural theorizing within a particular geography to shift the ways in which we categorize philosophy in a conflation of geography and ethnicity/race?

Soria-Martinez and Puchalska offer readers *New Ways of Making in the Face of Uncertainty: Approaching Difficult Conversations through Media Arts.* The program introduced in this article looks to acknowledge the unprecedented uncertainty of post-pandemic life (in the lifetime of current generations), to address at least one deep socio-cultural wound of our times (the BLM movement), through currently relevant technology (media arts) as a positive teaching and learning tool. This is to activate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) for social justice as a curricular strategy. This research, which involves collaboration between community and state-based institutions, demonstrates a pro-active response to the anxiety foisted on teachers about "lost time" during the pandemic and to the anxiety of students' vulnerabilities regarding mental-health and well-being by fostering their ability to engage and apply cognition in their future lives, through "increasing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and responsible decision-making."

Valuably, the authors illustrate how researchers can acknowledge adjacent social theories and approaches without conflating (and thus being in danger of appropriating or colonizing) marginalized tenets. They do this by explicitly recognizing their layering of SEL, Restorative Justice from Native American traditions, and Culturally Responsive Learning to build their research in a participatory practice. They offer hope, at least to this editor, that this may be a significant aspect of the Next Big T hing in respectful and inclusive allyship in research production.

Lynn Sanders-Bustle in *Sorry, Not Sorry: Activating Moments of Slippage Through Transpedagogical Practice*, and Kletchka et al., in *Thinking Through 'Zines: A Collaborative Visual Essay Inspired by Systems Thinking, Queering the Museum, and Emergent Strategy*, also exemplify participatory collaborative projects that concede the tenuous, unruly, and emergent nature of research and

teaching that explores the relationality of the complex social and institutional systems we function within and their policies we are expected to follow, along with the effect on authentic human relationships in this process. Sanders-Bustle frames her research in terms of socially engaged art and art as social practice as being inherently transpedagogical to collectively build critical and crucial questions around the inconsistencies of our socio-cultural present, as curriculum.

Where Sanders-Bustle works with high-school students, Kletchka et al. focus more on relational thinking in art museum and museum education contexts with graduate students in college. In a hopeful strategy of clarifying the layering of adjacent frameworks—Queering and Systems Thinking, most transparently—Kletchka's team shows us a way to trace the process of personalized response building up to collective emergent thinking, via arts-based interventions that create pedagogical space in institutional places.

In *Digital Place-Futures Outside a Colonial Metaversal Imaginary*...Luke Meeken marries injustices that began in the past (colonialism and its impacts on race and gendered identities) with future technologies explored in our present within a framework of decolonial placemaking and digital materialities. Meeken analyzes Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley's artwork *We are here because of those that are not* to inquire into how "physical and digital places crafted in colonial contexts bodily habituate settler-colonial sensibilities."

The increasing ubiquitousness of human habitation in a globally connected digital universe and its often-disarming impacts on both online and offline behaviors makes this exploration of what Meeken calls "critical sensitivities" timely. The author weaves the complexity of intersectional identity and space in Brathwaite-Shirley's artwork into emerging digital technologies to both acknowledge and resist the potential and real replication of colonial ideologies

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and habits into tentative spaces. Framing this as anti-colonial work embedded with a lens of allyship, Meeken's research offers readers space to consider how artistic and art education work may be understood as anti-colonial vis a vis decolonizing, through visual representations of occupation of space, and our emergent understanding of territory itself, in historical and new materialities.

The forty-third volume of this journal closes on a somber but caring note, wherein Horwat, Yu, and Grube "highlight the implicit generosity that arts-based research engenders in its ability to make tangible the distressing and ambiguous psychic conditions (of grief) we experience." The authors of **Good mourning: Existing with Loss While Living in the Anxious Now** share their own journeys of transforming grief into "something generative" by articulating the necessity of both allowing ourselves to define the kinds of grief we are experiencing in the current moment. The authors show us how, in using creative and visual strategies to consciously make space and language to go through a healing process of mourning for our losses, we can embody a process of living inquiry into individual and collective grief.

This article is significant in a journal focused on theory, because it offers some closure in reminding us of a pragmatic need to pause and remember that our own embodied selves are not distant and separated from our researcher/teacher/productive selves, that we do need to make time and space to acknowledge the *relationality* of our individual and collective wounds, ethics, and responsibilities in an anxious moment in history at the cusp of change into an uncertain future that involves entrenched thinking moving into new territories and materialities.

One point that is alluded to but not directly addressed in this issue that I see as a major issue in considering *The Next Big Thing* is the role and place of what is being called Artificial Intelligence, drawn from collective human knowledge and experience, in artistic production and arts education. Perhaps the

submissions to this issue, and the consequent acceptances indicate that *The Next Big Thing* needed is to appropriately acknowledge and deal with the anxieties of our present moment through creative, inclusive, and empathetic acts of care, personally as well as socially.

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