journal of social theory
in art education

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The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education (JSTAE) is a publication of the Caucus on Social Theory & Art Education (CSTAE), an affiliate of the National Art Education Association. Its editorial policy is in compliance with the CSTAE's constitutional mandate:

- to promote the use of theoretical concepts from the social sciences—which include, but are not limited to, anthropology, sociology, and political science—to study visual culture and the teaching of art; to inform art educators about theory and practice in the social sciences, thus acting as a liaison between social scientists and art educators; to encourage research into the social context of visual culture and teaching art; and to develop socially relevant programs for use in the teaching of art.

The editors invite formal and informal contributions on all matters relating to social theory in art education. Correspondences, permission requests, performance pieces are welcome. Original manuscripts, together with three copies, should be prepared according to an internally consistent publication style. Membership is not a precondition for submittance. Deadline for submission for JSTAE No. 11 is January 15, 1991. Send relevant articles to:

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Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JSTAE Number 10 April 1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Editorial Re(Mark)!:
The Question of Representation(s)

Jan Jagodzinski

As the perceptive, or should I say - receptive reader may not(e), no thumb print appears in the margins of this year's editorial - rather, an index finger 'figures' prominently. The index sign is particularly apropos for this issue for index signs give us clues to what is being represented. Deceptively, they establish their meanings through a physical relationship to their referents. As Krauss puts it: "They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index, we would place physical traces (like footprints), medical symptoms, or the actual referents of the shifters (p.198)." Playfully, on the front cover of her book, Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths, from which the above quote is taken, a thumb 'print' is literally represented as a photograph - yet, it could easily be mistaken, or 'misread' as a 'toe -print'? The word "print," such as a photographic "print," remains an index sign, a recorded representation of some framed 'reality.'

Thus, a new figure emerges - the toe/thumb- an anatomical part which never existed before! It belongs to no order. It is born in absence, seemingly in disorder. Such an indexical sign makes us oscillate its 'reading' between the hand and the foot suggesting a variety of interpretations: from an evolutionary viewpoint, hands were once feet, yet both are used for balancing our upright position differently; being on your hands and knees suggests inferiority and humbleness - the reduction to animality. Both are necessary for fine motor control but we privilege the hand over the foot; dexterity is associated more with hands than with the dance of feet.

In a more sophisticated reading, the toe/thumb which appears on the front cover is a photograph by J.-A. Boiffard. We are informed that it was the front jacket for George Bataille's, Le Gros Orteil which plays with the anatomical geography of Bataille's thought between man's pretensions toward the elevated, spiritual and ideal realm associated with verticality and uprightness (the hands?) and the horizontality of the mud, the real source of libidinal energy where 'he' is truly mired. My own misreading of this print vivifies the play of such indexical 'undecidables' (Derrida) or figures (Lyotard) which make us question the very borders or frames around signs - around names - around any forms of correspondence which we believe have captured the essence of a thing.

JSTAE, No. 10, 1990
Framed

'We' are all framed by index signs,
by representations.
And the rhetorical tropes used to construct them.
Representations have now become our conceptualizations.
Borders between art and philosophy has vanished as:
Form becomes Content.
Our naive notions of mimics, the avant garde, and art as Truth
have been decentered.
For it is 'we' who 'unwittingly' create the Truth.
For there is no transcendental signifier.
Only form and process,
which
reveals the human(e) process of making Order.
So Nothing remains outside the text,
for what is 'real' is what is represented.
Identity remains constructed through
impersonal social relations
of ubiquitous power.

Krauss's definition of the index sign, as it was first conceived by
Pierce, remains a two dimensional effect. By introducing perceptual
ambiguity on her front cover, it adds to the releasing or opening up
of meaning of the signified, thus putting representation to doubt. The
celebrated example of Velasquez's Las Meninas, discussed at length by Fou­
cault, represents Representation itself in the Classical Age where "representation is the principle of ordering." Velasquez presents the final word, the end of representation, for "nothing seems to escape representation when representation itself is represented."

The perceptive reader will not(e) that the interplay of the meaning of
representation, quoted from David Carroll's study of Paraesthetics, is as
much a conceptual end as the work he comments on. Foucault wants the
spectator/reader, "to reflect representation back on itself and open it up to
what it is not - to make conscious of itself and, in doing so, to indicate the
limitations of this consciousness, the gaps or empty spaces with it." The
artist in Velasquez's painting is caught, frozen in that gap of representation,
"on the border between visibility and invisibility, at a moment when he can
still be seen looking out at his model and just before he moves behind his
painting in order to paint his model and is hidden from view." In that
oscillation, a leap of faith is made, for what is then represented is said to be true.

In that gap, "being" hides.

To interrogate "being" requires a deconstructive move. Naively we
assume sugar is sweet. The verb "to be" supplies us with the necessary
illusion of Reality. But that Reality is only experienced in Taste, sweetness
lies neither in the sugar nor on our tongues. It is dependent on context, in
the act of tasting which exists in that gap. To the Native refined sugar may
taste bitter and be spat out. To a Westerner, if raised on candies, the natural
sugars of fruit or yams taste rather bland. Deconstruction of naive Reality
then, requires a defamiliarization, a disturbance to everyday perception so
that thought is forced to question itself and begins to confront alternatives
to itself. Critical theory begins with non-recognition in a carnivalesque
distorted mirror for, to confront radical alterity is to recognize the excluded
categories.

Text These opening explanatory remarks permit me to dwell on the
the kinds of writings the reader will find in this year's journal: all in one way
or another question representation by treating art education as an index
sign - for they play with its shadow; they attempt to continue the decentrali­
zation and fragmentation of the meaning of art in education. There is, I
sense, a continued vigor and reluctance to be entrapped by the Modernist
rhetoric of DABE and the centralizing tendencies which wish to place
everything back to a 'white mythical order' and chase away ambiguity.
There is, therefore, also the anxiety of beginnings - not influence, to be found
in these essays, which in their part, reflect holographically the larger
problematic that the Social Caucus continually finds itself in: how to respond to
a postmodern world bent on nihilism, where it is far easier to go back to a
Romantic past, pull back into a conservativism and continue to promote
the Great Western View of Art with its parade of Masters on reproducible
cellular slides and disregard the feminist critique that this is a phallocen­
tric discourse occupied by the Man of Genius - the invention of humanism.
The Social Caucus, like feminism, is caught in an impossible political
position. It must provide both critique and direction simultaneously,
forever rehearsing this anxiety of beginning within a context that already
claims parity, equality and justice. Is there, I ask, any known ideological
position which cannot be accommodated within the DABE mandate? Its
rhetoric serves us all. Doesn't it?

In the first section, entitled: Foundations of Art Education, Thistle­
wood's examination of Read's political and social commitment reminds us
of the inescapability of our own posture in the World. Since there are no
neutral observers, no non-neutral symbolic systems which govern our
organization and valorization of phenomena, socially committed teachers
must find their own political convictions and state them openly. Like John
Caputo's claim that today Derrida practices a "responsible anarchy,"
Herbert Read, in his day, exhibited a similar anarchical conviction that
art education must become socially responsible. Graeme Chalmers' essay is
equally clear in its insistence that art education must embrace the cultural
pluralism which exists globally today and recognize the diverse functions
that the arts have always fulfilled culturally. With similar vigor and debate,
Katan and Pearse give us a cross-section of the various paradigms which
ground teaching. Their dialogue vivifies the variation of political commit­
tment to transformative changes. We become mindful of the difficulties of
developing a socially and ethically responsible educational practice. Lastly,
Jansen offers a succinct analysis of the ideological uses of art appreciation
courses in New England Universities where the the stage was set for
securing the 'right' cultural capital. All of the above authors are cognizant of
the conceptualization of art: how the discourses of the artworld
museums, art history within universities, and contemporary conventions
of understanding art - go about shaping what art education takes to be its
'object' of study. All the above authors put this 'object' of artistic representation
to question.
Creativity and Political Identification in the Work of Herbert Read

David Thistlewood

The idea of a class conflict, in which a powerful minority subjugates the majority among other ways by depriving it of any sense of self-esteem deriving from worthwhile, original work - that is, by suppressing its creativity - was something Herbert Read acquired through his youthful involvement in the late stages of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It was a premise he was never seriously to question, as was the corresponding idea that to assert one's right to be creative was to engage in a political act. He was certain that artistic conventions were the means of suppression, and that to be truly creative required conventions to be defied, which in a sense also meant defying the social order. While the Establishment would tolerate this in individuals - indeed, encourage it for its refreshing influence upon the elites' taste and artistic possessions - it could not contemplate it in the mass (in the form Read proposed in his middle age in his book Education through Art) for this would be to initiate complete social upheaval. Thus his mild-mannered arguments in favour of a properly creative education for all, and his workable proposals for implementing this, in fact made him a danger to the political standing. It was perhaps his amused realization of this which persuaded him to dramatize this aspect of his work by calling himself an anarchist.

This is the only reasonable explanation of this political identification of Read's, the central topic of ten of his books written after 1938, and a substantial feature of twenty-five more. For he was never a member of 'organized' Anarchism; and what he propounded was hardly orthodox - his campaigning for freedom from centralized government, for localized production, for a federated industrial economy, and above all for the preservation of regional stylistic traits in all creative work owing more to Kropotkin, and to Guild Socialism, than to Anarchism in the forms it had assumed by mid-century. As Read's earliest vivid political experiences had been Guild Socialist it seems fair to consider whether he was always a Guild Socialist at heart. The purpose of such an enquiry would be to wonder whether Guild Socialism, which failed as a political force in 1922 with the collapse of the National Guilds League, lived on a philosophical force in Read's writings and survived into the present in those educational ideas of his which are still widely practised. Such an enquiry, of course, must cope with the prospect of his Guild Socialism surviving other changes of political identification too - to Marxism and to communism. And it must also consider the sources of a political persuasion positive enough to have such lasting potency.

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Notes on Contributors

David Thistle is a Professor at the University of Liverpool. He is a Read’s scholar who publishes widely, especially in the British Journal of Aesthetics. Graeme Chalmers is a Professor of art education in the Department of Performing Arts, University of British Columbia, Canada. He is currently a vice-president of the International Society for Education Through Art, as well as a Chief Examiner in Art/Design and the Coordinator for all the Arts for the International Baccalaureate Organization. Elleta Katan, past coordinator of the Caucus, continues in her capacity as an arts program specialist in the Boston area. Harold Pearse, is a Professor and past chair of the Art Education Department at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Widely published, a recent exhibition of his work on the Canadian Mounted Police demonstrates his capabilities of bridging both textual worlds. Charles R. Jansen is an Assistant Professor of Art History, Middleborn, Tennessee. Karen L. Sorensen is a research assistant at Southern Connecticut State. Charles Wieder, formerly at the University of Kansas, now teaches at Southern Connecticut State University. His interests range from concerns with liberal theory to children’s artistic development. John Wilton is a visual arts instructor at The Southeast Center for Photo/Graphic Studies, Daytona Beach Community College, Florida. Peter Schellin is involved with helping AIDS victims. He teaches in the Department of Art, California State University, Los Angeles. Patricia Stuhl is an Associate Professor in the Dept. of Art Education, Ohio State University. Her special interests lie in the ethnographic study of art. Jeffrey Leptak is an Associate Professor in Adult Education Program at the Ohio State University. Pat Rafferty is a Professor in the Dept. of Elementary, University of Alberta. She teaches art education and is interested in the sociological aspects of art and issues of postmodernism. Kristin Congdon is Chair of Community Arts in the Art Dept., University of Central Florida, Orlando. Both her and Doug Blandy write the NAEA News column as well as co-editing a new book on criticism. Doug Blandy is an Associate Professor and teaches at the University of Oregon, Dept. of Art Education. Karen A. Hamblen continues to be a very active writer, publishing widely. She is an Associate Professor in the Dept. of C&I at Louisiana State University where she teaches courses in art education. Amy Brook Snider continues to be Chair of Art Education at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, N.Y. She is currently the coordinator of the Caucus. Ken Marantz is a Professor at the Dept. of Art Education, The Ohio State University. Known for his asperic humour, Ken was a former editor of Studies. Georgia Collins is a Professor of art education at the College of Fine Arts, University of Kentucky. She is an active feminist and one of the founders of the Women’s Caucus. Jan Jagodzinski is presently editing this journal for the last time. Clayton Funk is a Doctoral Candidate in the Dept. of Arts in Education, Teacher’s College, Columbia University. Sara Snowden is a student at the Dept. of Art Education, University of Oregon. Tom Anderson is a former editor of this journal. He is an Associate Professor of Art Education, Florida State University. Tom’s interests are in popular culture and criticism. Charles Gaines remains a mystery. Jim Paul is a Ph.D. student in the Dept. of Secondary Education, University of Alberta. His interests are in semiotics and critical social theory. Dan Nadaner, formerly of Simon Frazer University, now teaches art education and studio courses at The California State University, Fresno. His current focus has been on postmodern criticism.