Questioning the Foundations of Art Education
Issues in Aesthetics
Men in Feminism?
Art Criticism in a Postmodern Age
journal of social theory in art education

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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.

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Editorial Re(Mark)!:
The Question of Representation(s)

JAN JAGODZINSKI

Pretext 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. Deceivingly, 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.

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Framed

'Ve' 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 mimesis, 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 Foucault, 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 note that the interplay of the meaning of representation, quoted from David Carroll's study of Paraethetics, 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, 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 naïve 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 years 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 decentralization 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 DBAE and the centralizing tendencies which wish to place everything back to a 'white mythological 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, to pull back into a conservativism and continue to promote the Great Western View of Art with its parade of Masters on reproducible celluloid slides and disregard the feminist critique that this is a phallocentric 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 DBAE mandate? Its rhetoric serves us all. Doesn't it?

In the first section, entitled: Foundations of Art Education, Thistlewood'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 governs 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 commitment 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 in 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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