

An Editor's note: Critical Theory, Art and Education

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With *JSTAE 14* the editorial team offers an innovation that we hope will be carried on by future editors, and will function as a provocation to the art education research community. What follows are 11 pages of images as well as a 12th work on the cover that have been selected for their relevance to the theme Eco • Techno. A review of academic publications in art education reveals extremely limited evidence of visual practice among the research. Of all the fields in academia, the one most suited to exploring the link between the many aspects of visual practice and the goals of research ought to be art education, but the term 'visual research' is not currently a part of our working vocabulary.

In *The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism* Ben Agger (1992) discusses the role that Marcuse attributes to art in contemporary critical theory.

By refusing to succumb to the appearance of the given, art is 'permanent subversion,' giving form to hidden content amplifying the inherently dialectical character of the social world. The content is hidden, he contends, in *la prose du monde*, the attitude of the one-dimensional common sense where things 'are' as they appear to be, hence fatefully ensuring the identity of the real and

rational. Marcuse suggests that art transforms our conventional perception because art is more evocative than what Hegel called *Verstand*, uncomprehending common sense. Instead art grasps at the occluded possibility of a qualitatively different reality. And it is because total mobilization in advanced capitalism distorts and falsifies our immediate experience that we must resort to aesthetic transcendence in order to keep alive our dreams and memories of freedom and happiness. (Agger, pp.154-155)

As does Duncum elsewhere in this journal, I question Marcuse and Aggers' high cultural conception of art as a singular force in theory because I feel that the notion of singularity undermines what is being suggested, which is that art(s) inject ambiguity and questionings into a social discourse that tends toward linearity and even one-dimensionality. If critical theory is "a prefigurative praxis that actualizes and communicates the image of a better world," (Agger, p.223), or a process of questioning (as is explored by Gaudelius elsewhere in this publication) then I feel Marcuse is right in placing art(s) at the center of an individual's engagement in cultural critique.

There are any number of examples of contemporary artists whose work actualizes and communicates the image of our world (for better and for worse). Cindy Sherman's film stills, with their demanding analysis of media, genre and the politics of representation has clearly challenged her audience to engage in the kind critical considerations that Henry Giroux describes in *Border Crossings* (1992). Carrie Mae Weems has used self-portraiture to typologize the racist images of black women in her work with *Group Material* because, in her words "the construction of Black women as the embodiment of difference is so deep, so wide, so vast, so completely absolved of all reality that I didn't know it was me being made fun of, somebody had to tell me" (Weems, 1988).

Bolton, in *Art as Education* (1993) discusses the importance of "the hybridization of literacy, crossing the borders between reading and writing, video, photography, popular culture,

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English, Spanish, and so on" (Bolton, p. 16) because of the need for audience participation and diversity in art. These same issues of criticality, communication and diversity characterize the state of the academy. The lexical-numeric domination that functions within academia has allowed the work of researchers to become manageable and safe. A kind of structuralist aesthetic in research pressures each of us engaged in critical practice to present our 'findings' in an acceptable form. While this may suit institutional goals and structures, critical theory is not intended to be safe or manageable. The images in the Gallery and on the cover partially represent the visual research of a number of people from across the country. By reproducing these works just as we reproduce the written works in this journal the editorial team is making a serious first effort to unbind academic form. My hope is that the result will be lots of questions about this journal as well as about the institutions in which we participate.

A final note: Both Chuck and Elizabeth were asked to critique and contribute to this brief introduction to the Gallery. They will recognize their words and ideas (as well as where I was stubborn!) I also want to acknowledge Elizabeth's role in finding appropriate work. Thanks again.

Agger, B. (1992). *The discourse of domination: From the Frankfurt School to postmodernism*. Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

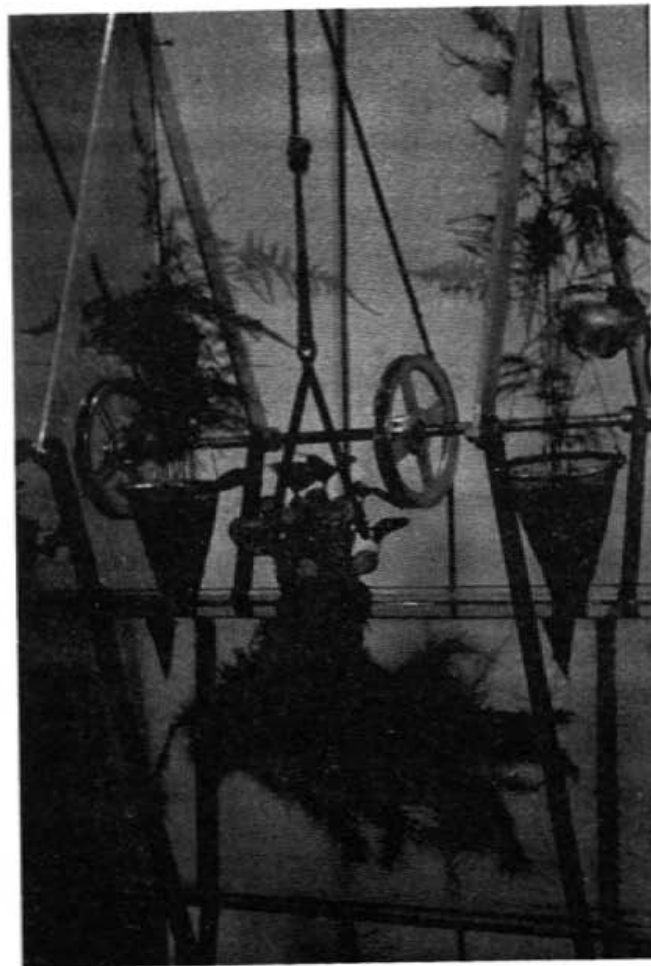
Bolton, R. (1993) Art as education. in *New Art Examiner*, 20(5), pp. 12-16.

Giroux, H. (1992). *Border Crossings*. New York & London: Routledge.

Weems, C.M. (1988). *Inserts* A group art production sponsored by The Public Art Fund. Inc. and inserted into an issue of the New York Times.

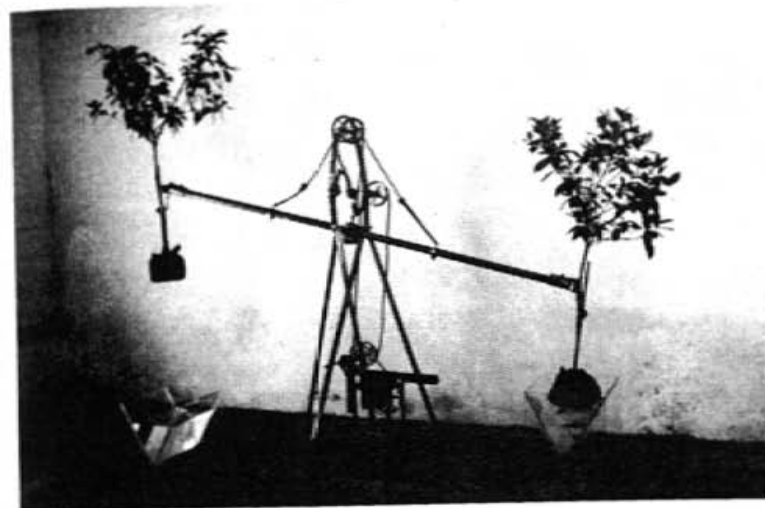
The Gallery

David Amdur
 Robert Bersson
 Gene Cooper
 Drent Howenstein
 Laurie Lundquist
 Meryl Meisler
 Juanita Miller
 Gretchen Riemer
 Kai Staats



A System for Satisfying Needs 1989 By: Laurie Lundquist
steel & glass ht: 5' (lights hang at 8') x w:4' x d:2'.

This machine functions as a motorized life support system for water hyacinths by lifting them up and down in a nutrient solution



The Lightness of Trees 1989 By: Laurie Lundquist
steel, glass water & gardenia trees; ht:6'8"xl:8"xd:3'

The see-saw motion of this motorized structure alternately lifts and dips nursery trees into a limited supply of water.



Lying in the Desert 1990 By: Laurie Lundquist

temporary installation, Tempe, AZ. A work in response to the speculative development typical of the Phoenix Valley



Our Persian Theater II 1991 By: David Amdur
acrylic on canvas

I see painting as a way to recover my connection to the world. I use the word 'recover' because I've been working against a sense of disconnection and loss. This feeling of disconnection had been caused by the constant mediation of insubstantial, ephemeral and inane representations issuing from electronic and print media. These media gave me the power of easy negation; any unpleasantness could be avoided by merely changing the channel. I was trained, therefore, to be aloof, ironic and apathetic — finally nihilistic. In the work I have developed since 1984, I've sought to use the expressive means of painting to engage viewers in unfolding visual narratives depicting events of moral consequence.



Industrial Landscape

1993
mixed media

By: Robert Bersson



Civilization 1991 By: Drent Howenstein
environmental installation of beaver sticks, steel & rocks



Fresh Fish (Chilling Out) 1990 By: Meryl Meisler
digital photography

This is a fire hydrant I walked by every day on my way to
and from the school where I taught.



Untitled 1993 By: Kai Staats

electronic, mechanical environmental installation built at the Deep Creek School [for a fuller description see page 17].



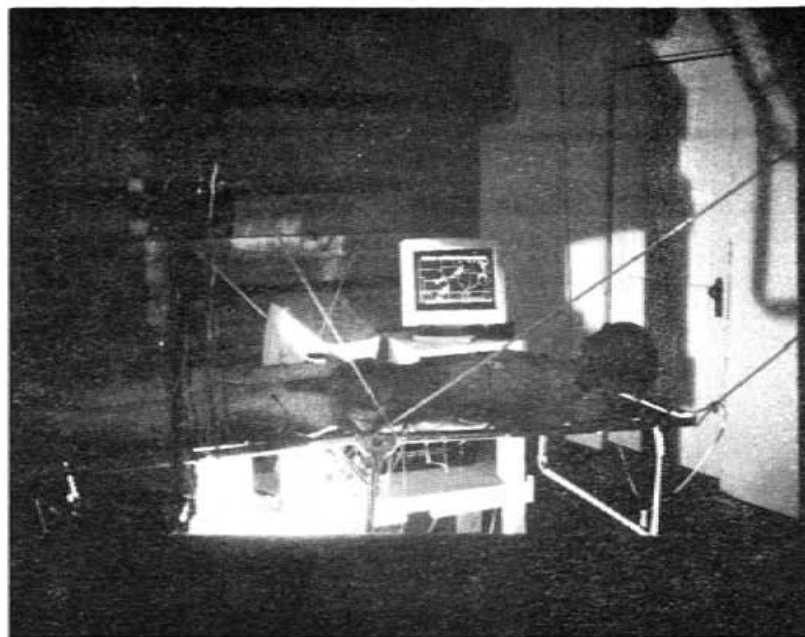
Untitled 1992 By: Gretchen Reimer

A requiem performance that, unlike modern technology, is powered by the body. [for a fuller description see page 23]



Criticality 1994 By: Juanita Miller
performance/installation with stones and logs constructed
at the Deep Creek School

An environmental artwork that illustrates the principle of critical mass in physics. During the performance, rocks were piled onto a foot bridge until it reached the critical point of breaking or losing rocks (metaphor intended).



Thunder Volt 1994 By: Gene Cooper
performance/installation integrating the environmental,
biological and digital conducted at Deep Creek School

[for a fuller description see page 31].