The 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.

The theme for volume 18 will be Community-Based Art Education. October 15, 1997 is the deadline for submission of articles, images, and reviews of books, video/films, performance/action pieces, and exhibitions. Images and visual research may be submitted. Membership is not a precondition for submittance. Please send black and white or color images no larger than 8” x 10” in either photographic, original, digital, or slide form. Original manuscripts, including an abstract, should be prepared according to the APA (4th ed.) style. Please place your name on a separate paper to help facilitate anonymous review. Please send images and/or four paper copies to:

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BOOK REVIEW

Yvonne Gaudelius 141 Cahan, Susan & Kocur, Zoya (Eds.). (1996). Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education

ON THE COVER

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Robert Bersson Global Unity/Peace Angels
Kim Finley-Stansbury

CONTRIBUTORS

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On The Cover

Prisoners 1996 By: Robert Bersson
(Front top) Mixed Media, 8.5" wide x 17" height

Vessels of Reciprocity 1996 By: Drea Howenstein
(Front bottom) Sassafras prunings & boats, 55' high x 35' oval x 15' height

Global Unity/Peace Angels 1996 By: Kim Finley-Stansbury
(Back) Digital IRIS print of mixed media (oil pastels, graphite, & colored pencils) collage, 7" wide x 9.75" height

See pages 144 - 146 for artists' statements concerning their artwork.
The group of six articles in this volume explore the theme “invisible in plain sight.” The authors examine the structures that enable or disable cultural visibility. They question: Who creates the visions of the world? Whose views are pre-empted?

Emme argues that cultural invisibility happens to anyone who does not contribute images to the world or who does not vigorously critique pictures. He discusses the photographic work of Jo Spence and Judith Golden who expose the invisibility of those considered plain (i.e., old and female). “Invisibility in plain sight” in some instances may concern perceptions and biases against plainness. My recent professional sojourn from my former home beneath the canopy of Douglas Fir in the forests of the Northwest to the open plains of West Texas, has made me acutely aware of how one’s invisibility or visibility within one’s environment affects one’s culture. The canopy of the Northwest blocks the sun, and I have discovered, frightens some people who are accustomed to a “plain” view. The trees and mountains hide what lies beyond or beneath them, and the people who inhabit these private spaces are the most xenophobic and reticent people that I have ever encountered. In West Texas there is no place to hide. The open expanse and plain terrain exposes everything and everyone to open scrutiny. Name places reflect
this, with towns such as Plainview. These people who live in plain view are the most open and friendly that I have met. Several authors, in this volume, ask readers to re-examine institutionalized structures that devalue the aesthetics of “plain” folk in other respects.

Morris concurs with Emme in her study of developing and implementing a six-week curriculum that exposed denigrating Appalachian Mountain Culture stereotypes and supplanted them with images that children created after they had investigated their West Virginia Mountain Cultural history of oppression and rebellion. Morris’s article will be useful reading in undergraduate pre-service curriculum courses as an example of social reconstruction pedagogy. It utilizes both Sleeter (1989) and Banks’ (1993) conceptions of multicultural education as foundations for developing curriculum. The issues that Deniston, Desai, and Check raise encourage us to re-evaluate notions of excellence, racism, and histories and compliment Morris’ article on social reconstructive pedagogy.

In Living the Discourses, Deniston, Desai, and Check explore the invisibility of elderly women’s art due to an aesthetic preference for originality. They also discuss racism as an institutionalized system, and the invisibility of discourse concerning homosexual worldviews embedded in gay and lesbian art. Cultural, political, and economic systems elevate some images above others. Deniston criticizes the perpetuation of value systems that esteem originality and denigrate the handwork of elderly women. Desai recognizes the invisibility of racism since literary sources and discourse often equate racism with stereotyping, prejudice, and ethnicity. Desai disagrees with these definitions and concludes that racism is a socio-cultural construct rooted in historical events. She argues that racism is institutionalized to such a degree that without careful scrutiny it becomes accepted practice due to its invisibility. Check posits that most histories of art exclude certain types of life experiences in their portrayals of art. He provides examples of the invisibility of gay and lesbian perspectives. He argues that the specific vision of the world by a gay artist may provide an understanding of the individual artist’s intent, as well as an analysis of humanity’s interwoven similarities and differences.

Anderson finds that social change may be evident in the absence of an image. He discusses how the murals that Japanese and North American children painted fifty years after the bombing of Hiroshima
and Nagasaki do not depict “the bomb,” but he argues that “the bomb” pervades the murals. Perhaps the events of Chernobyl and Three Mile Island make the threat of nuclear power plant accidents far more real to children than nuclear weapons. However, when I showed prints of the two murals (reproduced in this journal) to my husband and asked him to guess which one the children from the United States had painted, his reading of the images indicated that the invisible “bomb” was clearly present. In the United States children’s mural, North American children are flying over the Pacific with gifts. This seemed to him a re-enactment of the bombing sortie itself. The mural includes a setting sun over Japan, and this seemed like a reference to the bombing as well. In the early days of atomic power, nuclear fission was often referred to as “unleashing the power of the sun.” Of course none of the participants intended that the mural’s peace flights were analogous to a destructive bombing strike. But the viewer who juxtaposes the mural’s imagery with the events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki can readily visualize the invisible bombs in the image of children flying over the Pacific in formation. Although Anderson discusses the “copy cat” aspect of the Japanese children’s imagery, it seems that the inspiration derived from Faith Ringold’s Tar Beach and her quilt motif is a similar form of selective imitation. Anderson and his Japanese colleagues also found similarities between themselves as they tried to define their differences.

In order to analyze how cartoons present the female gender Green surveyed television toons that pre-school children watch. She finds that the infant, shrew, eccentric, maternal, frump, vamp, and twin dominate as role models and she argues that these stereotypes limit children from imagining other possibilities. Invisible are female roles of intelligence and self-assertion. When a character, such as The Little Mermaid, does seem intelligent and inventive, she also tends to typify the Madison Avenue/Playboy image of beauty. The repertoire of female characters seems to have become, like our congress, more conservative. During the early 1980s characters such as Punkie Brewster, very plain but very assertive and in control, began to appear in cartoons for young children. According to Green, however, TV toons seem to have reverted to stereotypical representations of females. Green cites research that posits that children do not easily distinguish between reality and fantasy. Thus television portrayals may severely limit conceptions of possibilities for females in the real world.

jagodzinski in his article, Perception of Non-Perception, argues that
illusion is the separation between belief and knowledge. *Trompe l’oeil* works by delaying knowledge so that belief supersedes. He presents five lessons in his article. The first two lessons concern *trompe l’oeil*, as symbolically holding both a power to deceive and to make us feel whole. These lessons concern the public’s high regard and need for art that presents believable illusions. jagodzinski examines the psychological foundations of this need. The last three lessons build upon the first two but emphasize illusionism, film, and aesthetics in relationship to morality.

The journal concludes with a book review and On the Cover which presents stories by the three artists featured on the cover of this journal. In *Vessels of Reciprocity* Drea Howenstein rededicates Herr’s Island to life by commemorating the spirits of the animals that were once killed and prepared for consumption on this island. The second story by Bob Bersson concerns the invisibility and visibility of prisoners. The final story by Kim Finley-Stansbury involves visions of unity through a cross-cultural art exchange. Together, the eight authors and three artists in this volume make visible the invisible.

Hopefully you will find connections or contradictions to your own beliefs as you read volume 17. Write your comments or visually respond as you read this journal and send these to KarenKB@ttu.edu so that I can place them on a Caucus for Social Theory in Art Education (CSTAE) Website. Send an email in the fall of 1997 to find out the URL website address. I plan to initiate monthly real-time virtual chats using either a WebBoard or virtual site as well as place the text and images sent by CSTAE members in the website.
References


Photography(s) and Cultural Invisibility: Symptoms and Strategies

Michael J. Emme

What does it mean to be visible? We cross paths and we see each other. Simple. Why bother asking the question? The fact that artists and cultural theorists have for the past decade or more been energetically pursuing precisely this question of visibility is one of the dominant features of the visual arts today. At the heart of this collective inquiry is a concern to discover the social nature of both vision and pictures. This concern rises out of the almost common-sense realization that much of what we “know” about the world we know because of pictures and that despite much rhetoric to the contrary, we generally believe that what we see is true. Or at least we act that way. We are transported through pictures to believe the stories that they tell.

Vision (the stimulation of optic sense organs) is not the same thing as perception which includes the mental ordering and ultimately the attribution of significance to visual sensation. The art historian, Jonathan Crary (1992) traces changes in both the art and science of the early 19th
Cultural Invisibilities

century that reflect a shift from the idea that visual perception is like a camera obscura (direct and true) to the idea that vision and perception are constructs of both the observer’s mind and the social conditions surrounding a visual experience. The stereo camera and its illusion of 3-dimensionality is offered as a symptom of this new understanding of visual perception. Crary expands on the constructed nature of visual perception by exploring the separation of vision from the other senses and, ultimately, from the need for a connection between visual perception and the “real” objects reproduced in a picture (pp. 67-96). Essentially Crary argues that developing lens technologies and early work by researchers such as Müller and Fechner into the physiology of perception lay important groundwork for the behaviorist assumptions of both the mass-media and early psychology (pp. 137-150).

Two important ideas serve as foundational components of postmodernity. First, vision “works” even when the viewer is separated from direct physical contact with a seen object. The second idea is that, at least to some extent, visual sensations can be measured and managed. The entire film industry and its elaborate visual apparatus is one manifestation of this. The capacity of lens images to be erotic is clear evidence of their ‘spectacular’ impact. Since images are mass-produced, visibility, and its opposite, invisibility, become social conditions. Media specialists use lens technologies to represent a world that is capable of serving the ends of those who control the production and distribution of those images.

As Benjamin (1985) pointed out, photography is potent both because of the kind of image it can produce and because those images can be reproduced. Mass-media imagery represents the bulk of information about the world for many people. Therefore, those people whose lifestyles are somehow undesirable, are not represented in the mass-media, and are in a very significant way, invisible. This results from the “postmodern” dependence on simulacrum to anchor “reality.” Pamela Anderson and Ellen DeGeneres come to signify different aspects of female, Johnny Depp and Wesley Snipes becomes signifiers of what it means to be male, as our own experiences of gender (or race, or age, or culture) become increasingly irrelevant.

Symptoms
Martin Heidegger once called this “The Age of the World Picture.” To him “the fact that the world becomes a picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age.” Nothing in the world, he contended, exists any longer except in and through representation. (Jussim, 1989, p. 10)

More recently, Victor Burgin describes “a picture of a new subject for the new society of information technology—a subject (like the subject known to psycho-analysis) radically ‘decentered,’ [a subject formed] in the wake of the signifier” (Burgin, 1986, p. 168). The signifiers Burgin mentions are the traces of bio/graphic and economic data scattered throughout institutional computer banks which, when they are gathered together, represent the “decentered”1 individual’s existence in society more powerfully than does her or his body.

In the essay Through the Narrative Portal (Kozloff, 1987), critic Max Kozloff explores the dynamics of simulacral2 experience by looking at a black and white ad typical of those pioneered by Bruce Weber for Calvin Klein designer jeans and cotton underwear.

The scene illustrates a possible sexual contretemps that has been calculated to appeal to both genders. Asking us to speculate on the fascinating pass to which the couple has been brought, the image switches its narrative lure to an object display that conveys, in fact, the real story message. Ours not so much to wonder about the history of this tense, mysterious pair, as to acknowledge that wearers of Calvins

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1 The Freudian concept of being ‘decentered’ is used here to describe not only a psychological but also a social condition resulting from the individual’s experience of self and other through the many apparatus of mass-representation. In various texts Barbara Maria Stafford (1993, 1994, 1996) traces the beginnings of the technology of decentering and visuality to Enlightenment efforts to stabilize knowledge. See also Harlan (1995, pp. 114-124) for an extended discussion of the media representation of first nations’ women and contemporary artists’ strategies of re-presentation.

2 Burgin’s use of “simulacrum” represents a fairly extreme understanding of a slippery term. Simulacrum can mean anything from simply a representational image to something akin to and as dangerous as a mirage. (See also Krauss, 1980.) In choosing to use this term I am consciously introducing a sliding scale of potential meanings which, in the context of visuality I have termed “Lens Meaning” (Emme, 1989).
are likely to have such a history. Suitably denimed, we, too . . . can embark on the sensual and other adventures of the role reversal. (Kozloff, 1987, p. 93)

The advertising industry has taken the psychoanalytic notion of identification to heart and is providing imagery like that described by Kozloff for both the consumer’s conscious and unconscious mind. Because the mass-media are subsidized by business institutions that expect sales to result from their support, it is not surprising that “desirable” lifestyles dominate mass-media imagery. Because the styles of life represented in the media’s lens imagery exist only as simulacra, the viewing subject is brought to desire some “thing” that for all practical purposes doesn’t exist. Even if the viewer of a media-generated lifestyle image could buy all the objects and re-enact the uses represented in the image, that viewer could not reproduce the hermetic seal of photographic idealization. Burgin (1986) claims “in a (Platonic) word, upon which Jean Baudrillard has elaborated, we are a society of the simulacrum” (p. 169). Our place in society and our notions of what is real are defined in large part by databases and mass-media imagery.

In describing the lens as a prosthetic device, Rosalind Krauss (1985) draws attention to a key complication to the concept of visibility. Our technologies allow us to see around the world, to see both the macro and the micro, and to see both slowly and quickly. These views of the world transcend our original sensual capacities. To the extent that we have come to depend on these same technologies to bring us a “complete experience of the world,” they serve to define the visible. Existence has become a product of the mass-media. Our visual perceptions seem to provide us with an ever expanding opportunity to know the world, but this postmodern vision relies less and less on direct physical experience of people or actual objects. Much of our world is ink on paper or illuminated screens.

The many technological and social apparatuses that order vision in postmodern society (Eleftheriotis, 1995), as dominant modes of representation, are more central to our visibility than are an individual’s own work or visual literacy. To be fully engaged in our visibility as individuals and as participants in our own culture(s), we must engage with the business of representation. If we are not picture makers, or at least vigorous critics of pictures, then we are passive viewers of a culture that others define.
Strategies

The discussion among photographers concerning the relative merits of straight (realist) and pictorialist (expressive) photography established a polarity that contemporary critics question. These (perhaps false) polarities of objective and subjective meaning are contained within a larger cultural context, with the result that

the study of “visual art”—for so long confined within artificially narrow intellectual and institutional limits—now ranges across the broader spectrum of what [Victor Burgin has] called the “integrated specular regime” of our “mass-media” society. “Art theory,” understood as those interdependent forms of art history, aesthetics, and criticism, which began in the Enlightenment and culminated in the recent period of “high modernism,” is now at an end. In our present so-called “postmodern” era the end of art theory now is identical with the objectives of theories of representations in general: a critical understanding of the modes and means of symbolic articulation of our critical forms of sociality and subjectivity must be contextualized. (Burgin, 1986, p. 204)

In many ways, traditional critical and economic practices still dominate the artworld. But photography, as a popular art, is not as restricted by these fine art institutions. “Photography is too multiple, too useful to other discourses, ever to be wholly contained within the traditional definitions of art. Photography will always exceed the institution of art, always participate in non-art practices, always threaten the insularity of art discourse” (Underhill, 1989, p. 25).

One result of [this] situation is that photography has been more readily accepted as a starting point for an interdisciplinary study that, following the logic of its methods, is [potentially] able to move out into a radical dismantling of social relations without having to bring these discoveries back as nothing more than meanings for the hallowed [artworld] series. (Rifkin, 1988, pp. 162-163)

Lopes (1996) uses the term “demotic pictures” to refer to mundane,
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as opposed to art, images (p. 6). “Pictures share language’s burden in representing the world and our thoughts about it. And this function of pictures is at the forefront in the demotic rather than the aesthetic” (Lopes, 1996, p. 7). Within this context of photography as a radically accessible and popular practice on the one hand, and a convention-bound institutional practice on the other, I would like to give further examples of work that attempts to reclaim visibility.

Jo Spence (Dennett & Spence, 1982) and Judith Golden (Grundberg & Gauss, 1987) are among those who have used photography to explore the invisibility of being old, plain, female, and sick. Golden’s imagery includes somewhat comical self-portraits where parts of her face peer through holes torn in the faces of media celebrities depicted on the cover of People magazine (Grundberg & Gauss, 1987). Spence practices a personal form of phototherapy through explicit documentary photographs of the fleshy impact of her own and her mother’s surgery (Hoy, 1987). She and a male friend and collaborator presented childhood fantasies about their fathers in family photo album form (Spence, 1987, pp. 24-5). Spence produced an autobiographical text and guidebook designed to document her explorations and to suggest how others might do the same (Spence, 1986). Spence’s images are “theoretical” (McGrath, 1987, p. 71), in the same sense that Burgin (1986) used the term with reference to painting.

An expansion of the concept of “conceptual,” as it was used to describe that art in the 70s that de-emphasized individual objects in favor of ideas played out through social interaction and technological mechanism, can help us to understand a viewer’s emotional response to photographs at a symbolic level. Spence’s work is to be taken as Art, but these images of the “unspeakable and invisible” are not only offered as challenging aesthetic objects in the traditional sense (Spence, 1986, p. 71). Spence “suggests that the task at hand for any radical photographic practice is both to unpick the apparently seamless photographic web and simultaneously to weave new meanings” (1986, p. 71). There is a pointed irony in Spence’s work being collected in the form of a photographic how-to manual for the invisible. The text acts as a powerful antidote to the multitude of soft-porn photographic manuals on the market, such as How to Photograph Women—Beautifully (O’Rourke, 1986), with its amply illustrated selection of poses, costumes, lighting, and make-up tips. It functions as a visual dictionary for creating photographic simulacra.
The historical oppositions of objective and subjective in photography are complicated and made more relevant by Abigail Solomon-Godeau’s concern with the politics of representation. In her concluding essay for Reframings: New American Feminist Photographies (Neumaier, 1995), Solomon-Godeau introduces a third dimension to representation which she calls “subaltern postmodernism” (Solomon-Godeau, p.304). She describes the projects of photographic artists such as Renee Green, Carrie Mae Weems, Lorna Simpson, or Cindy Sherman, each of whom incorporate aspects of seemingly realist photographic portraiture-of-self in their work. Solomon-Godeau tentatively argues that subaltern postmodernist artists “deploy a form of self-representation that exceeds the personal, [and] can even be considered impersonal” (p. 304). These images challenge existing mass-mediated representations. She suggests that:

If indeed the project of representing women remains an important project for feminism, it must be with the awareness that the women who represent, and the subject of their representations, must navigate on the one hand the legacy of bourgeois individualism that exalts the individual producer, and on the other, the risk of a totalizing or universalizing assumption that the category “woman” is equivalent to the plurality of difference that constitutes the category “women.” (p. 310)

The technical and economic accessibility of photography explains, in part, the medium’s popularity as an avenue for oppositional cultural practice. It is still true, however, that we tend only to see the work of those (young, feminist, gay, or lesbian) among the invisible who have gained access to the artworld. One of the great fallacies that has grown out of the age of mechanical reproduction is that the value or import of an image somehow inevitably corresponds to the size of its viewing audience. This assumes that the mass production of images, with the distance this puts between an original image (if it exists) and the viewing audience, unavoidably frees that audience from a kind of “false consciousness” implicit in the extreme value placed on the uniqueness of the original art object. Walter Benjamin suggested in 1935 that mechanically reproduced art, “instead of being based on ritual, begins to be based on another practice—politics” (Benjamin, 1985, p. 681). This capacity of photography to move the viewer to some form of internal or external “action” depends on its marketability in a
fickled artworld. When Marcel Duchamp complained that “I threw the bottle-rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty” (Richter, 1966, pp. 207-208), he pinpointed the artworld’s capacity to undermine opposition by co-opting it into the institutional fold. The “business” of symbol making is a precarious one that involves mounting effective social criticism within an institutional artworld that will either deny you access to an audience or market you as an “Artist.” Economist and former Canada Council Director of Research Harry Hillman-Chartrand has suggested that the artworld today is, in effect, the research and development arm of the advertising industry (Hillman-Chartrand, 1989). Richard Bolton’s article, *Enlightened Self Interest: The Avant-Garde in the ’80s* (Bolton, 1989, pp. 12-18) with its images of feminist photo-artists Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger as cover-girls for *ARTnews* and any number of ads depicting the desirability of the artworld lifestyle, is explicit evidence of Hillman-Chartrand’s claim. Clearly the issue is more complex than this. The use of lens media to produce representations from within specific cultures does not require mass distribution or artworld recognition. However, any advertiser will tell you that you have to get your message out, somehow.

*Cultures in Contention* (Kahn & Neumaier, 1985) is a good example of a selection of cultural works (some using photography and other lens media) which generally side-step the artworld in favor of representing people and issues that have otherwise been absent from the mainstream media. Much of this work has used the formal presentation and context of advertising or journalistic photography to inject oppositional imagery into the mass-media. In the *SuperBowl* bus ad project (Sisco, 1987), three artists produced photographic poster ads for display on the outside of San Diego city buses. The images drew attention to San Diego’s dependence on an impoverished workforce of illegal aliens during the time that the city hosted the *SuperBowl* and was especially sensitive about its image. Fred Lonidier’s work with unions involved producing documentary photographs combined with written text that were presented to the union workers as a kind of mirror (Lonidier, 1985). The work of Hans Haacke has used the billboard for explicitly political purposes in an artworld context (Haacke, 1985). The *Guerrilla Girls* have used the full vocabulary of the advertising industry (including, but not limited to photography) to take issues of injustice both within and beyond the artworld “to the streets” (G. Girls, 1995).
Organizations have explored alternative venues for their art work like *Group Material* which have produced a black and white newspaper insert that contained imagery ranging from the traditionally artistic to the overtly political (*Group Materials*, 1988). These efforts comprise a kind of counter-acculturation that attempts to encourage viewers outside of the artworld to question appearances. They also promote change.

Concerning the imaged world of children, the bulk of images, whether they are framed as advertising, education, entertainment or art, (*Corkin*, 1990) are the product of an adult vision of childhood. It is reasonable to argue that children are completely invisible in our society because none of the images we see of them are self-produced. Fortunately, there are examples of organizations or individuals trying to give, whether for altruistic or commercial reasons, the apparatus of representation to children. Visible programs, such as *Shooting Back* (*Hubbard*, 1991, 1994), allow homeless children to document their experiences. Commercially, *The Polaroid Education Project* has moved from its origins in grants to individual innovative teachers/artists such as Wendy Ewald (1985) and her work with Appalachian children, to a national network that clearly mixes kid-based photography, with more mainstream educational strategies. But if textbooks, teaching resources, and the mass-media in general are an appropriate indicator, children are virtually invisible in our society.

Certainly at some level the goal of self-representation is a foundational assumption of most art education, but the transition from image consumer to critically grounded, effective image producer will require much work. Students need to become visually fluent in the forms of the mass-media and to develop an awareness of the connection between the social and the personal that is embedded in every media image. Art educators must make the transition, as *Lopes* (1996) has done, from unquestioning acceptance of cannonical images to a recognition of the importance of “demotic” or everyday images (p. 5). *John Berger* (1974) described the importance of photography.

We think of photographs as works of art, as evidence of a particular truth, as likenesses, as news items. Every photograph is in fact a means of testing, confirming and constructing a total view of reality. Hence the crucial role of photography in ideological struggle. Hence the necessity of our understanding a weapon which we can use and which can be used against us. (*Berger*, 1974, p. 294)
The Lens Media’s potential for allowing popular input into cultural production, as well as its key role in the mass production of commercial imagery, makes understanding the many uses of the lens media of central importance to the individual’s critical participation in contemporary society.

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political, personal and photographic autobiography]. Ten•8, 25, 71.


Emme
Encountering stereotypes promulgated by media representations is a daily occurrence. Information perpetuated in the media continually influences how people view the world. Female gender roles portrayed in television, for example, have altered from the 1950s stay-at-home mother portrayed by Barbara Billingsley in *Leave It To Beaver*, to postmodern portrayals of independent actress/mothers such as Jane Seymour. The messages that such diverse personifications suggest of motherhood are equally disparate. While television once perpetuated images of mothers as in the home caregivers, this domestic characterization has evolved into moms who now venture actively into the world.

Such influence is so prevalent that we tend to overlook its existence and impact. We recognize that such representations are unrealistic and one-dimensional, and we downplay their importance. When we consider stereotypical representations in children’s media, such as those portrayed in the cartoons that toddlers watch or the comic strips that youngsters read, their significance is often thought to be innocuous.¹ In this paper, I will explore why investigation and recognition of stereotypes are important, describe female gender roles prevalent in
children’s television, and discuss ways in which television viewing may be used for educational purposes.

**Reality or Fantasy?**

The seriousness of gender role stereotypes depends upon two factors: Whether children can distinguish between reality and fantasy in television, and whether the content of what they view affects their perception of gender. Ibrahim Hefzallah (1987), author of *Critical Viewing of Television: A Book For Parents and Teachers*, concluded that children do “confuse fantasy with real life situations [and, furthermore, that] adults who watch more television are likely to overestimate their chances of encountering violence and to overestimate the percentage of men employed in law enforcement and crime detection” (p. 68).

Given the real-life drama of many contemporary shows that have “moved sharply away from the obvious contrived situations common” to television in the 1980s, and the highly edited versions of shows presented in the 1990s, it is no wonder that children have problems perceiving reality (Hefzallah, 1987, pp. 60-61). The situation, according to Milton Ploghoft and James Anderson (1982), is further compounded for those children who “have no experience” to compare with “television information” (p. 61). The authors argue that it is imperative that children whose life experiences are limited are afforded media literacy skills as part of their educational curricula (Ploghoft & Anderson, 1982).

James Kaplan (1995) cites a study endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics in Chicago which states that children under the age of eight “cannot uniformly discriminate between real life and fantasy/entertainment” (p. 21). The research concludes that children learn how to resolve issues, such as the use of violence, through the actions of televised characters, especially if the personification is a “hero.” Moreover, viewers regard messages that media sources promulgate as “representations of the world” (Hobbs, 1994, p. 143). Hobbs further suggests that “viewers and readers depend on them [media messages] for their understanding of culture.” This is even more pronounced for a child whose “real-world experience” is limited (p. 134). Much research

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1This observation results from conversations with university colleagues, friends, and students participating in visual media studies curricula.
has concluded that people have difficulty, most notably preschool-age children, discerning between the reality presented on television and the reality of their daily lived experience. It also appears that the content of programming that viewers watch affects their construction of reality.

The second factor, whether television affects the perception of gender in young children, is an important issue. According to sociologist Patricia Lengermann (1985), socialization, or the process by which individuals internalize group attitudes such as the perception of gender roles, begins at birth. Lengermann’s research suggests that social learning occurs informally in microsocial settings such as families and friendships, and formally in macrosocial settings such as schools and large organizations. Included within the macrosocial realm are mass media effects of which television is certainly a central component.

Indeed, most children in the United States begin to form their conception of the world with their first exposure to media which for many children occurs at birth. Not surprisingly, Milton Chen (1997), Director of the Stanford K. Q. E. D. Center for Education and Lifelong Learning, notes that the average American child watches about three and a half hours of television each day. In the average home with children, the television is on nearly eight and a half hours a day. Additionally, Chen observes that “watching television is the most common activity for kids between the end of the school day and dinner” (p. 82).

Further studies have shown positive relationships between increased viewing of television and more stereotyped beliefs about the sexes (McGhee & Frueh, 1980; Zuckerman, Singer, & Singer, 1980; & Morgan, 1982). In effect, since mass media affects socialization, children are not immune to the pervasive influence that television plays on their perception of gender. Moreover, since the general population has difficulty distinguishing between what is real from what is fabricated, it is especially crucial to monitor and critique children’s programming. In the next section I present a critical examination of the portrayal of one female role model in children’s programming.

**Baby Bop**

Few people would recognize Baby Bop, the child-like sidekick of Barney the Dinosaur, since the pudgy violet Tyrannosaurus Rex is
clearly the star of the show and source of a billion dollar corporation. Of the three principal characters in this dinosaur troupe, two are male and one is female. The central figure is Barney—mature, kind, and lovable—while the supporting cast is composed of Baby Bop and her brother B. J. The only female role portrayed is an infant, that is a character that is childish and immature, and more often than not, demandingly infantile. The male role portrayed by Barney is lauded for his wisdom. Baby Bop is reprimanded for refusing to share her toys. When Barney wields the glittering Barney Bag of magic and surprises, Baby Bop toddles off for her nap carrying a faded yellow blanket. In one episode Baby Bop praises her brother B. J. for being the knight in shining armor who comes to her rescue! Clearly, the conventionalized male role, as rational protector, and female role, as a helpless victim, are reinforced in Barney during the 1990s.

To further explore the roles that females assume in children’s television, I have examined a sampling of cable and public broadcasting programs that aired during the morning hours, 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 a.m., over a six-month period from September, 1995 to April, 1996. Based on the analyses, I will discuss three areas: (a) seven roles that are characteristic of female representation, (b) the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of female gender roles, and (c) a critical viewing guide for the evaluation of gender roles represented on children’s television.

Female Roles in Children’s Television

If “all television is educational,” as Milton Chen observed, the question is: What are children learning? (1997, p. 82). Indeed, watching children’s television with my four-year old has been as much of a learning experience for myself as it has for my son. For example, I have observed that most female roles are repetitious and can be characterized by seven stereotypic representations: the infant, the shrew, the eccentric, the maternal, the vamp, the frump, and the twin. I will discuss each, and provide examples of the character’s behavior and dress, as well as the scenarios in which the characters appear.

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2 According to Forbes magazine, the Barney Corporation makes one billion in gross revenues annually as reported in The Atlanta Journal (Casey, 1995, p. A-11).
The Infant

Lamb Chop, like Baby Bop, is another female infant role. With her high pitched whine and little girl mannerisms, she epitomizes the female whose emotional growth is stunted. One wonders if she is incapable of growing up or if she simply refuses to mature. Although Lamb Chop is the star of the show, she often defers to the escapades of her more rambunctious brothers, Hush Puppy and Charliehorse. While she also displays empathy and kindness, which also represent stereotypic views of females, Lamb Chop is clearly a child who needs constant attention and reassurance.

The Shrew

Harkening back to the aggressive, overbearing antics exhibited by Miss Piggy of The Muppets Show and Lucy of Charlie Brown fame, one example of a contemporary cartoon shrew is named, ironically, Angelica, or little angel. A Nickelodean program, Rugrats, features the spoiled Angelica who constantly torments and teases her toddler cousins. She forces the four younger babies to eat dust balls from under the couch, orders them to chauffeur her around in her peddle car while feeding her the choicest chocolates, and humiliates anyone within screaming distance. The show infers that Angelica’s outrageous behavior, insatiable demands, and overwhelming insecurity are the result of her executive mother who spends most of her time arguing on a cellular phone, and an ever indulgent father.

The Eccentric

When females receive star billing, they rarely assume sage-like centrality as Barney of Barney and Friends, Tommy of Rugrats, or Kermit the Frog of The Muppets do. For example, Miss Frizzle, the central character in The Magic School Bus, does not exhibit the wisdom of a Yoda. Miss Frizzle is a red-haired teaching whiz whose outrageous ideas never fail to entice her reluctant pupils to learn the rudiments of scientific curricula. At the same time, some of the children regard this charismatic instructor as abnormal, or “loopy.” At the beginning of one episode, Arnold, one of her students, hopes that the upcoming field trip will be normal. The immediate response from the bus load of kids is feigned surprise. “With the Frizz,” they scream in mock amazement.
Arnold groans while the next wild and crazy escapade lurches into high gear.

As with Miss Frizzle, when females such as Aggie of *Dudley the Dragon* are given star billing, they are often presented as bizarre and quirky. “High flying Aggie,” as Dudley nicknames her, calls herself a sailor of the sea and sky. She catapults into Dudley’s existence from an air balloon that descended unexpectedly at the opening of one sequence. Wearing a worn leather helmet and brown bomber jacket, Aggie proceeds to allow Dudley to skyrocket into the sky without knowledge of ballooning. Throughout the episode, we discover that she has also engaged in such diverse occupations as dentistry, acting, and directing. The plot closes with Aggie, clad in shower cap, forming the letters DUDLEY in a cheerleading attempt to entertain a misfortunate sky-bound Dudley. Even with all her diverse accomplishments, Aggie conveys eccentricity rather than Renaissance genius.

**The Maternal**

Another popular role that female characters assume is that of a mother. Some of the most widely cherished tales are those of Winnie the Pooh and his menagerie of friends. However, all of the lovable characters who star in a new Disney cartoon series, based on the time-honored story, are male—Piglet, Eyore, Christopher Robin, Tigger, Rabbit, Roo, and Gopher. The only female is Roo’s mother. While she is usually referred to as Mama, occasionally, we hear her name, Kanga, whose name seems incomplete without her son, Roo. Although the role is positive in the sense that Kanga adores Roo and takes meticulous care of the youngster, it is the only female role in the program. One episode deals with the four—Pooh, Eyore, Tigger, and Piglet—and their inability to get along with girls. Most of the episode is spent searching for a girl (inferring few, if any, exist in the Hundred-Acre Woods) with whom they can practice their underdeveloped social skills.

Maternal roles in children’s television are so numerous that most shows regularly portray at least one of the characters as a mother. For example, *Rugrats* features three mothers, *Muppet Babies* employs a nanny whose role is maternal, Gumby, of *Gumby*, is regularly attended by his mother, and *Busy Town* features an array of mothers. While the maternal role is not inherently negative, characterizing and emphasizing
females as mothers or caregivers limits the range of possible role models, thereby stereotyping females as solely service-oriented rather than active participants in everyday life. The Hundred-Acre Woods may be full of adventure, but no other female than the mother exists within its confines.

The Frump

Richard Scarry’s *Busy Town* features two male personifications, Huckle Cat and Lowly Worm. Other characters who often figure in the plots are Sergeant Murphey, Mister Fixit, Mister Frumble, and Hilda Hippo. In this series, four of the five main characters are male with the fifth being an oversized female hippo, who has trouble keeping up with the physical acumen of her male cohorts. One story focused on Hilda’s attempts to match-make two of her favorite friends. While the two do, in the end, become sweethearts, Hilda is dismayed because the outcome is not as romantic as she had anticipated. Her disappointment perpetuates the stereotype of women as hopeless romantics.

In another episode, Hilda is brought along on the cat family’s vacation to babysit their two children at the beach. After several mishaps that demonstrate the glaring incompetence of Hilda, she becomes extremely distressed. In the end, she manages to save Huckle and Lowly who are swept out to sea which again places Hilda in the good graces of the family. All is well until in the last scene Huckle chuckles to Lowly that Hilda didn’t really save them. In reality, Huckle the cat informs Lowly the worm that he had only let Hilda think that she was the heroine of the day to assuage her guilt over ruining the vacation with her constant bungling. The cat’s family may be deceived, but the viewing children know that Hilda is a frump.

The Vamp

With scalloped sea shells that barely cover her adolescent bosom and a V-shaped mermaid fin that cuts well below her navel, Ariel, the little mermaid, is clearly the hottest sea creature to breaststroke into Saturday morning television. In her many escapades with Flounder the fish and Sebastian the crab, Ariel consistently demonstrates that she masterminds most of their schemes. While her intelligence and wisdom are unique to female television characterizations, her scholarly virtues
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are overshadowed by the suggestive allure of her sensual costuming. The young girls who view *The Little Mermaid* may soon feel the pressure to conform to an idealized version of beauty. Ariel, a positive model of intelligence and self-assertion, also represents the “perfect” skinned, slender ideal. If a girl chooses to emulate Ariel, will she have to conform to this fabricated ideal of beauty?

**The Twin**

Two popular shows, *Rugrats* and *Muppet Babies*, feature sets of twins. Although Phil and Lil figure in most plots in *Rugrats*, Lil represents one of only three central roles reserved for females in the show. The other main female characters are Tommy’s mother Didi and Angelica. Similarly, in the *Muppet Babies*, Skeeter and Skooter are another set of male and female twins, with Skeeter, Miss Piggy, and the nanny comprising the three female roles on the show. That the three main female roles in both shows are represented by a twin, a shrew, and a maternal figure is disturbing. Caregiving, harassment, and functioning in group structures are the principal roles represented in these highly regarded children’s telecasts. These roles clearly limit the range of female models. Moreover, some of these representations are negative, and perpetuate negative gender stereotypes.

**Misrepresentation and Underrepresentation**

The foregoing representation of female stereotypes in children’s television, while seemingly innocuous, is problematic for a number of reasons. First, of the seven stereotypic female roles presented in the media, three (i.e., the infant, shrew, and frump) are inherently negative portrayals. When coupled with negative connotations, stereotypes are indicative of what Alice Walker refers to as “prisons of images” (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 198).

Not only are the characterizations oppressive and less than desirable, they suggest that human nature is a static, one-dimensional entity. Character development is rare in children’s television, and roles are simplistic and easily understood. Nuance, contradiction, and complexity are lost in the repetitious scenerios of daytime programming.
The second area that I find problematic in children’s television is the underrepresentation of females as both protagonists and participants. To ascertain the number of female roles, I surveyed 14 shows on three channels (i.e., *PBS, Disney, and Nickelodean*) from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Of the observed shows, there were 84 male and 25 female characters represented. (See Table 1.) If one surveys the 1997 television line-up on individual channels such as *Nickelodean* and the *Disney Channel*, the percentages are similar. Of the 21 child-oriented *Nickelodean* broadcasts between 6:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., 16 of the shows feature male lead characters. Disney telecasts 16 shows from 6:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. that target pre-school and young children. Only one show, *The Little Mermaid*, features a female lead.

Table 1

1996 Sampling of Gender Representation
Broadcasted on Three Television Channels
Designed for Children’s Viewing
When the programs represented females, they are most often in secondary roles, such as the mother or sister of the main character. Males assumed the majority of the pivotal roles. Since the general population is roughly 50% female and 50% male, one might conjecture that there would be an equal balance of male and female roles on television. This is neither the case with children’s broadcasts, nor with adult television (Schultz, 1981, p. 58).

The underrepresentation of females in television can suggest several messages to children. One implication of the dearth of females is that women are not significant enough to portray protagonists or the major character in a show. A second possible conclusion is that there is something innately different between the two genders in terms of intelligence, ability, or talent; with women conveyed as the less competent. Although direct correlations between what children view and how they perceive reality (Gunter, 1995) is complex, television provides a prominent occasion for viewer’s construction of culture (Saenz, 1992, p. 37). Since television influences our understanding of society, all stereotypic representations of gender or racial roles should cease, especially in children’s programming. The first step is monitoring and critically analyzing stereotypic images that television perpetuates.

Visual Literacy through Critical Viewing

Richard Paul (1990) described critical thinking as “conscious, continuous thinking, thinking for oneself” (p. 50). More specifically, critical thinking in television takes the analysis of what is seen and heard on television, the distinguishing between reality and representation, and the critical analysis of stereotypes and biases.
and fantasy, the construction of informed judgments and thoughtful evaluation of programs, and the intelligent use of leisure time in which television viewing plays an important role” (p. 15). Hefzallah continues that “critical viewing is an outcome of planned activities in which the medium of television and what it offers and thinking about one’s relationship with television are underlined” (p. 15). “It is a skill,” Hefzallah concludes, “that can and should be taught” (p. 15). Moreover, the development of such skills can be applied to the critical examination of gender roles.

To address the ways in which critical viewing can be applied to the understanding of gender representations, I developed a critical viewing guide composed of questions and a worksheet that can be used formally in classrooms or informally within family settings. The suggested questions that follow arose from discussions with my son, as we attempted to understand the programs’ content. The questions target two groups: pre-schoolers and elementary age children and can be adapted according to the individuality of the child.

**Questions for Viewing Children’s Television:**
**Pre-school Age**

After selecting and viewing a favorite program, discuss which characters are male and female in the show. Next, examine what happened in the episode. Discuss how the characters felt about their situation and ask what might happen if a character continues to think or act a certain way. Ask if the child agrees with how this character responds. Ask if the character is happy, sad, angry, afraid, or mad, and why. Finally, ask gender-specific questions about favorite characters and episodes that are viewed, such as: Can a girl dog direct traffic? Can boys take good care of babies? Can girls work computers?

**Questions for Viewing Children’s Television:**
**Elementary School Age Children**

Older children can address more complex issues such as character development, plot analysis, and program format. Observe an array of programs and discuss the number of female and male roles. Do these numbers change from episode to episode, from week to week, or from show to show? Ask students to think about the representation of males
and females and their behavior, occupations, attitudes, and actions. Provide a list of adjectives such as aggressive, romantic, and friendly, and have the children decide which words describe certain characters. Ask the children to summarize how each gender is represented and if they think that this is accurate. Compare what they view concerning gender roles on television with their own family. In addition, compare what they view on television with the content of the movies or videos that they watch and the books that they read.

Finally, consider the plots presented. Who initiates the action? Are there subplots? Who is typically involved in the main action and the subplots? What is the theme of the episode? Is there a balance between story line and characters or does one dominate the other? Exploring character, plot, and story development can provide valuable information on how gender is represented in the daily fare of television, and can teach children to question, analyze, and evaluate what they view in formal and informal situations.

In order to teach television viewing skills as part of an art education curricula, I have developed the following activity guide. After viewing portions of broadcasts that are either teacher or student selected, teachers ask students to complete the activity sheet which can then be used to conduct subsequent discussion. (See Table 2.)

The implications of watching television characterizations that stereotype female gender roles as inherently negative and peripheral compels me, as a parent, to monitor my son’s viewing with dialogue that questions the validity of what is portrayed. As an educator, I feel equally responsible to provide opportunities for my students to analyze and evaluate the visual culture that pervades their daily lives through pedagogy that integrates critical viewing exercises into the traditional art education curricula.

\[3\] By age three, children know their own gender, and by age four or five, they learn to label the gender of others correctly (See Kohlberg, 1966, p. 104).
The Good News—The Production of *Puzzle Place*
While the roles assigned female characters in children’s media are predominantly stereotypical and secondary, there are signs that television may be changing. One such example is the newly produced *Puzzle Place*. Balancing the number of roles between male and female characters, the plots focus on issues of diversity, the appreciation of difference, and the importance of respect and understanding. Monitoring the contents of shows that children watch and choosing programming that reflects the personal values of individual families is paramount to critical viewing.

While viewing television is usually for entertainment purposes, responsible adults who participate in the activity with children under their care can make the experience educational. According to Carmen Luke (1994), critical cultural literacy challenges:

> how representations of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation and culture disempower some groups while privileging others. It gives students analytic tools with which to read and remake maps of meaning—maps which delineate how people are taught to view themselves and their relationship to others within the dynamics of everyday life in local and larger societal context (p. 31).

Despite the evils commonly ascribed to viewing television, experiences are not intrinsically negative. Rather than isolate children from a pervasive influence in our society and from one to which it is inevitable that they will be exposed, I suggest that it is more important that we teach youth how to navigate media representations through thoughtful inquiry. Such endeavor prepares our youth for independent critical thinking, and when included in art education curricula has the potential to make pedagogy relevant and engaging. Moreover, if as Paul Duncum (1997) suggests, the future responsibility of art educators will be to “address the proliferation of mass media images and their multiple readings by our multifaceted selves,” the contents of this paper represent first steps towards art instruction for “new times” (p. 77).

### References


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Introduction

Factors of social class, race, gender, and sexuality are important to any understanding of the social processes of art. Often, art educators discuss these factors in abstract terms, thereby confining discussion in art education to a set of identifiable variables constructed as static, universal, and homogeneous. The particularities of living and working in educational spaces structured along racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic lines remain largely unexplored. Recent scholarship in art education has begun to examine the particularities of these social relations (Garber, 1995; Stuhr, Krug, & Scott, 1995). But the fractures, dangers, and the erasures are not being articulated in ways that highlight the experiences—and the analyses—of those most marginalized by the dominant discourse.
The three of us, “schooled” in the critical bases of our discipline, are troubled by the schism between the institutionalized discourse and our lived experiences in the classroom. In fact, the genesis of this paper was a series of discussions we had about how what we were learning—and forced to teach—often bore so little resemblance to our lives. In this paper, we challenge certain universals in art education in order to interrupt the process of institutionalizing a partial, even distorted, discourse. We present this challenge as three separate perspectives: each of us as individuals giving voice to experiences, reflections, and thoughts that have often gone unspoken. In choosing to speak in our own voices we have tried to present a collage of experience, analysis, and theory. In doing so, we seek to weave a tapestry as much as a statement, one that reveals similarities evens as it exposes our differences.

In the first narrative, Deniston examines the social construction of class and taste in women’s art practices, and the social and historical contexts that undermine and undervalue women’s work and art. She challenges the socially constructed and often “invisible” norms of creativity, originality, and making often associated with women’s work and posits broader implications for art teaching and the classroom. In the second section, Desai emphasizes that racism is a social-cultural construct grounded in historical events that are continually rearticulated. Institutionalization occurs to such a degree, according to Desai, that without careful scrutiny racism remains invisible to both dominant and subordinate peoples. And finally, Check examines how internalized and projected homophobia is produced and circulated within art education discourse. Citing literary examples, Check describes and analyzes the problematic relationship of gay and lesbian artists to culture. Grounded in personal and anecdotal experiences, he argues for the construction of art education discourses which reveal complexity and difference that challenge homophobia.

Gender and Age: Out of Our Yards, Sight, and Minds
Exclusion is a very powerful method of producing social inequality. In art, exclusion functions to narrow the critical field of interest by continuously omitting certain work from the realm of “serious” or “high” art. This work, often relegated to the category of craft or kitsch, is treated with dismissal, if not contempt, for its supposed lack of aesthetic originality. This work is overwhelmingly produced by women. An enormous body of work produced by a very large population is, consequently, excluded from attention and research. It is my contention that both art and social justice are greatly diminished by this exclusion. These excluded art forms are particularly transparent. This transparency allows unique insight into the various social meanings contained within art forms, practice, and aesthetics.

Researching the Familiar

My research originated when I began to tape my mother’s stories. She emigrated to the United States at the age of 24 and had a wealth of interesting and unique life experiences that I felt would be lost if they were not recorded. Born in 1902, my mother witnessed tremendous social, cultural, and technological change; and her ability to live through those changes with humor and imagination was of great interest to me. I learned about her neighbors and had an opportunity to meet many of them. Most were, like my mother, elderly women whose lives were characterized not only by great change but also, again like my mother, by the central necessity of “making things.” Wanting to understand what their aesthetic processes meant to them over a lifetime, I began to interview these women.

These interviews allowed me an intimate look at the conditions of aging women, the work of their hands, and the stories of their lives. In the process, I learned how economically fragile many older women become as they outlive their husbands and their children move away. The individuals I interviewed all live in a government-subsidized apartment complex located in the heart of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I became acutely aware of how, in U.S. society, illness, disability, and isolation define the experience of the elderly and greatly limit personal choice. I have witnessed, personally and from afar, how disruption of lives from the illness, death, or divorce of a spouse is capable of reducing many
women to a precarious financial status that makes financial security a challenge. Many women over 60 and many women of my generation gave up earning power, including social security and a retirement fund; during those many years they nurtured young children. The many—often unacknowledged—networks of support that provide safety nets for the privileged are not there to protect these individuals.

As I collected data for my study, I was startled to recognize how, as I grow older, some of these same dynamics have begun to play out in my life, in spite of very different social circumstances. On a social and professional level, I became aware of a pervasive lack of interest in the elderly. This small group of women, in my study, represents a very large population of people in this country: individuals isolated by age, limited economical resources, deflated social status, and misperceived and misrepresented artistic efforts.

Although their aesthetic activities changed throughout their lives, all the women in my study engaged in some form of art making. Art was part of their daily lives and included (but was not restricted to) a substantial amount of needlework and sewing—work characterized by a high level of skill, but not distinguished by great originality. On the other hand, innovation and aesthetic adaptation to numerous technological and cultural changes, challenges, and crises filled their lives.

Embracing the Familiar

In order to understand the apparent discrepancy between the modest aesthetic of these women’s art work and the extravagant vigor of their lives, I employed Ellen Dissanayake’s (1988) understanding of art as “making special.” Dissanayake’s analysis of art as behavior helped substantiate the significance of their work as “art work” deserving respect and attention. Although focusing on gender, not age, the research of Georgia Collins and Renee Sandell (1984) was particularly useful to this study in its celebration of multiple art forms and aesthetic practices and interrogations of their social origins.1 The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in regard to the social distinctions inherent within art practices helped me to locate the source of the aesthetics of the women in my study. I also found his notion of “habitus” to be crucial in interpreting the data that the interviews yielded. As “[h]abitus is a system of shared social dispositions and cognitive structures which generates perceptions,
“Check, Deniston, Desai

appreciations and actions” the concept helped me understand the degree to which aesthetic taste is rooted within historical specificities such as birth, gender, and socioeconomic class—as well as their location within a broader social space (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 279). This social space is one in which those born into a more privileged social class are able to retain their privileges by maintaining possession of cultural capital, of which aesthetic taste is a major signifier.

History Embodied within Form

The aesthetic tastes of the women in my study reflect the historical times within which they were born, the impact their gender had upon their choices and expectations, and the socioeconomic class into which they were born. The lack of distinctive originality in the work of their hands reflects all of the material conditions into which they were born. It derives from social and historical contexts that have nothing to do with the vigor, intelligence, and creative natures of the women themselves. However, the discourse of art places extraordinary value on art that bears the mystique of originality. This notion of originality places it outside a social context, as though the artist has exclusive ownership of a facility to project and communicate the intelligence, creativity, and vigor that are reflected within his/her art: as though that work owes nothing to the social ambiance and privilege within which the work was produced.

Further, exclusion of women’s work concerns more than simply giving voice to the particular women in my own or any other study. Giving individual women voice will not fracture the structures of academic discourse that reinforce the mystique of originality and bestow

1Art educators have addressed issues concerning art programs for the aging sparingly. However, the literature within the field is growing, and its many faces reflect the complexity of issues concerning aging, as it impacts on the field (and as the field impacts on aging). Various art educators have laid the foundation for further study in this field (Greenberg, 1985, 1987; Hoffman, Greenberg, & Fitzner, 1980; Jefferson, 1987; Jones, 1980, 1993; Kauppinen, 1987, 1988; Kauppinen & McKee, 1988; Kim, 1980; Taylor, 1987). Kauppinen (1990), Sidelnick (1993), Jones (1993), and Barret (1993) are among those who have contributed recent insights into the unique issues of senior adults and their art activities.
Living the Discourses

privilege. Rather, it is the discourse itself that requires scrutiny. When we introduce students to an aesthetics of—originality—without providing an accompanying critique—we build a wall that excludes all artistic experiences that lie outside conventional frames of aesthetic reference. We also reinforce the misperception that such art is “unoriginal” or lacking in excellence.

Students need to understand not only the products but the processes of art. They need to see how social and historical forces can secure artistic privilege for some at the expense of many. When paradigms of excellence drive pedagogy and curriculum, not only are these contexts invalidated but students are deprived of an opportunity to understand how art is “constructed.”

Out of Our Yards, Sight, and Minds

As the division between classes increases in this country, I am reminded of the even sharper division by socioeconomic class that I encountered while living in Lima, Perú. There, sharp shards of cut glass edged the walls around private residences in the wealthy districts of the city. The intention behind the construction of these walls was to keep those living in poverty out of the yards, sight, and minds of the privileged. In the United States, many visible and invisible barriers are being built in cities like Milwaukee, isolating people in their misfortune and relegating them to misery because of their race, ethnicity, gender, class, or age. We build such walls around our educational institutions, as the growing diversity in school populations encourages ever more insistent efforts to keep those populations out of our yards, sight, and minds.

When we introduce our students to concepts of an aesthetics of originality and formalism—especially without providing any critical analysis of aesthetics—we build a wall excluding their prior aesthetic experiences. Likewise, when educators seek to change the aesthetic taste and sensibilities of their students to reflect that of dominant western culture, those sensibilities are first diminished and buried in the silence of inadequacy and shame, and then relegated to “craft.” Craft becomes, in turn, one more indicator of these students’ lack of cultural capital, keeping them outside “aesthetic” walls. By educating in this manner, we effectively keep underprivileged populations out of society’s yards,
sight, and minds. By disregarding students’ aesthetics and by keeping the social origins of those aesthetics invisible, we ensure that their efforts, informed by the values of popular culture and commerce, but rarely attended by education in our schools except as objects of scorn, will “disappear.”

The Discourse of Excellence

Pushed by political pressures demanding accountability, educators are kept busy in schools and universities defining standards of “excellence,” “benchmarks,” the “outcomes” of education, and the “qualities” of the educated person. Because of this, behavior and process are seen only as means to these never-contested, never-debated ends. Since I believe that the standards of excellence pale next to the wonder of ordinary human beings making, the discourse on excellence becomes another social construction that threatens to diminish the field rather than enhance it. Especially in a pluralist society like the United States, we need to remember that art is for people, not the other way around. We need to be mindful of the social complexities from which aesthetic taste is born. We need to remember that aesthetic practice often has a normative function, one in which “excellence” circulates and secures privilege in a stratified society.

The Experience of Oppression, Pain and Desire

Valerie Walkerdine (1990) made many attempts to establish “the difference between the ‘cold’ aesthetic of high culture, with its cerebral and intellectualized appreciation, and the bodily and sensuous pleasures of ‘low’ cultures” (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 202). In her studies on the imposition of cultural values on women, she questioned what happens when educators are efficient in undermining aesthetic tastes and pleasures. Her arena of criticism is the Hollywood cinema, an arena that is applicable to anyone marginalized or erased by mandarin discourse.

What concerns me is how these women, children, whoever, are being asked to deal with their previous enjoyment of such things[i.e., “low-brow” movies]—a pleasure shared with family, friends, and their general social and cultural
environment. It seems that they are being left little room for any response other than feeling stupid, or despising those who are still enjoying these “perverse” pleasures.

What this typically academic emphasis on rationality and intellectualization can overlook are the specific conditions of the formation of pleasures for particular groups at a given historical moment. Rather than seeing the pleasures of “the masses” as perverse, perhaps we should acknowledge that it is the bourgeois “will to truth” that is perverse in its desire for knowledge, certainty and mastery…. The crusade to save the masses from the ideology that dupes them can obscure the real social significance of their pleasures and, at the same time, blind us to the perversity of radical intellectual pleasures. (pp. 200-201)

Within this context, Walkerdine explains that the work of academics is dependent upon those whom they study—those whom they hope to enlighten, and those whose aesthetic tastes they hope to refine and civilize. “The alternative is not a populist defense of Hollywood, but a reassessment of what is involved in watching films. This becomes part of the experience of oppression, pain and desire” (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 210). Similarly, it is important to reassess how the aesthetic experience is structured, not only for our students but also the communities in which they teach. That is, whether the experience is named high art or low, art or craft, craft or kitsch.

I derive one final insight from my interviews of elderly women. As I continue to examine how women’s work, like the poor of Lima, is trivialized and ignored, many educators are removed from the much larger world—whose concerns might disturb them, were they not insulated by the privileges of class. Since the connection between class and aesthetic taste has been thoroughly documented by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), I conclude with a statement made by Paulo Freire who devoted much of his scholarship to recognizing this larger world that is populated by people who do not share U.S. privilege.

What excellence is this, that manages to “coexist” with more than a billion inhabitants of the developing world who live in poverty, not to say misery? … What excellence is this, that
sleeps in peace while numberless men and women make their home in the street, and says it is their own fault that they are on the street? What excellence is this, that struggles so little, if it struggles at all, with discrimination for reason of sex, class, or race, as if to reject someone different, humiliate her, offend him, hold her in contempt, exploit her, were the right of individuals, or classes, or races, or one sex, that holds a position of power over another? (Freire, 1994, p. 94)

In this quotation he is examining the concept of excellence; one that can be as oppressive to art as it is to the bodies of the old, the female, the non-white, and the poor.

**Race: Speaking in Diasporic Tongues**

Dipti Desai

My interest in investigating racism is based on my experiences, shaped by a particular history, place, and culture. I am an East Indian woman who moved to the United States as an adult and found myself marginalized as a member of a group constructed on the basis of race. Perceived and “hailed” (to use Althusser’s 1971 term) in the United States in different ways—as “colored,” “foreigner,” “Hispanic,” or “immigrant”—I am taken to embody categorizations that contain multiple, contradictory, and often negative meanings. This forces me to continually reconstruct my identity, constantly aware of the nexus of social relations that encompasses each of these categorizations. I embody the traces of my home culture of India, its history, language, beliefs and values—while simultaneously negotiating those of my adopted country, which is also my home. In the words of Stuart Hall (1993), I am the “product of a diasporic consciousness,” that is, the product of “several interlocking histories and cultures, belonging at the same time to several homes—and thus to no one particular home” (p. 362). Living daily in this space of overlapping worlds has provoked me to address the complexities and contradictions of race as it intersects with gender, social class, and sexuality in my teaching, artwork, and research.

**Racism as an Issue in Classroom Practice**
The problematics of not addressing issues of race and racism in both classroom practices and in the critical discourses is brutally clear to me when I teach. One of the in-class assignments that I give to my art education majors is designed to initiate dialogue on racism. I teach at a small liberal arts college in the northeast. Students in the art education classes tend to be predominantly Euro-American from New York State. Occasionally I have had one or two students of color in my class. The purpose of the class (which is the last class students take before student teaching) is to explore theoretical and practical perspectives on teaching art as “situated practice.” I use this term to draw attention to the ways all teaching is situated, that it takes place in particular institutions (i.e., in schools, museums, and community centers) in specific historical moments, within particular social structures.

The in-class assignment is a 10 minute anonymous free-writing exercise in which students describe an incident from their lives when they had either faced, perpetrated, or witnessed racism. Though a few white students claimed that race was not an issue in their lives, the African-American student and I shared that we had faced so many forms of racism that one incident could not capture the multidimensional character of racism. He seemed as perturbed as I by the accounts of racism given by white students. A majority of them, in my most recent class, narrated incidents from their lives when they faced, what they termed, racism. They genuinely believed that they were victims of racism, and two of them offered the following as examples: “On numerous occasions, I have been called ‘white bitch’ and have been insulted in other ways by my African-American roommate;” “As one of the few white cheerleaders in my racially diverse high school, I was constantly harassed by the black cheerleaders who felt I should not be part of this cheer leading group as it was composed of largely black students.” These two students, and others in the class, viewed these incidents as “reverse racism.” In their minds there was little conceptual difference between racism and prejudice, other than the fact that racism is discrimination based on the color of one’s skin. Accordingly, the students believed that African-Americans could be racist towards whites. This conflation of racism, discrimination, and prejudice kept surfacing in our discussion. Based on their free-writes, I realized that we had to directly confront the question of what racism is in the United States.

This question was necessary because the students had no notion of race as a conceptual construct, directly connected to the systematic
production and maintenance of social, economic, political, and ideological dominance of white people over non-whites, or that this unequal power relation is embedded in the institutional bedrock of society. Although, I try to provoke students to engage in discussions of the structural nature of race relations, I am compromised as a non-white teacher and the classroom itself becomes a site of struggle. Students express anger, guilt, and powerlessness; they speak of their inability to speak about racism as it is an emotionally charged issue. In all of this, I stand in a contradictory position. Although I hold power as their teacher, the collective voice of these white students often silences me as a person of color. The classroom is no longer a safe space for either my students or myself as we negotiate the boundaries of our discomfort. I view this discomfort as a necessary part of learning to understand the hierarchical structures of racial differences, and more importantly, to discuss how to work across our differences rather than erase them.

One of the most effective ways that the status quo is maintained, in a racially structured society such as the United States, is through the erasure of difference. White people, like my students, contend that they have experienced racism. Such contentions obscure or erase the power relation between oppressor and oppressed. When white people equate prejudice with racism, such as statements made by people of color perceived as reverse racism, who then is oppressed? If everyone can claim some sort of oppression, then is who responsible? Examining how race and racism are fundamentally structured within the discourse of art education and the classroom is central to understanding the way power operates in a stratified society. The work of Stuart Hall (1993), in particular, and the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971) has greatly influenced my understanding and analyses of the structural nature of race relations, both theoretically and in the classroom.

**Reevaluating Multicultural Art Education Discourses**

Critical and multicultural art education are discursive spaces where researchers and educators discuss issues of race as a conceptual construct. Despite the development of a more sophisticated understanding of culture in recent years (Freedman, Stuhr, & Weinberg, 1989), much of the discourse is couched in ethnic and cultural terms. Researchers and educators understand race as one component, along with religion,
nationality, culture, and language, that forms people’s ethnic identity. I agree with the proponents of the social reconstructivist model of multicultural art education who maintain that acknowledging that certain groups have faced prejudice and discrimination provides the basis for curricula and pedagogical approaches to art education. The recognition of forms of discrimination enables teachers and students to broaden their approaches to art education by encouraging positive role models, examining both teacher and student prejudices/discriminatory actions, and challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of the dominant group (Wasson, Stuhr, & Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1990). Providing the above opportunities in the classroom “enables all students to work past their prejudicial values and discriminatory social actions regarding people with differing physical and mental abilities, socioeconomic status, genders, ages, politics, religion, and ethnic backgrounds and in so doing recognize the inherent worth of each member of a sociocultural group” (Wasson et al., 1990, p. 242). It is equally important, however, to specifically distinguish between racism and prejudice. The problem with equating racism with prejudice or discrimination, is that it inhibits an understanding of the fundamental ways in which U.S. society is structured racially. Instead, racism, like prejudice, is primarily viewed as individual acts of unfair treatment by members of one social group towards another. This attitude (one which my students share) obscures the manner in which racism functions in society through an interlocking web of social relations. The structuring of political, economic, cultural, social, and ideological relations within a complex network of hierarchical relations is important to any understanding of racism. The struggle from one historical moment to another alters these networks of social relations and creates different configurations of race relations which in turn shape different meanings of race.

By conflating racial issues with those of ethnicity or culture, race as a variable socio-historical category remains undertheorized in critical and multicultural art education discourses. Multicultural art education ignores the crucial role of social class, gender, and sexuality in the formation and structuring of racial identity within a historical moment by casting race as one among many differences. Although the term racism as a “rational abstraction” (Marx, 1971, p. 18) does focus on certain common social features, it is not useful for theoretical investigation because all abstractions tend to generalize and omit the multidimensional and contradictory character of particularities. Karl Marx (1971), explains the problems with the abstract notion of “production” in the Introduction to Grundisse, a passage relevant to our
discussion on racism. He stated:

Even the most completely developed languages have laws and characteristics in common with the least developed ones, what is characteristic of their development are the points of departure from the general and common. The conditions which generally govern production must be differentiated in order that the essential difference should not be lost sight of in view of the general uniformity. (p. 18)

I argue that an implicit assumption underlying critical and multicultural art education discourses is that racism is the same across different historical time periods and across diverse cultures. Most discussions of racism, as I have already mentioned, are subsumed under culture or ethnicity. One of the few articles that directly addresses racism in art education is “The Origins of Racism in the Public School Art Curriculum” (my italics) written by Chalmers (1992). This historiographic article raises important issues regarding race and provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which art educators construe racism. Racism is understood as a static unitary and homogeneous structure with specific identifiable origins. Chalmers draws upon eighteenth and nineteenth century English sources to examine the eurocentric origins of art education both in England and the United States. He ignores the two nations’ different histories, and a commonality is implicitly assumed between England and the United States. He points to scientific and biblical ideologies as the original sources of racist ideologies in art education. Although, biblical and scientifically based ideologies determined inclusions and exclusions in what was considered art in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, they do not directly determine some of the current eurocentric ideologies in art education.

There are two major points I would like to raise regarding the problems of charting racism as a simple linear trajectory. First, race is an ideological construct in the Gramscian sense and ideologies are lived relations, that is, they are connected to the daily experiences of people (Gramsci, 1971). Although ideologies carry traces of the past, they have to be continually recreated and are not simply inherited from the 18th and 19th centuries. As Fields (1982) explains:
Nothing handed down from the past could keep alive if we did not constantly reinvent and re-ritualize it to fit our own terrain. If race lives on today, it can do so only because we continue to create and re-create it in our social life, continue to verify it, and thus continue to need a social vocabulary that will allow us to make sense, not of what are ancestors did then, but of what we ourselves choose to do now. (p. 98)

The important issue at hand is not to locate the origins of racism in art education but to examine the prevalent conditions in art education and other institutions that make racial forms of domination an active part of our society today. Some of the prevalent conditions in art education today include the paucity of students of color and faculty of color in higher education, which can not be overlooked.

Second, we must begin to understand racism, as a concept, historically (rather than as a cultural phenomenon) in relation to the political, economic, and social institutions that structure U.S. society. Racism differs within each historical period, and therefore it is important to understand how racism has developed and changed. We must understand the specific development of racism as a political force. Hall explains how racism differs with time and place:

> It’s not helpful to define racism as a “natural” and permanent feature-either of all societies or indeed of a sort of universal “human nature.” . . . It does not always assume the same shape. There have been many significantly different racisms—each historically specific and articulated in a different way with the societies in which they appear. Racism is always historically specific in this way, whatever common features it may appear to share with other social phenomena. Though it may draw on the cultural and ideological traces which are deposited in society by previous historical phases, it always assumes specific forms which arise out of the present - not the past - conditions and organizations of society. (quoted in Solomos, Finlay, Jones, & Gilroy, 1982, p. 14)

The equation of race and culture, in critical and multicultural art education, renders meanings of race, borrowing Hall’s words, “natural and permanent” (quoted in Solomos, Finlay, Jones, & Gilroy,
However, racism in the United States during the 1960s, when multiculturalism emerged as a curricular reform movement, is markedly different from the racism of the 1990s. Since these differences are not addressed in the discourses of critical and multicultural art education, art educators inadvertently perpetuate racial dominance (Omi & Winant, 1986).

We, in critical art education, need to begin the process of disconnecting race with culture. We need to address issues of race as historically linked in particular ways to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and social class in various institutions such as museums, schools, and galleries. By examining our present social and cultural institutions, we can understand the ways specific forms of racism are reconstructed and linked to certain ideologies. Addressing the ways our differences are historically inter-related and hierarchically organized is necessary if we are to change the accepted (and commonsense) understanding of race and racism in the U.S. We must confront issues of race and racisms both theoretically and in the classroom.

Queers in the Classroom: Internalized and Projected Homophobia

Ed Check

My interests in examining the relationships of sexual identity, art, and education have grown out of my own personal experiences as a gay male, artist, and educator. Theoretically embedded in feminism and the pro-feminist men’s movement, I use autobiography—in the sense of testimony (Felman & Laub, 1992; Felstiner, 1988)—as both a motivation and a theoretical framework. My testimonials recount what I have witnessed in my life, in my art, and in my work as an educator. These stories not only offer insight into context, content, and meaning, but have implications and applications for art and education.

For example, in an art methods class I taught for elementary education majors, I assigned a short reading from the Village Voice about artist Keith Haring entitled: “Crossover Dreams: Sexuality, Politics and
the Keith Haring Line” (Deitcher, 1990). As part of that assignment, students also viewed a half hour video titled: “Drawing the Line: A Portrait of Keith Haring” (Aubert, 1989). These assignments were part of a class segment investigating sexual identity as difference in art.

The Deitcher (1990) article examines the impact of sexuality on Haring’s public personae and his art through the use of biography and autobiography. Asked, at one point, if kids looked up to him as a “gay role model,” Haring responded:

I know a lot of hard-core street kids who would say they hate faggots, but they would never say that they hated me. Right? ’Cause they don’t know me as a faggot. They respect me as a person, which is the most important thing. So it never really becomes an issue. (p. 11)

Not wholly convinced by his answer, Deitcher notes that it was in the private confines of the art gallery that Haring put his homoerotic art in view. It was there where “the disparate strands of his identity came together as a tense but fragile whole” [my italics] (p. 110). Haring’s awareness of institutional homophobia is clearly indicated throughout this article: the power of homophobes to destroy him in a minute, his unwillingness or inability to risk being a gay role model, and the decision not to make “an issue” of his sexual identity. Further, the suggestion that distorted views of pedophilia should not prevent him from working with children illustrates the compromises that Haring was forced to make as a gay male, artist, and educator. Keenly aware of the negative stereotypes of gays in society and the damage gay imagery might have on his career and success in straight culture, Haring chose to silence himself and subvert a gay context for his work.
By contrast, the Aubert (1989) video virtually “straightens” out Haring’s life and art, rendering his sexual identity invisible and unproblematic. The video uses a narrative documentary style, replete with critical “experts” who lionize and historicize the importance of Haring’s public contributions as an American artist. The video defines Haring as a “pop” cultural hero. His artistic style and use of social themes in his art (drug abuse, literacy, animal rights, apartheid, and safer sex), combined with his involvement in children’s and various community groups, exemplifies what the video refers to as his “commitment to the people.” Absent from the text of the video are Haring’s personal commitments, such as his participation in the fight against AIDS, his eventual death from AIDS-related illnesses, and that he was gay. The video’s final frame simply states: “Keith Haring died on the 16th of February 1990.”

During the class discussion, which compared the video, the article, and relevant personal experiences, many students were clearly uncomfortable engaging in an open discussion about the construction and impact of sexual identities on art. Instead, they maintained that it was not necessary for them to know the impact of sexuality itself on their understanding of an artist’s work.

I sensed a general uneasiness in the classroom, and as a self-identified gay person, considered that knowledge of Haring’s sexual identity was essential for an informed evaluation of his art. I presented other opinions, such as Trebay’s (1990), which notes that Haring’s being gay was “not coincidental to his life and death” (p. 116). I suggested to the class that to understand Haring, one must place him within a larger cultural context which is often homophobic, erotophobic, and sexist.

Despite this discussion, students continued to maintain that “it shouldn’t matter what his sexuality was,” and that sexual orientation was irrelevant to the study of art. I realized that I needed to both witness and testify. I spoke of the hostility and homophobia that I encountered and the shame and repressed rage that I sometimes felt as a gay man and as a gay artist.

As a result of this brief act of self-exposure, everyone in the class began to analyze the interplay between homophobia, masculinity, and heterosexuality. During the following weeks, some students
investigated issues of gender, especially masculinity. I asked students for a sketchbook response to the question: “What does masculinity mean to you?” The students then responded in their sketchbooks to the movie, *The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* (Clark & Hamlyn, 1995). These assignments reaffirmed for the class that many straight people have distorted visions of homosexuality, and that gays and lesbians, in turn, internalize these perceptions, as they struggle with their own issues of safety and shame.

In another example, I helped co-curate an art exhibit at a gallery at the University of Wisconsin-Madison entitled, *Drawing Upon Our Experiences*. It was organized as part of the University’s Fall National Coming Out Week celebration. Press releases and posters posed the following question to artists: “Where was the last academic setting or gallery space where you were encouraged or felt comfortable to exhibit your work dealing with themes that are important to you as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered person?” We received one thunderous reply—“nowhere.”

While interest in and elation over the exhibit ran high, so did apprehension about appearing in such a show. In fact, the experience seemed schizophrenic and dilemmic for nearly everyone involved. On the one hand, many artists were hesitant to participate in the show, and thus identify themselves as lesbian or gay (or as allies). Some refused to give their names over the phone. On the other hand, the artists who did show their work were profusive in their thanks for an opportunity to exhibit their art, art that they had never been able to exhibit anywhere else.

At this point, a brief discussion of a few recent articles on the subject will help confirm what practice reveals. While it is true that critics like Honeychurch (1995) and Lampela (1996) write about the importance of sexual subjectivity and identity in art, the literature in art education is silent, illusive, or misrepresentative. This point is glaringly revealed in the April/May (1990) issue of *Art and Man* (since renamed *Scholastic Art*) which features the art of David Hockney.

The article, which occupies nine of the magazine’s sixteen pages, reduces Hockney’s art and life to formal principles and elements of design. The text makes no mention of Hockney’s sexual identity or
its influence upon his life and work. Since Hockney, a living artist, is quite explicit about the relationship of his sexuality to his art (Hockney, 1976) such silence is deliberative and deforming. For example, the article states that:

When David Hockney first saw Los Angeles in 1963, he immediately noticed the brightness and intensity of the light. He had been used to the rain and fog of England, so California seemed like a tropical paradise filled with sun-drenched houses, palm trees, and bright-blue swimming pools. (The California Story, 1990, p. 4)

Contrast this with Webb’s (1988) description of what attracted Hockney to California, derived from Hockney’s own explanation of his experiences:

Whatever the attractions of New York, Hockney’s real purpose in returning to America [in 1963] was to visit California. His fantasies about America centered around beautiful suntanned beach boys, the sort of boys who filled the pages of Physique Pictorial, which he had collected avidly in London. The magazine originated in Los Angeles, so that was his destination. (pp. 63-4)

The refusal of a journal in the field to acknowledge both the ordinariness of sexual identity and the sexual identity of a major living artist is not an anomaly. Artists from Michelangelo through Winslow Homer to Robert Mapplethorpe have been either “straightened” or demonized through silence or hyper-sexualization.²

Judith Butler (1993) points out the presumption that the male sex is primary in culture. It gets expressed through a privileged masculine gender and a sexuality that is heterosexual. The male, the masculine, and the heterosexual represent the culture’s ideal (Mosse, 1993). Men are expected to exhibit power and demonstrate their manhood within such a phallocentric culture (Abbott, 1991; Kimmel, 1991). Such socially constructed, arbitrary, and tenuous distinctions significantly affect social and economic interactions between men and women. Frye (1983) and Stoltenberg (1989) state that gender affects the ways we think, act, learn, live, adjudicate, remember, and know. This is clearly evidenced in the
depiction of Hockney, a situation where a gay artist—who has publicly announced his affectional preference—is firmly pushed back into the closet to conform to cultural ideals of sex, gender, and identity.

Most men do not even question cultural masculinity. As Porter (1992) points out, “for men to ask such questions in the spirit of personal self-reflection remains itself a bold departure” (p. 4). My own experiences tended to support culturally determined developmental structures. I, like other boys, mimicked the modeling of adult males in order to become a “real man” (Silverstein and Rashbaum, 1994) and learned to “despise ‘faggots’ in order to feel masculine” (Stoltenberg, 1991, p. 8).

Yet I also, like millions of other men—including Keith Haring and David Hockney—simultaneously reinforced and undermined such ideals. While beginning the process of learning to accept and love myself as a gay male, I also despised myself for not being man enough. As a college senior, I practiced walking “like a man” because someone yelled out to me that I walked like a girl. Simultaneously, I was searching for gay culture. Like Haring, I sought acceptance by straights. Like Hockney, the gay part of my identity was both being honored and disappeared.

To articulate myself as more than silence, or to contest myself in the limited discourse that does exist is both a frightening and frustrating experience; not only for me but for other lesbian or gay artists or lesbian or gay art educators as well.\(^3\) As Vito Russo (1990) so poignantly explained it:

As a gay person, one grows up with the people around you, including your parents, assuming you are straight. At some point of course you know different, and so you acquire a kind of double vision. You are able to see both the truth and the illusion. Growing up with this double vision helps you to practice it on art, on cinema, or in writing. You imagine all sorts of things in order to create a world where you exist. (Vito Russo in Bell, Fouratt, Millet, Russo, Weinstein, White & Harris, 1990, p. 136)

In order to create a world where we do exist, gay and straight educators need to reveal the existence of lesbian and gay artists. Artists
such as:

Bernice Abbott, Judith Anderson, Mary Austin, Francis Bacon, Sadie Benning, Ross Bleckner, Deborah Bright, Romaine Brooks, Paul Cadmus, Janet Cooling, Tee Corrine, Imogene Cunningham, Betsy Damon, Charles Demuth, Nicole Eisenman, Louise Fishman, Gran Fury, Gilbert and George, Laura Gilpin, Gluck (Hannah Gluckstein), Della Grace, Duncan Grant, John Greyson, Harmony Hammond, Winslow Homer, Harriet Hosmer, Marsden Hartley, Keith Haring, David Hockney, Holly Hughes, Jasper Johns, Deborah Kass, Marie Laurencin, Sadie Lee, Zoe Leonard, Edmonia Lewis, John Lindell, Robert Mapplethorpe, Tim Miller, Donald Moffett, Frank Moore, Ellen Neipris, Robert Rauschenberg, Marlon Riggs, June Redfern, Monica Sjoo, Hugh Steers, Andy Warhol and David Wojnarowicz—to name a few.

The true naming of these men and women, while it would not prevent distortion of the relationship of sexual identity to their work, would eliminate much of the silence that surrounds them.

Because these artists were or are engaged in a highly problematic relationship with their culture, it is critical to examine their sexual identity. Some have hidden their sexual identity, and others have “flaunted it.” Some have named themselves and others have denied their sexual identities. Some have attempted to articulate a vision based on their sexual aesthetic; others have simply struggled to exist. Yet each has attempted to create a discourse, an artistic narrative, that could

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explain the ambiguities and dilemmas of lives that were often lived in exile from their authentic selves. This was a strategy that I myself have employed and understood.

One final example is useful here. When I submitted the first draft of this paper, one reviewer requested changes by stating:

While I am sympathetic to the author for the difficulty of living with discrimination and prejudice and affirm his right and need to talk about his personal experiences, from an intellectual and political point of view, I think the article would be stronger if its tone was [sic] less judgmental toward those who do not currently see how to incorporate the study of the construction of sexuality into the K-12 program.

The conscious intent of this reviewer was undoubtedly benign: he or she simply wanted to alter the tone of a discourse that he or she found either uncomfortable or dissatisfying. Yet, the result was that I, like many of the artists that I have named, felt both shamed and silenced. Shamed because my approach to the issue was not perceived as “intellectual,” and silenced because—however well-intentioned—the reviewer sought to silence not only my articulation of my own life but my critique of the culture at large, a critique that he or she labeled judgmental. I was labeled judgmental, not this culture nor my anonymous reviewer. My attitudes needed changing, not his or hers.

Yet, there is irony here. For in this most recent experience of the dissonance between critical discourse and lived experience, I recognize that every time I “come out,” it is a political as well as an aesthetic act. Sedgwick (1990) described it as one that is filled with complications:

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3 For further reading of lesbian and gay artists’, teachers’, and students’ concerns about fear and silence see: Deitcher (1990); Hammond (1994); Kanov (1991); Katz (1993); Rist (1986); Sheff (1989); Weinberg (1993); and Wojnarowicz (1991) about artists; Griffin (1992); Harbeck (1992) and (1988); Jennings (1994); Lampela (1996); and Turley (1994) about teachers; and Gordon (1983); Green (1991); Maguen (1991); National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (1991); and Rofes (1989); about teens, schools, and students.
every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people, new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure. (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 68)

Finally, I must inject a note of ambiguity into all the circumstances that I have described. The editor of *Art and Man*, the students in my class, and my anonymous reviewer—like Keith Haring, David Hockney and I, are all living the discourse. All of us, in our words and in our silences, through our rebellions, complicities, and desires, exist as the ongoing creations of our politics as well as in the ongoing creativity of our art. And, as this happens, our discourse will continue to expand and narrow, slow and congeal. And it will continue.

**Conclusion of the Three Discourses**

Critical discourses in art education rarely examine the complexities and contradictions of living and working in educational spaces. Throughout each of our stories, each of our vignettes, we have tried to provide small windows to view the unexamined. That is, we have tried to interrupt the juggernaut of “art education as usual,” and present an alternative way of seeing and interpreting our lives in relation to both teaching and to art.

Since each of us participates in the discourses within art education that perpetuate misunderstandings of race, class, and sexuality, we are therefore implicated in the problems as much as the solutions. We are not exempt from the perspectives we seek to change. Yet our insistence of the validity of “outsider criticism” invokes what might be considered the best of “outsider art:” a way of seeing old problems with “new” eyes; a way of conceptualizing other outcomes. It also suggests that the disjunction between materiality and discourse is itself one place to begin to come together: to speak, to share and, perhaps, to change.

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Check, Deniston, Desai


On August 6, 1945, at 8:15 a.m., a United States bomber dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, that instantly incinerated at least 70,000 people. Another 100,000 perished due to atomic poisoning by the end of 1945 (Weale, 1995). On August 9, 1945 another bomb, dropped on Nagasaki, killed an additional 40,000 people. Shortly thereafter, on August 14, Japan surrendered and World War II ended. Dropping the bomb was one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. The New York Times declared that one “cannot understand the twentieth century without Hiroshima” (Kristof, 1995, A-1).

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and the end of World War II, Abe Toshifumi of Osaka Women’s College sought my assistance to develop an international children’s peace mural exchange. Professor Abe’s idea was to “build a bridge of peace” between the United States and Japan through this project. Initially I thought that this was a wonderful idea. My second thought, however,
Anderson was a question. How does art begin to address what has been called the defining moment and event of the twentieth century?

As a community muralist (T. Anderson, 1985) and contextualist I believe that the purpose of art is communication from one human being to another about things that count (R. Anderson, 1990; Dissanayake, 1988; Lippard, 1990). This does not mean that we disregard the aesthetic component—the “wonder”—in an artwork. Rather, it implies that the aesthetic serves an extrinsic function beyond its supposed raison d’être. That function, which is usually both prosaic and symbolic, is to serve as a marker that in some way defines the people who make, use, and view artworks or aesthetically framed objects (R. Anderson, 1990). Art is something people do to give them a sense of themselves, both as a result of the product and the process. Thus, we may use artworks as vehicles for understanding human nature through their displayed visual qualities, the forming process, and their social context (T. Anderson, 1995).

This paper follows from that premise. I will consider the reasons for the peace mural project, the processes involved, and the murals’ compositions and stylistic qualities as manifestations and means of initial ingress toward understanding the cultures and people from which they arise. My belief is that peace rests on intercultural understanding and one way to approach such understanding is through art.

The Bomb: An Absence of Presence

It may be appropriate in the postmodern age to begin this account by describing how the purpose for the mural was visually absent from the mural, and how the bomb’s absence was a source of the project’s power. There were no depictions of the bomb in either the North American or Japanese children’s murals. This was framed consciously by both adult mural team facilitators, to accentuate the positive. While the atomic bomb was not depicted that does not mean that it is not there. It has the weight and mass of a black hole not only for this project, but for life on Earth. And like a black hole, the gravity of the bomb affects the way all things look and act within its sphere. It is the bomb that can destroy life, thus in some sense defines life on this planet. We live in the nuclear age, the age of the bomb, and it is the bomb itself that gives this project its guts.
The bomb has had an effect not only on those against whom it was used but on everyone, everywhere. For example, at that developmental point in life when kids fear ghosts and monsters, I and many of my friends feared the bomb. We did not like to talk about it. It was too overwhelming. It was a faceless anonymous threat before which we were powerless. Like one of those bad dreams where you sink into quicksand or can not run fast enough to get away, the omnipresent power of the bomb seemed inevitable.

With increased temporal distance from Hiroshima and the lessening of East-West tensions in recent years, it is my perception that perhaps children have gone back to worrying more about monsters than the bomb. The problem, however, with forgetting the bomb in favor of the monsters is that many of these monsters are not real. The bomb is. And though (or maybe because) it has sunk to lower levels of consciousness, it is still dangerous.

The Peace Mural Exchange Process

Professor Abe, in partnership with Yasuda Tadashi of Art Japan, an arts and culture network, initiated the project and asked me to collaborate on the Project Statement. Our three member team stated its hopes that through remembering the horrific results of the atomic bomb, such devastating warfare could be avoided. We facilitated an intercultural exchange of peace murals by children from both Japan and the United States. Each mural was executed on canvas the size of Guernica (about 25 feet by 12 feet). Two teams of adult facilitators asked children in Japan and the United States to envision how they could promote peace as citizens of their country and the world, in a locally and culturally specific manner. Children, in the mural workshops, explored the concept of peace, not only in abstract universal terms, but also in concrete and specific terms.

This paper concerns the mural exchange between the United States and Japan in which children in Tallahassee, Florida created the first mural. Their mural was sent to Tokushima, Japan so that a group of Japanese children could respond to it through the creation of their own mural. My analysis is derived from the process of this exchange and from viewing the completed murals displayed together in both Japan and the United States.
As articulated in the Project Statement, we recognize that the children and sponsors of this project have distinctly different cultural backgrounds, yet also shared certain universal human drives and concerns. One such desire that we expressed was to live safely in peace, free from war or the threat of war. We also believe that since art is an instrument of culture, the children of different countries participating in this project would express these universal concerns differently, each according to their local cultural norms. Finally, we believe that the power and potential of the project would come from our unity of purpose and diversity of approach. By examining the multiple paths taken to reach common goals, it is our hope that understanding, tolerance, and respect for one another would grow. As expressed in the Project Statement, we hope that the mural exchange would be a path to world peace.

We decided that cooperative community mural making was a natural vehicle for this project since community murals are instrumentalist in nature, and focus on social or community-related issues (T. Anderson, 1985). We felt that an emphasis on group identity and cooperative problem solving was particularly significant for the peace mural exchange. This aspect, in fact, became a key factor in my own examination of some similarities and differences between Japanese and United States society.

The Tallahassee Peace Mural

As the project evolved it became apparent to all of us that peace in the world is not simply a United States-Japan issue. Consequently, Professor Abe and Arts Japan brought France, Korea, Papua New Guinea, India, and Nepal into the project and I recruited teams in Kuwait, Canada, Australia, and other parts of the United States to participate. We continue to recruit sites as of this writing. The first mural, executed in Tallahassee, Florida, in July, 1995, was exhibited at Space Gallery in Tallahassee and then was sent to Japan as a stimulus for the workshop there. Then both murals were displayed at the Tokushima Museum of Modern Art before being sent on to Korea where adult leaders used them as stimulation for a third children’s workshop. All three murals were displayed in Korea, then sent on to Nepal, and so on. The final destination for the murals will be at the Hiroshima Museum of Modern Art as part of a children’s international peace festival in 1998. If readers would like to get involved, I invite you to view the Art Japan web site for information and images at http://www.express.co.jp, and then to e-mail Tadashi Yasuda at yasuda@mbox.kyoto-inet.or.jp
To execute the Tallahassee mural, I recruited an adult mural team consisting of artistic director Linda Hall, an established community-oriented muralist, and four undergraduate Florida State University art education majors. The children’s team consisted primarily of fifteen mural painting veterans recruited from the Fourth Avenue Cultural Enrichment (FACE) program directed by Jill Harper. These children, between the ages of nine and fifteen, had created several inner city murals already. Completing the core team were five children representing socio-economically privileged lifestyles. With the cooperation of Director Gay Drennon, we were also able to gain participation from the week-long Very Special Arts Florida Festival at the 621 Gallery, where the participants painted the mural. Thus, about 75 to 100 Very Special Arts participants also contributed to the mural. In this sense, the Tallahassee workshop was consciously inclusive, community-based, locally specific in its design, and directed to socially instrumental purposes. We wanted to provide empowerment and validation to as many types of children as possible through this project. To borrow an over-used cliché, it was our philosophy to “think globally and act locally.”

We began the workshop with a presentation to the core mural team about World War II and particularly about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Beyond the obvious point of wanting the children to know what we were doing and why it was important, we also wanted them to know who else was participating, to whom they were sending the mural, and for what reasons. Toward that end, Maruyama Yasushi, a native of Hiroshima, told the children about the effects of the atomic bomb and about Hiroshima then and now. Ide Kumiko, a native of Tokyo, described to the children about what life is like for a child in Japan, and particularly what the children to whom we would send the mural are like. We discussed war and peace and their causes, what Japanese children like to do, and how they spend their time. To illustrate a popular Japanese belief and activity, Kumiko led an impromptu lesson on how to fold an origami crane.

At that point, through cooperative interaction between the children and adult mural team members, the theme of the Tallahassee mural began to crystallize. We decided that we could only achieve peace when we understand one another. What could we do to help the children of Japan understand who we are and what we like to do? We decided we could symbolically send gifts to the children in Japan that would help them understand what we value. To portray who we are, we decided
to paint self portraits holding the things that we care about most. These would be our gifts of peace. *A Gift of Peace* became our theme and title. In another discussion we generated a list of possible gifts that described our character, particularly through objects and activities that the children valued. Further discussion centered on how we would send these gifts to Japan. One adult team member suggested that the children could fly, like in the book, *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991). Many of the children knew this story and agreed enthusiastically. Children then rendered themselves on paper, taking off and flying, carrying gifts which included, among other things, peace signs, fried chicken and French fries, a chocolate milk shake, skateboards, a rap C.D., kittens, U.S. flags, sports equipment, *Nike* tennis shoes, and a *Sweet Valley Twins* novel.

We painted the mural over the course of about a week, during which time children with special needs visited the 621 Gallery workspace and engaged in mural making and in other activities. Inspired again by Faith Ringgold, the adult mural team decided to use her quilting device as a compositional structure to give everyone equal access to expressing themselves in the mural, and to create a product of high aesthetic quality. The solution was to give each special arts student a square of his or her own which together formed the border around the main composition. Many of these exceptional needs children executed symbolic gifts to send to Japan including peace signs, a steel drum in [sic] C.D., kittens, the U.S. flag, a lizard, and flowers.

The Tallahassee mural process, then, was one in which an adult mural team provided the broad theme of peace, the media, some of the conceptual foundations, and some of the compositional structure. Children, in cooperation with the adults, developed the specific theme and title, *A Gift of Peace*, and the specific content and imagery that fit the theme.

The opening exhibition at the *Space Gallery* was accompanied by West African drumming and dancing, celebrating the *FACE* team’s African-American roots. The Tallahassee mural workshop was a process that celebrated the multiple identities, abilities, and cultures of America, and the empowerment of each in the pursuit of the universal theme of world peace.

Professor Abe came from Japan to videotape the Tallahassee workshop for his research. In addition, *Art Japan* hired a professional
video crew from Florida-based *Seminole Productions* to provide raw footage for a future documentary on the project. I slowly became aware, as I will discuss later, that this desire for documentation was a higher priority for the Japanese than for the Tallahassee group.

**The Tokushima Peace Mural**

At the invitation of *Art Japan*, I took the Tallahassee children’s mural to Japan, where I joined and observed the Japanese children’s peace mural workshop. The workshop was held at the *Tokushima Museum of Modern Art*. I found the facilities and resources mustered for this project impressive. The working spaces in Florida, a classroom at *Florida State University* and the non-air conditioned space at the *621 Gallery* in Tallahassee’s *Railroad Square Art District*, paled in comparison to workshop and display space in the gleaming, almost new, Tokushima Museum of Modern Art. Support for the Japanese Children’s Peace Mural Project was remarkable. The *Tokushima Museum of Modern Art* provided an air conditioned, 40 foot by 80 foot workspace, three museum staff members, a full-time curator, and two assistants. The entire floor in the Tokushima Museum workshop space was covered with blue plastic tarp. The museum supplied a canvas that was cut and professionally sewn to the right dimensions at a factory, and provided state-of-the-art brushes and supplies. *Sakura Corporation* supplied paint for the entire project. This was in sharp contrast to the Tallahassee experience, which many art educators in the United States will recognize as typical (i.e., scrambling for everything and working on a shoestring). The resources directed to this project in Japan, and to Japanese arts and culture in general, I perceived as phenomenal.

The process of the Tokushima workshop differed from the Tallahassee workshop in interesting ways. For example, the adult mural team members spent considerably more time consulting and achieving consensus than the Tallahassee team. In Tallahassee, Linda Hall and I met a couple of times before the children’s workshop to talk about format, theme, and strategy. We discussed the mural a couple more times on the phone. We assigned the rest of the adult mural team, consisting of the Japanese presenters and four art education students, their tasks. Working from a bare-bones conceptual foundation, we made many of our decisions about content, form, and strategy spontaneously and “on the fly” during the course of the week-long workshop. That choices were made in a spontaneous, open-ended manner meant that the final form and content of the Tallahassee mural was not known
until the mural was completed.

The Tallahassee process was open-ended in terms of participants’ roles. Certain members of the adult mural team were more interested and involved than others and took on more central roles. Likewise, children became more central or more peripheral depending on their level of interest. This fluid definition of who would do what and how much affected the outcome. For example, the borders that we had reserved for the use of Very Special Arts students were partially painted by core mural team members who wanted to do more, and the main composition was partially painted by special students who had the skills and the desire. This open ended and divergent process at times resulted in a rather chaotic process, but we believed that it also gave everyone more opportunity to contribute and to take ownership of the mural. Probably the mural workshop process would not qualify as Banks’ (Banks & McGee-Banks, 1989) fourth stage or Sleeter and Grant’s (1987) fifth stage, in which the students construct the issues. But certainly Banks’ third stage and Sleeter and Grant’s fourth were utilized in that students were led through a pre-existing problem to recognize and respond to intercultural issues such as identity, prejudice, and empowerment (Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1997).

In Tokushima, the process seemed formalized and deliberate. Both adults’ and children’s roles were more narrowly defined than in Tallahassee. Everyone knew their roles in the project at the onset. These roles remained constant. The process of consultation was almost ritualistic. The adult mural team met frequently, and at some length, every day before the children came and after they left. All adult team members had the opportunity to contribute and to inform the consensual decisions that the group made on all significant aspects of the project prior to action. The children were also integrated into the consensus building and decision making process in a much more formalized manner than in the U.S. workshop. Unlike the workshop in Tallahassee, there were formal sessions that began and ended each studio experience in which the children expressed their opinions about what the content of the mural should be and how that content should be expressed. In short there was an attempt to gain consensus from the workers at each stage of the process. Over time, I understood how important these meetings and full attendance was to the practice of consensus in Japanese society (Davidson, 1993; Nakane, 1970).
The Japanese children’s mural proceeded in an orderly fashion. With the help of translators, I observed that the major structural components as well as the processes were formulated in advance. Every step was planned through group consensus. Individual spontaneous decision making in the heat of the process was neither a desirable nor an accommodated behavior. The mural team did not welcome surprises in form or process. Innovation during the mural making process required group consensus. The Tokushima team was more aware than the Tallahassee team of how one change affects the whole. These impressions were later verified by research on Japanese culture (Crump, 1989; DeMente, 1993; Kerr, 1996; Nakane, 1970).

The Japanese children worked more cooperatively than the United States children. They worked in groups while the children in the United States worked either singly or in pairs. Other studies support my observation of cooperation and obligation as highly valued among Japanese people (deMente, 1993; Nakane, 1970). For example the United States sense of individual ownership was expressed by one Tallahassee child when she said to another child about her self portrait, “This is my picture, don’t touch it.” My limited Japanese language skills prevented full confirmation, but I did not detect this attitude expressed by the Japanese children. Their postures, interactions, and words (translated by my interpreters) suggested that the children were familiar with cooperative group work. Although individual Japanese children did initiate images and ideas in the planning sessions, it was the norm during the actual painting process for children to work on components of the mural together. The only time Tallahassee children worked on the same section was while painting the background, a task that the children acted as if it was a bothersome necessity to be dispensed with before they got to the “real stuff”—their own individual expressions of self.

Another marked difference between the Tallahassee and Tokushima mural projects was media coverage, which was more important to the Japanese team. While my impressions may be skewed by the fact that Art Japan was the primary sponsor of the project, my perception was that in the Japanese project the media coverage was as important or possibly more important than the event itself: almost as if there were no point in doing it if it were not broadcasted on television. Several times, for example, I, as well as others, had to move or stop engaging in what we were doing on the project because the video crews felt we
interfered with the media coverage. An elaborate ten foot high video stand was installed for aerial shots of the children working. *Art Japan* spent many thousands of dollars on videotaping the mural making events in Tallahassee and in Tokushima. At times it seemed to me that documentation was a primary purpose of the project for *Art Japan*.

There also was a different attitude toward and by the commercial media in Tokushima than in Tallahassee. I experienced a sincerity and earnestness in the Japanese media that was unlike the more manipulative United States commercial sound bite-and-visual-overload strategies of minimal substantive content. In Tallahassee, the team viewed the arrival of the local news crew as an annoyance, a necessary evil, and a slow-down of the work at hand. The news team seemed to be looking for a quote with “punch” and a sympathetic image of a *Very Special Arts* child rather than trying to convey the purpose of the project. Their 15 minutes on the scene resulted in a 30 second segment on the eleven o’clock news. I watched it but did not videotape it, and was surprised that this disappointed Mr. Abe. In Tokushima, three network teams were there for the entire workshop over a period of a week, and there was extended coverage in primetime. There were so many cameras and media people that I was surprised that they could videotape the event without filming each other. Every nuance was filmed and refilmed from numerous angles. The crew interviewed everyone involved in the project. In fact, it turned out that one of my primary responsibilities in Japan was to be interviewed! *Arts Japan* orchestrated it all. The commercial media had to ask permission to film. I sensed the power that *Art Japan* held not only over the other media but over the project itself. The media coverage was, in a sense, constructing reality not only in the ephemeral world of electronically produced light and sound, but in the real temporal and spatial world of people and canvas. Perhaps for the Japanese, the video documentation helped to prove that the experience existed. (But then maybe this paper and the presentations I have given on the peace mural project serve a similar function in North American culture?)

### An Analysis of the Murals in Their Cultural Contexts

With the exception of the continent of North America and the islands of Japan, the largest and most dominant elements in the Tallahassee mural are the individual children’s portraits. These portraits,
flying with gifts, serve as the compositional focus of the mural. Many portraits are life-size, and through their very size, dominate the area around them. Overall, the mural gives a sense of being one composition, tied together by the horizon line, contracurved banner, figures flying all one direction from right to left almost as though in formation, and by the quilt-like frame of squares. (See Figure 1.)

The Japanese mural consists of five dominant compositional elements: a half globe, a giant rainbow repeating the Earth’s curve, a partially visible red sun in the top left corner, an immense tree with its roots extending down into the ocean, a hot air balloon with an Asian and a Caucasian child in it, and a large yellow banner with a message of peace in Kanji script. There is no empty space in this mural. Every inch is packed with imagery. The mural has multiple foci, compositionally created by repeating curved structural components that center the eye alternately in different areas of the composition, none of which dominate the others long enough to hold the eye indefinitely. There is not one line of movement or one primary area of focus that stands out above the rest. The detailed content of the mural reinforces this, providing the eye with many choices. The overall sense is one of density in which no individual image dominates. The multiple images seamlessly mesh into one unified decorative design. (See Figure 2.)

The most obvious difference reflected in the processes, imagery, and compositions of the two murals is a Japanese collectivist versus United States individualist sensibility (DeMente, 1993; Hendry, 1986; Nakane, 1972; Tames, 1993). John Dewey described an American sense of society when he said, “society is an organic union of individuals . . . [and] the individual to be educated is a social individual” (McDermott, 1973, p. 445). Embedded in this belief is the Cartesian, Humanist notion that the rational individual is the center of social authority (Bowers, 1987); is free to make choices in the personal and social spheres according to his or her own inner, felt, rational decisions; and should remain uncompromised by external social restrictions. It is within this philosophical context of Liberal Humanism that Dewey states, “the child’s own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting point for all education” (McDermott, 1973, p. 444). The welfare of the group is best served, according to Dewey, not by the application of external social convention on the developing individual, but by the application of that individual’s freely developing powers to the problems of society. Although Dewey recognized that we are social animals, he believed, and American society and its educational institutions have largely
Anderson integrated his beliefs, that education should begin with the individual, rather than through "forced and external process" that subordinates the "freedom of the individual to a preconceived social and political status" (McDermott, p. 444). Variations on this theme are echoed in both the conservative and liberal camps in North American art education. For example, in his introduction to the *Educational Imagination*, Elliot Eisner (1995) questions whether the one-size-fits-all sensibility of the *America 2000 Goals* is appropriate for a nation as diverse as the United States. Likewise, Peter London in *No More Second Hand Art* (1989) extols the virtue of centering instruction in individual student sensibilities.

The Tallahassee children’s mural and the process of creation reflect an individualist reality. In the Tallahassee mural, each representation was chosen and executed by an individual and represented that person’s content choices, stylistic sensibility, and level of skill or talent. Likewise, the theme itself was individualistic. It may appear egotistical from a non-North American point of view to present personal, favorite items to help others understand who we are as individuals. Visually, the individual portraits which dominate the mural are separate and distinct, and stand starkly against an otherwise almost empty background. Yet collectively, in their individuality, they define a group sensibility. Individual expression is highlighted while still adhering and contributing to the collective theme and composition. Overall, then, the U.S. mural had the spirit of a collection of individuals cooperating within a loosely agreed upon structure.

This sense of individualistic treatment is enhanced by the varying levels of talent and differing developmental stages evident. Some sections, particularly some of the border squares, may seem inadequate under classic “school art” criteria (Efland, 1976). The Tallahassee adults welcomed the children’s individual expressions, whatever their content or talent level. We assumed, possibly naively, that each child was doing his or her best, and, thus the image represented the child’s participation and empowerment as an individual. Unless it was severely detrimental to the mural’s final form and purpose, all images were allowed and individuals were free to express what they willed. The resulting unevenness, rather than a detriment, was seen as an authentic representation of the process and a validation of children’s art accounting for multiple developmental and talent levels. The adult mural team saw it as less directive and restrictive in nature, and as representing a democratic process in which each child participated.
Figure 1. The Tallahassee Mural, *Kids’ Guernica*, 25’ x 12’, July 1995, *The Florida State University*, USA. Reproduced with permission by *Art Japan Network*. 
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Helping children recognize a global concept of peace was our achieved goal. However, individual and local outcome were also valued. The most highly valued local outcome was that children from the inner city, from privileged suburban lives, and those with special needs were united in purpose by the act of creating an international peace mural. They learned to work as a team, and with the adults, and to experience individually the cooperation, difference, and compromise that is so critical to individual relations as well as peace between nations. Artistically, the children learned to make design and color choices and to alter those choices. The most difficult lesson for many of the children was the occasional sublimation of their own individual creative and compositional drives and choices. The Tallahassee mural process primarily exhibited individualism. It should be noted that this concept of rugged individualism held dear by U.S. citizens and personified in the Tallahassee mural holds only to a point, beyond which it becomes a caricature or stereotype and breaks down. Certainly cooperation is necessary in all societies.

On the issue of stereotype, my first uneducated impression on viewing the completed Japanese mural was that it was also stereotypical, but in a different way. It seemed conventional in its images of balloons and flowers and wide-eyed, “Keene-like” children swinging from rainbows and holding hands, too cute for my taste, and too evenly controlled to be interesting. At that point I was seeing Japanese imagery through unsensitized North American eyes. Further reflection, however, has led me to modify my assessment. From the Japanese perspective, convention is a highly desirable quality, the result of doing something correctly and according to form (deMente, 1993; Mura, 1991; Nakane, 1970). An analysis of form and the process of forming illustrates some of these differences between educational norms rising from the cultures of Tokushima and Tallahassee.

Education and Culture in the United States and Japan

Japanese and United States citizens hold almost opposite views of the relationship of the individual and society (deMente, 1993; Hendry, 1986; Nakane, 1970). As in most traditional or indigenous societies, the ultimate source of social authority for the Japanese lies not with the individual, but with the group (Bowers, 1987). In spite of a feudal history that ended only 50 years ago, Japanese culture is highly articulated in social roles, hierarchy, specialization, and is complex by world standards
(DeMente, 1993). On the other hand, due to their geographical isolation and separatist proclivities, they are the largest homogenous culture on Earth. In this sense they are a tribal international power. Japan is one of the most interesting anomalies in the world: a complex, modern, world class society permeated by the conservative, authority-oriented, and tradition-driven values and mores of indigenous societies.

**Shikata and Shitsuke: Two Japanese Perspectives**

A useful perspective to understand the Japanese mural process is represented in the *shikata*, one of the most important concepts in Japanese culture. *Shikata*, or *kata* for short, literally means “way of doing things” (DeMente, 1993). It refers to the proper form and order of doing things with an emphasis on people serving and supporting one another, particularly as determined by hierarchical social structures that have been in place since feudal times. As novelist Abe (1964/91) stated, “Obligation is a man’s passport among his fellow men” (p. 127). I suggested to a Japanese graduate student that this collective obligation might be the source of the collective wealth I observed in the Tokushima Art Museum. Agreeing enthusiastically, she suggested that it was also a factor in less individual wealth among Japanese people than among United States citizens.

According to some cross-cultural scholars, the Japanese do not have a philosophy in the Western idealist sense (Bouvier, 1992; DeMente, 1993). However, *shikata* might be the Japanese version of epistemology. The inner order (the individual heart) and the natural outer order of the cosmos are connected in Japanese metaphysics through appropriate “form” or actions on the part of the individual. This form, the *kata*, then, is the means through which individuals connect to society. According to DeMente (1993), the challenge for each individual is to know one’s true heart, or *honshin*, and to act in accordance with it through following the *kata*. Over the centuries doing things the right way, utilizing the various *kata* as guides, has been sanctified, ritualized, and equated with morality. Not following the *kata* is a moral offense against society. Form thus becomes ethics, and policy (i.e, a way of doing things) becomes principle (DeMente, 1993).

Education in Japan, then, centers on the primacy of the group, not the individual. The Japanese word for child rearing and early training
is *shitsuke*, which refers to the passing of customs and correct behaviors (Hendry, 1986). Interestingly, also embedded within the Kanji character designating this concept is the idea of the human body and of beauty, the aesthetic component implying that one’s correct action or form is beauty. This attention to aesthetically framed form as philosophy is the quality that makes some observers think of the Japanese as the most aesthetic people in the world (DeMente, 1993). This beautifying of both the body and the heart through correct action also signifies the valuing of mutual dependence (i.e., *amae*) in Japanese society and education, as opposed to the Western emphasis on independence. In Japan, the most highly prized qualities for students to attain are compliancy and harmonious behavior. Overall, *shitsuke* embraces the belief that the societal expectations shape the child. The individual is to serve and be subservient to the group. Thus the goal of education in Japan is to raise children to be ordinary or average, and similar to other people. The Japanese have an adage that illustrates this: “A sticking up nail should be knocked in and a bent one straightened” (Hendry, 1986; Tames, 1993).

This same tendency is in Japanese art. Mura (1991), in critically analyzing Japanese Noh theater, observed that one element does not stand out above the others. Mura generalized that “Japanese culture eschews a center of focus. The Japanese mode of perception is more amorphous, more intuitive than that of the Westerners, fluid, not fixed” (p. 209). This avoidance of a center of attention in the arts and in educational practices reflect a cultural tendency in Japan to be a part of the group and to not stand out above the others.

Finally, an emphasis on form may be seen by many North Americans as Japanese aestheticism, what Mura (1993) describes as “an aesthetics of surface, of outside appearance” (p. 20). According to Mura, the Japanese “place far more value on surface beauty and appearance, than the depth seeking and morally conscious Americans” (p. 35). This emphasis on form, however, does not imply a lack of rigor or depth, only a different focus. It is not a shallow and superficial concern with form as might be interpreted from a Western perspective but a deep and abiding sense of form as substance (DeMente, 1993). In addition, the traditional concern with form required that each vocation or skill was reduced to basic elements that were classified or labeled in relation to their role in making up the whole. Learning, then, consisted of incorporating the mastering of basic components in a codified order and manner. In this
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\textit{kata} the goal is not minimal functionalism, but absolute perfection.

Mason's (1994) analysis of art education in Japan confirms that many of these qualities are integrated into the curriculum. Standardization is institutionalized through The Ministry of Education's national curriculum for all grades. According to Mason the curriculum stresses composition in painting and the understanding of formal elements, as well as observation and the proper use of tools. She also confirmed that the exacting nature of studio process and level of expected technical competency are at the heart of the art curriculum. Self expression is a secondary concern that is only acceptable in the proper form and at the proper level of skill. Japanese educators do not accept free expression that is not technically of high standards. Texts describe the "right" way to do things. Knowledge and skills are formally presented toward the group rather than individually oriented. Teachers expect that tasks will be performed correctly rather than creatively.

Seen in this context, the Japanese children's mural is an excellent paradigm reflecting the values of its genesis. In terms of its general structure and composition there is greater uniformity in the Japanese mural, the whole appears more homogenous, and of a more collective mind than the American mural. The theme and treatment of the theme are collectively rather than individually oriented. The imagery and composition conform to the \textit{shikata}. There are no sloppy passages. There is a uniformly high level of skill in composition and rendering. There are multiple, mutually reinforcing centers of interest, none of which dominate the others, and there is conventional imagery that will not call attention to itself above other elements. This is reinforced by a lack of individual portraiture, each figure being relatively generic, proportionately small, and in a sense stereotypical—meaning that they are conventional and standardized in type, rather than individualistic. Rising from these qualities and from the density of content, one perceives a sense of uniformity—a collective equality. In short, there are no nails to pound down.

From a Japanese perspective, then, the uniformity that I initially considered "cute" was remarkably accomplished children’s art in the Japanese context. It represented a uniformly high level of skill and in physical and procedural form it followed correctly from master paradigms. Ironically, one of the paradigms used by the Japanese team was the U.S. mural project. I wondered what they thought of the
pre-schematic scribbles on the borders of the Tallahassee mural. The Japanese copied many qualities from the mural done in Tallahassee, but not that. I suspect now that certain of our practices and compositional features must have left them aghast.

**Shikata and (Selective) Imitation**

The Japanese are frequently thought of as the world’s greatest imitators (deMente, 1993). It only follows that if correct form is of fundamental importance, then the ability to copy would be a highly desirable and refined skill. But as Tames (1993) suggested, we only need to look at the uniqueness and complexity of Japanese culture to recognize the stereotype of the “copycat Japanese” is superficial and artificial. Not that they do not copy. They do. Bouvier (1992) and Tames (1993) report on the Japanese’ first encounter with the Dutch in the 1500s, seeing their first gun, and having reproduced it six months later. That in itself is remarkable, but what may be overlooked is what the Japanese did not copy. They took what they thought would be useful, and eschewed the rest. They had no use, for example, for the Christianity that the Dutch were so eager for them to adopt. That the Japanese freely admit to being a borrowing culture tends to overshadow that they assimilate consciously, selectively, and intelligently. It also obscures that they make their own what they borrow. They have modified Chinese characters to present uniquely Japanese concepts and Korean ceramics became the famous Japanese pottery. More recently, they copied German cameras and American automobiles, which the Japanese made into Nikons and Toyotas, products which were distinctly better than the models from which they were working. Bouvier (1992) described that the Japanese expansion in the Pacific, resulting in World War II, was patterned exactly on what they learned from the colonial practices of the European powers.

In an art museum in Wakayama, I pointed to a work that both Professor Abe and I thought was Italian Futurist. When we learned that it was created by a Japanese artist, I commented on the Japanese talent for copying. Professor Abe agreed, then self deprecatingly said, “Like a monkey.” Perhaps neither the Japanese nor many outside observers recognize the Japanese creativity in adapting what is borrowed and improving on it to meet their own needs. It is not like a monkey at all. Their relentless pursuit of excellence in form becomes a source of innovation, not rising from individual creativity as in the West, but as
a result of a collective focus on the perfection of form itself, through shikata. Their creativity as McRorie (personal communication, 1996) stated, lies in the refining moment rather than the defining moment.

This quality is readily apparent in the children’s peace mural project. The Japanese drive to “correct” (as opposed to innovative) form led Professor Abe to me, a mural expert according to the vita he had seen. In the workshop that he directed, he liberally and unashamedly copied many elements of the form and process, but also left much out—notably the philosophical underpinnings and individualist approach he knew was unsuitable in the Japanese educational context. Making the mural process and product suitably Japanese resulted in technical as well as procedural innovations, and in a smoother, more polished final product. The technical and procedural aspects that had at first seemed superficially “merely” form, I now recognize as deep content that expresses a cosmology and epistemology.

Lessons To Be Learned About Peace and People

What broader implications and/or lessons can be drawn from this toward the project’s end goal of peace through understanding? “The Japanese see themselves largely as Westerners see them—polite, loyal, hard-working, conformist and not profoundly inventive” as well as clean, kind, and with a refined aesthetic sense” (Tames, 1993, p. 1). They also see themselves as warm, impulsive, and sentimental. They perceive Westerners as cold, calculating, and unfathomable. Huh? Wait a minute, that second part is all reversed! Isn’t it? I have heard many times a North American describe the Japanese as coldly inscrutable, two-faced, untrustworthy people who will tell you anything and never keep (the principle of) their word. Or is there a different driving principle involved? The Japanese follow the harmony principle called wah and will not directly say “no” to a request. In the month or so that I have spent in my two trips to Japan, I never heard the word “no.” It just is not used. It is improper form. But that does not mean that your request has not been denied. (And from the Japanese perspective, how could you trust someone who does not even understand good form?) The point is that, as Lacan (Sarup, 1993) stated, the language (culture) that speaks the individual rather than the individual that speaks the language. Understanding each other’s forms of expression is crucial for the deeper understanding that can result in peace.
On my last night in Japan, the core mural team was riding the train back from Tokushima to Osaka. We were discussing what we all believed to be core differences between Japanese and North Americans.

“We Japanese believe in loyalty.” “So do we,” I said, and added, “We also believe in honesty and integrity in keeping your commitments.” “So do we in Japan,” and so on until we all just stopped and looked at each other. We could not find any deep, fundamental value on which we disagreed. Finally one of our team members said, “Well maybe we’re not as different as we thought.” The sense of “Otherness” was gone. Having worked together for weeks for the common good, across cultures, and in spite of many false starts and misunderstandings, we really were, in fact, a team.

It would be easy to conclude here that we are all alike under the skin, but I do not want to end this paper with some sort of saccharin platitude, because we are definitely not alike. But we are all people. And we do have, it appears, some universal impulses, like loyalty to the group and honesty and integrity, and the drive to make art. These impulses take different forms in different circumstances and in different cultures. That’s the rub. It’s the form that counts after all. We take on the ability to engage in (Sarup, 1993; Wilson, 1988) and understand (R. Anderson, 1990) symbolic communication by being embedded in a particular culture. Beyond substance, it is the manner in which something is presented that allows us access to the inner life of the other. Or keeps us out.

A major difference between the United States citizens and the Japanese is in the sense of how things are done (deMente, 1993; Mura, 1991; Nakane, 1970). As two of the greatest powers in a shrinking world where many of the missiles of destruction are still aimed, it is vitally important that we understand and respect each other. It is important that we recognize that we are distinct cultural types, maybe the most extreme opposites in the world. I believe it is also vitally important to understand that the extreme stereotypes of belief that pit one cultural group against another, tribe against tribe, are no longer a survival mechanism, but a detriment to the survival of us all. Art has been instrumental in focusing group attention through aesthetic means on those values, mores, and ways of doing things critical to a group’s survival (Dissanayake, 1988). Understanding a culture’s ways through making and examining artworks interculturally, then, may indeed be a bridge to world peace. Or maybe it’s too grandiose to think of this...
project as a bridge of peace. Maybe it is a plank or a nail. But the idea of intercultural understanding toward world peace is a worthy goal. Maybe the fiftieth anniversary of Hiroshima is as good a place to start as any. Can we hope that in hammering this sticking-up nail we will bind two of potentially many planks on a bridge to peace?

References


A Mountain Cultural Curriculum: Telling Our Story

Christine Ballengee Morris

Abstract

Jim Wayne Miller, professor of English at Western Kentucky University, declared that school children in West Virginia have more exposure to other cultures than they do to their own. His concern was that, “Lack of knowledge about the area’s history helps perpetuate negative stereotypes about the region’s mountain people” (Associated Press, 1994). If the Mountain Culture, to which many of the students belong, is not reflected in the curriculum, their identity, voice, heritage, history, and arts are censored and the Mountain Cultural youth are rendered invisible in their own state. Results from a survey of three elementary schools located in three counties in West Virginia served as the impetus to develop and implement curricular changes to include Mountain Culture. In this paper, I describe a case study of one elementary school’s use of social reconstruction pedagogy. The project, “Telling Our Story,” was implemented in 1995 and 1996 at a rural school in a small West Virginia strip mining community. My husband, David, and I served as Mountain Cultural artists in residence. My role in this project was a participant-observer. My husband and I are from the Mountain
Culture and learned our art forms from our elders in the home and/or community. The project utilized issues of the community, Mountain Cultural arts, and labor history.

**Introduction**

The Mountain Culture is a response to the geographical land forms, occupations, resistance, oppression, social change, political dynamics, and stereotypic representations of the culture. These components create beliefs, ways of life, traditions, actions, reactions, and art (Morris, 1996). The diverse art forms include ballads, songs, dance, visual art, storytelling, and poetry that tell stories about people, events, and religious beliefs. In Lucy R. Lippard’s (1990) exploration of folk art from various cultures, she concluded, “Folk arts has been defined as art that reflects its surroundings. These artists provide intricate maps of reality of daily and spiritual life” (p. 77). In the Mountain Culture, the art forms are passed orally from one generation to the next. The tradition of teaching the art forms includes stories that put the art form, the maker, skills, and medium into context. David Novitz (1992), a philosopher, views stories as part of the art.

It is not just that we have “images,” “pictures,” and “views” of ourselves which are more or less “balanced,” “colorful,” or “unified,” but that we also have “stories” and “narratives” to tell about our lives which both shape and convey our sense of self. (p. 86)

The elementary school that participated in the case study is located in a small rural community. Since the development of automated coal mining and the decline of the railroad system, the once prosperous community’s population and job opportunities have dwindled. Many subsist below the poverty line. The majority of the students are from the Mountain Culture whose families have lived in the immediate area for two generations or more. The school’s principal gleaned this information through the community’s oral and written history. There

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1In a previous study, I interviewed 16 West Virginia Mountain Cultural artists. I asked them to define Mountain Culture, the art forms from that culture, and the methods of teaching (Morris, 1996). Their definitions were used for this paper and project.
were five classroom teachers, one physical educator, and one part-time art educator. Out of the seven teachers, only two, the physical and art educators were from West Virginia. The school is considered the center of the community. Parent participation is high and a town/school reunion is held every other summer. David Morris and I were artists in residence at the school in 1994. The principal received a grant to implement school-wide thematic curricula in 1995 and 1996, and hired David and I as coordinators and artists for one of the projects.

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, I define the multicultural approach that I utilized. In the second section, I describe the development and implementation of the Mountain Cultural curriculum. In the third section, I focus on examples of lessons and activities. In the fourth section, I explore the evaluations of the project from the students’, parents’, artists’, and teachers’ views. This case study of incorporating Mountain Culture in West Virginia’s public education is an example of social reconstruction and multicultural education through the traditions of the Mountain Culture.

**Pedagogy and Multiple Perspectives**

Prior to discussing the Mountain Cultural curriculum, I will establish an understanding of the terms “culture,” “multiple cultures,” and “multicultural education” as applied in this project. Fairchild (1970) states that culture encompasses “all behavior patterns socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols” (p. 80). By extension culture includes customs, techniques, beliefs, institutions, and material objects. Garcia and Pugh (1992) conceive of culture as “a kind of argument that stems from certain premises or given conditions, both material and nonmaterial” (p. 218). Owens (1987) believes that culture represents values, or what one thinks is important, beliefs, or what one thinks is true, and norms, or how one acts. Davidman (1995) offers the notion of social or cultural groups as any group having

an identity or label which is recognized or created in a macroculture (from within or outside the social group . . . [T]his is the case because its identity and label are facts which are negotiated or given meaning within that specific macroculture. (p. 10)
Davidman (1995) also observes that cultural groups may have identity in one macroculture but not another. We can consider these conceptions of culture at various levels, including perspectives of individual, family, and community.

The goals of multicultural education in general have broadened from their initial intent to address issues of civil rights and racism in the 1960s and 1970s to a reform movement that includes issues related to ethnicity, gender, class, language, ability, and age. Banks (1993) identifies content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure as dimensions of multicultural education. In a sociopolitical context, Nieto (1992) asserts that, “Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism” (p. 208). Nieto’s concept of multicultural education centers around critical pedagogy, in which social change becomes the ultimate goal. In striving to achieve such goals, Nieto (1992) assumes that multicultural education is for everyone without exception. Teachers should not be the sole recipients of criticism for student failure, since schools, communities, and society in general, are inseparable.

Sleeter (1989) conceptualizes multicultural education as one which seeks to develop political resistance to oppression, and believes that the tasks of multicultural education should be to:

1. Articulate more clearly what social changes are desired, and to clarify the relative importance of addressing individual prejudice and stereotyping versus inequality among groups.

2. Delineate exactly who is struggling against whom over what, and develop strategies to promote solidarity and a clear sense of an agenda for social action.

3. Develop organizational structures that articulate and promote the goals of multicultural education and social movements with which it is connected.
4. Study the politics of social change and translate this into teaching approaches for classroom use.

5. Systematize insights into educational organizational structures, curriculum, and instruction in a developmental fashion. (pp. 66-68)

This approach to multicultural education reflects a social reconstructivist mindset, one which critiques contemporary culture from an orientation that addresses issues of oppression and social structural inequality.

My conception of education that imbues elements of multiple cultures and perspectives evolves from my own teaching experience and the writings of these educators and researchers. Taken collectively, the models of multicultural education indicated the need for the following guidelines in the design and implementation of the Mountain Cultural curriculum:

1. Multicultural education is basic to all learning experiences.

2. Participatory interaction is encouraged of all learners.


4. Multiplicity of problems and solutions is recognized.

5. Assumptions of language, communication, behavior, and power are examined.

Mountain culture traditions and manner of teaching aligns with the social reconstructive multicultural education approach. In my previous study, Mountain Cultural artists referred to a process of learning their art form that included recognizing oppression, valuing resistance, and using the arts as a social tool for reformation (Morris, 1995). The elders and artists of the community were their teachers, and
the schools included these cultural teachers in school functions. The tradition of resistance and exploitation is a central part of the Mountain Culture and artists interpret this tradition in many forms (Morris, 1995). The primary teaching method used in the Mountain Culture is shared stories, observation, and hands-on exploration (Whisnant, 1983; Jones, 1994; Morris 1995). I used these traditions and educational processes as the foundation for pedagogy in the classroom. The Mountain Cultural curriculum involved teachers in a critical examination of the history of the Mountain Cultures’ traditions, rituals, and struggles with colonialists. The objectives were to encourage students’ development of cultural pride, value, sense of place, cultural identity, and voice.

Developing and Implementing a Mountain Cultural Curriculum

In developing the curriculum, the coordinators made decisions regarding the required or encouraged nature of multicultural education and whether separate, sequenced or infused strategies should be applied. At this point in the project, it was important to review previous approaches by the school in exploring cultures and Mountain Culture. One teacher had integrated heritage activities and equated heritage and culture. The heritage approach, as she described it, emphasized “the good ole days,” and addressed activities such as making butter. The idea of exploring the purpose and relevancy of those activities to the children’s lives was not a part of her decision-making process regarding curriculum. Sterilized romantic representations re-define history and ignore injustice, exploitation, and resistance. Because this was the only inclusion of Mountain Culture in their educational system, I concluded that staff development would be the first phase.

At the staff development workshop, I spoke about positive resistance, critical analysis, and critical consciousness; and gave the staff a packet of lesson plans that utilized those components. I introduced art works that expressed socio-cultural issues of the Mountain Culture. The packet also included issues, critical questions, and resources to encourage the teachers to explore beyond the lesson plans. At first, the teachers feared repercussions for teaching about Mountain Culture issues and critical actions. The principal voiced her concerns about viewing and teaching resistance as a positive concept. She spoke about her goal to “squash” such thoughts. To her, resistance and behavioral problems were the same.
I decided that if critical analysis and critical consciousness were going to be a part of this project, I would need to utilize peer coaching. I modeled critical analysis with the students in the teachers’ classrooms while they observed. Afterwards, I met privately with each teacher concerning observations and ways to teach critical thinking. Each teacher observed and met with me for five days over a period of three weeks. We evaluated why some strategies worked well and others did not. Familiarity with the processes helped the teachers feel more comfortable asking questions that might lead to unpredictable student responses.

Previous heritage programs were usually held for one week. I presented Howard Gardner’s (1995) idea that, “It makes far more sense to spend a significant amount of time on key concepts, generative ideas, and essential questions and to allow students to become thoroughly familiar with these notions and their implications to nearly every topic” (p. 208). Since it was the stated goal of the group to teach lifelong skills, the length of time was increased from one week to six weeks. The teachers stated that this would allow them ample time to explore the topics in multiple perspectives and learning styles.

As the coordinator of this six-week project, I had asked both the teachers and David to come prepared to share ideas at a staff development meeting for the purpose of creating a curriculum. We also discussed the importance of including the community in the project to help dissuade the County Board of Education from closing the school. The group decided that a festival and its media coverage would be a good opportunity to introduce resistance to the proposed closing. We agreed that the curriculum themes would be resistance, positive cultural identity, and community pride. We developed the following curriculum guidelines:

1. Examine community issues that affect students.

2. Have students and teachers gather data regarding targeted issues that are reflected in current media and arts including magazines, newspapers, movies, television, cartoons, and books.

3. View, read, and analyze from multiple perspectives and
agendas.

4. Bring in guest speakers such as artists, historical society representatives, labor representatives, and community members.

5. Examine oral, local, regional, state, and world histories regarding chosen issues.

6. Study current and past artistic interpretations, such as poetry, dance, tunes, ballads, plays, and stories that express chosen issues.

7. Based on research, art forms, and discussions, have the students produce a variety of projects that reflect their experience, community, history, heritage, arts, culture, talents, and interests.

8. Evaluate and analyze the educational process by exploring questions such as: Has this experience changed my perspective? What have I learned? How can I take the new knowledge and manifest change for myself, my community, and state?

David and I presented lessons on the occupations of the town, John Henry’s resistance to industrial change, local historical events, and Rocks in My Pockets, a book by Bonnie Collins (1989), about mountain people’s values, ways, and relationship to people from outside their culture. These core materials were integrated into all subjects and explored in a variety of ways. The teachers implemented self-directed community research.

Activities for Social and Cultural Consciousness

In phase two, the classroom teachers chose activities and lessons to introduce the students to the study of their culture(s) and community. All the grades explored: jobs of the past and present, how occupations created the town, food ways, stories, games of the past, and family lore.
The students and teachers completed a variety of projects and explored each one extensively.

In one of the lessons, they explored the theme, “John Henry, man or myth.” The tunnel where John Henry had worked, raced the steam engine, and died is located near this school. The students’ had not explored the importance of John Henry to their lives. The teachers showed a variety of film and animated versions of the John Henry story. Each version was critically examined and compared to the others. From their examination, the students developed several notions. The first was the importance of a story, narrative or written, and how, in this case, the story encouraged multiple artistic interpretations. The second notion involved the way each version and interpretation had a slightly different purpose. The example the students used was a cartoon that portrayed John Henry as a mythical character disregarding historical evidence that he lived, or was at least a compilation of several men. The students compared that version to the Dance Theater of Harlem’s signature piece John Henry. The students saw the dance version as emphasizing strength, courage, and racial tension. This led the students to an exploration of the different reasons people tell stories.

The students and teachers viewed a visual interpretation of John Henry by West Virginia sculptor, Charlie Permelia at Mountain Homestead, a living history museum in Beckley, West Virginia. Permelia depicted building a railroad, digging a tunnel, and the John Henry Steamdrill Race. It comprises 400 separate pieces made from 56 types of wood grown in West Virginia. The trip included a visit to the Exhibition Coal Mine. Students rode a mantrip that goes through a converted mine. An ex-miner served as a guide and told stories about constructing a mine, mining, and mining disasters. Many of the children’s parents and grandparents were and are miners. Prior to this, many of the students spoke about their lack of knowledge about coal mines because they had never seen one. The trip helped them realize what a mine is and what is required to work in one. What they had imagined it would look like compared to what they saw was for many a moving experience. The teachers stated that this led to various classroom discussions and explorations that included labor and union history.

In phase three, David and I integrated their explorations into Mountain Cultural art forms. The objectives were to have students and teachers explore the traditions through documentation, written
formats, visual interpretation, drama, ballad singing, and movement. We emphasized the variety of languages or disciplines that we could utilize to express self, culture, ideas, and life experiences. Students utilized critical analyses in examining the past and representation of the past, such as the story of John Henry and how literature and popular media portrayed John Henry.

The week long residency culminated with a “Community Festival.” The tradition of festivals goes back to the early 1800s and was used as a format that included political, social, and cultural components (Whisnant, 1983). The arts were a tool for social change, an approach that is advocated today by some social and critical theorists as a way to develop social and cultural transformation (Giroux, 1992; Trend, 1992). It was within the tradition of the Mountain Culture that the arts were used as tools to re-establish cultural and social practices, and that the festivals celebrated community, identity, and voice. The stated intention of the principal and teachers was to bring to the community’s attention the Board of Education’s decision to close the school. They hoped that the awareness of the school’s closing and reminder of positive resistance through articulation of voice and community protest would save the school.

The fifth/sixth grade (combination class) wrote a historical, speculative play based on one student’s actual experience of finding a pre-Civil War sword stuck vertically into the ground. With the help of the local historical society and the State archeologist, the students obtained information regarding the town’s involvement in the Civil War, and how a sword was used as a marker to locate buried payroll, important documents, and/or a body. The students used the information to write a play. They cast themselves and wrote their own lines. Students designed and created a backdrop, costumes, and set.

The fourth grade class explored the ballad as an art form, after they enjoyed a ballad that David had sung for them entitled “Barbara Allen.” The story in this old Scottish ballad reveals how a young woman’s jealousy led to the death of the young man who loved her and then to her own death. A rose grew from the lover’s grave and from her grave a briar, which then intertwine. The use of the metaphor and the moral of the story highly motivated the students to hear more ballads. On the whole, the class enjoyed visualizing the action in the ballad stories and were eager to learn the art form of ballad making. The class collected
oral and written histories about their community, and learned to sing the ballad of *John Henry*. Due to the previous in-depth exploration of John Henry, we expanded this study by including a historical examination of how technology affects our lives. We discussed the importance that John Henry’s resistance to modernity has had on the world, and how his resistance did not change technological advancement but encouraged self-determination. The study of John Henry served as an example of the liberation of oppressed people through his ability to empower workers to take pride in their culture and history, and to fight for their rights. His memory and drive were and are used to represent collective groups and unions. Using their experiences and collected information, they wrote a ballad about their community. The students included resistance as a response to the possibility of their school being closed. They viewed their school as the center of their community. In the last verse, the students recognized change but they viewed the change as a natural occurrence that should not keep people from acting like a community:

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We have all seen some change
Nothing stays the same
At our long history we can look
There’s still community
People can’t you see
On Pax we’ll never close the book
(Morris, 1995, p. 196)
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The second/third grades (combination class) concentrated on visual and movement interpretations of the Mountain Culture. They made dancing body self-portraits and learned to flatfoot, a Mountain Cultural dance form. We critically examined the difference between flatfoot dance, as they learned it, and what they had seen in movies, television, and cartoons. In many of the examples viewed, the children felt there was an attempt “to make fun of us.” We discussed reasons why people of the Mountain Culture are ridiculed in popular media. Shows such as *The Beverly Hillbillies*, an episode of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and *Bugs Bunny* were reviewed for their stereotypical representation of the Mountain Culture people. As part of this exploration, we countered the misrepresentation with their observations of their people and place.

The combined class of kindergartners and first graders wrote a
song about occupations in their town and a person in the town that they believed was important to their community. This person was also used as an example of a positive image of the Mountain Culture because she had won the blue ribbon at the West Virginia State Fair in 1994 for her biscuits. It was interesting to note the children’s commentary in their song regarding mining and who gets the coal and who doesn’t.

Fayette County, West Virginia
There’s the little town of Pax
Right through the middle
Runs the railroad track.
The miners mine the coal.
The train wheels roll
And they take away the coal
But they never bring it back.
We grow the gardens, we make the jelly
And we put it on a biscuit made by Phyllis Kelly.
At the Pax Reunion we all gather around
We’re all mighty proud of our home town.
(Morris, 1995, p. 191)

Evaluation

David and I went back to the school nine months later. We visited the classrooms and spoke about stereotypic images of the Mountain Culture—specifically the image and word hillbilly. Nine months earlier, the majority accepted the word hillbilly. A few had internalized some of the characteristics. An example of this was observed when one of the children made a mistake while painting the play backdrop. The child slipped into a southern drawl and stated, “Dah, I’m just a dumb hillbilly.” Several other children who heard this student laughed and repeated the derogatory statement. However, they also voiced their hatred or dismissal of the image. Now, many of the children spoke freely about the image of themselves and their people and what was being projected onto them by popular media’s portrayal of them. We examined the historical, political, and social context of the stereotype—and questioned why the image exists. We discussed possibilities for change and action that would be necessary for transformation to occur.

The students had been familiar with the school rules of no
talking and no movement in the classroom. The Mountain Culture project involved collaboration, talking together, and moving from group to group. Their normal school routine had been replaced with activities that required self control within organized chaos. The teachers responded with their concern regarding students’ response to being called hillbillies. Once the project concluded the teachers’ enforced the prior school rules of no talking or movement in the classroom. Some students had not developed self-discipline. Apparently, on the last day of our residence, an outbreak of negative behavior had occurred that included name calling. For the teachers, this confirmed their belief that exploring resistance leads to fighting. The two fights were enough for the teachers to stop exploring positive resistance. David and I used this opportunity to revisit John Henry’s positive resistance to the Industrial Revolution. John Henry did not stop the Industrial Revolution from occurring, but his courage and determination gave him a voice. We reviewed John Henry’s description of himself as a “natural man,” and what that might have meant to him. The objective was to learn how to assert voice within appropriate behavioral guidelines. Simply stated, no fighting allowed. The children played out “what if” situations, such as, “What if someone called you a dumb hillbilly?” As a group, we analyzed the responses.

At the end of the day, some of the students wanted to review the songs they had learned nine months ago, others wanted to dance, and a few wanted to draw pictures. After a day of group work, it was interesting to note that the students separated into small self-interest groups. David led a sing-a-long. I danced with students, while others sat at tables or on the floor and drew pictures of John Henry, mountains, or portraits of David and me. They had remembered the art, songs, and dance, and that through traditions, strength for resistance is restored. This is the essence of Mountain Cultural curriculum. We taught through the cultural traditions of learning, storytelling, and the arts.

Overall the students were responsive to this approach and each participated in their own way. Parents observed their children doing self-assigned homework. Examples given were:

1. Drew pictures about their day.

2. Interviewed parents and grandparents about Mountain Culture issues.
3. Went to the town library to get books on the project’s themes.

4. Students changed their requests from, “I want to go to the library” to “I need to go because we are studying John Henry.”

The teachers’ evaluations of this project were divided. Immediately following the community festival, the teachers felt the positive energy from the students and parents. The community had responded positively and the press coverage was good. The teachers, at the time, responded with pride in their students and relief that the project came together so well. Two months after the project, their evaluations were still positive and included criticisms that I expected. The teachers complained that the project required too much research, too much time, and left them drained. Some of the specific responses given were:

1. There was no single textbook to consult.

2. During the artists’ week, their schedules changed.

3. Children were too excited and hard to control.

4. Lack of a schedule created discipline problems.

The teachers stated the positive components of the program as:

1. Students that were labeled difficult or learning disabled participated more fully. The teachers attributed this to the oral components such as storytelling and singing.

2. Children seemed to enjoy the self-directing research. Two teachers stated they were surprised that the students actually wanted to explore issues and had anticipated that students would slough it off and do very little work.

3. The community seemed interested and more parents
volunteered to participate than in previous projects.

4. The project was important to the students, personally and educationally. The teachers stated that students talked about their involvement and contributions for months and would refer to the project in classroom discussions connecting their exploration or culture to new topics. One teacher regarded this as annoying and disruptive and a negative component of the program and asked, “What does one issue have to do with the other?”

The teachers and principal stated that they were committed to this pedagogical approach and would continue to explore social, political, historical, and cultural issues. However, for their own comfort, they wanted to review ways to implement stricter discipline and conduct less research while utilizing the Mountain Culture curriculum. The teachers’ criticism of the project was focused on discipline issues and teacher control versus student self-directed behavior. I had not anticipated this conflict, but I conclude that this is a by-product of the principal’s discipline philosophy and policy. Disorder of any type is not tolerated. The principal believed that control over the students’ behaviors was essential to having an efficient and productive school. The principal’s strict disciplinary policies may be due to time constraints since she served as both the school’s principal and the fourth grade teacher. I had not observed the teachers in their classroom prior to our participation. If I had, I believe that I would have been able to identify control over the students as a major objective for the teachers. By identifying this conflict, I could have suggested positive reactions and actions when using a critical student-directed approach to dealing with organized chaos and students’ excitement over the project. The teachers felt a loss of control over their classroom, and reacted by applying more restrictions which created more confusion and frustration for the students. It was difficult for me to believe that teachers would react so negatively to children’s excitement in learning. I observed a real need for classroom management skills. The teachers recognized the conflict in their evaluation but blamed the program. From this I learned that in future applications, knowledge of the school’s discipline philosophy and individual teaching styles is necessary to insure that conflict resolution can be a part of the curricula.

This case study described and interpreted how a school faculty
and community defined and explored cultural identity, history, and the idea of community. In reviewing the evaluations, I concluded that the project met the overall objective which was finding the silenced voice and fostering a sense of cultural identity. Perhaps the most salient suggestion for the field of art education would be for art educators to reconceptualize the notion of multicultural education by viewing multiple cultures and perspectives as an ongoing process that begins with self and filters out. In developing a strong sense of identity, we may view other cultures as broader patterns of similarity and difference. The objective is to eliminate the notions of exotic and romantic from culture and replace it with self-determined voice and respect. Revisiting issues and themes and expanding the explorations by including multiple cultures and perspectives reiterates that culture is always changing. The benefit, of course, for all students, regardless of their ethnic, racial, and cultural background, is to engage in equitable learning.

Conclusion

This case study illustrates the need to help students identify their cultural selves as a foundation for recognizing their inclusion in the discussion of culture and related topics. By constructing personal narratives or coherent life stories, each participant established an important connection to their cultural identity. Stivers (1993) expounds upon this idea, “We find identity and meaning as result of the stories we tell about ourselves or that others tell about us. Therefore, a narrative approach to self-understanding is not a distortion of reality but a confirmation of it” (p. 412). If their story is not included, as in this case when the Mountain Culture is excluded from the majority of schools in West Virginia, the cultural identity and voices of the culture are silenced. The teachers, David, and I discovered that once the students found their voices and felt that they were heard, they had much to express.

References


Morris


The Perception of Non-Perception:
Lessons for Art Education with Downcast Eyes
(Part One: Trompe-L’Oeil and the Question of Radical Evil)

jan jagodzinski

Pretext

The Roman historian Pliny recounts a story that occurred during Periclean Athens. I will utilize this story, as a trope to undertake an interrogation of perception as it is commonly understood and currently practiced by art educators in schools. In order to deconstruct vision/blindness, or the perception/non-perception binary, I have examined the psychoanalytic paradigm of Jacques Lacan. His current interpreters provided the conceptual tools for such an undertaking. Given that the question of representation has become a key sign-post of postmodernism, art educators must conceptualize a trajectory for itself in the 21st century.

Part One of such a trajectory questions the very foundations of the Western Eye. Its heyday of Cartesian perspectivism has now evolved into the postmodern simulacrum which purports to represent the phantasmagoric spectacle, that Jean Baudrillard called the “hyperreal”
world of simulations where the sign of the image refers only to itself in a
system of differences. Perception has been metaphorically characterized
as a “corridor of mirrors,” a *mise en abyme* effect of endless reflection
(Carroll, 1987). The claims to a multi-dimensional and multi-perspectival
knowledge of all phenomenon paradoxically strengthens the status
of an enucleated eye despite the waning of a transcendental gaze. In
*Part One*, I question the validity of the enucleated eye by raising the
“spectre” of desire which can’t be “seen.” I suggest that this “other”
of vision is introduced into the field of vision by the function of the
gaze as Lacan developed it in his *XI Seminar* (1979). He argued that the
field of vision is essentially organized around what cannot be seen and
what appears as a “screen” or a “stain,” a “spot.” Given such a stance,
vision in the postmodern age now becomes complicated by an ethics
of blindness (cf. Emmanuel Levinas) and sublimity (cf. Jean-François
Lyotard). I will explore the implications of this “blind spot” for art
education by introducing the question of “radical or diabolical evil;” i.e.,
the possibility that the human will is capable not simply of opposing
the moral law, but making this opposition the very motive of human
action. Such a possibility, for example, is paradigmatically illustrated by
Oliver Stone’s film *Natural Born Killers* which specularizes its excesses
(Hamsher, Murphy, Townstead, & Stone, 1994). Given the prevalence
of this “dark God,” what are art educators to make of postmodern evil?
*Part One* responds to this question through “five lessons” that are meant
to lay the ground work for further analysis (i.e., a sequel—*Part Two*)
which will extend this conversation to the simulacra world of electronic
technology and the digitalized image in a more direct manner.¹

Lesson One: **Perception as (Mis)perception and Deception**

There is a famous story told by Pliny about the quest of the

¹This short essay is the beginning of a larger project which explores the
question of art, art education and ethics from a decidedly Lacanian psychoanalytic
point of view begun some ten years ago (see Jagodzinski, 1996). *Part 2*, which
deals with the question of the deep structures of perception and simulacra of
digitalized images has been developed for “Untold Stories about Perception”
an art education symposium honoring the work of Ron N. MacGregor. The
notion of “downcast eyes” in the title comes from Jay (1993).
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artist to represent reality. One day Zeuxis and Parrhasius had a painting contest to determine who could best paint nature in all its verisimilitude. Zeuxis painted grapes which were so lifelike that birds came and began to peck at them. Overjoyed, he thought that he had won the “mimetic” prize. Parrhasius, on the other hand, had painted a picture of a curtain. When Zeuxis came over to see what Parrhasius had done, he requested that the curtain be drawn back and the picture displayed. When he realized that he had been fooled he gestured in defeat. Whereas he had managed to deceive only birds, Parrhasius had deceived an artist.

This story holds a special place in the development of Western art concerning the question of mimesis, or “realism.” The capturing of an exact mirror likeness of Nature remains a strong impulse for school-age artists and for the “lay” public in general. Adolescents, who their peers identify as “class artists,” are often judged by their skillful ability to render reality “naturalistically.” Professional artists, especially illustrators, are legitimated by their ability to draw “realistically.” Unquestionably, art education has sought to teach such drawing skills. Kimon Nicolaïdes (1941), whom Betty Edwards (1979) studied, provided sure ways to draw “naturally.” Some art educators feel that constant practice is all that is necessary. Peter London (1989), for instance, wrote, “Do you want to draw like Rembrandt or Degas? Simple! Just draw ten hours a day, six days a week, for forty years” (p. 16).

If art is to be “accessible” and not “avant-garde” it seems that there has to be some transference of feeling between the viewer and what is represented. The gestalts have to be recognizable, but not necessarily “realistic.” Like the bird in Pliny’s story it becomes necessary for the viewer to “peck” at the art in order to understand its meaning. The temporal gap between an image’s effect on spectators and their response to it must be instantaneous. The feeling of “surprise” or “delight” that characterizes aesthetic experience is suddenly “present,” and seems to emerge from “nowhere” (“know/where?”). In contrast, in a film or novel we have to wait for the unfolding of the narrative in various scenes (the moving tableaux) before the “surprises” begin to happen.

So the first lesson Pliny’s story teaches art educators is that the connection between the image and the viewer must be, in some way, illusionary. The image, sculpture, film, dramatic play, and so on, must
first catch the viewer before he or she understands its meaning. An “arrest” of movement must occur that means that the spectator believes in what s/he sees. A suspension of disbelief is a necessary condition for art to take its effect on us. The spectator has to be “hailed” by the work of art; and an “interpellation” or “suture” of identity with its “world” has to transpire (see Althusser, 1971; Silverman, 1983). However, what is considered “illusionary” and “realistic” is a question of modality and cultural specificity. Modality, as Hodge and Tripp (1986) have concluded from studying children as they watched television, depends upon the established cultural codes. In the Western perspectival world children find the news more “realistic” or “real” and hence less illusionary than television cartoons or spectacular action pictures. The question of modality raises the question of the psychic distance between the viewer and the aesthetic object. For children, the news has more of a distancing effect than the spectacular effects of artistic illusion. When a culture, such as Islamic fundamentalism, remains more isolated and protective of the electronic “carpentered perspectival world” of spectacularity (see Segall et al., 1966), the modality of what is considered “realistic” and “illusionary” rests more on oral/aural tradition and written orthodoxy.\(^2\)

It seems that the trompe-l’oeil effects in Pliny’s story have a strong tactile sense about them, a tangibility which hints at the possibility that both blindness (invisibility) and seeing (visibility) somehow come curiously together. The temporality of sequential perception, a characteristic of the way blind people “see,” and space, associated with “normal” vision, collapse as modalities in the arresting moment. Feel and look, acting as one, characterize the fascinum (spell) as distance vanishes. Certain sculptures or paintings “invite” touching, so much so that the effect of the resultant “peck” becomes a question of transgression of distance. Visitors to museums and art galleries must observe “the do not touch” policy. The “peck” is considered to be pathological if a

\(^2\)With the introduction of the video camera and Super 8 film the grounds of what is “realistic” and “illusionary” undergoes another shift as television series like Top Cops and The Most Wanted attempt to provide a “realistic” portrayal of crime. In this context “realism” is meant to act as a deterrent against crime (and, I would suggest, inciting paranoia) keeping “illusionary” space at a distance. This, however, is not the case with computer games where graphics “make-up” its artistic artifice. Each generation of computer graphics are said to be more “realistic” and “superior” to the ones before on the grounds that the child or adolescent can become more embodied in the illusionary world that the game provides. Children and adolescence judge their “realism” by the qualitative
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spectator actually “copy-cats” in “actual” life the aggression, violence, rape, or killing seen especially on television and film where the technical proficiency of reproducing the “essential copy” of “reality” are at their height (see Bryson, 1983). Here the power of the trompe-l’oeil effect is said to be so powerful that the “image” (and by implication its creator) are held responsible. We need only think of Orsen Well’s 1940s radio play *The War of the Worlds* which caused a panic because of its illusionary power to create the belief that aliens have landed. In such cases art imitates life and life imitates art to the point where the boundary between them seems indistinguishable.

It is not difficult to comprehend why modernist Kantian aesthetics, which invests “aesthetic attitude” with a particular kind of distance characterized by “disinterestedness,” guards against this potential fall into “immorality.” The implications of Pliny’s story forms part of Kant’s problematic. Kant, a pious Lutheran, in his third and final critique—*The Critique of Judgement*—attempted to bridge the abyss between reason (“pure” determinate judgments of science, the realm of necessity, the “is”) and ethics (“pure” practical and indeterminate judgments of morality, the realm of freedom, the “ought”) through analogies drawn from aesthetic exemplars such as parables, allegories, and episodic narratives. Some aesthetic objects were *ob-scene*. Their trompe-l’oeil effects had no redeeming moral values whatsoever. Such art was simply all “artifice” and trivial entertainment. Baby boomers of the Moral Right blame television violence, punk, gangster rap and heavy metal music (played backwards for its satanic messages) for destroying the moral fiber of the youth. This familiar complaint stretches back to Plato’s injunction

amount of distance which *vanishes* when the game is being played (see also Virilio, 1991). Ultimately this leads to the “impossible” fantasy of cyberspace where the body has “figuratively” entered into the computer (e.g., as in Walt Disney’s film *Tron* was the earliest example, now we have MUDs and virtual communities). Metaphorically, the bird has not only pecked the grape, but has begun to explore all the juices it has to offer! Such a cyber fantasy has a direct bearing on the ethical question this essay is attempting to raise for art education. Part 2 develops this further. (I would like to thank Karen Keifer-Boyd’s helpful commentary in clarifying this difficulty between “realism” and “illusion.”)

³The story about Virgil, a blind man who regained his sight after having cataract operations on both eyes, relates the difficulties of the conflict between sequential perception and spatial perception. This dilemma ended up being an unresolvable conflict for him. After several years of trying to visually “see,” Vigil became psychically blind to end his torment so that he could blindly “see” once more. See Sacks’ (1995) chapter “To See or Not to See.”
against artists for their effects of simulacra. Presumably psychic health consists of “good” family value television (a euphemism for television programming that is both educationally and morally proper). Listening to Pat Boone songs and having a V-chip (a “violence” chip) installed in one’s television set will insure psychological health. Teaching and consuming the best works of art and literature in the schools will nurture “good” upright and caring citizens. Such reasoning can be traced to the most influential educator of the nineteenth century: the British school inspector Matthew Arnold (1869). His most recent revivalists in higher education are such figures as the late Alan Bloom (1987), E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (1987), Roger Kimball (1990) and Dinesh D’Souza (1991). In art education we have Ralph Smith’s (1988) crusade for “excellence” and the Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) curriculum sponsored by The Getty Center for Education in the Arts (Feinstein, 1988).

Lesson 2: Theologica Moralis: Art and Evil

The deception of the trompe-l’oeil effect obviously both fascinates (charms) and threatens, a threat which must be contained. The threat is that of an “evil eye,” an “eye” that is capable of arresting movement and killing life. In some stories the moment of punishment is the moment of looking. We have only to think of the story of Sodom (Genesis, 19) where Yahweh turns Lot’s wife into salt for looking back at Yahwah’s destruction of the city. The gorgon Medusa in Greek mythology was capable of turning men into stone, paralyzing them into terror when they gazed at her face. From the Biblical injunction against worshipping false idols, to Bernard of Clairvaux’s complaint to Abbot William that monks were fascinated by the representations of animals and fabulous beasts that flourished on the capitals of Romanesque cathedrals rather than studying the text of the Bible (see Jauss, 1982), theological discourse has always supposed the natural propensity of “man” to be “drawn in,” deceived or be fooled by the artist’s trompe-l’oeil effects. Throughout history, iconoclasm is a well-documented phenomenon, perhaps the Calvinist and Islamic injunctions against “graven” images of any kind are the severest and most puritanical examples.

From a Biblical point of view the question of the trompe-l’oeil is heavily coded by moral injunctions. There is no “good eye” in the Old or New Testament (Lacan, 1979, p. 119). It is always maleficient. The lust for sex and being caught by the pornographic image underpins
the allegory of “man’s” fall from God’s grace. Sex remains demonic. Like the bird in Pliny’s story the male uncontrollably “pecks” at the female in a “natural” state of hysterical sexual frenzy. It requires little theoretical effort to see how the sensuousness of the material body, rather than the soul or the mind, is coded as being evil, its lot cast with the animal kingdom in its inability to participate in higher transcendental realms. The ontology of the medieval “Great Chain of Being” (Lovejoy, 1978) hierarchically ordered the animals in their possible relation to the transcendental spirit of God. Slithering on the bottom was, of course, the snake which transports us to the allegory of the Garden of Eden. This debased and lowest of creatures, perhaps first associated with goddess worship as a symbol of phallic control (e.g., in predynastic Egypt a picture of a cobra was the hieroglyph for the word Goddess, see Stone, 1976), is evil personified, prompting the woman to use her body to lure man into sin which formed the stain that “mared” the purity of God’s light by the reddish glow of the apple’s bite. Adam and Eve must struggle against Nature in order to survive as Adam and Eve are cast out of the illusionary, symbiotic, and fantasmatic relationship with God to fend for themselves.

There is yet another aspect to the allegory of the Garden which again brings up the question of sight. When Adam and Eve face God they do not lack. They seem completely under His watchful eye, an originary trompe-l’oeil effect where only His gaze is beneficent. Having “sinned,” however, they fall out of His “grace,” and consequently must face the “evil” outside the Garden. Now as incomplete creatures Adam and Eve must face the “imagos of the[ir] fragmented body” (Lacan, 1977, p. 11), e.g.,

images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body. One only has to listen to children aged between two and five playing, alone or together, to know that the pulling off of the head and the ripping open of the belly are themes that occur spontaneously to their imagination, and that this is corroborated by the experience of the doll torn to pieces. (ibid.)

Children engage in acts of sadism and masochism—hate and pain (e.g., as temper tantrums and crying) when society fails to meet
their needs and demands. They are frustrated by being uncoordinated and not “whole.” Emotions of both love (pleasure and the life drive) and hate (reality and the death drive) emerge as children struggle to preserve and maintain themself. As newly born children, Adam and Eve possess an ontological aggressiveness. There is a voracious aspect of their sight that is marked by “evil.” The eye has consumptive scopic desires. To be whole and complete, their eye (metonymic for the self as I) is capable of an “evil look” in its thirst to survive and possess some Thing that will make it complete and satisfied. Evil, which is another name for the “death-drive” in Freud’s system, is ontologically before the Good, and in this sense “radical” (see Zizek, 1993). We could say it is the “original stain of nature,” that is, the Christian concept, “original sin.” By way of evil, “man” wrests himself from animal instinctual rhythms, that is, “he” overcomes the dominion of pathological natural impulses. In other words it is Evil that enables man to free himself from the “nature” which “he” shares with animals. Evil as the death drive “installs” the system of pleasure. It makes way for the Good! “Man’s” originary choice is not between Good and Evil as oppositions, rather it is between the pathology of Being (our animalness) and radical Evil (overcoming it).

Lesson 3: The Moment of Blindness as Objet a

What has all this to do with our discussion concerning art education? It seems that certain forms of hyperviolence, i.e., in particular aestheticized violence which appeals only to ethical indifference and consumptive gratitiude, require more than a hysterical reactionary response by self-appointed moral guardians of society. The aesthetics of specularity in the media and the continued commercialization of the arts should give art educators pause to rethink “visual literacy” in this postmodernist era. “Visual literacy” involves more than the outdated understandings of perception (Rudolf Arnheim for instance). It requires a recognition that unconscious fantasy permeates all our conscious

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4Space does not allow me to elaborate on the importance of the “death instinct” as a second-order principle which governs, founds, or “installs” the pleasure principle which governs our psychic life where we systematically seek pleasure and avoid pain. This is brilliantly articulated in comprehensible language by Gilles Deleuze in his chapter “The Death Instinct” (1991).
life. I have noted that the *trompe-l’oeil* effect is considered “evil” and a threat, as well as a seduction. From the psychoanalytic point of view, it shows the subject’s lack of presence because the image’s potential to mislead and deceive the eye seemingly happens without mediation and modification. The transaction appears “causal,” i.e., as a natural and unrestrained response.

The second part of Pliny’s story, which involves the curtain as *trompe-l’oeil* presents a different scenario. The eye is “taken in” only momentarily. The entire aesthetic effect depends on the eventual recognition that the painting is illusionism rather than illusion, as Mitchell (1994) argues. To deceive a human being, as Parrhasios makes clear, is to present the spectator with a painting of a curtain or “veil” (*linteum*). What incites Zeuxis is not the veil *per se*, but what was “behind” it—which was precisely *nothing*! Lacan (1979) reads Pliny’s story as an illustration of unconscious “desire.” It was the seduction of Zeuxis’ desire that did him in. What attracts and satisfies a spectator in a *trompe-l’oeil* is a moment when, by a mere shift in the gaze, the spectator is able to realize that the representation does not move with the gaze, but indeed is merely a *trompe-l’oeil*. The picture does not compete with “reality” *per se*, but with what is beyond appearance. Lacan reads this “beyond” as objet petit a—the fascinatory element introduced by the gaze—which, in psychoanalytic parllance, is the desire to be complete and whole. One’s lack is filled by the fascinatory object. A successful work of art that the artist or student either consumes or produces is one which satisfies this lack. It provides psychic satisfaction and makes one feel more “alive.” It is here that the pedagogical task for the art educator becomes difficult, since “visual literacy” in this sense is an art education based on this “blind spot” of desire. Let me try to explain what is at stake here by returning to the Pliny story.

Paradoxically, in a painting that has momentarily “caught” the

5The ontological system that is being questioned here is (again) the modernist ethic proposed by Kant. Following the work of Slavoj Zizek, Joan Copjec and Jean-Luc Nancy (Nancy, 1993) the claim is that Kant was unable to accommodate and account for the question of “radical evil” in his system. “Radical evil” is the exception that deconstructs his systemic ethics based on reason.
spectator into its lure (its labyrinth of meaning) there is a blind spot or absence present in the central field of the picture. This is what Zeuxis does not “see” but desires. It is what he is “blind” to. In other words, every representation contains within itself a metaphorical “vanishing point” which indicates the limit of the field of vision and consciousness, just as there is always a vanishing point on the horizon of our field of perception. It is this point, or limit which can be equated with Lacan’s notion of objet a. Objet a is what “frames” vision psychically, not perceptually. It is removed from the field of visual reality which frames it. A slightly modified diagram introduced by Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan’s foremost practitioner, as it appears in Zizek (1992, p. 94), demonstrates this framing of visual experience.

We see here that objet a frames our psychic Imaginary “vision.” Lacan made a distinction between the eye and the gaze. The eye (or the look) stands for the geometrical, visual grammar of the current historical hyperconventional “realism” (art as mimesis or versimilitude in Pliny’s case), and the gaze stands for the subject’s position within this grammar. Whereas the eye (look) represents the conscious, self-reflective subject of knowledge or cogito, the desiring subject of the gaze leads us to the unconscious desire for an unknown object which in Lacanian parlance is (once more) objet a. The objet a is something separate from the subject, that which the subject lacks to constitute itself as psychically “whole” or complete. Lacan argues that the primordial objet a of satisfaction is the mother’s breast.

The blind spot (objet a) which appears in the hallucinatory mirror after the initial suture into the picture, represents the limitation of the subject’s consciousness. Objet a, where Zeuxis’ directed his gaze, has no specular image, no visibility, and represents the other side of
vision and consciousness. It belongs to the unconscious, and forms the "cause" of desire. Recognizing that such desire ensnared him, evoked a "smile" ("delight," "surprise") from Zeuxis when he realized his own expectations had framed him. The imagined object of his own desire had "framed" him. In other words, his gaze became inverted and directed back at himself. Based on the illusion of seeing only a mirror of reality (as represented by the veil where there is no blind spot), to the moment when he realizes that he and his surprise are the object of Parrhasius' gaze its blind spot has now appeared. The gaze of the Other (e.g., Parrhasius) decenters his vision. Zeuxis is no longer the eye ("I") of consciousness seeing what he wants to see. Rather he is seen in a way that he may not want to be seen (self-consciously with "egg" on his face). His initial illusion was broken when he "downcast" his eyes. The "true" nature of envy presents itself in such a gesture. As Lacan (1979) remarks, "invidia [envy] comes from videre," to see (p. 115). It is triggered when someone gazes at someone else who—seemingly—possesses objet a, and is, therefore, complete and satisfied, for example, when a little child sees his younger brother at his mother's breast. Envy here is not jealousy, nor is it directed at possessing a particular object (the child who looks at his younger brother does not want to possess the breast). Rather, it is directed at the illusion that someone else is whole and complete. In Zeuxis case that Parrhasius might be fulfilled by possessing objet a. The lesson Lacan teaches us here is that desire is the desire of the Other.

The curtain or veil is identified by Lacan as a particular kind of trompe-l'oeil which he playfully calls a "dompe-regard . . . the taming, civilizing, and charming power of the function of the picture" (1979, pp. 111; 116). A dompe-regard evokes "downcasts" eyes. It is, therefore, a turn to the "good." Zeuxis recognizes that he has been "framed." But this "frame" had to precede his moment of "knowledge" in order to "tame" his envious gaze. Zeuxis had to avert his gaze and admit failure. By perceiving what was non-perceivable within himself (the blind spot as the "nothing" behind the veil), Zeuxis provides an exemplary case for the West's lesson of coming to grips with desire of the Other—an ethical act which refers to the interrogation of one's own response to Things in relation to the Other. Animals are not capable of doing although humans share with them an Imaginary realm. An oscillation between illusion and illusion-ism has to take place if such an ethics is to succeed. The power of
the image has to be continually overcome. The “good” becomes defined as the overcoming of deceptive appearances. These could include the “lure” of advertising, ideology critique, pornography, and of course, exposing the panoptic surveillance of a spectacular society. The paradox of the artist in such an ontological position is that s/he must work with the arrestment of life and the movement of the self as a way to “ward off” the evil eye. Art becomes a moral endeavor. While banning and pacifying the evil eye, painting formally relies on its arresting function. Both movement and arrest form the dialectic of painting, as the paradox of the constancy of change itself. Every work of art must necessarily be an act of failure, or, perhaps a momentary victory, in the sense that art can never satisfy fully and completely psychic wholeness. One thinks here of such industrious artists as Giacometti whose search to find the “human essence” after uncountable attempts was, in this sense, a failure. Giacometti shows us that there is also the danger of becoming so obsessed with a Thing, that the Thing can begin to devour the artist. In other words, the artist, like the spectator is no less immune to the threat of trompe-l’oeil which constitutes an undoing of the psychical defenses. Such ob-session, like something which is ob-scene, indicates crossing a boundary into a perverse and psychotic world (next lesson).

Lesson 4: When the World Stares Back and Objects Possess Us!

In some moments we have what might be properly called psychotic experiences, when that which is “normally” invisible to us in our everyday perception, reveals itself. These are moments when “objects” stare back at us, as if they possessed the gaze. Rather than being in control of our own gaze, at moments objet a appears to peer at us. We may have auditory hallucinations. (For example, Norman’s mother’s voice in Hitchcock’s Psycho.) These are typically uncanny, unnerving, anxiety ridden moments when the unconscious non-perception “speaks.” We sometimes experience a flash of the phenomenon when we gaze at the mirror but don’t recognize ourselves. The uncanny evokes an odd moment of anxiety. There are experiences that make us feel as though we are gazed at when no one is there. Art objects, especially films, can show us what we don’t want to see by forcing their gaze back upon us. In other words, paradoxically, we vanish as subjects when such objects “eat” us up as in David Cronenberg’s biography of Edgar Rice Bourrough, Naked Lunch (Thomas & Cronenberg, 1991). The presence of objet a constitutes the threat—the undoing of a psychical defense—
causing a split or division within ourselves (written as $, Lacan’s symbol for the split-subject of desire). We are suddenly self-exposed when we recognize that we are seen “being seen.” Freud (1923/1961) captured such dread and horror through his examination of the German word Unheimlich (frightening, eerie, sinister) which is related to Heimlich that has the ambivalent meaning of either homely and familiar, or hidden and secret. The un of Unheimlich marks the return of repressed material. We can say that what is Heimlich belongs to the “look,” visibility, and the symbolic order of language, while Unheimlich belongs to the gaze, objet a, the imaginary order, and the unconscious. William Blake’s visions present a paradigmatic example of such perverse perception. Kandinsky (1964) offers a more “modern” example of such animistic perception when he wrote, “Everything ‘dread’ trembled. Not only the stars, moon, woods, flowers of which the poets sing, but also the cigarette butt in the ashtray . . . everything shows me its face, its innermost being; its secret soul, which is more often silent than heard” (pp. 23-24).

The familiarity (Heimlich) of art which is regulated by intentionality and a centered point-of-view, the “eye” or I of consciousness, can act as a screen against such moments. When art is familiar it appears harmless (less harmful). This explains the strong impulse for realism in the arts by young people and adults alike. The (over)emphasis on “beauty” and properly distanced realism, represses the fear of the sublime as the uncanny “evil” eye, and provides a “normal” perception which centers a coherent subject-spectator rather than deceners vision in which the “world,” or Big Other, is gazing at you—panoptically and scopophilically (i.e., vouyeristically). Masks, puppets, and ventriloquism, which projects the voice “elsewhere,” provide a mediation from this panoptic gaze and voice. These are forms of a homeopathic or prophylactic “eye” which enable us to effectively deal with this potentially psychotic “worldly” gaze which exists everywhere and nowhere. Realistic art participates in the dompte-regard as a process of taming and reassuring our normal perception. Like masks, realism in representation requires that the spectator adopt the stance of the fetishist. Fetishism requires that we undertake a simultaneous acceptance and denial of what we see. We believe that what is represented reflects the real world, yet at the same time, we recognize that the representation is only a

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6 Lacan who was a good friend of Merleau-Ponty drew many of his examples of art from him and, of course, Surrealists like René Magritte. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception and his interest in Cézanne were Lacan’s points of departure.
representation. Fetishism in this sense is a psychologically “healthy” response for “normative” perception. The fetishistic cult object of indigenous peoples, such as a talisman, acts as a “counter-eye” to guard against evil. In psychoanalytic theory, fetishism, as the binding together of belief and knowledge, acts as a defense against castration which signifies to the subject his/her own emptiness—that is, the fundamental splitting of subjectivity ($) as ideal ego (the look) and ego ideal (the gaze). But the trompe-l’oeil can produce an uncanny effect, a hyperbolization of positioning the spectator in a situation in which there is a separation between belief and knowledge. The contradiction between these two events becomes more apparent as the gap between the Imaginary and the Symbolic registers in the conscious mind. For the trompe-l’oeil to “work,” there has to be a “delay” in the knowledge that seems real is indeed artifice. The longer the interval between illusion and illusionism, the more anxiety, fright, and horror the spectator can feel. This seems to be particularly the case within the horror genre.

A disturbing example in this regard is the 1993 Belgium film Man Bites Dog, directed and written by three film students: Remy Belvraux, Andre Bonzel and Benoit Poetvoorde. Shot in black and white in the style of a documentary, it recounts the story of several film students who wish to document a psychopathic killer. As the story proceeds they become implicated in the killings, and the psychopath eventually kills the camera crew. The spectator is never certain whether these events were staged or real. The experience is as repulsive as a “snuff” film in which a “real” victim is tortured, raped, maimed, shot, and killed. There is no “acting” involved. The filmmakers of Man Bites Dog seem to have consciously eschewed acting. The disturbance of its effects are increased by the sheer “ordinariness” of the actors. No one in the film is “recognizable” or famous enough to indicate to the viewer that this is all artifice. The moment of illusionism never comes. The spectator remains “locked” - trapped - in its illusion, which is a profoundly disturbing experience. Such films are “rare.” It is obviously this fear that Boomer moralists are reacting against, although they target violence indiscriminately, since they are unable to articulate their unease easily.

7 I am not developing aspects of the voice which forms another object a in Lacan’s system, the mother’s voice being its originary function. This is merely to recognize its power here. See Silverman’s (1992) “Fassbinder and Lacan: A reconsideration of gaze, look and image” for an understandable account for the gaze in its capacity as society’s Big Other.
The violence of a film such as *Man Bites Dog* is “too real”—“too close.” When it loses its fetishistic, i.e., its artificial “staged” effect, the eyes cannot “blink” and become downcast or averted. Cinema in the moral reactionary’s view, ought to act as an institutionalized control of the effects of *trompe-l'oeil*. Art’s *dompté-regard* is supposed to teach us the moral lessons which surround our desires; to make the invisible visible in Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) turn of phase, and to help us perceive the imperceptible. This has been the West’s legacy: the triumph of rationality over our emotions and passions; the repression of the demons that come at us out of the sublime as a way to face the amorality of nature. Pliny’s account of the illusion of realism, taken in its broader context (see Mitchell, 1994), was for the greater progress of the political economy of Athens. The public function of “realistic” art, by such artists as Apollodorus, Timanthes, Androcydes, Eupomps, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, was its role in political propaganda and mass spectacle, as means to propagate noble genealogy. But this was not all. Pliny’s recounting of the story compared the superiority of humans over animals in their ability to overcome the illusions that captured them. Rather than being enslaved by the image, Pliny argued that humans could become self-conscious, as they become aware that a mere image had “taken them in.” With the proper distance such freedom could be achieved from the power of illusions that arrested their attention. Interpellation by the image could be overcome through criticism, ideology critique and demystification, a long standing agenda for educators of the Left.

**Concluding Lesson: The Hidden Binaries**

Having justified why art education should continue to both pursue the fetishization of objects (as forms of realism) as well as continually break the spells of *trompe-l’oeil* so as to achieve the “right” Kantian distance and avoid the pathology of psychosis, there is of course, something very “wrong” and troubling with this modernist endeavor. I will conclude with a discussion of some of these troubling issues. Pliny’s story sets up a self/other binary in which the first hierarchy is between animals and humans. Humans can overcome their animal nature, animals can not overcome theirs. A strong anthropocentrism asserts itself, one which John Berger (1980) identifies as standing for all forms of otherness: class, race, sex and gender. Not only have animals become throughout history progressively more and more marginalized, but race, sex, gender and class are represented by images of subhuman brutishness, bestial appetite, and mechanical servility. This is one side of
the anthropocentrism which has displaced God with Man at the apex of Modernism’s inversion of the “Great Chain of Being.” We must rethink the question of nature’s animism from the perspective of an ecological consciousness and a green aesthetics (Jagodzinski, 1987, 1992). The sublime sense of nature is coded as evil both in scientific and theological discourse. From this yet another self/other binary reproduces itself as the West and the “Rest.” The Western eye presents a division between an animistic art which is caught up with vision quests and in which one seeks guidance from the spirit world (see Highwater, 1981), and a rationalism that represses such “monsters” (not spirits). Do we then follow Freud (1923/1961) in his claim that archaic animistic knowledge is more “primitive”? that, before the advent of scientific rationalism the world was more “psychotic”? and that the West is therefore more “progressive”?

There is yet another self/other binary at work here which is every bit as fundamental as the other two, and this is the recognition that for the masculine subject, woman is the trompe-l’oeil par excellent. First, and perhaps most obviously, is that males have viewed women as closer to Nature than they are. She lactates, menstruates, gives birth to children, socializes (tames) them, and “services” the body through such nurturing acts as cooking the meals and looking after the Heim (house) (see Ortner, 1974). Further, she is the one who wears the mask (the masquerade of make-up), which, on the one hand is her “lure,” and also a sign that she needs more “protection.” More frail and susceptible than her male counterpart (recall the Garden scene) she is less rational. Perceptually, according to psychologists like Witkin (1949/50), she is said to be more “field dependent” than men who are “field independent.” In other words, the lures of the environment ensnare her. This view supposes that women are less analytical than men, e.g., that they can not read maps, and only tell men drivers “where to go” (pun intended). Accordingly, the brain of women is said to be wired differently. Psychosexual brain differences put her “spatial imagination” at a big disadvantage (see Fausto-Sterling, 1985 for rebuttals). Being “field dependent” she is suspect to the trompe-l’oeil effects and in the Imaginary register. Although she dwells in the same “house” (Heim) as man she is always a threat. Her “mask” (masquerade) can change as the “virgin mother” turns into a she-devil by simply applying “too” much make-up and changing her looks. This is a familiar cinematic trope (e.g., recently played out in Renny Harlin’s film, The Long Kiss Goodnight). She can arouse dread and horror as the “phallic Mother.” Like Medusa, she can turn a man to stone. Everything that is coded as
feminine, as “body,” loses distance and the right moral attitude since the masculine and the feminine are “incomplete selves” who are locked together by lack and desire.\(^9\) The West’s concept of art privileges the spectator as masculine (the distance of knowledge) and the image as feminine (the closeness of belief). If we are to believe the controversial Paglia (1990) the Western contemplative, conceptual eye of art was born in Egypt (p. 50). Since that time the conflict of identity has remained, as Nietzsche described it, a struggle of a will-to-power between the forces of Dionysus and Apollo.\(^10\) Lacan (1992) in his seminar on ethics in the 60s developed the concept of the “sinthome” as that which gives the subject its ontological consistency. Zizek (1992) writes that the “sinthome is a psychotic kernel that can neither be interpreted (as symptom) nor ‘traversed’ (as fantasy)—what can we do with it, then?” he asks, “Lacan’s answer is to identify with the sinthome” (p. 137). Man’s Western Eye has been unable to identify with its sublime Other. In other words, its inability to face that which it fears most, that which provides it with its very identity.

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The uncanny (or umheimlich) has become an important consideration in postmodern aesthetic because it acts as a challenge to representation—to the acquiescence of fetishism per se. It provides the potential to make us see the world not as ready-made for our description, depiction, and portrayal. Rather it presents it in a constant process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. The success of recent television shows, such as The X Files, Millennium and Dark Skies, among young viewers is an indication that they are fascinated with the uncertainty of the times. The sublime remains the Other in Kant’s aesthetic of beauty. A working through the West’s realistic repression of the sublime can downcast the eye in yet another way. When it can not bear to look—but must face its own evil—art travels upon a road that is perhaps too dangerous for the classroom (and Hollywood) because of the clanging heard by moral Boomers outside classroom doors. Disney Productions seems driven to satiate the Western eye until it becomes ob-ese, dripping with mawkish sentimentality. Certainly opening up Pandora’s Box to explore repressed perversities provides little economic rewards when compared with the reproductive, consumptive hegemony of realism and its presumption of an innocent, transparent image.

What I have in mind can be illustrated by a scene and a film by two
director-explorers of the postmodern sublime—the two David’s—Lynch and Cronenberg—one American, the other Canadian. Both investigate the repressed image and interrogate it rather than preserve it. Radical evil is pushed to the point where it reverses itself into moral revelation. David Lynch in *Wild At Heart* presents a rape fantasy so “close” to the surface that it answers to the patriarchal “she made me do it” by making the scene/seen so painful to watch that the audience is left squirming in their seats\(^1\) (Montgomery & Lynch, 1990). In a lonely run-down motel room in the middle of nowhere, William Defoe asserts unrelenting pressure on Laura Dern to yield to his desires. He touches and squeezes her, invading her space of intimacy and says “fuck me, fuck me” over and over again. The ugly scene drags on to the point where we see Dern slowly surrendering to his suggestions. The camera pans to her clenched hand which slowly opens up in compliance as she faintly answers “yes.” The audience is released from any more pain when Defoe makes an about face and says, “No thanks. Not today. I’ve to go.” What makes the scene/seen so excruciating and excessively cruel is the realization that Dern has been psychically and not physically raped. Her secret desire to be brutally raped, the very kernel of her being, has been stirred up, and exposed. This makes the rape excessively humiliating, and, in turn, stretches the gap of illusion to a point where the audience can no longer bear to watch the exposure of Dern’s secret.

On the same register of the sublime, is David Cronenberg’s recent

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\(^1\)It should be pointed out that there is the object relations theory of feminist psychoanalysis like Nancy Chodrow (1978) and an entire movement of feminist gynocriticism (predominately lesbian) in literature and art which supports such an assumption (see Frueh, Langer, & Raven, 1994). In this view the essence of femininity and hence woman is to be found in the imaginary pre-Oedipal register where daughters are still attached to their mothers. From a Lacanian feminist position, e.g., Constance Penley, Jacqueline Rose, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan such essentialism oversimplifies the Oedipal difficulties which sex/gender present.

\(^9\)Here I wish to avoid setting up a hetero/homo binary. Following Lacan’s logic in his ‘formulae of sexuation’ (1982) masculine and feminine represent ‘logical’ positions. A gay or lesbian couple, like a hetero couple, are split into masculine and feminine positions.

\(^10\)More radical feminists like Mary Daly (1978) claim that this opposition does not go far enough. Dionysus and Apollo are “two faces of the same god” (p.64). She claims that Dionysus is Zeus in his young form. “Dionysus was in fact his own father” (ibid.).
movie *Crash*, based on J. G. Ballard’s novel about sex and car crashes (Thomas, Lantos, & Cronenberg, 1996). The viewer can comprehend the movie when one recognizes that the characters in the story are already “dead.” Pleasure turned into pain can only be understood by making the death-drive present. These characters stare evil in the face, and we are asked to stare with them—if we can. The images are far from alluring and erotic. Sex is presented in a desexualized fashion—as a drive (*Trieb*), as a need or a demand that is not caught up in the dialectics of desire. Sex and metal come together, even more debased and void of spirit than any animal. Hard. Cold. Voices show no emotion. Their bodies are wedded to metal prosthetically, sometimes to the car itself. They present the antithesis of transnational capitalist fantasy of cyberspace as the disappearance of the body and the cyborgs it breeds. This is the pain of technology gone awry, in which the car crashes of Jayne Mansfield and James Dean are revered as heroic and iconic exemplars of the suicidal road kill of 50s America (mis)perceived Other—Hollywood’s leading ladies and delinquent youth. The reply to the current Boomer nostalgia should be obvious.

On that happy note, I appropriately end this essay on the 31st of October, 1996. Halloween. Trick or Treat?

**References**


Hamsher, J., Murphy, D., & Townstead, C. (Producers), & Stone, O. (Director). (1994). *Natural Born Killers* [Film]. (Available from Warner Bros.)


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11This example in a modified form comes from Slavoj Zizek in a lecture series presented at the University of Alberta in August of 1996.


Thomas, J., & Lantos, R. (Producers), & Cronenberg, D. (Director).


In this paper, a theoretically critical approach to art education (as described in a recently published book, *Real-World Readings in Art Education: Things Your Professors Never Told You*) challenges teacher-as-artist and discipline-based art education models. I use informal language in places to distance myself politically from higher-ed jargon users whose work is often ignored by classroom art teachers (the book’s audience).

The question is this: What’s missing from all that preening, posturing, and horn-tooting by the teachers-as-artists and the discipline-based art eddies? Kristen Fehr, Karen Keifer-Boyd and I have edited a
book in which prominent critical art educators give some in-your-face answers, but before I describe them, let’s look at the horn-blowing. The teacher-as-artist model-arted as a series of studio activities with minimal linkage to art viewing or societal issues-dominated art education in the post-war 1940s and 50s, boosted by Viktor Lowenfeld’s *Creative and Mental Growth* (1947).

Criticism of this model-in fact the sprout that would grow into DBAE-emerged in 1960 when Jerome Bruner suggested that art ed be defined as a series of disciplines. Elliot Eisner (1972) and others, driven by a blend of noble intent and Getty Center money, tinkered with Bruner’s suggestion. Their tinkering crystallized into DBAE in the 1980s.

DBAE, popular though it be, has not replaced the artist-as-teacher model, however. Its staying power is suggested in the fall 1998 issue of Studies in Art Education, where we read that domination of Canadian and U.S. graduate art ed programs is shared by both approaches (Anderson, Eisner, and McRorie). And Creative and Mental Growth still sells so well that no one can keep track of which edition is current.

The irony of the teacher-as-artist model is that its proclaimed strength, studio production with little in-depth exposure to art exemplars or life outside the school, is its greatest weakness. First, this approach perpetuates the cocoon-like isolation from society that has served the art world so poorly in the 20th century. By ignoring much of the content of visual art, this approach assures the subject’s frill status in schools and undermines art’s potential as an agent of social reconstruction.

Second, requiring children to make one artwork after another over the course of a school year without comprehensive study of strong work done by others is unfair. Why are our own studio walls covered with postcards of artists’ openings and pages torn from *ArtFORUM*? Because we choose not to work in a vacuum. Because we are inspired by the work of others. Because we cannot individually generate many of the universal symbols found in our world’s art heritage. How can we place studio demands on our students while denying them access to the symbology we provide ourselves? Such matters are part of what art educator Ed Check (1998) referred to when he said art education can be a silly field.
Even cynical postmodernists like me will allow that in one way DBAE has benefited art education—öit has made art viewing important. Its problem is how it does this: DBAE is tainted with one of humanity’s most enduring traditions—racism.

DBAE’s roots reach back to ancient Greek philosophy (aesthetics), 19th-century U. S. academe (art history), and capitalist economics (criticism). Aesthetic philosophy is an ancient Western discipline, traceable at least to Plato. Greece was the cradle of Western civilization, and our students almost always study only Western aestheticians.

What do Asian, African, Native American, and other cultures say about the nature of visual imagery? What have women, Western or Nonwestern, said? We don’t know. And if we seek to answer these questions using DBAE, we must assume that DBAE’s disciplines are applicable to these groups. This assumption is academically reckless and culturally arrogant. The answers are more honestly found by skipping DBAE and approaching our research with an open mind and a cautious awareness of our Western biases (Fehr, 1995a).

A second DBAE discipline, art history, emerged in U. S. universities in the late 19th century. One of its goals was to create cultural parity with Europe’s educated class. One of its results was to create a European canon. This in turn created a European standard by which to judge all other art.

The same urge, but couched in economic terms, drove the creation of the quintessentially Western field of art criticism. Art criticism has always been more an economic than an academic endeavor. Its primary purpose is to serve the collectigentsia’s practice of investing in art they don’t understand. Twin ironies undermine DBAE’s insistent justification of this Eurocentric, capitalistic approach to art viewing—öthe Western art community is beginning to accept world art on equal footing, and American schools are filling with children of all ethnicities.

At the 1996 annual conference of the National Art Education Association, I encountered a typically pinched perspective of a prominent DBAE apologist on the faculty of one of the Getty’s six national centers. I asked her how Getty footsoldiers justify DBAE’s bastardizing of Nonwestern imagery. She responded that the Getty is increasing its
I kindly and gently suggested that increasing a bad thing won’t make it better. The conversation ended there—I think she said Barbara Walters was waiting to interview her or something.

At a state art ed conference in 1997, a faculty member from another Getty center gave this answer to the same query: ”That’s not a problem because DBAE can be anything you want.” This argument denies that DBAE is a model with four specified disciplines. If DBAE supporters do realize the racial bias of these disciplines and consequently step outside them, they are no longer practicing DBAE.

So where do we go? Critical theory’s emphasis on challenging authority seems to be one signpost of tomorrow’s art education. Postmodernism’s dismissal of grand narratives seems to be another. Add feminist consciousness-raising and the political activism of a host of marginalized groups, and a picture begins to emerge. The roots of this approach are not new—an early progressive call for art education to link itself with the rest of the world came from John Dewey in 1916. Manuel Barkan, a Deweyan art educator, wrote in 1955 that the social environment is the best place for children to grow into responsible adults. In 1961 June King McFee, one of the few prominent female voices in art education at the time, revived progressive populism by calling for art education for oppressed groups.

Such visionaries may emerge as the most influential shapers of art education in the 21st century. Today, however, their observations are largely un-addressed in the professional literature, pushed aside by DBAE discussions of postimpressionism and teacher-as-artist tips on how to paint on aluminum foil—in other words, what many of us were taught in college.

This state of affairs is driving growing numbers of scholars to create a new place for art ed to go. In 1980 art educator Vincent Lanier called for making our youth literate about visual documents that explore their social oppression. Andreas Huyssen (1990) advises abandoning the dead end created when modernists separated politics from aesthetics. Elizabeth Garber (1992) calls for curriculum building blocks about issues, themes, and cultural phenomena rather than formal art vocabulary, art
styles, and canonical examplars stripped of their cultural contexts.

Building on these ideas, Kristen, Karen, and I, along with our panel of authors, describe a version of this new place with a book of transgressive essays titled Real-world readings in art education: Things your professors never told you. Our version is primarily for classroom art teachers, the people we feel are—along with their students—the most important members of our field.

Real-world readings is divided into four sections: Real-world classroom voices: Protesting the rules; Real-world aesthetics: Breaking the rules; Real-world art lessons: Teaching outside the rules; and Real-world structural change: Writing new rules.

Section I, Real-world Classroom Voices: Protesting the Rules, grapples with the daily experience of teaching art in today’s public schools. In Chapter 1, Kathleen Connors presents classroom teachers’ stories in their words, and those words vibrate to anyone who has been there. In Chapter 2, Paul Duncum challenges sentimental and manipulative adult views of childhood created by the corporate world. He proposes art curricula that make children aware of these media fictions. Daily artroom experience is atopic studiously avoided by many art education writers, and in Chapter 3 Elizabeth Manley Delacruz explores why. In Chapter 4, Yvonne Gaudelius combines scholarly and personal prose to explore differences between critical and feminist theories. She offers a feminist definition of art on which contemporary curricula can be based.

The authors in Section II, Real-world aesthetics: Breaking the rules, challenge mainstream assumptions about what art is, what good art is, and what the tradition of honoring only the European patriarchal canon has done to children in schools. I describe a lowrider art curriculum I developed with an inner-city middle school teacher to enable her Latin students to honor their artistic heritage and yet become aware of the sexism in lowrider culture. Harriet Walker discusses how art teachers can use interviewing to teach artforms unique to their geographic regions. She demonstrates this by interviewing two Southern African-American photographers. By examining the artforms and teaching practices of Appalachian mountain cultures, Christine Ballengee Morris measures the cultural loss that results from teaching only mainstream art. Grace
Deniston critiques the myth of high art imposed on art majors by university art faculty. Deborah Smith-Shank suggests that art curricula address issues such as aging, reproductive rights, motherhood, and standards of beauty.

Section III, Real-world art lessons: Teaching outside the rules, gets at the heart of the matter—incorporating radical art educational theory into daily classroom practice. Each of these chapters offers alternative content in practical terms. Olivia Gude describes two radical art lessons on how women are trained to see themselves. Mary Wyrick deconstructs the media's one-dimensional portrayals of women. Laurel Lampela provides ways of discussing artists' sexual orientations in public school classrooms. Future Akins suggests that art teachers bring the sacred into their classroom practice. Lisette Ewing goes beyond arguing for the inclusion of visually impaired students in studio activities; she convincingly explains how to include them in viewing as well. Frank Pio describes a mural project he developed for an at-risk school on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Drawing on the religious myths of the Ojibwe people, Pio created a program in which members of ethnic gangs studied each others' cultures and created murals honoring their diverse heritages.

The authors in Section IV, Real-world structural change: Writing new rules, outline ways to radicalize school policy, curricula, and teaching. Marianne Stevens Suggs and Gayle Weitz present a burlesque field guide of guerrilla tactics for art educators who seek change. Karen Keifer-Boyd describes how she promoted democratic art education by including voices from the community in developing a local art curriculum. Ed Check describes how sharing his authority with his sixth graders caused them to take responsibility for their educations. Michael Emme calls for art educators to become comfortable with electronic technology in preparation for a future in which art education's format is nonlinear and electronic rather than linear and text-based.

Emme's article reminds me of a comment I recently heard from an art educator, a comment that further clarified the need for this book. She suggested that making art with a computer diminishes the immediacy of the aesthetic moment by placing a technological intercessory between artists and their work. I responded that I could imagine the same criticism befalling the first human artisan to make a line with a charred stick instead of a soot-covered finger: "Hey, Org-you diminish
immediacy of aesthetic moment by placing technological intercessory between you and work. Stop it!"

To summarize, we are living through an important moment on the West's millennial clock, a moment rich with symbolic opportunity. Today, countless marginalized groups are finding their voices and creating new artforms that hybridize components of their heritages with the heritages of the mainstream West. These artforms often represent a third culture—their experiences in the cultural borderlands (Fehr, 1995b). These cultures and their artforms cannot be understood within teacher-as-artist programs that disdain viewing and ignore social issues. And they cannot be depicted fairly within the strictures of DBAE. Real-world readings offers teachers a democratic alternative.


References


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Routledge.


On the Cover

Vessels of Reciprocity, Prisoners, and Global Unity/Peace Angel

Drea Howenstein
Robert Bersson
Kim Finley-Stansbury

Vessels of Reciprocity
Artist: Drea Howenstein

_Vessels of Reciprocity_ stands in the wildflower field on Herr’s Island. The original impulse for the site specific work stems from visceral childhood memories that I have of the slaughter house that once operated on the island. I began with a consultation with my long time friend, collaborator and teacher Carlo Hawkwalker.

Carlo Hawkwalker is a Sundancer and a Pipe Carrier of the Lakota tradition. He carries a medicine bundle for the Three Fires; He works with and represents the Seneca and Lene Lenape as well as People from several other Nations. He has been a resident and keeper of local
holy ground for 12 years. He currently lives and works in the Grand Traverse Ottawa and Chippewa reservation in northern Michigan and he actively supports repatriation.

I walked the island several times to better get to know it. During one of my ventures I happened across an old cow pelvis. This unusually synchronous event was an important confirmation, especially in view of the fact that the slaughterhouse had been defunct for twenty plus years and that bones comprise a fair portion of the diet of rodents who were visible inhabitants.

After significant research into the history of the region we agreed that the next step was for Carlo to lead a healing ceremony for the desecrated land and four leggeds of Herr’s Island to be held at high noon during the full moon on Sunday, June 2, 1996. During what Carlo referred to as a “powerful window of time,” the cow pelvis was given a proper burial. *Vessels of Reciprocity* contains visible references to sky burials, vehicles to the afterlife and the place of sacrifice in the cycle of life. The two boats are reminiscent of wooden coffins, pointing in different directions, like compass needles. The boats seem to be suspended high in the trees, as if stranded by changing water levels or the constantly changing and unpredictable aspects of life. In Lakota, the symbol for water is also synonymous with life. The viewer is left to ponder: Are the vehicles forsaken or are they transcending? Do we, collectively, know where we are going and who is steering?

**Prisoners**

*Artist: Robert Bersson*

Prisoners are a class of human beings who are simultaneously visible and invisible both in North America and worldwide. We see prisoners on the news during an extraordinary event such as a prison breakout, for example, or a prison takeover. But those million who are locked in prisons throughout the world are locked out of our gaze.

The immediate subject of my grim mixed media work “Prisoners”—in which I used enamel spray and a collaged newspaper photograph—is
the imprisonment of political revolutionaries in an Andean country in South America. We see the rebels captured, guarded, and placed in metal pens. Literally or actually, they are on their way to disappearance. Their capture made the prime time news, but after that brief moment of visibility, they became invisible, perhaps forever.

My own town, a small city in western Virginia, has a prison located in the center of town. In spite of this location, one never sees the prisoners inside. There environment effectively renders the inmates invisible. But we know that they are there, and we have noted their convictions in the local paper. They are simultaneously existent and non-existent, visible and invisible.

Global Unity/Peace Angel
Artist: Kim Finley-Stansbury

Under the direction of Kim Finley-Stansbury, Southeastern University art students and area school children participated in the second Global Art Project in 1996. Artists and students created artworks which expressed their visions of global unity. Over 270 artworks were exchanged between Hammond, Louisiana; Lexington, Maryland; San Francisco; the Taipai American School in Taiwan; and Jerusalem. The Global Art Project is a grass roots effort founded by Katherine Josten, a Tucson artist. Global Unity/Peace Angel traveled to the Imaginary Journey Studio, a children’s art workshop in Jerusalem. The artist, Kim Finley-Stansbury believes that the angelic realm connects us as human beings. There are two angels in this piece, one is more solid, and the other more otherworldly. The star-like image over the abdomen represents the Earth and Kim’s hope for planetary rebirth.
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Jane Vanderbosch was a poet, essayist, and activist. Her work examines the impacts and intercessions of social class, feminism, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and recovery issues on and in her life.

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