PreOccupy/Maximum Occupancy

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Editorial

When the Editor and Associate Editor conceived of this call for papers for PreOccupy/Maximum Occupancy, it was based on the Caucus members’ input during the annual meetings of the Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education (CSTAE) at the National Art Education Association conference, NAEA 2012, New York. We listened to our colleagues speak about the year’s events, and we discussed how we as art educators could respond to the needs of the Caucus and of our field for Volume 33 of the Journal of Social Theory in Art Education (JSTAE).
As Editors developing a call for papers, Sharif Bey and I used a kind of call and response method of work. We questioned, debated, and discussed the Caucus dialogues during which a variety of possible themes arose—geography of the body, viruses-viral, trickle up, banding together, immaterial, and preoccupy/maximum occupancy. PreOccupy/Maximum Occupancy was chosen by the group. As Sharif and I worked, we distilled our own ideas related to the theme in a somewhat non-linear way, ending with the question: How might we create a call broad enough to elicit multiple submissions that could and would inspire writers, artists, educators, and activists? Since we could not visit each other’s homes, we did this through virtual collaboration. At the end of each session, we sent each other some questions, or prose, a poem maybe, the result of our conversations, our easy exchange of ideas. Our communication style seemed to mirror a version of what Patty Bode, Caucus Coordinator at the time, described as having taken place at Occupy Boston. The practice of the “human microphone” deeply impressed her: each listener close to the speaker simultaneously repeated the speaker’s words and passed them along through the group. In our working together as editors in some small way like a human microphone, we too amplified each other’s voices as a call and response.

The Occupy Movement was also born as a response. It was an uprising—a resistance to being silenced in the face of a system producing wealth for the few at the expense of the many. And although the Occupy Movement began in the U.S. in 2011, it quickly became part of an already developing worldwide movement that is still echoing across the globe, giving people far and wide a sense that their voices must be heard. As editor of the 33rd volume of the JSTAE: PreOccupy/Maximum Occupancy, I ask: How has each author interpreted the meaning of to occupy? Occupy, for me, is connected to the idea of taking up space, creating space with, creating space by, without creating space for. I associate occupying space with speaking up, having the courage to voice ideas, moving out of a space of silence, staking claim, taking up space where none has been provided. It is my belief that we need to be careful with phrases like “giving voice to,” “allowing another to have a voice,” “creating a space for” because such phrases imply that the we who give voice, or allow for another’s voice, or create a space for the other often do not acknowledge our own privilege. We who get to speak are often part of a dominant culture that perhaps does not always recognize itself in the role of an elite holding power and does not always acknowledge itself as a gatekeeper. With little acknowledgment of our centered visibility that pushes others into the shadows, we in some ways ask that others remain there, or perhaps even demand it in insidious silence. By virtue of our positions as academics, teachers, scholars, and researchers, we hold and yield power, but we abuse that hold if we do not acknowledge it. In contrast, the writers in this volume specifically oblige us to take responsibility through acknowledgment, collaboration, resistance, and support for a kind of occupation that shares power, recognizes everybody, and makes or co-constructs room. In these writings, the authors acknowledge the importance of presence. And their concept of this presence has taken many forms in this volume.

Even though the editor is generally assigned the privileged position of presiding over authors’ writings, I will move over so you as readers can interpret the authors’ responses to the themed call for papers yourselves. Inspired by the form and function of the human microphone in the Occupy Movement, with its integrated call/response mechanism, the remainder of this editorial will be presented in the form of a call and response. Like listeners in the distance who repeat the words again, I will offer up an excerpt from our call for papers, to which chosen excerpts from each author’s manuscript will respond in her/his/their own words. In this way, you as readers can also be a part of this people’s
microphone. In close proximity to the speaker, you as readers can perhaps repeat the words again to yourselves until all people gathered hear the words. And like the Occupy Movement(s), past and present, all people, artists, authors, editors, and readers close by or in the distance are invited to repeat the words again, until all people gathered hear the words.

Below is the entire Call for Papers, followed by call and response sets of excerpts for each author: the first excerpt in each case is from the call; the following excerpts are responses from one or more authors.
CALL:

**OCCUPY** - FORMS OF "DIRECT DEMOCRACY" HAVE BEEN PRACTICED FOR MILLENNIA IN MANY INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND SMALL-SCALE SOCIETIES THAT HAVE ACCOMPLISHED COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING. NAMING THIS PRACTICE OF CONSENSUS-BASED DECISION-MAKING "GENERAL ASSEMBLIES" CAN BE TRACED (IN THE WESTERN WORLDS) TO THE ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY (AROUND THE SIXTH CENTURY BCE IN ANCIENT GREECE). IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT, THE PRACTICE OF THE "HUMAN MICROPHONE," ALSO KNOWN AS THE "PEOPLE'S MICROPHONE," IS A MEANS FOR COMMUNICATING SPEECH TO A LARGE GROUP OF PEOPLE, WITHOUT AMPLIFICATION EQUIPMENT. EACH LISTENER IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE SPEAKER SIMULTANEOUSLY REPEATS THE SPEAKER'S WORDS. LISTENERS IN THE DISTANCE REPEAT THE WORDS AGAIN, UNTIL ALL PEOPLE GATHERED HEAR THE WORDS. IN THIS WAY, ALL PARTICIPANTS AMPLIFY THE VOICES OF OTHERS, COMPLETELY EMBODYING THEIR WORDS, REPEATING THOSE UTTERANCES WHETHER OR NOT THEY AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THEIR WORDS. EVERY PERSON WHO SPEAKS TO THE GROUP IS HONORED. EACH IDEA IS MADE AUDIBLE BY TAKING THE IDEA IN AND REFLECTING IT BACK. FULL DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION TAKES PLACE WHETHER OR NOT ONE AGREES WITH THE IDEAS THAT ARE SET FORTH. IT IS THE VALUE OF IDEAS BEING SET FORTH THAT IS HONORED. CAN ART EDUCATION BE A FORM OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY?

RESPONSE:

**This is What Democracy Looks Like: Art and the Wisconsin Uprising: Kim Cosier**

"I would argue that if we wish to continue to engage in art education as a profession, we must get beyond fears that may hold us back and do as Bastos (2009) has advised—start somewhere. The future of public education lies in the balance. Many people who marched around the square next to me in the Wisconsin Uprising would never have imagined themselves to be protesters even a week before the uprising began. But when you realize those who would do away with public education are coming for you, and your students, you may surprise yourself. So if you are afraid or otherwise resistant, begin with descriptive lessons and slowly (at first perhaps) ease yourself into social action. Soon you will find yourself chanting, 'This is What Democracy Looks Like!'" (2013, p. 16).

**Anonymous: The Occupy Movement and the Failure of Representational Democracy: jan jagodzinski**

"It may be somewhat of a sacrilege for many art educators to think of the Occupy Movement as political and ethical art whose affect was to create a 'smooth space' of media attention within the striated territory of capitalist interests, which by law sets up the corporation as having the rights and responsibilities of persons with Wall Street as its pulse center. Yet, that is the aim of this essay: to treat the Occupy Movement as a 'sense-event,' a bloc of sensations in relation to the creative philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980), where art is theorized as a constant *traversa/*flight into and across disciplines, thereby placing the social always into question" (2013, p. 22).

**Poetic Occupations: Artists as Narrator-Protagonists: Jack Richardson**

"Conceiving of artistic practice as a form of poetic occupation compels us to reconsider what constitutes an artist. That is, rather than an individual representing the world through his or her unique point of view, the artist is always already conceived of as being-in-common with the world and as such possesses a perspective that is always already multiple. The artist is not solely a recorder of that which already exists, but is one element among many within the contingent relationships that constitute his/her being as being-in-common" (2013, p. 40).
CALL:

**PREOCCUPY** - PREOCCUPY CAN COMPEL US TO WITHDRAW AT A TIME WHEN OUR PRESENCE AND VOICES ARE MOST NEEDED TO RAISE CONSCIOUSNESS OR AMPLIFY ISSUES.

WITH MAXIMUM PRESENCE CAN WE EVOKE THE KINDS OF CHANGES WE HOPE TO SEE IN OUR FUTURES AS ARTISTS/RESEARCHERS/TEACHERS?

RESPONSE:

**Craft As Activism: Elizabeth Garber**

"Craft activism, as much DIY, can be understood both as an occupation and a way of life that involves participatory or substantive democracy (Macpherson, 1962, 1973; Torres, 1998; Garber, 2005) in which socially equal and reflective individuals contribute to building "a sense of community, of association, of neighboring and joining" (Torres, pp. 146-147). Craft activism engages participatory making where democratic processes are valued. Craft activism occupies spaces within individuals’ lives, but moreover in local communities, engaging a “human microphone” of makers and viewers directly in participatory democracy. For activist crafters, such making is a way of life, a way of voicing and participating, of expressing, and of raging that reaches a public directly, sometimes drawing them in" (2013, p. 55).

**Feminist Zines: (Pre)Occupations of Gender, Politics, and D.I.Y. in a Digital Age: Courtney Weida**

"The zine genre demonstrates powerful and accessible means by which art education projects and provocations can sustain and enliven active learning through self-publishing, activism, and D.I.Y. ethics. Further, women’s documenting, sharing, exhibiting, and selling their artwork both online and offline through zines can be viewed as an occupation of the hegemony of gender divisions in art and technology, forming feminist spaces for a counter-culture of women creating, trading, collecting, and purchasing zines” (2013, pp. 80-81).

CALL:

**OCCUPATION** - IS ART EDUCATION MORE THAN AN OCCUPATION? A WAY OF LIFE, A CALLING A MEANS TO FULL PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRACY? ART EDUCATION CAN EXPAND OR CONSTRICIT PARTICIPATION. PREOCCUPATION WITH STANDARDS, EXPECTATIONS, BUREAUCRACY, ASSESSMENT CAN IMPEDE MAXIMUM OCCUPANCY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING. WHO IS OCCUPYING ART EDUCATION?

RESPONSE:

**(Pre)determined Occupations: The Post-Colonial Hybridizing of Identity and Art Forms in Third World Spaces: Amanda Alexander & Manisha Sharma**

"Perhaps our identities, cultures, and art forms do not have to be rooted in one discipline, one cultural practice, one set vocabulary for us to be valuable. Our whole range of self-understanding and perceived affect can change with a more hybrid understanding of that simple and most basic question: who do we want to be? Of course, the very asking of this question makes visible an understanding of being in positions of power as art educators, researchers, and cultural workers whose self-determination is recognized as a decision to occupy a vocal place in conversations we believe to be important” (2013, p. 100).
Hosting the Occupation of Art Education as Aporia: Nadine Kalin

“Throughout, I endeavor to keep the question of whom we teach unanswered and open, while searching for spaces of possibility within unpredictable, aporetic entanglements inherent in normalizing frameworks within the field of art education. I contextualize Derridean notions of aporia, hospitality, monstrous arrivant, undecidability, and responsibility within the specificities of art teaching that call on us to imagine the field and ourselves otherwise. Art education as aporia must be both rule-governed and unruly, open to the heterogeneity and incalculable of what may come to occupy our field as household” (2013, p. 105)

CALL:

MAXIMUM OCCUPANCY - MAXIMUM OCCUPANCY IS A CAUTIONARY SIGN THAT ONE MIGHT READ ON AN ELEVATOR WHEN NUMBERS OF OCCUPIERS REACH A LIMIT. THE ELEVATOR WILL FAIL TO ASCEND IF IT EXCEEDS ITS OCCUPANCY AND CAN ALSO BECOME A DANGEROUS FORCE IF IT COMES CRASHING DOWN. THE ROLE OF ASSEMBLY CAN BE A POWERFUL FORCE, BUT WITHOUT MAINTAINING SIGHT OF THE VISION, DIRECTION, AND PURPOSE IT CAN PROVE TO BE COUNTER PRODUCTIVE. DO WE TRULY EMPATHIZE WITH THE RESPECTIVE CHALLENGES AND HOPES OF OTHERS? CAN WE BE UNITED BY A COMMON VISION? DO WE SHARE A DREAM? CAN DIVERGENT VISIONS AND CONFLICTING ASPIRATIONS OCCUPY SHARED SPACE?

RESPONSE:

Big Gay Church: Religion, Religiosity, and Visual Culture: James H. Sanders III, Kimberly Cosier, Mindi Rhoades, Courtnie Wolfgang, & Melanie G. Davenport

“Big Gay Church is a performed interruption of the NAEA conference and an occupation of the church as institution, one that questions how LGBTQ2 subjects have (or have not) been addressed in the field of art education. Prior sessions have critiqued queer cultural consumption and naming practices, but most recently troupe members have explored political and social intersections with the church, particularly as it is narrowly imagined by the religious right. Members of the Big Gay Church troupe have also shared their personal experiences with religious orders and institutions, those that with few exceptions have seemed to loathe, ignore, exploit, or repress LGBTQ2 subjects. The performed provocations recounted here have been occupying the annual meeting space of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) since 2009” (2013, p. 119).

The past two years as editor of the Journal of Social Theory in Art Education have filled me with a sense of pride in the field of art education. I have had the privilege of working with young scholars who are thinking progressively about the necessary changes in our field to make it truly inclusive; with scholars who have shaped my own work as a young scholar, those who pioneered the CSTAE, and whose values have been a home for those of us who sought an elsewhere where all people count; and with reviewers who have demonstrated a commitment to support the work of others and encouraged them to broaden their visions. Each volume has felt like a bit of a life’s work, as I have tried to help the authors’ voices cohere into a unique shape.

In closing, I want to thank Patty Bode for her leadership as the Coordinator of the CSTAE during my time as editor. I also want to thank Alice Pennisi, the current coordinator of the Caucus, for her support of JSTAE Volume 33: PreOccupy/Maximum Occupancy. In addition, I
want to thank the editorial review board, Bob Sweeny, Senior Editor, and Sharif Bey, Associate Editor. Thank you to all the reviewers who are the core of the journal. Many thanks to the contributing authors whose hard work and constant conscientiousness make this volume so rich. I want to extend my extreme gratitude to Kelly Gross, whose exceptional organizational and technology skills, work ethic, and vision made her an outstanding editorial assistant. And a huge thank you to Ildikó Carrington whose copy-editing skills and love of language have been a great help to me as editor. Finally, thank you to my institution, Northern Illinois University, for supporting my work as editor of this journal.

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This is What Democracy Looks Like: Art and the Wisconsin Uprising

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Abstract

In February of 2011, an enormous popular political movement came to life in Wisconsin. For many people who were engaged in the month-long occupation of the Capitol in Madison, the Wisconsin Uprising was their first experience with direct political action. For the artists who are the focus of this article, taking part in the Wisconsin Uprising seemed like a natural outgrowth of their many years of socially engaged artmaking. In this article, I offer a brief overview of the Wisconsin Uprising followed by a discussion of the contributions of the artists in the protests in the context of their larger bodies of work. I close with an argument about why art matters in social justice movements and why art teachers have an obligation to include activist art in their curricula.

Art is indeed a weapon, and an especially powerful one in the midst of a peaceful movement. (Julie Guereseva, 2012)

In February of 2011, an enormous popular political movement came to life in Wisconsin in response to a bill called “Act 10,” which used a trumped up budget crisis to gut unions and strip funding from public schools. It was miraculous; the people (many of whom had previously seemed indifferent to political engagement, being preoccupied with the Green Bay Packers and Friday night fish fries) got up off their couches and barstools and took to the streets – in huge numbers, side by side. For many people who were engaged in the month-long occupation of the Capitol in Madison, the Wisconsin Uprising was their first foray into direct political action. For the artists who are the focus of this article, however, taking part in the Wisconsin Uprising seemed like a natural outgrowth of the many years of socially engaged artmaking done collectively and individually. It was like watching a small spark, carefully tended, burst into a wildfire.

Jesse Graves, Nicolas Lampert, Colin Matthes, Barbara Miner, and the Overpass Light Brigade (founded by Lane Hall and Lisa Moline) are all Milwaukee-based artists who make work that deals with a wide range of social justice issues including the environment, prison reform, the politics of schooling, racism, and poverty. Each has been engaged in social activism and art in diverse ways over the course of their careers. In this article, I offer a brief overview of the Wisconsin Uprising, from my perspective as a participant, followed by a discussion of the contributions of the artists involved in the protests in the context of their
larger bodies of work. I close with an argument about why art matters in social justice movements and why art teachers have an obligation to include activist art in their curricula.

The Wisconsin Uprising: A Brief History

The Wisconsin Uprising was sparked by the introduction of “Act 10,” also known as the “Budget Repair Bill.” The budget in the state was actually in much better shape than it was in many others at the time, but newly elected Republican Governor Scott Walker was out to make a name for himself and to pay back his wealthy political patrons by stripping unions of power and paving the way for more privatization of schools among other things (Miner, 2013). Walker coupled his announcement of Act 10 with news that he had put the National Guard on alert in the event that there were strikes or other forms of unrest. It was a grandstanding, politically self-promoting risk taken by a politician with national aspirations. Although he threatened his constituents with military force, Walker did not actually expect trouble. Act 10, which was supposedly created to address a fiscal crisis in a state that had no real crisis, was expected to smoothly pass through an assembly and senate that were both controlled by Republicans. No one counted on the peaceful, powerful energy created in the ensuing weeks.

At first we were stunned. Act 10 made clear Walker’s goals to attack public schools and dismantle public worker unions. This was obviously aimed at ramping up the Right’s long-range assault on the Commons, while annihilating the support unions have traditionally lent to Democrats in the state and across the country. The bill grew out of model legislation drawn up by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which has been behind so much corporation friendly, anti-worker, and anti-democratic legislation in this country from publicly funding an increasingly privatized prison industry with so-called “Three Strikes” laws, to the “Stand Your Ground” laws that have recently been highlighted in the tragic yet predictable murder of Trayvon Martin.¹

Wisconsin’s union-busting bill was one of sixteen such bills introduced across the country, but Walker was the first to pull the trigger (Jerving, 2011). According to Miner:

Walker’s first assault involved unprecedented legislation that eliminated collective bargaining rights for most public sector workers in Wisconsin—ironically, the first state to allow collective bargaining by public sector unions. In Wisconsin, elementary, secondary, and higher education employees account for the majority of those employed in the public sector. Teachers and students soon were in the forefront opposing Walker’s antiunion agenda. (personal communication, October, 23, 2012)

The Wisconsin Uprising was unlike any political action in the state’s history (Paton, 2011). Larger than the massive protests that took place in Madison in the 60s against the Vietnam War, the crowd also differed from any other in its demographic make-up. These protesters were not only leftist students and university professors (such as myself), they were also teachers, Teamsters, retirees, farmers, firefighters, doctors, and priests. The 2011 crowd was multiracial and intergenerational; young families marched side by side with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson and his entourage.

¹ For more on ALEC, see: http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/ALEC_Exposed).
I had marched on Washington with hundreds of thousands of people before, but this was different. It was homegrown, and the energy that was created by mixing the masses of new and seasoned activists was like none I had ever experienced. Each of us was filled with a profound sense of loving kindness and righteous indignation. As McChesney eloquently wrote, “the Wisconsin protests reaffirmed what many Americans had forgotten, and some never knew: that when people come together in solidarity directed at social justice they are capable of great sacrifice and unrivaled joy” (as quoted in Yates, 2012, p. 12). Joy was indeed present in all we did together that winter. Standing shoulder to shoulder, chanting “Kill the Bill!” we were a cross section of the heartland, bundled up in our parkas, mittens, and earflap hats.

A few days after Walker’s press conference, hearings on the bill began. On that night, and every night after for a month, hundreds of people stayed overnight in the capital building.
knowing that, by state law, the building must stay open if the public wishes to engage in the legislative process. Sleeping on hard marble floors, the “People’s Popular Assembly” took care to practice real democracy rooted in the common good. They shared food, music, wellness support, and information, swept and scrubbed the floor, and broadcast the whole thing on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The ubiquitous chant - “Tell me what democracy looks like...This is what democracy looks like!” - was enacted in the words and deeds of all of the protestors in Madison and around the state of Wisconsin, but those who camped in the Capitol were a true inspiration. Their actions provided another rallying cry: “Whose House? Our House!”

Emboldened by the energy of the protests, 14 Democratic Senators left the state to try to keep the Republicans from ramming the bill through the legislature, giving time for light to shine on Act 10. Rachel Maddow and Ed Schultz began regularly featuring in-depth stories about the protests on MSNBC. Other news outlets covered the story, though less thoroughly (McChesney as cited in Yates, 2012). News about the uprising made it to Egypt (where another protest was taking place!), and someone from Cairo ordered pizzas for the protesters in Wisconsin from Ian’s Pizza, which changed its tagline to “This is What Democracy Tastes Like.” News from the Right took a turn for the ridiculous when Fox News ran a story claiming that the protests were getting violent, repeatedly broadcasting footage of riots to drive home their message. The only problem? There were palm trees in the background of the videos, since the footage was from California, and Stephen Colbert caught them red handed! (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOzerRfB27o)

The weeks between the departure and return of the “Wisconsin 14” were filled with injustice and inspiration. Scott Walker refused to negotiate even after public worker unions voluntarily consented to the part of the bill that called for a 12% increase in worker contribution to pension and benefits. This refusal poked holes in the Republicans’ claim that Act 10 was about a budget deficit. Three weeks later, with the protests going strong, Walker and the Republicans shed any pretense of the union-busting bill being a budget fix by stripping the fiscal portions out so they could go ahead and vote without the quorum that had been denied by the departure of the 14 Democratic senators.
The following Saturday the "Wisconsin 14” returned and were greeted by a crowd of well over 150,000 (Miner, 2013), filling the streets and the grounds around the Capitol despite temperatures that were hovering around zero degrees Fahrenheit. It was one of the most amazing days imaginable. It began with a “tractorcade” of farmers who showed up first thing in the morning to circle the square around the Capitol, demonstrating solidarity with other workers. All morning, taxi and bus drivers and others parked or driving around the periphery of the capital square tooted their horns in time to the rhythm of the chant, “This is what democracy looks like.” When the “Wisconsin 14” came out on the stage, the entire crowd spontaneously began chanting in unison, “Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!” It felt as if we were all held afloat on the strength of our collective gratitude. That was the pinnacle of the Wisconsin Uprising.

Since that day, things have become much less dramatic, turning away from the adrenalin rush of the occupation to the quiet organizing that must always follow (Reed, invoking Ella Baker, 2005). We have had some victories and some serious setbacks. Out of the uprising grew a movement to recall Scott Walker. A million signatures were gathered, twice the number needed to require a recall election. Then the movement was whisked out of the hands of the people and turned into a campaign by the Democratic Party of Wisconsin. All the effort and enthusiasm for change were squandered, and the governor retained his throne. Several Republican senators were successfully recalled, and the balance of power tilted for a few months, but the most recent elections gave both chambers to the Republicans, thanks to redistricting that from the looks of things will ensure their hold on state politics for years to come. Parts of Act 10 were declared unconstitutional by an appellate judge, but there is a stay at this time while the state pursues an appeal.
Artists of the Wisconsin Uprising

Artists need Movements.
Movements need Artists.
(Nicolas Lampert, 2012)

Scores of artists and art teachers took part in various aspects of the demonstrations in Madison. *Art Workers for Wisconsin*, for example, is a collective of artists and teachers that formed out of the protests. The group’s most notable public intervention was a parade in which about a hundred participants marched around the square in ornate costumes and banners made out of the blue painters’ tape, the harmless stuff our opponents claimed did millions of dollars of damage to the Capitol (for a story on Jon Stewart’s take on this see http://www.mediaite.com/tv/jon-stewart-ridicules-how-fox-news-reported-clean-up-cost-to-wisconsin-capitol/).

For some artists, this was their first real foray into the realm of the political, but the artists focused upon in this essay had all earned their “radical credentials” well before the Wisconsin Uprising (Fowkes & Fowkes, 2012, p. 12). Their work helped spur the creation of thousands of posters that were made and employed during the occupation of Madison. They have continued to do important work that should make its way into art classrooms. Therefore, links to downloadable images of the posters and to the artists’ websites and other sites of interest are provided at the end of this article as a resource for educators.

Barbara Miner, whose photographs illustrate the story above, has come to the art world after finding much success in writing. An award-winning journalist and former Managing Editor of *Rethinking Schools*, Miner added photography to her repertoire of investigative tools fairly recently. She brings a journalist’s incisive eye to the act of documentary photography, linking it with a commitment to social activism. About her work, Miner quotes from Berger’s (1972) *Ways of Seeing*: “The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled” (http://www.barbarajminer.com/#mi=1&pt=0&pi=2&p=-1&a=0&at=0).

Miner is always keenly aware of that relationship. In 2008, she won a Greater Milwaukee Foundation’s Mary L. Nohl Fund Fellowship for Individual Artists. She used the award to document life along a major east-west street that cuts from affluent lakeside neighborhoods, through the heart of the central city, to the conservative stronghold of Waukesha County. The exhibition, *Anatomy of an Avenue: North, from the Lakefront to Pewaukee*, was powerful and highly acclaimed. According to Christensen,

> More than any other major thoroughfare in the Milwaukee area, North Avenue links neighborhoods, cities and counties. Barbara J. Miner...follows North Avenue and examines what unites and divides Milwaukee as a community. It is designed as a visual spur to challenge assumptions and to encourage people to get to know neighborhoods that may seem as distant as far-away countries but that are, literally, only down the street. (2009, n.p.)

Miner has connected the power of her journalistic work with documentary. She continues to explore the unsettled relationship between what she sees and what she knows. Resources on Miner’s work and the other artists can also be found at the end of the article.
Jesse Graves is an emerging, interdisciplinary artist who possesses impressive facility in a range of media and an equally impressive depth of concept for an artist so early in his career. Graves was trained as a metalsmith but works with any media that best suit his message. His work has a compassionate quality that reveals much about his moral compass as an artist as well as his politics. Graves is currently teaching art at the elementary level in a public school system in the Milwaukee area and continues to engage in artmaking that connects him to local, regional, national, and international activist communities.

Graves’s artwork addresses environmental issues, urban/guerilla gardening, and critiques of capitalism and consumer culture. He gained notoriety in the eco-street art community while still an undergraduate. In Nicolas Lampert’s Art and Ecology course at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Graves developed “mud stencils,” a method of street art stenciling that is ecologically friendly, inexpensive, and not illegal. He became internationally recognized for this contribution to activist art. Since then, Graves has used mud stencils to collaborate with activists in tactical media campaigns in cities across North America. Because they take place outside of the realm of traditional art spaces and are designed as social intervention, these tactical media campaigns fall squarely within the realm of interventionist art that Richardson (2010) urged art educators to consider. In this case, the artists engage in artistic production in a public space and then use the curiosity their work engenders to engage people in difficult dialogues about issues such as prison reform.

As part of his artistic reaction to Act 10, Graves created this mud stencil of an angry badger, which found its way around the state. The badger, the official animal of the State of Wisconsin, was featured in many of the poster designs found at the marches and in the occupation of the Capitol. Interestingly, Wisconsin was not named the “Badger State” because the animal proliferated here (Dictionary of Wisconsin History, n.d.). In the 1820s and 1830s lead miners first settled here. Without shelter in the winter, they lived in tunnels burrowed into hillsides, as badgers do. Badgers may live in holes, but badgers also fight when provoked! The state named after workers discovered that when workers come under attack, they fight back!

Figure 7. Recall Walker. Jesse Graves, 2011, mud stencil.

During the Wisconsin Uprising Graves worked with fellow artists Nicolas Lampert, Colin Matthes, and others to produce poster designs and prints that could be distributed free of charge to the protesters. This screen print was made using a photo taken by Graves during the protests in Madison. About this print Graves wrote: “In the Gettysburg Address Abraham Lincoln calls the American government a ‘government of the people, by the people,
for the people’. Whether or not this was ever a true statement is debatable, but it is certainly not true of Wisconsin’s government in the wake of Act 10’ (personal communication, November 15, 2011). Graves and associates wheat-pasted the poster throughout Madison and Milwaukee.

Nicolas Lampert also employs any means necessary to get his ideas to the people. Working primarily in print and collage, he also makes sculptures, installations, and music. Lampert has also undertaken numerous curatorial projects employing an activist’s eye. Lampert’s work has strong, though not didactic, political implications. Currently Lampert is pouring much of his creative energies into his forthcoming book, *A People’s Art History*, which will be published by The New Press in 2013. The book will be an incredible resource and teaching tool for art educators.

In addition to his fine art practice, Lampert engages in direct political action such as the project he and Jesse Graves did in conjunction with the activist group *Tamms Year Ten* to expose inhumane conditions for prisoners in Illinois’s Tamms prison. Lampert and Colin Matthes are both members of the Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative, which is committed to bringing low cost educational prints to the people. Free downloads of poster designs are available on their website ([http://justseeds.org/](http://justseeds.org/)), and, according to Lampert, Justseeds saw “massive traffic” to their site during the Wisconsin Uprising (personal communication, October 13, 2012). This is another interventionist tactic employed by artists in the Wisconsin Uprising, making poster designs widely available through free online distribution and, in a process of discursive social exchange, making new designs based on protesters’ revisions and reiterations of the designs (Richardson, 2010). Lampert told me that one of his favorite memories of the protests was walking up to the Capitol and seeing a crowd of

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complete strangers screen printing his designs at a makeshift printing station (personal communication, October, 13, 2012).

On the blog Printeresting, Urban (2011) wrote about this work:

As most visitors of this site are painfully aware, there is a lot of lip service paid to “the political print.” Too often it’s framed in historic terms: the demo- yaaawwwwn -cratic artform. Something print used to be. This work (and much of the justseeds work in general) is a living, breathing example of print being employed for a cause of the day. While twitter and facebook may be amazing organizational tools, holding up your iPhone at a political rally to share a political graphic is less effective. That’s where old-fashioned paper and ink come in handy. Thanks for sharing, Nicolas. (Urban March, 2011, n.p.)

**Figure 10.** Screen prints of designs by Colin Matthes and Nicolas Lampert. Photograph courtesy of Nicolas Lampert.

**Figure 11.** Protest Scene. Photograph courtesy of Nicolas Lampert.

**Figure 12.** WI Rise Up. Nicolas Lampert, 2011, screen print.
Colin Matthes makes socially engaged multidisciplinary artwork and graphics, much of it connected to social justice issues including labor history, factory farming, capitalism, and our dependence on oil. He also makes a wide range of types of work including zines, prints, installations, murals, and other forms of public art. In a video about a public art project he worked on in Milwaukee’s central city, Matthes said, “I guess anytime art has a larger, non-art audience, my ears perk up a little bit” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AyUSnQvCG8). That statement captures the spirit of much of Matthes’s work, it is truly for the people. The work Matthes made for the Wisconsin Uprising was most certainly for a larger, non-art audience.

As noted above, Matthes works collectively with Justseeds, a decentralized network of twenty-six artists living in the US, Canada, and Mexico. They run a print collective, produce portfolios, contribute graphics to movements, co-publish books, and build installations. Matthes made what I consider to be two of the most iconic prints of the Wisconsin Uprising, Union Made and Occupied for Labor, which can both be downloaded from the link provided above. As can be seen in the figures below, these designs pack a visual punch with Matthes’s signature, sketchy style, and quirky hand-drawn typography that give his posters the sense that they are by and for the people. Union Made can still be found in many windows on our campus and throughout Wisconsin.

Figure 13. Union Made. Colin Matthes, 2011, screen print.

Figure 14. Occupied for Labor. Colin Matthes, screen print, 2011. Photograph courtesy of Nicolas Lampert.
The Overpass Light Brigade (OLB), founded by Lane Hall and Lisa Moline, has become a movement unto itself born of the Wisconsin Uprising. The idea was simple: the artists made panels with illuminated letters to bring messages to the public in a sort of flash mob performance. Heimerl (2012) humorously dubbed it “Lite-Brite Activism” and said,

Holding lighted anti-Walker signs from pedestrian bridges overlooking busy interstates, the group inspires split-second reaction times from drivers below, whether it’s a happy “toot toot” from an approving motorist, or a booming “Fuck you!” from a giant SUV thundering under the bridge. (n. p.)
After a time, the signage itself grew less important, and the import of the community of “Holders of the Light” took on more significance. There are now affiliate groups throughout the United States. About this Hall said, “it is the community of volunteers who continue to amaze me. It is like we built this weird operating system, and these great people inhabit it” (personal communication, October 23, 2012). Milwaukee OLB continues to stage occupations and has done so in collaboration with the Nuns on the Bus (http://occupyriverwest.com), who joined the team to illuminate the signs “Question Austerity” and the Bainsport occupation (http://freakoutnation.com/2012/10/17/behind-your-back-documentary-details-bain-capitals-erasure-of-american-jobs/bainsport/). Images of their signs have gone viral on the Internet and have appeared on MSNBC’s the Ed Show.

In the run-up to national elections (and in the style of the Billboard Liberation Front, which engages in “improvements” of existing commercial billboards to make statements about the ubiquity of advertising and the unhealthiness of consumer culture http://www.billboardliberation.com/mission.html), OLB launched an offensive against a full-frontal attack on voter rights in the form of a billboard that appeared all over the central city. After the interventions of OLB and other more conventional activists, the billboards were taken down, and a counter-campaign was reportedly launched to rebut the original message.

2 The billboards were paid for by Stephen Einhorn, Principal of Capital Midwest Fund, President of Einhorn Associates, and a member of the Milwaukee Art Museum’s board. http://www.ideastream.org/news/feature/49912.

Figure 17. Action in response to voter suppression billboards, OLB Milwaukee. Photograph courtesy of Lane Hall and Lisa Moline.
Why Does Activist Art Matter?

Could an occupation take place without visual culture? Of course, but it is art and visual culture that give form to the ideas and demands of a movement, help people stake claims to the public spaces, and, along with video documentation, persist as historical artifacts once the occupation is over. Reed (2005) references the importance of art to social movements in his cogent analysis of the work of ACT UP and Gran Fury in the 1980s saying,

The war over HIV/AIDS was going to be very much a “discursive” battle, a battle over the meaning of works and images. This was surely not something wholly new in a social movement, but the extent to which “semiotic” warfare became self-conscious and central to the work of ACT UP was unprecedented. (p. 185)

With their signature style of bold images and spare but powerful text (such as the black poster with the inverted pink triangle and the message “Silence = Death”), ACT UP taught us to use the language of advertising and marketing to share meaning with one another as well as with the wider population through the news media.

As noted previously, there was considerable media coverage of the Wisconsin Uprising. As a result, images played a large role in the perceptions of people outside of the immediate area. This sometimes ended up being a discursive loop, for example, when palm trees suddenly began appearing on homemade signs and in inflatable form in street performances after the Fox News story had run. The artists of the Wisconsin Uprising used the lessons of artists in ACT UP and the Celebrate People’s History Project (MacPhee, 2010) to great effect keeping text to a minimum to heighten the visual impact of the posters, which served as quick reference guides to the issues that were important to the people of Wisconsin.

Urban (2011) points out the continued importance of the political print as a democratic art form, even in the age of the Internet and digital devices. This is especially true in the thick of an occupation. According to Solnit:

A revolution is a moment of waking up to hope and power, and the state of mind can be entered into from many directions. If revolutions often prompt posters to appear, the appearance of posters, murals and graffiti may foster revolution or at least breathe on the cinders, keeping the sparks alive until next time—which is why gentrification and repression often see to create silence as a texture. (2010, p. 9)

There does seem to be an allure to the print in times of unrest. Throughout the uprising, the Print Club at our school held open studio times when students, faculty, staff, and community members could come and screen print t-shirts and posters with the pro-Wisconsin worker messages. We were surprised at the turnout for these events. It seemed as though people wanted to have physical artifacts to help keep the movement alive. Thus the artistic interventions of the artists of the Wisconsin Uprising helped breathe on the cinders of revolution.

Staking a claim to a public space was a major component of the uprising, as it is in any movement that includes physical occupation (Campana, 2011; Garoian, 1999; Richardson, 2010). According to Duncum (2011), “today we face a serious contraction of public space. Due to the relentless logic of consumer markets and the visceral fear of physical attack, some have asserted that public space is now dead” (p. 348). Public space was very much alive during the Wisconsin Uprising, and the occupation of the Capitol owes a debt to art and visual culture for helping stake the claim.

With shopping malls passing for public spaces in our “consumer culture,” the occupation of a government building seemed almost outside of the realm of possibility in 2011. But early artistic interventions, both musical and visual, helped make the occupation in Madison happen and helped articulate a conception of public space that differs from commercial spaces for parallel consumption, places of discourse and democracy. Duncum writes,

I consider public space, both actual and virtual, as a place of conversation and contestation in pursuit of social justice issues.... Here, I am more narrowly focused upon public spaces as sites appropriated for the purpose of holding a conversation that extends to contestation. (2011, p. 349)

The space that was created through art and activism in Wisconsin was indeed a place of compassionate contestation. An appropriation of space that everyone had forgotten was ours and that the conservative foes, knowing the power of such a space, tried in every way to bar was incredibly significant. And that occupation, along with the Arab Spring, paved the way for the Occupy Movement.

The artists of the Wisconsin Uprising continue the good fight in the largely disembodied, post-encampment occupation period. Some, like the OLB, have successfully continued to bring bodies together in pursuit of political change. As Lane Hall wrote, “after the recall' [actions]... OLB gets (oddly enough) more interesting” (personal communication, October 23, 2012). Although the crowds may be gone from the public space, the public space remains in the minds and work of the artists.

Finally, art is important to movements because art and visual cultural artifacts can be catalogued and preserved for posterity. During the height of the protests the Smithsonian Institution came to Wisconsin and collected many samples of posters and photographs of...
the occupation (Arioto, 2011). Thus there is a collection to draw upon in the future. Although our history books do not contain much about labor history or popular uprisings, the information is available online through alternative venues such as the many links I have offered here, and in official spaces like the Smithsonian. I believe we have an obligation to teach about these alternative histories.

**Why Does Teaching about Activist Art and Artists in Movements Matter?**

As noted above, the information that students have access to in history textbooks is not inclusive of the people’s history (Zinn, 1980/2003). That is no accident. There are history teachers who find ways to bring the people back into history. So too should art teachers. You may not see yourself as a radical. You may even say that you are not political. But everything we teach in schools is political. According to Reed (2005), “any aesthetic text can be put to political ends, and all aesthetic texts have political implications, but no aesthetic text is reducible to its political meanings” (p. 303). We have an obligation. If you do not teach alternative social and art histories, you are ignoring the political implications of doing so and propping up a system that is working against your own well being as well as that of the rest of the 99%.

Teachers need not jump in head first. There are degrees of engagement with social justice teaching. According to Duncum (2011),

> Art educators have adopted a variety of pedagogies: descriptive, prescriptive, prescriptive, as well as alternative, and oppositional. Some pedagogies describe social reality with only an implicit agenda; others more clearly argue against existing social realities; while still others attempt to prescribe other possibilities. Conceived as a continuum of intervention in the cause of social justice, these pedagogies range from social critique to social action. (p. 351)

I would argue that if we wish to continue to engage in art education as a profession, we must get beyond fears that may hold us back and do as Bastos (2009) has advised – start somewhere. The future of public education lies in the balance. Many people who marched around the square next to me in the Wisconsin Uprising would never have imagined themselves to be protesters even a week before the uprising began. But when you realize those who would do away with public education are coming for you, and your students, you may surprise yourself. So if you are afraid or otherwise resistant, begin with descriptive lessons and slowly (at first perhaps) ease yourself into social action. Soon you will find yourself chanting, “This is What Democracy Looks Like!”

Resources for the Artists


**Colin Matthes:** the artist has many prints, books, and zines available at [www.justseeds.org](http://www.justseeds.org). His website is [colinmatthes.com](http://colinmatthes.com). downloadable graphics from the Wisconsin Uprising: [http://www.justseeds.org/blog/2011/03/wisconsin_downloadable_graphic.html](http://www.justseeds.org/blog/2011/03/wisconsin_downloadable_graphic.html).

**Overpass Light Brigade:** The movement’s website can be found at: [http://overpasslightbrigade.org/](http://overpasslightbrigade.org/). Lane Hall and Lisa Moline’s other artwork can be found at their website: [Bad Science: http://www.badscience.org/](http://www.badscience.org/).
Related Resources

**Occuprint:** All posters displayed on this site are part of the creative commons, and available to be downloaded for noncommercial use, though they ask that artists be given attribution: http://occuprint.org/Posters/ViewAll.

**Printering:** http://www.printering.org/2011/03/04/printing-for-a-cause/ - more-19188.

**Occupy Art and Design Pinterest Page:** http://pinterest.com/occupydesigning/occupy-design-art/.

**Interference Archive:** “The archive consists of many kinds of objects that are created as part of social movements: posters, flyers, publications, photographs, moving images, audio recordings, and other printed matter. Through our programming, we use this cultural ephemera to animate histories of people mobilizing for social transformation.” http://interferencearchive.org/.

References


Anonymous: 
The Occupy Movement and the Failure of Representational Democracy

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Abstract

In this essay I try to make the case that the Occupy Movement can be thought through as a Post-Situationist art event which requires that it be thought of in terms of its pragmatic effects and what it can ‘do’ in relation to its viral spreading around major urban centers of the globe. I further try to make my case by utilizing the conceptual tool kit of Deleuze and Guattari; hence such ideas as sense-event, territory, virtual, and actual are part of this repertoire. I then try to further the complexity of Post-Situationism by including hacktivism and exploring the importance of being Anonymous in a society of control. The overall intent is to worry representation and to make the case for direct or participatory democracy.
It is an error to divide people into the living and the dead: there are people who are dead-alive, and people who are alive-alive. The dead-alive also write, walk, speak, act. But they make no mistakes; only machines make no mistakes, and they produce only dead things. The alive-alive are constantly in error, in search, in questions, in torment.


1. It may be somewhat of a sacrilege for many art educators to think of the Occupy Movement as political and ethical art whose affect was to create a ‘smooth space’ of media attention within the striated territory of capitalist interests, which by law sets up the corporation as having the rights and responsibilities of persons with Wall Street as its pulse center. Yet, that is the aim of this essay: to treat the Occupy Movement as a ‘sense-event,’ a bloc of sensations in relation to the creative philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980), where art is theorized as a constant traversal flight into and across disciplines, thereby placing the social always into question. It is an attempt to treat the Occupy Movement, whose manifestations went viral globally via social networked media, as an exemplar of Post-Situationist art that works with virtuality, becoming, temporality, and territory. This is an exercise in what could be called practical aisthetics, as opposed to the usual aesthetic paradigm (defined as non-use-useful) that is usually foisted on art. The Occupy Movement exemplified a form of performance that no longer asks: “is this art?” but rather “what does it do?” And, moreover, ‘is it useful?’ To treat the artistic ‘sense-event’ in this way is to dispense with the usual framing that art in its various forms of capitalist discourse receives, such as ‘what does it mean?’ and, perhaps worse, ‘how do we judge whether it is a good|bad piece of art?’ And, of course, ‘what’s its worth, pricewise, that is?’ Such criticism and framing fall away when we shift the ground for art as a social ‘tool.’

2. Can the Occupy Movement be taken as a ‘tool’ in its performative theatrical sense? Such a pragmatic question that weds art to life is only obliquely tangent to Jacques Rancière’s (2004) now well-known stance on the “distribution of the sensible.” For the magnitude of such a reorientation to happen, Rancière (1998) places political change as a “rare event,” (p. 17, 139) which then redistributes the senses for greater participation by “the part that has no part” (Rancière, 2004, p. 12). The claim being proposed here is more modest; the emergence of an artistic sense-event enables an ontological reorientation on the micro-level

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1 This essay was inspired by Ian Buchanan’s “September 17, 2011: Occupy without Counting.” See his remarkable exploration of May 68 in Buchanan (2008). Smooth and striated spaces will be explicated later in this essay. The terms come from the philosophical oeuvre of Deleuze and Guattari (1980).

2 The difference between aiskesis (aisthetics) and aesthetics is a long running theme throughout my writing (see for example, jagodzinski, 2010a). Aisthetics is played at the neurological level; aesthetics is at the level of conscious cognition. Not that this has made much difference in the business as usual of art and its education.

3 See Wendy Brown’s (2002) analysis of the paradoxes of the rights movement and Ellen Feiss’ (2012) attempt to evaluate Tania Bruguera’s art project, Immigrant Movement International (IMI), in light of Brown’s Critical Legal Studies argumentation. This would be an example of the complexities of judgment based on what art can do.
or molecular level to take place, offering a micropolitics that becomes serialized as variant actualizations of Occupy Wall Street as the epicenter. Unlike Rancière’s model of transformative change, the Occupy Movement immanently emerges from the system that is already in place. It’s closer to the Duchampian urinal that conceptually flipped the ‘inside’ of the gallery and museum institutionalized space to the ‘outside.’ Zuccotti Park, as the site of public artistic action, occupied the ‘conceptualization’ of Wall Street as a symbol of Capitalist neoliberalist progress. The park is, after all, a slab of concrete. While the urinal created resentment and shock to bourgeois sentimentality, the Occupy Movement created resentment and shock to neo-cons, so much so that the conservative non-profit group Citizens United along with the late Andrew Breitbart, a high profile conservative, produced a conspiracy theory video called Occupied Unmasked to claim that this was pre-organized by leftist interests. As is well known, it was not the weather that did the Occupiers in. The ‘performance’ was stopped when the State had had enough from pressures placed on it by property owners, propertied classes, and capitalist interests; when all the deterrents had failed, force became the only way to ‘stop’ the movement.

3. One of the concerns I have with the social justice developments in our field of art and its education that understands artistic practice as a progressive cause is the way it has been caught by representational thinking and identity politics. Many of the essays in JSTAE continue to employ categorical signifiers of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability when making their arguments for equal rights. The worry is that subjectivity is decided on a priori grounds, as if it were some sort of pre-established combination of signifiers. From this a master signifier emerges within a particular context that defines who ‘I am’: queer, visible minority, white male, disabled, and so on. A dead-end has been reached. While I recognize that this position amongst my colleagues is contentious, it needs to be said. While I recognize that the struggle of identity must continue along molar lines, the worry is that the theorization of ‘difference’ remains caught up in representational thought that will never escape claims of hierarchy, bifurcation, and the slippages into transcendentalism and monolithic accounts shaped by the classical signifiers of representational thought: color, class, gender, sexuality, ability. Pluralist democracy, based on representation, is continually sabotaged by those very ‘representatives,’ who claim the rights of leadership, based on being a ‘purer’ form of a particular ideal that is seeking equality and justice. Such leaders are said to be closer to such discrimination than others included within the same categorical identity: poor Black people, ‘real’ women, transgendered as opposed to gay and lesbian. Inadvertently identity politics supports a ‘genderism,’ ‘postracism,’ ‘sexualism,’ and so on by virtue of the way ‘difference’ is cleverly pitted against a hegemonic ‘sameness.’ Since the constitutional ‘Law’ operates in this way, this ‘molar’ battle will continue. In Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980) terms, identity is a question of intensity and movement as well as a problematic by way of an ‘Idea,’ which articulates an unfolding desire. This is what holds a heterogeneous assemblage together. The categorical a priori signifiers fall away. The Occupy Movement formed such a heterogeneous assemblage that surpassed identity politics.

Contemporary critical art takes the political and the critical as shibboleths that apply equally to the neoliberal agenda as to the leftist agenda. A recent example is Imran Qureshi, who has been awarded “Artist of the Year” 2013 by the Deutsche Bank KunstHalle. The Deutsche Bank Global Art Advisory Council has a ‘gaggle’ of internationally renowned

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4 So, for instance, for them a workhorse is closer to an ox than a racehorse. Identity is no longer based on a genus.
curators including Okwui Enwezor (of Documenta 11 fame). The bank honors auspicious artists who address social issues in an individual way. Qureshi is a Pakistani artist who works from the motifs, symbolism, and ornaments of the Moghul tradition that flourished in the 16th and 17th centuries. The work is a reflection of the West and the Islamic world. Here tradition is referenced for the constricting models it represents, for its violent political and religious sentimentality, stereotypes, and conventions so as to work the tensions between violence and hope, destruction and creation, to call for peaceful resistance and optimism in these difficult times. Here we have a social criticism, supported by a world bank, via identity politics (Pakistani, Islamic, with the right tone) so as to further the much needed stability to keep currency flowing and tradable. In contrast, the Occupy Movement as a heterogeneous assemblage upsets such poststructuralist critical thinking since its defining identity appears to be ‘missing.’ Gender, sex, race, religious affiliation, age, and so on were not the defining signifiers of belonging. How often did the pundits of critical thought and the right raise the issue that there was no ‘leadership,’ that there were no clear demands made by occupiers, and so on? Why is that?

4. The Occupy Movement merged life and art, and it is in keeping with post-Situationism characterized by non-representational activism: the artist is not privileged, requiring interactors to make the artwork ‘happen;’ such art is situated in the ‘real world’ of the public theater, and it operates in a political sphere that is theatrical in the way social ‘padules’ are intervened and disrupted; the types of gatherings for post-Situationist art are differentiated by the force of the event itself—from micro to macro gatherings; the social media is employed in creative ways to reach the global network; it’s a DIY ethic that disseminates information that is contra to the syndicated news channels. The Occupiers movement’s fundamental demand follows the thinkers and rioters of May ‘68 to ‘change life’ (changer la vie). All desire is social production—economic and structural. As a well-known quote has Foucault (1984) querying,

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (p. 343)

Such is the thrust of the Occupy Movement: life as art. It is much like Joseph Beuys’ precursive idea of ‘social sculpture’ where ‘everyone is an artist.’ Following Beuys, the Occupy Movement seems to have strong affinities for building a ‘moving’

“SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART” . . . EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST who—from his state of freedom—the position of freedom that he experiences at first-hand—learns to determine other positions of the TOTAL ART WORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER. (As quoted in Tisdall, 1974, capitals in original, statement dated 1973, p. 48)

One might think this is an exaggerated claim. However, we can think of each Occupy site within the realm of interventionist installation art in two ways: first there is the literal site, which simply refers to the location as a singular place (i.e., Zuccotti Park) that has its own

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5 Patterns and schedules.
6 For an exploration of art into life and life into art, see jagodzinski (2010b).
physical constraints, and second, there is the functional or pragmatic site that does its ‘force work.’ Here Wall Street is the target that is being **virtually** ‘occupied,’ and the economic and political problematic that the Occupation Movement presented is oxymoronically presented by this ‘pragmatic site,’ for it is only ‘temporary,’ although the attempt is made to hold on to the territory for as long as possible. After all it’s the **Occupy Movement**, not the **Occupied Movement**. As the ‘outside’ forces that biodegrade artwork endure, so too do the State forces eventually try to ‘wear down’ the demonstrators via court injunctions and various safety prohibitions, until violent State forces are employed (pepper spray, billy clubbing, tear gas, physical constraint and removal, smashing computers, and so on) to finish the job. But not before the economic problematic has been exposed globally via social and public media. The artwork as an ‘abstract machine’ has done its job; its effects have been disseminated. Whenever this happens the questions concerning the Law are always raised. In this regard the ethical and political questions that surround the performative videos of hostage beheadings by Al-Qaeda and of the Occupy Movement are one of degree rather than kind. Both extremes answer to a ‘future social order.’

5. The Occupy Movement that spread globally into major cities has many qualities attributed to art engaged with genuine interpersonal human relationships, ‘participatory art,’ which requires some form of engagement on behalf of the viewer to complete the work. Passersby, workers going to Wall Street, and the media had to ‘engage’ with the demonstrators in Zuccotti Park (formerly called Liberty Plaza Park!). Such art enters the public sphere to disrupt daily movement, comprising a spatial element, a territorialization that escapes the institutionalized space of the museum and gallery. Yet, such ‘participation’ needs to be evaluated—is it merely a subordination to the artist’s will as the organizer of the ‘spectacle’ for ethico-political ends? Are the participants yet more fodder for the ‘event’ like reality television? Are these bodies serving in the capacity of the service economy—as unpaid labor through their voluntarism? Such art that enters life focuses the economic injustices that are so obviously in play within the designer capitalist system. It is a shift away from the lens of aesthetics to the force of the social impact that emerges from the formation of bodies affecting each other. Thus the creation of a meme whose genesis reproduces itself as more and more people are acceptant of the cultural idea no matter their identity as defined within representational logic. Post-Situationist in its thrust, the Occupy Movement did a turn with media that spread its efforts **serially**, that is, horizontally and rhizomatically. The **virtual idea**, the Occupy Movement’s virtuality as a sense-event in relation to the problematic that they were demonstrating, is what became **actualized** globally, spreading from one city to the next by clearing a smooth space within each urban area, parking next to some iconic monument (city hall, state building) or marker of progressive achievement (a bank).

6. With communication networks becoming interior-focused, private space and identity

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7 To what extent are bodies ‘used’ by artists as participants like Sebastiao Salgado for his dramatic pictures of Sahelian famine? Are these victims or willingly ‘posed’ bodies? What of Santiago Sierra? He hires disadvantaged and marginalized individuals as part of his performance pieces. Sierra hired a tattoo artist to tattoo a continuous line across the backs of four drug-addicted prostitutes in return for the price of one hit of heroin. What of the infamous ‘container’ installation by the late Austrian artist Christoph Schlingensief to raise awareness of the increased xenophobia over immigration by the use of the nationalist Freiheitliche Partei of Jörg Haider back in 2000? Are these shock tactics to raise the ‘problematic’ of injustices ethically and politically justified? Whenever art in life is staged, such judgment can never be avoided as human rights and the Law come into play when it comes to transformative change, no matter the scale.

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seem all there is; the public arena within cities has been striated, privatized and marked spatially and temporally only to continue the flows of commerce. Yet, Occupy took the tactic of holding a space as a constant reminder that civil disobedience marks a stance of defiance against ‘business as usual.’ Such a ‘smooth’ space begins to act as a space of condensation for the repressed worries on everyone’s mind. As Zygmunt Bauman (2001) put it, “Public Space is not much more than a giant screen on which private worries are projected without, in the course of magnification, ceasing to be private” (p. 107). At the molecular level the creation of such ‘microutopic’ communities follows a ‘swarm mentality’ that is experimental in nature. Occupy was not a protest as much as a “demo-stration” of what a participatory assemblage might function like, complete with a General Assembly that arrived at decisions by 90% consensus and the production of The Declaration of the Occupation of New York City on September 29, 2011. It is a statement that marks out the problematic of ‘corporation’ in the way that a ‘person’ has corrupted what was perceived to be a democratic system ‘by the people, for the people.’

7. It is perhaps ironic that the Occupy Movement as an art that works with a ‘swarm’ mentality with acephalous leadership overturns Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) well-known claim that the camp exemplifies the ‘state of exemption.’ Here the camp, rather than being under sovereign control, is taken back. It is not pervaded by ‘bare life,’ but by life that thrives, exemplary of direct democracy’s potential for communism where people help people in a cooperative effort. As many have pointed out, the campers used extraordinary ingenuity as the State tried to impose its ‘soft’ force to make them give up and disappear. A late October snowstorm prompted the city of New York to confiscate gasoline generators as a fire hazard. Occupy Wall Street’s response was to acquire bicycle generators to create ‘clean’ and safe energy as well as to contribute to the good-will of participants in their solidarity. With the banning of bullhorns, the human microphone, or ‘open mic’ as the entrainment of the voice—repeating words and passing the message on down the line so that everyone ‘got it’—solidified the affect and the resolve of the encampment. As Protevi (2011) puts it

The human microphone thus offers an entry into examining political affect in the enacting of the phrase ‘We the People’ at OWS. It shows us how direct democracy is enacted by producing an intermodal resonance among the semantic, pragmatic, and affective dimensions of collective action. (n.p.)

The ‘joy’ that this human microphone created worried right-wing pundits like Ann Coulter (whose personality exemplifies the sickness and dysfunctionality of U.S. politics). To her these encampments (or anything that she perceives as ‘liberal’) were mobs or potential mobs. Once so perceived, her spin was to generate threat and anxiety as to their explosive violence, vilifying them as devils. To drive this home Andrew Breibart of Citizens United Productions produced a documentary called Occupy Unmasked claiming that Occupy was a plot manufactured by the Democratic ‘hard’ left. Rape, drug overdoses, and deaths were played up to further vilify the encampment.

8. Through Facebook, 400 unique pages on the Occupy Movement were developed that spread the word across the U.S. There was at least one in each of the 50 States. The Facebook pages enabled organizers to facilitate local encampments and organize protests and marches. People could be recruited, resources allocated to local occupations, information could be exchanged, and stories told and shared. Twitter announced the event and polled the views at large on a specific decision in real time. Gender, sex, age, disability
made no difference here. This was a non-representational movement. Not labor unions or teachers marching in the streets, or a gay liberation parade, but an ‘occupation,’ both virtual and actual, pointing to the utter stalemate with the political and economic system of representation and the corporations that they support. If the U.S. elections showed that the country was evenly divided left and right, then this was no centralist compromise. There is no disputing the disparity of wealth over the last 30 years; the top one percent has received three-fifths of all the income gains in the country. Most of this went to the richest tenth of that one percent (see Trudell, 2012). The movement was the lumpenproletariat along with students and working men and women and those that joined displaying its ‘last stand.’ It was but a glance as to how participatory democracy might work—no representatives claiming leadership for the cameras. By resisting making specific demands or adopting some sort of platform (liberal, democrat, green), the movement avoided political partisanship, and it was one of constant ‘becoming,’ continually open to more and more actualization of the idea that another future was possible than the one framed by capital.

9. And what precisely have neoliberal economic policies wrought that Occupiers find so distressing, besides the Democratic betrayal and the waning of the Obama Dream? As Wendy Brown (2011) summarizes it:

staggering unemployment (25% among recent college graduates), deteriorating wages, vanishing pensions, home foreclosures, scandalous rates of poverty and homelessness (1 in 5 children in the US is born into poverty) and accelerated destruction of public goods and services already slimmed by two decades of neoliberal defunding and privatization. Together these effects pooled the predicaments of the poor and the middle class, the young and the old, the working and the under- and unemployed: all are sacrificed as capital is propped, bailed, and continues to feast. Put another way, what makes this era unique is the unprecedented mutual identification among working middle class families carrying under-water mortgages, unemployed youth carrying under-water college loan debt, laid-off factory workers facing contracting unemployment benefits, public workers forced to shoulder ever growing contributions to their own ‘benefits’ or losing long-promised pensions, and skilled and unskilled workers—from pre-school teachers to airline pilots—whose salaries for full-time work cannot lift their families above poverty level. (n.p)

Can anyone not be affected when reading this succinct list?

10. So why post-Situationist? How can I claim that the Occupy Movement be seen as an exemplar of this force of artistic theater? Situationist International addressed the society of the spectacle. So, have we left such a society? Many would say it’s stronger now than when Guy Debord (1970) first formulated such a thesis with a rigor that has stood up. However, what the society of the spectacle is and how it is taken up in artistic discourses vary from critic to critic: some attribute it to corporate display (architecture was postmodernism’s first love affair) or to ‘screen’ culture in general, with the glut of images that continues to be produced exponentially it seems. Certainly Jean Baudrillard (1983) dismissed this idea in the early 80s, suggesting that “the merging of medium and message” should be considered “the first great formula of the age” (p. 54). I personally maintain that the dispositive in place is the synopecton (jagodzinski, 2010b), an inverted panoptic. Here the many watch the few, while the self-exhibitionism of the few (through the social media of television,
YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, personal webpages, blogs) clamors for recognition by appealing to an amorphous conglomeration of spectators 'out there' for their aggrandizement, which is abetted by the silliness of having the 'audience' vote as to who is the best dancer, or class act, and so on, enriching the global franchise of these 'talent' shows. The apotheosis in the art world in this vein/vain may well be the 'Twitter Art' of Anthony Gormley. One and Other (2009) was a 100-day (2,400 hours) project of a 'human sculpture.' A single person was to occupy the 'fourth plinth' of Trafalgar Square in London for an hour. He or she could do whatever he/she liked. These activities were recorded and continually streamed online. The project was touted as 'democratic,' 'representing' the 'people' of Great Britain. Here spectacle is reinforced as a stream of banal egos is forwarded in the name of 'participatory' democracy.

11. Such faux participation is furthered by the communicative technologies, as if they have opened up more 'participatory democracy' rather than simply refining representational politics into the ability to find precise target groups as evidenced in the recent presidential election: the Latino vote, the women’s vote, the Black African-American vote, the gay vote, and on it goes. Participation in designer capitalism is characterized by 'interpassivity,' as the Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller (2003) put it. The fetishism of technology seems to further communication, yet the platforms that make it possible are pre-designed, and in the last instance control the responses that are possible. Post-Situationist art looks to a 'participating' spectator, what I have called elsewhere an 'interactor' (jagodzinski, 2010b). The 'interactor' here is an 'affected' individual, as if drunk with the possibility of change that outstrips the 'post-political' climate where everything is calculated and marketed for economic gain. Such an interactor need not merely be a 'participant' but a collaborator as well. But many artists who maintain that they oppose individualism and the commodity object often play into neoliberalism's most seductive forms such as networking, the freedom of mobility (as long as one is productive), affective labor, and art projects that draw the crowds into the city's gallery system. We have today, like designer capitalism itself, the generation of a new oxymoron that satisfies both the left and the right: mass customization. The Occupy Movement was proliferating such 'interactors' before the State shut down the experiment in participatory democracy. Such post-Situationist art speaks not only to consumerist societies where 'activism' is the right to vote for some celebrity on television, but to totalitarian and military regimes as well, where it is far more dangerous to engage in such theater. Yet there is an attempt to revive 'communism' as an Idea, rather than look to the Communism that collapsed in 1989, and it has been hijacked by regimes such as China which has in its place an even more ruthless form of capitalism: communist capitalism or capitalist communism, take your pick.

12. The Occupy Movement has direct ties to Hacktivism (hack and activism) in the way the tension between artistic and social critique is maintained, yet overcoming the usual claims of art activism, especially in the case of Nicolas Bourriaud’s (2002) ‘relational aesthetics’ that has received too much attention in art and its education for its transformative impact since it is confined to the gallery network, a fact that seems to escape its advocates. in terms of the ‘relational’ thesis, one is hard pressed not to see the difference between Rirkrit Tiravanija cooking Pad Tai (1990) for gallery visitors and talking to critics and the Occupiers of these camps sharing and cooking food together. The difference of course is the site itself and the problematic that is being engaged. Hacktivism and the Occupy Movement overcome the usual binaries when it comes to public art: individual/collective, artist/participant, active/passive, art and life. They do so because such binaries are worked through as a productive tension via anonymity. Hacktivists are the ones who wear the Guy
Fawkes masks that come from the cult film V is for Vendetta, responsible for aiding the demonstrations in Tripoli and Cairo; arrested for their Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) raids against corporations and trolling techniques by attacking Scientology (which resulted in jail time). One such hacktivist development was by twenty-year old Isaac Wilder and his friend Charles Wyble during the Occupy Wall Street Movement. Their invention was the ‘The Freedom Tower,’ another DIY project. The Freedom Tower is essentially an alternative Internet, or mesh network, like a pirate radio Internet, that works with peer-to-peer network interaction to share files and information, completely shielded from corporate and State Internet controls, which could easily be enforced. As a meme, it spread to Occupy Austin, Occupy San Antonio, and Occupy Los Angeles before it was all shut down.⁸

Anonymous

In the remaining part of this essay, I would like to dwell on the question of anonymity that pervades the hacktivism of Anonymous and the ‘leaderless’ General Assemblies that characterized The Occupy Movement. It is a reflexion⁹ that folds back on the first part of this essay, attempting to make the outside inside once more.

13. Anonymity is generally understood as some sort of cover or mask over a subjective self. It presents the paradox of being a somebody—yet a ‘nobody’ with agency. The null position of its erasure or disappearance (anonymity's double or duplication) occurs when it is considered a form of identity itself. The common sense notion of being anonymous is somehow to escape identification, or to support something up front, like a charitable donation, and not be identified with it. Why? Perhaps to become known and associated with a cause brings unwanted consequences—corporate donations are generally anonymous so that they can target charities they feel serve their value system, not to mention the generous tax break that is given for being a good corporate citizen. With the US presidential elections much was made of the so-called anonymous Super PAC [political action committees] donors that were shaping the Republican presidential race. Their anonymity has finally been exposed as the players behind the spate of caustic advertisements. That it was the wealthiest 1% should be no surprise.

14. Western art’s overriding trope has been subjectivity, the authority of the artists and self-expression as tied to libertarian rights. Ai Weiwei has become the new iconic symbol of such free expression. Promoting such an artist who is so vocal and mistreated so badly by the Chinese government garners not only sympathy, but presents the United States as a country where artistic dissent is prized as long as it stays within the limits of the State and national laws. The question of who is promoted for what political reason should always be asked.¹⁰ Yet, Ai Weiwei used his international fame to push against his country’s immigration

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⁸ In art and its education David Darts has developed his DIY PirateBox that enables wireless file sharing networks where users can anonymously chat and share images, video, audio, documents, and other digital content (see http://wiki.daviddarts.com/PirateBox_DiY).

⁹ I use this grapheme (self-reflexion) in my writing to distinguish it from representational self-reflection and post-structuralist self-reflexion that is often used with identity politics. Self-reflexion works with the notion of the Deleuzian 'fold' (pli) wherein the symbiosis of the inside/outside becomes a complex topological landscape.

¹⁰ An obvious example in an art historical context comes from the support of the CIA and the genesis and support of the National Endowment for the Arts as a direct result of Cold War cultural politics where Abstract Expressionism was touted as ‘free expression’ in contrast to Social Soviet Realism (Guilbaut, 1983).
policies, raising their problematic by performing *Fairytale* for 2007 Documenta XII.\(^{11}\) It shows self-reflexivity in action. If my argument that the Occupy Movement is an example of a new artistic public expression, articulating the frustration of representative democracy publicly, then that ‘freedom’ of expression has been further breached. Recent U.S. legislation over copyright laws (that were eventually thwarted) caused some websites to voluntarily shut down like Btjunkie. Others like Pirate Bay stood their ground. In a designer capitalist system there isn’t much wiggle room as intellectual property means profit dollars. Copy Left does what it can within a system where everything is counted for personal gain. The hacktivism of Anonymous pushes hard to make all their software free source. Instructions are easy for participating in a DDoS raid, or for being a ‘troll’ to help shut down a racist site. But then the law is always in the corridors.

15. To be anonymous could not exist without the null set of a system of being ‘nobody’ as the binary of being a ‘somebody’ (see Figure 1). Anonymity exists as the overlap between the I and non-I, between marks of non-agency (literally no body) to literally possessing some body, which grants full agency. Anonymity exists between non-signification and signification. In this overlap it is Janus-faced operating on the border of the in-between. There are a number of ways to take this in-between existence. I will develop two of these: one representational and the other non-representational, which is where I think the force of art as played out in the Occupy Movement and hacktivism occurred.

16. First it is necessary to recognize that anonymity operates within a global society of media surveillance and electronic identification as one’s digitalized persona in the so-called control society where faciality is not only profiled and categorized but in many countries arrests are made for civil disobedience, as we have witnessed in Syria, but not only Syria. The riots in London and Vancouver when the Philadelphia Flyers beat the Vancouver Canucks in ice hockey for the Stanley Cup led to many arrests simply by having police

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\(^{11}\) One thousand and one Chinese immigrants were invited to come to Kassel, Germany along with 1001 chairs from the Ming and Quing dynasties that stood empty as the surrogates for the 1001 visitors who milled around the city with its citizens.

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**Figure 1.** Between no-body and some-body.
looking at surveillance tapes and checking their data banks. The difference between Syria, Britain, and Canada in this regard is simply one of degree rather than kind. When one thinks of the clever way protestors have been removed from their “occupy sites” via fire rules and loitering regulations, the comparisons seem all the more worrisome. Even more tragic when it comes to forms of protest as performance art, Canada has passed a law that makes it illegal to wear masks during riots and protests during unlawful assembly, in itself a tenuous definition. The Draconian Bill C-309 has yet to be ratified by the Canadian House or Senate. If it does pass, the jail sentences are up to ten years! The Anonymous hackers who troubled Scientology were given sentences longer those given to pedophiles, up to ten years. This speaks to the power of the mask and the power of anonymity that the State fears. One positive aspect is that such masks are still allowed in peaceful demonstrations and protests. Peace and violence are like two sides of the same coin, easily ‘flipped.’

Figure 2. TIME's "Man of the Year" – The protestor.

17. There is no such thing as anonymity, or rather anonymity is defined by ways of avoiding State capture. Civil disobedience remains at the global forefront in so many countries. The youth of the world are attempting to open a future. They form a huge culture of disillusionment and disappointment. To look at the recent U.S. elections is to see the stalemate of the State as the disconnect between power and politics. Politics, it seems, serves power rather than has power. The power of the State has been beleaguered. Power lies in the spaces of finance, trade, information, off-set by drug trafficking, illegal immigration, the illegal sex trade, and corruption. Much has been made of Time’s Person of the Year issue being “The Protestor,” which appears on the top left corner in this image of a sea of images for what was once called “Man of the Year” (see Figure 2). This image was claimed to be anonymous—supposedly neither male nor female, nor any race, nationality,
or religious orientation. But the irony of this image of “The Protestor” who was to represent the 99% of nobodies of the Occupy Wall Street Movement was soon revealed, if the image itself was not a hoax (see Figure 3). It turned out to be that the image taken by photographer Ted Soqui was that of Sarah Mason, a 25-year-old resident of Highlands, part of a later Photoshopped scene of an Occupy LA protest at Bank of America in Downtown LA in November of 2011. The Protestor of the Year has been fingered and exposed. Again, “There is no such thing as anonymity, or rather anonymity is defined by ways of avoiding State capture.”

Figure 3. TIME’s “Person of the Year” – The protestor.

18. Artists working to avoid capture by the State operate within a post-Situationist diagram. Much of it is like protest itself—attack and then withdraw to disrupt chronological time, since the operations need to be clandestine leaving no trace behind. Unfortunately, these are more anarchic, like the Hacktivists known as ‘Anonymous,’ who dons the mask of V (in V for Vendetta) (see Figure 4). To go outside the social institution, to become a ‘nobody’ can operate only in the form of nomadology, which means perpetual movement, and the political question then becomes where the line is drawn between criminality and justice since hackers are able to play both sides of the border. Internet issues blatantly show where power lies. When Wikileaks became controversial Pay Pal, MasterCard, and Amazon pulled out from the site so that donations couldn’t be received.

Figure 4. Anonymous.
19. Activist media has had three incarnations so far. Net.art was the 1.0 version. People like Heath Bunting maintained that Internet communications, which were being promoted as the triumph of the democratic subject, were in actuality being co-opted by capitalist forces as a tool to expand consumer culture. As the free Web loses more and more ground, it seems that the 1.0 net.artists have been proved right. The next incarnation was Tactical Media or the Web 2.0 version by advocates like Geert Lovink, who continued social activism, but here the Achilles’ heel was the design. Tactical media weaponry could attack and destroy but rarely build anything new. The third wave has become locative media or ‘situated software’ thatforegrounds networked bodies. Locative media are flexible, versatile, embodied, and portable. An obvious example of this third incarnation is Electronic Disturbance Theater’s Transborder Immigrant Tool. A cheap cell phone (Motorola’s i455) that has GPS functionality is then redesigned to assist people crossing the Mexican-US border across the desert—this is a real favorite of Republicans! The ‘war machine’ here fights surveillance with surveillance through the GPS mobile device. Unlike Tactical media, these mobile technologies offer activists a way to reconnect to the world in DIY kinds of ways to achieve ‘real effects.’ There are many more examples like the Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA) that finds ways to skirt surveillance cameras.

20. Anonymity in first and second incarnation is through representation, that is, trying to avoid surveillance and detection where all the spaces of movement and time are being shut down via designer capitalism that counts everything in terms of warrants and tolerances. The other way might be via non-representational means—anonymity that faces in the direction of nobody rather than somebody, a rethinking of subjectivity altogether. This is where the Occupy Movement and hacktivism by Anonymous find themselves involved with the more flexible means of ‘fighting fire with fire,’ so to speak. They turn the possibility of media in on itself: Copy Right becomes Copy Left. The Freedom Tower, mentioned above, is a good example of its versatility in the way an alternative Internet is possible on a micro-scale. I call this (again) self-reflexivity within the forming assemblage of desire.

21. Recall that behind the mask of Anonymous—V for Vendetta—is the burnt unrecognized face that is so horrible one cannot look at it (see Figure 5). Anonymity can be rethought as the inhuman—or the unconscious inhuman that has its own agency—like the swarm effect of the Occupy Movements. While Deleuze and Guattari (1980) develop the ‘war machine’ as tactical representational media 2.0 demonstrate, they also develop the notion of probeheads as a way to disturb faciality.

![Figure 5. The faceless face of V for Vendetta.](image)
It is the face, they maintain, that positions and characterizes subjectivity—what they take as the facial machine of black space and white wall. In other words a face does not exist until it signifies, and its signification can materialize only against a discourse, which is the identity politics of representation. While poststructuralism has seen a proliferation of differences, each difference is still set against an ideal type, so there is a proliferation of ideal types that identity politics has set into motion. The most obvious examples are advertisement companies like the Colors of Benetton in the way they manage racial identities, and in the entertainment industry it has been Madonna that has profited on the multiple makeovers with Lady Gaga being a step-up, rather than being a ‘probehead’ that deterritorializes subjectivity. We might think of Anonymous hacktivism as a form of ‘probehead’ that places ‘identity’ into stasis (see Figure 6).

![Figure 6. Anonymous as probehead.](image)

22. Probeheads destroy categorizations and look towards, as Deleuze|Guattari (1980) say, “a people yet to come” (p. 345) The youth are generating this “people yet to come” via a participatory democracy that has ‘yet to come.’ The faciality of anonymity as a form of probehead cannot be categorized, unlike hybridity, which still enables categorizations to
emerge in finer details—like getting your genes analyzed and saying you are 1% aboriginal or 4% black and so on. Probeheads simply disturb and are not so easily identifiable as they are an abstraction, an ‘abstract machine.’ The hacktivism of Anonymous and the Occupy Movement are the non-representational emergent developments, searching for an ‘audience’ that has not formed, via participants that are not yet there; they hold the virtual potential of another ontology, another ‘world’ view that must emerge if the 99% are to have life that is not held hostage to the debt that the corporate world uses to define its future for the 1%.

We see that even the State can be held hostage—all across Europe by the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) insistence on payment: Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, and most recently Cyprus. Italy is endangered as well.

One of course may call my characterization of the Occupy Movement as ‘bad performance art,’ much as early Christian art was ‘crude’ in relation to the splendor of Roman art that was refined and polished. Yet Christianity introduced a new ethic of citizenship: a creed that enabled any citizen to join them, breaking with Roman civitas, which applied only to Roman citizens. The Occupy Movement also introduced a new ethic: open participation for a Cause of economic equality and community. Judgment cannot be based on aesthetic grounds (good/bad) because we are not dealing with refined and polished theater, an aesthetic that is already in place. Rather it is an emergent diagram or platform that is just beginning to be crystallized. Here we have the start of something crude—an experiment of potentiality that does not ‘premediate’ the future, but rather opens it up.

The Occupy Movement is ‘an abstract machine’ in the way it reproduces desire for a participatory democratic process that emerges from the stranglehold of global institutions like the World Bank. We saw its replication around the planet, a social meme gone viral. While it was brutally shut down, the virtuality of its force has hardly been extinguished. It is the projection of the emergence of new global citizenry, the affective feeling that there is an economic cancer that has to be cured, and the health of the planet fought for.
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Poetic Occupations: Artists as Narrator-Protagonists

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Abstract

What does it mean to “occupy” space? Referencing the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protests of 2011, this paper articulates a type of public art practice that can be understood as poetic occupation. The paper further suggests that shifting one’s understanding of public art practice provokes a reconsideration of the role of the artist. To this end, Miwon Kwon’s (2002) term “narrator-protagonist” is useful for expressing this alternative role. The paper proceeds with an exploration of the work of the artist collective Lone Twin, supported by Michel de Certeau’s (1984) theories associating walking with speaking, and illustrated with an analysis of student artwork. Through this analysis, the paper concludes with an examination of the type of learning that might occur when one produces poetic occupations.
Introduction

The Occupy Movements that characterized much of the latter half of 2011 in both New York City and abroad can be viewed as a process of laying claim to a particular space as a public space. For instance, Zuccotti Park, the now famous location of the origins of the Occupy Wall Street Movement (OWS), is a publically accessible park. However, its characterization as “public” is somewhat convoluted. A program established in New York City allowed developers to purchase space adjacent to or near their building project in return for concessions regarding building size restrictions. Using this opportunity, Brookfield Office Properties acquired the area now known as Zuccotti Park and designated it as an “open space” in accordance with the agreement. It would be publically accessible yet still privately owned (Foderaro, 2011). This vague designation opens the space to critical interrogation. A conventional understanding of occupying a site would suggest a conscious taking over of a space. In the case of the OWS, occupation was meant to produce a visible and cohesive community of like-minded individuals intent on projecting and promoting a particular social perspective.

Whether this action was successful or not is not the focus of this paper. Rather, I am interested in the theoretical foundations that give the process of occupation and the resultant community meaning. I mean to address the basic question: What does it mean to “occupy” space? And what are the consequences of that occupation? Furthermore, how can this understanding be applied to reconsider forms of artistic expression for students and to rearticulate the purposes and pedagogical objectives of art education? The paper will conclude with a reflection upon final public art projects in which pre-service elementary education undergraduates were asked to “occupy” a site on their campus through the installation and/or performance of site-based work.

One of the qualities of the Zuccotti Park demonstrations that caught my attention was the manner in which communication was accomplished. If one person were speaking to a large crowd gathered around him/her where those furthest away were unable to hear, every phrase uttered by the speaker would be repeated in succession by each concentric ring of listeners until the comment reached those at the outer edges of the crowd. This practice of not using a megaphone accomplished two things. First, all were compelled to actively listen, as they would be responsible for repeating what was just spoken, thus creating an engaged and unified audience. Second, it reinforced what Judith Butler (2011) suggested in a presentation about the Occupy events: “Space and location are created through plural action” (n.p.). Communal action is a core condition of public space. That is, public space is a consequence of neither architectural nor natural physical form, but is produced by connections among and between people. Butler argues, “all political action requires the ‘space of appearance’” (n.p.). Yet this is not a prescribed or willfully defined space, nor is it a community constituted by the efforts of a few individuals. Rather the “space” or community appears as a result of the common presence of the collective itself. That is, the occupation, what Nancy (1991) would call “being-in-common,” produces an alliance among people, rather than the other way around, and produces a space that “belongs properly to alliance itself” (p. 2). A community is thus not defined through deliberate effort and consensus, but as a provisional community that emerges through the very act of putting oneself in relation to others.

Nancy (1991) correlates the conditional nature of such a community with the ontological understanding of the subject as always already “in-common” with others. As such,
communal structure does not have an essence corresponding to a sense of the individual as a unique being with his or her own will. According to Nancy, since there is not a common atomistic sense of being, then a community with a common identity or an agreed upon common meaning is impossible. For Nancy, being itself, understood as “being-in-common,” (p. 1) is the essential condition of community. Thus community is defined essentially by the co-presence of two or more people rather than by any particular commonality put forth by any individual. The variability and unpredictable nature of multiple voices render a stable community untenable, thus opening the very structures of any presumed community to question and critique without an expectation of subsequent consolidation. As such, its meaning and form come about through preexisting relationships occurring incidentally or unconsciously as a result of contact, which “produce[s] the very conditions of the interaction, performing its own coming together and coming apart as a necessarily incomplete modeling or working-out of a collective social process” (Kwon, 2002, p. 154).

Arendt (1958) reflects this understanding when she writes, “action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anywhere and anytime” (p. 199). Occupation thus produces a tentative community defined as “a gift of the word without ever being assured of reception by the other, while, at the same time, only the other renders the request for speaking possible” (Devisch, 2000, p. 11).

Conceiving of artistic practice as a form of poetic occupation compels us to reconsider what constitutes an artist. That is, rather than an individual representing the world through his or her unique point of view, the artist is always already conceived of as being-in-common with the world and as such possesses a perspective that is always already multiple. The artist is not solely a recorder of that which already exists, but is one element among many within the contingent relationships that constitute his/her being as being-in-common. The meaning of the alliance between artist and participant/spectators is not ordained by the artist; rather “being-in-common is [emphasis added] the condition for the possibility of meaning” (Hinderliter, 2009, p. 15). Building on this understanding, Kwon (2002) suggests that in such work meaning unfolds around actions of the artist in contact with others and represents “a fragmentary sequence of events and actions through spaces, that is, a nomadic narrative whose path is articulated by the passage of the artist” (p. 29). It is important to note that it is the path, understood as presence, that generates the narrative, not the will of the artist. The artist is thus understood as a “narrator-protagonist” (p. 51) who situates him/her self within rather than in opposition to or conceptually above or beyond the quotidian aspects of life.

The designation of narrator-protagonist not only alters one’s perception of what an artist is, but also shifts one’s understanding of what an artist does. At different moments, the work of the narrator-protagonist may resemble but not adopt various roles, such as ethnographer, anthropologist, scientist, or flâneur. Narrator-protagonists do not stay on the sidelines objectively regarding, analyzing, or commenting upon what is present. They observe and they are observed, they collect and distribute, they read and they write as they publically intervene and make their presence known. In all cases they function as sort of unintentional narrators of the very spaces they occupy, not in the sense of declaring a particular narrative order, but as a sort of conduit through and around which others make contact. They act within this fleeting occupation of everyday life, and it is during this interlude that knowledge and understanding are produced through frequently unintended poetic juxtapositions.
The following sections will provide foundations for developing an understanding of poetic occupations and the role of the narrator-protagonist. I will introduce a piece called *Spiral*, an example of a work that might be productively read as poetic occupation, by artists Gregg Whelan and Gary Winters, who go by the collective name of Lone Twin. Michel de Certeau’s (1984) work will provide theoretical support for understanding the nature of occupation within the context of the everyday. Employing de Certeau’s analysis of everyday practice reveals the work of the narrator-protagonist as producing eccentric communities that do more than just take up space. Occupation informed by his analysis of walking is conceived not only as a physical but also a rhetorical practice. Walking “weaves places together” (p. 97), places that cannot be fully understood as physical sites, but also as locations produced by the navigations and negotiations of the spaces of everyday life. In this regard, occupation becomes a poetic calculation that reveals the relationships that coexist alongside the communities that we occupy.

**Lone Twin: Being-in-Common**

In 2007, Lone Twin created *Spiral* at the Barbican Arts Centre in London. For eight days, they walked, following, as closely as possible, a spiral trajectory they had drawn on a map of the buildings that comprised the Barbican Estates.

*Figure 1. Map of Barbican Estates including the spiral line indicating the proposed path for the project. Photo courtesy of the artists Gregg Whelan and Gary Winters.*

Weaving in and out of both public and private spaces, Whelan and Winters navigated obstacles such as stairways and elevators. Starting at the outermost point on the spiral, they moved slowly towards their endpoint, the Barbican Arts Centre. To complicate matters, they had sent out requests for “donations” from the public that could be contributed to the work, which they offered to carry for the entire journey. Objects ranged from small toys, magazines, and gloves, to empty water bottles, a medium-sized wooden table, and an anvil. Their pace was leisurely. Along the way, they stopped for brief friendly conversations with various onlookers.
For one week the pair circumnavigated the Barbican, walking and carrying a makeshift mass of everyday materials. All along their route they accumulated more stuff. With additional objects, the cumbersome collection grew like a snowball being rolled across a snow-covered field.

Referring to this work as a “donation project” (Williams & Lavery, 2011, p. 345) that accumulated ordinary materials associated with the lives of those who offered them, Lone Twin moved this work away from customary notions of site-based work into the realm of ethnography. It would be inaccurate to suggest that the artists were doing ethnography; however, to the extent that the nature of the work resembles ethnographic practices, it is
outsiders recording or imposing upon an already formed community, but begin with the assumption that their presence will change what is there. It is in this regard that Lone Twin’s work as poetic occupation resembles but diverges from standard ethnographic work and by extension from traditional notions of artistic practice.

Lone Twin engaged the living qualities of the space they occupied as they were presented to them. That is, they made no effort to consciously alter the working, living, touring, or shopping patterns of those who lived in or were visiting the Barbican. The objects that composed the expanding mass of materials were not found at the site, but were produced by their occupation. The act of selecting and identifying significant local material had been inverted and left to those who “donated” objects to the work. The artists had no intention of analyzing, representing, or otherwise critiquing the site or the objects given to them. In the strictest sense of the word, the objects as well as the donors “spoke” for themselves and as such produced or narrated an emergent public space within which they and the objects would have meaning. Indeed, at the completion of the project the amassed materials were disassembled and left for people to take what they wanted, thus initiating new contacts and alternative configurations of being-in-common.

To refer to Spiral as ethnography and Whelan and Winters as ethnographers would be misleading at best and is not my intent here. However, this project, as with others that they have done, bears a strong resemblance to ethnographic practice. Unlike much ethnographic practice in which objects and people are observed within their presumed proper setting, Spiral consciously introduces forms and behaviors that are inconsistent with the environment. Participating in unorthodox ways, navigating a spiral form that is impossible given the paths presented by the space, and introducing objects with no apparent connection to or purpose within the existent community, Lone Twin makes apparent the structures that had previously defined the community of the Barbican Estates. As such, the work addresses the social, political, and spatial composition of an established location through its occupation. I am engaging the socio-spatial practice of ethnography as a useful referent for articulating the nature of this form of artistic practice. Understood as a poetic rather than sociological or scientific endeavor, such action is capable of transforming the experience of public space by disrupting presumed structures that designate it as such. Their work produced a sort of poetic distortion that skews our expectations of the everyday by presenting an extraordinary act within the parameters of daily practice that provoke alternative understandings of the local environment (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).

Figure 4. Whelan and Winters negotiate the streets of the Barbican Estates. Photo courtesy of the artists Gregg Whelan and Gary Winters.
Distortion is at the heart of the practice of written poetry where language is used to defamiliarize conventional understandings in order to open one’s perception to meanings beyond what is directly apprehended. *Spiral* brought together materials, spaces, and people not otherwise related and whose reason for being in contact was only imaginable within the context of the work. As Gaston Bachelard (1972) suggests, “Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination” (p. xxxii). Following Bachelard, *Spiral* can thus be read as a poetic occupation.

One of the most endearing and oddly one of the most provocative aspects of Lone Twin’s work is their ethic of generosity. They rarely if ever attempt to speak for others. Perhaps unintentionally, the validation of friendship as an integral component of their work links it with Nancy’s (1991) notion of community. Indeed, it is the illogic of friendship and love that represent the core of Nancy’s community rather than a formal or ideological logic imposed by forces external to the communal coalition. In a later work titled *Speeches* (2008), Lone Twin, along with a professional speechwriter, collaborated with ordinary people to craft speeches that expressed that individual’s personal and idiosyncratic knowledge of a particular topic or site. Each speaker then presented his/her speech at the location to which it was connected for anyone who wanted to listen. This gesture of making the ordinary extraordinary is a testament to Lone Twin’s particular practice. In a review of *Speeches* in *The Guardian*, Lyn Gardner (2008) captures this spirit, “There are no astonishing revelations here, no remarkable insights. But there is a sense of ordinary people making themselves heard.” She concludes that “There is nothing startling in these speeches, and they are not even delivered with huge aplomb, but each is a little act of generosity that celebrates the fact that we all have something to say that is worth hearing” (n.p.). These speakers, who had intimate and perhaps entirely private associations with their selected sites, were able to “occupy” these sites through their retelling, or narrating, of these public places. The association between one’s voice and the process of occupation is central to an understanding of poetic occupations and the role of the narrator-protagonist.

**Moving: Telling Stories**

In an analysis of the narrative qualities of Lone Twin’s practice, Pilkington (2011), referencing the work of Adriana Cavarero (2000), suggests that “the terms ‘story’ and ‘narration’ are not identical, as a story is already there before it is narrated” (p. 71). In *Spiral*, the distinction between movement and narrative is similarly blurred. Whelan states, “If you go between two points, it is a story: it has a beginning, a middle and an end” (quoted in Pilkington, p. 73). The journey traced by *Spiral* is likewise a story told not exclusively by Lone Twin, but informed by their movements as well as the objects they have collected. “[M]any of the stories are present as physical traces of their journeys, and at the same time many activities [i.e., collecting donations] on these journeys are devised, deliberately, to accumulate traces” (p. 72). It is the simultaneity of telling and moving that constitutes the narrative quality of work produced by a narrator-protagonist.

Following an incident with New York police in which three female protesters were pepper sprayed, outrage among the OWS participants grew and on October 1, 2011, the OWS protestors went mobile (Writers for the 99%, 2012, p. 35). Though not the first march associated with the protests, this shift in tactics from occupation to ambulation can be examined in multiple ways. Perhaps the park was so closely associated with the group’s
particular agenda that its capacity to protest other issues became diluted. Perhaps organizers simply felt that occupation must be expanded to surrounding locations through the gesture of mobilization. Or perhaps once a “story” (the perception of Wall Street’s role in the global economic downturn) is associated with a site, the act of disassociation through movement is necessary to produce another story. In any case, protesters left Zuccotti Park at 3:00 p.m. and marched toward the Brooklyn Bridge, a walk that took approximately half an hour (Writers for the 99%, 2012, p. 35). Along the way, protesters carried signs, each “narrating” a different story. New dialogues were forged as the mass came into contact with other people and other parts of New York City. The occupation continued, albeit an occupation in motion.

The plan had been to “occupy” only the pedestrian space on the bridge. Yet when they arrived, a new story requiring a new path emerged as policemen confronted the approaching crowd. What had started as an occupation protest against the social inequities of wealth and power had morphed into a referendum on the use and abuse of authority. Many protesters locked arms and pushed across the bridge on the roadway, only to be met and arrested by the waiting officers (Writers for the 99%, 2012, p. 36). Bearing a resemblance to decades of prior protest actions, this event could be viewed through the lens of situational and political expediency. However, if examined through the lens of Michel de Certeau’s (1984) theorizing of walking as a form of narrative, we can connect the OWS movements through the streets to the poetic occupations of Lone Twin by focusing on what occupation actually produces literally and theoretically rather than on the intent of either a protester or an artist. It is this fundamental aspect of occupation read as narrative that implicitly connects these two very different efforts.

De Certeau (1984) articulates a sort of narrative process that occurs as pedestrians move through a city. Telling stories, like walking, he suggests, is a spatial practice. It is an idiosyncratic movement that does not necessarily correspond with the structures that compose the city. The apparent coordination of elements in space is destabilized by the unpredictability of the wandering pedestrian. De Certeau correlates this process with speaking in that the interjection of language creates unanticipated relationships among the other words and texts within a particular context. One could properly say that once a word is spoken, the place in which it is encountered is altered. “In short, space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers” (p. 117, emphasis in original). Space is not defined solely through movement, but through narrative. Thus walking is not just a physical act, but also a rhetorical one. Pedestrians, or occupiers, are “practitioners” of a city that “follow the thick and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it” (p. 93).

On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. (p. 117)

Walking organizes space by creating connections between and among spaces that have no necessarily preconceived relationships. As such, OWS protesters and Lone Twin can be understood as writers around which stories emerge as “they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 115). Movement becomes a form of narration and a catalyst for new
stories, an act of defamiliarization. “The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments or trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93). What can be discerned through de Certeau’s analysis of walking as writing is that occupation as movement, seen in both Lone Twin’s movements through the Barbican Estates and in OWS’s decision to move away from Zucotti Park, assumes narrative qualities with the potential to produce alternative stories, which produce alternative spaces. Whereas both intended to open spaces for alternative voices to be heard, OWS seeks to fill this space by inserting specific goals with political ends. Lone Twin’s occupation of the Barbican seeks primarily to open the space to being-in-common with others.

Disruption, protest, and occupation are not new to 20th and 21st century art practices. As early as the 1950s, Guy Debord and the Situationists theorized that the modern built environment had, like everything else, receded into spectacle. Subjective presence in this environment was always restricted by the spectacular quality of the space. Debord (1967/1995) writes, “The modern spectacle…depicts what society can deliver, but within this depiction what is permitted is rigidly distinguished from what is possible” (p. 20). Situationist practices such as dérive, or aimless drift through the urban environment, were intended to distort and reconstitute one’s experience of the fragmented structures that govern one’s passage through the city in order to evoke alternative experiences and possibilities. The spontaneity and aimlessness associated with dérive represent one of the antecedents to work such as Lone Twin’s. The functional and poetic association of the dérive with both the physical and discursive structures of urban life align with de Certeau’s (1984) theoretical account of the pedestrian in the modern city and Kwon’s (2002) notions of the nomadic narratives associated with the narrator-protagonist. Both writers associate actions (walking, occupation) with disruptive language (political, poetic).

The potential for disruption, conceived as occupation, movement, and language, to transform experience lies in its ability to deny its recapture. This is the essence of a poetics of speech and the basis for understanding poetic occupations. De Certeau (1997) writes, “From this standpoint, the innovation that emerged could easily be co-opted by the knowledge that it sought to place in the service of autonomy” (p. 30). If the patterns and content of the language of occupation are too similar to the expectations associated with a particular site, its power can be reclaimed and diminished as its contrast to these expectations is not sufficient to disrupt expectations and provoke alternative perceptions. That is, autonomous language or “liberated’ speech [is] ‘recaptured’ by the social system” (p. 30). Poetic occupations avoid “recapture” by “generating a poetics subtle and tactical enough to allow for the differentiation of a multiple everyday” (Highmore, 2002, p. 151).

De Certeau (1997) sets up a difference between representational practices and narrative practices. On the one hand, representation accounts for what was experienced; on the other hand, narrative suggests simultaneity of experience and expression as represented by a mobile citizen. In the case of Spiral, this could be discerned in the disjointed movements of Whelan and Winters as they piloted their growing mass through the rigid structures of the Barbican. It is within this type of work that I understand the force of Kwon’s (2002) concept of the narrator-protagonist as simultaneously writers and readers of poetic occupations in which they produce and are produced by the narratives that emerge in the process.
Poetic Occupations: Students as Narrator-Protagonists

Lone Twin’s work gives a voice not only to those who either do not speak or who remain unheard, but also to space itself. Narration is produced as much by the material, social, and political conditions of a site as it is by the narrator. Narrative links personal and incidental stories and spaces within broader contexts associated with certain locations. It is with this in mind that I constructed a final “occupation” assignment for my elementary education undergraduates not guided by the obvious question, “What does an artist do?” but rather “What is happening in the process of making art?” This question emphasizes neither the status of the maker nor the product made. By speaking out on the campus through site-based artworks, the students were asked to “speak back” to the institution that controls so much of their academic life. Two particular works emerged from this process that I feel exemplify the productive potential of poetic occupations.

![Figure 5. What’s weighing you down?
Photo courtesy of the author.](image)

Having used this assignment with multiple classes, I have noticed that one aspect of the students’ life on our campus is a sense of lack regarding community. At a regional campus, many students commute and do not feel that they have enough contact with others to form a social community; there is no sense of being-in-common. It is in opposition to this condition that many students chose to situate their work. One student chose to respond to the stresses and anxieties associated with the campus by spending about one hour wandering around the campus with a sign bearing the question, “What’s Weighing You Down?” on her chest. When students asked her what she was doing, she would respond that she would be willing to carry whatever burden might be inhibiting their ability to focus on their exams. The respondent was then asked to write his or her burden on a small strip of paper that she would then attach to her leg in a small loop. She continued walking around campus until she had roughly 20 responses, each representing a link in a growing paper chain affixed to her ankle.

The student and I were both struck by the willingness and sincerity with which people participated. In a sense an alternative community based on compassion and personal interaction emerged. For the period of the piece, the student and those who interacted produced a transient and conditional space for reflective considerations of their place in this campus community. Read as a poetic occupation, the effects of disrupting expectations can be seen through the re-articulation of the space by the insertion of an alternative “language” and movement not easily re-captured by conventional narratives of campus experience.

The second piece involved a small group of students and a large obelisk at the center of the campus dedicated to a philanthropist who had made generous donations to the school. At its base is a plaque bearing a portrait of the donor and the quote, “Let me know if I can do anything for you.” Considering their often busy and complicated lives, the students decided...
to solicit responses to this query by asking students what this benefactor could do for them. Responses were written on the most convenient material, everything from napkins, to scraps of paper, to a CD, and then affixed to the space around the plaque. Responses ranged from “Can he babysit my daughter while I take my exams?” to “Can he pay for my books?” to “Can he fix my car so I can get to work?”

Figure 6. Let me know if I can do anything for you.

Figure 7. Detail. Photos Courtesy of the author.

Generally, the personal and immediate urgency of the comments belied the apparent generalized benevolence implied by the quote. As a poetic occupation, the work distorted and re-directed the institutional language of philanthropy to their concerns as individuals. As such, it produced a space of dialogue that for the period of the work’s presence gave rise to an impromptu community. In both of these examples, the students functioned as narrator-protagonists rewriting their experience in line with their particular association with the campus and its institutional structures. Like the OWS movements and Lone Twin, their occupation of these spaces gave them a voice distinct from and in contrast with established narratives creating a temporary space for their voices to be heard above the din of everyday life.

Implications: Producing Knowledge

Suggesting that art students engage in narrative practices of physical intervention sets up both opportunities and challenges. For instance, what alternative learning experiences become available with a shift in nomenclature from artist to narrator-protagonist? Such a shift necessarily places priority on making as a site of knowledge production. It is the active production of an alternative narrative experience as a narrator-protagonist that produces the conditions for new knowledge. By contrast, conventional approaches to art education, with students identified as artists in the more common understanding of the term, associate skills development with making and situate knowledge production primarily in reflective and interpretive practices.

The type of meaning produced during poetic occupations corresponds with Ellsworth’s (2005) account of ways of knowing that are produced as a consequence of an active experience initiated by and carried through by the learner. Knowledge is produced at the
point of contact with a world that disrupts one’s expectations. It is at this sometimes fleeting moment that meaning occurs, and it is here where learning and making converge. Ellsworth describes pedagogy “as the impetus behind the particular movements, sensations, and affects of bodies/mind/brains in the midst of learning” (p. 2) rather than prior or subsequent to it. Pedagogy as such “plays host to: experiences of being radically in relation to one’s self, to others, and to the world” (p. 2). In other words, pedagogy is not viewed as something that conceptualizes and organizes pre-existing knowledge as a thing already made and does not presuppose learning to be “an experience already known” (p. 5), but rather is an experimental event that proceeds as a result of the relationships created by a learner experiencing the self and knowledge “in the making” (p. 5). Knowledge production as a narrative process depends entirely on the kind of narrative; not all narratives are linear. For the narrator-protagonist, occupations produce a being-in-common that is neither entirely planned nor based solely on chance. They represent the confluence of everyday life, active intervention, and heightened spatial awareness coming together as a form of inquiry introduced by a poetic narrative that disrupts predictable flows and experiences.

Poetic occupations represent both the process and product of the narrator-protagonist. Just as speaking is the active use of language and syntax to communicate thoughts through the implied relations developed by using a linguistic structure, spatial practice transforms space from a site for reading, representing, or translating the texts and signs of the visual and physical landscape to one of using that landscape as the raw material for writing, or narrating, meaning. Narrative space is a space of dialogue, of conversations. Poetic space links, distorts, reorganizes, affirms, and dissolves one’s experience.

By suggesting that “Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice,” de Certeau (1984, p. 115) reminds us that the narratives that compose our daily lives, that continue to inform our understanding of the world, are always associated with the experience of encountering difference. The conversations that occur between our environment and us become the threads that bind the disparate and disjointed stories that arise from these conversations. They organize and are organized by the spaces in which they occur and help us make sense of the world around us. “These narrated adventures, simultaneously producing geographies of actions and drifting into the commonplaces of an order, do not merely constitute a ‘supplement’ to pedestrian enunciations and rhetorics... they make [emphasis added] the journey, before or during the time the feet perform it” (p. 117).

Poetic occupations produce narrator-protagonists. In the end, the practices of the artist as narrator-protagonist produce not objects for reflection and contemplation, but reverberations that produce further narratives that resonate and confer meaning on all spatial practice, initiating an ongoing and ever-changing script.
References


Craft As Activism

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Abstract

Craft activists work outside the mainstream of consumer society, in grass-roots efforts, to create social change that positions individuals and groups of people as reflective contributors who occupy a participatory democracy. These activities connect to and draw from feminist and other civil rights movements, sustainability, and do-it-yourself [DIY] activities. They are forms of affective labor. The crafted products are considered in terms of whether they contribute (or do not) to the surplus economy, in terms of class taste, and vis-à-vis their ability to connect people and contribute to social change. Education of craft activists and audiences takes informal forms, such as websites, books, and public acts related to culture jamming.
**Introduction**

Craftivism. Church of Craft. Stitch 'n Bitch. Handmade Nation. Revolutionary Knitting Circle. Anarchist Knitting Mob. Yarn bombing. Red Sweaters Project. Extremecraft.com. Crafts for Critters. Knittaplease. Craft Hope. Anti-factory.com. Microrevelt. Wombs on Washington. Body count mittens. These groups and projects—a mere sampling of knitters, sewers, crocheters, embroiderers, printers, bookmakers, zinemakers, recyclers, and other self-designated “crafters”—are activist craft positioned outside the mainstream of late capitalist consumer society. “Making your own clothes, your own dinnerware, your own art has become a way to politely (or maybe not so politely)” turn your back on corporate consumption, argues *American Craft* magazine editor Andrew Wagner (2008, p. 1). It is “a reaction against a whole slew of things, including our hyper-fast culture, increasing reliance on digital technology, the proliferation of consumer culture, and even war,” he continues (p. 1). “The crafted object as old-fashioned or traditional has now been eschewed in favor of crafting as a strategy to examine and challenge contemporary issues” (Black & Burisch, 2010, p. 610). The politics range from groups wanting to influence policies, raise funds, or increase awareness of a cause to those making cultural interventions into daily or street life (Bratich & Brush, 2011, p. 249). Craft activism is also sometimes referred to as “alternative craft” (Metcalf, 2008) or “craftivism” (Greer, 2011; Robertson, 2011; Black & Burisch, 2011).

But what is craft, and why craft? “Craft is a way to connect with people, a way to create a community that you are inspired by,” begins Faythe Levine in the foreword to *Craft Activism* (2011, p. 5). “Making things” is a phrase that she uses, along with Rachel Mason, in her extensive work on craft education in the UK (Mason, 1998). Making connects to a fundamental human need (Dissanayake, 1992). Levine ties making to mental and physical focus, and to personal pride: “When the fad passes, we will still be making. Because making things by hand has never stopped, and it will never disappear” (p. 5). Rather than defining craft as certain media or processes, it is this idea of “making things” that is operant here. Craft and making are more democratic, culturally speaking, than art, but this definition does not preclude art. They are more democratic because many people are engaged in them, often without extensive training, making “making” accessible to most who have the inclination. Many crafted items are often part of gift exchange, and often functional, connecting them to daily life. Many of them result in gestures of caring: covers from the cold, for example. Craft and making are often learned informally—from a friend or relative, from books or on-line sources or experimentation, from a community education site such as a craft store or a community center or a group of like-minded learners (such as a knitting circle). Craft making often forms the basis of a community, be it a quilting bee, a knitting circle, a group of yarn bombers (see Endnote 1), or an Internet blog. These are a few reasons why the connection between crafts and activism is currently strong.

Craft making (including but not limited to craft activism) manifests in a number of arenas, from market commodities, to documentaries, to anti-capitalist craft (Bratich, 2010). What is addressed in this paper is this last realm of “anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian craftivist projects” (p. 304) because they are a recognizable form of grass-roots activism, connect to social theories of interest to art and visual culture educators, and involve the informal education of makers and viewers.
Connections

Craft activism is a species of do-it-yourself (DIY) culture that is tied to using available resources to create something to share with others. The roots of DIY are in using lo-fi, available resources, and in people crossing the boundary between consumption and creation to exchange ideas, information, images, music, or goods. “The primary aim is to build unique idealized networks in which anyone can participate . . . members of the DIY underground aren’t ‘fixated with the promise of money, they are people who want to do something just to see it happen’” (Michael Cupid as quoted in Spencer, 2005, p. 11). In addition to craft and art, DIY is a notable arena in film, music, writing and publishing, and politics.

Craft activism, as much DIY, can be understood both as an occupation and a way of life that involves participatory or substantive democracy (Macpherson, 1962, 1973; Torres, 1998; Garber, 2005) in which socially equal and reflective individuals contribute to building “a sense of community, of association, of neighboring and joining” (Torres, pp. 146-147). Craft activism engages participatory making where democratic processes are valued. Craft activism occupies spaces within individuals’ lives, but moreover in local communities, engaging a “human microphone” of makers and viewers directly in participatory democracy. For activist crafters, such making is a way of life, a way of voicing and participating, of expressing, and of raging that reaches a public directly, sometimes drawing them in.

For example, knitters from Europe, the UK, and the USA contributing to Marianne Jørgensen’s Pink Tank made over 4,000 knitted squares as part of a protest against the war in Iraq. Together the squares created a covering for a World War II combat tank that was displayed publicly. Knitted by many different people using varied patterns, designs, types of yarn, and shades of pink, Pink Tank helped to convey a sense of the wide breadth of people opposed to the war in Iraq, noted the artist (Jørgensen, n.d., n.p.). (To see a photograph of Pink Tank, please visit www.marianneart.dk). When Pink Tank was exhibited in front of downtown Copenhagen’s Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, formal volunteers as well as passersby helped sew together the squares. “The possibility of ‘knitting your opinions’ gives the project an aspect I think is important,” reflects Jørgensen (n.p.). The voices and suggestions of individuals involved are part of many activist craft organizations, meaning that there isn’t an imposed hierarchical leadership. Activist craft is “counter to dominant notions of the placid individual crafter . . . crafting here is a social movement and a form of direct action, whose current work is prefiguring a world to come” (Bratich & Brush, 2007, p. 22). This doesn’t mean that an individual never works alone, but that s/he understands her/his work as contributing to and building the values of participatory democracy.

Although Bourriaud doesn’t engage craft in the many examples he develops, activist craft is related to his idea of “relational aesthetics.” He talks about relational art as “a dot on a line,” where the art object is subsidiary to the participation that surrounds it (2002, p. 21). As an example, artist Rirkrit Tiravanija has remarked on the display of bowls, vases, and teapots made for use and now in museum displays. “I decided to find a way, to address this issue of use or misuse by reusing it. So I would say that by reusing it basically means to take that antique bowl and put food in it—put life back into it” (Rirkrit Tiravanija as quoted in Bao & Carey, 2004, n.p.), which is what he did in his Untitled (Free/Still), first shown in 1992 and last reshown earlier in 2012 at MoMA. “A Tiravanija show,” argues Bourriaud, “does not dodge materialization, but deconstructs the methods of making the art object into a series of events” (p. 54). Tiravanija is focused on the interaction, on learning “what conviviality

and sharing mean” (p. 70). The readymade pots, chairs, tables, and food, for example, support people coming together and conversing, actions that are the centerpiece of his work. Tiravanija’s art that stimulates building dialogue and community is similar to what Church of Craft founder Callie Janoff says of craft activism, that “The acts of making and getting together [are] more important than the products made” (2008, p. 57). In the last fifty years of art when concept over product has been theoretically foregrounded, these acknowledgments of the role of a material object in building towards social change should not be overlooked. They are “dots” on a line, indeed, but remembering that mathematically a line is a moving point (or dot), they make a real contribution.

Affectively, there are pleasures in making and completing and in the use of the senses. “What is most important about craftwork is the quality of being affective labor . . . . where labor finds its value in affect, where affect is defined as primarily the power to act” rather than thinking of the product or capital as what makes value (Bratich & Brush, 2007, p. 3; italics in original). Affective labor “is itself and directly the constitution of communities and collective subjectivities” (p. 3). On an “everyday level, craftivists develop values and practices like mentorship, community-building, connection with other DIY projects, and gender empowerment . . . . as a politicized practice of resourcefulness, local knowledge, and nonhierarchical organizational forms” (p. 22). That labor is also “immaterial,” a term Lazzarato (1995) uses to refer to the contributions that some types of labor develop in the creation of cultural (as well as informational) content, such as tastes, cultural concepts, and opinions. “Craft-work as affective production allows us to think about value differently. Untied from capitalist valorization, craft-work produces communities and subjectivity laterally and contains an autonomous circuit of meaning and relationships” (Bratich, 2010, p. 309). Bratich further suggests that craft making as a gift-giving practice, a form of care, and a form of information exchange (talking in the knitting circle, teaching someone a new skill) is immaterial labor. In addition to the material outcome, craftivism develops mentorship, builds community, and contributes to personal as well as gender empowerment.

Craft activism speaks to sustainability when the knitter unravels a thrift shop sweater to make a new one, or doesn’t support a sweatshop and the corporations that put it on our shelves. It’s more than “creative reuse” (Johnson, 2009), although reuse is part of it. As Johnson points out, Duchamp reused extant objects and materials in his readymades, conceptually challenging the definition of art. The history of reuse includes the melting of bronze statues by the ancient Greeks to make more naturalistic ones, Romans’ reuse of decorative elements from old buildings to make the Arch of Constantine, medieval scribes’ reuse of parchment for manuscripts, the use of architectural and decorative elements from ancient Babylonian sites in medieval Baghdad, and the Spanish dismantling of Aztec temples to build colonial buildings in Mexico City. “The reuse of materials meant different things to different cultures,” argues Johnson (p. 8), who suggests three types of reuse: dominance of one culture over another, homage to another culture, and thrift. Craft activists sometimes incorporate these references, but their real theme is some type of social change as suggested by Wagner’s (2008) remark that activist craft is about eschewing the capitalist economy. Sustainability is not at play in all activist craft (would that it were, from my perspective), but an important part of much of it.

Craft activism’s roots are also in feminism and struggles for civil rights. Rozsika Parker (1984) recounts the historical shaping of femininity through needle arts in her well-known study of women’s embroidery, *The Subversive Stitch*, as well as the ways that the stitchers
worked through embroidery to express ideas and sentiments that were not permitted women. There are many other studies of the cultural link between women’s work and craft. Nineteenth century African-American quilters famously stitched Underground Railroad routes into their quilts. Craft activism again brings to light the public/private sphere important to early work on women’s lives. In the current sphere, the appearance of domesticity in popular culture, on public sites, and circulating on the social web are instances of what Railla calls “the new domesticity” (2004, n.p.). What has traditionally happened in the home, such as crafts, takes on a public face (Bratich, 2010), reclaiming women’s formerly private spaces (that Bratich and Brush [2011] argue were never constrained to the home) in a way that “rewears the old itself” (p. 238).

In *The Aftermath of Feminism*, Angela McRobbie (2009) talks about “illegible rage” developing in young women because they are told they are equal and therefore sexual politics are no longer necessary, yet they are still encountering situations that suggest they are evaluated and treated differently. I have suggested that some women’s activities work outside this social system that coopts women as consumers while maintaining a gender hierarchy. In a personal interview with Norma Bates, a Milwaukee roller girl (or player), I learned,

> the real power [of roller derby] lies in the social and financial network we have created . . . I buy skates from a roller girl. I get my hair cut from a roller girl. I order pizza from a roller girl. My vet is a referee. My barista is a beerleader. My massage therapist is a volunteer. Everywhere there is a roller derby team, derby girls are turning to other derby girls to cater their parties, file their taxes, walk their dogs, trade their stocks, fix their cars, rehab their knees and plan their funerals. (Garber & Garber-Pearson, 2012, p. 99)

In other words, many women and men in DIY movements such as activist craft challenge gender hierarchy and the social status quo through their actions.

Bratich & Brush (2007) argue that the outcomes of craft activism are closely linked to how we understand gender in the current climate of rethinking communities, spaces, and labor. Philosopher Rosi Braidotti (1994, 2002, 2006) develops a Deleuze and Irigaray-influenced description of feminism that focuses on what she calls “nomadic subjectivity,” which she defines as “a strategy to undo the many, localized, ‘hard core’ identities that continue to be perpetuated in our globalized world” (Braidotti as quoted in LaFountain, 2008, n.p.). She speaks particularly to identities reified by the binary of male and female. Using Deleuze’s challenge to the idea of a single, unified subject, she focuses on productivities that are disembodied and not the outcome of a unified subject acting. Braidotti seems to be applying this brand of feminism to political activism in cultural forms that are rhizomatic in nature. She suggests creating new kinds of female feminist subjects (not necessarily girls or women but rather undesignated subjects, nomadic and ungendered gangs) who are interested in transformation through marginal practices and cultural activities. In desiring transformation, she might, as McRobbie (2009) suggests, come close to a re-invention of self “according to the intensified logic of consumer culture” (p. 162), but the desire that Braidotti builds on is one for alternatives that suggest the potential for transformation in marginal cultural practices. While this position can certainly be criticized as accounting for persons already informed by feminism and other alternative strategies for progressive social change, and as drawing from an educated, westernized, middle-class understanding of subjectivity (McRobbie, pp. 160-169), it posits a position of possibility and action from
which at least some subjects, of whatever gender or other identity—fixed or in transition, can work. This is the possibility and hope that craft activism is part of, along with other grass-roots practices for voice, sustainability, and community forms of goods and service exchange. Feminist practices underlie what craft activists are doing, but feminism isn’t always acknowledged, and craft activists don’t feel obliged to connect themselves explicitly to feminism. But neither do all of them self-label as environmentalists or even activists.

**Product**

Still, some of this craft stuff gives me the hives. Plush houses with eyes to hang on the wall? Fabric donuts?? Clothespin people with polymer heads??? Cute little animals melted into tiles of glass? Handmade books with little girls and watering cans? The concept as well as the word “‘craft’ has horrible connotations,” remark J.W. and Melissa Buchanan, who run “The Little Friends of Printmaking.” “The word besmirches work that is really important” (Buchanan & Buchanan, 2008, p. 60). I agree. What is it that differentiates a range of sock dolls on Etsy.com from a Halloween umbrella-cum-bat craft project presented on Martha Stewart’s (from tagging street signs with knitted wraps (www.knittaplease.com), from Margarita Cabrera’s soft sculptures of domestic appliances that comment on the US economy’s partial reliance on Mexican maquiladoras (www.margaritacabrera.com)? Or any of these from Jean Shin’s *Umbrellas Stripped Bare*? And from Lacey Jane Roberts’ *The Queer Houses of Brooklyn* quilt and her woven fences, such as *Building It Up to Tear It Down* (laceyaneroberts.com)?

The sock dolls, clothespin people, and fabric donuts are part of the surplus materials economy that caters to consumption. An umbrella-to-bat craft project suggests recycling, and engages the consumer in making rather than consuming. I could argue that it is tied up with some of the motivations of sock dolls and clothespin people in celebrating traditions and making what many might consider tasteless “kitsch” in large part because it relates to the economy of “cute” but am rebuffed in remembering a quote from Daniel Harris’ *Cute, Quaint, Hungry and Romantic*, that “Jeremiads against consumerism…[make] contemptuous appraisals of the ugliness and vulgarity of capitalism [that] are in fact simply covert attacks on the bad taste of the lower classes…[and] based on an unaccountably dour disapproval of creature comforts” (2000, p. xv). Tagging street signs suggests a culture of taking action to counter consumerism that is part of a social movement for change raging against the corporate machine. Lacey Roberts’ *Queer Houses* quilt makes a statement about alternative lifestyles of support and caring.

More important to understand about craft activism is that its practitioners value “the radical potential” of an activity over the actual object (Black & Burisch, 2010, p. 610). The focus, as well as the making, is conceptual and communal. “This emphasis has made room for reconsiderations of crafts(wo)manship, performativity, mindfulness, tacit knowledge, skill sharing, DIY, anti-capitalism and activism” (p. 610).

Maybe all of these differences can be argued as a class issue. But there’s something more at work. Art works, argues Bourriaud (2002), are set apart from other human objects and activities by their “(relative) social transparency. If a work of art is successful, it will invariably set its sights beyond its mere presence in space: it will be open to dialogue, discussion, and that form of inter-human negotiation that Marcel Duchamp called ‘the coefficient of art’” (p. 41; parentheses in original). Bourriaud also talks about the relative uselessness of art to do something (such as cover, contain, or support, Risatti’s [2007] three characteristics of craft), although it is part of a system of exchange. Some activist craft meets
this description: yarn bombed trees and street signs, for example, but not quilts or beanies sent to charities. But maybe not doing something isn’t really the point. The real emphasis that Bourriaud suggests, when he states that what artists produce is “first and foremost . . . relations between people and the world” (p. 42), is that art has to do with relationships, and this is one of the chief motivators for craft activism.

These distinctions don’t mean that other forms of (not activist) craft are to be dismissed or left on the bottom of art and cultural hierarchies. “We can still cherish our handmade sweaters, mittens, or quilts as winter wear and warm coverings for a bed. And we can marvel at an exquisite woven rug hanging in a gallery as a piece of purely decorative art” (Tapper, 2011, p. 9). We can still enjoy making as part of holiday traditions or slow culture. Activist craft, however, is distinct from these better-known craft traditions in intent, message, and use.

Education

Craft activism involves education of makers and viewers in a way of life that ties making something to political expression and active involvement in a participatory democracy. It is generally a peer-to-peer education, with teaching taking place in person, or through books and the Internet. It further involves self-education, in learning how as well as re-thinking why one makes something and for whom s/he makes it.

Craft Hope started with a call for dresses made from pillowcases to be sent to a children’s shelter in Mexico. Founder Jade Sims posted a basic pattern on a blog. Next, she called for cloth dolls for a Nicaraguan orphanage. Burp cloths, crib sheets, sock monkeys, quilts, beanies for preemies, and other items followed, with children to college students to elders contributing and suggesting items to be made. In her book Craft Hope, Sims (2010) provides instructions for 32 craft projects, each linked with a charity that needs the item: soap for women’s shelters; beanies for cancer patients; pillowcase skirts for refugee children along the Thai border. These are preceded by suggestions for giving, such as making items that the recipient needs and can use over a period of time, making things well, and considering symbolism. She additionally provides a list of nonprofit organizations that could be contacted to inquire about needs, but encourages giving locally. Beyond these principles, she sets some basic contexts for empowerment through giving that involve not only material goods and money to meet immediate needs but committing to finding ways to help individuals and communities take care of their own needs. “A book tote is a thoughtful gift to give someone who is learning to read,” she remarks, “but if you also became that person’s literacy tutor, you could make an incredible difference in his or her life” (Sims, p. 13). Craft Hope could be understood merely as a gift-giving charity that satisfies the givers’ making needs, but the organization is also an example of a type of informal education, for Sims’ book educates her readers not only about how to make things but also about how to set up meaningful gifting.

In an exploration of home-decorating magazines, Lara Lackey (2005) argues that they teach art overtly by giving instruction about interior design or crafts as well as through implied values about the way a home should look. The context of such education may be viewed as the full set of conditions and circumstances—material, structural/organizational, ideological, overtly stated and tacitly understood—that people take into account, and with which they interact.

as they proceed in learning. . . . While the context does not fully impose or restrict our choices and behavior, we negotiate within context as we decide on our options and grow to understand what is expected, valued, and appropriate within a given arena. (p. 326)

The plethora of books, magazines, and websites on craft, and on craft activism in particular, provides not only a community of learners but also a set of values, choices, and behaviors that informs that learning. Voicing beliefs, making for social or political causes, preserving the environment through upcycling (or using already-used materials as a material), eschewing the system of corporate manufacturing, promoting local labor and regional goods are values implied in books such as Craft Activism (Tapper, 2011), Craft Hope (Sims, 2010), Eco-Craft (Wasiger, 2009) and websites such as craftivism.com, jaffagirls.com, bagsforthepeople.org, microrevolt.org (and many others).

The quilt Crying the Blues conveyed its makers’ (all women who were seniors) concerns about social issues: social cuts, social equity imbalance, hospital closures, housing costs, health care, privatization of schooling and the cost of university education, attacks on labor costs, rising living costs, war and violence, and environmental degradation (Clover, 2005). These were the everyday concerns of the makers. Traveling across British Columbia, the quilt educated audiences about the experience of being elderly in North America, much as Suzanne Lacy's performances Crystal Quilt and Whisper, the Waves, the Wind incorporated references to quilting patterns. Crying the Blues responded to the makers’ and audiences’ feelings about being elderly as well as to social issues that arose under Canada’s neo-liberal government. It also educated the makers themselves in building their ability to engage collectively in social issues that affected them, a type of education through doing.

Craft activism speaks to culture jamming, described by Sandlin and Milam (2010) as “the act of resisting and recreating commercial culture in an effort to transform society . . . [as] created and enacted in our daily lives” (p. 250). Culture jamming resists hyperconsumption and commercialism in favor of using intermediary spaces to build relationships between our inner selves and the people, objects, and places that surround us. Craft activists employ culture jamming when they engage dialogically with everyday materials and experiences to engage in critical citizenship (Tavin, 2010), acts that build participatory democracy. Culture jammers educate themselves and those who interface with their work when they “interrogate and expose ideological forces embedded within our everyday” (Darts, 2004, p. 323) and when they reflectively engage in cultural production that challenges the status quo of consumer culture. Using these parameters, craft activists are by default involved in education through culture jamming: education of themselves and others.

Conclusion

Maxine Greene (1995) argues for the importance of imagination in building consciousness and imagining “new forms of civic association and collaboration” (p. 6). Craft activists investigate and educate themselves and others in ways that imaginatively empower, deepen understandings of living and directing one’s own life, promote respect for diversity, build community, and engage makers in a participatory democracy.

Skilled or not, beauty, kitsch, and taste aside, what attracts me to the craft activism movement is that it brings together a social commitment to change that was present in earlier feminist art, that is present in eco-art, in community art, and in art that engages
spectator participation—from Fluxus to the Situationists to Tucson Arts Brigade to Rirkit Tiravanija. It makes do, as de Certeau (1984) might say, resisting and opposing the dominant paradigm. Craft activists are women and men whose art and actions occupy spaces in a participatory democracy and activate spaces for social change.
References


Endnotes

Craftivism describes the link between craft and activism that is discussed in this article; it also describes a specific movement begun by Betsy Greer as a way for crafters to make a difference locally and/or globally (for more information, please see Greer, 2011, and craftivism.com). The mission of Church of Craft, begun by friends Tristy Taylor and Callie Janoff, is to promote value for all acts of making as they contribute to valuing humanness. Church of Craft has chapters in the US and the UK and values all acts of making (churchofcraft.org). Stitch ‘n Bitch is a global network of knitters and crocheters who meet in local chapters to talk while they create (stitchnbitch.org). Handmade Nation is an anthology, blog, film, and Facebook page organized by Faythe Levine that promotes handmade aspects of craft making as political (see Levine & Heimerl, 2008; Levine, 2009; indiecraftdocumentary.blogspot.com; www.facebook.com/Handmade.Nation). Revolutionary Knitting Circle was begun in Calgary by Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, and promotes knitting as a radical alternative to the commodification of life (Robertson, 2011; Black & Burisch, 2011). The collective Anarchist Knitting Mob is a loosely-knit community of individuals living around New York City (see anarchistknittingmob.blogspot.com; Black & Burisch, 2011). Yarn bombing describes a type of graffiti accomplished with knitted or crocheted creations; yarn bombs are placed in public places (see www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/fashion/creating-graffiti-with-yarn.html?_r=0) and also the book by the same name by Moore & Prain (2009). The blogging site Extremecraft.com from the northwest US brings together a wide range of DIY craft as art, craft, and subculture. Crafts for Critters (http://craftsforcritters.org/home/) supports animal welfare through the sale of crafts. Knittaplease is a yarn bombing group out of Texas led by Magda Sayeg (http://www.magdasayeg.com; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knitta_Please). Craft Hope was founded to share handmade crafts with people around the world who live in economically and materially challenged situations. The group forms partnerships with charities (see founder Jade Sims’ (2010) book of the same name). Anti-factory.com is a clothing company that makes sweatshop-free apparel out of re-used materials (http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/antifactory/). Microrevolt is a website that promotes knitting as a form of protest against sweatshops and low-waged female labor. They offer web applications that translate digital images into knitted ones (most notably corporate logos; www.microrevolt.org). Wombs on Washington was a project that involved placing knitted wombs on the steps of the US Supreme Court to support pro-choice legislation; patterns were circulated over the Internet (Robertson, 2011; see also knitchoice.livejournal.com). Body count mittens, begun in 2005, memorialized US soldiers killed in Iraq; each mitten bore the date of a soldier’s death and the number his or her death represented in the war (http://www.craftsanity.com/pdf/mittenpattern.pdf).

Participatory democracy is distinguished from protective democracy, based on the hegemony of a market economy; developmental democracy, based on elevating working-class people into self-interested consumers; and equilibrium or pluralist democracy, where apathy among the majority of citizens is crucial to a functioning society because participation is perceived as cumbersome (Torres, 1998, pp. 146-147).

For more historical depth on craft activism, Kirsty Robertson (2011) weaves together contemporary and historical artworks and movements, as well as citing some key writings.
iv To see the umbrella-bat project, visit www.marthastewart.com/946348/spooky-umbrella-bat-puppet.

v The Slow Movement began with “Slow Food,” organized in Italy in the mid-1980s against McDonald’s and other fast food chains. It stressed local foods, cultural cuisines, and attention to making food as one of the rhythms of life. Other “Slow” movements later took hold: Slow Travel, Slow Design, Slow Sport, Slow Shopping, etc. Slow Movement stresses doing things at a pace right for that activity, at a deliberate pace.

Abstract

This article examines the potential of recent feminist zines as frameworks of grassroots D.I.Y. and direct democracy in physical and digital communities. While the height of zine creations as works on paper may be traced to the 1990s, this form of feminist counterculture has evolved and persisted in cyberspace, predating, accompanying, and arguably outlasting the physical reality of protests, revolutions, and political expressions such as the Occupy Movement(s). Contemporary zines contain not only email addresses alongside ‘snail mail’ addresses, but also links to digital sites accompanying real-world resources. Zinesters today utilize the handmade craftsmanship and hand drawn and written techniques of zines in combination with the grassroots connectivity enabled by digital networks relating to zines. These physical and digital communities form interesting protest spaces. This paper explores the persistence and potential of zines as various expressions of personal and political feminist identities via maker culture and of explorations of the dimensionality of the screen and the page. The educational contexts considered in this paper include university zine collections, zine-making in K-12 teaching, as well as zine communities outside of schools and academia.
Introduction: Occupying Zines and Zine Preoccupations

Zine historian Bleyer (2004) defines zines as “the intersection of art, protest, confession, and theory” (p. 49). In his survey of zines, Duncombe (1997) categorizes them as “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” (p. 6). Zines are often characterized by hand bound pages, scrawled and personalized handwriting, and generally intimate qualities of handmade books, along with personal and political content. Zinesters (who make zines) in this subcultural genre create an array of materials including but not limited to personal chapbooks, diaries, commentaries, editorials, rants, news, and recipe collections. Referencing the greater political scenes of gender, sexuality, and reproductive rights, zines also document the journal/diary-like realms of personal testimonials and individual experiences through collage and drawings. The zine framework occupies the space between objects that are manufactured and things that are handcrafted and one-of-a-kind (often abbreviated online as: OOAK). Zines may be compellingly rugged, jagged, and sticky, yet they can also be very digital and machinized in their font, formatting, and Xeroxed qualities. Zines often model and question a balance of handmade and handcrafted with mass-produced and digitized. Zines are produced by a diverse array of individual makers, whether students creating zines inside or out of school settings, hobbyists working on zines recreationally, or artists approaching self-publishing and book arts such as zines as the focus of their profession.

In this article I investigate relationships between zines in print and in digital formats, both embodying artistic, literary, and pedagogical practices of feminist inquiry, political protest, and personal expression. Art education researcher Klein (2010) observes that for art educators, the zine framework of images and text cultivates “storytelling, self-expression, teacher identity construction, and collaboration” (p. 42). Tavin (2002) advocates collaborative and countercultural explorations via student-produced zines. Through an analysis of the persistence of zines in university collections, K-12 classrooms, and D.I.Y/maker communities online and in the physical world, I will examine craft/craftivist cultures of feminist zines and their creators, particularly pertaining to issues of gender, the Occupy Wall Street Movement, and related, recent politics. In contextualizing zines and their communities, I will also address related examples from my own teaching and activist experiences.

Zine Histories: Foremothers of Zine Traditions

Although zines can be seen as a relatively new and youthful framework for countercultural art, their histories may also be usefully linked with long-standing traditions of self-publishing among artists and artistic communities. Friedman (1997) observed, “it was artists and writers who took up the call of self-publishing in the early part of the twentieth century” (p. 4). She also points out the importance of (zine-like) Dadaist manifestos, surrealist journals, anarchic broadsheets, and miniature magazines. In addition, researchers like Congdon and Blandy (2003) have linked zines with political pamphlets dating back to the self-published materials about the Vietnam War or even Thomas Paine’s Common Sense (1776). Zines may be seen as an extension of genres like artist sketchbooks, chapbooks, surrealist games, and manifestos of art history, highlighting young women’s contributions in particular (e.g. Women’s Studio Workshop (http://wsworkshop.org/), the National Museum of Women in the Arts (http://www.nmwa.org/), the Dinner Party Curriculum Project (http://judychicago.arted.psu.edu/archived/dpcp/minx.php), femmage.
Part of the richness of zines that is of interest in teaching is located not only in their historical links to other artists' books, but also in histories and traditions of feminism, activism, and open publishing. As an example, I have invited students in a course on women and the imagery of Western civilization to consider historic female figures through various forms of documentation, comparing and contrasting voices, histories, and artistic formats. Countering the ‘Great Women’ approach to Women’s Studies (Chernock, 2013), zines often give voice to particular lesser known female activists and artists such as Queen Latifah, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Sandra Orgel (http://www.niu.edu/wstudies/news/files/zine3001.pdf), and those addressed in later sections of this article. With reference to women artists and their contributions to self-publishing, we might also consider how writer Anais Nin's printing press and diaries could be viewed within a continuum of handmade, self-published works, alongside zines. Or we might ask students to examine activist zine writings in dialogue with Valerie Solanas' SCUM manifesto (http://www.womynkind.org/scum.htm). Zines about sexuality and PSAs (Public Service Announcements) can also be productively compared with Margaret Sanger's health pamphlets (http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=31790) and/or Hildegard von Bingen's little-known writings about the female orgasm (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/hildegarde.asp). Zines, like other forms of marginalized or non-mainstream writing, can introduce students to neglected issues or unexplored aspects of mainstream topics.

Teachers may also note and share the etymological kinship of the word ‘zinester’ with other feminized (and sometimes feminist) terms for individualistic women like the term ‘spinster.’ Instead of being used as a derogatory term or insult, this spinster/zinester role can be reclaimed as productive and hopeful in conceptualizing zines and their makers’ places in art and history. As Henke (2003) evocatively observes,

> The spinster is there, always, as society's well-kept secret resource—a woman whose life is devoted to the spinning of cloth or the spinning of tales . . . often alone and sometimes defenseless, she continues to spin wheels and words, webs and visions, fantasies and frustrations—all collected in the marginal spaces (p. 23).

I have observed similarly productive solitary space afforded by zines, in which makers are located as observers, storytellers, reporters, artists, and individuals who perhaps operate on the margins, but are sorely needed in those margins. The importance of zine writing as an historically-relevant artistic form lends it credibility in the classroom.

### Creating Zines Identities on the Page, Sharing Selves on Screens

Moving forward in zine history, major shifts of the digital age impacted artistic production by generating many additional platforms for publication/exhibition and personal expression, including digital zine communities at http://wemakezines.ning.com, online zine reference sources from http://zinewiki.com, and online zine stores of http://www.etsy.com/search/handmade/books_and_zines. As a researcher of zines, I have been particularly struck by zinesters who continue to work on paper and by hand to create, then use digital networks to share, distribute, and archive images of their hand-made zines. Zine researcher Piepmeier (2009) has observed that despite similarities between zines and blogs, zine creators focus on physical materials and “identify zines as a paper medium”
Many zinesters share their work both digitally and by hand, depending upon the audience. For example, within the Occupy Movement, paper zines were particularly instrumental in quickly and locally disseminating information beyond and before web content and traditional news. During visits to Zuccotti Park with other artists and educators in the Fall of 2011, I often noticed hand-made booklets of protest songs, announcements, and resources passed out to those on site. PSAs can often function with a certain immediacy to inspire and inform when created on paper and passed directly to readers.

Meanwhile in more personal writing, the diary component of zines combined with the public sharing enabled by digital media makes for a unique and ambivalent format exploring the boundaries between personal/private and digital/public. Emily Ashley, the author of *Emily's Heart #56* (2004), captures the tensions and transitions from personal writing to public sharing:

> For years, my diaries were my best friends. They knew all my secrets, and they never let me down—could not have survived without them. Still, there was a big part of me that wanted to share myself with other people. I was sick of being silent. But I was afraid of rejection, and I was afraid of criticism. As I grew older, my fears began to subside. I opened up more. And in doing so, I made some great friends... with this zine, I have my same old fears and instincts: rejection, criticism, and the urge to run-and-hide. But I am going to face them, and hope for the best. Besides I have always been more bold in print. (n.p.)

![Figure 1. Collaborative zine exercise. Pages from graduate art education course taught by the author.](image)

Zinester and zine collector Friedman (1997) has classified this boldness in zines as "unlike anything else in the mainstream: more opinionated than newspaper editorials, more..."
personal than magazine articles, more topical than books" (p. 1). Book artist Drucker (2011) adds that publicly shared personal writing is a special kind of genre: “women who make books out of the materials of their lives and imaginations establish a balance that gives voice to their own issues on their own terms” (p. 14). In creating zine collections with my own students, I particularly wanted to impart that a key element of the zine genre lies in striking a structural and philosophical balance between the personal and political. Locating authentic subjects that are both dear to the creator and useful to the audience is an important part of the creative process with zines that is transferrable to making other public, guerrilla, and activist art (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). In the classroom, it can be productive to interrogate artistic identities in practice through zines and similarly anonymous public art, just as the Guerrilla Girls (http://www.guerrillagirls.com/), keri smith (http://www.kerismith.com/popular-posts/how-to-be-a-guerrilla-artist-2/), or Banksy (http://www.banksy.co.uk/) have done in public artworks. Models such as the Guerrilla Girls’ publications (e.g. Bitches, Bimbos, and Ballbreakers: The Guerrilla Girls Guide to Illustrated Stereotypes, 2003) serve as anonymous art and writing with hand-drawn and personalized annotations to art history, satirical comics about artists, and an array of critical collages. One might even view the Guerrilla Girls as zinesters.

Meanwhile, the zine itself can take on a separateness from the zinester that is particularly interesting and productive. While zines focus upon materiality and political messages openly, they may often retreat from declarations of authorship and identity disclosure in various ways, much like the feminist theorist bell hooks, whose pseudonym honors female relatives by incorporating parts of their names and uses lowercase letters to de-emphasize individual naming itself (http://www.berea.edu/appalachian-center/appalachian-center-home-2/faculty-and-staff/bell-hooks/). We may note that zines are often associated with

![Zine example for K-12 students by art educator Curtis Widem.](image)

Figure 2. Zine example for K-12 students by art educator Curtis Widem.
authorial contact information including only pseudonyms, defunct websites, or fleeting college email addresses. Some zines only list a physical address at a college as contact information, suggesting an authorial and artistic choice to focus upon a particular and often transitional moment in time, instead of the identity of the artist, one’s presence in cyberspace, or any lasting artistic mark on the world. I believe zines distinctly speak to tensions and dualities surrounding female authorship and artistic presence. Perhaps redefining Virginia Woolf’s (1929) famed assertion that “Anon . . . was often a woman” (p. 51), these zinesters are working within a framework of their own anonymity to highlight the voices, names, and visions of other women from contemporary life and art history. These considerations are particularly relevant aspects of zines as art forms that complexly document gender within specific moments and lives. I’ve even invited art education students to take on pseudonyms and alter ego personalities for art and authorship in this way, allowing them to act as guerrilla artists through zines and other guerrilla art. My sense is that writing and making anonymously can become a strong declaration of oneself and one’s work purely as an artist and a feminist (rather than a named student, teacher, daughter, wife, or mother).

**Zine Spaces: Asserting Adolescent Angst**

![Figure 3. Comic strip from art teacher zine by the author.](image)

Producing anonymous zines can engender valuable personal and political creative space. As a teenager, I created zines because I wanted to generate something between a newspaper and a personal journal. My passion for art and teaching was ignited during high school by the dismissal of an art teacher who seemed to be one of the few adults that understood the predicaments of adolescence and addressed them through art projects and discussions. I began a series of anonymous pamphlets and comic books celebrating his unique, brave, compassionate teaching and lamenting public school personnel practices (see Figure 3) inviting other students to join me in protest via letters and petitions to save his position. Working with my friends (and at times my sisters), I was also using zines to respond to and
revise restrictive images and ideas about teenage life from *Seventeen* magazine and other media readily available to teens. Writing about adolescence and socially-defined gender expectations, Douglas (2010) has similarly observed that American teens,

are expected to be restless, rebellious, defiant of adult society . . . [but also] to conform to pre-existing (mostly male) standards of beauty and behavior, to comply, to obey . . . . How is that for an impossible place to stand? (p. 53)

Zines can be a self-made space of inquiry, allowing alternatives to narrow concepts of female consumption, teenage angst, and commercially condoned parodies of creativity and resistance for young women. Angela Francis (2002) writes of the usefulness of the zine community in *her side of the sidewalk #1*: “if we start telling these stories, maybe this space can be filled with something else. It has been my experience that the more we talk and the more honest we can be, the less threatening we become to each other” (n.p.). Locating oneself and representing oneself are essential human impulses, but it is particularly crucial to connect and to be heard during the struggles of transitory teenage life.

As another example of alternative models of young adulthood posed by zines that are increasingly relevant in revealing sexism in society, *girl swirl fanzine #3* (2000) includes empowering calls to the reader: “Protect Yourself! Do not be another victim. Fuck shit up” (n.p.). *Girl swirl fanzine #3* also counters the restrictive ‘conventional wisdom’ of avoiding unwanted sexual advances by shunning provocative clothing. Instead, it gives young women fashion tips: to wear sunglasses to avoid eye contact with a predator, to choose shoes that allow for running or slipping off easily, and to forego the feminine modesty of covering oneself because it might slow one down in a fight. Rather than encouraging young women to be ashamed of their bodies, this zine offers alternative suggestions to arm and empower readers.

Though zines are historically the products and (pre)occupations of adolescents (Duncombe, 1997), there are many zines in circulation that are written by and about former teen zinesters who matured into adults, still working to carve out alternative spaces and advice. Many zinesters continue to interrogate gendered experiences as they grow up. For instance, *Leeking Ink* (Breier, 1995) is a Baltimore zine that evokes and addresses topics ranging from adult pregnancy, bisexuality, menstruation, work, travel, and many other aspects of post-teen life (see Figure 4).

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Revise restrictive images and ideas about teenage life from *Seventeen* magazine and other media readily available to teens. Writing about adolescence and socially-defined gender expectations, Douglas (2010) has similarly observed that American teens, are expected to be restless, rebellious, defiant of adult society . . . [but also] to conform to pre-existing (mostly male) standards of beauty and behavior, to comply, to obey . . . . How is that for an impossible place to stand? (p. 53)

Zines can be a self-made space of inquiry, allowing alternatives to narrow concepts of female consumption, teenage angst, and commercially condoned parodies of creativity and resistance for young women. Angela Francis (2002) writes of the usefulness of the zine community in *her side of the sidewalk #1*: “if we start telling these stories, maybe this space can be filled with something else. It has been my experience that the more we talk and the more honest we can be, the less threatening we become to each other” (n.p.). Locating oneself and representing oneself are essential human impulses, but it is particularly crucial to connect and to be heard during the struggles of transitory teenage life.

As another example of alternative models of young adulthood posed by zines that are increasingly relevant in revealing sexism in society, *girl swirl fanzine #3* (2000) includes empowering calls to the reader: “Protect Yourself! Do not be another victim. Fuck shit up” (n.p.). *Girl swirl fanzine #3* also counters the restrictive ‘conventional wisdom’ of avoiding unwanted sexual advances by shunning provocative clothing. Instead, it gives young women fashion tips: to wear sunglasses to avoid eye contact with a predator, to choose shoes that allow for running or slipping off easily, and to forego the feminine modesty of covering oneself because it might slow one down in a fight. Rather than encouraging young women to be ashamed of their bodies, this zine offers alternative suggestions to arm and empower readers.

Though zines are historically the products and (pre)occupations of adolescents (Duncombe, 1997), there are many zines in circulation that are written by and about former teen zinesters who matured into adults, still working to carve out alternative spaces and advice. Many zinesters continue to interrogate gendered experiences as they grow up. For instance, *Leeking Ink* (Breier, 1995) is a Baltimore zine that evokes and addresses topics ranging from adult pregnancy, bisexuality, menstruation, work, travel, and many other aspects of post-teen life (see Figure 4).
Zine Space: Adult Archivists

Part of the contributions of adult zinesters to the zine scene is the organization of networks and archives of zines. Like myself, several adult zinesters and former zinesters aim to contribute to the circulation and study of zines as part of their careers, hobbies, or side projects. In addition to zine historians and zine researchers, zinesters themselves (often including librarians and others affiliated with universities and communities) have created directories and libraries of zines. One of the major zine libraries is Barnard College’s growing zine collection, part of the Columbia University library system.

Perhaps the most prominent current resource addressing the vast range of feminist zines is digital: The Global Grrrl Zine Network, a web directory of zines (much like a distro, or zine distribution service). Importantly, this digital resource owes a great deal to print media. In fact, the directory echoes both Riot Girl Newsletter and Action Girl Newsletter of the 1990s, and the website features self-made and published zines spanning categories of grrl, lady, queer, trans, and folk zine cultures. The Global Grrrl Zine Network also subtly reconfigures language and status online to suit its purposes, with references to webmistresses of online zines and distros (instead of the conventional webmasters). In digital craft communities, the assertion of female identity remains central, and manifests within declarations of digital space and punk affiliation such as “riot grrrl” (http://onewarart.org/riot_grrrl_manifesto.htm), “craftgrrrl” (http://craftgrrl.livejournal.com/), or “grrrl zine” http://www.grrrlzines.net/).

In the classroom, such distinctions of identification in zines underscore the potential of digital space to dually address gender and artistic identities. I have often invited college students within online classes to question representation and identification in terms of virtual and physical realities, where marginality is reconfigured. For example, a choice as simple as disclosing one’s gender, age, or culture is highlighted as optional in the digital realms of discussion. Zines are similarly unique because university professors can write as artists or activists, students might act as educators, and the choice to disclose identity and affiliation remains elective. For women zinesters who choose to disclose age, gender, or race, each identification can be an activist assertion of feminism. Johnson (2003) examines such feminist assertions of self and space in writing provocatively, suggesting “women have to figure out how to take up the space around us, to take it up like a craft” (p. 103). Sarah Jean Kennedy (199x?) reprinted a similar philosophy or manifesto in her Ms. America zine # 2 from a zine entitled Slingshot:

WHY WE NEED A WOMAN’S ONLY SPACE

Because in this boring boy’s club of a world you would never let us speak.

Because we refuse to ask permission to speak.

Because on the few occasions when you do listen, our rage is usually met with patronizing condescension.

Because we are fed up with having our ideas dismissed, and women understand the value of other women’s ideas.
Because in this manmade prison, if we do speak up we are labeled as freaks and man haters.

Because you, with all your inherited ignorance push us to the edge. And when we strike, wild eyed with centuries of anger, you call us ‘hysterical’, ‘typical emotional women’.

If you were a woman, knowing this, wouldn't you desire a woman's only space to speak your mind? (n.p.)

*Slingshot* zinesters (see Figure 5) have also created a California-based maker/D.I.Y. spot to actualize this sort of creative space ([http://slingshot.tao.ca/issue.html?0096030](http://slingshot.tao.ca/issue.html?0096030)). Other zine creators have often created and collaborated within craft-inspired formats for makers. Jen Cooney’s describes her *Zine Circle #1* zine as a sort of ‘quilting circle’ (n.p.) in that its contributors passed around the pages to add on to its content. So too, Occupy Wall Street demonstrations and community organizing were collaborative and operated through community call and response. The Occupy movements have spurred diverse, if somewhat short-lived political zines such as *Occupy The Zine* on Facebook ([https://www.facebook.com/occupythezine](https://www.facebook.com/occupythezine)), and it is notable that many zines were included in the 2011 Occupy Wall Street makeshift library. This library was a public, community-based, collaborative collection of self-published works and donated books that evolved into additional Occupy library branches I observed at the 2012 New York Maker Faire in Queens.

*Figure 5. From Slingshot zine.*

Recent zines pertaining to the Occupy movement similarly emphasize gender and safe space in protest sites. For example, Workin’ on it! We activate! We agitate! Womyn of color, Occupy Wall Street & beyond! #1 (2012) addresses women of color and issues of sexual harassment and even assault within the Occupy protests. As a positive reaction in response to these serious difficulties, the zine also offers suggestions promoting self-care for women and helping teach others about racial and gender oppression.

**Contextualizing Zine Readers: Collectors, Makers, and Craftivists**

Aside from protests, popular events in physical space centered on zines range from festivals to symposia and conferences that build community around creative activity, bartering of crafts and zines, and community action (e.g., [http://brooklynzinefest.com/](http://brooklynzinefest.com/); [http://www.portlandzinesymposium.org/](http://www.portlandzinesymposium.org/)). Bleyer (2004) has observed that the very ways in which we subscribe to, exchange, and/or collect zines are inherently artistic, noting that the zines she has acquired over time are effectively “artifacts in my own personal museum” (p. 49). As an educator and artist who has worked in both schools and museums I am especially intrigued by the physical elements of creation and collection within my recent readings and interpretations of zines. Paper zines document an assemblage of personal handwriting, traces of the tape the author used in cutting and pasting, and other visible connections of language and visual art between the zine’s creator and the reader. Extending this creative connection, the Occupy Wall Street library and art galleries were makeshift spaces meant for visitors to view, read, swap, and contribute artifacts as an engaged community. Craft researcher Metcalf (2007) has observed this “crucial opposition stance [in that] the hand-made object is widely understood as the antithesis of mass-produced anonymity” (p. 21). In this way, zines are distinctly personal artifacts that stand out among a range of manufactured objects that occupy the physical space of our lives.

Notably, zines on the whole are not as carefully nor prescriptively created and collected as many handmade artists’ books, and this is an important aesthetic distinction that relates to their immediacy and a certain quality of freshness. As the Radical Art Girls stated in the 2001, Issue 1 zine of the same title, “art is not based in a system of competition and comparison. Some of the most stunning artwork, layout and writing I have experienced has been in zines that were copied on cheap photocopy machines and haphazardly stapled together” (n. p.). Zines take on a certain accidental and spontaneous quality, where making is direct, and by virtue of their accessibility as an artform, also rather democratic. Sabrina Margarita Sandata (1995) writes about communal bookmaking in her zine, Bamboo Girl #1, “as a hands-on medium with which [everyone] can chronicle their personal narrative, realities, and dreamworlds . . . . We’re not as concerned with the topic of the book but rather the idea of people making things” (n. p.). I have observed that one of the exciting aspects of creating a zine in the classroom can be located in the personal construction of the zine format. Each student must make individual artistic choices about the inclusion of comics, poetry, rants, collages, and other parts of the zine.

More importantly, making a zine does not require training, initiation, or education as a prerequisite—a zinester is simply a person who creates a zine. A valuing of democracy and artistic accessibility may be liberating as well as problematic in terms of issues of artistic expression and quality. For example, artists and teachers are limited by fonts, formats, and copyright restrictions if we post art on Facebook and other sites. The physical practice of zine-making by hand allows creators to approach authorship, creation, and the page itself as considerations to be revised and reconsidered. Some zines are more well known than others among readers, but the notions of quality at play are an interesting and shifting
combination of subject matter, technical skill, passion, and personality. Genres like zines offer a playful space for experimentation and improvisation around artistic considerations of typography, found art, collage, and visual culture. Zines may be employed complexly as informal sketchbooks, polished hand-made artist books, substitute artist trading cards and exhibition cards, and hybrid formats to serve an array of artistic purposes.

(Re)Mixing: Revising Politics of Crafts and Collage Through Zines

Zines have educational roles as a part of histories and emerging forms of publishing, documenting, and making. They simultaneously look backward and forward into writing and collaging practices. Many zines include renegade re-prints of essays, manifestos, poems, and other works by various authors (with and without permission from the original creators). Notably, j. t. bunnell and irit reinheimer¹ (2003), make the following acknowledgements in the first Issue of their coloring book-style zine on gender: “We would like to thank all the artists who created work that we gracefully appropriated, changed, and used as inspiration for this project. May we all appreciate, make, and share anti-copyright work” (n.p.). In this way, some zines could be seen as an exemplary Creative Commons-friendly²-media format, for they seek to appropriate corporate content in collages, but often acknowledge and more creatively borrow works from independent artists. The ways in which we borrow, reference, create, and re-create are important questions art educators can explore through zines. Educators might make classroom connections as obvious as using ‘cut and paste’ that could be reclaimed, experienced, learned, and revised in various ways:

Which images and texts are we allowed to appropriate as men, as women, as people from particular cultures and within various communities?

What constitutes borrowing, and what may be considered theft?

When (if ever) is it acceptable or necessary to break copyright law as a form of art or as activism?

As the above questions suggest, simple choices of crafting a zine become highly personal and political. Collage can be much more than haphazard exercises with scissors and adhesives. Collagista (http://collagista.wordpress.com/) is an online zine that centrally promotes complexity in collage. There is a certain subversion in flouting the often sleek and clean format of web design by reverting to imperfect arts and crafts sensibilities. Meanwhile, zine websites like www.smilandactnice.com feature web design that appears rather like hand-collaged images, showing the nostalgic aesthetic influence of the handmade upon webpage design. For educators, zines can provide particularly interesting and in-depth provocations around overlapping issues of individual style and expression that can sometimes be overlooked in digital spaces.

A classification of zines not only as collage, but as found art and altered art is also applicable, for zinesters are creating and/or reconfiguring and revising photographic, material, and/or text-based artifacts of their lives. Notably, protesters from Occupy Wall Street have recently modified their movement to document and address the destruction and homelessness in

¹ These two authors utilize lowercase spelling for their names as bell hooks does.
² Creative Commons is a non-profit organization that enables artists to share their creative work, but retain copyright and designate attribution procedures.
Brooklyn post-Superstorm Sandy ([http://occupywallst.org/article/occupy-sandy/]http://occupywallst.org/article/occupy-sandy/). Zines and Facebook sites around this revised movement invite volunteers and designers alike to repurpose their own belongings and to create works of art around related issues of ecology, recycling, and consumerism ([http://actipedia.org/project/occupy-sandy-relief-effort-puts-occupy-wall-street-activists-spotlight-again-year-after]http://actipedia.org/project/occupy-sandy-relief-effort-puts-occupy-wall-street-activists-spotlight-again-year-after). Within these collectives, a sense of personalization emerges in the practice of re-defining, anthologizing, and documenting political action that comprise a unique sort of categorization, classification, and collection of art and politics.

**Zine Communities: Collaborating Craftivists**

In addition to the roles of collagista and critic, we should also view the zinester as a collaborative collector and cataloguer/archivist, for as author Sheena Allen of *Mister Fujiyama Loves You #2* (1999) notes, “we are all collectors of humorous and completely true stories” (n.p.). Zine readers interact with zines as consumers or collectors, simultaneously participating as collaborative creators of upcoming zines. Royce Carlson (2002), of *Black and Blue* zine, routinely invites readers to take and submit pictures of activist activities in their towns for upcoming issues. In Issue 3, Carlson urges: “IF YOU DOCUMENT SOME SURREAL ACTIVITIES IN YOUR TOWN SEND ME SOME PHOTOS AND I WILL PRINT THEM IN FUTURE ISSUES OF BLACK & BLUE” (n.p.). Such participatory emphasis is particularly evident within the Occupy Movements, where media from protestors served as rich counterpoints to major news outlets. As Breitbart and Noguiera (2004) have argued,

> open publishing works best when many people are posting their versions of the same event . . . users can build their own understanding of an event or issue . . . flatten[ing] the hierarchy that exists whenever specialized news producers are separated from their passive audience. (p. 35)

This sort of participatory and documentary content among zines generates community-based artistic practice. Creative participation in zines also can function like communal journalism. Bleyer (2004) notes how many zinesters generate conversation and activism through their zines: “integral to reading zines was the implicit challenge to turn around and write them. Zines made clear that they were not another product to be consumed but were unique contributions to a vast conversation” (p. 48). Sites like the *We Make Zines* ning ([http://wemakezines.ning.com/]http://wemakezines.ning.com/) are careful to address the community of readers and writers of zines as an overlapping demographic.

These interactive communities can be utilized as valuable extensions of the classroom for young people. Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) examined numerous collaborative teen zines and issues of development and education. They found that zinesters’ strengthening of their personal relationships with collaborators was a social and intrinsic motivator in the creative process of zines. Further, the zinesters were able to broaden “personal worlds by exchanging ideas and ‘meeting’ (through cyberspace or snail mail) new people” (p. 431). Within all these interactions, I do not mean to suggest that all zines envision community as an uncomplicated ideal. One zine, *her side of the sidewalk* (2002) carefully articulates anxiety and ambivalence around models of feminist sisterhood and communal making in contrast with her lived life:
women are generally not encouraged to be supportive of one another. In order to understand the implications of this, I feel like we need to go back and look at how we, as well as other groups, have been set up to be pitted against each other historically. . . . How do we undo this training? . . . I struggle with the contradictions in my own relationships with women. They unravel in an astoundingly similar pattern before my eyes. What makes these close friendships so much more fragile than I had thought? We go to these meetings, sit in a circle and talk about our bonds with each other as we cut and sew the patterns of homemade menstrual pads—then we all leave and go home to our boyfriends . . . . How do I balance the dynamic of being mostly intimate with boys while wanting to work on and acknowledge my clashes and closeness with girls? (n.p.)

Within this excerpt, there is an acknowledgement of the disconnect between homemade objects, activism, feminism, and everyday life that the author of the zine identifies and discusses. In this way, zines can explore tensions around gender and sexuality (including heteronormative imperatives), feminism, and coalitional dynamics as demonstrated by authentic personal examples.

Furthermore, while zines examine politics, they keep writing and making in mind as connected and connective practices. Zinesters also often follow a traditional convention from old novels, to address the reader directly or dedicate the zine to him or her. For example, girl swirl fanzine #3 (2000), begins with the following declarations on neon green paper:

this is an information zine for women and girls.

it is a source of knowledge and part of the revolution.

it is for you. it is for your best friend and it is for your little sister (n.p.)

Both a handwritten text and addressing one's readership are traditional conventions, yet these practices are reconceived in zines and zinester cyberculture as friendly, informal, and/or subversive artistic gestures. This convention also highlights the practice of communication and reciprocal exchange inherent in zines between the author and reader, who is addressed in calls for community participation and even gifted with handcrafted items like “cootie catchers,” felted objects, and other inclusions within the zine itself. Just as zines reflect the community, they also push forward into the politics of revisions and revolutions.

Concluding Reflections: Future Feminisms, Digital Discourse, and Zines

Some of the tensions and possibilities surrounding zines prove productive avenues of inquiry for feminist teaching about personal and political experiences. These include sometimes opposing and sometimes collaborating forces, such as academic discourse versus discourse outside of academia or anti-academia, adult cultures versus youth cultures, digitized and mass-produced zines versus those that are OOAK, timeless versus timely zines, and personal versus political issues in zines.

In an increasingly digitized era of art education (Hurwitz & Day, 2011), we may well take up zines as physical artifacts and grassroots practices of activism. I believe we must do so within a framework that honors their histories, meanings, and potentialities. Turkle (1995), Director of MIT’s Initiative on Community and the Self, has observed that traditionally some people “identified being a woman with all that a computer is not, and computers with all that a woman is not” (p. 56). Craft researcher Katz-Frieberg (2010) has also noted ways in which strategies that in previous decades were identified with women artists attempting to liberate themselves of the male hegemony have been integrated into contemporary artmaking as . . . a celebration of manual production in a world that has wildly over-computerized itself. (p. 696)

Crafting zines by hand and/or holding them in our hands and reading them can both identify makers with a continuum of creative women in the past, and also function as a subversion of mass production through contemporary manual artistic processes. Sterk and Knoppers (2009) also suggest that we may come to explore questions of gender and feminism “somewhere in between hardware and software, those two reductive senses of how humans live out gender, in a space that honors both individual humans and communal living” (p. xiv). My sense of zines is that they are often immensely personal and yet communally relatable in compelling, gendered ways.

Today’s D.I.Y. scene might be viewed as a renaissance of craft itself through maker culture, a celebration of ideals about community, feminism, and social justice, often expressed and catalogued online. Further, many zines offer art educators rare political context, personal expression, and views into local adolescent culture, transcribing oral information into self-published print. One zinester observes in CROQ #12 (2010), “folk is the new punk” (n.p.). As Bravo notes in his 2005 book on the popularity of D.I.Y. cultures “people are dissatisfied with what our contemporary situation has to offer and [are] . . . searching for practical, vital, and sustainable alternatives . . . yearning for some sort of blueprint for a better world” (p. 1). Along the same lines, Brent (1997) has observed how self-publishing serves as a sort of antidote to the disaffection of zinesters. Zines and zinesters communities provide a living framework for future visions of art education and feminist activism.

I believe that many feminist artists and educators will locate many of their activist cues by reading zines, and they will create new paradigms by generating new zines and zine-inspired manifestos. Perhaps the Radical Art Girls (2001) express this best in the first issue of their zine: “Collective action, education, art and decision making can and will transform society” (n.p.). Zines have changed the way I read, write, and make art with my own students (inspiring, for example, the creation of a zine and altered book library with pre-service teachers at my institution). As Burkhart (2006) has suggested, various handmade books defy definition, but provocatively intersect areas of art, documentation, and literature. In addition, zine-making can bridge gaps between disciplines of art and other areas through little known or uniquely considered connections to history, literature, gender studies, and philosophy. Zinesters are actively participating in and reporting on local politics, analyzing historical and contemporary discourse in reference to their own experiences, and arranging their illustrative drawings and collages by hand. The zine genre demonstrates powerful and accessible means by which art education projects and provocations can sustain and enliven active learning through self-publishing, activism, and D.I.Y. ethics. Further, women’s documenting, sharing, exhibiting, and selling their artwork
both online and offline through zines can be viewed as an occupation of the hegemony of gender divisions in art and technology, forming feminist spaces for a counter-culture of women creating, trading, collecting, and purchasing zines.
Digital Resources

Occupy Movement Wiki

http://www.occupytogether.org/
International Occupy Movement

http://occupywallst.org/
Unofficial de facto resource of Occupy Wall Street

http://brooklyncollegezines.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2011/10/09/the-occupy-wall-street-library/
Brooklyn College Zine Site for Occupy Wall Street Library

Zine Wiki

http://www.grrrlzines.net/about.htm
Global Grrl Zine Network

http://wemakezines.ning.com/group/feministzinesters
Zine Group for Makers and Readers that Identify as “Feminist”
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*Workin’ on it! We activate! We agitate! Womyn of color, occupy wall street & beyond! #1 (2012). [Zine].*
(Pre)determined Occupations: The Post-Colonial Hybridizing of Identity and Art Forms in Third World Spaces

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Abstract

In this article, we present the effects of globalization on art forms in Peru and on teacher identity in India while exploring hybridization as an ongoing global paradigm in both contexts (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1979). Peruvian art forms are continuously shifting as global cultures meld and become more technologically connected, which ultimately brings about questions of authenticity. The identities of Indian art educators are evolving, and shifting indicating an assemblage or structure containing many parts working together to perform a particular function. In realizing its function, the structure can be named or its form made visible (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This article examines some of these functions through post-colonial lenses to explore the notion of authenticity. In a process of self-reflexivity, both authors ponder how we occupy and are pre-occupied by our identities, roles as art educators and researchers, and how this affects power dynamics in our work. Both researchers’ accounts are important as a means to study the changes of cultures, identity, and art forms (inter)nationally, and to enable equitable processes of cultural exchange and learning in art education.
Introduction

The world is on the move with temporary and permanent migration, immigration, exchange, and mobility of peoples and ideas occurring across physical and virtual places. This movement is affecting ideological, political, and economic spaces. National, cultural, and consequently personal, as well as communal identities, take on new dimensions within the fluidity of postmodern discourse. In this process, discussions of fixed notions of authenticity and tradition in culture are rendered problematic. This condition of flux that the human world is currently undergoing has been named globalization. As researchers concerned with the discourse on this condition, we find it linked inextricably with the condition of post-colonialism and the effects of colonization on cultures and societies (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998). The work of post-colonial theorists often reflects and informs current literature on globalization (Bhabha, 1994; Diversi & Moreira, 2008; Said, 1979; Spivak, 2003). Using the terms of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we define post-colonialism as a state of becoming or constant evolution that nation-states and cultures exist in—as they reinvent themselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and economically in an ongoing response to the event of being colonized. We refer to post-colonialism throughout this article with a recognition that its discourse includes geographical countries and political-ideological nations that are still being colonized and are living under the influence of colonization in avatars of military, economic, and ideological occupation and influence, both direct and indirect (Chibber, 2013; Nair, 2002; Tuhiri-Smith, 2012). This article reflects our processing of theoretical assumptions within post-colonial discourses in our cross/trans-cultural work as artist-educator-researchers in communities in Peru and India.

There is a rich body of research in art education on the naming, knowing, and claiming of traditional and contemporary cultural knowledge in the process of exchanging and disseminating information. The themes in this research consist of new ways that art education and pedagogy connect to the world not only through visual culture (Duncum, 2000; Tavin & Hausman, 2004), but also through attempted decolonization (Ballengee-Morris, 2000, 2010; Ballengee-Morris, Sanders, Smith-Shank & Staikidis, 2010; Tuhiri-Smith, 2012); Indigenous identity (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Bolin, Blandy, & Congdon, 2000); tourism (Ballengee-Morris & Sanders, 2009); the problematic authenticity of various art forms (Ballengee-Morris, 2002); and geography (Desai, 2005). In unpacking our own hybrid identities as culturally mobile workers—transnational, transcultural, and transdisciplinary—we examine our response-ability to enable equitable exchanges of ideas and information in art education practices while studying and teaching the ‘other’ and our own cultures.

Unpacking our separate experiences working with artists and educators in Peru and India, we provide a brief overview of globalization. We explore what it means, and how this global paradigm has led to hybridization (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1979) of people, cultures, and the arts. We then discuss hybridization and its effects on peoples’ identities and the arts from cultures worldwide. Subsequently, we share our own experiences with hybridity focusing on Peruvian artists and Indian artist-educators by drawing on the issues and tensions

1For the purposes of this article, we define authenticity beginning with Clifford’s (1988) definition of “that which has not changed” (p. 97). We expand on Clifford’s definition, noting that authenticity should be self-determined by a particular culture of people and their own ideological framework in a manner that reflects critical relevance.
Within these communities as we examine how our own researcher selves impact these communities. Finally, we offer recommendations for studying art education through the lens of the hybridization of cultures, people, and the arts so as to enable equitable processes of cultural exchange and learning, rather than mere re-tellings or appropriations of another’s story. We realize that as researchers we occupy spaces of privilege, and we hope to utilize these spaces to support the growth and bring forward inaudible voices of others such as our research participants, Peruvian artists and Indian artist educators. In doing so, we focus on ways in which we recognize how fresh solutions and inaudible voices might be suppressed through our own pre-determined outcomes and how we define ourselves and the scope of our occupations.

**Defining Globalization and its Connection to Post-Colonialism**

Al-Rodhan and Stoudmann (2006) define globalization as “the process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of the transnational and transcultural integration of all human and non-human activities” (p. 2). Although many definitions of globalization exist, most often it is associated with the process of international integration and interchange of ideas, products, worldviews, culture, technologies, and economic activity.

Within discourses of post-colonialism, there is a distinction made between first, second, third, and fourth world peoples based on post-colonial definitions of migration and economics. These distinctions are based on whether a colony is exploited (as in the third world—like India and most of East and South Asia) or expropriated (as in the fourth world—like South Africa, U.S.A., and South and Central America—where the Natives or aboriginals are sent away to reservations or other small sites). In this sense, post-colonialism might be understood as similar to globalization in that issues of authenticity and the idea of “Native” belonging are brought into question. Thus we might understand the core concerns of these discourses as intertwined, which is why in some instances we refer to post-colonial globalization. For the purposes of this article, we will focus on the idea of hybridity in globalization, the dynamic among different cultures, which through their interaction, both give to and receive from each other (Bhabha, 1994).

**Hybridity, Identity, and the Arts**

More than the exchange of cultural goods and artifacts, hybridity commonly refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998). In its most basic sense, hybridity refers to mixture, and the term originates from biology to classify offspring from racial mixing. For much of history, hybrids were seen as an inferior dilution of a pure race (see Robert J. C. Young’s *Colonial Desire*, 1995).

In post-colonial discourse today, hybridity focuses on the effects of mixture upon identity and culture (Bhabha, 1994, 1995, 2004; Hall, 1980, 1992, 1997; Spivak, 1990, 2003). A new or hybrid identity is formed from influences from more than one location, usually drawing upon dual influences of the colonizer and the colonized. Homi Bhabha (2004) proposes that it is not only the colonized world that is affected by imperialist contact; the colonizer’s world is also irrevocably altered. In Bhabha’s utopian notion of a Third Space, he envisions knowledge construction in a way that does not allow an automatic dominance of any one cultural ground.
With increases in globalization and the movement of people, objects, and ideas, hybridity now appears commonplace and reflected in personal and communal identities as well as language, music, visual/material culture, pop culture, and the arts. Languages undergo linguistic cross-breeding when words are loaned to and from both the colonizer and the colonized. Pidgin, Creole, Swahili, Aborigine, Irish, and variations of the English language are all examples. Linguistic hybridization is commonplace in the U.S. with the increase of immigrants, workers, refugees, and tourists; the most notable changes are a mix between Spanish and English or Spanglish. Even as we offer this example, we recognize that the hybridization of language does not go without problems—much of the world feels colonized through the use of language. This is not a value-free construct. In fact, this example of hybridity allows an examination of the definition of authenticity as a process indicating enduring relevance, rather than a static or irrelevant marker of a nostalgic past defined from a particular perspective.

There are many hybridizations taking place in art forms including artists’ media and material, technique, personal, and cultural identity, and interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary work. Many artists cross cultures by moving beyond national or ethnic identities to speak in more (inter)national terms incorporating images and objects from different locations. One can find examples that encompass hybridization in contemporary artworks by Chris Ofili, Huang Yong Ping, Dieter Roth, and more (Chris Ofili, 2010; Huang Yong Ping, 2011; Dieter Roth, 2004).

Multicultural/ethnic artists’ artworks are also able to flow to and from countries with greater efficacy than ever before (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Desai, 2005). Desai (2005) asserts that art forms are thought of as being located in one culture, the culture of origin; however, with globalization, this is changing. Ethnic art forms are now made outside their cultural context and sold as an authentic artifact or product. The idea of deterritorialization or what Appadurai (1997) calls the “global cultural economy” (p. 27), the movement of people and the shaping of their identities based on the many places they may have grown up, culture to culture, may play a part in artworks being created outside their cultural context (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Desai, 2005). Technology is another factor, and artists all over the world are now able to see and (re)create art forms from the opposite side of the globe.

Ballengee-Morris (2002) argues that “culture for sale” (p. 232) results in conflicts due to inauthentic representations of Indigenous art forms. Questions have arisen about the authenticity of Indigenous products offered in the tourism market, about what consumers are willing to purchase based on their own experiences with that culture, and about what they may assume is authentic (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Ballengee-Morris & Sanders, 2009; Desai, 2005). Globalization and hybridization are having a dramatic effect on artists worldwide and changing the way we understand, discuss, and see artworks from all cultures. As we work to define ourselves as professionals—the nature and scope of our occupation as art educators, researchers, and artists—it is important that we employ reflexivity about how we view and define the process of interaction with whom we work.

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2Deterritorialization, as discussed by Deleuze & Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), alludes to the removing (of something) from its original context. When this happens, the original territory as well as that which has been removed is irrevocably altered, as is the location to which it is removed or reterritorialized.
based on the contrast between our pre-determination of who they are and their own authentic self-definitions of their cultural identities, visual art, and artifacts.

**Hybridization and Authenticity**

With the rapid increases in the deterritorialization of cultures and peoples, which demands new theories of flow and resistance, intellectuals are compelled to rethink research regarding representation (Papastergiadis, 2005). The complex forms of representation incorporating images from different locations that carry symbolic meaning for different cultures also bring about new or competing codes. Papastergiadis (2005) believes, “to do justice to both the complexity of the artwork and the intellectual potential of these new conceptual headings we need to develop frameworks that can address both these signs of difference and the process by which signs are made out of plays with difference” (p. 1). As art educators working both in the U.S. and our research sites, we ask: What do art and identity look like if they are constantly evoking the shuttling between places, both physical and ideological? Do artworks and identity take on new cultural mixes of artistic styles, expressions, and meanings, or through the process, do they become homogenized and Westernized (Khor, 2001). Might they lean more towards certain dominant cultures, for instance, those determined by gender-based occupational recognitions (Guyas, Poling, & Keys, 2013)? Artists are blending and mixing cultures in art; for example, Native artists in the U.S. and beyond have always worked in response to the dominant culture. In other places such as in India the term Native/native itself becomes value-laden as it is intertwined with problematic histories of ethnic and tribal migration and original occupation.

Determining authenticity with hybridized art forms has become critical for many who are establishing policies, working in museums, and studying artworks (Ballengee-Morris, 2002). At times, policies and academe are in conflict with the beliefs and points of view of certain cultural members and their institutions (Ballengee-Morris, 2002). For example, in “They Came, They Claimed, They Named, and We Blame: Art Education in Negotiation and Conflict,” Ballengee-Morris (2010) discusses an Ohio policy which allowed a private country club to build a golf course around the Octagon Mound in Newark, Ohio.

Ballengee-Morris (2002) writes that the tourist industry and sometimes governments “sterilize culture to heritage, remove the context of the forms, and view culturally driven forms as noncultural, which is another form of culturecide” (p. 241). Certain cultures and artists manipulate symbols that maintain their culture’s ideological framework; this is the way art forms should be examined. Those from the culture should be able to determine their own direction of the culture and the manifestation of cultural forms (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Graburn, 1976).

However, identifying authentic symbols of any culture, whether historically defined or in process of determination, can be difficult since internal identifications (within the community) can differ from representations for those outside the community or just entering it—such as tourists, or hybridizing elements, both welcomed or forced (as in colonization). Part of the issue according to Ballengee-Morris (2002) is the effect of tourism and outside power on different cultures that alters their identity, practices, and products:

Stereotypic representations, the predominant use of outsiders to represent insiders, and the institutional representatives’ emphasis on romanticized heritage versus the reality of cultures has placed cultures and visual forms in
danger of extermination. The lack of education . . . was the missing link between makers and buyers. (p. 242)

Such research illustrates the need for educational programming to foster the survival of both non-Native and Native understandings, especially given the lack of organizational funding for such programming when it is built upon Native knowledge (Grande, 2004). Most stories of artists, their identity, and products are constructed from touristic or historically specific viewpoints. Often this does not provide room for the artists’ or educators’ voices, nor for their opinion on how they would like to be represented. Questions then arise: Whose story is being shared, and who determines those stories? What is culturally authentic? How do we represent a person or idea as Native/native to a culture when our own cultural experiences and identities influence how we might (pre)determine the representation of Native voices?

As art education researchers working separately with artists and educators in Peru and India, we believe it is important to acknowledge the hybridization of cultures, identity, and artworks from a multitude of locations. In the next sections of this article, we describe and analyze our individual experiences and approaches with our research participants. We question ourselves about our impact on other cultures’ ideas, art, and educational forms. We wonder where the idea of hybridity fits in with this process of self-reflexivity, and we work to understand our position as insider-outsider. One example focuses on the hybridization of artworks in Peru, whereas the other speaks about the hybridization of art educator identity in India.

Hybridization of Tradition and Art Forms in Peru

Amanda’s Story: From 2002 to 2005 while living in Cajamarca, Peru as a Peace Corps volunteer, I lived and worked with a wide range of Native artists from the Cajamarca region. There were two main groups of artists—La Collpa, a weaving workshop, and Keramic Makkas, a pottery workshop. Each of these groups consisted of 10 plus artists that ranged in ages from 14 to 65 with a mix of genders. Although these were the main groups, the numbers varied depending on the workload and projects that the artists had at various times of the year. Most of the artists spoke Spanish; however, the older generations (mostly female) spoke Quechua (one of the languages of the people of the Andes). The language in which we communicated was Spanish.

After my time with the artists from 2002 to 2005, I continued to work with them on various projects. From 2007 to 2010, I conducted research for my doctoral dissertation by creating a website with the artists called Colors & Creations, which is currently an ongoing project.

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3We also read Native/non-Native as representative of insider/outside status; for instance, in ourselves as researchers and culturally located art educators, identifying our positions within the communities with which we work.

4I do not like to categorize this population as Indigenous because they would not represent themselves as Indigenous, rather calling themselves campesinos or peasants, farmers, or country people. I prefer Native because their families are Native to the Andes Mountains of Cajamarca, Peru. They believe Indigenous peoples are from the Amazon jungle, not the Andes Mountains.
Working in Cajamarca, Peru for the past eleven years with a group of artists, I have come to deeply appreciate and better understand the inner workings of Peruvian\(^5\) cultures and traditions. The beautifully handcrafted pottery, weavings, jewelry, wooden toys, rock sculptures, and baskets are distinctly symbolic of past pre-Incan and Incan cultures. Passed down from a long generation of family members, a traditional process is followed in each piece, including both decorative and utilitarian vessels for multipurpose uses. However, some craft knowledge is new to the Peruvians and has been taught to them by various governmental and nongovernmental organizations for income generation.

In 2003 while working as a Peace Corps volunteer, I shadowed and observed Aid to Artisans (ATA), an international nonprofit organization that is described as “a recognized leader in economic development for the craft sector, [that] by linking artisans to new markets and buyers to culturally meaningful and innovative products...provides needed economic opportunities to artisans to build profitable craft businesses” (“About ATA,” 2012). While I acknowledge that ATA had good intentions of important income generation for the artists, the new designs and colors that were being used were more geared toward the Euro-U.S. market than in keeping with tradition. These sometimes good intentions in turn were and still are dismantling the cultural traditions of the Peruvian handcraft. After working with ATA, the artists believed that to sell more products, they needed to use more Euro-U.S. designs, colors, and shapes.

This was not the first time that Peruvians had seen a shift in their traditional art making through globalization. The influence of the Spanish, starting in 1532 with Francisco Pizarro’s conquest of the Incan Empire, prompted a change, perhaps the cornerstone of colonial hybridization in the Cajamarca region (where Pizarro captured and killed the last Inca\(^6\)). Today one can see a more rounded, vase-like form, instead of molded shapes, in the traditional pottery and textiles produced on a wooden loom, instead of the “callhua,” the Quechua word for a backstrap weave (Atwater, 1954; “Peru,” 2011; Tidball, 1969).

Not only was Euro-U.S. knowledge contributing to a shift in the Peruvian craft design, but technology was also shaping the process and outcome of the product. For example, many textile workshops were requesting and receiving wooden looms from many nongovernmental organizations. Another shift seen in Peruvian textiles was the change from natural dyes to more chemically based, modern dyes (anilina dyes, mostly purchased in Lima, Peru). These dyes were much easier to obtain, removed several steps of the dyeing process, and promoted a more accurate color balance throughout the product. To appeal more to the Euro-U.S. market, these items were both being pushed on the artists and gladly received by the artists as it simplified the process of weaving.

The history of fading Peruvian artistic traditions could on one hand be seen as hybridity or a rhizome\(^7\) of cultures (Pieterse, 2004), and on the other as an imperial mark or a

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\(^5\)I am using the word Peruvian to designate Native cultures from the Andes Mountains of Peru. The history is long, ranging from Pre-Incan, Incan, to contemporary society. This does not include Indigenous groups from the Amazon basin.

\(^6\)Much of literature is incorrect when referring to the Incan culture. The true designation should be Quechua people/culture as the only person called Inca was The Inca or emperor. Many living today in Peru take umbrage at not being acknowledged as living Quechua (descendants from the Inca) people. They would consider Pizarro’s conquest an invasion.

\(^7\)According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the rhizome is nonbinary, nonhierarchical, and nonlinear. It is a structure that recognizes and encourages multiplicity of influence and affect. It spreads
modernizing and homogenizing process (Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Pieterse, 2004). The power dynamic in play is a result of ‘first world’ consumer-driven structures that require the ‘third world’ producer to accommodate consumer demands. This notion leaves one to wonder about authenticity. In this case, is a Peruvian handcraft item authentic, and who defines what authentic means? One now experiences and sees a more hybridized Peruvian art form coming out of Cajamarca, which mixes tradition, Euro-U.S., and other global cultures.

The effect that globalization is having on traditional Peruvian social, political, economic, and cultural systems and ways of life can also be seen through mining practices in Cajamarca (Bury, 2004, 2008). Yanacocha, the largest gold mine in South America, is located in Cajamarca, and brings many U.S. citizens to the area. The artists are commissioned by the miners’ wives to make an array of products from pictures of artworks found in magazines to coffee mugs as wedding gifts for guests. Many of the artists’ traditional products are being pushed out by a dominant, ‘first world’ culture through designs or images found on the Internet. This is both good and bad for the artists: it provides an income for them and their families as well as advancing technology within the community, but it is also a concrete view of globalization hybridizing century-old traditions.

While working with the artists from 2002-2005, I continuously mentioned the loss of tradition to the artists. Asking them to make both the traditional wares and the modern items, I began questioning myself, asking: Who am I to tell them what might be best for them? As a cultural outsider I was concerned for their loss but soon realized this concern in itself was an imperialistic notion following in the footsteps of other outsiders, both individuals and organizations, promoting the artwork for profit. My concern was legitimate, but my need to change the artists’ ways of thinking (to be more like my own) was imperialist. I did not want to fall into that category. Ballengee-Morris and Sanders (2009) ask similar questions regarding authenticity stating, “Who gets to determine and who benefits from defining or reproducing notions of authenticity? How is a made object changed when a maker loses control over meaning, or its significance is wrestled from them?” (pp. 139-140). In many instances, this is the case for Cajamarcan artists.

Recently, I attended the 2012 Inclusive Museum conference at the University of the West Indies, Barbados, where I presented this issue and put forward questions of authenticity based on hybridization and outside influence on Peruvians. A Barbadian woman working with artists in her own country argued that I should speak with the artists about the loss of tradition. She referenced similar happenings to traditional art forms in Barbados and told me that artists sometimes do not realize the impact globalization and hybridization are having on them until it is too late. After years of my own internal conflict about this issue, this Barbadian woman made me feel that perhaps education and some outsider suggestions for the artists might work toward supporting preservation of traditions. Upon reflection I realized that the website that I had been working on with the Peruvian artists since 2007 has been an attempt to preserve Peruvian artistic traditions.

Through this process, my own ideological framework has continued to change, morph, and become realized through the eleven years of visiting Peru and the artists. As a researcher, I have more fully understood my role, a role of privilege that could support and open boundaries for the artists on their terms and be a benefit for all involved. But I have also

outwards rather than upwards or downwards. In this sense, there is less judgment and rigidity, though more chaos.

acknowledged that there are complexities and complications when representing others (Ballengee-Morris, Sanders, Smith-Shank, & Staikidis, 2010). Through this research, many of these complexities came to light. I am continuing to work through the complications, as I am sure many others in this position do.

The idea behind the website (which was a request directly from the artists) was to develop it with them on their terms. This collaboratively created website demonstrated the evolution of a consistent narrative between researcher and participant. I became more of an insider than an outsider, and at times, the artists told me that they trusted me more than their counterparts. However, I continuously questioned this and am cautious about saying this. Many of the trust issues among artists in Cajamarca emerged from conflict about idea generation for new products, technology development, and who could increase profit. Since my position with them as researcher was to ensure confidentiality and to support the entire group, they began to see me as trustworthy (Alexander, 2010). I understood that my position with them as researcher was the power position, and they likely saw me as a bridge to a ‘better life.’ However, I felt that the real trust was not through the research or work but came through the relationships that I built through eleven years with them (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). We consider each other friends.

Through this project, I was not only able to gain trust but also to provide information to the artists about globalization and expertise about website development. With the website as a focal point of conversation, we were able to discuss the ideas of a global market, the Internet, and the business concepts of a web platform. Through the process, the artists became more aware of their position in the global marketplace and were better able to understand and educate themselves on the issues at hand. They spoke for themselves and decided how they wanted to be represented on the website (Alexander, 2010). The main goal of the research was to acknowledge that I, as a researcher, am not always correct, and that the artists knew best how to represent themselves and their products. This idea was counter to what I saw during the beginning days of working with the artists and ATA. Today, the artists continue to struggle with sales and finding the correct products to promote to consumers, but since 2002, they have learned a lot through trial and error in this global arena.

I believe, as does Ballengee-Morris (2002), that education for researchers, artists/producers, and any entity working in a ‘first/third world’ capacity is key to understanding art forms in a global marketplace and hearing those voices that are most often inaudible. In my experience working with artists in Cajamarca, the biggest differences made were through mutual education, patience, trust, and a sharing of assets and knowledge.

**Form and Expression in the Hybrid Identities of Indian Art Education and Educators**

**Manisha’s Story:** Moving from India to the United States for graduate studies in art education, I often encountered questions about the nature of art education in India and found myself in the position of Native Representative or ambassador for Indian art education, as it were. Over the decade that I was away from India, my familiarity with Western discourses in art education as a discipline grew as did my distance from practice and discourse in art education in India. I became increasingly uncomfortable with this assumption of my Native-ness to the field and the authenticity of my representation of those
that actually worked “back home.” In order to understand whether I could authentically call myself (or answer to) the label of “Indian art educator,” I needed to understand who art educators in India were, and whether an all-encompassing and singular term like “Indian art education” was even valid. This quest for what I now recognize as an authentication of identity is what led to my dissertation research.

During this research I found that the development of Indian schools of artmaking has been recorded by scholars who have mapped traditions of art and craft from ancient to modern, from pre-colonial to post-colonial transitions, and the hybridity of methods and materials that resulted from encounters with colonialism and globalization. However, I found a paucity of research investigating the development of pedagogy from the perspectives of the teachers themselves. Even scarcer is research on the identity of these art educators and their perspectives on the location and possibilities of their practice. In other words, while there is plenty of information on content, methods, and histories of art and cultural education in contemporary India, there is little information on who actually disseminates and teaches this content, what drives them, and what resources offered and deemed necessary by policy and programming they know and use. Therefore, rather than addressing the hybridity of artmaking methods and materials in schools of art, I focused my investigations on the hybridity of teacher identity across sites of practice.

Over the course of three years, at two sites in urban India, I interviewed seventeen artist educators whose professional practice revealed transversals of 1) sites of practice in education, such as K-12, higher education, and community/museum settings, and 2) disciplinary practice, such as artist, teacher, art historian, and art critic. I employed the term ‘artist educator’ to reflect this hybridity since I recognized early in my research that the terms art educator and art education, as the discipline-based nomenclature I learned during my studies in the West held no such fixed meaning for my India-based counterparts.

In constructing this study I encountered two major dilemmas: one was my difficulty finding comfortable or linear ways to categorize or define the form or function of art education and artist educators with whom I spoke; the second was my struggle during analysis and interpretation of data to find a balance in my ontological self that thought simultaneously and interchangeably in Western and Indian theoretical paradigms to translate and connect my national-cultural-researcher-self to those with whom I spoke. Eventually, to analyze the narratives of these artist educators, I applied the theoretical model of assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to illustrate hybridity in the identity of Indian art educators and in the locations of practice of art education in contemporary urban India. To reflect the hybrid and varied (multicultural) nature of the identities of Indian art education, and artist educators, as well as myself of artist educator-researcher, I defined the construction of my study as well as my findings within a context of post-colonial and globalization theories.

To explain briefly, the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of assemblage describes a machine or structure containing many parts that work together to perform a particular function. Deleuze and Guattari postulate that it is in realizing its function that the machine can be named or its form made visible. The assemblage might be machinic—concerned with technical, content-based, or organizational aspects, or it might be an assemblage of enunciation—concerned with linguistic, communicative, or expressive aspects. In my assemblages, the machinic was the information I collected about art and cultural education policies in place and in process, and the structure and content of programming and curriculum at my sites of study. In other words the machinic provided an idea of the

resources made available by policy and programming—the audible and recognized voices (Sharma, 2012). The enunciated was what I inferred by analyzing the dialogue I heard from the artist educators themselves and juxtaposing it with the dialogue represented by the policy and programming efforts. I decided that it was only with such a juxtaposition that a true or authentic image of Indian art education could be articulated.

Wise (2005) explains the concept of assemblage as a “process of arranging, organizing, fitting together” to create a whole that “expresses some identity and claims a territory” (p. 91). An assemblage of identity comprises stories of professional development as well as personal journeys. This process has been well documented in education and art education research (Ölsson, 2009). These collective assemblages of enunciation are “acts and statements” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 88). After analyzing my interview data and applying the concept of assemblages to represent the form that I saw as emerging through juxtapositions of idea and form, I identified three narratives of art education in India that seemed to me, to speak across the multiple cultures of ethnicity, geography, cultural history, and disciplines that I was exploring. I saw these narratives as being those of learning, teaching, and ideology. I presented these narratives by constructing fictional characters that represented assemblages of the voices of my interviewees across spatial-temporal practice.

I constructed three composite characters, named for their Sanskrit meanings. These are Vidya (knowledge), Shakti (power/action), and Neeta (policy). A combination of spiritual instinct and material-logical reasoning ran as undercurrent to most of the interviews as well as the documents of curriculum I studied. The narratives demonstrated a disconcerting tug-of-war within every aspect of Indian art education—as both a singular discourse and a collection of ideological terms and practices. To summarize, in defining these composite characters, I illustrated my understanding of how artist educators in India map their practice of learning and teaching art across striations of disciplinary practice marked by institutionalized programs.

These three composite characters might be read more as collective assemblages of enunciation indicating the ways of knowing illustrated by the 17 participants in my research study: specifically, their knowing of themselves and the spaces within which they function in fluctuations as powerful and powerless, as sharply defined, or as fuzzy and indistinct. For example, the composite characters, Vidya, Shakti, and Neeta, describe their movement across disciplinary striations:

“I would say I am an art educator—I teach how to make visual art and I teach art history so that is being an art educator I think,” says Vidya. While she and Shakti describe the locations of their students across schools and colleges and private tutoring, Neeta adds community-based organizations, like museums and NGO's to her locations. “...here in India,” says Vidya, “we are all jack of all trades because see, one hour I teach an art criticism class, the next I go to a life drawing class and then into a painting class. Then, onto

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8Sanskrit is a historical Indo-Aryan language that is often considered as the language of Indic traditional thought and theory across the many linguistic and cultural regions of the Indian subcontinent.

9Deleuze and Guattari (1987) present space as striated and smooth landscapes; striations are marked borders and boundaries indicating more ordered routes of movement. Smooth space has fewer markers, and while it encourages more transgressions, it also has more bumps and rough areas.
a value education, religious doctrine . . . based on where you are teaching.”
(Sharma, 2012, pp. 124–125)

The identity of the Indian artist educator, as voiced in these composites/assemblages, is that of a nomad moving across the territorial spaces of defined curriculum and policy and deterritorialized spaces of creative instincts based on necessity and opportunity. As nomads they occupy in-between spaces, off defined paths of professional structures, and outside the organized systems of institutionalized programs. The narratives of learning and teaching reflect a sense of the invisibility of their input into the assemblages. When placed outside their own territory, their narratives become mute enunciations, reflecting the inaudibility of the art teachers’ voices and experiences within the dominant narrative. In other words, they reflect the inaudibility of the voices and experiences of the art teacher as resources within Indian art and Indian education.

There is quite a clear recognition of the defined identities of the artist who teaches and of the teacher who employs art as a tool of education in the policy and research documents of organizations like the Center for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT), National Center for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and Department of Education in Arts and Aesthetics (DEAA) (see Sharma, 2012). However, once the boundaries of these territories defined by policy, curriculum, and educational politics are crossed—moving into the in-between spaces defined loosely as artist educator—definitions, functions, and acknowledged effects of practice become fuzzy and indistinct. Understanding and recognition of where these practitioners come from, what they should focus on, what they are working towards, and what they accomplish get lost in the inability to track a clearly (pre)defined professional accredited practice because it does not always match up to who the practitioners and students are.

This can be understood in Vidya’s clarifications that “Besides teaching, I am also a practicing artist . . . though it’s difficult to balance my work as an artist with teaching and also have a family life.” Shakti, on the other hand, identifies herself as an academic in her work as a researcher, art critic, and writer, but when it comes to teaching art history and criticism at the higher education level, her language changes. “There, I identify only as a teacher,” she explains. “If I was preparing people to be artists, then I would identify as an artist educator or an art educator.” Neeta, as a designer, questions her very presence in the study, not quite knowing whether her work “fits” within the definitions of the field or what I as a researcher, with a power to define and represent, am looking for. “I am more a designer than an artist. So does that make me an art educator?” she asks. Their uncertainty about being part of the field: its policy and curricular conversations and structures becomes a space for understanding how the inaudibility of these artist educator voices in the assemblage of enunciation is a lack in the machinic assemblage (the structure of the field) that could be enriched by its inclusion.

In epistemological terms, I posit that we can read these enunciations as a system of signs in the context of post-colonial globalization. When these inaudible enunciations are read as linguistic signs embedded in regimes of inherited language, hybridity in language can be reduced to a sign of colonial legacy and its possible efficacy shunned as inauthentic or less valuable. In post-colonial India, linguistic difference is bridged by communicating in English as a connecting language. For instance, the participants in my study teach, and I interview them (based on the sites of this particular study), in various flows of language that fluctuate between English, Hindi, and Urdu, or hybrid forms of these multiple language and dialectical
systems. However, when read beyond embedded signifying regimes (self-consciousness), this linguistic hybridity can be transformative. In this context, I own English as my language as much as any other language system of which I am a ‘native’ speaker, namely, Hindi and Urdu. I choose not to locate English in hierarchies nor opposition to any ‘other’ inherited linguistic system. In the construction of my research and representation of my participants’ voices, I employ language not to mark hierarchies but to make connections. Thus, I am able to juxtapose my influences and interpretations drawn from Sanskrit texts in Hindu philosophical systems with the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, that are written by European scholars for a primarily Western audience. These juxtapositions allow me to think of the power and possibility of both the hybridity and authenticity of ideas and of language, not only those of my own researcher and art educator self, but also those of the audiences for my work that I both recognize and ignore in doing so.

Thus, while language indeed remains an important issue in post-colonial discourses, there can be a choice in how it is used. Within a discourse of art education with nationalistic agendas, such as the simplification of defining an Indian art education through government-issued textbooks promoting particular political agendas with fixed definitions and visual markers of ‘authentic Indian culture,’ this reterritorialization with linguistic and ideological signifiers can provide a bridge between the disconnect of art education policy and artist educator pedagogy. For instance, based on the narratives I constructed from my data analysis, in Indian art education creative instincts to learn through individual exploration and expression push at more structured traditional ways of learning. These are embodied in both the Western atelier and Indian traditions of Silpin (master-artisan) and karkhana (factory-like) exemplified in the exercises of copying and mimicking the masters, mass-production or craft-as-art, and learning art history as separate from artmaking practices.

This instinct manifests in the narratives of learning and teaching. Fictive composite Shakti defines this structured and prescriptive system as the reason for her frustration at not knowing how to evaluate her originality of expression until the time that she reached college (Sharma, 2013, p. 133). She clearly indicates dissatisfaction with the acquisition of merely technical skills in art classes. In her own words, “the idea was not to explore yourself; it was basically more towards the perfection of the piece of art you were working on with the idea that this could only be gained by copying someone.” Neeta’s experience of copying alamkaric (decorative) designs without ever learning that they were designs drawn from the murals of the historic cultural site of Ajanta and Ellora confirms this. But it was never enough for her as a student to just develop a manual skill in drawing or painting without processing the content and meaning in order to know the history and context.

In other words, these artist educators began articulating their territories of teaching practice based on knowing what was not in their spaces of learning or that which needed to be spoken for, a space to be occupied. This instinct also pushed them to explore the criteria of learning and of teaching that became programming and policy. While structured learning produces a sense of comfort by providing known directions, it inhibits nomadic movements that create an open space for learning where questioning arises from multiplicities in combinations of instinct and experience.

In listening to and interpreting these voices, I was able to find more comfortable ways of identifying my own voice in speaking as, for, and about Indian artist educators, and my function in doing so. In making visible components of the definition and practice of Indian art education, I found my own purpose and identity becoming clearer, which has led to my

being able to define my role as an art educator living and working in the West more clearly. For instance, I realize that identifying as an Indian artist educator writing in English, or using vocabulary originating in the West—such as the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari—does not make me less authentic as an Indian scholar; neither does using Vedanta philosophy and Sanskrit terms make me more so. Although my use of the latter might be read as closer and more faithful to Indigenous traditions, I cannot identify myself as native to the dialogue in process about Indian art education practice because at this point I am really on the margins, looking in.

Even though this theorized assemblage of enunciation as an identifier of Indian artist educators seems tenuously held together at this point of my examination, it is this very lack of a singularity in definition that keeps the field from falling into complacency with what it is, does, and might be in both form and function, as well as with whom it engages. For “nomadic thought does not immure itself in the edifice of an ordered interiority . . . it does not repose on identity; it rides on difference” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. xii).

Relevance of the Hybridity of Indian Art Educator Identity to Global Discourse

As I struggled to make coherent my findings about Indian artist educator identity, including my own identity and responsibilities as a researcher, I found that my construction of my dissertation reflects my own cultural, disciplinary and intellectual hybridity. For instance, its ontological development reflects my Hindu-upper middle class origins and my education and career in the US and abroad. In the context of Indian art education, it is an exploration of my participants’ and my hybrid identities as socio-cultural chameleons migrating between physical, socio-cultural, and disciplinary geographies. In unpacking these hybrid identities, questions emerge: How do we, in art education, value workers inhabiting disciplinary fields of ambivalence incorporating an ethic of care (Noddings, 2002) for those who dare to live as disciplinary nomads having to defend themselves in a political arena that demands set answers to where they are migrating from and where they intend to settle? How do we, as nation/ethnicity/race/religion-based citizens in a globalized world, value ideas of tradition and change from dual or opposing ends of our hybrid ways of thinking illustrating unproductive hierarchies of ontological influences?

In Conversation

In sharing with each other our insights into our researcher-selves, our participants, and their locations, we focused on a few common concerns: the dismantling of “traditional” cultures through individual and organizational programming in post-colonial and global contexts; the naming and inclusion/exclusion of who and what “Native” cultures are, both in how artists and art educators identify themselves and what they envision their artistic products and roles to be; the naming and inclusion/exclusion of “progressive” cultures in envisioning the territory of our field and the factors that affect this vision; and our entry into and engagement with these artistic and cultural communities to consciously foster productive relationships toward deeper and more equitable learning.

This analysis allowed us to articulate that traditionally the ways we have envisioned spaces or territories of action have become quite easily fixed and rigid. This rigidity occurs when we use geographical and cultural space or profession or occupation to define who is Native or non-Native. Basically, such definitions are about who belongs and who does not, what action is authentic and what is not. When such boundaries are defined whether through

fixed histories or good intentions, our areas of effect and affect become pre-determined and fenced off from creative and equitable change.

Conclusion

It is clear that with increasing migration, multiplicity, and hybridity of both cultures and peoples, our ability to define identities and art forms is becoming more elusive. The backlash against this is the drive toward defining authenticity, culture, nation, and tradition as essential and historically rooted. This backlash is due to socio-political and economic realities as well as to our own basic needs for security and social belonging. We acknowledge this in considering not only the content we intend to teach and research, but also the paradigms within which we choose to do so—those we reach out to—to engage with in terms of cultural, geographical, political, and disciplinary borders. In other words, we choose with whom and with what we ally ourselves, as well as what pre-determined spaces we might challenge and (re)construct through occupation.

The concept of hybridity as explored in this article illustrates the ways in which binaries of eastern/western, traditional/contemporary, Native/non-Native, insider/outsider can be revised allowing us to look inward through the chaos of infinite influences and discourses to inquire: who are we? Our theoretical lenses, i.e., Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) assemblage, Bhabha’s hybridity (1995), and other voices in postcolonial theory also offer a vocabulary to resist a single essential answer to explore multiplicity in identities and cultures, an enduring concern of post-colonial globalization discourse. Perhaps our identities, cultures, and art forms do not have to be rooted in one discipline, one cultural practice, one set vocabulary for us to be valuable. Our whole range of self-understanding and perceived affect can change with a more hybrid understanding of that simple and most basic question: who do we want to be? Of course, the very asking of this question makes visible an understanding of being in positions of power as art educators, researchers, and cultural workers whose self-determination is recognized as a decision to occupy a vocal place in conversations we believe to be important.

In reflecting on our work processes, we found ourselves exploring our participants’ hybrid art forms and identities as artists, educators, researchers, and pro-active citizens occupying multiple physical, socio-cultural, and disciplinary geographies. Identifying our art education community as such, we in these various areas of impact can deeply enrich this discourse in claiming an authority of voice(s). We might reposition ourselves with our borderland locations and nomadic statuses as giving us positions of mobility and power.

As researchers and academics, we occupy positions of insight on issues of migration, settlements, hybridity, and ambivalence, in terms of discipline (studio art, art history, aesthetics, design), methodology (area-based artistic practices, vocabularies, transversals, and intersections of arts and crafts), and cultures (traditional practices and media, new media, fine art, mass media, and visual culture). All this is the discourse of the moment, and we believe, of the foreseeable future in Peru, India, and abroad. Through our self-reflective analyses in this article, we intend to stress how these positions we occupy must be recognized as positions of power and privilege where the opportunity to engage with and hear inaudible voices must be an ongoing endeavor and choice. We must constantly and critically review our own senses of self and power as teachers and researchers for our work to become authentic representations of those striving for visibility and audibility. In reflecting on and employing our own hybrid selves, we can use our own multiplicities in

productive and satisfying ways instead of allowing ourselves to become invisible and powerless in political and territorial spaces of culture, nation, and academics.
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Abstract

This article articulates an ethics of hospitality within art education that adopts an uncertain disposition to visual arts learning and affirms the unforeseeable while inviting openings for the transformation of art education knowledges and associated subjectivities. Throughout, I endeavor to keep the question of whom we teach unanswered and open, while searching for spaces of possibility within unpredictable, aporetic entanglements inherent in normalizing frameworks of art education. I contextualize Derridean notions of aporia, hospitality, monstrous arrivant, undecidability, and responsibility within the specificities of art teaching that call on us to approach the field as contradictory and ambiguous so that we might imagine the field and ourselves otherwise. Art education as an aporia must be both rule-governed and unruly, open to what may arrive to occupy our household.
I was recently asked to respond to the question “Who do we teach?” as part of a panel that included participants from art history, studio art, and design. By asking for challenges to and strategies for recognizing and serving students from multiple constituencies with diverse learning styles, the session prompted panelists to share dynamic and effective curriculum exemplars from their respective disciplines. In contrast, as I prepared, I found myself ruminating on the implications of asking the question itself and some of its implications within my teaching contexts. Examining the very notion of recognizing and knowing who students are within schooling and schools of art and design while engaging discipline-specific content was my alternative slant to re-focus the question away from an array of “best practices” to service diverse students. This question “Who do we teach?” held my attention theoretically, pedagogically, and ethically. Additionally, as I lay out below, dwelling on this question facilitated a probing of the ways in which we engage with outsiders to our field and how these engagements can limit and/or expand the very field of art education to which we cling.

In order to directly face the complexities of attending to those moments of ethical disruption that reveal themselves as an openness to the Other, I ask that we approach art education as contradictory and ambiguous to keep the field in a state of undecidability. Correspondingly, I articulate an ethics of hospitality within art education that adopts an uncertain disposition to visual arts learning and affirms the unforeseeable while inviting openings for the transformation of art education knowledges and associated subjectivities. Throughout, I endeavor to keep the question of whom we teach unanswered and open, while searching for spaces of possibility within unpredictable, aporetic entanglements inherent in normalizing frameworks within the field of art education. I contextualize Derridean notions of aporia, hospitality, monstrous arrivant, undecidability, and responsibility within the specificities of art teaching that call on us to imagine the field and ourselves otherwise. Art education as aporia must be both rule-governed and unruly, open to the heterogeneity and incalculable of what may come to occupy our field as household.

Occupying the Question

Curriculum discourses in art education produce and regulate subjectivities of learners (Atkinson, 2008). As a field, art education continually creates restraints around itself to allow others in or exclude them from being recognized. Using priorities set before we even meet someone, we are also caught up in classifying who an art educator is, who a competent art student is, and who lies outside our field. Educators engage in re-presentations of students—in how they perceive them and use discourses to describe them often through stereotypical ideas about types of students as deficit and/or superior to other types, as insiders or outsiders. If we consider the question “Who do we teach?” in schooling and schools of art and design, for example, more often than not, we begin by answering through classifying and reducing a student into a thing devoid of his or her own subjectivity (Aoki, 1983/2005). Inherent in this is the limiting of possibilities for expansion of the very field we are protecting.

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1 The College Art Association’s Education Committee Panel asked for panelists to consider the following theme: “Who do we teach?: Challenges and strategies in recognizing our students, and developing and supporting curriculum for multiple constituencies.” My co-panelists were Annika Marie, Tera Galanti, and Christopher Moore. The panel, chaired by Joan Giroux and Cindy Maguire, was presented at the College Art Association Conference in Los Angeles on February 22, 2012.
Instead, Atkinson (2008) suggests we simply start with “Who are you and how do you learn?” to greet the subject that is not yet comprehended or recognizable (p. 235), thereby allowing the Other to speak for him or herself. “Who are you and how do you learn?” acts as a form of address toward each learner within pedagogical encounters that potentially disrupt assumptions of a deficit pedagogy and hegemonic dispositions of teaching. This “disruption of established states of pedagogical knowledge and practice through which learners are recognized” (p. 235) unpredictably turns against itself as an ethical imperative.

Relevant here is Foucault’s (1982) focus on the question “Who are we?” (p. 781), wherein those in power, professors, for instance, automatically categorize and attach an identity to someone, such as a student, thereby subjugating the student to the power and control of the professor—here power forms the subject. We know very little about our students upon first meeting them, but we often receive information on their current major, or in K-12 contexts are provided with a file on a student passed on by previous educators, psychologists, or administrators. This inevitably fills us with preconceived notions of a student’s capability that distorts our interactions, for better and/or worse. Instead, Foucault (1982) proposes we should not be permitted to answer “Who are you?” on behalf of another, for we cannot determine another’s answer or singularity in advance. According to Caputo (2000),

Foucault wants to keep this question open, and above all to block administrators, professionals, and managers of all sorts from answering this question on our behalf, thereby closing us in on some constituted identity or another that represents a strictly historical, that is, contingent constraint.

(p. 30)

For when we determine in advance someone’s worth and ability, based on his or her disciplinary major for example, we are limiting the possibility of new modes of self-invention, and, as I maintain, disciplinary re-invention as well.

### Occupying a Hospitable Field

Instead of diagnosing students’ needs, abilities, and identities prematurely, we need to be less sure of students in advance, and in doing so we potentially open paths to reevaluate our own positions of power and the very limits of our field. In an effort to embrace the aporia we encounter in art education, and inspired by Derrida’s notions of hospitality, it behooves us to welcome students from a variety of backgrounds unconditionally by addressing them in particular. In lieu of assuming we can answer the question of whom we teach, we might instead ask students “Tell me who you are” (Naas, 2005, p. 8). Here the “wholly other” within a Derridean (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 26) ethics of hospitality (a framework indebted to the work of Emmanuel Levinas) is pertinent as it references something or someone unimaginable that exceeds and/or subverts our pre-formed expectations. In welcoming the Other, we, as art educators or hosts, are not seeking to reduce his or her independence through identification or dominance by fitting him or her into a space already created for him or her to fit into (Todd, 2008). In fact, the host has to accept that this “guest may change the space into which he or she is received” (Ruitenberg, 2011, p. 32)—perhaps even transforming a disciplinary space. Hospitality here amounts to the deconstruction of the “at-home” (Derrida, 2002, p. 364) through a form of occupation by the Other.

For Ruitenberg (2011), this at-home could be a curriculum that represents a discipline we
are very sure of and that we require students to learn with mimetic efficiency, thereby further buttressing our disciplinary fortifications. Yet, an ethic of hospitality in teaching “means deconstructing the curriculum, so that students come to understand how the ‘home’ of knowledge called curriculum came to be what it is” (p. 34).

A hospitable curriculum, then, pays explicit attention to the voices that have been excluded from its development, and the effects of their absence. Furthermore, it asks how it can give place to, or would be undone by, the arrival of new ideas—for new ideas do not necessarily sit comfortably in the existing home of the curriculum. (p. 34)

In order for the practitioners within a hospitable field to value the wholly other, they need to view the current limits of a field with “a certain provisionalness, as regulations temporarily in place, a temporary shelter taken before something else comes along that takes us by surprise” (Caputo, 2000, p. 177). This openness seeks out the wholly other for its potentiality to unfold present limits to novel articulations—acting as a nemesis to current parameters. In this sense, we do not know what art education is at any given moment. For in the midst of the wholly other, as Caputo notes, we can gain access to the edges and beyond the limits of our field:

... where we are forced to think anew, to confront what we did not see coming, to cross over into foreign lands, to rethink what we thought we knew in the light of what now imposes itself upon us and impresses upon us how little we really know. (2000, p. 179)

We are called on to respond to the unfathomable without a rulebook so that “an ethic of hospitality education must be constructed in such a way as to leave space for those students and those ideas that may arrive” (Ruitenberg, 2011, p. 33). Here we might continually ask ourselves Biesta’s (2010) Rancièrean-inspired question “who can speak?” (p. 544). Art educators need to ask themselves this within their pedagogies. We have to begin from the assumption that every student, no matter the background, can speak within a field. This is really a reversal of how educating has been conceived. As educators we are expected to translate pre-established knowledge for students to acquire on our pre-set terms (despite repeated warnings about the fallacy of a faithful transmission from educator to learner [see for example, Dewey, 1916/1997 & Ulmer, 1985/1992]). Starting from the assumption of Rancière’s (1991) equality of intelligence, disciplinary knowledge is opened up in radical ways. From this position, we are stirred to examine if we are allowing for those outside of art education to have a say within our field. Who do we believe has the ability or capacity to speak on art education content, and how do we communicate these beliefs? This ongoing criticality and acknowledgement of how our “having been received into certain traditions has created conditions of inhospitality for the Other” permits us to possibly reduce our complicity in the perpetuation of these conditions (Ruitenberg, 2012, p. 4).

Furthermore, I long for what Biesta (2011) refers to as the “beautiful risk of education” wherein we embrace risk in art education as we try to stay open to the risk of being interrupted or “being put into question by the other”—keeping our eyes, ears, hearts, and doors ajar (p. 540). Here we are taking a risk, not knowing in advance who we teach or how they learn. Such risk requires flexibility in the development and implementation of curriculum to accommodate an emergentist epistemology by reconsidering knowledge “not as something we receive but as a response, which brings forth new worlds because it necessarily adds something (which was not present anywhere before it appeared) to what
came before” (Osberg, Biesta, & Cilliers, 2008, p. 225). This is especially difficult and needed as our current era of evidence-based education is premised “on the eradication of risk and a desire for total control over the educational process” to the point where making “education 100% safe, to make it 100% risk-free[,] thus means that education becomes fundamentally un-educational” (Biesta, 2011, p. 540). Likewise, Caputo (2000) urges us to affirm a kind of structural blindness, that

... will, contrary to what we might expect, keep us open to innumerable mutations and unforeseeable possibilities, to incalculable ways of being and knowing, doing, and seeing, exposed to potentialities of which we cannot presently conceive, to things improbable and incomprehensible, unimaginable and unplannable. (p. 6)

**Unforeseen Occupation**

An ethics of hospitality (at the end of ethics) is oriented toward surprises, anomalous, unexpected, horizon-breaking events that are “an affirmation of something to come, something deeply futural, that we cannot foresee” (Caputo, 2000, p. 177). Derrida’s hospitality is preoccupied with the guest that arrives as the monstrous arrivant, for whom we do not yet have a name. The arrivant, as a borderline figure, pries open “such a proclivity toward the wor(l)d as given, stealing peace of mind and reading us back to ourselves in unanticipated and unfamiliar ways” (Wallin, 2007, p. 4). The unforeseen must be met with a hospitality that desires and affirms the surprise for which we can never be fully prepared. Therefore, we need to reach for a more anti-essentialist stance towards the prolific and polymorphic diversity in our seminar rooms, studios, community sites, and classrooms along with an open-endedness toward the subjectivities before us (Caputo, 2000).

Disturbances within pedagogical moments and practices seem particularly apt to this form of emergent ethics as we play on the edges of the frontiers of art education. Leaving the borders to our field permeable through an ethics of hospitality as interruption, provides an unfinished openness to monstrous excesses that undo us, our positions, our certainties, and our relations to our field. For in these encounters the laws and limits preserving mastery within a field are transgressed (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). It then follows that hospitality requires non-mastery, a relinquishing of control of our disciplinary attachments in relation to what the wholly other brings. Derrida’s (1999a) question “Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?” (p. 51) helps us to understand how we are implicated within an ethics as unconditional hospitality—a welcoming without restrictions or reciprocal exchange that disrupts us. If we invite others in, we must lessen our fortifications of authority and risk a disruption of the self by the new arrival—an occupation of the already known by the unknown, if you will.

Educational hospitality asks us to give over control of our inherited knowledge to the unpredictable Other. In order for this to be embraced within our teaching, we have to promote and encourage recognition of gaps, dissent, risk taking, and unpredictability so that a multitude of learning paths and outcomes might be encouraged. Educators have to be willing to be flexible in the face of this lack of control, flexible enough to change their current ontological states. This disruption of pedagogical knowledge and practice is called a pedagogy against the state by Atkinson (2008) in that there is a moving against fixed notions of content and learning toward the emergence of unknown potentialities of becoming—in other words, an “ethics of the unknown of becoming rather than established
forms of being” (p. 236). Prescribed curriculum and product-focused outcomes stifle the unpredictability and vulnerability necessary for spaces of relationality and transformation in education. How might this ongoing criticality and hospitality play out within art education?

**Occupying Chez Soi**

A ten-year old student I encountered during my first full-year teaching used drawing in a way I was not familiar with and in a style that didn’t adhere to developmental exemplars I had been trained on during my undergraduate studies. I was at a loss as to how to respond to his images of soldiers, cadavers, and mass killings that proudly showed up on my desk during any and all art lessons, even those having nothing to do with drawing. He bypassed the colored pencils, paint, charcoal, group sculpture assignment based on cultural identity, and observational drawing lessons. I was laboring under the assumption that students with a first language other than English may not understand my instructions for a lesson, but they could watch their classmates and see examples of how to complete a lesson in such a way that I could fairly assess their learning. His drawings functioned as excess to my developmentally appropriate, western canon of art, ruled by discipline-based art education. I, as educator, was bound by my contract and duties to plan, implement, and assess, which, ultimately, dictated I “engage in the violence of exclusion… through the erasure of… difference” (Phelan et al., 2006, p. 175). Would he fail my art class?

At this juncture, I realized the inhospitality of my profession. My priorities ordered that I all but ignore his use of drawing or deem it invaluable, insignificant, or incorrect. His interpretation of art as a way to tap into his overwhelming experiences as a child of war and witness to atrocities was exceeding the boundaries of what I had established. However, his satisfaction in this, his only form of communication in this classroom other than Tamil, pulled at a different type of responsibility beyond my disciplinary training. In my adherence to my duties as art educator, I had bypassed the urgency of creation and the need to use art for communication, irrespective of advancing a set of pre-established skills or broadening one’s appreciation and knowledge of master artworks. There was no place for this guest or his interpretations of art. Here I was thrown into an uncertain relationship with my own profession and values related to art that motivated me to go back to school for my master’s as soon as possible, but in the meantime, I had a decision to make.

This guest posed a threat to my security as host. I was in a panicked space of “undecidability” (Derrida, 1999b, p. 66) wherein what was familiar to me about art education became strange at a fundamental level. In unconditional hospitality we are asked to relinquish control over our mastery of a domain—as host I was becoming hostage. In this state of undecidability, multiple paths are possible, but one clear decision is not at hand—no textbook answer was forthcoming. As a fresh graduate, I would have to choose my response from beyond my art education knowledge that gave the impression that one curricular route could fit all. I couldn’t just turn this student into any other student; this context was unique and I was called on to consider him in an ethical way beyond my prepared script. I had to consider what would be fair and just in this specific instance. “The consequences of such efforts are uncertain—we may never be sure that we are doing the ‘right’ thing, yet it is within this ambiguity that our commitment to reducing violence is perpetually renewed” (Wang, 2005, p. 56). In the end, I betrayed my training and implemented a different mode of curriculum, one that came out of his needs to keep going. His pride was the basis of my assessment of his efforts. In my ensuing years of teaching art, his drawings became the foundation for his ongoing counseling, and as he gained more...
English, he stopped drawing in this way and took up other art forms.

To whom was I responsible in this scenario? To the student, my profession, my disciplinary training, my curricular priorities, or my assessment criteria? In a sense, an overriding obligation to the student throws every other obligation into a specificity that we must facilitate repeatedly with individual students. The profession, discipline, curriculum, and assessment as provisionary are what I keep coming back to again and again ever since this experience with the fifth-grade refugee, newly arrived from Sri Lanka some twenty years ago.

“Whatever and whoever turns up”

As Gilbert (2006) articulates, an ethics of hospitality and difference requires hosting “whatever and whoever turns up” (p. 26) so that the metaphor of occupation by an arrivant works to interrupt art education as usual. Månsson and Langmann (2011) claim that opening education up to the ambivalence of the stranger and the unknown should not be viewed “as a problem, but as a quest for humanity and justice” (p. 15). We need to endeavor to “temper our drive to educate with a willingness to endure the humiliations of surprise” (Gilbert, 2006, p. 33). Derrida’s hospitality requires us to circumnavigate an ambivalent and fragile gap between our ideal lesson or what we imagine art education to be and the inevitably, unexpected guest in all its singularity.

In an effort to work my job through an ethics of difference and hospitality, I entered into a space of indecidability, risking ambivalence in a profession that denies its presence (Gilbert, 2006). Here, as host, once I took up the responsibility to respond to the Other, I had to give up the fantasy of taking comfort in my training, the delusion of mastery in the knowledge base of my discipline. This student’s drawings irrupted into my identity as competent teacher. This

... coherence of the self [was] pushed into crisis by an encounter with another’s foreignness. This dynamic is what makes for the difficulty and the necessity of hospitality: in welcoming what seems strange in the other, we encounter our own sense of foreignness. (Gilbert, 2006, p. 27)

This experience revealed the dogmatic terms of students’ maneuverability within the limits of my rules of engagement within art education. It rendered my fixed ideologies transparent, vulnerable, and susceptible to reinvention. For Derrida, responding to heterogeneity is an ethical demand, “knowing that my judgement must come through a reflexivity in which I continually ask myself—is this a just decision? (Todd, 2007, pp. 596-97).

In every area of our practice, we need to continuously preserve a space for that which has yet to come. In its antagonistic potentiality between the familiar and the strange, this space holds the key to our renewal. Antagonism in our practices alerts us to anomaly that we may censor or ignore in order to keep control and continuity over ambiguity as a threat to ontological or epistemological security (Phelan et al., 2006). How do we educate others for this possibility and responsibility in art education? How do we hear the guest in such a way that our obligations are remade in more just ways that are opened ever wider to multiplicity and plurality? Here is where the abstractness of art education is put to the test in its specific implementation in the face of plurality, while we jockey between the particular and the general, the diverse and the same, harmony and confrontation, so that art
education lacks a definite outline or border in an ongoing re-performing of a field. The fifth-grade student marked “the limits of the familiar, the clear, the common” with all its inherent anxiety and foreshadowing of what is yet possible (Phelan et al., 2006, p. 177).

Veiled Occupations

Alas, as Waghid (2010) warns, we should not “reify encounters with otherness as some romanticised dream” (p. 104). While we may venerate the Other, we also need to be aware of how the Other only ever presents a partiality of who s/he is, a veiling of her or his specific features in order to protect the full strength of his or her otherness. Here who is unrecognizably different complicates an ethics of hospitality in a student/teacher relationship. Educators are constantly policing borders while opening up fissures to let some in without ever knowing for sure who they just let in or omitted access to. Without knowing who we are hosting, hospitality as a response to difference troubles the identity between guest and host, outside and inside (Langmann, 2010, p. 339). Furthermore, as Langmann points out,

Hospitality is not offered to every stranger, nor does every stranger perceive hospitality as a gift. Paradoxically, it is only those recognized, identified, and familiar strangers that have the right to be invited. In this sense, hospitality is never fully open to the other; there is always some violence and exclusion. (p. 340)

Therefore, through hospitality, we certainly risk letting in the “parasite” (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 59) or reforming the Other into the recognizable, turning hospitality into hostility (Jones, 2007, p. 153).

All of us have experienced the unexpected in art teaching wherein we might be at a loss as to how to respond. What do we do in these antagonistic encounters with excesses that invite us to view existing frameworks as invalid? Typically, we are far from hospitable to the monstrous. Instead, the ambiguity of the arrivant is not tolerated for long as the unknown is “overturned by rational deliberations, attempting to convert the unexpected into the known” (Derrida, 1999b, p. 77). As we experience the drive to seek out sameness and control, neutralize difference, and colonize the monstrous within normalizing structures to which we hold fast, we expunge its power and invalidate its ways of knowing our field. In doing this, we resist being deconstructed and transformed through an encounter with otherness.

Occupying the Aporetic

Aporia present us with dilemmas or put us into a state of puzzlement. According to Wang (2005), we experience the aporetic when we exceed boundaries and find ourselves at an impossible passage with contradictory imperatives and conflicting gestures (p. 46). We may enter aporia through hosting the Other wherein we are asked for a response, not a technical response according to preset rules that would reinforce boundaries, but a responsible response that does not rely on predetermined principles or absolutes, but leaves “an uncertain condition for inventing singular responses” (p. 49). This involves a questioning and irruption into pre-established norms, practices, and tradition as well as a shattering of the self as stable. Therefore, aporia is a space of perpetual uneasiness of being pulled in opposite directions of contradictory engagements with tradition and promise in a quest for actions that “open up nonpresent possibilities” (p. 51).
The aporia or unresolvable dilemma of hospitality is that if we are too hospitable, we give up the power to act as host. Conversely, if we wish to preserve our power, we are inhospitable. But the perpetual interruption and instability between the roles of host and guest allow for an aporetic encounter so that something new disturbs our identities, exceeds our expectations, and alters the social field, while deconstructing safe places (Langmann, 2010, p. 343). We need to embrace an ethical attentiveness toward that which we don’t expect in art education that highlights the contingent and shifting identities of student and educator. For in hospitality I adjust, I become in relation to the Other. In this responding, I am left changed for “to truly welcome the stranger is to arrive somewhere new” (Langmann, 2010, p. 344). If we assume we already know who a student is, how s/he learns, what s/he offers, or how s/he is ignorant, we shut down possibilities for our transformation, blocking vulnerability in our mastery, thereby fixing knowledge in time. Conversely, as Caputo (2000) reminds us, “When I am in a singular situation, faced with something singular, I do not have it, but rather it has me” (p. 180).

In searching for a response to the 5th grade student, I was unsettling and questioning myself. In dwelling within the uncertainty and ambiguity of this space, I exposed some of the inherent contradictions in teaching art. In embracing a responsible engagement with the aporia between commonality and difference, student agency and teacher authority, self and other, center and margin (Wang, 2005), we in art education explore alternative modes of pedagogy and the limits of our field. This encounter with my art student brought together tradition and specificity, discipline and life, for in responding to this singularity I wasn’t completely ignoring my contract as teacher and my training as art educator, but I was going beyond the previous script and well-worn path. My response was not only negotiated from existing regulation, but it was also a singular, context specific re-invention of regulation. We need to maintain this double gesture in our field in a paired duty of “affirming yet questioning self and other through addressing differences” with a Derridean responsibility to imagine and invent new modes of subjectivity for both teacher and student (Wang, 2005, p. 59).

The teaching subject, as an aporetic subject within art education for example, finds him- or herself immersed in “the paradoxical demand of giving space, of creating space by delimiting it, and of enabling uses by constraining them” (Ruitenberg, 2010, p. 272). The art teacher deploys and is obedient to what is already established as knowledge, rules, norms, and practices of our field along with the accounting for and regulating of such systems. Here the teacher must be certain, rational, and decisive according to established norms, according to what is rather than what might be (Delgado Vintimilla, 2012, p. 2). Yet, there is also “the logic of the promise, of what is yet to come, indeterminate or unconditional” (Delgado Vintimilla, p. 124) that is in excess of our contractual duties as art educators that interrupts predeterminations, embracing what might be. We need to be responsible to each of these logics as they might co-exist within our field, between the pre-established and what lies beyond it. Here we are immersed in the aporia of responsibility (Delgado Vintimilla, p. 126). The ethics of this cannot be codified in advance as this contingent responsibility occurs within the unique and singular transactions between student and educator, between the norm and its excess, between promise and contract (Delgado Vintimilla, 2012, p. 127). These are rare events of emergent undecidability in which, for instance, an educator admits s/he doesn’t know how to answer a student’s question or when we recognize the myths of assessment we are perpetually playing out. To rest with this undecidability immerses us in an impossible responsibility, risking being both an irresponsible and unrecognizable subject
in transgressing normative logics and pre-programmed routine. This dissensual rupture and paradoxical agitation mark the limits of our field and the unforeseen (Derrida, 1992).

**Remaining Occupied**

At this very moment, our art classes, seminar rooms, art museums, and community sites are occupied with arrivants awaiting our responses and inviting us as art educators into the aporia that imbues our field at the intersections of promise and contract, margin and center, ambiguity and tradition. While it is unlikely art education can be based on an unconditional hospitality,

> ... schooling that does not maintain a reference to the principle of unconditional hospitality loses its reference to education, and to ethical education in particular. Education, following this logic, ought to be concerned with giving place to students and with receiving children and adults who arrive, who are, in spite of the best attempts at preparation by teachers and administrators, unpredictable and wholly other. (Ruitenberg, 2010, p. 270)

An ethics of hospitality incites us to occupy our field as a more temporary structure, provisional categorization, and less restricted to hybrid formations of knowledge generation. For this art educator, it is the participants within any given learning community that continually constitute a space of possibility, where the question “who are you?” is interwoven within a discipline’s curriculum and pedagogy, resisting a response by an art educator, but instead negotiated, transformed, and articulated slowly over a journey of uncertainty outside established borders. Every time we teach provides us with the chance to unbind knowledge and the limits of categorization that do not allow us “to explore that which we do not yet know or that which is not yet a subject in the world” (Rogoff, 2006, p. 3). In order to welcome alternative modes of self-invention in art education, I first have to recognize the partiality of my pedagogy and knowledge that can never fully accommodate the complex realities we are trying to live and think out together. I need to remain ever open to the “(im)possible promise” (Friedrich, Jaastad, & Popkewitz, 2010, p. 584) of hosting the occupation of art education by the Other.
References


Big Gay Church: Religion, Religiosity, and Visual Culture

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Abstract

Five academics explore their performed occupations of the National Art Education Association Annual Meetings. They have annually mounted Big Gay Church (BGC) services that deconstruct and question the ways visual culture, media representations, scriptural interpretations, and religious teaching have constructed (at times harmful) depictions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ2) subjects. This essay recounts how co-authors have drawn on their multiple experiences with/in churches to play with religious rituals and narratives in ways that queerly comment on the damage or support organized religions offer LGBTQ2 students and educators.

The role of religion and religious beliefs in the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ²) people is profound, whether individuals connect with a particular spiritual tradition or not. Though there are many inclusive religious traditions, the lives of queer people are impacted by the religious right in ways disproportionate to the numbers of queer believers who live in places near and far, from Wisconsin to Uganda. Surprisingly, there has been little scholarship connected to this phenomenon; however, a recent volume of the *Journal of LGBT Youth* (2012), 9(3) addressed many of these issues. That volume, however, still left many openings unattended when it came to matters of religion and religiosity. Toward a fuller discussion of the role of religion in art, education, and society at large, the co-authors of this essay re-examine a half decade of presentations they have made as a troupe of performing artist-activist-educators at the annual conference of the National Art Education Association, under the mantle of *Big Gay Church*.

*Big Gay Church* is a performed interruption of the NAEA conference and an occupation of the church as institution, one that questions how LGBTQ² subjects have (or have not) been addressed in the field of art education. Prior sessions have critiqued queer cultural consumption and naming practices, but most recently troupe members have explored political and social intersections with the church, particularly as it is narrowly imagined by the religious right. Members of the *Big Gay Church* troupe have also shared their personal experiences with religious orders and institutions, those that with few exceptions have seemed to loathe, ignore, exploit, or repress LGBTQ² subjects. The performed provocations recounted here have been occupying the annual meeting space of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) since 2009.

In this article we offer varying descriptions and analyses of our loving and disruptive interventions, those that in part have sought to make a space for developing new ways of thinking about the problematic introduced in the already mentioned, rigorously researched edition of the *Journal of LGBT Youth* (a publication co-sponsored by the LGBT/Queer Issues Caucus of the NAEA). Principally, our troupe has researched the churches’ roles in...
producing LGBTQ² subjects, research that methodologically differs from the largely quantitative methods employed by social scientists contributing to the Journal of LGBT Youth, 9(3).

The presentation of our findings, the pedagogical/presentation approaches, and rhetorical methods we employ are intentionally varied and mirror the range of teaching approaches we use and have individually witnessed in the church services of our youth, ranging from Catholic catechism and Midwestern Methodist Sunday Schools to fundamentalist revivals in the Deep South. These experiences have marked us and occupy our imagination, and our art historical, autobiographical, and philosophical inquiries. In Big Gay Church we share multiple forms of queerly embodied research—interventions that have actively engaged audiences and multiple technologies to extend those historic political and social struggles of LGBTQ² populations.

Big Gay Church comments on the teachings of many religious orders, lessons that inform our students’ understandings of sexuality and human rights. These teachings are often at odds with the histories we cite and the experiences we have lived. As a group, half of us were raised in devoutly evangelical households, spending most Sunday mornings and evenings in church, singing in choir, and participating in numerous Christian youth groups and accompanying parents as they proselytized door to door or on street corners. Others of us were schooled in Catholic settings and were raised with the pomp and circumstance of that tradition. Some loathed these rituals, and others valued religious rituals as a way of “fitting in” and being socially accepted. There have been many more participants in these presentations than there are authors of the present essay (including non-religious participants, as well as those embracing Buddhist, Jewish, and Indigenous beliefs), but in this essay the co-authors include five who survived Christian childhoods that we attempt to illuminate with our flaming torches.

![Figure 2. Sister Sanders at Big Gay Church 2010. Baltimore.](image-url)
Invocation: Why Big Gay Church Matters

Authors contributing to the *Journal of LGBT Youth, 9*(3) explored how religious teachings shape student attitudes toward Queer Subjects. While we value the knowledge presented within the volume, we argue that the arts offer something that remained largely unaddressed in that issue, which includes the range of political tactics, social change strategies, and media utilizations that characterize more recent occupations (e.g., Occupy Wall Street). These earlier strategies were deployed by groups like the Gay Activist Alliance, ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), Guerrilla Girls, and Gran Fury among others (see Cahan & Kocur, 1996, or access the new documentaries *How to Survive a Plague*, 2012, or *United in Anger*, 2012).

We model our work after these groups’ relational artistic practices, those which reframe discourses, reinvigorate states of political entropy, and engage or incite readers and audiences to contemplate the value of the arts and ritual performances as community-building acts (Bourriaud, 2002). *Big Gay Church*, as a form of occupation, interrogates relationships between queer people and religion in relational artistic practice, operating as an alternative approach to communicating insights regarding conservative religious orders, the role of the church, and/or critiques of homophobic religious doctrine and scriptural interpretation.

Our group has used humor to disarm resistant congregants, advance our ironic insights, and contrast our multiple ways of tackling difficult subjects in school settings while simultaneously having fun in the pursuit of our goals as a group of academics. We consider this scholarship with a sense of humor. We have played a variety of roles over the years, but recurring characters include Sister Sanders, a.k.a. Hermana Harry, a bearded guy in clown face dressed as a nun; Miss Jeanette, a Methodist Sunday School teacher; the Right Reverend Rhoades; and our Music Director, Brother Love (Courtnie Wolfgang). Our outrageous performances are in part beholden to the interventionary tactics of the San Francisco Cockettes of the late 1960s and early 70s (see Tent, 2004) and to work that is sustained with missionary zeal today by those in the International Order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (an activist performing order of gay men committed to raising funds, spiritual awareness, and fighting for social justice. See oath below). Opening our queer church service with a qualifying clarification about our intent, we annually play for congregants the YouTube remarks of Sisters Merry Peter (SMP) and Reign of Terror (SRT):

*SMP:* Why is everyone so afraid of humor or laughter? This [performance] is not mocking someone but it’s [aimed at] opening you up. It’s the idea of the holy fool—that ancient idea that there’s someone who stands looking completely absurd and gives you permission to say things that are completely true and honest without misperception, covering, avoidance, or hypocrisy.

*SRT* (reciting the pledge of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence): I, Sister Reign of Terror, as a member of the Order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, dedicate myself to public service, social activism, and spiritual enlightenment. (YouTube edited rebroadcast of the 2009 *In The Life* TV program on The Sisters. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kv2PoetiQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kv2PoetiQ))
After sharing the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence’s oath, Sister Sanders ritually clarifies that the art historic examination he traditionally delivers as the first service in Big Gay Church should not in any way be considered critical of the important work of Catholic Women Religious, nor should it be seen as commentary on the popular televised art critic Sister Wendy. He does not, however, deny taking aim at the hypocrisy of men in the church, though he does add that the troupe hopes to honor those who stand for that which is good in religion.

Hermana Harry’s Harangue

In Sister Sanders’s 2011 presentation, he lauded Sister Wendy for publicly defending the curatorial decisions of Jonathan D. Katz and David Ward’s Hide/Seek exhibition at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery (see http://arthistory.about.com/b/2010/12/13/on-the-wojnarowicz-controversy.htm). That exhibition had been attacked by the Catholic League for a 13-second depiction of ants crawling on a sugary crucifix in David Wojnarowicz’s unfinished film, A Fire in My Belly (1986/87). The video was removed from the exhibition within weeks of its first opening, after the Catholic religious group had complained that the ant-infested sugary Día de los Muertos was “hate speech” and an act of blasphemy (Itzkoff, 2010). This complaint incited Speaker of the House John Boehner to threaten a review of the Smithsonian Museum’s funding—unless, that is, the work was immediately removed. It was. Had the video remained in the exhibit, it might have interrupted public complacency about a pandemic that even today in 2013 is seen as medically manageable. Instead, however, the U.S. Speaker of the House of Representatives intervened in the name of Christian decency (as was earlier done by Jesse Helms in response to Andres Serrano’s photograph Piss Christ in the 1990s).

Hermana Harry honored Sister Wendy for arguing that A Fire in my Belly appropriately referenced the symbolic specter of Christ as the ultimate sign of suffering, and as a reflection of the pain Wojnarowicz endured watching his lover Peter Hujar’s demise from HIV/AIDS (which at that time was under-researched and seen as untreatable). Sister Wendy stood up for the lyrical power of the piece and recognized that Wojnarowicz
frequently referenced ants as symbolically representative of man’s insignificance. It was with the missionary charity and consciousness-raising work of the Order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in mind that Hermana Harry called attention to the hypocrisy of legislators and men of the Catholic League who called for censoring this video provocation. These men deployed their own power and denied the good works that artists and curators had attempted by layering on a sound track from an ACT-UP demonstration Wojnarowicz had recorded onto his previously silent film. Such earlier progressive occupations were mounted in the name of human rights and constituted political actions aimed at drawing attention to a pandemic that threatened the health of populations around the world.

*Big Gay Church* is an occupation of NAEA, both in the sense of an occupation of good work(s) and of occupation as protest. It is an arts-based political action taken in the context of goodwill and a gesture of faith in the power of performative action to create change. It is an occupation in which all are welcomed to participate. Honoring delicious deviance, *Big Gay Church* supplicants are encouraged to celebrate their own queerness and the joys shared in flaunting it! (Hallelujah! and a big Amen/fist bump to Sisters Therese Quinn and Erica Meiners, 2009).

In the 2012 *Big Gay Church* Session, Sister Sanders cross-examined Justin Spring’s (2010) *Obscene Diary* installation of Samuel Steward’s personal effects exhibited at the New York City Museum of Sex and cross-examined it within and against Jonathan Katz and David Ward’s *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, an exhibition installation at the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery (later shown in Brooklyn, New York, and Tacoma, Washington). The question first posed to congregants that morning asked, “Whose forms of love and loving can be considered in our culture?” The second question was which exhibition congregants found the most obscene: an installation explicitly examining the erotic excesses of a mid-century U.S. English scholar, tattoo artist, and “sexual renegade” pursuing prurient interests in Columbus, Ohio, in Chicago (at times with Alfred Kinsey and researchers observing), and in Paris among other cities? Or co-curators Katz and Ward’s exhibition, calling viewers’ attention to the sexual identities of scores of visual and performing artists (outing some who had never previously been “out” in any public sense during their life times)? The third question congregants were asked to contemplate was what form of violence Katz might have committed by re-editing Wojnarowicz’s multilayered silent 8mm film to just over 4 minutes of video onto which he dubbed an audio track from an ACT-UP protest (granted, one initially recorded by the late artist and authorized by his estate executors), but nonetheless a coupling that thereby foreclosed the multiple readings audiences might have otherwise been able to bring to this unfinished film. Our scholarly sister intimated such violations were to him a pornographic affront far more offensive than an ant-creeping crucifix.

**Sister Jeanette’s Sunday School Lessons**

Annually the troupe of *Big Gay Church* performers deliver two Sunday School lessons—the first as described above, being Hermana Harry’s reexamination of an art historic subject, exhibition, or publication that could be appropriate and of interest to an adult or older teen population. The second lesson, modeled on lessons for younger audiences, is delivered by Miss Jeanette, a Methodist Sunday School teacher. She uses digital versions of storytelling strategies frequently employed to engage primary age students, such as digital flannel board stories.
Miss Jeanette is the quintessentially patient elementary teacher, a loving missionary of hope and good will, whose lessons apply a comforting salve after the severity of the bearded Sister’s critical art-historic sermonizing. With her pin curl wig, appliqued denim jumper, support hose, and Crocs, Miss Jeanette focuses her lessons on queer crusaders. She has taught about contemporary Saints—queer folks who passed on in the late 20th and early 21st centuries but who made strong contributions to the project of expanding what is possible for LGBTQ people during their lifetimes. For example, when the NAEA conference was in New York (2012), Saint Vito Russo, gay activist and film critic, was honored, and in Baltimore (2010), movie star/drag icon Divine was given her due. These lessons use the tropes of a typical Sunday School lesson from a queer perspective to honor individuals who may have been the subject of derision by the religious right. Miss Jeanette also prepares Holy Cards with the likenesses of such exemplary individuals as an offering to the congregation and as a memorial to fallen activists.

Another focus of Miss Jeanette’s lessons has been “Angels who Dwell amongst Us.” In this vein, MSNBC anchor Rachel Maddow (2011) was heralded for her fine story on the so-called “Kill the Gays” bill in Uganda and its connection to “The Family,” a secret society of American right wing politicians (http://www.nbcnews.com/id/26315908/ns/msnbc_tv-rachel_maddow_show/vp/m42999443#42999443).

Miss Jeanette is not afraid to expose hypocrisy! She uses her lessons to highlight good behavior, but she also warns of wrongdoing on the part of folks who claim to speak for God. Under the guise of simply celebrating Maddow as a guardian angel, Miss Jeanette educated the congregation about the complexities of this secret world. Within the seemingly sweet flannel board lesson was an exposé that linked powerful, evangelical politicians with the murder of Ugandan LGBTQ activist David Kato, who was beaten to death with a hammer (Sharlet, 2009).

In 2012, Miss Jeanette’s lesson focused on a less well-known guardian angel, Melissa Bollow-Tempel, an ally who wrote an article in Rethinking Schools called “It’s Okay to Be Neither” (2011). The article is about what a first-grade teacher learned from having a gender-variant child in her classroom. That article went viral, making Bollow-Tempel an Internet celebrity among gender queer communities and among teachers who want to help build a more just world for LGBTQ students. Framing Bollow-Tempel’s article within the broader discussion of gender-variant and transgender identity and in relation to media representations of gender queer youth (see, for example, the film Tomboy, 2011) allowed Miss Jeanette to expose the dangers inherent in “the specter of the normalizing gaze” (Taylor, 2012, p. 147).
Brother Love’s Musical Ministry

Big Gay Church also includes music as a vital component. Pop songs referencing Biblical beliefs, like Lady Gaga’s “Born this Way,” often blare as congregants begin entering. More importantly, Big Gay Church employs a musical ministry of brotherly love that invites and engages congregants in communal vocal participation that is both spirited, playful, and serious fellowshipping. Brother Love’s ministry closely resembles her childhood experiences and affiliations with organized religion. Church, for Brother Love, consisted of specified places for adults and other spaces for children. For a child to have a voice, to be noticed within the walls of the First Methodist Church, s/he must sing, ring bells, play keys or strings. Big Gay Church uses music to push boundaries, radicalize and extend what gets voiced, acknowledged, and accepted, and who can be heard. Love has appropriated evangelical shape-note hymns like “Amazing Grace,” digitally-projected country western vocalists wearing double-knit and crooning, “I’ll have a new body,” and has played ukulele-accompanied renditions of newer hymns like “All God’s Creatures Got a Place in the Choir.”

With music Big Gay Church creates a space to protest practices that marginalize and alienate LGBTQ² people and communities. Music offers congregants the chance to be and act together, creating a unified voice with many bodies. Such choral moments of amplification are politically and personally powerful, voices blending together into a rising sea of song, a tide of swelling connection. Transcendental moments like these can be few for LGBTQ² art educators, allies, and students alike, and the Big Gay Church music service creates opportunities for such connections.

Prayerful, Contemplative Interlude before the Right Reverend’s Remarks

Hybrid forms and cross-disciplinary investigation constitute Big Gay Church, marking it as a provocative performance place and perennial favorite for those who are dutifully committed to occupations dedicated to social justice and scholarly theorizing with a sense of humor. This is a space where participants can tackle subjects most would never consider confronting in their normal day-to-day school setting. That said, the first time Big Gay Church was convened, the group anticipated with trepidation a scene in which some attendees might simply be in attendance to gauge how offended they could be. In contrast, however, by the end of the first morning service, most congregants remarked how valuable and moving the session was for them—offering opportunities for sharing strategies for teaching tolerance, combatting hatred, and uniting as a community committed to human rights. Congregants remarked how challenged they had been; now they were inspired to consider how they, too, could begin looking at ways the arts may have silently served as vehicles for the production of the fear and loathing of queer subjects, of LGBTQ² marginality, invisibility, or misinformation about sexual subjects.

It is perhaps because as a troupe we embody a pedagogy of love, as Reta Ugena Whitlock
(2007) discusses in “Queerly Fundamental: Surviving Straightness in a Rural Southern High School,” that we have thus far avoided attack. Our Right Reverend’s sermon clearly communicates a message of love that is repeated in variable ways in each successive year.

![Figure 6. Big Gay Church 2010. Song Service led by Dr. Debbie and Rev. Rhoades.](image)

**Right Reverend Rhoades' Sermons**

The Right Reverend Rhoades' sermons embody *Big Gay Church*'s earnest efforts to grapple with the deep embeddedness of conservative Christianity and its influence. Using a dramatic inquiry approach where all participants actively co-create an imagined reality (Edmiston, 2011; Heathcote, 1984), the sermons transform the session into a hybrid academic/spiritual/communal church service. The sermons are the most familiar and traditional component of most church services. The Reverend preaches a sermon *as if* all the co-participants (attendees and presenters) were in a traditional church, albeit one that clearly echoes the more conservative Christian ones experienced by the majority of the *Big Gay Church* troupe members. Our goal is to disrupt, subvert, and alter dominant oppressive discourses generated, fed, and justified, however distantly, by conservative Christian doctrine and biblical interpretation.

These sermons offer a performative critique, a queer re-visioning of traditional Church, in multiple ways. As an Internet-ordained minister, the Right Reverend blurs the lines between reality and fiction, critically exposing and exploiting their performative dimensions (Butler, 2004). As a gender-nonconforming lesbian, the Reverend deliberately disregards and dismisses decades of oppressive, misogynistic, homophobic preaching from the male pastors of her youth about proper gender roles that emphasize the requisite subservient roles for women. The sermons also employ an unusual multimodal critical preaching approach, mixing video clips, pop music, arts, and cultural references in combination with historical, religious, and personal contexts and events.

Although the sermons feel familiar on the surface, they are more subversive. Instead of the more literal and fundamentalist translations and interpretations of Old Testament scriptures and practices, the sermons primarily focus on New Testament verses and principles. They emphasize core Christian tenets: love, acceptance, and worthiness;
forgiveness; continued questioning of doctrine and truth(s); living wholeheartedly and connectedly; and suspending judgment and condemnation. These sermons investigate ways dubious literal religious translations and interpretations, along with selective moral judgment and condemnation, persist within Christianity and permeate the legal, social, and institutional standing and treatment of LGBTQ² people in almost all venues of their daily lives (U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008). Like Jon Meacham in his April 1, 2010 New York Times review of Diarmaid MacCulloch’s (2010) Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years, the Right Reverend stresses the need to use reason and critical intelligence to challenge the notion that something is true simply because it is written down somewhere or repeated over and over. She further argues that we need critical reconsideration of biblical interpretations and their consequences in the establishment of the acceptance and perpetuation of widespread sanctioned prejudicial treatment of LGBTQ² people in the U.S. and globally.

The sermons include bits on forgiveness, grace, connection, compassion, acceptance, and action, but the focal message is Jesus’s focal message: love. Big Gay Church urges our congregation to remember and act on love’s power to create positive change in the world. The Reverend uses many of the same verses from the same King James Bible used in most Christian fundamentalist churches, and preaches about many of the same ideas using many of the same words, but the messages are completely different. These sermons operate to produce possibilities—what ifs: What if U.S. culture didn’t reflect the most conservative interpretations of Christianity? What if we used the arts to raise awareness of and create positive changes around these core Christian tenets? What if the whole Christian church accepted and loved LGBTQ² people? What if we recognized and celebrated LGBTQ² people and their contributions to their communities, churches, and larger culture? What would it mean to education? To everything? Unlike many traditional services, Big Gay Church sermons focus on love, acceptance, support, and community within a more holistic spiritual, personal, academic, and educational framework, one that recognizes and honors queer people, queer theory, and education.

Big Gay Church services conclude with a queer offering, prayers, and benediction. Rather than collect funds from congregants, Big Gay Church troupe members gratefully give guests gifts as tangible talismans of gratitude, love, and community. In 2010 and 2011, Miss Jeanette distributed Holy Cards with information about a Saint or Angel introduced earlier in her lesson; Reverend Rhoades gave “forgiveness” and “love” cards. After the offering, parishioners are invited to make prayer requests or ask to have us “hold [someone] in the light,” in the Quaker tradition. The Benedictory blessing offers a final expression of love, an invitation to continue fellowship.

**Aesthetic Performances that Disrupt Silences**

In “Beyond Soldiers in the Closet: Creating Queer Carnival and Aesthetic Dimensions in the Classroom,” Yin-Kun Chang reminds readers that, “teachers rarely have a place to talk about eros or the erotic in school” (2007, p. 119). Further, as bell hooks (1994) reminds us, “entering the classroom [we seem] determined to erase the body and give ourselves over more fully to the mind . . . in short confirming that desirous passion hasn’t a place in the classroom” (p. 113). Queer subjects are one of the unspeakable taboos that educators are taught to avoid in school settings; therefore, as Chang argues, “finding ways to dig out the queer voices or narratives in schooling becomes the core mission for critical educators” (p. 123). Hallelujah! Amen.
Discussing how aesthetic experiences provide chances for contradicting one-dimensional reality, Yin-Kun Chang (2007) refers to Marcuse, “[who] argues that through the aesthetic experience, art creates an opportunity to recognize a vision of life and reality that diverges from one-dimensionality ... an image of reality that is independent of normative reality” (as quoted in Chang, p. 129). Big Gay Church similarly operates independently of normative academic conference sessions by conceptually occupying the church through NAEA and issuing performed analyses of film and video, art historic documents, cultural practices, and scriptural readings. Big Gay Church reexamines the occupational hazards produced through these multiple forms and how they may have (dis)served LGBTQ² educators, youth, and the possibilities of studying queer subjects in schools.

Deborah Britzman, who explores queer theory in her 1995 essay in Educational Theory, asks, “Why is it unthinkable to work with gay and lesbian writing when one thinks about experiences like friendship, community, research methodology, curriculum theorizing and educational theory?” (p. 151). As a Big Gay Church troupe, we try to think the unthinkable by questioning the role religion plays in the lives of the students we teach. Simultaneously theorizing and crafting a research methodology that is situated in friendship and community, we support our colleagues in helping to think through how best to determine what sexuality subjects might be (un)suitable to address in the classroom. We further question how art educators could consider the deliberate evasion of sexuality subjects when addressing artworks and artists’ biographies to be an educationally sound and sufficient practice. As Hermana Harry has argued elsewhere, such omission from the curriculum clearly constitutes a deceptive practice and an unethical erasure of Eros.

**Blocking and (re)Modeling our Performative Occupations**

Big Gay Church contributes to art educators’ rethinking those prohibitions against addressing queer sexuality matters in their classrooms by providing multiple, relational,
artistic ways to respond to religious sanctimoniousness. Our services rethink and challenge many fundamentalist Christian religions’ renderings of LGBTQ² subjects and lessons of hatred, those that too frequently seep into our students’ classroom discussions. Whether encouraging congregants to use resources like the documentary films *Trembling Before G_D* (2001) with its exploration of LGBTQ² Jews wrestling with interpretations of the Torah, or Sharma’s *Jihad for Love* (2009), addressing gay and lesbian Muslims longing for recognition, or the fundamentalist Christian documentary *One Nation Under God* (2003), interrogating the ex-gay ministries in the United States, or the presentation in *It’s Elementary* (1996), suggesting ways educators can discuss LGBTQ² issues with younger students, *Big Gay Church* hopes to provide occupational support to its congregants.

Additionally, sharing strategies, attendees regularly relay those approaches each has found most effective for disrupting hatred, whether by using (non)traditional resources, like children’s picture books with alternative family narratives, such as *Mommy, Momma and Me* (2009), offering more inclusivity, or suggesting ways of broaching sexuality subjects in the elementary setting. *Big Gay Church* services create annual opportunities for engaging in dialogue about ways of addressing LGBTQ² issues in the classroom. This is a form of occupation we aim to extend through the repeated words of many mouths, and now in online and in print forms that we hope can be used by colleagues toward the end of making social change happen.

Not settling for routine polished drag shows enjoyed passively by an audience, our *Big Gay Church* troupe instead focuses on ways that, as advisors, graduate committee members, educators, and performing/visual artists, we can employ arts-based pedagogies in our actions and assume stances for human rights. Performing our research about LGBTQ² educational concerns helps us model alternative methods for creating and re-presenting knowledge. *Big Gay Church* honors queer performance practices, valuing our relationships and experiences with camp (see Sontag, 1964), and our faith in the possibility of change. Our queer blending of education, research, and co-participatory performance embodies the fluidity and performativity Judith Butler unpacks in * Undoing Gender* (2004). We repeatedly

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*Figure 8. Congregants at Big Gay Church 2010. Baltimore.*

reenact and represent our research through multimedia, multilayered, arts-based, queer pedagogies and performances, with attention to our own sexualities as subjects and as fluid identities subject to marginalization and queer concerns. We seek to stimulate critical conversations and change by adopting and encouraging creative, risky teaching as occupational practices of learning in schools, and particularly in arts classrooms.

Final Testifying and Benediction

There is both potential value in and significant risk taken by the Big Gay Church troupe’s occupational tactics. In working through artistic means and gesturing through a metephoric church service, as actors we recognize our performances are opened to multiple (mis)readings and political re-appropriations. We have faith, however, that an arts performance intervention can serve as a forum for amplifying our voices and our critiques. Too infrequently are the arts considered a vehicle for political actions, or a medium through which to undertake or present research, engage audiences in social and political debate, or enliven the imaginations of LGBTQ² students, faculty, or scholars. Through troubling and provocative art forms, one may, nonetheless, be encouraged to come to terms with indeterminacy and at times interrupt even one’s own intentions and occupations. It is this reiterative questioning, as an act of queer theorizing, that can lubricate congregant scholars’ thinking. Our occupations demand that we challenge readers to consider that which they might otherwise have found unbearable to contemplate. Sharing our various approaches to doing this, from gentle, sweetly instructive elementary grade-level morality tales, to musical rendering in lyrical form, or to more confrontational cross analyses of curatorial decision-making, our occupations have attempted to incite contemplation about a subject too infrequently broached in classroom practice.

Ours is NOT a form of evangelical hyper-confidence, nor do we sustain any belief in our own ineffability. We have attempted to avoid claiming that any one of us offers the proper, correct, or righteous reading or interpretation of a scriptural verse or social practice. Instead our Big Gay Church services have been grounded in the mysterious assumption that we, too, can speak through queerly god-inspired voices. Participants in annual Big Gay Church services are invited to both comically and solemnly consider contesting connections between schooled productions of fear and loathing, whether through visual art forms, filmed, or orally canted rituals. We have loved occupying NAEA through our performance disruptions, and welcome congregants to alternatively offer their own lessons and testimonials, shed tears of laughter, raise goose bumps of joy, and join the revelry in aisle-rolling hilarity at the outrageous silliness of a group of middle-aged academics eager to confront the mistreatments of a population long demonized by many religious teachings.

The Big Gay Church troupe aims to disrupt those silent messages and call out those invisible lessons too frequently ignored as problematic subjects in K-12 school settings, art history texts, and social critiques. The Big Gay Church is thankful that our audience/congregation has been comprised of those devoutly committed to human rights, social justice, and open to queerly questioning the connections between fundamentalist fearmongering and those ways the arts could contribute to pedagogical possibility and support LGBTQ² liberation struggles through a theatrical interventionary tactics. Each year, Big Gay Church sessions have been granted an exceptionally generous amount of time within the NAEA conference program. We are grateful for that and also thankful because year after year we have heard from attendees, both students and professors alike, that they are moved by the shared dialogical space we create through Big Gay Church. These congregants mark these
performances as an opportunity for reawakening their own social and pedagogical imaginings of occupational possibility. On a much smaller scale, we feel that we have created a decentralized community, like the larger Occupy Movement, that continues beyond the times when we are physically in the same space.

*Big Gay Church* occupations intend no harm, but are undertaken as annual performances that are based on a hope of shaking participating subjects free from the bondage of propriety, free from those schooled or religious protocols that prohibit the possibility of researching and speaking from loving and embodied spaces. In short, *Big Gay Church* aims to disrupt those fixed rituals that have long disciplined the discourses scholars have undertaken at annual academic assemblies and instead opens up spaces where, as holy fools, we can play.

Contributors to *LGBT Youth, 9*(3) examined the impacts of religious experiences on the field of education. Studies in that volume examined religiosity and academic success (Gottfried & Polikoff, 2012); Evangelical Californian Christian College students’ attitudes toward gay rights (Wolff, Himes, Kwon & Bollinger, 2012); exploration of youth online relations (Hillier, Mitchell & Ybarra, 2012); and the significant contribution to the field of the reading practices of LGBTQ² youth and straight students’ interpretations of young adult literature (Bittner, 2012). The risks and values explored by these authors were perhaps consistently far more measured and cautious in their claims than our largely philosophical and theoretical arts-based inquiry has been. At *Big Gay Church* we invite the congregation to witness and testify sharing their experiences as teachers addressing the needs of LGBTQ² youth, or as queer teachers themselves, sharing their experiences. Periodically throughout our services, we offer opportunities for audience members to share or inquire. Some have spoken of their personal experiences with negotiating their own religious beliefs and their teaching responsibilities, and others have raised pertinent questions about how to address the needs of their students when issues arise. We provide a safe and supportive space to discuss these situations and invite input from the congregants to support each other in their struggles. We contend it is important to consider arts-based inquiry and performance as occupations that hold great potential for questioning fundamentalist religious teaching and prescribed church rituals that exclude LGBTQ² populations. Through the arts we contend alternative ways of struggling through the social, legal, and educational skirmishes that face us today, and at this historical juncture, as the Supreme Court tests the legality of 34 states’ Defense of Marriage statutes, this is a particularly urgent cause to be sustaining.

With budgetary challenges and slashing of arts programs across the U.S. and abroad, colleagues may question whether or not those queer issues our troupe raises are placing the field at yet even greater risks. We recognize such concerns but contend it is equally urgent for art educators to use whatever means they have at their disposal to confront the current conservative backlash, like the *Hide/Seek* Exhibition’s forced removal of the Wojnarowicz video in 2010. What more opportune occasion could there be for educators in the arts than to question how religious fundamentalist prescriptions promote hatred, intimidate progressive educators from advancing democratic curricula, and misrepresent threats to democratic and inclusive teaching practices in our schools and the constitution of our families? We consider the least we can do at this juncture is to share our research and knowledge about LGBTQ² youth, the strategies and interventionary tactics we have deployed in occupying NAEA. As a *Big Gay Church* troupe we shared our experiences, knowing full well that in doing so we risk being placed in the crosshairs of those who would see schools privatized and evangelicized in ways that *Big Gay Church* has tried to trouble.
It is through the arts as a discipline that *Big Gay Church* has attempted to address identities and identifications of historic figures, cultural practices, and the ways religious mores of various cultures have shaped our field and current struggles. We can only pray that in the future colleagues and peers will be willing to intellectually embrace the messy tenuousness and indeterminacy that artworks offer (be it in film, music, dance, or theater), and perhaps through this messiness, consider new forms of inquiry. Then a new spirit of solidarity will revive our imaginations and moral conscience once more.
References


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