Editorial: The New Culture Wars

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This issue's mini-theme and resulting articles address implications for art education during a time of political chaos and cultural division in the United States. When we (the editors of this journal) put out the call for this "New Culture Wars" mini-theme in July of 2016, the country had not yet voted in the Presidential election that resulted in Donald Trump—business mogul and reality game show host—becoming the 45th President of the United States. Rhetoric on news and social media have suggested deep emotional responses to a cultural division highlighted in American politics and practices. These New Culture Wars have been referred to in the media as different from the Culture Wars of the 70s and 80s, the earlier highlighted by disagreements over immigration policies and post-industrialism and the current inclusive of social, economic, and political divisions as well (Mitchell, 2017).

New Culture Wars also implicate K-12 and Higher Education, as the percentage of Republicans who value higher education has declined and Republican politicians attempt to censor K-12 Ethnic Studies curricula (Sandoval, Ratcliff, Buenavista, & Marín, 2016). Arts also play a significant role in the New Culture Wars. Close to the publication date of this issue, chaos ensued on the campus of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia at the removal of the Robert E. Lee confederate statue, resulting in the death of one and injury of many counter-protesters to Alt-Right – an ideological group associated with extremely conservative viewpoints including white nationalism – protesters carrying Confederate and Nazi flags, tiki torches, and chanting anti-Semitic epithets and Nazi slogans such as "Sieg heil" and "blood and soil." The New Culture Wars have revealed themselves over historic and present meanings and values assigned to pieces of public art and visual symbols hailed by the Neo-Nazis and White Supremacists opposed to their removal. Art and visual culture are seemingly at the center of this recent eruption and cultural conflict, raising many potent questions for the field of art education. The contributing authors to this issue grapple with these questions in a collection of articles that highlight the voices, histories, and values of art and art education in our country.

Sunday and Kaplan point out the absence of addressing issues of class in multicultural art education discourse, providing an historical overview of Culture Wars in the U. S. Criticizing multicultural education as overly focused on identity politics and elitism, they argue for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to art education as a way to explore the entanglements of discourse and matter, introducing Feminist theorist Karen Barad's (2007) notion of new materialism. Further, they implicate art and art education in the erasure of legitimate concerns posed by rural white working-class people and argue that multicultural art education should focus on agency, equality, and inclusiveness, addressing the power structures of oppression and the economic conditions of neoliberalism.

Hetrick explores a shared culture of disillusionment that she argues has evolved on both sides of the cultural and political divide. She questions how to engage and teach in a culture of disillusionment instead of disavowing disillusionment and potentially trying to eradicate its existence. She suggests that art educators engage students with the culture of disillusionment, offering eight ways of action for change within each individual. In reconstructing an empathetic and collaborative social reality, she opines that art educators provide the ideal environments to facilitate significant change and transformation within individuals and their communities, working through disillusionments to create a better tomorrow.

The next article by Buffington is particularly potent at the point in time of this publication due to the recent chaos in Charlottesville, Virginia over the removal of a confederate monument. Buffington applies Critical Race Theory as a lens through which to unpack the political nature of the built environment through studying the work of contemporary artists who challenge symbols of the Confederacy, such as confederate monuments. This article also offers an historic lens to the existence of confederate monuments to put into perspective current events and issues around their removal and ensuing protests.

Nelson provides a personal narrative of her practice in higher education immediately following the election of Donald Trump in a divided classroom of students. She describes her exploratory process of teaching using color concepts of Blue and Red with the goal to promote empathy among her divided class of students. She also reflects on her journey as a liberal educator in a conservative state, attempting to use current visual culture in order to best promote empathy for bipartisanship among students in a time of political unrest.

Woywod provides a teacher research study about pivotal encounters that occurred in a course entitled Multicultural Art and Visual Learning as she faced the challenge of how to responsibly engage with Culture Wars as an educator during the heated political environment of 2016. She suggests the possibility that learning with and through the arts can provide students opportunities to make meaningful learning choices, support their development of empathy

for each other, engage them in challenging dialogues about culture, and prepare them to contribute to civic life in a democratic society.

The following three articles address other educational and cultural issues. They offer a range of views and suggestions in dealing with conflicting interests and values in schools and other settings. As a unique visual essay, Lawrence illustrates that the deficiency and declination of art in schools, with extreme emphasis on computer literacy, coding, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) education, forecast a dire future for students' art learning, providing a case study of comics as a pedagogical tool. He investigates ways of integrating the language of comics into classroom learning strategies, sharing that A/r/tography, semiotics, and life-writing are useful in addressing students' negotiation of identity and development of authorship.

Moxley and Feen discuss social innovation through arts-based organizations that can empower both helping professions and those who seek help. Relying on their work experiences with arts-based organizations, they conceptualize three kinds of organizations for linking arts, social action, and the provision of helping marginalized or oppressed people in society. The organizations they identify involve the development of marginalized artists, those that link the arts and social action, particularly for protest, and those that produce innovations in social arrangements, helping processes, or group support.

West, Daugherty, and Maples report the effect of interactive theater in a high school setting, examining the prevalence and impact of bullying among high school students. The outcome of their study is in strong support of applying interactive theater in bullying prevention and response, indicating students' improvement in self-efficacy and communication. The authors suggest interactive theater as part of an effective intervention of bullying, noting that bullied students are particularly responsive to interventions and build communication and problem-solving skills.

Finally, Bradshaw reviews the 2016 book *Arts Integration in Education: Teachers and Teaching Artists as Agents of Change - Theory Impact Practice* (edited by Gail H. Mardirosian and Yvonne P. Lewis). She reiterates the book authors' argument that the real power in arts integration is all the more relevant today given our political, cultural, economic, and social challenges faced in the high stakes testing environment that is schooling.

In this volume, all authors share their unique voices, visions, and engaging curricula and pedagogical practices. Their voices and pedagogy in their classrooms offer thoughtful and insightful responses and reactions to the New Culture Wars. They all share that we are facing unprecedented pressures and conflicts within ourselves, between students, and among communities. Our call and this mini-theme is a response to this social climate of the United States, offering a collective voice of the authors for change that takes place in their educational contexts. Toward inclusive, open, and an embracing education and society, these authors reiterate that art education and classrooms are ideal sites for building a more equitable society, even though this volume might offer only several examples toward the promises and powers of our teaching and research. We hope that this volume facilitates further discussion and future empowering pedagogy in schools and other educational settings.

References

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