

Beyond Identity Politics: The New Culture Wars and Art Education

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ABSTRACT

With the surprise election of Donald J. Trump as the 45th president of the United States and the subsequent resurgence of conservative social policies, this article situates the culture wars - the mini theme of this issue - within art education's focus on multicultural and social justice initiatives. Harkening back to the battle between conservative republican moralist legislative policy and liberal values, we situate our work in the populist political landscape of Trump's victory, which has re-inscribed difference marked by geography, race, class, gender, and religion while simultaneously engendering hostility towards the liberal values that seek to build inclusiveness and political agency for marginalized and oppressed peoples. Addressing rhetorical pastiche, we focus on how the identity politics of postmodern, multicultural art education have failed to give adequate consideration to the material systems of power and production. We then introduce the idea of new material precarity as a way to think about the entanglements of discourse and matter to suggest a more inclusive and intersectional approach to art education.

The November, 2016 US election results, in which the fiscal and socially conservative republican team of Donald Trump and Mike Pence became the president and vice president elect, sent shockwaves and surprise across the country and the world. As artists, art educators, and members of the academy, it has been difficult for us not to feel embattled by a protectionist economic and foreign policy of nationalism, but also by the resurgence in conservative social politics (and policies).

Asking fundamental questions about who we are and who we want to be as a nation, the term *culture wars* refers to struggles between two conflicting cultural values marked by polarities between defining social and political issues. Emerging out of the normative views of the American family in the 1950's, Hartman (2015) contends that the culture wars began in the tumultuous social contexts of the 1960's, when divergent visions of national life were taking shape in the United States. Politically and culturally performed, the culture wars took on discursive and rhetorical power through divisions between the "left" (liberal/democrat) and "right" (conservative/republican) - or rather, the two party pillars that are believed to uphold western democracy.

Though shocking to many, the populist support for the "return to normalcy" of the Trump/Pence ticket poses a very different understanding than that which most millennials and post millennials have experience with. Growing up in decades marked by politics of governmental recognition framed by feminism, gay rights, non-traditional families, and sexual freedom, as well as being profoundly shaped by technologies that are globally connective, millennials are thought to be more progressive and idealistic than preceding generations (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Meanwhile the resurgence of conservative social politics re-inscribes differences that have already been transcended by millennials - those marked by identity classifications pursuant to geography, gender, religion, and ethnicity (Greenberg & Weber, 2008). We are not suggesting a successful end to the culture wars, or that we now live in a post-racial world; however, we do contend that differences between the old and new culture wars are a crucial and necessary aspect of re-thinking art education in the age of the Trump presidency. In doing so, we also believe that it is important to keep a pulse on contemporary students, how they communicate, and what they bring (socially, economically, and politically) to the art classroom.

In this paper, we argue that although class increasingly defines America's new culture wars, it is largely left unaccounted for in art education's discussion and implementation of multicultural and social justice education. In the wake of worsening race relations, the need to accommodate undocumented, poor immigrants in our schools, and the rise of the "alt right" as leaders of the United States, we consider how the political and social hostility surrounding issues such as race, religion, immigration, homosexuality, and gender have played out in postmodern art education's commitment to identity politics and acceptance of cultural difference, heretofore identified as "multicultural" and "social justice" education. To do so, we begin with a discussion that helps to define culture wars before positioning Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) and Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE) within the context of the culture wars. Next we move to a discussion of late capitalism and the ways that structures of power are linked to the economic conditions (and ideologies) of neoliberalism and how globalism is implicated in dislocating the system of production. We conclude by considering how rhetoric is implicated in the connections and disconnections pursuant to neoliberal identity politics. The goal of this paper is to help expand concepts of multiculturalism in art education. Specifically, we proffer intersectionality as a way of re-thinking the position of the rural poor in art education discourse, teaching, and learning. In doing so, we implicate art and art education in the erasure of legitimate concerns posed by white working class people and suggest that multicultural art education's focus on the power structures of oppression must address the economic conditions of neoliberalism if we are to forward

a call for equality and inclusiveness.

The Culture Wars, Representation, and Identity Politics

Originally, the term *culture wars* came from the German word *Kulturkampf* that translates to “a struggle for the control of culture” (Williams, 2003, p. 10). This term, discussed by Wallis, Weems, and Yenawine (1999) in the pivotal text, *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*, harkens back to the battle between conservative republican moralist legislative policy and liberal values of free speech, inclusion, and tolerance as it played out through the identity politics¹ of the 1980’s and 90’s, with the elitist aesthetics² of the leftist art world front and center. Wallace (1999) claims that initially the term culture wars was “limited to the immediate ramifications of the successful effort by the Christian right and conservative politicians to censure and decimate the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)” (p. 167). However, Williams (2003) claims a broader conception of the term as invoked by Republican presidential hopeful Patrick Buchanan during a speech to the Republican National Convention in 1992, when he claimed that “conservatives must declare a cultural revolution – ‘a war for the nation’s soul’” (p. 10). Generally the culture wars have come to mean the political battle between the cultural ideologies of the religious right and the liberal left. According to Dombrink (2012), the culture wars also signaled the “hyperpartisanship that had been characterizing American politics from the time of Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War” (p. 302).

From a broader and more politicized definition then, the culture wars are situated in partisan politics and cultural ideologies associated with both activist and academic interests. In this sense, we view the first (or most recently concluded) culture wars as beginning in the 1960’s with social and activist movements for civil rights and gender equality (Hartman, 2015). Mutually constitutive of one another, this social activism reverberated through the academy in the decades that

1 Here, we use the term *identity politics* as referent to political positions, social movements, and activism forwarded by feminist theory that sought to displace masculine assumptions of modernist thought (Alcoff, 1988). Identity politics places oppressed groups as important agents of social activism by suggesting that identity as a resource of/for knowledge is key to successful social change.

2 *Elitist aesthetics* refers to the institutional power and cultural capital of the world of high art and culture, which manifests in soft ways, often through notions of taste, judgment, and temporality. Here, power has a “softness” that seems to guide or persuade ideas of value, and as the right would contend, it has the power to influence and shape morality through customs and attitudes. As Lippard (1999) explains, it also has the power to create hierarchies within the art world and culture.

followed, through the expansion of poststructural feminist theory that considers social and cultural constructions of reality and their relationship to power (Alcoff & Mohanty, 2006).

The early iteration of the culture wars situated “traditional” family values – normalized as white, middle class, hetero-normative, and patriarchal – against the struggles of minority and oppressed groups for representation, recognition, and political agency (Butler, 2006). During these first culture wars, boundaries were drawn along the lines of racial and gender status, with the greatest material losses and embodied casualties incurred by the most vulnerable and invisible racial and gender minorities. In the 1960’s during the Civil Rights Era, African American communities endured innumerable atrocities in the fight for equal treatment and recognition under the law, and the sexual revolution saw women embattled for equality as a shift in gender roles, particularly those of middle class women, which reexamined women’s place in the world. In the 1980’s and 1990’s we saw the now LGBTQ community besieged by a politics of invisibility in which the withholding of basic human and governmental rights of recognition delayed responsive and appropriate action to the HIV/AIDS crisis (Cogan & France, 2013; Wojnarowicz, 1989). We also saw the defunding of the NEA under the guise of calls for decency and the fortification of the moral center.

What is important to note about the first culture wars is the relationship between identity, politics, and (material) power (Butler, 2006). These were initially discursive battles in which a politics of identity and recognition presumably aligned to “matters” (or the matter and material modes) of power and production. During the Civil Rights Era, the sexual revolution, and the culture wars of the 80’s and 90’s, issues of identity and representation were not only about social and cultural acceptance of difference, but the very notion of identity politics was also tied to a very real concept of representational politics and governmentality. During this era, issues of identity representation were tethered to calls for equal treatment under the law as promised by the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause, which states: “no State shall...deny to any person within its jurisdiction equal protection of the laws” (U.S. Const. amend. XIV). This assured citizens’ equal protection under the law. Here, the assumption was that equal representation and protection produced equal power, which manifested materially and discursively. Visibility through governmental representation and protection promised equal power and access.

The culture wars continued until the late 2000’s when the election of Barack Obama signaled what Dombrink (2012) viewed as “an era of ‘post partisanship’ and an end to the ‘culture wars’ ... [and the end] of the ‘era of Regan conservatism’” (p. 303). Despite this claim, the

election of Donald Trump has initiated new concerns over culture – specifically in his rally cries of ethnic decline, as well as his contempt for both political elites and the liberal media. Trump’s campaign and subsequent election have shifted attention to the invisibility of the rural, white, working class and how the previous culture wars essentialized identity constructs of “whiteness” as singularly privileged.

As a normative/ normalizing agent that serves to develop (and produce) community identity and social order, schooling has remained a key context where culture is institutionalized (Shor, 1992). Insofar as schooling serves to develop (and produce) community identity and social order and the art classroom specifically serves as a site for the kind of critical thinking that “challenges power in the name of tolerance, transparency, accuracy and sheer experimentation” (Viveros-Fauné, 2016, para 7), we now turn our attention to the ways that the culture wars were taken up in the field of art education.

The Culture Wars and Art Education

As noted by Darts (2008), “the culture wars within and around art education have most recently manifested in two interrelated battles—the first over the adoption of a visual culture paradigm for the field, and the second over art teachers’ moral responsibilities and academic and expressive freedoms” (p. 105). While he continues to explain that the former argues the distinctions between formal aesthetics and an approach for a more socially engaged inclusion of art in everyday democracies, the latter includes controversies over contemporary art exhibits that beget questions of nationalism, moral decency, government funding, and art students’ exposure to museum exhibitions.

Adopting a Visual Culture Paradigm

In 1988, Elliot Eisner noted that the turn towards Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) invigorated a discussion of what should be taught in art. Although presented as an approach rather than a formula for art curricula, DBAE was largely focused and directed toward a curricular emphasis on traditional art skills (i.e., painting and drawing), interpretation of canonical works, and art criticism via western artistic values (Clark, 1997; Eisner, 1988). While DBAE brought legitimacy to art as an academic school subject, it did so under a limited focus, ignoring contemporary forms of art and failing to address multiculturalism as well as the growing interest in democracy and social perspectives on art education (Delacruz & Dunn, 1995). Described by Wilson (2003),

art education, with its restricted and selective use of artifacts and practices, [drew] primarily from the art museum territory embraced by DBAE—and of course from the residue of folk handicrafts and the modernist inspired elements and principles of design. (p. 219)

Thus, DBAE reflected an approach to art education that privileged “high culture,” or rather, a view of culture as hierarchy in which the educated and elite determine the aesthetic value, merit, and preservation of mental and spiritual cultivation.

Breaking down hierarchies between fine art and low art, Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE) created new possibilities to move past formalism and bring students’ everyday experiences and contexts into art making and interpretation. Recognizing the value of working with and expanding students’ cultural experiences, VCAE took as its starting point images of (and within) everyday contexts as sites of ideological struggle that could offer flexible and powerful connecting points for critical thinking and empowerment among students (Duncum, 2002). Thus, visual culture acknowledges the proliferation of images, including the appropriation of fine arts into advertising and everyday objects (such as Sunday’s credit card that hosts an image of Michelangelo’s David). Television, billboards, children’s clothing and backpacks, film, social media, and the ease of photography aided by the iPhone have served to shift how we consume, produce, and make meaning with/from visual images (Freedman, 2000).

The deconstruction of everyday images is intended to allow new conversations to emerge about visibility, or the politics of producing and consuming images (Mirzoeff, 2006). Pursuant to issues of race, class, and gender – in both high and low culture – VCAE sought to give voice to “little narratives,” and in doing so attempted to invite multicultural art education as a transformative experience that was complementary, if not synonymous, with postmodern art education. Fueled by the ubiquitous surge of images brought about by easy reproduction in the technological age, art teachers were encouraged to embrace postmodern practice (Gude, 2004) and bring a contemporary art perspective to their work. While students juxtaposed, appropriated, recontextualized, hybridized, and represented, the move to VCAE placed art education front and center in a postmodern aesthetic that engaged representational (and identity) politics – calling out assumptions of fixed meaning and symbolic totality while seeking recognition, if not celebration, of culturally defined differences.

Challenging Multiculturalism

Despite its efforts, VCAE ultimately lost sight of the historical and political struggles of those it sought to emancipate through its emphasis on multiculturalism. Taken up in the museum, multiculturalism became a “crisis of representation” (Desai, 2000, p. 116), in which culture became a commodity produced and consumed by the elite, ultimately reifying the homogenization of culture through an inability to address the systemic and “unequal power relations that underpin inequality” (Acuff, 2015, p. 32). Desai (2005) suggested that museums and other cultural institutions lacked the necessary criticality to address the impact of globalization, and in their failure to do so, essentialized rather than opened up culture. Teachers who drew upon their collections oversimplified (or totally ignored) the context of a global political economy, and also globalization’s impact on the “discursive practices of speaking for and about others” (Desai, 2000, p. 116).

Thus, rather than realizing its transformative potential and ability to confront power structures of oppression, multiculturalism was largely taken up as critically unexamined tolerance of the “other.” In becoming a zeitgeist of political correctness, multicultural approaches further alienated those for whom economic oppression crossed racial, ethnic, and gendered lines. Rather than seeing themselves as part of the neo-liberal system that constructs *all* subjects in terms of their market value, the rural white appear to be frustrated by liberal rhetoric of accepting cultural difference without any real sense of how politics, power structures, and economics were implicated not only in others’ oppression, but also their own. Thus, the multicultural movement became primarily focused on a politics of identity without consideration for how the politics of wealth redistribution is implicated in equality (North, 2005). In other words, multiculturalism focused in terms of culture rather than in terms of lack of power, and as a result, singularly positioned white as oppressor without consideration for the multiple and intersectional conditions that make up race and gender. Class became increasingly less visible, specifically for those geographically located in the rural areas of the United States and particularly among whites. As a consequence, multicultural art education failed to help all students understand how power structures and economics were implicated in the oppression of differences based on race, gender, *and* class—issues that are especially visible in the new culture wars.

Resistant White Ruralism and the Academic Elite

Reflecting on a recent article in the November 16 *New York Times* titled, “The Two Americas of 2016,” Wallace’s (2016) suggestion of

a nation divided along the lines of ruralism advances the question of whether we as art educators are directing our efforts in ways that may already be preaching to the converted. In other words, the report seems to show that not only do many of our institutions of higher education fall within this liberal exteriority (or as islands within a sea of ruralism), but also our students seem to find work and populate these same urban areas. This begs the question, how can the work of education and art education departments of our higher education system react and respond to the needs of rural America? Do progressive educational politics impact all of the country equally, or are they unable to permeate vast regions of the US?

Upon close examination of the data from exit polling, such as that conducted by the Pew Research Center (Tyson & Maniam, 2016), it was determined that education played a large part in how Americans voted. According to pewresearch.org, among (all) college graduates, Mrs. Clinton was backed by a “nine point margin (52%- 43%), while those without a college degree backed Mr. Trump 52%-44% . . . the widest gap in support among college and non-college graduates in exit polls” as compared to 2012, where there was “hardly any difference” between college graduates’ choices of Romney and Obama. Even more astounding was the difference between “college-educated” and “non-college-educated whites.” According to the same poll,

Two-thirds (67%) of non-college whites backed Trump, compared with 28% who supported Clinton, resulting in a 39-point advantage for Trump...Due largely to the dramatic movement among whites with no college degree, the gap between college and non-college whites is wider in 2016 than in any past election dating to 1980. (Tyson & Maniam, 2016)

What this shows higher educators, particularly those in education and the social sciences whose programs wish to be in conversation with progressive social change, is how far removed we are from making an impact upon the lives of those who exceed the direct reach of our university classroom – we are not in conversation with them.

Multiculturalism as Elitism

On May 2nd, 2017 the popular news satire organization The Onion presented a video titled, *Trump Voter Feels Betrayed By President After Reading 800 Pages Of Queer Feminist Theory*. The video, a mere 2 minutes and 6 seconds, features fictional Mike Bridger, who fades in and out of focus as he speaks:

I voted for Donald Trump. I voted for Trump because

I thought he'd create a better America for everyone. But after reading 800 or so pages of queer feminist theory, I realize now how much I've been duped. You gotta understand, I come from a small steel town in Pennsylvania. If I had known the foundational texts on intersectional theory, I would never have chanted "lock her up." We were told Hillary Clinton was the enemy, but it's clear now that the true enemy is a patriarchal capitalistic society that maintains its ascendance by making powerful and ambitious women appear threatening, only to protect my status in a system purposefully designed to benefit cis-het white men like myself. Jesus. When Donald Trump said he was going to make America great again, it's obvious to me now that he was only trying to play off my own complicity and comfort in an unequal social structure that disproportionately strips women AND minorities, particularly trans and gender queer people of color, of their autonomy and seeks to subjugate them into an invertebrate and antagonistic andocratic order. I get that now after I attended a gender fluid, non-binary poetry slam at Swarthmore. A couple of other guys attended it too, and now it's all we talk about on the line. I liked Trump because I thought he told it like it is. But you know who really tells it like it is? Judith Butler. (The Onion, 2017)

Reading from the book, *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990), he continues,

Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive cultural means by which "sexed nature" or a "natural sex" is produced and established as 'prediscursive' or prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts." If I had just known that back in November, I would have never voted for Trump. God. How could I have been so stupid. (The Onion, 2017)

With more than 8 million views on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, the now viral video speaks to the elitist rhetoric that has failed to communicate in a language that is accessible to a majority of Americans. While the 13,000 comments are much too vast for analysis at this juncture, a scroll through the comments accentuates the idea that the liberal elite is so out of touch that they themselves do not fully understand the satire.

Art critic, theorist, and activist Lucy Lippard (1999) describes how political movements, through cultural elitism, fall prey to the very

same representational practices they are trying to thwart. She describes how the culture wars experienced a rhetorical shift and formalization of language that produced an exclusive material reality and revealed a politics of the exclusion and representation within the movement itself. Here, the movement's previously grassroots and people-led activism has been transformed to reveal the movement's elitist and growing institutional power to produce and embattle material and rhetorical dichotomies and exclusions. She explains,

As postmodern theory became further divorced from the activist practice within the complexities of deconstruction, the normally fragmented art world split into even smaller pieces. In this process only certain histories were recalled . . . One form of censorship is cultural amnesia. What is dismissed often reveals as much about the zeitgeist as what is canonized. Events and artists forgotten by art-world power structures (and even the alternative art scene has its power structures) can, when recalled, evoke something alien, perhaps threatening to a high-culture identity. (Lippard, 1999, p. 41)

Watching (and listening to) "Mike Bridger" describe his multicultural awakening is a reminder of Lippard's (1999) term "amnesiac rhetoric," in which disenfranchised voices are further forgotten and excluded from new discourses and structures of power. The culture wars, according to Lippard (1999), shifted to an academized formalization of language whereby "sexism became 'gender' and racism became 'multiculturalism'" (p. 40-41). Subsequently, discourse became decoupled from political action, power, and matters of materiality and production.

Likewise, the cultural elite are the very people whom feminist theorist Audre Lorde (1984) describes as the people "who still define the master's house as their only source of support" (p. 113) and who are faced with the conundrum that the tools they are using, such as identity politics and multiculturalism, offer the distinct possibility of never truly dismantling the representational system that they are opposing. Lorde (1984) claims, "For the master's tools will never really dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (p. 113).

Identity is (and No Longer is) the Problem

As has been our claim, the focus of multicultural education in terms of culture rather than power suggests that identity politics is positioned

front and center in educational initiatives of multiculturalism. While identity politics are still very much produced and reproduced within the power structures of this late capitalist and globalized economy and the promise of post-racial society emboldened by the first black president has yet to be realized, there are some difficulties in looking to identity as it is often conceived of or as a lone qualifier. To be sure, it is not the authors' intention to diminish the continued and reinvigorated call to recognition, representation, equality, and justice sought by marginalized and oppressed groups, but rather it is our intention to open up this discussion to additional ways in which these and other groups are conceived of and to expose the ways they are exploited, deceived, or misrepresented.

To begin it is important to remember that identity is neither singularly defined by one qualifier, nor is the power it manifests. This conception of identity as multiple, plural, and complex is defined as *intersectionality*, a term that contends that identity is constructed from multiple factors. Furthermore, taking from queer theory, it is important to remember that identities are also performed (Butler, 1990) and relational (Bhabha, 1994). Therefore, it is important to remember that when identities are constructed based on gender and race, they are done so against a static, unified idea of whiteness. This, however, could not be further from contemporary understandings of identity as multiple, fluid, and relational.

Intersectionality as described by Crenshaw (1991) involves the complex layering or "intersection" of multiple identities or social attributes in order to create a different understanding of the identity as a whole. In her writings, Crenshaw (1991) focuses on the intersection of race and gender as it applies to women of color and concludes that "gender identities have been obscured in antiracist discourses, just as race identities have been obscured in feminist discourses" (p. 1299). While her work seems to focus heavily on the intersection of race and gender, Crenshaw (1991) claims, "Intersectionality may provide the means for dealing with other marginalizations" (p. 1299) through the collations or groups people find themselves in. Here, she opens up the possibility of class and modes of material production as a possible site for "constructing group politics" (p. 1299). Likewise Bhabha (1994) makes a similar if not more fluid call for intersectional politics:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new

signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (p. 1-2)

Bhabha not only considers representational strategies beyond race and gender, including additional spheres of class, nationality, generation/age, location, and sexual orientation, but he also opens the possibility for fluid, hybrid understandings of identity yet to be created. With these expanded notions of identity politics, it is possible to entertain multiple identifiers when considering group politics. It makes it possible and desirable to consider class in terms of its relationship to economic and material power and production and to consider the ways in which capitalist systems reproduce difference within traditionally understood cultural groups such as race and gender. It also makes it possible to consider differences locally, rurally, nationally, and globally in terms of identity and material modes of production. We need not make the mistake that simply because someone is white and male, their difference is static and irreconcilable and they are automatically in power, disaffected by oppressive systems of production.

Matters of Matter in Late Capitalism and Art Education

What is different about the new culture wars is what might be termed a "new material" precarity – or a condition in which the discursive or rhetorical misaligns with the material to produce heightened systemic vulnerabilities. We extrapolate the term *new material precarity* from Feminist theorist Karen Barad's (2007) notion of new materialism, in which matter and discourse are co-constitutive of each other, or entangled. Given that new materialism hinges on the co-constitution of discourse and matter, the term new material precarity implies a breakdown in agency or power that results from discord between what is (materially) and what is said.

The authors contend that the new culture wars are different from the previous culture wars in their rhetorical pastiche, or use of an imitative, stylized discourse, that speaks to but ultimately mismatches with the economics of late capitalism. Pastiche is an art or cultural term which refers to a work that imitates the style of another. American literary critic and Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson (1991) claims that "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (p. 17). Therefore, building off this definition of earnest imitation, rhetorical pastiche is the earnest imitation of a style or politic of language or discourse.

While the new culture wars engage in representational politics, they do so differently and in response to a battle that has already progressed. Here both the left and the right engage with a rhetorical pastiche of identity politics that feels or seems similar to the same old issues of representation and recognition, but which are complicated by both their imitation of previous rhetoric (i.e., the culture wars of the preceding fifty years) and the dissolution or decoupling of the rhetorical/discursive and the material. An example of this might be the right's only recently revisited discussion to end funding of the NEA, despite this issue's 20+ year hiatus from the political stage and negligible share of the total national budget. While nationally the issue possesses little budgetary and material impact, it signals a larger symbolic or discursive power. Here, the imitation and recalling of outmoded rhetoric possesses infinitely more value through its association with past politics and ability to entrench political division than as an action with material impact.

What makes this imitative discourse particularly precarious is when it is read against a contemporary economic structure of globalized late capitalism. This discursive anachronism diverts the power of the public away from the matter at hand, a matter which is very much about economic materiality, or rather the economic and material systems of power and production – one with which we have more in common than we have differences. Yet in this rhetorical pastiche, which is not really of our time, we are overtaken by divisiveness, and more tragically we are distracted, diverted, and delayed from our power to act collectively and materially. We are too busy fighting among ourselves to see the material disadvantage produced by a system that reproduces the very differences over which we fight. Identity politics as rhetorical pastiche ultimately results in a weakened or powerless materiality. Therefore, an identity politics (and multicultural art education) that comprises a more contemporaneous understanding of the material possibilities of hybridity and intersectionality proffers material and political agency.

Concluding Thoughts: The Art Education Classroom

Much like the way that VCAE reconsidered notions of what and whose culture counted through an invigorated discussion and resulting curriculum that reconsidered art education curricula in terms of high and low culture and art (Tavin, 2005; Wilson, 2003), once again it is art education's charge to reconsider and rethink the impact of cultural and artistic inclusion and exclusion within our own practices. In our multicultural studies, it is not only important to consider the ways that fluid, hybrid notions of identity impact what we know and how we interact with the world, art and otherwise, but we must also critically examine, challenge, and problematize

our rhetoric and the discursive practices we enact and in which we are embedded. We must consider how rhetoric and discourse manifest in relation to difference produced by material distribution and whether we are reproducing an imitative discourse or engaged creative practices and discourses that produce new coalitions and understandings of collectivity and identity. We must also direct our research and pedagogy toward examining how power and modes of production manifest materially and materialize in culture. As North (2005) suggests, we must not “ignore the political economy” and its inequities when considering multicultural issues (p. 511).

As Crenshaw (1991) purports, we must consider and “understand the need for and to summon the courage to challenge groups that are after all, in one sense ‘home’ to us, in the name of the parts not made home” (p. 1299). We must reconsider whom and by what criteria we have excluded from the scope of our practice and reexamine our understanding of home. We must prepare our students who will enter the homes of others and who will have encounters that will be complicated, difficult, intersectional, and interstitial (Bhabha, 1994). We must prepare them to resist a polemic of pastiche and to work to create new hybrid understandings of culture and new coalitions the likes of which we cannot imagine.

As art educators and members of the academy, we must remember that our abilities to make connections with the electorate and act as agents of change happen primarily through our work with pre-service teachers. It is our students who are charged with being the interface between politics and so-called identity politics. Not only must we help students understand the political, cultural, and economic contexts of art and art education, but we must also help build the tools that will enable them to work within and against a growing national, political polarity. To do so, we ourselves must take into consideration the rural contexts from which many of our students arrive – and to which they will likely return.

In light of the new culture wars it seems time to reconsider our own practices of identity politics as they relate to inclusion and exclusion and revisit the ways that multiculturalism has been taken up in the field (and in the classroom). We suggest that an incorporation of ruralism into art education's robust discussions of urbanity and urbanism can create a point of generative hybridity with the possibility to create new conversations, communities of knowledge, and coalitions of people.

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