

Editorial Introduction: Making human rights visible as a visual and cultural practice

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A chilly persistent wind blows on this damp rainy afternoon as I walk with three women from *Machsom Watch* (Human Rights Group) along the towering, stark grey, barbwire-capped wall to the entrance of the Khandani checkpoint. This checkpoint cuts through the West Bank, separating the Palestinian towns and East Jerusalem. Palestinian workers are heading home from Jerusalem talking and laughing as they cross several turnstiles, slowly disappearing from my view. I am here to watch the activities at the checkpoint, which is part of the mission of *Machsom Watch* (“Machsom” means checkpoint in Hebrew), an organization of Israeli women that is against the Israeli occupation of the territories and the systematic repression of the Palestinian nation. Currently, the women monitor over forty checkpoints across the West Bank in groups of two or three volunteers and record what they see. A report is written after each shift and disseminated through their website. The website features daily reports, photographs, and videos documenting the restricted movement of Palestinians. This restriction, as Ginsburg (2011) indicates, “impact[s] upon all aspects of the lives of Palestinians: access to medical care, work, employment, education, and more” (p. 22).

A significant part of human rights activities is making the invisible visible. Underscoring the articles in this special issue on human rights and art education is a question that Natascha Sadr Haghghian once put to artist Ashley Hunt (2006): “How do we erase the images that create invisibilities?” (p. 6). Each article in different ways addresses the visual practice of human rights, that is to say, the “way we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein” (Foster, 1988, p. ix).

In this special issue human rights is understood as both a visual and cultural practice (Pres, 1996) that is “embedded in local contexts and in the multiple realities of everyday life” (p. 290). Our ability to understand the complexity of the Israel-Palestinian situation for instance, depends on a view of culture as a practice, a view that moves away from a static notion of culture toward one that addresses the multiple realities that come into play in this situation. Here multiple interests, and asymmetries of knowledge/power shape the ways human rights models are perceived, enacted, and provoke social change. As

the women of *Machsom Watch* indicate the government of Israel has used the women's presence at the checkpoints to indicate that the government is not abusing the Palestinians and in fact has allowed a human rights group to observe their actions, which speaks to their openness. This complicates the power of *Machsom Watch* to enact social change. Initially, the Palestinians saw them as allies, but now they are seen as powerless women and incapable of really making a change for them. Yet, as the women indicated to me, they need to be present and vigilantly watch the checkpoints, despite their compromised situation.

Several articles in this issue allude to the question of the role of human agency in defining and being defined by a set of human rights values (Pres, 1996), and of the role visual representation plays in this articulation of human rights. Human rights is defined broadly by the authors in this special issue: from art itself being viewed as a right, to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which outlines the right to life, liberty, freedom, equality and justice, as well as to civic and political rights, and cultural, economic and social rights. As a visual and cultural practice each author examines what human rights means pedagogically and its implications for the field of art education.

James Rolling, Jr. in his essay "Arts practice as agency: The right to represent and reinterpret personal and social significance" argues that art practice is a fundamental human right. The right to make visible one's lived experience has been a vital component of human history and one that is also a highly contested terrain. Understood as a behavior that develops agency and self-determination, art practice is conceptualized by Rolling as mark making, making models, and making "special" aesthetic interventions that are a necessary part of living in a democratic society where exchange of competing ideas is integral to its structure. By arguing for the social significance of the arts, Rolling makes a case for art education pedagogy as a vital force for social transformation.

The graphic essay "The Fork" is a tale about the dehumanizing experience of prison life and the emotional texture of visibility. The author, Rachel Williams describes an incident in the Iowa prison where she works as an art teacher that reframes how we understand domesticity (in this case through a real fork) from a site of privilege and of confinement.

In our post-colonial era where mass migration has become a common phenomena, human rights has been redefined as Gail Benick discusses in "Digital Storytelling and the pedagogy of human rights" to encompass the right to maintain one's collective identities. By counteracting and contesting the images of themselves as invisible and/or visible only in a negative/stereotypic manner, immigrant students in Benick's digital storytelling course intervened and re-presented themselves and their lives in a manner that complicates our understanding of the immigrant experience in Canada.

In "Disrupting discourses digitally for LGBTQ rights," Mindi Rhoades argues for using digital media for community-based collective actions to disrupt, challenge, and change the anti-LGBTQ dominant discourses that circulate in our society today. She analyzes the hateful/negative discourses using the lenses of *artivism*, liberatory literacy performance and interventionist art, and provides examples of contemporary positive/celebratory discourse in virtual space that are not without its own challenges. She shows the complexities of the discourses on LGBTQ rights in terms of the ways in which positive discourses can be co-opted, negated and neutralized.

The topic of human rights through the lens of contemporary art is explored with hospitalized youth in Madrid in the article, "Contemporary art as a resource for learning about human rights: A case study of the use of the Placenta Methodology" by María Acaso, et al. Using the Placenta Methodology a team of artists and art educators designed five workshops based on articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—covering freedom of opinion and expression, right to education, right to migration, and right to an adequate standard of living. The description of the art educational workshops provides a vivid example of how we can engage youth in understanding their rights, and also demonstrates how socially engaged art can, through critical reflection and dialogue, open spaces to envision social change.

Themina Kader in "Violations of human rights as revealed in Afghan children's artwork" shows the ways children's representations of their lives make visible the abuses incurred by Afghan women and children in the current Afghanistan War. She argues that artworks are credible tools that record the violations of human rights and therefore serve a pedagogical function that need to be used in art classes in the United States. These artworks are one way the images of invisibility regarding a war that we are implicated in, and the price paid by those directly affected by this war, are made visible.

In "Human rights, collective memory, and counter memory: Unpacking the meaning of Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia," Melanie L. Buffington and Erin Waldner argue for the inclusion of public pedagogy in art education. Using Monument Avenue as a pedagogical site, Buffington and Waldner examine the way racism functions in this society and how it can be examined and challenged through the use of contemporary art. They show how the many statues that line this avenue commemorate the confederacy and in doing so actively construct our collective memory about the past in the present. By focusing on the controversy regarding the addition of the Arthur Ash monument they discuss the ways this monument embodies a counter memory that complicates how we understand the past and present

In "El Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos: Pedagogic Reflections," Kathleen Keys shares a case study of a memorial museum, El Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos as a pedagogical site. In the Fall of 2005 in Santiago, Chile, Keys taught a course (titled "Visual Art and Human Rights") for a group of American students studying abroad. Drawing on this experience, Keys discusses how meaningful learning about human rights was experienced through their visit to the memorial museum that documents the brutal regime of Pinochet and its significant human rights abuses enacted upon ordinary Chileans.

Altogether the articles in this issue illustrate the different ways human rights work in art education is enacted as a visual and cultural practice. Drawing on a broader understanding of education that moves beyond schools to include public spaces, hospitals, museums, and children's artwork, they show us the need and relevance of public pedagogy as a site for social transformation and the ways the arts can reveal the invisible operations of power and privilege in our society. From a simple domestic object like the fork, to architectural spaces, to city planning we see the ways the regimes of the visible educate us in particular ways, actively rendering invisible those who live on the margins of our society. This collection of essays is one small gesture towards erasing the images of invisibility.

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Arts Practice as Agency: The Right to Represent and Reinterpret Personal and Social Significance

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author reframes arts practice as agency, the right to represent and reinterpret personal and social significance in a way that contributes a positive self-valuation. A positive self-valuation in turn becomes a berth for the beneficial *habitus* of the individual. Bourdieu (1990/1999) describes *habitus* as the locus of the capacity to generate reasonable, common sense behaviors that are beneficial to others. Arts practices are *herein* theorized as a stock of reasonable, common sense behaviors—making marks, making models, and making "special" aesthetic interventions that signal a person, object, artifact, action, event or phenomenon as uniquely valuable, sacred or life-sustaining. These are behaviors that human agents commonly and continually employ in response to social needs, causes, and the imperative to signify. Given the social significance of arts practice, there is also great potential in a broader application of arts education pedagogy as a force for social transformation. Brent Wilson (2005) sketches out a fundamentally democratic and transactional pedagogical framework that socially responsive and responsible educators can make use of in the cultivation of social justice, the ethical imagination, and the transformation of the systems that ill-define us.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITY

While it may seem to many that the arts are nice, but not entirely necessary (Eisner, 2002), making art is nevertheless universally practiced in some form by every nation, every people group, and every civilization. If the arts are not necessary, why are they practiced so ubiquitously? For the purposes of this article, I will redefine the practice of making art as the practice of rendering meaning from life experiences either through making marks, making models, or making special—the latter being a concept introduced by anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake (2003).

Rendering meaning artistically from life and thereby leaving behind the residuals of one's existence can be argued as a basic human right largely because all people, all cultures, and all civilizations at one point or another must assert the agency to represent to others that they matter, make a difference, or were simply here. To assert anything less is to accept meaninglessness. Perhaps the most crucial of all human rights is then the right to signify self, to signify experience, affinities, aspirations, beliefs, and ideas. Without the liberty to mark oneself as a person that matters, to model one's personal and social experience to others without censorship, and to make special one's place in the world without