

## Editorial Introduction

DIPTI DESAI

Given that we now understand art production as a practice that shapes meanings about our community, nation and world, how we understand culture needs to be questioned in art education. It is this rethinking of the notion of culture and cultural difference that the articles in this issue of JCRAE address, and in doing so they open our understanding of culture. Blurring the boundaries between “us” and “them,” and by focusing on different cultural and aesthetic spaces, the authors in this issue “explore the processes of production of difference in a world of culturally, socially, and economically interconnected and interdependent spaces” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 14). This is a crucial difference as it forces us to ask different questions about both art and culture when we think in spatial terms. As Trevor Paglen (2009) has argued considering art from the perspective of a spatial geography the question is not what is art?, but how is the space we call “art” produced in our hierarchically interconnected society. Similarly, we need to ask, how is the space we call “culture” produced in art education?

This means moving away from thinking about cultures as autonomous and distinct pure spaces that require us to forge dialogic relations across these separate spaces. Instead we should examine how a culture or community is formed as a culture or community “out of the interconnected space that always already existed” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p.8). Several of the articles in this issue question both historically and politically the ways we assume that places and spaces are given in art education; and instead they begin to explore the ways places, spaces, and identities are constructed, contested, and imagined. Some of the authors, by focusing on particular artistic interventions that disrupt dominant representations of culture (such as zines, performance, activist art, public installations), open up, as Jennifer Eisenhauer suggests, a rethinking of our understanding of these art practices as a “third space” (Bhabha, 1989) or border arts (Anzaldúa, 1987).

In her article, Eisenhauer explores the ways zines written by people with mental illness create a community that challenges dominant representations of mental illness. She argues that zines, an interventionist artistic and cultural practice,

should be understood as a third space as it disrupts the boundaries between doctor/patient, consumer/producer, and reader/writer. By examining zines as part of an underground disability art movement, Eisenhauer positions mental illness as part of a larger disability culture that complicates our understanding of culture in art education.

How youth identities are constructed through art practices and visual material culture is the focus of Kristen Ali Eglinton's and Mary Stokrocki's articles. In particular, Eglinton's examines—through ethnographic means—how gendered identities are constructed through the interconnected web of urban spaces that youth encounter in their daily lives. She describes the multifaceted ways male youth in New York City negotiate their masculine identities through using visual material culture (fashion, websites, popular culture). Her article draws out the complex relationships between youth lives and identities, visual material culture, and the local places they live in and through. Here, place and space are interconnected—they are dynamic, productive, and call for a critical place-based pedagogy that requires both youth and art educators to explore the multiple identities that constitute places/spaces, and are experienced in different ways based on one's location in the field of power. Also using ethnography, Stokrocki transformed ethnographic notes into a performance script that was later performed by her graduate students. She describes not only the ways adolescents negotiated and reflected on their identities, but also what we can learn about identity and performance research.

Dealing with different historical periods and places, Cindy Maguire and Terry Lenihan, and Sharif Bey explore how community is created out of the spaces of socially engaged art practices that challenge dominant ways of understanding culture and art. In their article, Maguire and Lenihan argue that the changing demographic diversity in the United States shifts our understanding of the culture of art classrooms, and requires art teachers to enact, embody and assess their classroom practices from a social justice perspective. Drawing on their research they show that the arts can create a dialogic school culture where differences are explored and accepted, in the process building community. Bey on the other hand explores the role Czechoslovakian artists played in resisting the Soviet regime in the city of Bratislava in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He advocates opening up high school art practices in our country to include the ephemeral art practices that stem from this particular set of political and cultural circumstances.

In the spirit of opening dialogue across connected academic fields and also to disrupt the construction of a separate field we call art education defined by a set of cultural practices, I invited Marita Sturken to contribute an article to this issue. The last three articles in this journal feature two essays by art educators,

Kerry Freedman and Paul Duncum that “talk back” to a chapter written by Sturken (2007) called “Consuming fear and selling comfort “ from her book *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*. It is my hope as the editor of JCRAE to create a larger community of cultural workers who continually challenge normative ways of seeing, being, thinking and feeling.

Building this community is not a process that is done alone. I would like to acknowledge and thank the many people who have contributed to this journal as a one of the sites of ongoing transformation in art education: my colleagues on The United States Society for Education through Art (USSEA) board and in particular the editorial board of JCRAE, and my editorial assistant, Kate Brideau, without whom this journal would not have come together. I would also like to acknowledge the financial support and resources this journal receives from the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, New York University—in particular Dean Mary Brabeck, Dean of Research Perry Halkitis, and Nancy Barton, Chair of the Department of Art and Art Professions—as well as the financial contributions of USSEA, the organization that produces this journal.

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