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Editorial

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This is the first issue of The Journal of Art for Life to be published as strictly an on-line publication. While there is something to be said for hard copy (the smell of fresh printers’ ink, the texture of paper, the turning of the page), there’s also much to be said for digital communications (the fact that volumes and issues can be flexible in length, the instantaneous publication of a finished paper, the potentially vast audience of Internet readers, and the price, not to mention the trees we are saving, which are thus available for all to hug). Inherent, too, in digital publications is the potential for creative use of the cyber-space strategies such as hyperlinks to video and other resources not conducive to hard copy. We are particularly looking forward in the future to exploring those creative digital spaces. As with all previous issues, this issue of JAfL is available online, free and open access through the support of Florida State University Library’s Diginole System. Also contact us by email if you want a hard copy of this issue or previous issues, which we have in limited numbers. Starting with this volume of JAfL and all succeeding issues, we will be available only online through Diginole at http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/jafl/.

The lead article in volume 5(1), by Jeffrey L. Broome, entitled “The Case for Humanistic Curriculum: A Discussion of Curriculum Theory Applied to Art Education,” is an appeal for art educators to revisit the venerable humanistic tradition in art education for its own sake and for the sake of social justice within and through teaching and learning in art. Our second contribution, by Courtney Lee Weida and Jennifer Marsh, entitled “Soft Sustainable Media: Representing Ecology and Re-envisioning Craft with the International Fiber Collaborative,” focuses on environmental and social activism connecting handcrafts, digital media, and community arts. The third article, entitled “Mandalas and Wellness Wheels with Persons with Severe Mental Illness,” by Maryellen McAlevey, looks at eight dimensions of wellness (rather than focusing on a deficit model) using mandalas and wellness wheels as exemplars of strategies to achieve recovery and wellness. In the next article, Laura Rachel Fattal, in a piece called “Alterations: The Work of Altered Book artist Miriam Schaer,” explores Schaer’s feminist work with a special focus on childless women, with implications for art education. Finally, David A. Gall examines fragment(ation), collage as a vehicle, and potential wholeness beyond the dualisms of postmodernism’s challenge to modernism’s so-called artistic purity, with implications for art pedagogy that reflect cultural difference through transcultural similarities, in his entry entitled “Fragments of What? Postmodernism, Hybridity, and Collage.”

Bringing this issue to fruition I want to thank, once again, Florida State University, the FSU University Library and Micah Vandergrift, The College of Visual Arts Theatre and Dance and Dean Peter Weishar, as well as to The Department of Art Education and Chair David Gussak for their support. Also I want to acknowledge and thank my two editorial assistants for this issue, Marisa Agama, and succeeding her, Jackie Juriasti, both of whom have been invaluable in putting this issue together.

As always we invite your submissions on any aspect of art for life, whether that be in the realm of art education, art therapy or arts administration. We will consider philosophical pieces; commentaries; explorations of issues; arts-based, qualitative, and quantitative research; and reviews of existing texts, videos, online publications, and other art-for-life oriented phenomena. If you have questions please contact me at tanderson@fsu.edu. I hope you find this issue of the Journal of Art for Life to be stimulating and useful for your life in art education, art therapy, and/or arts administration.
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COMMENTARY - The Case for Humanistic Curriculum: A Discussion of Curriculum Theory Applied to Art Education

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A recent personal event, as well as frequent media reports of school violence, bullying, and public outbursts of vitriol, have given me cause to reconsider curricular approaches to K-12 art education. The personal event involved my eight-year-old daughter, Mackenzie, when she came home from school to relay a story to her mother and I about a troubling lunchroom occurrence. A classmate had singled her out for her cultural background and made efforts to exclude her from group interaction. I had long ago braced myself for the moment when my children might experience prejudice of one kind or another, as my wife’s religion is Judaism and her nation-of-origin is Mexico. It was the former factor that eventually caught the attention of Mackenzie’s classmate, who asked a group of students at their large lunch table to raise their hands if they believed in Jesus. Afterward, he turned to Mackenzie and announced that he only wanted to sit with those who shared his beliefs. He then made his wishes more clear and direct: “Mackenzie, I don’t want you to sit with us because you are Jewish.”

This incident resulted in immediate long discussions with our daughter about her own feelings and reactions, the behavior and the actions of others, and also private discussions between my wife and I about our own responsibilities as parents. After the fact, this event gave me further cause to reflect more deeply on the application and implementation of curricular approaches and theories in art education. Like many others before me, I wondered what role art education could play in fostering caring and sensitive relationships and experiences for children, in some small way paving a path for a more harmonious society. In this commentary, I share my musings on this topic by first examining the major curricular theories that have dominated trends in art education over the last six or seven decades, and then state my argument for a renewed emphasis on updated versions of humanistic curricula in art education. A concluding section includes a brief personal reflection connecting humanistic approaches to another strand of my
research agenda, multi-age art education, and offers a synthesis of the ideas presented throughout the article.

**Background: Curricular Theory Applied to Art Education**

McNeil (2009) categorizes overarching curricular purposes into four conceptual paradigms: the systemic curriculum, the academic curriculum, social reconstructionism, and the humanistic curriculum. These curricular theories offer frameworks related to the intentions of those who create and implement curriculum, and a brief discussion of the manifestation of each theory in the field of art education is in order to frame the arguments presented in this commentary.

**Systemic Curriculum**

Systemic curricular frameworks emphasize the measuring of student learning through structured assessment and the consistent alignment of classroom objectives and activities with predetermined measurable benchmarks or standards (McNeil, 2009). Curriculum developers begin with these standards in mind, and the quality of teaching and learning is largely determined by the documentation of how well students have met such benchmarks, often through the process of standardized test scores. These forms of systemic accountability are featured prominently in today’s U.S. schools and can be traced back to government initiatives such as the federally mandated *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (Chapman, 2005) and more recently, the *Common Core Standards* initiated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2012; Kendall, 2011). With standards-based instruction mandated for nearly all public schools in the U.S., one would be hard-pressed to find a contemporary domestic approach to K-12 art education that has not been impacted by systemic curricular frameworks in some way. In this context, art teachers have been routinely
asked to document student achievement of state and national standards throughout the past several decades. The systemic curriculum has been criticized for its overemphasis on individual student competition over collaboration, its lack of attention to creativity, problem-solving, and higher order thinking, and also for the disadvantages presented to diverse and special populations in a system that is so strictly standardized (McNeil, 2009).

**Academic Curriculum**

Curricula guided by academic frameworks focus on presenting and organizing content in ways that feature established methods and questions central to specific subject areas and academic disciplines (McNeil, 2009). The roots of this approach stem from ideas proposed by Jerome Bruner (1960) involving the introduction of methods of inquiry that resemble those used by professionals working in the subject area under investigation. These strategies served as the supporting framework for the creation of discipline based art education (DBAE), an academic model of art instruction focused on approaches used by artworld professionals, not just in studio production, but also as art historians, art critics, and as aestheticians (Greer, 1984). DBAE dominated K-12 art education during the late 1980s and most of the 1990s, and many art teachers became oriented to writing rigid sequential lesson plans that featured objectives in art production, criticism, history and aesthetics. However, a paradigm shift has since occurred in the field (Carpenter & Tavin, 2010) with DBAE falling out of favor among many for its lack of attention to multicultural issues, visual culture, and an overreliance on Western views of art historical superiority.

**Social Reconstructionism**

Social reconstructionist curricula centers on aims to enact social reform, often in critical examination of existing power structures and with the intent of creating positive societal change
through direct action and student participation (McNeil, 2009). For some, the roots of social reconstructionist pedagogy come from the work of Paulo Freire (1970/2002) and his efforts to liberate oppressed and illiterate populations in Brazil through educational programs. His work was influential to educators addressing illiteracy in other poverty-stricken areas, as well as issues related to feminism, multiculturalism, and community-specific concerns. Social reconstructionism has received increased attention in art education during the new millennium from those concerned with a variety of social justice issues (Anderson, Gussak, Hallmark, & Paul, 2010; Quinn, Ploof, & Hochritt, 2012) and also those who advocate for the study of visual culture as a way to critically examine the power and influence of popular media (Tavin, 2003). Critics of social reconstructionism identify shortcomings related to difficulties in assessing student work and the long-term impact of such efforts. They also find fault when the approach becomes dogmatic in the hands of teachers who push their own political agendas, rather than allowing community issues to emerge democratically from local viewpoints, revealing a contradiction in the overall intent of the approach by supporting the power of instructors’ persuasive convictions over that of students (McNeil, 2009).

**Humanistic Curriculum**

A basic premise of humanistic pedagogical frameworks is that curricula focused solely on academics is incomplete, and that it is the responsibility of teachers to address the needs of the whole child, including social and emotional learning (Aloni, 2011; Hewitt, 2006; McNeil, 2009). Such a stance lies in opposition to standardized frameworks that emphasize uniform approaches meant to fit all students and instead emphasizes the belief that each child is unique and that diversity, rather than uniformity, is a key ingredient to good pedagogy (Eisner, 2002). Believing that standardization leads to depersonalized experiences in schooling, humanistically orientated
educators often provide opportunities for students to explore relevant interests through units that relate to real life or by giving students choices in selecting topics for study (Hewitt, 2006; Huitt, 2009; McNeil, 2009). Such units often feature projects that emphasize creative problem solving, in the belief that there can be multiple solutions to educational and social issues, rather than one correct standard answer.

Many aspects of the humanistic curriculum were prominently featured during the heights of the creative self-expression era in art education during the 1960s and 1970s (Zimmerman, 2010), and were inspired by the ideas of Viktor Lowenfeld (1964) who stressed the importance of fostering creativity and individuality in student artwork. Although individuality is a point of emphasis in humanistic curricula, cooperative learning and group work are also featured as ways to nurture social and emotional needs and to teach students the importance of working together while accepting differences of opinion, background, and experiences (Huitt, 2009; McNeil, 2009). With this emphasis on peer collaboration and on establishing multidimensional classrooms that provide students with high levels of choice in exploring interests, the humanistic curriculum shares much in common with constructivist learning theories (Shunk, 2004) that assume that people actively build knowledge through their interactions with others and through direct experience (DeVries, Edmiaston, Zan, & Hildebrandt, 2002).

Proponents of systemic and academic frameworks often criticize humanistic approaches for placing a greater emphasis on idealistic teaching methods over the importance of assessment and determining whether or not such methods are truly beneficial to student learning and achievement (McNeil, 2009). Social reconstructionists urge supporters of humanistic curricula to go beyond the empathetic exploration of student social and emotional needs, to actually taking action on social justice issues.
A Need for Renewed Emphasis on Humanistic Approaches

It is unlikely that the strict classification of various versions of art education into different curricular frameworks accurately describes the eclectic approaches embraced by most K-12 practitioners as “there is likely to be a mix of these visions in any school or classroom” (Eisner, 2002, p. 25). I think that this is how it should be. An eclectic approach that borrows the best from existing methods has its merits, as has been shown by the establishment of comprehensive programs that include the various disciplines of DBAE along with visual culture studies and opportunities for creative self-expression within a socially reconstructive framework (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). As a colleague once put it to me, there is no need to throw the Bauhaus out with bathwater, provided that the methods of the Bauhaus still have relevance. Art teachers working in public schools are required to deal with systemic standards, and having such standards can provide a positive guiding focus, as long as these benchmarks are not overtly prescriptive or close-ended. Using academic examples from various disciplines of the professional artworld can be used to great effect, provided that teachers are mindful in selecting diverse examples and cases. Finally, it is hard to argue against the virtues of addressing social reconstructionist issues, unless those issues are dogmatically dictated by authority figures teaching students what to think, instead of how to think critically.

I support all of these approaches in a blended comprehensive fashion, but have concerns regarding the under-emphasis of humanistic approaches in art education during recent decades. Other than specific attention paid to creativity and holistic art education from some scholars (Campbell, 2006; London, 2006; Zimmerman, 2010), the humanistic curriculum has, since the days of Lowenfeld, taken successive backseat status first to DBAE, and later to visual culture art education and standards-driven models. With increased reports of bullying and school violence
situated within an educational system that emphasizes individual competition through the strict guise of standardization (Chapman, 2005), I have become concerned that schools and art education are not doing enough to balance academic concerns with the social and emotional needs of children. I advocate a renewed emphasis on humanistic curriculum, blended with salient aspects of other approaches, that draws greater attention to nurturing humane and respectful relationships with one another through such strategies as carefully selected thematic units, cooperative group assignments, and the development of caring teaching personas and activities that encourage students to respond critically and expressively in their work.

**Thematic Instruction**

Connecting art curricula to themes of interest in students’ lives is not a new idea (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Stewart & Walker, 2005; Walker, 2001). The use of such themes or enduring ideas is often promoted as a way to make art instruction more meaningful to all students, even those who will not go on to study art later as adults, partially because such an approach can illustrate art’s relevance in addressing concepts that have concerned humankind throughout time. I also advocate the use of thematic instruction, but more specifically urge art teachers to consider the selection of big ideas related to compassion, empathy, identity, respect for differences, and other topics that may tap into opportunities for social and emotional learning.

Other scholars have argued for the exploration of humanistic themes in other subject areas, including Noddings’ (2004) proposal to study the topic of war as a way to enhance student compassion and critical thinking, as well as Gardner’s (2000) recommendation to study the holocaust as part of a curriculum addressing principles of morality, truth, and goodness. I believe that the subject of visual art can be just as useful in studying these themes, as artists have dealt with similar issues in their work (Campbell, 2006). Humanistic themes can be introduced
through the exploration of selected individual works of art (such as Judy Chicago’s *Rainbow Shabbat*), a group of art works from various artists on a common theme (perhaps, respect for diversity), or artworks centered around personal and historical events (such as Miné Okubu’s or Henry Sugimoto’s depictions of their experiences in Japanese American Internment Camps, or work from children’s art classes led by Friedl Dicker-Brandeis at the Terezín concentration camp during World War II).

In introducing these works of art and related themes, art teachers should facilitate authentic class dialogue (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005) allowing students to express their viewpoints through class discussions and in resulting projects. Teaching studio technique would still be necessary, but as a way to allow students to effectively communicate their feelings and perspectives on the theme, not as an end to itself. The resulting artworks would be tied together by a common humanistic thread, yet individual pieces may look very different from one another since they would be guided by open-ended themes intended to foster creative responses and individuality.

### Cooperative and Collaborative Work

A central tenet of humanistic curricular strategies involves the nurturing of respectful relationships between students while encouraging the acceptance of differences in opinion, approaches, and background (Aloni, 2011; McNeil, 2009). While these tenets can be explored at a certain level through thematic discussion, collaborative and cooperative activities may lead to more direct opportunities for students to experience diverse perspectives. When carefully facilitated by adept teachers, students working on collaborative assignments are presented with opportunities to share responsibilities, hear alternative solutions to problems, and learn the benefits of compromise and teamwork (Hurwitz, 1993). Learning theories also posit that
carefully organized and scaffolded group work may allow participants to reach new levels of knowledge that they may not have been able to reach on their own (Vygotsky, 1934/2012; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

In consideration of the potential benefits of group work as well as the recent emphasis placed on student collaboration within the Framework for 21st Century Learning (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012), I encourage art educators to incorporate such cooperative opportunities into their repertoire on a more frequent basis. For art teachers seeking resources on structuring these types of activities, Bobick (2009) has made practical recommendations for implementing cooperative learning in art classrooms, and Hurwitz (1993) has detailed a number of suggested projects, including murals, earthworks, mosaics, installations, community planning, multi-media events, and environmental improvement. While lack of time and budget may be potential obstacles in implementing multiple collaborative projects during the course of a school year, I encourage art teachers to consider such assignments annually and remind them that cooperative activities can involve the investigation and discussion of aesthetic and critical issues as well (Bobick, 2009). With a number of art educators noting positive social, emotional, and moral results for students participating in collaborative art-making experiences (Hurwitz, 1993; Hutzel, Russell, & Gross, 2010; Kelehear & Heid, 2002), I believe that even occasional efforts to implement such activities are worthwhile.

Caring Role of the Teacher

The role of humanistic teachers has been described as one where educators adopt a warm and caring presence (Aloni, 2011), facilitate experiences where students are encouraged to explore their own interests and ideas (Hewitt, 2006; Huit, 2009), and imaginatively present challenging learning situations with more than one answer (McNeil, 2009). I find that all of the
above characteristics can easily be incorporated into the practices of art educators interested in humanistic teaching strategies. Since caring relationships take time to develop, Noddings (2005) recommended that students and teachers stay together for a period of years in order to foster deeper levels of understanding and caring for one another. Such long-term ongoing relationships may be difficult to develop for classroom generalists since the traditional structure of schooling dictates that students progress from one grade level to another, typically abandoning the previous year’s homeroom teacher in the process. In contrast, many elementary art teachers may instruct the same students continuously from kindergarten to fifth grade, and some secondary art teachers have the opportunity to build ongoing relationships with students particularly interested in visual art as they re-enroll in elective courses from semester to semester. Regardless of whether or not art teachers see students for consecutive years, it is important that instructors take the time to get to know their students’ concerns and interests, as merely spending additional time with one another is not enough to guarantee caring relationships.

Additionally, a humanistic and caring approach to facilitating thematic instruction involves encouraging students to respond to such themes in an open-ended fashion that allows for variability and the representation of diverse opinions and approaches. At times, students can participate in the selection of themes for the year (Kuntz, 2005), and certain contexts may even allow students to select media best suited for responding to given topics. Similar choice-based practices, along with many other learner-directed strategies, have been suggested as effective ways to encourage artistic behaviors and creative thinking in children (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009).

The additional use of student journals, including written or visual responses to teacher-directed prompts, can provide students with another venue for comfortably expressing their thoughts, research, plans, and opinions on engaging classroom themes (Anderson & Milbrandt,
2005; Ruopp, 2004). Art teachers should openly review these journal entries as a way to get to know their students better, constantly staying attuned to individual interests and concerns, and also to encourage students in developing these ideas further in their artwork. Finally, while I encourage art teachers to develop caring personas with their students, I also remind them that they are not licensed therapists, and that deeply troubling personal issues that may arise in journal entries should be referred to the appropriate school or health-care professionals.

**Personal Reflections and Conclusions**

While the unfortunate incident with my daughter served as an impetus for thinking about instructional approaches in art education more deeply, further reflection has led me to realize that my interest in humanistic curricular frameworks has been present in my own research agenda for some time, as illustrated by my investigations into multi-age art education (Broome, 2009a, 2009b; Broome, Heid, Johnston, & Serig, in press). In brief, multi-age learning classrooms are characterized by the purposeful grouping of students from adjacent grade levels with the intention of building a classroom climate similar to those of caring communities and nurturing families (Nishida, 2009). On more than one occasion, I’ve been asked why I would build a major portion of my research agenda around a topic that would seemingly offer only pragmatic interest to a small percentage of art teachers. While I’ve responded differently to these inquiries at different times, I can now offer a more definitive response guided by my concern for the current state of schools and society. My interest in multi-age art education stems from my belief that such models offer real-life exemplars that effectively represent the ideals of humanistic curricula through its use of thematic units, differentiated instruction guided by student interests, cooperative learning (Kuntz, 2005), and the nurturing of sustained caring relationships (Ball, Grant, & Johnson, 2006). While I’m not suggesting that all humanistically orientated classrooms
need to be reorganized into mixed-age groups, art teachers interested in humanistic approaches may wish to investigate these existing examples further as I believe they can learn much from multi-age instructional strategies regardless of whether they teach to mixed-age groups or not.

Overall, the humanistic approaches exemplified by multi-age education have played a supporting role in art education throughout the past four decades, while systemic, academic, and socially reconstructionist curricula have played more-recent starring roles in the form of standards-based instruction, DBAE, and visual culture art education. As I’ve noted above, I am not calling for the abandonment of these other approaches as I feel each offers elements that can contribute to a renewed emphasis on humanism in art education. In fact, it could be argued that much of what I have called for in this commentary is as much socially reconstructive as it is humanistic, since the central crux of my concerns revolve around emphasizing art education’s potential role in bettering personal relationships and society. While I acknowledge the socially reconstructive aspects of my proposal, my intentions are more closely aligned with humanism, as I believe that we must first heal ourselves and our relationships with others before we can ever hope to heal the world.

In consideration of the competitive framework established by high stakes accountability measures in public schools (Chapman, 2005), and increasingly frequent reports of bullying, outbursts of public vitriol, and school violence, I find it reasonable and necessary to return to humanistic sensibilities in creating and implementing art education curriculum. I hope others who share my concerns will consider adopting some of the approaches outlined in this article, including the use of humanistic themes to guide art teaching and learning, the use of cooperative projects and activities in the art room, and the development of caring personas and related approaches by the art teachers who implement such strategies. While I’m not naïve enough to
think that such strategies alone will cause a seismic shift in how humans relate to one another, I do believe that making an effort is imperative and that the potential for art to address such concerns is considerable. Furthermore, I am hopeful that these suggestions offer adequate starting points for other teachers and students to build-on in their future practices, decision-making, and interaction with others. Whatever course art educators decide to take, remaining completely passive will certainly do nothing to improve current situations in which bullying experiences like my daughter’s, or exchanges even more troubling, may become increasingly commonplace.
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1-1-2013

Soft and Sustainable Studio Work: Recycling Media, Representing Ecology, and Re-envisioning Craft with the International Fiber Collaborative

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Joining the International Fiber Collaborative

Much of the art that I create has uncertain archival potential. I work with recycled and ephemeral materials, and often it is the idea or theme and not the material that matters most. In contrast, particular teaching moments and memories remain with me as an educator. For example, while I was in graduate school, a mentor warned against “putting all my eggs in one basket.” This phrase and predicament seemed personally and professionally poignant in terms of sustaining myself in my field. There are myriad considerations (or containers) for an art educator. How much time should go into curriculum building versus one’s own work, what topics are most relevant to pursue in research and teaching, and which theories and approaches will be of most value to one’s field? Responding to these and more personal considerations of social and family commitments, I began to weave hundreds of tiny baskets from colorful recycled telephone wire and filled them with collections of tiny beads and ceramic forms (Figure 1). Crafting this web of baskets was a sort of reflection of my attempts to make a meaningful constellation out of so many possibilities in art education, and to keep several interests in mind and in hand. Rather than accept art and craft making as a small part of the already crowded life of an art educator, I sought ways to integrate my making, teaching, and writing.

Working as a teacher educator, I continued to look for models and approaches to teaching art that address many contexts and considerations. I found a blend of craft, activism, community, and ecology within the International Fiber Collaborative (IFC). Sometimes the most atemporal, ephemeral, and discursive artistic projects (like the IFC or my baskets) can serve as connective constants in the changing landscapes of our lives.
The IFC is a global craft initiative with members creating collaborative, large-scale, public projects. The IFC projects include wrapping a gas station, large tree, and NASA rocket in giant fiber cozies contributed by artists and makers around the world. Like many artists and art educators, I have continuously contributed to the IFC projects over the past 6 years. My participation as a contributing artist have seen me through graduate school, my experiences teaching in higher education, and geographical shifts across the country.

Jennifer Marsh’s International Fiber Collaborative (IFC) and its communal, monumental artworks have been pedagogical, artistic, and activist companions to my students and me. I first stumbled upon her project online in 2007 and envisioned opportunities for collaboration within my K-12 and university teaching, which later extended to my artistic practice, and then to my arts research in a dialogue with IFC’s
SOFT AND SUSTAINABLE STUDIO WORK

activist framework. Like a constellation of points in a unified whole, her projects combine small artistic exercises and investigations into a monumental, meaningful finished work.

The IFC is situated as a community-based and craftivist (combining craft and activism) group with an ephemeral physical presence and persisting digital space. Overlapping aspects of craft, culture, and politics sustain and inspire communities and individuals through online art documentation. The IFC is well documented in blogs, Flickr sites, and digital videos. My research as a participant observer spans multiple collaborative projects with Marsh, my students, and the IFC community over the past few years, including digital IFC sites. This article examines the potential of sustainability within the IFC in terms of repurposing and “upcycling” artistic media, creating ecologically and environmentally activist artistic expressions, and reinventing media ecology of art education and craft media within digital communities. Goals and purposes of the three projects of the IFC will be considered in relation to contributions from and discussion among craftspeople, artists, artisans, hobbyists, and other makers.

Framing the IFC and Arts Research

In her book addressing artists and social responsibility, Becker (1994) asserted, “Questions need to be asked . . . by artists, writers, and intellectuals themselves—with a generous spirit of investigation: What is the responsibility of the artist to society [or] of society to the artist? How might this relationship be understood?” (p. xv). Marsh takes up these questions of community engagement directly in her interdisciplinary work as founder and organizer of the IFC. She began the IFC because of a sense of disillusion with loneliness and disconnectedness of the art world from communities and the
environment. Rather than work with isolated artists and galleries, Marsh took up tactile traditions of fiber and connective frameworks of collaboration (J. Marsh, personal communication, March 19, 2008). The 2007-2008 Gas Station Project was composed of crocheted, knitted, stitched, patched, or collaged 3-foot square fiber panels that expressed various interpretations and implications of human dependency on oil. I observed how Marsh facilitated canvas or armature for artistic expression of personal and political issues by securing a gas station for public art to realize her project. Additionally, Marsh builds relationships between communities in the arts, the sciences, and corporate and civic life to create IFC projects. Increasingly, the IFC projects have involved partnerships with public parks and fairs to sustain the work, through the creation of panels within workshops and the hosting of exhibitions prior to the final installation. These partnerships extend both the themes of the artworks and the values of its contributors in terms of outdoor education, ecology, and community outreach.

Curriculum theorists Krensky and Steffen (2009) have argued that such community art organizers "manage . . . by establishing and maintaining relationships with administrators, funders, government officials, nonprofit professionals, and property and business owners. They inspire gatekeepers and stakeholders to trust the community-centered process" (p. 22). Similarly, Marsh acted as a spokesperson and liaison to introduce outside parties such as businesses and public figures to the project, and then invite them to contribute to various dimensions of construction, funding, and publicizing. The monetary and physical frameworks of public projects exist alongside (and underpin) the artistic production of community contributors. To sustain her project in all its
physical fleetingness and extended planning and digital presence, Marsh must also
balance the placement of numerous “eggs” in various “baskets.”

The finished works of the IFC (a wrapped gas station, tree, and NASA rocket)
exist in their communities only for a limited time physically, and persist in the digital
documentation of their processes and preliminary art exhibitions of groups of works.
Krensky and Steffen (2009) have asserted, "community art is both a process and a
product" (p. 19). Similarly, Donahue, Stuart, Elkin, and Mistry (2010) observed how
"community artists believe that the process of their art is as important as the resulting
artwork in promoting social justice" (p. 40). The digital displays of photos, videos, and
comments from the artists and community surrounding the IFC enables a certain
exploded documentation of the processes and products of each work, especially
ecologically and politically-motivated messages and symbols. To explore Flickr sites and
Facebook posts about the multi-site exhibitions is to encounter the makers, their
messages, and their techniques in photos, captions, and blog posts. As Prain and
Christenson (2011) aptly observed, "while our faces often glow in the light of laptops,
many of us still have the urge to express ourselves through tactile experiences" (p. 17).

My process in researching the messages and meanings of Jennifer Marsh’s
International Fiber Collaborative is cooperative and organic, not unlike the project itself.
I acted as a participant-observer in creating panels in 2007 for the Gas Station Project,
leaves in 2008 for the Tree Project, and patches with my own students and artistic
communities over the past 5 years toward the current Dream Rocket Project. As a
researcher, I analyzed and contributed to material posted on digital communities of the
IFC website and adjoining Flickr and Facebook sites. I also assisted with exhibitions of
individual panels leading up to the final installations, helping to categorize the works into shared themes. I aimed to describe craft practices of the IFC and interpret their various meanings and contexts, in collaboration with organizers and participants in my area. Speaking metaphorically, arts researcher Leavey (2009) has observed how “both artistic practice and the practice of qualitative research can be viewed as craft” (p. 10). Design writer Ahl (2010) has even ventured that “the process of forming questions and thought is a form of craft; it is linked to practice” (p. 608). Along these lines, I view my craft as a researcher in parallel with my creative process. I posed questions, collaged various resources, and sought to understand and represent artists and communities from within. This model of crafting research in concert with artmaking may be of interest to other art educators wishing to synthesize aspects of their teaching practice with their artistic projects. In this way, we can begin to sustain ourselves as art educators and artists.

**Sustainability of Materials**

The central aim of Marsh's work is contributing to and creating a community through fiber explorations. While the IFC projects are open-ended and include many diverse opinions and experiences pertaining to the environment, the contrast between the resources and processes involved with hand-made crafts and those involved with manufactured materials communicate themselves clearly and with links to individual named makers. This criticality models layers of considerations for art educators. During the 2007-2008 Gas Station Project collaboration, I noted several panels documented on the Flickr and Youtube sites that gave craft materials and techniques a personal or political context (discussed throughout this article and viewable online at: http://www.internationalfibercollaborative.com/html/photos.html). California artists
Courtney Stricklan and Jennifer Van Trease created a panel from over 200 plastic shopping bags (which are created from petroleum), but tied together in a traditional quilt pattern. Maine artist Ann C. Kittredge Houlton contributed two panels for the Gas Station Project that juxtapose petroleum-based yarns with natural yarns that correspondingly read: “I AM OIL” and “NOT OIL.” A sculpture professor, (who coincidentally once taught me when I was a student) Rob Millard-Mendez, similarly created a No Petrol Panel from cotton fabric and cotton thread that reads “no petrol products in this square.” Aesthetically, the panels combined into a covering look almost like windows or framed paintings about oil and the environment. In this way, the IFC frames messages, questions, and ideas artistically as well as conceptually.

We might view the IFC projects as eco-art education, defined as a hybrid area of environmental and art education that addresses issues like interdependence, conservation, and sustainability artistically (Inwood, 2010; p. 34). As eco-art, the themes of various panels were incredibly diverse in concept and appearance, but materiality and message were often very consciously considered. Carol Lowell, a New York artist, recorded the rise in gas prices with a sort of knitted chart for her panel. Minnesota maker Jane Fisher-Merritt generated a geometric blue and yellow panel repurposed from teabags (Figure 2). A UK artist named Rebecca Wombel similarly used recycled VHS tapes in her crocheted black and white geometric panel, taking on antiquated audio-visual media and transforming it into a craft material. These distinctive material choices demonstrate social and ecological inquiry. Meanwhile, German artist Barbara Schneider created a tantalizingly colorful and textural panel made from layers of cast off stuffed toys that
addresses re-using symbols and perhaps reconfiguring childhood memories through cast-off materials (Figure 3).

**Figure 2.** Teabag Panel from the Gas Station Project by Jane Fisher-Merritt

![Teabag Panel](image)

**Figure 3.** Toy panel for the *Dream Rocket* Project by Barbara Schneider

![Toy Panel](image)
Jeannie Clark, an Australian environmental educator, worked with her elementary school students to create images of the Red Gum Woodlands which is recovering from drought. Students created iconic glimpses of hollows in trees, green sprouts, and life-giving water that celebrate biodiversity. Other pieces reference both natural material and symbols of nature, such as *Burlap Membrane* by Costa Rican collaborators Aura Madrigal, Irene Chaves, Gaby Chavarria, Alina and Carlos Chavvaria, and Alex and Antony Gonzalez. California artist Karen Rosenberg created a wool and silk composition of shapes of various sizes and colors evocatively titled *Earth, Sea, Sky*. Each piece can be viewed as a singular composition and materially relevant interpretation of related earth science themes.

The variety of themes and political ideas is often matched by materials used by IFC makers, including crochet, knitting, stitching, patching, and collage. As book artist and author Drucker (2010) has observed, craft can reconfigure consumption of its various materials: “possibilities for reinventing traditions of art making and of shifting the relation of critical opposition to mass media into a different key can be enunciated, one in which the pleasures of consumption are an acknowledged part of aesthetic production rather than a repressed one” (p. 595). In the IFC, there is a wonderfully complex interplay of materiality: of celebrating materials consciously, even while critiquing commercial and consumer aspects of contemporary culture. Educators may ask students to consider such questions of personal aesthetics and the politics of the materials and objects that fill our lives.
Sustainability as Message Through Materials

The IFC community's use of materials is meaningfully linked not only with subjects of nature, but also with ecological and political messages. The Gas Station Project investigated the environment through a variety of images that address ecology and sustainability. Missouri artist Lauren Jacobs quilted and painted a panel that powerfully evokes (and perhaps predicted) the 2010 BP/Deepwater Horizon oil spill, centering on an oil-slicked eagle trying to fly against an ominous grey background.

Addressing community and ecology more directly than the Gas Station Project, the second major work of the IFC (The Project Tree Project) examined interdependence as a theme in terms of roots, branches, and leaves. Participants were asked to create and submit leaves from fiber materials and/or techniques, culminating in the form of a giant tree on view in museums and parks. Metaphorically, this project took on a similar approach to the Gas Station, joining multiples by various individuals into a larger, unified work. However, The Interdependence or Tree actually simulated a gigantic living tree, highlighting a natural object instead of a distinctly commercial, human-made form. In this way, the Interdependence Project inverted a previous subject of oil and pollution into the theme and subject of nature. Marsh also integrated the installation portion of this project as part of her own teaching practice in a Public Art course, integrating arts practice with critical inquiry in education. While there was a great deal of artistic freedom allowed in the creation of leaves, Marsh (2009) specified for participants that each submission should “relate to interdependence in a social, economical, political, ecological, or geographical way”

The leaves featured in this community work seemed to take on a certain gem-like quality, from my observations of the digital sites (see http://www.internationalfibercollaborative.com/html/gallery.html) and final installation in a children's museum. They evoke a micro and macro-ecology in size and symbolism. Although still ultimately connected as communal art from individual fragments, each piece was precious and involved a great deal of process when viewed in isolation within digital photos submitted prior to their installation. California artist Linda Laird directly repurposed remainders from the Gas Station Project, using remnants of her cabin quilt to create a leaf pattern. Jane Linders, of Missouri, explored the metaphor of photosynthesis through cloth, negatives, and cyanotypes (involving water and sun, like actual leaves). Suzan Engler, from Texas, created “leaf fossils” by fusing grocery bags, recycled buttons, and fragmented leftovers of yarn and cotton.

Many of the leaves in the Interdependence Project were aesthetically focused on nature rather than overtly political, perhaps to a greater extent than the IFC’s first Gas Station Project. The shape, color, and texture of the leaves themselves were frequently emphasized. Florida artist Susan Wallace explored the shape of local leaves, underscoring in her website description the complexities of red bay trees in her area, which are being killed by a fungus. Ann-Marie Sjoberg, of Sweden, worked from wool and yarn, generating a leaf for each season of the year. These examples nicely demonstrate the idea of ecology as metaphor for the space of the makers, the digital space, and the artistic representations of nature. Lin (2011) has similarly examined the context of physical space in terms of “learning ecology,” (p. 12), going beyond simple artmaking around the physical world to also address relational networks between various
makers in digital realms. If learners can locate such preciousness and precariousness in nature and community, they can also make meaning in a more metacognitive way.

Other IFC leaves were more linked to the symbolism of trees and leaves, such as New York artist Lisa Post’s commemorative leaves for her mother and grandmother, perhaps responding to the metaphor of the “family tree.” Similarly, Venezuelan artist Maria Parada created leaves in honor of her grandchildren from collaged cloth and paper. Concepts of family also emerged in the stories of the makers, many of whom created their work in collaboration with their children, exemplifying another kind of interdependence and sustainability of family within the creative process. Meanwhile other artists addressed hopes for sustaining larger cultural and geographical communities. Hana Hong, from Seoul, worked with Korean paper and the Korean flag motif. New York artist Melissa Kraft assembled a leaf from ribbons, threads, papers, and ink, inscribing the materials with words of peace in several different languages. Still, several submissions combined family and communal symbols within ecological contexts. For example, makers from the Department of Economics at the University of Dhaka visually emphasized the natural resource of rivers, while also including materials like jute (the golden fiber of this region), Shapla (pink water lilies, the national flower of Bangladesh), and kashful (the white flowers in bloom on the river side) (Figure 4). Anecdotally, Marsh and I have observed that most of the panels submitted outside of the United States are made from natural, local materials, whereas the materials of most U.S. panels are man-made, purchased, and/or recycled. Such a global artistic exchange brings considerations of materiality and geography to bear.
IFC artists’ individual approaches are pedagogically rich in material as well as message: telling stories, posing problems and questions, and inspiring viewers to action. For instance, during their experience participating in the Gas Station Project, art education students and art teachers with whom I worked in Virginia reported that they became more cognizant of abandoned gas stations in their communities, and informally discussed their questions about the ecological impacts of fuel consumption, as well as the economic and communal implications of run-down plots of land. This exploration also led to related conversations about mountaintop removal in our geographical location. In these ways, we may note the interdisciplinary threads within IFC panels, from embroideries that mathematically chart gas prices, to fabric collages that advocate for animal rights, to leaves addressing deforestation and ecology with a focus on the sciences. While the IFC projects are intentionally open-ended and include many diverse political and ideological responses; the shared message of community and local activism proves a common thread that sustains each work and brings about public dialogue.
Weaving Webs: Sustaining Crafts and Community Arts Digitally

Researchers Adams and Goldbard (2002) have noted that "artist-organizers . . .
collaborate with others to express identity, concerns and aspirations through the arts and
communications media, while building cultural capacity and contributing to social
change” (p. 8). They specify that community may be delineated by geography, common
interest, and identity. In this way, Marsh’s projects through the IFC create particularly
valuable examples of individual and communal social change through socially conscious
and politically symbolic craft techniques of fiber. Though the original function of craft
objects have utilitarian meanings, (such as a potholder or quilt), the purpose of an
individual artist’s panel is often a uniquely personal and/or political expression.

Educators can benefit from such projects within classroom teaching, for they bridge
many academic subjects and uniquely human experiences across geographies and
identities. The IFC project sites and makers are also charted on a digital map image that
shows globalization and connection. Marsh divides her work for the IFC into both virtual
and manual connections of digital documentation and hands-on making (J. Marsh,
personal communication, January 2, 2009), embodying a hybrid craft and activist
practice. Black and Burisch (2010) have asserted that “key features of craftivism such as
the IFC include: participatory projects that value democratic processes, the use of various
cross-disciplinary media, and an ongoing commitment to politicized practices, issues, and
actions” (p. 614). The current IFC Rocket Project (which will wrap a NASA rocket)
particularly emphasizes interdisciplinary connections of science and art through space
exploration, and also evokes the social and cultural history of astronauts and space
exploration in the news, literature, and personal identifications. One prime example is
the collaboration of Alabama fiber artist Celia Dionne with her engineer husband to represent an atom, formed from feathers, acrylics, fabric, and yarn (See http://www.thedreamrocket.com/dream-themes-and-art.)

The IFC projects reach and connect a diverse collective of participants through websites, magazines, and other announcements of organizations such as College Art Association and Fiber Arts Magazine. Marsh’s past two projects and current Dream Rocket Project reveal and celebrate reclaimed and reconfigured craft techniques of the past through digital documentation. Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch (2010) have similarly examined craft within feminist theory and DIY cultures, arguing that "the accessibility of global communication networks have [generated] . . . increased sharing of craft knowledge and skills, and created an overall democratization of crafting practices " (p. 609). Many artists of the IFC wrote to Marsh about the processes of their work, and these descriptions are included online alongside images of each individual piece (See http://www.flickr.com/photos/thedreamrocket/). In reading the artistic descriptions to students and audiences, I am often struck by unexpected materials and processes employed and layered messages. For example, artist Annie Perry submitted a striking panel for the Dream Rocket project that is an iconic, ecologically-positive image of the silhouette of a bicyclist (made from scraps of clothing and accessories worn to shreds from biking, See http://www.flickr.com/photos/thedreamrocket/4408102682/). At the same time, this panel employs Art Deco style of the 1920s and pays tribute to Annie Londonderry, the first woman to ride her bike around the world. Digital social networks open to all facilitate such rich sharing and rare, little-known art historical commentary.
The individual pieces function almost like visual encyclopedia entries selected and crafted by the makers.

Each fiber panel is a separate entity, but perhaps is best described and understood as a unified whole. It is the digital format of the IFC website (http://www.internationalfibercollaborative.com/) that allows us to view the entire process, combining concepts of the individual panels with the total monumental project (especially in the case of YouTube videos of the installations). There are some interesting parallels in terms of unity and craft in related disciplines. Portraiture methodology creators Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) also emphasize that attaining unity in the structure of the research narrative as akin to creating a quilt or weaving, with separate but related pieces forming a cohesive whole. Craft communities like the IFC are on the one hand social groups where artistic sharing, technical conversations, and critiques take place; yet the community interactions may be asynchronous and visitors may even lurk or visit a site without making one’s presence known as in the physical world. In this way, we can also examine layered roles within these contexts, as user, viewer, and maker. These various layers of participation provide a diverse craft community that is understood and experienced in several different ways simultaneously.

The individual pieces composing IFC projects were connected manually on the sites, and also synthesized digitally on websites by Marsh herself. Within this framework, the founding artist takes on a connective role of curator and custodian of the artworks of many individuals. The potential role of the viewer as she/he engages with the IFC’s projects is structurally two-fold. Visitors to the actual sites of the Gas Station,
Tree, or Dream Rocket installation could view the wrapped structures during the brief period of exhibition. On the IFC website, viewers can continuously peruse photos or video of the project itself, which engages an appreciation of the process of installation involved with large-scale artworks. The digital interplay of weblogging, linking, and online commentary allows a range of overlapping and divergent voices to coalesce in digital space.

Krensky and Steffen (2009) have observed, “in addition to having a clear and empowering framework for interaction, a positive community art experience needs a safe space that feels like a non-threatening and lighthearted social setting” (p. 27). This distinction of physical setting was crucial to my contributions as a facilitator and participant in creating collaborative works for the IFC with my students. It was not the classroom time or space per se that lent itself to these endeavors, but rather out-of-school, after-school occasions and settings that were conducive to the kind of informal, knitting-circle-like gatherings of production. Engaging public school classrooms, fiber artists from universities, an increasing number of girl scout troops, library outreach, and more traditional craft groups within online forums allows IFC's many participants to dialogue with one another about how the crafts interplay with contemporary visions of ecology from various perspectives. At the same time, craft itself is becoming increasingly subversive and visionary as an accessible and communally expressive activity.

Conclusions for Craft, Community, and Ecology

Throughout this article, sustainable approaches to material, methods, and messages of craft have been considered. The IFC meaningfully balances the sustainability of craft traditions and media with individual makers’ artistry and identity.
As Starr (2010) has observed of collaborative work in art history, "only now are we learning, partly from dismal experience of life barren of beauty and variety . . . that no man can execute artistically what another man plans, unless the workman's freedom is a part of the plan" (p. 156). In Marsh’s IFC projects, both planning and execution are thoroughly collaborative, from surveying project ideas from previous participants, to communal installation and shared digital documentation. Through the collaborative, democratic, and engaging social networks of blogs, social networking and personal sites, any participating artist in the IFC can be known to a viewer. In fact, the Collaborative itself is often more recognizable than Marsh’s individual name.

Over the past few years, I have learned a great deal about art and education from my observation and collaborations with this interesting group and its many members. Marsh’s Collaborative has provided a space of possibility within my research of digital communities, my personal artistic practice in craft, and my interdisciplinary teaching. My hope as a researcher is to enlarge and open up more dialogues about ecology in craft education with Jennifer Marsh. The IFC creates much-needed artistic and social spaces for many individuals to experience craft, community, and sustainability as personal and collaborative endeavors between artists and their communities. Michele Hardy (2004) claims that "craft is a particular engagement with the world, a particular way of knowing the world" (p. 180). The IFC provides many unique and hopeful examples of relating to the natural world, and reflects ways in which community, conservation, and craft can be imagined and realized.
References


Mandalas and Wellness Wheels with Persons with Severe Mental Illness

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Mandalas and Wellness Wheels with Persons with Severe Mental Illness

Throughout this article, people with severe mental illness will be referred to as just that: people with severe mental illness. This nomenclature is in accordance with person-first language which stresses that a person is not his or her diagnosis, meaning that they are not schizophrenics or bipolars; they are people with an illness (International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services, 2003). Saks, a law professor, in speaking about destigmatizing mental illness, implored the public to remember that “these people may be your spouse, they may be your child, they may be your neighbor, they may be your friend, they may be your co-worker.” Furthermore, she stated that “the humanity we all share is more important than the mental illness we may not” (TEDGlobal, 2012).

Severe Mental Illness

People with severe mental illness (SMI) struggle with a thought disorder (e.g., schizophrenia) or mood disorders (e.g., major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder), and can have other secondary diagnoses such as personality disorders, anxiety disorders, and/or substance abuse disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Along with these mental disorders, people with SMI are at high risk for metabolic syndrome, which includes cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and pulmonary disorders, causing them to be at high risk for early death (Gill, Murphy, Spagnolo, Zechner, & Spagnolo, 2009). According to Hutchinson, Gagne, Bowers, Russinova, Skinar, and Anthony (2006), a conceptual definition of wellness must include the concept of health promotion, not just symptom amelioration.

Persons with SMI are more likely to die between fifteen and twenty years earlier than their peers without severe mental illness (Berren, Hill, Merikile, Gonzalez, & Santiago, 1994,
Swarbrick, Hutchinson, & Gill, 2008). This alarming statistic has served as inspiration for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) 10x10 Wellness Campaign (2010a), which aims to improve the life expectancy of people with mental illness by 10 years in 10 years.

Persons with SMI are also likely to experience psychosocial stressors such as alienation from family members and community, unemployment or underemployment, lack of housing or living in unsafe residences or communities, inadequate finances, legal issues, lack of education, and other issues (APA, 2000). Thought disorders occurring as a symptom of schizophrenia might impact on one’s parenting ability, resulting in alienation from a child. Mood swings occurring as a symptom of bipolar disease might result in poor job performance, leading to termination of employment, loss of living situation, applying for disability, possible medication non-adherence, and so forth. These are just some examples of the ramifications of psychiatric illness on day-to-day living.

**Art Therapy and Impact on Symptoms of Mental Illness**

One method of reducing the effects of these ramifications is artmaking. Persons in recovery from bipolar disorder cite artmaking as a strategy for eliminating or reducing symptoms and increasing self-esteem (Copeland, 2001). Furthermore, Copeland (2001) advocates for art therapists to be included in a client’s support team, along with medical doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, pharmacists, naturopaths, and the like. In interviewing artists with SMI, Spaniol (1998) discovered that creativity was more a component of wellness than of mental illness.

Due to the severity of clients’ problems (mental health or societal), confounded by issues such as war, trauma, brain injury, and addictive substances, “art therapy is needed as much as it
ever has been, if not more” (Slayton, D’Archer, & Kaplan, 2010, p. 108). The benefits of art-making on mood and/or symptoms are numerous and have been studied quantitatively and qualitatively, as cited below. In a randomized controlled trial, art therapy has been found to have a significant impact on reduction of negative symptoms in persons diagnosed with schizophrenia (Richardson, Jones, Evans, Stevens, & Rowe, 2007).

In their study of persons without SMI, Curry and Kasser (2005) found that coloring mandala designs significantly reduced anxiety compared to free form coloring. The anxiety reduction was found to return them to a pre-anxiety state. A replication study of psychology students by van der Vennet and Serice (2012) produced results that supported Curry and Kasser (2005). Students who colored a mandala design for twenty minutes had a greater reduction of anxiety levels than those who colored a plaid design.

A study of art-making after exposure to tragic images revealed that drawing images resulted in increased positive mood compared to copying shapes (De Petrillo and Winner, 2005). Similarly, Bell and Robbins (2007), using a randomized controlled trial, found that participants who created art had significantly greater reductions in negative mood and anxiety compared with a control group of those that only viewed art prints. Sandmire, Gorham, Rankin, and Grimm (2012) conducted a study that resulted in significantly decreased anxiety scores in college age students after artmaking. Art therapy was found to be beneficial in improving social, interpersonal, and task skills for an individual with schizophrenia (Schindler and Pletnick, 2006). Drapeau and Kronish (2007) discussed participants’ diminished suicidal ideation, improved quality of life and other benefits after participating in outpatient art therapy groups. Chandraiah, Ainlay Anand, and Avent (2012) offered weekly art therapy groups in an outpatient psychiatric
setting to clients with a range of psychiatric diagnoses including mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and schizophrenia. The study group demonstrated lower scores in depressive symptoms that were statistically significant. While not all of the participants in the aforementioned studies have SMI, it can be extrapolated that the positive outcomes of art therapy can be applied to participants with SMI.

**Recovery**

In spite of the medical risks and other odds facing persons with SMI (disengagement from family members, social isolation, undereducation, impoverishment, and other issues) recovery from mental illness is achievable, as evidenced in the writings of Deegan who offers the concept that she calls “a conspiracy of hope” (1987, p. 1). North (2003), a practicing psychiatrist who was diagnosed with schizophrenia while in medical school, authored the book, *Welcome Silence*, the title of which refers to the auditory hallucinations being diminished. Recovering individuals also include Swarbrick (2009) who devised the dimensions of wellness and Copeland (Copeland, 2001) who devised Wellness and Recovery Action Plans (WRAP) and has written numerous books on bipolar disorder. Jamison (1995), a professor of psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, wrote *An Unquiet Mind*, a memoir of her struggle with bipolar disorder. Furthermore, Saks (2007) wrote about her treatment and recovery from schizophrenia in *The Center Cannot Hold*. In this autobiographical tome, the law professor progressed from frequent psychotic episodes filled with bizarre behavior and neologisms to writing a model statute against restraints that was published in the *Yale Law Journal*. After hospitalization, she posited that mechanical restraints are neither reassuring nor comforting and should not be used for the convenience of staff.
Recovery rates, as reported by the National Institute of Mental Health Council’s *Health Care Reform for Americans with Severe Mental Illness* (Deegan, 2003) are as follows: panic disorder, 80%; major depressive disorder, 65%; obsessive compulsive disorder, 60%; bipolar disorder, 80%; and schizophrenia, 53-68%. Community mental health providers currently focus less on quantitative measurement of recovery and shift the focus to how the consumer of services defines recovery. The nomenclature of “treatment plan” is being replaced with “individualized recovery plan.” Funding sources encourage community mental health services to interview consumers about their strengths and preferences for community living, their chosen valued role, and whether that role is worker/volunteer, student, family member, faith-based community member, or other identified role. Including such interview questions during an intake session sets the tone for the consumer as driving the treatment rather than being a recipient of services.

Recovery is a concept that should be embraced by clinicians working with clients who have SMI. Educating clients with SMI about the concept of recovery is as important as educating them about psychiatric diagnosis, symptoms, and medications. SAMHSA (2012) website and promotional materials include the working definition of recovery, which is: “A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential” (SAMHSA, 2012, “Definition,” para 2). Contrary to the NIMH statistics (Deegan, 2003), the current definition of recovery focuses on the process, and not an end-result.

Training programs for art therapists must shift focus from coursework that pathologizes clients with mental illness to coursework that embraces their self-directed recovery. Spaniol (2003) described recovery as one of the “necessary conditions” (p. 269) in which therapists must
be competent while working with persons with severe mental illness. “Recovery represents the therapist’s belief that people with mental illness can build lives of meaning and purpose despite their illnesses” (p. 269).

**Wellness**

Many persons with the lived experience of mental illness focus on the concept of wellness in their daily struggles with symptoms and recovery (McNamara, 2009). Currently, dimensions of wellness include: emotional, physical, social, occupational, spiritual, intellectual, and environmental (Swarbrick, 2009). Additionally, financial wellness is a dimension in some program approaches. SAMHSA’s Wellness Initiative (2010b) described the dimensions as follows: emotional or coping with life and creating satisfying relationships; physical or recognizing/improving the need for physical activity, diet, sleep, and nutrition; social or developing a sense of connection, belonging, and well-developed support system; occupational or personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from work or volunteerism. Other dimensions include: spiritual or expanding sense of purpose and meaning in life; intellectual or recognizing creative abilities and expanding knowledge and skills; environmental or occupying pleasant, stimulating environments; and financial or satisfaction with financial situations.

Dimensions of wellness abide by the strengths focus and treatment/rehabilitation, integration, and holistic approach principles of psychiatric rehabilitation (Pratt, Gill, Barrett, Roberts, 2007). Dimensions of wellness also abide by the holistic component of recovery (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

The principles of recovery are:

- Recovery emerges from hope—people can and do overcome challenges, barriers and
obstacles

• Recovery is person-centered—individuals define their own life goals

• Recovery occurs via many pathways—recovery is individualized based on a person’s needs, strengths, preferences, culture, trauma experience, etc.

• Recovery is holistic and includes mind, body, spirit, and community

• Recovery is supported by peers and allies—mutual aid groups assist with recovery vis-à-vis sharing of the lived experience

• Recovery is supported through relationship and social networks—the recovering individual must be surrounded by people who believe in the person’s ability to recover

• Recovery is culturally-based and influenced—culture is key in determining a person’s unique pathway to recovery

• Recovery is supported by addressing trauma—services should be trauma-informed to foster safety and trust

• Recovery involves individual, family, and community strengths and responsibility, all of which serve as resources for the foundation of recovery

• Recovery is based on respect—community, systems, and society must protect the recovering individual’s rights and eliminate discrimination. (SAMHSA, 2012, pp. 4-7)

Case Examples

The concepts of recovery and wellness are reviewed with participants of a particular partial hospitalization program in an urban setting. This message is reinforced in weekly
Recovery groups as well as when the client defines goals on his or her Individualized Recovery Plan (IRP). These methods appeal to verbal and kinesthetic learners, though, and this author wanted to appeal to visual learners. Therefore, tasks of wellness wheels and recovery-themed mandalas were introduced in a Creative Arts group for several sessions. Various art media (oil pastels, markers, colored tissue paper collage) were utilized with the intention of the members of the heterogenous groups to further adopt the message of recovery.

Two art therapy groups are facilitated weekly. One art therapy group is one hour long, and program consumers can select this group voluntarily (as one would pick a college course) or be recommended by their case manager. The other art therapy group is two hours long and is more psychotherapeutic in approach, and consumers are recommended by the treatment team or case manager. In addition to these two art therapy group sessions, art therapy is incorporated into several other weekly groups. For example, art therapy tasks and/or free choice sessions are facilitated during a three-hour life skills unit or co-occurring disorders (mental illness and substance abuse) unit, or one hour women’s issues or boundaries groups. The population is adults over the age of 18 with severe mental illness. Clients attend program for a minimum of two days weekly, and program meets for five hours per day.

Before mandalas were introduced in the one-hour art therapy group session, the group leader facilitated a group discussion about the meaning and significance of circles. The discussion centered on the Sanskrit origin of the word, the symbolism that a circle engenders, and where circles are found. Participants generally contributed answers such as a clock, sun and moon, the circle of life, a compass, hex signs seen in Pennsylvania Dutch culture, and so on. The facilitator added other meanings or symbolism of circles to illustrate the point. These
included that wedding rings (circles) are exchanged to symbolize that the marriage should have no beginning and no end and how the knights of the round table did not sit at a triangular or rectangular table to indicate that every opinion had equal value.

After this discussion, the group leader described the dimensions of wellness (SAMHSA, 2010b) and disseminated handouts with a wellness circle. The dimensions of wellness include: emotional, spiritual, physical, social, occupational, intellectual, environmental, and financial. Discussion ensued about the concept of wellness, the importance of attending to the whole person, and how clients are able to partake of these dimensions in their everyday lives. Then, one 12”x18” piece of drawing paper folded to a 45° angle and labeled with one of the dimensions of wellness was placed at a table or given to one group member (for a total of eight pieces of drawing paper). Group members were given a time allotment of approximately two to three minutes to draw and/or write ideas of how they fulfill that dimension of their lives before they pass the paper to the right for the next person to fill in. This pass occurs eight times until each person has had an opportunity to reflect on and fill in their idea on the sheet. Later, the sheets are assembled in pinwheel fashion, in order to make a whole (See Figure 1).
One detail of the wellness wheel illustrates responses on the Spiritual section (See Figure 2). This group was comprised of approximately sixteen participants. Two individuals worked on a section at a time. This group included individuals with various levels of functioning and diagnoses, including thought disorders, mood disorders, and co-occurring disorders (mental illness and substance abuse). Some details included miscellaneous imagery of meditation, church, references to a client’s sacrament, and the phrases “into your hands,” “listen to music,” and “where did God go?” the latter of which was written by a woman who was referred by Drug Court and was new in recovery.

![Figure 2. Wellness Wheel detail—“Spiritual”](image)

At other times in the group, a sample wheel with eight spokes was drawn on the board or provided on a handout. The center of the wheel was labeled 0, and the outside of the spoke was labeled 10. Each spoke is labeled in increments from 0 to 10. Consumers were then asked to rate how well they do in each aspect of their lives by grading that dimension from 0 for not well to 10 for exceptional. Participants were then asked to connect the dots to see how inflated their
wheel is. The analogy that wellness is like a tire and that ideally, the tire should be fully inflated or else someone can go flat and wear unevenly, like a tire, was discussed.

Another method utilized in this group was for participants to draw mandalas after a discussion about wellness. The group participants were provided with 12”x16” paper on which circles were pre-traced (to save time) and instructed to start at the center—as in to center oneself, and work outward to the edges of the circle, making a design with lines, shapes and colors. They were to cover the entirety of the paper with their chosen art media and to take the entire artmaking period to lend to relaxation and minimize placating behavior.

*Sunflower* was a tissue paper mandala created by a 51 year old single woman diagnosed with bipolar disorder (See Figure 3). She wrote about this piece: “The sunflower came to me instantly for my mandala. (1) It has many bittersweet memories of my mother’s mother—all of 5’1”. Sooo every now and then at least 1 sunflower would provide her shade or out-dwarf her. (2) I see the sunflower as always attempting to reach just a ‘lil bit higher.’ I also see it as the Grand Protector of the Garden for me? I hope the day will come when I can stand tall, straight & proud, have my Light as bright as the sunflowers (outer rim) and continue to protect what life has given me & then some.”

![Figure 3. Mandala—“Sunflower”](image)
Art therapists know that artwork created is autobiographical. This 51 year old Sunflower artist had mobility issues, and she was unable at times to stand straight without the assistance of a walker. She also saw herself as protector, as she took in and nursed abandoned cats and dogs, getting them homes with her peers when they were well. Since her discharge from program, this artist was seen to use her walker minimally, and she has become involved with a human service organization that helps persons displaced by Hurricane Sandy. The recovery principle that can be applied here is that recovery emerges from hope. This woman is overcoming her physiological challenges and helping others recover from the aftermath of the hurricane.

*Seasons* was a tissue paper mandala created by 46 year old single man with schizoaffective disorder (See Figure 4). This client, an avid gardener, remarked that he looks forward to the release of seed catalogs like a child looks forward to Christmas. Each year, he grows the seeds he purchased in disposable cups in his apartment, carrying the seedlings to the program and selling them to staff and clients alike because he had “no room to grow them all”
where he resides. He divided his mandala into four equal quadrants with apple picking with ladder and basket for fall in the upper left quadrant, snow for winter in the upper right, spring blossoms in the lower right, and summer with apples on the tree in the lower left. The recovery principle that can be applied here is that recovery occurs via many pathways. This gentleman is using his strength with his green thumb to assimilate in the recovery community.

*Key* was drawn by a 58 year old woman diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder (See Figure 5). She wrote: “We hold the key. This is the key to what is—Intellectual, Occupational, Spiritual, Social, Emotional, Social, Environmental, Financial. Program is the key that opens my door to these 8 parts of wellness” and “Program—one thing it does is open a locked mind and body to the light.” This artist stated about her drawing that she made a mistake and her attempts to correct it in marker got bigger and resembled a skeleton key which she perfected. This artist was finding healing in this period after the death of her elderly father in her artwork and in the physical act of riding her bicycle to the ice cream shop in the shore community that she calls home. The recovery principle applicable in her case is that recovery involves individual, family (who pulled together when her father was ill and since his death), and community which serve as resources for the foundation of recovery.

*Figure 5. Mandala—“Key”*
Radiation was by a 48 year old single man diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder (See Figure 6). About his piece, he wrote “Radiation is used to express that what happens to one person affects all others, just like the noontime sun warms everyone.” He remarked in groups that he occasionally had a “poison feeling” that ran through his veins and in order to deal with this feeling, he practiced distress tolerance. This man had returned to work full-time after completing training at the local vocational rehabilitation program. He quit the full-time job cleaning bathrooms that he acquired through the vocational rehabilitation center for medical reasons and has since returned to program. He had no regrets about going to voc-rehab, taking the job, leaving it, or returning to program, and commented that attending the program was, for him, his job. His recovery is person-centered. He is defining his life goal currently as not working but attending the program. He is actively involved in Illness Management and Recovery (IMR) groups at the program in order to plot out his future after the program.

Figure 6. Mandala—“Radiation”
Since people learn visually, auditorally, and kinesthetically, the group facilitator had the group participants complete the mandala by getting up from their seats and walking in a clockwise fashion around the table slowly. This gave them the opportunity to view each others’ artwork closer, contemplate mandalas that provided visual interest to them, and internalize the circle that they just created on the page by walking in a circle.

**Conclusion**

Persons who have lived with severe mental illness for a significant portion of their lives can demonstrate iatrogenic effects or learned helplessness, meaning that they can rely on institutions and treatment facility staff to make decisions for them about treatment options, medications, program settings, group schedules, and the like. The mandala and wellness wheel projects are facilitated semi-annually as a reminder to clients to see how far they have come and to metaphorically move forward at least partially through their own means and choices. As wheels are used to transport, these wellness wheels can propel the client forward in their recovery.

Many of the clients who have participated in the art therapy groups have graduated from the partial hospitalization program, which is considered intensive, to a lower level of care. A group of graduates and soon-to-be graduates of this program recently had other pieces of artwork on display at a gallery show, demonstrating that artmaking is just as vital in structured, program time as it is in informal time away from program. Other program graduates attend a local clubhouse, which is a self-support model, and they are charged with facilitating art groups themselves.
Service providers might do well to learn that recovery from mental illness is achievable and to consider consumer preferences and empower consumers to exercise their rights of decision-making. The culture of treating persons with SMI must change from one of learned helplessness to “learned hopefulness” (Spaniol, 2005, p. 86). Working with adults with severe mental illness requires hopefulness, empathy, the ability to engage and inspire, creativity, and more. Being a change agent is not enough. One must be a hope agent as well. The decision-making processes that one utilizes in creating art can be a vehicle for hope in other aspects of life.
References


Alterations: The Work of the Altered Book
Artist Miriam Schaer
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Miriam Schaer’s altered books originate from a profound introspection of the inseparability of the heart, mind and body. She is seductive and meditative, funny and serious. Personal, cultural, aesthetic, and historical critical threads are germane pathways to understand Schaer’s work. Personal perspectives that appear in Schaer’s work include interior dialogues that ebb and flow over time. Her edginess brings attention to temptations that border on the dangerous. The artist’s cultural perspectives note the proclivity of Jewish culture to have a surfeit of questions arising out of every argument. She also feels at times an unsolicited hostility from unknown sources culminating in a feeling of being an outsider. As a book artist, her aesthetic perspectives explore unique aspects of scale, media and construction while responding to misogynic attitudes in contemporary society. Historical perspectives are seen in the Jewish context of much of Schaer’s work aligned with an acumen that often reveals deceptive political actions over the centuries.

Schaer is a Brooklyn-based interdisciplinary multimedia book artist and a Lecturer in the Interdisciplinary Masters of Fine Arts Program in Book and Paper at Columbia College Chicago, Illinois. She is an assimilated, non-observant Jewish woman, with American born parents. However she feels there is something that comes through in her interests and her art that conveys a connection to Judaism. She is affiliated with the Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art based at the Brooklyn Museum and the Center for Books Arts in Manhattan. In 2012 the International Museum of Women online exhibition included her work in an exhibition entitled Mama: Motherhood around the Globe. Coming from the world of fibers, printmaking, and artists books, she has lead the transformation of book arts in feminist introspection, cultural and ethnic sensitivities and allegiances and the use of new materials to best reveal personal and public contradictions seen, felt and heard in the world around her.
Schaer’s altered books are fertile examples of social inquiry, a component of critical pedagogy in art education according to Tavin (2003). Schaer’s experience as a teacher/artist has facilitated an intellectual forum of mutually enlightening discourse with students, colleagues and the public. Her students are part of learning communities, gaining confidence and encouragement from her guidance and from peer assessments in the art-making process.

The following interview was conducted over a three month period (late spring to midsummer 2012) with prepared written questions by the author and written responses by the artist. A subsequent conversation between the author and artist occurred on March 1, 2013. Germane to art educators such as Lai (2009) pursuing critical pedagogy, Miriam Schaer’s work senses injustice in a Roman apologist, in the global marketing of an idealized femininity, in sanitized fairy tales, in fossilized familial roles, and in the power relations among women themselves. The insightful and introspective responses reveal aspects of the artist’s creative process, motivations for her work, and reflective stances on aesthetic decision-making. The concluding section synthesizes her art educational pedagogy that facilitates exploration, dialogue, and critical thinking in the instruction of imagining and constructing interdisciplinary altered books.

The Interview
LF: Your book series entitled, Hands of Josephus (2008-2010), is inspired by the Roman first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus’ Twenty Books of the Jewish Antiquities, The Life of Josephus and The Jewish Wars. How does the narrative embedded in this series specifically raise questions about who owns history or does the hand of the victor always control the truth?
MS: A friend gave me the two-volume set, Flavius Josephus’ Twenty Books of the Jewish Antiquities, The Life of Josephus and The Jewish Wars, but it was about a year before I knew
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what to do with them. Despite 12 years of Hebrew school and Jewish summer camps, I wasn’t at all familiar with Josephus or his writings, so I did some research into his life and learned not only about his contributions, but his service as a Roman apologist. I also learned his writings should not necessarily be taken at face value. For example, he claimed to be a survivor of Masada, which contradicts the no-survivor stories I learned while growing up.

I started *Hands of Josephus* during the G. W. Bush administration, the Bush who told the American public to go shopping after the World Trade Center was bombed. As the wars of retribution against the Taliban and Al Qaeda progressed, it seemed obvious only a portion of the truth was being told, especially regarding Iraq, as the hunt for weapons of mass destruction was revealed to be a lie. I like to think of *Hands of Josephus* as a reminder that history is written by the victors (see Figure 1).

![Hands of Josephus](http://miriamschaer.com)

*Figure 1. Various sizes (from 10.5 x 4 x 15 to 10.5 x 4 x 37) beads, wire hand forms, each page cut into hand shapes, on to flexible beaded spines. The artist used as inspiration a series of books (Josephus, 1999). Copyright 2013 by [http://miriamschaer.com](http://miriamschaer.com).*

LF: Why did you choose girdles, female figure enhancing undergarments, as a skeleton for a series of altered books such as *Foundations of Twentieth Century Thought?* (1992) (see Figure 2).
MS: I came of age when Twiggy was the female ideal. I, however, was much larger and rounder, which made it more difficult than it should have been to come to terms with my changing body, an experience unfortunately not uncommon among young women. While our bodies may bear the marks and scars of our lives, they don’t in most magazines, especially the glossy titles targeting women. In their alternate Stepford-style universe, women are, for the most part, as youthful, glowing, glamorous and flawless as photography and Photoshop can make them. Photography’s increasing sophistication in the 1960s with large magazine pages presenting idealized images of their customers could not help but affect me growing up. To some older women, able to understand the deep contempt its veneer concealed, it formed part of the cultural misogyny whose backlash was the rise of feminism.
The idea of working with girdles occurred to me during my first encounters with bookbinding. In my studies of bookbinding and book structures, I learned about a medieval format, the Girdle Book, worn by monks. The Girdle Book was a traditional codex with a swath of fabric on the top edge (or fore-edge) of the book, allowing it to be tucked into the girdle or waistband of a monk, so his prayers would always be at hand. I immediately thought about using these structures to create narrative sculpture to address female issues. Then I realized I could use the structure to also address ideas not specifically female, but through a feminist perspective.

Later, I began to use other garments as well, children’s clothing and gloves in particular. The scale made sense for book structures, and I could broaden my framework to include other issues, such as family and infertility.

Figure 2. *Foundations of Twentieth Century Thought*, (1992)

Large book formed from a girdle, with a child’s nursery rhyme inside. Images are collaged from classic vintage female underwear advertisements from the 60s and 70s. Copyright 2013 by [http://miriamschaer.com](http://miriamschaer.com).
LF: In your girdle books, *One Heart*, (2004) and *Not with a Club the Heart is Broken*, (2004) you suggest quiet tragedies in people’s lives. These works scratch the surface of the melancholy in many of your pieces…Is there a particularly Jewish feminist melancholy? If so, why? (see Figures 3 and 4).

MS: I created *One Heart* and *Not with a Club the Heart is Broken* for my installation *Six Wives of the Brothers Grimm* at the Brooklyn Public Library. But I hadn’t thought of them as possessing a Jewish perspective. I wanted to freshly adapt some fairy tales for an urban setting. Grimm’s original tales, popularized by Hans Christian Anderson and Charles Perrault, have by now been so sanctified, sanitized and Disneyfied, they have the moral nutritional value of Happy Meals. The original tales had darker themes and intentions, cautioning readers against the dangers and traumas life can bring. The original Little Mermaid, for example, sacrifices her voice to marry the prince, and never gets it back. The tableaux I created for *Six Wives of the Brothers Grimm* use the fables to explore questions that may not have answers, certainly not easy ones. This may well reflect a vital part of Jewish culture, the tendency to examine issues from all sides of every question.
My idea for the *Six Wives of the Brothers Grimm* installation was to use some of Dickinson’s poetry to help shape a new urban folk/fairy tale. Based in Brooklyn, in a crowded urban environment, it’s impossible for me to isolate a New York sensibility from the broader perception of the possibility of danger, even in our relatively sanitized, affluence-oriented times.

Dickinson’s words, written more than 100 years ago, speak to me with the voice of fairy tales. Emily Dickinson’s poems explore personal and romantic tragedies, the ways people experienced their contemporary anxieties. I hand cut all the lettering in *One Heart* and *Not with a Club the Heart is Broken* to better reflect the fragility of the poems’ expressions.

MS: Both works contrast the idea of a smooth, calm exterior with tumultuous interiors revealed when their garments are opened. My idea for *Solitary Confinements: A Family Portrait* was to explore how the traditional roles in which family members are cast clash against family members’ interior dialogs, so often in opposition to their assigned roles within the family hierarchy. As a viewer enters the space of *Solitary Confinements*, (Schaer’s first installation) he/she is greeted by four figures standing at a table set as if for a meal. Each figure is a large artist book that dramatizes the place of each individual in family life. Constructed from actual items of clothing, each book represents one member of a family consisting of a mother, a father and two kids. A brightly colored table, chairs, dishes and flatware suggest elements of a dollhouse blown up to life-size scale. Each family member tells a different story and the torso of each opens to reveal a removable book containing a brief narrative. Some of the narratives are in accord with how the world perceives us; others are not. The books within the books of *Solitary Confinements* are available for visitors to read or examine. Visitors can also sit in the red chairs around the yellow kitchen table, guests and participants, as it were, in the larger family portrait. *Solitary Confinements: A Family Portrait* was based on my own experience with the family dynamic. I am the oldest of four children, raised in a traditional, stable middle class family. My parents were married for 45 years until my father passed away. My mother lived in the house I grew up in for 54 years, until this very summer (2012). Our roles were narrowly arranged with
little latitude for variation. I remember feeling terror at the options open to me at the time, and very unclear about what path to take.

In *Altars of the Invisible*, the interior signifies areas and issues women focus on to maintain the illusion of perfection. This could be interpreted through a Jewish lens in the sense that Jews are expected to maintain a perfect persona, like other so-called model minorities. Be polite, not too loud, not too pushy because any out-of-step behavior will bring negative attention to the Jewish community. This piece is a new millennium altarpiece for today’s women, who are still being told they can have it all if only they will try hard enough. In form, it is a sculptural work in which I have torn apart, restructured, and compartmentalized an actual wedding dress. The front of the garment, transformed into working doors, can open and close to reveal or hide the interior of the dress and its objects. The piece was inspired by *Virgem do Paraiso*, a 13th century Portuguese altarpiece from Evora, Sandy Orgel’s *Linen Closet* installation (1972) and *Maria*, the robot provocateur turned goddess in Fritz Lang’s silent *Metropolis* (1927). In *Altars*, the female body is stylized to form a series of compartments bearing items necessary for a woman to thrive in today’s world. These objects – symbols of love, sex, careers, marriages, households, families and children – serve as every woman’s interior trousseau, and reflect the multiple roles thrust upon women by culture, the media and women themselves. The piece *Altars* expresses to me the interior conflicts and cacophony having it all entails.
Figure 5. *Solitary Confinements: A Family Portrait*, (2001)

*Figure 5.* Mixed media installation at Ceres Project Room at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts. The original installation filled the 15 x 24 foot room. The walls are covered by a series of Xerox and graphite 4 x 6 feet modular paper panels. The bright yellow painted table with accompanying chair is 5 feet long by 36 inches wide and 30 inches high. The dimensions of the figures are as follows (h x w x d in inches, all figures closed). Father: 62 x 23 x 12 (inches); Mother: 45 x 20 x 12 (inches); Sister: 35 x 16 x 8 (inches); Brother: 24 x 10 x 8; Brother in high chair: 56 high (inches). Copyright 2013 by [http://miriamschaer.com](http://miriamschaer.com).

Figure 6. *Altars of the Invisible*, (2005)

*Figure 6.* 67 x 28 x 22 (inches) Large stiffened and transformed acrylic blue wedding dress opening to reveal numerous tableaux of found objects representing the perfection women try to attain in the quest to have it all. Inset Book: 29 x 7.5, Trapezoidal shaped digital book printed on hand-painted Whatman paper, contains text *Adjusting for the Moon* by Stan Pinkwas, produced in an edition of 18 with one Artist’s Proof (AP) about the complexities of relationships using ancient techniques of navigation. Copyright 2013 by [http://miriamschaer.com](http://miriamschaer.com).
LF: What is the spiritual contemplation of Eve in *Eve’s Meditation* (1997) and how does this book’s aesthetic structure interpret the biblical narrative? (see Figure 7).

MS: *Eve’s Meditation* is a wordless, non-traditional book sewn on hyper-packed, beaded cords that curl along the length of its extended spine. Rather than use text, the interior consists of an endless row of apple silhouettes, hand-cut into the pages, forming a tunnel that bores thru the snake’s interior. The book becomes, in effect, the serpent in the Garden of Eden. At 5 inches high by 6 inches wide by 42 inches long, it pushes the boundaries of book structure. For the end papers, I used images of Durer’s *Expulsion from Paradise*. I always felt this was a breakthrough work for me.

![Figure 7. Eve’s Meditation, (1997)](http://miriamschaer.com)

*Figure 7. 5 x 6 x 42 inches. Silk, acrylic, ink, beads, Xerox. Long purple book, with apple shapes cut from the interior to resemble a snake. Copyright 2013 by [http://miriamschaer.com](http://miriamschaer.com).*

*Eve’s Meditation* takes the form of a serpent, a book and a fruit, the shape of which fills the serpent with the spirit of hidden knowledge. The path to knowing, therefore, is through the belly of a snake. More than this, it suggests that knowledge is dangerous and apart, allied with
temptation, acquired in disobedience, and punished by shame: all signs of the outsider, the guest
denied the feast, characteristics of my own relationship to Judaism. Growing up Jewish in
western New York State, among few other Jewish families, my earliest memories are of
apartness. That apartness has always made it difficult for me to accept stories at face value. To
find the story in the story, to tease out the text between the lines, sensing so often that all is in the
not said, I find myself still applying the perspective of an outsider looking in, shaped like *Eve’s
Meditation*, by an external assimilation that leaves me still Jewish to the core.

LF: Please elaborate on your inspiration for *Baby (Not) on Board: The Last Prejudice?* (2010—
2012) (see Figure 8).

MS:  Artist’s Statement:  *Baby (Not) on Board: The Last Prejudice?* (2010-2012) Among the
multitude of biblical citations urging the faithful to do one thing or another, “Be fruitful and
multiply,” Genesis 1:28, is often first in the minds of many in the Jewish community. Some
believe it essential to bear *at least* three children, two to replace the propagating couple and a
third to replace those lost in the Holocaust, an imperative that also serves to resist perceived
threats of assimilation (outside Israel) and ethnic encirclement (within). Women, however, who
cannot or choose not to have children for one reason or another seem to anger or offend a great
many individuals and institution: so many, that hostile attitudes against the childless amount to a
cultural bias, and not only among Jews.

In *Baby (Not) on Board: The Last Prejudice?* I hand-embroidered on several baby
rompers cutting comments made to women who chose to not have children. Some were said to
me, some to other women who told them to me, and others I encountered in my day-to-day
activities. A few examples: “Childless women lack an essential humanity, you still have time, maybe you’ll adopt, and your decision not to have children is a rebellion against God’s will.” This attitude is so commonplace and deep-seated as to keep alive the old question: does a woman have any value other than to produce children? Many, and the Orthodox more than most, would answer in the negative. Baby (Not) on Board is my effort to shine a little light on a hurtful, harmful attitude that is often expressed but rarely discussed.

I had been thinking about childlessness for a while. At a certain point in my life, it became pretty clear that not having children was going to be my path. In this, I have been fortunate to have had support from my husband, my family, and most of my friends. The stories I have heard from other women are often heartbreaking, with their accomplishments dismissed out of hand because they didn’t have children. My mother once said to me, “I think you would have been a fantastic parent, but you chose the right path for you.” You can’t do much better than that.

Figure 8. Baby (Not) on Board: The Last Prejudice? (2010-2012)

Figure 8. Dimensions variable, white baby dresses and rompers, hand embroidered with red thread. Copyright 2013 by http://miriamschaer.com.
Discussion and Conclusions

Miriam Schaer’s work can be understood by its provocations for additional discussion. In the following section, Schaer’s contributions are divided into two sections, further interpretation of her artistic practice and her critical pedagogy focused on social inquiry.

Further Interpretations

In Schaer’s, *Foundation of Twentieth Century Thought?* (1992) using the girdle form for its structure suggests Jewish women are now participants in longing for shapely figures openly enticing men. *Foundation of Twentieth Century Thought?* is a page turning enticement to arouse male desire by looking at women seductively posed in lingerie. The girdle, a figure-enhancing garment, provides a prototype of an appealing feminine shape. Intrinsic to best understanding this piece is an oblique reference to the Talmud’s requirement that a married couple, not only have sex, but have sex in the right frame of mind, so as to have babies but also to strengthen the marital bond, essential for a healthy family. One’s requisite alluring shape, Schaer warns can therefore become an overriding preoccupation sidelining dialectical inquiry by both professional women artists and student artists.

When contemplating Schaer’s *Eve’s Meditation*, (1997) an alternate meditation could be considered. Lilith is an apocryphal character created not from Adam’s rib but equal in stature to Adam who refuses to be ruled by him. The artist says the character of Lilith never entered into her thoughts as she is often thought of as a female demon and whose legacy is complicated and open to interpretations. According to Melvin Konner (2009), she (Lilith) could not be considered the mother of humankind in the patriarchal society of ancient Israel since in any traditional society there are few worse things than childlessness for a woman. Konner (2009) investigates the fear of childlessness as it relates to infertility. Infertility can represent a fear of unregulated
female sexuality since there will be no repercussions of pregnancy. Lilith was condemned to an alternate world but not destroyed, so she became the temptress to all men. The Other is always hypersexual and that difference can be an aphrodisiac. Lilith can however have great currency for art students; many contemporary women do not have the desire for the inequities often embedded in marriage and subsequently child-raising.

In Jewish tradition, tattoos are seen as mutilation and therefore forbidden. In Not with a Club the Heart is Broken, (2004) Schaer has tattooed a garment with the text of an Emily Dickinson poem on the interior back side of the girdle and on the heart-shaped spill of pages coming from the inside back of the girdle structure. The skin of the girdle is festooned with googly eyes pasted on its exterior. One can then imagine the carved and tattoo-like text filled Girdle Books as a taboo charged alteration of the female torso. Many of Schaer’s art education students however are readily festooned in tattoo images. They perhaps conceive of themselves as avatars of the evolution from non-western ancestral to modern global aesthetic perspectives.

Schaer’s work and interpretation of her work prompts humor and sarcasm, and provokes a confrontation with sexual feminist topics. In Schaer’s Artist Statement Baby (Not) on Board; The Last Prejudice? (2010-2012) and in response to the author’s questions, there is a looming often unstated sentiment that Jewish women need to propagate to make up for the 1.5 million children murdered in the Holocaust. This is part of a larger ethos that it is a misdemeanor in deviating from what should be a Jewish woman’s most ardent wish, to be a mother. These two sentiments are also evident according to Wasserman (2011) in the work of Yani Pecanins a Mexican artist born 1957 who created a series of books from dresses her mother had given her that she and her sister had worn as young children. Pecanins’ books were inspired by the diary of Anne Frank and are called Both Sides, Los dos Lados, (1998). She created this artist book from
one of her childhood dresses with photographs, calligraphy, thread, and words from Anne
Frank’s diary. The artist feels the dress showed her as small and fragile the way Anne must have
felt not knowing what will become of you in the future and in the act of discovering yourself.

Several of Schaer’s students have used the human body as an inventive canvas to explore
sexuality. Two students with the most profound interest in depicting gender have been gay men.
One of them revealed how he was feeling pressure to have a child with his partner. The time-
based issue of fertility resonates in a gay man’s world as it does in the lesbian, transgender and
heterosexual world. The other student felt that Schaer’s embroidered baby clothes could be seen
as a colonization of consumerism where people are made to think that they must have children to
buy these precious clothes. Purchasing is then understood as a proactive activity of capitalism.

The power of procreation and the treasure of childhood innocence are timeless themes of
cultural production. The biblical character of Hannah, ultimately the mother of Samuel,
epitomizes the anguished woman who prays and admonishes God for not letting her have
children. The heart rendering cries and childless despair of Hannah can then be heard through
Rosa in Cynthia Ozick’s (1989) short story *The Shawl*. Rosa sees her starving infant, Magda,
floating on the shoulders of an SS soldier moving further and further away from her. The
terrifying image of Magda separated from her mother but seen at a distance thrown in the air
towards an electrified fence etches an unabated image of powerlessness shown through
suspended weightlessness. In Schaer’s embroidered dresses as pages in a book, like Pecanins’
book from dresses, there is a potent resonance of endless abeyance alluding to the vacuum of
childlessness. The shadow of the Holocaust is never far from the allusions engendered by
Schaer’s work.
Strident sentiments embroidered on Schaer’s baby dresses and outfits underscore the difficulty for Jewish women not being able to bear children to live up to public expectations of motherhood. Miriam Schaer has drawn from life experiences, corporeal and psychological, to address issues of equity, justice and compassion within Jewish tradition and culture. She has reconfigured the essence of a book, the stalwart pillar of beloved truths, constructing an aesthetic and pedagogical framework for exploration and interpretation of contemporary feminist ethical, social, and religious issues.

**Critical Pedagogy**

As a professor/teacher in art education and exhibiting artist for decades, Schaer has a highly engaged public as well as a broad age range of students and sister/fellow artists converging in their desire to further understand her interdisciplinary altered books confronting injustice. Narrowing the space/difference between student and teacher, Schaer’s students and others organized an informal salon at Columbia College Chicago provoked by curiosity to further explore interdisciplinary altered books. The salons can be understood as collaborative consultations moving from the abstract to the concrete. One of the ironical postures for Schaer, when participating in the salon, is to discuss her completed works of art while intellectually and aesthetically being deeply entrenched in the creative art-making process. She reflectively says that a teacher should assume nothing when teaching, recognize that inspiration comes from a broad range of experiences, and understand that there is no one way to reach all students. Schaer has seen students of all ages rise above their circumstances confronting personal and cultural obstacles to engage in meaningful artistic practice. Disruption often becomes a catalyst for creativity.
As an educator, Schaer feels she is a facilitator for students coming from diverse aesthetic and personal histories. When introducing a new project, she breaks down the project into discrete sections to focus her students. She asks students to conceptualize their work, to confront what will be the most difficult part, to imagine influences that perhaps will engender the work, and to eliminate any hierarchical ideas that could block the realization of the work. Miriam Schaer does not teach by using her own work as exemplars but employs questioning strategies as scaffolding for students to build upon for their own practice. For some of Schaer’s students, silence instead of dialogue needs to be transformed so that this often telltale signal of despair can be harnessed as a catalyst for art-making.

Critical aesthetic turns can be seen through a generational lens in Schaer’s students who have come from families who built accordions/musical instruments, electrical circuit breaker boxes, and/or were contractors and roofers. Miriam Schaer, in discussion with her students, notes the perhaps conceptualizing a past of artifact making was a precursor to their own work. Schaer acts as a conduit for student musings while encouraging students’ inventive infusions. She is selfless in her open conversation with students. Some of her current students’ work includes audio and visual technology into the making of books. The artist readily acknowledges that she does not know all there is to know about many topics. However, she is quick to put students in touch with information and appropriate people to gain an expertise.

Visual art students are often challenged in writing artists statements. In one of her art as practice classes, Schaer has students engage in a series of pair, listen, and write activities. By having students talk about their aesthetics, social inquiry and/or art-making ideas, not only do they hear their own voice but also another student hears these thoughts. Having the listening student write down/scribe what the student has said and then having it read back to the speaker
adds gravity to the thought. When this activity is done two or three times over time with different pairs of students, the repeated words of what another student heard helps solidify the speaking artist’s conception of what he/she is trying to accomplish. In this activity of pairing, students speak, listen, and write thereby becoming involved in active listening and purposeful talk. At first, students are resistant to be scribes but soon see the import of the interactive pedagogical activity.

Reflecting on her critical pedagogy employed in the classroom, Schaer has described her feeling of Otherness as both feminist and culture carrier. In this context, Miriam Schaer has said, as noted earlier, she finds inspiration for her work in the text between the lines. Critical inquiry according to Garber (2004) involves digging into subtexts and underlying meanings. By tackling issues of power relations within families, professions, and politics, she participates in public life, a basic premise of democracy.

Humor and heartbreak embolden the edginess of Miriam Schaer’s altered books. The unique scale, media and construction of the artist’s altered books incite a surfeit of questions. Her interactive pedagogy of critical thinking, collaborative consultations, encouragement of technological invention, and deep interest in social inquiry nurtures feminist introspection and addresses cultural and ethnic sensitivities. Schaer’s aesthetic and educational approaches reflect the diversity of contemporary artistic practice and teaching of interdisciplinary books arts.
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Fragments of what? Postmodernism, Hybridity and Collage

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Introduction

Postmodernists have privileged the socially constructed nature of identity that underpins postmodern theory to challenge modernist concepts of identity based on notions of fixed cultural essences. They have also deployed hybridity (outcome of mixture of types or species) and bricolage/collage (recombined disparately appropriated elements) as key strategies against ethnocentrism (Kapchan & Strong, 1999; Young, 1995). While these arguments have done much to undermine centrist biases that privilege cultural hegemony on the basis of abstract or “false universals” (Fox, 1987, p. 1), subtle forms of ethnocentrism persists in art and cultural discourse, indicating an unresolved anxiety about the integrity and instability of identity. Several scholars (Gilroy, 1993; Chakrabarty, 2002; Mitter, 2008; Shin, 2010 among them) have drawn attention to the asymmetries and inequalities that such centrism continues to underwrite.

Because the concepts of hybridity and collage/assemblage open windows on ideas of culture and being as dynamic rather than static, they constitute pertinent focal points for illuminating the complexity and unstable nature of culture and identity. I propose to reconceive the concepts of hybridity and collage, based on insights from critical realism (Bhaskar, 2010, Archer, 2000) and Indian philosophy (Ramanujan, 1989), and from this vantage point interrogate the subtle persistence of ethnocentrism in art education especially in higher levels of art education discourse.

*Hybrid* refers to mixing species; it entered scientific vocabulary in 19th century biology and botany. In 19th century ethnology it acquired the racial anxieties that characterize it (Young, 1995). Bhabha (1994) is perhaps most responsible for making hybridity a key term in cultural discourse. Hybridity is conceptually related to syncretism (Kapchan & Strong, 1999; Young, 1995). According to Kapchan and Strong (1999) the term syncretism originated with Melville
Herskovits to analyze new world cultural forms such as Vodoun. “The overall effect of Herskovits’s theory,” they state, “is to highlight adaptation, assimilation, and the reconciliation of cultures, rather than their plural coexistence” (p. 240). Syncretism attempts to account for identity’s emergent integrity and coherence as opposed to its heterogeneous origins. As a concept of cultural process it tends to mute the political struggles involved identity creation. As such syncretism does not problematize the political/nationalist claims of cultural purity and exclusionary boundaries in the way hybridity does, which is what makes the latter is a sign of transgression/tranformation.

On the other hand collage/assemblage, emerged as an art practice in the early 20th century. It is unmistakably artificial: a practice of reemergence from ruins/fragments, yet as art, the apogee of culture. My argument will counter-pose the biological and social determination of hybridity and self-determination implicit in collage/assemblage, will be counter-posed respectively against what Margaret Archer (2000) called “Modernity’s Man,” and “Society’s Being.” In the term Modernity’s Man Archer implied a critique of both modernism’s masculine and rational biases. In Society’s Being she implied a critique of postmodernism’s emphasis on the constructed fragmented nature of identity (pp. 3-4). The terms also point to two dominant explanations in social theory, one (Modernity’s Man) that traces the complexities of society back to individual actions, and the other (Society’s Being, postmodernism’s view) regards the individual person to be socially constructed. The latter tends to elide the concept of self with the sense of self, and sees us as

... purely cultural artefacts [which] is to neglect the vital significance of our embodied practice in the world. This is crucial because it is these practices which are held ... to be the non-linguistic source of the sense of self. (Archer, 2000, p. 4)
Disparity between postmodern discourse (its stated interest in cultural plurality) and practice (persistent ethnocentrism) is evidence of continuing anxiety over hybridity and identity’s integrity. In what follows I will expose this anxiety as integral to the persistence of ethnocentrism, trace its genealogy, and propose solutions to its tensions using the dialectic of hybridity and collage/assemblage.

**Discrepancy, Saying and Doing**

Partha Mitter (2008) lamented the fact that a recent text, *Art Since 1900: Modernism Antimodernism Postmodernism* (Foster, Krauss, Bois, Buchloh, Joselit, 2004), purporting to be global in perspective, marginalized non-Western art and suppressed Western modernism’s hybridity. Mitter acknowledged the book’s importance as a “valuable document to the last century’s insider-outsider politics of modernism from the Euro-American perspective” (p. 531). He continued, “I point this out only because the authors in fact distance themselves from the hollow universalism of the colonial period” (p. 531). Nevertheless, Mitter was forced to conclude “the book follows a well-trodden path that equates Western norms with global values, having the unintended consequence of excluding the art of the periphery” (p. 531).

Ryan Shin (2010) observed a similar marginalization of non-Western cultures in visual culture discourse in art education. “My viewpoint and experience as a member of a minority group in this society,” Shin stated, “has led me to question whether the current visual culture discourse has perhaps neglected the visual culture of minority ethnic groups” (p. 34). Others, he stated, share his concern, referring to Elkins (2003), who argued “visual culture studies . . . tend to privilege Western visual culture” (p. 34), and Noble (2004) who, Shin stated, “worries that Eurocentric thinking and paradigms dominate the discussion and discourse of visual culture” (p. 34). Inclusion is important to Shin and Mitter. However, of greater concern to them is the
evident failure to recognize the equal agency of non-Western ethnicities as modern and postmodern subjects.

Exclusion of others is not the only concern for Mitter, the crucial issue is the unequal value given to hybrid transgressive art forms of Western and non-Western artists. To illustrate the point Mitter (2008) referred first to the exhibition "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art, held in New York in 1985 and “the critical interventions surrounding the exhibition” (p. 534). Second, he focused on what he calls “the Picasso manqué syndrome” (p. 534). The latter was illustrated by a critique of Gaganendranath Tagore’s Cubistic paintings by W. G. Archer. Archer characterized Gaganendranath’s work as “weak as art” and “un-Indian” (Archer cited in Mitter, 2008, p. 535). “Unlike Picasso,” Mitter stated, “whose use of African sources did not compromise his integrity as a European artist, Gaganendranath's use of Cubism resulted in the loss of self as an Indian (Mitter 2008, p. 537). For both colonizer and colonized what is at stake is degradation and loss of self-integrity on the one hand, and on the other, continuity, expansion, and radical transformation. In my opinion these are profound sources of anxiety and the reason for the persistence of ethnocentrism.

But was Picasso’s integrity as a European artist never compromised by his interaction with African culture? That was what was at risk in the Primitivism show. As the very crux of MOMAism, analytic cubism in particular must be protected from outside influence; thus tribal art is assigned "but a residual role" in it. What, apart from the institutional need to secure an official history, is the motive behind this desired

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¹ Gaganendranath Tagore 1867-1938: Modern Bengali artist, painter and cartoonist, Nephew of Rabindranath Tagore. As a painter he explored the Cubist idiom.
supercession[sic]? What but the formation of a cultural identity, incumbent as this is on
the simultaneous need and disavowal of the other? (Foster, 1985, p. 56)

The so-called residual role was designated as the Negro period (Barr, 1966). In a cynical
reversal of reality, Picasso’s manifest failure to understand the collage/assemblage
configurational principles embodied in African art objects marked the limit of African
contributions to his understanding of their method, and as co-producers of Cubism. By a process
of reducing form to fragments Picasso arrived at an important “primitive” realization: the
constructed provisional nature of identity and the power of schematic images. Images, when
they appear in Analytical Cubism, emerge from the configuration of fragmented tones and
tendencial lines.

Schematic images stand significantly between two other visual art concepts. First: non-
representational examples of Analytical Cubism in my opinion signal the important concept of
non-being or absence (see Krauss, 1983). In its Analytical phase Cubism was more an analysis
of how images become perceptible, than a question of style. Second is illusionism, which
presents images as unproblematic: cat, car, coat, our familiar recognizable world. Western visual
art traditions generally presumed that illusionism was necessary to represent reality and ideas
(Halliwell, 2002), until Cubism overturned mimeticist assumptions.

It would have been embarrassing, however, to concede that so-called primitive artists
effectively comprehended the provisional collage/assemblage nature of identity without the
detour through Analytical Cubism. Foster (1985) recognized this embarrassment, and that
MOMA’s primitivist discourse was elaborated to preserve and elevate the Western process of
“abstraction achieved by analytic reduction within the patriarchal line: Manet . . . Cezanne . . .
Picasso: of the Western tradition” (p. 58). Ultimately, if Western cultural integrity, continuity,
and hegemony over African art was to be preserved, “transgression without [must be] rendered as dialectic within, the official model of modern art--a multiplicity of breaks reinscribed (by the artist/critic) into a synthetic line of formal innovations--is [thereby] preserved” (Foster, 1985, p. 58). What Foster described is the process by which transgressive illegitimate hybridity is translated into national purity.

On the other hand, an example of how nationalism insinuates itself into the margin’s defense of its integrity is Mitter’s identification of W. G. Archer’s denigration of Gaganendranath Tagore’s work as a threat to modern Indian integrity, and Mitter’s obligation to rebut it. Archer, Mitter stated, “follows Roger Fry's notion of ‘significant form’ as the antithesis to weak ‘feminine’ anecdotal painting. In addition, the word ‘power’ in the passage expresses his primitivist longing for the ‘masculine’ formalism and virile geometry of Indian tribal art” (p. 537). To counter Archer’s formalism Mitter employed the same strategy as MOMA, appealing to cross-cultural formal affinities and traditional legacies. In so doing he betrayed ambivalence about the power of form, (Western) formalism, and affinity, which remains unresolved in his essay. Mitter (2008) stated,

To take an example pertinent to my argument, the motivation behind the Western Expressionists Franz Marc, Lyonel Feininger, or Georg Grosz and the Indian artist Gaganendranath was analogous: objects could be distorted and fragmented to produce dazzling patterns. Although they shared this formal language, the specific cultural contexts of the Central European artists and Gaganendranath were as different as their artistic aims, not to mention their different artistic agendas. (p. 535-536)

Gaganendranath’s different agenda supposedly explains and indigenizes his Cubism. However, one could argue that, even given their contextual differences, all four artists show an
imperfect grasp of Analytical Cubist principles, or/and comparatively less effective use of Cubist principles, or the aspects borrowed from Cubism. Such a diagnosis is consistent with Mitter’s observation that “the Indian artist [Gaganendranath] epitomizes the decontextualizing tendency of the age, shared as much by artists in the center as in the periphery: styles past and present could be appropriated to generate strikingly new meanings” (pp. 536-537).

Helped by content-form confusion, Mitter’s nationalist anxiety, in the guise of contextual continuity, insinuates itself into a global transnational dialogue to block what could be sound diagnoses of a work’s internal constitution. Mitter’s (2008) observation below therefore applies to Archer as much as to Gaganendranath.

The overwhelming reason for Archer’s dismissive evaluation of Gaganendranath’s "Cubist" works lay in the Indian painter's use of the visual language of a culture to which he did not belong. In other words, Gaganendranath suffered a loss of self in becoming a colonial hybrid. (P. 537)

Just as Gaganendranath’s non-native incomprehension of a supposedly foreign visual language makes his hybridity deficient and degrading, Archer’s inadequate hybridity, his ostensibly insufficient comprehension of Indian art traditions, similarly renders him a flawed non-native critic.

How does nationalism insinuate itself into theory and practice of art history and criticism? Our biases are partly responsible, but the form/structure of theoretical practice can predispose interpretations towards nationalism. In postmodernism content is poured into form from socio-cultural context, a consequence of postmodernism’s social constructivist view. Though postmodern contextualism is polarized against modernist formalism, they are symptomatic of a deep dualism that afflicts Western aesthetics. By contrast so-called primitive
animists/pantheists assume forms are alive with or embody life content (see Mitchell, 2013; Pinney, 2001). ² When did modern society develop this content/form split and translation from fetish/icon to fine art?

The Fine Art Fetish/Icon Divorce

The Cubist encounter in some sense recapitulates an older encounter of Africans, Europeans, and so-called Orientals (Semites). But the hybridity resulting from this ancient encounter was intolerable to 19th and 20th century European imperialism, because historical evidence could imply Egyptians and Phoenicians had colonized Ancient Greece (Bernal, 1987). By the early 20th century modern Aryanism had turned ancient Afro-Egyptians into so-called Orientals: the intent being to distance black Africans from civilization (Diop, 1955/1974; Bernal, 1987). Cubism revisited unresolved issues of this ancient encounter, about images/objects as (a) living agents—the primitivist/animist-pantheist fetish/icon view; (b) idols—the iconoclastic-aniconic view, which denies any innate intelligence or power to objects; (c) the Western mimeticist aesthetic view distinguishing representational-expressive art-objects from (d) non-representational non-art functional objects (see Halliwell, 2002; Tatarkiewicz, 1980).³

A central objective of E. H. Gombrich’s Art and Illusion (2000) is to credit the ancient Greeks with the invention of art as “we” (i.e. Europeans) know it, and to mark the critical break

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² These are two authors, among many, who revisit the notion that objects are alive.

³ Halliwell (p. 7-9) disputes Paul Kristeller’s thesis that the fine art distinction is an 18th century invention. Halliwell persuasively argues that the distinction between the ‘representational’ or fine arts and the functional arts/crafts goes back to classical Greece, and was an enduring part of mimeticism. Tatarkiewicz’s (p. 276) earlier text supports Halliwell’s position. Also, functional objects are ‘non-representational’ but for the fact of recognition and labeling, which makes them deceptively familiar and prosaically everyday, otherwise they would be regarded as ‘abstract,’ ‘non-representation,’ and ‘art.’
from Afro Oriental-Egyptian pre-art. “It may sound paradoxical to say that the Greeks invented art,” Gombrich stated, “but from this point of view, it is a sober statement of fact” (p.141). Here Gombrich’s Eurocentrism, his hidden anxiety about Western traditions’ hybridity, asserts itself to make sure illusionism and art were invented by Europeans, culturally advancing beyond ‘Orientals’ and Afro Egyptians. According to Gombrich the latter were trapped in ‘pre-art’ conventions of representation that the classical Greeks overcame by inventing illusionism.

Picture making in the ancient Egyptian context had an affinity to picture writing, which, according to Gombrich, inclined Egyptian pre-artists to rely on schematic formulas to represent things. By contrast, the classical Greeks quickly achieved illusionism and art by inventing the process of matching traditional schema to observed objective reality, thereby transforming the pre-art practice of merely reproducing conventions into the art practice of constantly revising and improving representational schema to accurately match objective reality. The catalyst for this Greek revolution occurred “when classical sculptors and painters discovered the character of Greek narration,” which “set up a chain reaction which transformed the methods of representing the human body—and indeed more than that” (Gombrich 2000, p. 129). The “more than that” being inventing/ liberating art from Afro Oriental Egyptian pre-art, transforming the latter into the problem solving activity, that is “art” (Gombrich, 2000, p. 141).

Gombrich’s subtle analysis is driven by his conviction that Western and Oriental civilizations are different and unequally developed.

Perhaps it was not only as the maker of “substitute heads” and other dwellings for the “ka” that the Egyptian sculptor could lay claim to the appellation of “one who keeps alive.” His images weave a spell to enforce eternity. Not our idea of eternity, to be sure,
which stretches backward and forward in an infinite extension, but rather the ancient
conception of recurrent time. (Gombrich, 2000, p. 125)

Gombrich conjured African-Egyptian culture into pre-art, pre-science and pre-aesthetic states
through allusions to magic and his own magical word “perhaps.”

Göran Sörbom (1994) proposed that the source of the Greek art revolution lay in the
difference between new Greek and old Egyptian conceptions of the soul, body and life. Sörbom
developed his theory based on reservations Gombrich expressed about his emphasis on narrative
and pictorial art as the catalysts of the revolution. Gombrich felt he might have underestimated
the impact of the lifelike quality of figure sculpture. Using this hint Sörbom (1994) pivoted his
explanation around the change in the concept of psyche/soul.

It is not until the fifth century that we find the words “psyché” (soul) and “sóma” (body)
coupled together. Actually in Homeric Greek “sóma” always meant “corpse,” i.e. dead
body. The word “psyche,” which for the archaic Greeks connoted the free soul, came in
the classical period to connote the soul as a unitary whole. A number of organs and
functions of the additive sum understood as a human being in the archaic period, were put
together in the classical period into one thing called “psyche” . . . . In this way
eschatological, physical, and psychological functions were moulded into a unit which in
turn was coupled to the human body. But it was not only so, that the word “psyché” was
used to denote a given sum of functions. These functions were seen as having a certain
necessary relation to one another and to the body. (Sörbom, 1994, pp. 73-74)

Sörbom’s thesis implies that illusionism matches a new organic concept of reality. Just as in
this new relationship the body is dead without the soul and life simply ceases, so too form without
content is dead, and without form content cannot exist.
In contrast, Egyptians, and archaic Greeks, conceived the body “as a composite sum of parts” (Sörbom, 1994, p. 70). The Egyptian concept of the body/objects is echoed in the principles of hieroglyphic writing, which similarly regard parts as wholes and vice versa. Hieroglyphic process combines disparate pictographic part/wholes together to make new wholes, new meanings; indeed, by another mechanical act—adding sound values—to spell words.

“Something similar can be seen in Egyptian love poems,” Sörbom stated, “the beloved is praised for one part lovelier than the other, the result is a sum total of lovely parts” (p. 70). Sörbom’s implication that Egyptians’ aggregative aesthetics is primitive would be true, but for the fact that metonymy and metaphor involve a dialectic of sameness and difference, being/not-being, that translates the literal to the conceptual, which, when aggregated and syncopated, yields the exponential insight-full aesthetic experience, as Shakespeare well knew.

**STEPHANO**

This is some monster of the isle with four legs, who

hath got, as I take it, an ague. Where the devil

should he learn our language?

*(The tempest, Act 2 Scene 2)*

Four legs might be two men or an animal; it might even imply man-squared or square rooted. Given that in *The Tempest* the monster is Trinculo *and* Caliban, simultaneously friend *and* foe, self *and* other, the hybrid image might even imply duplicity; but whose, Prospero’s? To regard Afro-Oriental additive process as archaic and primitive is to misunderstand and disavow the Western past, its inside and outside, as alien and inferior to the new Greco-Western self. There were undoubtedly problems in ancient Egypt’s legacy, but the legacy of mimetic aesthetics and
art is equally problematic, if not more. The civilized/primitive dichotomy works within an illusion that Prospero, or Western civilization, is not and never was Caliban, a bad savage hybrid.

Gombrich (2000) traced the expressiveness that emerged in Greek art to Egyptian models. He specifically connects a vase painting depicting Heracles slaying Busiris and his followers to “Egyptian renderings of some victorious campaign” (p. 135). A photograph of a relief of Seti I attacking a town of Canaan exemplifies the Egyptian model (p. 135). Gombrich and Sörbom’s theories, though insightful, confuse issues of aesthetic choice with issues of aesthetic development. Nevertheless, we can appreciate illusionism as a Greek revolution with global significance, recognizing the shifting contextual nature of the latter.

The new expressive organic concept of body and soul, combined with older Pythagorean concepts of beauty based on ideal proportions, flourished under the new mimetic aesthetics and art. They would remain in place in Mediterranean European cultures until Christian traditions, deeply ambivalent about images, displaced the Greek/representational tradition (Belting, 1994). The schematic and iconic mode of visual culture that prevailed, effectively Christendom’s cult of saints, was an uneasy compromise between iconolatry and iconoclasm, negotiated by Scholastic theology (Belting, 1994). Following several hundred years of this pattern in Medieval Europe, the Renaissance propelled art toward artist-expressive freedom, and propelled the revived concept of expressive freedom toward global domination via enlightened colonialism, but not before the Reformation had pushed art from the religious deeper into the secular sphere. “The image,” stated Belting (1994),

. . . henceforth produced according to the rules of art and deciphered in terms of them, presents itself to the beholder as an object of reflection [not worship]. Form and content renounce their unmediated meanings in favor of the mediated meanings of aesthetic
experience and concealed argumentation . . . . The interplay of perception and interpretation that is pursued in the visual arts, as in literature, demands the expert or connoisseur, someone who knows the rules of the game. (p. 16)

**Rules, Universality, Form, Content**

What rules and whose game it is are central questions of postmodernism. In that context, to ask where is art’s freedom if mediation simply shifts from sacred to secular authorities, from authorized icons, to authorized artists and their ideas, opens the game beyond its European provenance: or, put another way, it makes the provincial/fragment status of the Western art concept self-evident. The Western paradigm’s asymmetries become self-evident: more males than females represented; few artists-of-color; no functional objects; identical objects packaged as precious or plebian. Belting (2003), however, is uncomfortable with expansion of the Western art historical paradigm. He recognizes that “the archive [the original—Western—art history] cannot absorb everything without fundamental change to its content and significance” (p. 65). But recognition that authority has to be shared and distributed seems to induce either epiphany or trauma. Referring to the *Primitivism Show* Belting (2003) authoritatively stated, “what is true of primitivism was by no means true of the ‘ primitives’ themselves, whom we expected to find outside the boundary of any [italics added] art history” (p. 66). In other words, Western art as a fragment of a more global art concept is unthinkable. Once again the anxiety about cultural identity asserts itself.

Like Belting, Arthur Efland (2005) is also anxious about art, though not so much with the expansion of the art archive. Efland’s concern is over hierarchy in art and culture: specifically with visual culture theory’s “leveling tendency—the belief that there is no pre-established hierarchy that accords privilege standing to certain objects such as ‘fine art’” (p. 37). Efland
distinguishes popular culture from fine art, based on their different social purposes. Popular culture works with readily accessible symbolic codes and familiar aesthetic experiences involving pleasure, entertainment, and escape. In contrast, he stated, fine arts

. . . have different purposes and are less accessible. . . . [They are] distinguished by a self-conscious attention to their own artistic language. Their claim to function as art derives from a particular concern with the ways these materials are patterned and organized to arouse perceptual attention and thus work as objects of art. . . . Many works of fine art originate in other times and places and thus may require knowledge of less familiar contexts for their understanding. (Efland 2004, pp. 244-245)

By Efland’s account, visual culture advocates, by an emphasis on demystification, reduce aesthetic experience to the pleasurable mask that subtly manipulative ideology uses to seduce viewers to accept established hierarchies as natural. Efland (2004, 2005), like visual culture theorists and social reconstructionists, accepts institutional theory’s concept of “the artworld” (Danto, 1997), and seems prepared to accept a plurality of artworlds (Erickson & Young, 2002). However, he insists hierarchy is important. In his opinion modernist formalism facilitates ideological seduction, but Efland (2004) blames this on a narrowing and misunderstanding of Kantian aesthetics.

The 18th-century concept of disinterestedness provided the foundation for 20th-century formalism, and was mistakenly understood to mean without any interest in the content of the world. . . . Modernist formalism gave due consideration only to the objective half of the theory, to the perceptual organization of art. In its disavowal of content as being significant in the study of art, it attempted to free art from its social matrix. What we
need now is a post-formal aesthetic, one that restores content to art while maintaining sufficient autonomy to give play to the imagination. (Efland, 2004, p. 248)

Efland recommends restoration of content to form with its original Kantian conception of the aesthetic experience and disinterestedness. He relies exclusively on modernist so-called misunderstanding of Kantian aesthetics to dispel notions that artworld hierarchies, and art objects’ power, to paraphrase Duncum (2002, p.13), are simply an effect or reflection of social relations.

In the account cited above, Efland assumes that Kantian aesthetics has an unproblematic relation to modernism, colonialism and hybridity. Like Kant, Efland (2004) believes that “while the moral is separate from the aesthetic, the category of the aesthetic can present moral issues evident in cognition in forms accessible to the senses” (p. 248). In Kant’s psychological scheme the senses are a lower class facility unable to grasp abstract concepts. In the rational person, the intelligent feelings of perception are split into empirical (rational) facts and subjective values (emotional qualities, feelings). The latter become associated with aesthetic experience, pleasure, and deception, and the former with ideas, critique and ideology. “Unlike rational judgments,” Efland continues, “images help to create a consensus of feeling and moral action leading to the sense of community of individuals who act in freedom, uncoerced by politics” (p. 248). This may be true, but histories of imperialism and postcolonial nationalisms have shown how easy it is to rationalize a community’s inhumane social practices. The institutionalized autonomy of the arts, like a sequestered conscience, functions to confirm to that community its illusions of innate goodness and to hide its narcissism. Here fine art is fetish in the derogatory sense. By contrast, animist/pantheist concepts, which allow so-called primitives to regard objects as being alive, offer a way out of the legacies of deep inhibiting dualisms of modernism and postmodernism.
Indeed, such ‘primitive’ attitudes speak to a need to transcend nationalism/ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism.

**Toward a Global Vision of Art Practice**

I believe that subtle nationalism and cultural myopia remain the main obstacles to a broader transcultural basis for art education. Given the tendencies to disavow hybridity, interdependence and co-origination,\(^4\) and the deep insecurity about identity, Mitter’s (2008) “Picasso manqué syndrome” (p.537), in which relationships are conceivable only in dominant/subordinate original/copy terms, will continue to subtly inhabit higher art education practice, if not its discourse. To critique and seek a way out of the syndrome Martin Powers (1995) employed the example of Western and Chinese traditions; both of which give high value to the *touch* of the individual artist. To presume these tendencies are the property of one culture from which other instances are derived distorts historical reality. “What this means,” Powers (1995) said, “is that the historical and conceptual parameters of the phenomenon in question cannot be adequately framed within the limits of just one cultural tradition. Rather they must be developed dialectically in comparison with related phenomena in other cultures, when such can be found” (p. 387). This approach works with his model of culture as *discourse*. Its aim is to overcome cultural ego, which skews records in favor of a particular culture.

It frees the historian from the essentialist premises of a term such as ‘belief.’ Unlike beliefs, elements of a discourse need not be intrinsic to any particular person or group,

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\(^4\) Interdependent co-origination, or dependent co-origination is a Buddhist concept or approach to reality. It affirms the interdependence of all life for the emergence of their individual identities (Santina, 2002). Postmodernism shares with it the realization of the constructed interdependent nature of identity.
but may be freely appropriated by competing groups for different ends. (Powers, 1995, p. 385)

“Discourse” is a good model of cultural interaction; it captures the constructed and fluid nature of identity. However, the need to abstract intrinsic personalized beliefs into discursive disinterested elements problematically treats the cultural art/object/image as a husk in order for transcultural work to be done. In spite of the utility of Powers’s discourse model, its drawbacks are exclusion of subjective emotional investment in cultural forms and retention of content/form dualism, which diminishes the intrinsic power of things.

A source of the devitalizing duality in postmodernism is the semiotic confusion of visual indexes/art-objects with the arbitrariness of verbal signs, and/or their reduction to cultural symbolism. The semiotic confusion is evidence of a failure to observe what Bhaskar (2010) calls referential detachment, defined as “the detachment of the act of reference from that to which it refers . . . a condition of any intelligible discourse at all” (p. 257). I will use the quotation below from A. K. Ramanujan’s (1989) insightful essay Is there an Indian Way of Thinking? to help unravel the confusion. He states,

One might say, from this [metonymic] point of view, that Hindu ritual (e.g. vedic sacrifice, or coronation; see Inden [1978]) converts symbols, arbitrary signs (e.g. sacrificial horse), into icons where the signifier (the horse) is like what it signifies (the universe) and finally into indexes, where the signifier is part of what it signifies: the horse is the universe is Prajapati⁵, so that in sacrificing and partaking of it one is sacrificing and partaking of the universe itself. (p. 50)

⁵ Prajapati: Sanskrit, Lord of creatures, Encyclopedia Britannica.
I would make two changes to Ramanujan’s description in order to revise the notion of form back to its pre-classical Greek non-dualistic understandings. First: reverse the order to be in keeping with visual/real experience, starting from the horse as percept-index—part of the universe as the universe; then as icon—something like (and not-like) the universe; and as a vital symbol (among others) of the universe. Second: seen in this order the horse, as symbolic image, is understood as culturally vitally necessary, *not arbitrary*. If it were arbitrary it would have no ritual efficacy as an index, subverting thereby any power it has as an icon and symbol, thereby cancelling all socio-cultural contextual reasons for having it. The horse (art form) is intentionally chosen for qualities it has that make it appropriate for selection as *the* sacrificial object.\(^6\)

**Revising rules and rituals**

Ramanujan (1989) saw the modern West predominantly as context-free and the East as context-sensitive dialectically related societies. He pointed out that each inhabits the other as subordinate tendencies, and as movements seeking to correct the other’s overwhelming power. Thus far their contention within art education has kept hybridity in the margins of theory-practice. Yet socio-cultural transformation is effected through hybrids. The challenge is how to connect the engine of the context-free/context-sensitive dialectic to art education theory-practice.

The first move has been to reconnect Ramanujan’s semiotic scheme to its visual/manipulative perceptual and object origins. This brings verbal practice closer to picture writing; i.e. to the hybrid juncture of percept-image and sound-word: to hieroglyphic and ideographic processes that incorporate collage principles.

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\(^6\) See Freedberg, D. *The Power of Images* pp 274-277 for a similar argument. However, Freedberg does not seem to view content/form in the stratified way that I do.
The next step is recognition that a metonymic and metaphoric dialectic, based in fundamentally intelligent-feeling intuitive processes, is situated at the heart of art practice, whether making or consuming. I propose that the aesthetic experience resides in the metonymic and metaphoric dialectic, and that it is in that dialectic that the power and agency of art objects resides. However, true to our fundamentally hybrid constitution and to collage/assemblage principles, all cognitive faculties, including reason, are used to make and make sense of art. Art-objects need to be recognized as complex embodied combinations of materials, skill-techniques, and intelligent-feeling. Content is regarded as subtle forms emergent from material art forms in their interaction with contexts. No level of form/content is reducible to any other; and because all levels are constituted of “co-preservation” (Bhaskar, 2012, p. 215) or combined absence-and-presence, no level of being is reducible to its social meanings. In this framework both context-sensitivity and context-freedom (to affect different contexts) are distinguished and sustained, and in this context transcultural transaction can be accomplished.

Because art objects, as index-icon-symbols are not-the-only one of their kind, dialectical comparisons, as Powers (1995) proposed, can affect meaningful cross-cultural or cross-context connections, thereby making and expanding community. Through a collage/assemblage hybrid centered model, it is possible to achieve sensitivity to the vital investments people make in cultural objects and connect to the latter’s global resonance. Cultural transactions or intercourse can be situated in a framework of interdependent co-origination that respects and makes sense of transgressive hybrid persons/moments. The dialectics of hybridity and collage/assemblage, of the context-sensitive and context-free social tendencies, can help transcend the anthropocentric and subtle nationalistic tendencies in modernism and postmodernism. The last thing art needs is
a return to narrow closed concepts of art and culture, mediated by super technology and a humanity whose art practice distances its inhumanities.
References


