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## Summary of

### WHY ART EDUCATION LACKS SOCIAL RELEVANCE: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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Contemporary art education is individual -- focused (i.e. self-centered) to the almost complete exclusion of larger social concerns. This is true whether the art education is child-centered, discipline-centered, Rockefeller (Coming to Our Senses) - centered, or competency-based. The primary concern, notwithstanding differences, is on individual artistic productivity and, to a lesser degree, on personal aesthetic response. The enormous untapped potential of art education - and ninety-nine percent of us will be viewers and consumers, not artists - is in the social dimension. Critical understanding of the dominant visual culture--often dehumanizing in its effect, multicultural understanding through art, and the democratization of our visual culture (i.e. culture of, by, and for all of the people) are major social goals largely ignored by art educators.

This presentation takes a critical look at contemporary American society, our particular social context, in order to help us understand why our culture, art, and art education are the way they are. By so doing, I hope to reveal alternatives to the deeply engrained definitions of art and art education which we have all inherited, put into practice, and all too rarely questioned. Analyzing the major components of our society - capitalism, democracy, and technocracy - leads to an understanding of why art education is so: individual-centered; upper class "high art" in its content and concerns; asocial or antisocial in its avoidance of contact with the larger visual culture which shapes the form and content of our daily lives.

Capitalism, our economic system, has had the most decisive influence on our culture, art, and art education. Its deepest values and inevitable socio-economic class divisions define art and art education from head to toe. Capitalism's encompassing values and goals of private property, private profit, individual freedom and competition, and dynamic production of ever-changing, new, and unique commercial products promote extreme forms of self-centeredness, self-seeking, and atomistic individualism. Self-realization is ever at the height of our concerns while social realization is barely in the ballpark. A balance is clearly needed. That the fine artist and work of fine art are most highly esteemed when most individualistic, unique, and original comes as no surprise. That privacy and subjectivity command a near monopoly on artistic creativity and aesthetic response in art education programs is likewise understandable.

Capitalism also creates inevitable socio-economic class divisions through an unequal distribution of wealth and power. Specific upper class groups, because of their wealth and power, gain the capability of supporting, defining, and advancing the arts and consequently, art education according to their class-based values and preferences. Inasmuch, we have a self-centered art education whose content revolves around the male-dominated, upper class European-American fine arts tradition. Wealthy and powerful museum trustees and boards of directors, art collectors, gallery directors,

art magazine publishers, and their cultural allies among largely middle class art critics, curators, aestheticians, and artists participate (the latter for their commercial or critical success) in this tradition. Art educators, following the major trends of the art world, all too often serve as unquestioning intermediaries between the world of high art and "the people." That the upper class, high art tradition dominates the thinking of some of our most influential art educators can be seen in Eisner's discipline-centered text, Educating Artistic Vision (1972), in which not a single work by a woman or American ethnic artist, folk or craft artist, graphic or industrial designer, film or video artist is included. Three architectural reproductions, solitary examples of applied art, are included but they are examined solely for their visual qualities, with no mention of their socio-cultural significance. Clearly, upper class preference does not value or concern itself with extra-aesthetic considerations or the broad range of visual culture that strongly affects and/or grows from the lives of the larger multi-ethnic, multi-class public which we art educators serve.

Although our political system, democracy, can be seen to further promote individualism in an already highly individualistic, class-divided society, democracy also represents the potential corrective to the cultural abuses previously mentioned. In its declared tolerance of and respect for cultural differences, in its promise of equality of opportunity and popular governance "of, by, and, for (all) the people," the principles of democracy stand as the essential potential force for the democratization of society and culture.

Conversely, technocracy--the exceedingly rational, bureaucratc way in which nearly every aspect of our non-leisure time is organized--is most often experienced as anti-individualistic and, at its extreme, de-humanizing and alienating. In the context of technocracy, art experience -- creative and appreciative -- becomes an island of humanizing, individuated experience in an increasingly impersonal, mechanical, and standardized life-world. In the flight from technocracy and the abuses of capitalism, art becomes for the artist and much of his/her public a much needed personal transcendent experience and, as Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck put it, an individualist "safety valve."

Our social context -- complex, contradictory, and massive in its influence -- has caused art and art education to be self-centered and upper class-based to the point of social irrelevance. Critical contextual analysis makes us aware, in spite of pervasive cultural conditioning to the contrary, that art education can be more socially relevant and culturally democratic than it currently is. The last decade in art education has seen substantial development in the area of social relevance and cultural democracy; this without excluding personal fulfillment as a primary goal. Witness Feldman's Becoming Human through Art (1970), Lanier's writings, McFee's Art, Culture, and Environment/A Catalyst for Teaching (1977), Grigsby's Art and Ethnics/Backgrounds for Teaching Youth in a Pluralistic Society (1977), and Chapman's Approaches to Art in Education (1978) and you know that a socially progressive direction is being charted. Witness the development through the 1970's of the Women's Caucus, Committee on Minority Concerns, United States Society for Education through Art, Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education, Environmental Design Educational

Network (EDEN), and Rural Art Educators special interest groups and one can begin to believe that this socially progressive direction might evolve into a full-scale movement in art education in the 1980's.