Editorial

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Social Action through Art:
Diversity within Community

One way to look at the 1995-96 proposed social action through art theme is that issues of relevance continually emerge—that is the action itself. Social action as identified in these articles revolved around the issue of diversity. Some identified differences as an abrupt clash or confrontation, others as a negotiation between worlds. All were concerned that we critically examine the values embedded in images—whether in art history textbooks, everyday images surrounding us via entertainment systems, television, film, or computers; or in "fine" art.

Social action through art can stimulate a community of diverse responses. Within the covers of this journal you will find a range of views. We can learn from views that are very different from our own beliefs. You may agree with some studies and bristle as you read others. It is my hope that by reading different, even opposing, views within the same journal that you will engage in dialogue using the Social Theory Caucus newsletter as a vehicle. The address of the editor of the newsletter is on the inside cover of this journal. Dialogue is essential to social action. Without dialogue social action is not social. In this JSTAE volume, Bickley and Wolcott point out that dialogue is also a collaborative venture.

The first group of three articles involve technology and art education. Perhaps newer technologies make diversity more apparent than in the past when local community meant the people, customs, and objects physically surrounding home. Today, home may refer to one's homepage on the World Wide Web. You may seek communities closest to your interests and beliefs while navigating the Internet, but any search introduces numerous alternatives. Television, while still more monolithic than the Internet, provides more choices than I had in my childhood when there were only three channels available. Diversity is a reality. Universals are a myth. Social actions grapple with diversity, some to identify the imbalances, others to develop a place for differences to peacefully co-exist. For Politsky, an emphasis on differences undermines cultural stability and is the impetus for controversial art. For other authors in this volume, difference is necessary to expose disparate meanings for an interwoven richness to the fabric of life. Perhaps, with an awareness of differences there is a greater need for making connections between disparate ways and ideas. If meaning is a matter of difference in the Saussurian sense, as Politsky describes in her article, then difference is also what connects us. Cultural connections could be derived from diversity. Rather than the survival of the fittest in which competition is promoted, survival depends upon diversification in which a community of differences work together, even with contradictory purposes and varied worldviews.

Duncum advocates critical engagement with the numerous digital and electronic images that surround our daily life. He urges that art educators utilize the contextualizing practices of media educators to develop socially critical consciousness. Media educators are concerned with the desires and motivation of audiences, and how they attend to images. For example, multiple exposure, rather than a singular prolonged engagement, characterize the way electronic and digital images are presented and perceived.

Johnson describes the contradictory worlds inhabited by the computer artist. The conventions of computer science and the conventions of art are at odds. The gulf that has separated art and science is about to flood fertile soils into both. While Johnson

and Duncum speak of differences having a betwixt and between, Politsky identifies a more abrupt clash of differences.

Politsky uses mythic criticism to interpret the appropriation of ancient religious myths and symbols by contemporary visual and performance artists. Mythic criticism, developed by post-Jungian theorists, is a psychoanalytic process of identifying culturally constructed archetypal images. According to post-Jungian theory there is a human need to identify and represent shared life patterns, but these patterns are culturally specific. Politsky provides several examples to support her premise that the socio-political postmodern worldview has led some artists to appropriate ancient archetypal rituals and images in order to question adherence to religious practices no longer connected to a communal spiritual orientation. Politsky argues that altering, substituting, or restoring established religious symbols is an attempt to stabilize the seemingly unstable postmodern world.

Social action revealed by the images published in *The Gallery* are examples of the intention and success in activating community. A brief editorial precedes *The Gallery*. *The Gallery* is situated between Politsky's article on a clash between the sacred and profane in art and Gaudelius' and Moore's article on violent images of women; these follow jagodzinski's article on violence, youth, and media hype. Through a recognition of different worldviews that unsettle the status quo, the middle group of articles bridge technology issues with the final group of four articles which concern gender and art education. The articles in the middle of the journal overlap technology and gender issues but also create their own emphasis by identifying uncompromising differences such as stereotypes and misunderstandings between groups of people. As art educators critically engage in issues of technology and gender in relation to the arts, will they desire a compromise, and if not, what are the alternatives?

In the last group of four articles, one topic that arises in both Bolin's article and Bickley and Wolcott's article concerns H. W. Janson's textbook, *The History of Art* . Bolin argues that art history survey textbooks have not included women artists in a way that represents their contributions. Bolin explains how

Anthony Janson's art history survey textbook has marginalized women artists.

True to their belief that collaborative activity among scholars and practitioners in diverse fields could develop more inclusive aesthetic theory and support a broader range of art production, Bickley and Wolcott collaborated on writing their article and included personal communications with women in the arts from the United States, Scandinavia, and Italy. Bickley and Wolcott argue that feminist scholars have changed the discipline of art history and art criticism. The authors advocate a phenomenological critical approach to art in which historical knowledge is based in both male and female experiences of art and artmaking. This approach emphasizes art objects within their physical and social context without attempting to explain or politicize them. Bickley and Wolcott suggest that collaboration between cognitive scientists, anthropologists, psychologists, and art scholars and practitioners may help consolidate the various feminist approaches into a contextually-based and pluralistic theory of art. Bickley and Wolcott advocate the development of theory and practice in art that not only includes the social and political context of artmaking, but also seeks understanding that integrates both male and female phenomenological experiences of art.

The journal concludes with two book reviews. One book reviewer suggests that readers of *Warrior for Gringostroika: Essays, Performance Texts, and Poetry* by Gómez-Peña (1993) may be moved to action. The other review on *Frida's Fiestas*, contextualizes art with the substance of life—food—something shared by all in a variety of ways.

Liz Hoffman served as editorial consultant. She generously gave me advice and encouragement; and thoughtfully edited three articles (i.e., Bolin's, jagodzinski's, and Gaudelius' and Moore's). She introduces these articles in her editorial and identifies youth as a theme that emerged in this group. Together, the nine authors and nine artists in this volume represent social action as they present the creative potentials of sparks, hot fires, and changing waters.