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**ARTFUL AWARENESS: SEEING WITH INTENTION**

A Thesis in  
Art Education  
by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

What kind of abilities does one need to have in order to make art? Though I was not raised explicitly in the visual arts, I've watched those around me engage in daily activities with particular awareness and sensitivity. Throughout my years working with non-art majors at Penn State University, and reflecting on my own Art Educational and other notable experiences, I have become interested in how people define art, and how the general population feels about engaging with and making art.

Essentially, the non-major course, Art 100, is a collage of multi-media, multi-modal experiences; it addresses Contemporary Art issues and making, as well as how these practices relate to everyday life. The Art 100 students were generally interested in learning about and making art, but they didn't consider themselves artmakers or "artists." I wondered what benefits a non-major might gain from taking an Art class with a studio component. And what about a contemporary art studio class where no particular media or technical skill set is predetermined? Can anyone make art?

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## Introduction

Because experience is the fulfillment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ. (Dewey, 1934, p.19)

I grew up in a household where I learned that I was the only one who could draw. I was the lone “artist.” I was told that being able to draw realistically was a gift few possessed. I was sent to do “artful” tasks for neighbors and family friends, and to Arts and Crafts summer camps. The neighbors and friends praised whatever I drew, and often lamented their own inability to draw anything beyond stick figures. I was told that what I could do was magic; that only a select few could be artists. I didn’t understand what I did as magic. I just liked to draw, and I spent a good amount of my childhood trying to get better and reproducing what I saw.

By the time I was in middle school, a lot of my friends who had been excited in Arts classes throughout elementary school seemed frustrated or bored. By the end of my freshman year of high school, most of my former Art class friends had completely lost interest. Art class became a place where observational drawing was the main objective. Those who didn’t feel adequate, or were looking for other forms of expression needed to look elsewhere. In addition, high school was when class rank and overall GPA took priority for some students. There were no honors or AP Art classes. Even if there had been, students would have asked the question of what the skill of drawing would provide in the future compared to Organic Chemistry, or even automotive design. I had been disappointed that there was little discipline diversity in my Art classes. But what was to be expected when these classes seemed to become superfluous and for the “gifted” only?

By the time I was in high school, I was associated more with sports than Art. I played on both the high school and local traveling club soccer teams. My coaches always related soccer back to bigger themes of life. Participating felt important and worthwhile. Art, on the other hand, didn't seem to relate to bigger life themes outside of the art classroom. I only participated when I was in school.

Partly because my interest in Art waned in comparison to soccer, I wasn't part of the various art cliques that became more prominent throughout high school. Over time I felt as though I related less and less to the other Art students. Socially, we ran in different circles. I also didn't understand their prominent aesthetic: many depicted dreary, sometimes disturbing imagery. Their works were encouraged as being honest and raw. I just understood their works as cries for attention. We never had class critiques or discussed why these works were effective, or not.

In conjunction with Art instructors' assignments and means of assessment, the art students reinforced what was essentially necessary to be a successful Art student: particular skill sets, aesthetic preference, or "talent."

\* \* \*

I originally entered into Art Education because I had coached soccer teams for years, and saw teaching Art (i.e. teaching students how to draw) as similar. I understood both as essentially a series of learned skill sets that were used to achieve a particular end. In one case, the end was winning a game or tournament, and in the other, the end was a drawing, painting, or 3-D work that closely resembled objective "reality." Personal expression fit in Art somewhere, but I wasn't exactly sure how...

I am currently writing from the perspective of an Art Education graduate student who has primarily worked with non-Art major undergraduate students at The Pennsylvania State University. Throughout my time at Penn State, I have both co-taught and individually taught the general education, Contemporary Art course, *Art 100: Concepts and Creation in the Visual Arts*. According to the class description on Penn State's course website:

*Art 100 is intended as an introduction to the concepts underpinning artistic creation. Through lectures and studio work, students will explore relationships between artistic processes and daily life. The objective of the course is to develop in the student both an appreciation and understanding of contemporary art through an examination of art and contemporary social, cultural, and political issues surrounding artistic practice.*

Throughout my years working with non-Art majors, and in hindsight my own Art Educational and other notable experiences, I have become interested in how people define art, and how the general population feels about engaging with and making art. The population I worked with in Art 100 was generally interested in learning about and making art, but didn't consider themselves artmakers or "artists." I wondered what benefits a non-major might gain from taking an Art class with a studio component. And what about a contemporary art studio class where no particular media or technical skill set is predetermined?

[...will be learned by him who sees...\(Dewey, 1934, p.5\)](#)

## Capability

Who can make art? First I think we need to think about “can” in two senses of the word: as an allowance or being granted the right, and to be able. Who is allowed to be considered an “artist” or call themselves a maker of Art? What kind of abilities does one need to have in order to make Art?

Seymour B. Sarason claims that artistic activity is a unique, universal potential of all human organisms. Human nature is social nature. Societal values are encouraged and practiced. How they are encouraged and practiced affects how they are defined or understood. *“Nothing has been more effective in obscuring the presence of artistic processes than the tendency to regard them as special features of special people, the most special of whom have their works exhibited in museums, galleries, or other sites.”* As these beliefs are not static or absolute, we should begin reexamining our society’s understanding of Art and the individual. (Sarason, 1990, pp.1-2)

Sarason is dissatisfied with the numerous ways we are effectively socialized to regard ourselves as non-artists. One of his major themes is how a narrow conception of artistic activity prevents us from recognizing the presence of the artistic process. (Sarason, 1990, p.6)

In order to understand the meaning of artistic products, we have to forget them for a time, to turn aside from them and have recourse to the ordinary forces and conditions of experience that we do not usually regard as aesthetic...(Dewey, 1934, p.4)

John Dewey thinks of artmaking as a process that includes more than just the creation of something. Artists are not only “gifted” in the powers of execution, but in an “unusual” sensitivity to the qualities of things. This sensitivity directs what and how they create. Artworks have qualities that spontaneous or uncontrolled activity does not have. (Dewey, 1934, p. 49)

Sarason claims everyone can make art, that it’s a universal capacity. If everyone is capable, why don’t more people engage in artmaking? Is it a choice?

Since entering graduate school, I have taught a section of the non-Art major Contemporary Art class, Art 100. This course meets twice a week: for one “lecture” component, and one “studio” component. Essentially the class is a collage of multi-media, multi-modal experiences that address Contemporary Art issues,



making, and how these practices relate to everyday life. Class content changed each semester as determined by both instructors and students. Art 100 is comprised of students from diverse majors with diverse interests and expectations of an “Art” class.

Sarason looks at educational institutions because how they treat and teach the arts reflects our society’s worldview. He quotes Elliott Eisner’s claim about “literacy”: not limited to things said; extended to things represented...power to encode or decode meaning through any of the forms that humans use to represent what they have come to know (p. xii). (Sarason, 1990, p.7) Could we think of Art as a visual language?

The children’s ways of exploring differed.

Some proceeded by analogy, choosing materials based on similar characteristics; for example, types of paper that tear more easily, plastics that retain an imprint longer.

Others by differences; for example, using the gestures of wrapping packages, two girls alternated thin paper with heavier paper.

Some children seemed to evaluate the characteristics of materials at first glance, as if they did not need to touch them. A lightweight piece of paper evoked the idea of flight and the children, looking at all the types of paper and choosing with precision, tried out the one that blew the best.

Other children perceived the potentials of the material in terms of tactile variations, so in their exploration, corrugated cardboard seemed to become a piano keyboard that they played with knowing and refined gestures. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p. 22)

## The Everyday

If Seymore B. Sarason is right, if everyone is capable of making art, then why don't more people engage in artmaking? Is it that we just need better skill building programs through the schooling years to build confidence through learned conventions and practice? Would more people draw and sculpt if they just learned how, and consistently honed their skills? Sarason mentions that in Western societies a narrow conception of artistic activity has been learned; the general population has been effectively socialized to believe that they are non-artists. This implies that there is more to art than what might be commonly accepted. What can be art or artmaking?

*Mostly, I believe an artist doesn't create something, but is there to sort through, to show, to out what already exists, to put it into form and sometimes reformulate it. That's the spirit in which I gathered all the press clippings and photos of women, their postures, their gestures- their hands stirring sauce or putting on a bandage. It's a language in itself, which is why we don't pay any attention to it. I didn't invent anything, I indicated...*

*- Annette Messager, Word for Word, 2006 (Johnstone, 2008, p.12)*

During the last few years of my undergraduate work, for the first time I was introduced to the concept of Art as a language. I had never really thought of an artwork as being (or maybe realized it could be?) a physical manifestation of an idea or a visual communication. In my experiences, Artworks had always been fairly static objects, predictable in form and in what they were supposed to do: copy what we saw in an aesthetically pleasing way.

Contemporary Art often aims to reframe expectations and perceptions (even of what Contemporary Art "is" itself) within particular societies and cultures. In today's Contemporary Fine Art world, the means and media are inextricably

linked. A lot of value is placed on the conceptual dimension. Intention can define artfulness, so there is no restriction regarding means and the media. The human body, actions, written documents, blogs, sounds, excrement, etc., have all become valid media depending on what the artist(s) wishes to express. And how society has come to understand particular objects, images, notable actions, words, media, is an important part of most Contemporary Artwork. It is common practice for objects, images, notable actions, words, etc., to be appropriated to challenge expectations or perceptions, and express something new.

In approaching material, one of the initial difficulties, perhaps the most important one, was grasping the concept of the material as matter. The children primarily saw the object, its function, color and history, and less the material of which the object was made....(Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p.55)

Not only has traditional media (i.e. the “*what*”) been confronted and expanded, but *how* and *where* we experience Contemporary Art has been exceptionally broadened as well: Artworks can be constructed outside of “Art” spaces (e.g. museums, and galleries), and be site-specific. Site-specific works are made for specific environments, or spaces. These kinds of works typically relate to that space exclusively, and would mean something entirely different if moved from that particular space.

Sarason directly references John Dewey when claiming that artistic activity is the opposite of random activity; a process in which self and materials are configured. He adds that one may not “like” the end product, but that is not warrant for ignoring its gestalt-like character. Ignoring that character contributes mightily to our misreading of the developmental significances of artistic activity in people generally. (Sarason, 1990, p.4)

An Artwork can document an experience of an artist, can just be an artist’s experience without documentation, or can be encouraged of the viewer. Entire environments can be constructed, or appropriated if already in existence, and the

“Art” can be about how participants experience, manipulate, or interact with that environment. Contemporary art reframes. As such, it is constantly reframing itself. There is a constant questioning of media, and the everyday is considered to be valid content. In fact, contemporary art is saturated with references to the everyday. The use of “the everyday” is generally understood as wanting to bring attention to lived experience that is commonly overlooked (The Everyday, Intro, p.12). What one would do, see, or experience on any given day now has the potential to become Art. Artists consciously choose both the media and means to express a particular message, and they pay attention to their environment. This way of consciously choosing, appropriating, rearranging, organizing, and responding can be done by anyone when they are actively engaging with their environment, and when one becomes aware of how they understand and participate within their environment.

We accepted their metaphors as genuine cognitive tools, capable of generating new knowledge... (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p.55)

Categories of things using metaphors...(Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p.33)

tulle – scratchy white

tissue paper – music white

terrycloth – tickly white

plastic – smooth white

Who can make art and be considered an “artist” has also been questioned in contemporary art. In exploring the vast and varied approaches to “the everyday” in the arts in his introduction to *The Everyday: Documents in Contemporary Art*, Stephen Johnstone highlights one political aspect. Johnstone

discusses that the use of the everyday can indicate a desire to give voice to those silenced by dominant discourses and ideologies. In doing so, the everyday's transformative potential becomes evident. In this dialogue to acknowledge and make public the taken-for-granted conversation of others is the first step in irrevocably changing everyday life (Johnstone, 2008, p. 13). For instance, multi-media performance artist Miranda July has recently encouraged anyone with internet access to participate in an assignment-based, Art-making forum called, *Learning to Love You More* (<http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com/>). Typically, July's assignments ask participants to reflect on experiences that have happened previously, or to document (through photographs, writing, etc.) a proposed experience or action.

Through Miranda July's project and others similar, *who* or *what* can make Art has been confronted. Collectively, within a particular context, these experiences become art. Are these "ordinary" artists? July sees her project as a collaboration between herself and the public. She has selected works from the website for exhibitions, as well as for publication in a book about the project. July even awards \$500 Art grants to personally chosen individuals so that they might make more work. Is the fact that these people are working with a renowned artist, and having their responses shown in galleries what makes it art?

While a key theorist of the everyday, such as Henri Lefebvre, may at times be extremely critical of the specialized knowledge art produces and the professional identity of artists, he readily acknowledges that the imprecise and ambiguous realms of art, literature, and drama have played a fundamental role in bringing everyday life into view (Johnstone, 2008, p. 14).

In Art 100, unlike other studio classes, there is no particular medium or form of working informing the course. Its organization is thematic with

contemporary issues, materials, and messages as the impetus. Coming together in the same space were diverse backgrounds with myriad ways to approach assignments, problems or propositions.

Because Contemporary Art practices encompass various means of expression through unlimited media, there is more opportunity for anyone to engage in artmaking activity in a class like Art 100. Unlike my public school art experiences, the possibilities for expression and exploration of concepts are myriad and diverse. Lefebvre posits that there is no either/or position in defining or studying the everyday. The everyday is said to demand an interdisciplinary openness, a willingness to blur creatively the traditional research methods and protocols of disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, and sociology (Johnstone, 2008, p.15). If there is not one clear way to communicate or express oneself, then the capability for anyone to think and make artfully is much more probable than possibly understood.

The arts which today have the most vitality for the average person are things he does not take to be arts...for, when what he knows as art is relegated to the museum and gallery, the unconquerable impulse toward experiences enjoyable in themselves finds such outlets as the daily environment provides. (Dewey, 1934, pp.5-6)

Miranda July's project works through assignments that draw from people's personal experiences, and what is around them. During one assignment in Art 100, students had the option to complete some of Miranda July's assignments, or to work with photography. Students chose either project for various reasons: some had learned about photography in high school and wanted to work with the medium again; some wanted to learn more about photography; and some didn't

see Miranda July's assignments as an "Art" project, but instead as a lot of little experiments.

During the final critique of the Miranda July assignments, I asked students to reflect on, "where the 'Art' was, and who the artist(s) was." I added, "Is the entire project the 'Art?' Are the responses to the assignments the 'Art?'" Most students saw Miranda July as more of a teacher than an artist, at least in this particular project. July inspired others to create, but what did she make? One student who was politically proactive, reconceptualized a new government, but didn't think it was Art. These were ideas she engaged in all the time. She claimed that the works, like the drawings or video pieces, that were time-intensive and required skill were Art, but not her written ideas.

Jonathan Watkins (curator of 1988 Sydney Biennale titled "Every Day") argues for a contemporary rise of the everyday: [A] desire to look at the ordinary is to reassert "a non ironic kind of realism"... "efficacy and unpreciousness" in the way art looks, and new concern with "the power of relatively simple gestures" as art connects with lived experience. Such works are "unforced artistic statements." Artists in the Biennale are united not by form, but by "[an] aspiration to directness, as opposed to gratuitous meditation or obscurantism." Positioned as "rejoinder to played-out operative tendencies and an overloaded academic (or psuedoacademic) discourse in the visual arts." (Johnstone, 2008, pp. 16-17)

The way students naturally and normally engage in things, and the resources they have available can be valid and powerful. This has been evident in Art 100 when students relevantly respond to an assignment or idea using their own languages, or what is familiar.

One semester, Art 100 students were assigned by one of the other instructors to read essays about the concept of mapping. One week, students read the Grimm's tale "Hansel and Gretel" in conjunction with Michel de Certeau's 1974 text, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In this book, de Certeau wishes to draw

attention away from the authority of the producer (writer, scientist, city planner) and the product (book, discourse, city street), and shift attention to the agency of the consumer (reader, pedestrian).<sup>1</sup> In the particular essay that students read, “Walking in the City,” de Certeau claims that everyday life is distinctive from other practices of daily existence because it is repetitive and unconscious; that everyday life works by a process of poaching on the territory of others, recombining the rules and products that already exist in a culture in a way that is influenced, but never wholly determined, by those rules and products.

A paper napkin on a table. An object that is camouflaged by normal use and everyday-ness, in some way becoming anonymous. An object we have already assimilated, already experienced. A “habitual material” which, when observed with searching eyes, eyes that distinguish, can become something else: white, airy, and delicate; just a bit rough; overlaid and opaque; or open and almost transparent. A napkin removed from invisibility and made the protagonist of attentions and reflections. From the object-napkin function, we change direction and are catapulted into the discovery of the known-unknown paper napkin, making it something special because we look at it in a special way. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p. 27)

In my section, students were asked to further consider concepts associated with mapping, such as: “marking,” “borders,” “ownership,” and visual representation. Their assignment was to orient themselves within the landscape of the campus. On their assignment handout was a rumination on the concept of orientating by *Stephen S. Hall, from “I, Mercator,” in You Are Here (Harmon, 2003)*:

*Orientating begins with geography, but it reflects a need of the conscious, self-aware organism for a kind of transcendent orientation that asks not just where am I, but where do I fit within this landscape? Where have I been? Where shall I go, and what values will I pack for the trip? What culture of knowledge allows me to know what I know, which is often another way of knowing where I am? And what pattern, what grid of wisdom, can I impose on my accumulated, idiosyncratic geographies?*

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<sup>1</sup> From back cover of book, Priscilla P. Clark, *Journal of Modern History*



Students were asked to orientate themselves by creating their own map through any media of their choice (i.e. painting, drawing, video, sound, photography, sculpture, performance, mixed media...). One resource students explored was the website, *GET LOST: Artists Map Downtown New York* (<http://www.newmuseum.org/assets/general/getlost/index.html>) a collective portrait of the city through diverse, individual, personal maps. In the end, we too would have a diverse, collective portrait of the university.

When it came time for critique, students' maps were varied in media and concept. How people perceive things impacts/shapes how they know things. There was a handmade book made by an English Education major with photographic documentation of meaningful sites both familiar to classmates and private to the creator, along with concise, poetic written reflections; a mixed media pen drawing by one of the shier students with half her face taking up a quarter of the large sheet of paper, and her wild curly hair filling the rest. She was from a more urban area and often talked with me about how unsettling the quiet and reserve of State College was. How she tried to feel more comfortable was to listen to music wherever she went. In her drawing, she intertwined with the wisps of her hair were song titles, lyrics, and musical artists that affected her navigation and experience of the campus; An agriculture student made a charming miniature model of the university horse stables out of simple, childlike crafting materials including pipe cleaners. Her interactive map included hand-fashioned, moveable tiny horses, fences, and their stables. She invited us to play within a place where she spends a majority of her undergraduate time, and with animals she has engaged with since childhood. An Engineering student constructed a meticulous interactive 2-D

campus map with doors on the buildings where she had class. When a door was opened, viewers read coldly and precisely articulated accounts of her academic pressures. Another student copied one of Penn State's campus maps onto a series of overhead transparencies. On each transparency, she traced one particular route in a different color marker. She then provided a homemade lightbox so that others could investigate each individual day's journey, or compound time and space by laying transparencies on top of each other and looking at the layered result via the light from the lightbox...

Each student's map was a genuine representation of how they located themselves, or felt they were represented, within the Penn State landscape; however, all but a few students used somewhat traditional "Art" materials to create all, or part of their response. One exception was a student named Sean, who was another sports-fanatical Economics student. As an avid long-distance runner, Sean invested in Nike+, a GPS sensor that could track running routes and measure intensity. On the Nike+ website<sup>2</sup> users' specific routes could be "visualized." Runners could then compare various days' performance, set goals and see how they were or were not met, and overall progress. Additionally, runners could "connect," or motivate, compete and train with other runners. Others' maps could be viewed, used, and commented on.

Depending on the context and intention, you could look at Sean's running route map differently. From the standpoint of someone interested in kinesiology, Sean's running and body efficiency could be tracked, as well as how his running shoes might be affecting his performance. From the standpoint of Sean, it was a

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<sup>2</sup> <http://nikeplus.nike.com/nikeplus/>

way he could gauge how he was running in order to improve. Within the context of the assignment, the map was a way for Sean to orient himself within the campus. It was a very personal map even though it was represented in the same way as everyone else's on the site. As Sean projected his map at the front of the room, he talked about and pointed out particular spots on his "visualization": "This is where I pass by the stadium, and get a rush of adreneline...This is when I like to listen to suchandsuch a song because it helps me cool down as I pass by West Halls..." Sean also showed us other people's (who we may never know) Nike+ maps, so we could see different way of "experiencing" the campus and State College.

I asked Sean about how this map compared to the actual act of his mapping. As someone who used to run regularly, I agreed with his reflection: he found the maps to function mostly as a way to gauge performance and train. They only coldly expressed the run. Nothing of the actual experience of running in a particular environment was evident. Even with Sean talking us through his experiences, the adrenalin rush, the smell of fresh air, dodging people, and feeling the difference between running downtown, by Beaver Stadium, and out in the cornfields was all lost.

Additionally, Sean noted that he wasn't able to copy his map or save it offline. His map seemed to belong to Nike+. This consideration lead to a class discussion about public and private information. I asked Sean if he ever exploited or attempted to subvert the tracking capabilities of Nike+. He had not, and he wasn't aware if anyone else had, but it opened up possibilities for poaching suggested by de Certeau. The running map was part of Sean's everyday experience. Superficially compared to other students' maps, it did not incorporate

anything traditionally “artful,” but it simply and effectively raised a lot of questions within the context of the assignment. Through context and intention, Sean’s running map became a work of art.

The extent to which the process of living in any day or hour is reduced to labeling situations, events, and objects as “so-and-so” in mere succession marks the cessation of a life that is a conscious experience. Continuities realized in an individual, discrete form are the essence of the latter. Art is thus prefigured in the very processes of living. (Dewey, 1934, p. 24)

To see, to perceive, is more than to recognize. (Dewey, 1934, p. 24)

## Intellectual Emancipation

The works of artists offer food for thought and for the imagination, but in working with children the primary focus is, and must always remain, the children themselves, with their own strategies of thought, their knowledge-building processes, and their relationships. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p. 15)

Sean recontextualized a document of jogging experiences and it became an artful expression. In Art 100, Contemporary Artworks and practices acknowledged in the Fine Art Market world as “Art” are a predetermined vehicle for getting students to expand their definitions of what can be art and artmaking. What else can be learned from these postmodern Fine Art ways of questioning, exploring and expressing?

As the course description also states, “...students will explore relationships between artistic processes and daily life.” How, or when, do students get to the point where they are comfortable using their everyday, or how they have come to know the world, to express themselves? Or maybe, how often are students asked to use and share what they already are familiar with to learn something new?

*In social philosopher Jacques Ranciere's text, The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation, we are introduced to the non-fiction story of Jacob Jacotot. A seasoned French instructor/deputy in the early 1800's, Jacotot was exiled to the Netherlands, where he was asked to be a professor. Jacotot knew no Flemish, so to communicate/teach, he established a “thing in common” (in this case, a bilingual edition of a somewhat controversial novel). When halfway through, Jacotot told students to repeat over and over again what they had read, and told them to read the rest of the book until they could recite it. When finished, Jacotot asked the students to write in French their thoughts about what they had read. He was amazed with the results, and wondered, “Was wanting all that was necessary for doing? Were all men virtually capable of understanding what others had done and understood?”(Ranciere, 1991, pp.1-2)*

*Before this experience, Jacotot had believed what all “conscientious” professors believe: “that the important business of the master is to transmit his knowledge to his students so as to bring them, by degrees, to his own level of expertise.” Not so that they can essentially parrot back what they’ve learned, but they must be guided in such a way so not to get lost; their minds still incapable of distinguishing the essential from the accessory. The essential act of the master was to explicate. To teach was to transmit learning and form minds simultaneously, by leading those minds, according to an ordered progression, from the most simple to the most complex. (Ranciere, 1991, p.3)*

At points in social philosopher Jacques Ranciere’s text, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Ranciere and his main non-fictional character Joseph Jacotot allude to socialization that recalls Sarason’s proposal of learned helplessness. Ranciere writes, “Masters with the best intentions strive for their students to reach the ‘slogan of the enlightened: understand(ing).’ But the more the instructor instructs, the more students feel as though they can’t figure out these ideas, lessons, concepts without it being explained to them. (Ranciere, 1991, p.8)

At some point early in my public schooling, I remember feeling more comfortable when others told me what was important to learn. Speed and accuracy were rewarded. But this method of learning and knowledge acquisition doesn’t leave much room for nuance, appreciation of exploration, and democratic ways of being. The kind of education I experienced growing up was about learning how to perceive a particular way. In most of my public school experiences, finding *the* answer was the goal. I have noted similar beliefs from the Art 100 students.

During the last semester that I taught Art 100, I had an Early Childhood Education student named A.J. He was someone who always wanted to know what “the point” of an artwork was. He wanted answers. In fact, he was always anxious to find out *the* answer. While others would muse about a classmate’s artwork, A.J. was always the first to ask the artist what they intended. He wanted every element delineated. Once that question was asked, everyone else in class would be

silenced. The common understanding was that the artist had the most credible answers regarding meaning.

I could empathize with A.J.'s, and eventually the rest of the class' desire to feel settled in attaining the truth. As I entered many college classrooms, it was difficult accepting that "the author had died," and others' interpretations could be meaningful and even transformative. I found it hard after years of standardized testing to enter college and entertain that there might never be one concrete meaning or interpretation of a work of art. And after years of trusting experts to teach me necessary knowledge, and test me on my acquisition, I was initially in disbelief that my opinion could weigh in and possibly change the direction of a lesson. What intellectual credibility did I have?

In Sarason's text, he raises questions related to learned helplessness, and I think that is an interesting way to think about learning and knowledge. If the teacher has *the* knowledge then the student cannot. And anyway, if it were acknowledged that students knew things then why would many teachers instruct with the assumption of helplessness?

When I was a sophomore in high school, I had a unique English class. Unlike other courses, there was not a "master explicator" in English class. The teacher, Mrs. McCoy, was a former school counselor who seemed to believe more in seeing how students interpreted classical texts and essays rather than explaining them to us. In this class we were assessed not on how well we could explain what we read, but rather how, in the words of Raciere, we "translated" the texts we read. What this meant within the context of this class was that small

groups of students had the freedom to independently plan, construct, and present to classmates any multi-modal response that they saw fit.

In this English class were many of my bright, witty, mostly ambitious and extroverted friends. Most were the kind of students who read what was asked of them without much fuss. Many also were confident in their intelligence, and not afraid to push course boundaries or even the teacher. The common feeling was that high school was generally a long and uneventful experience, so why not spice it up? During the previous year I had worked with some of these classmates on group projects. In the classes where we knew the teacher wasn't interested in parody or playful interpretation, we would produce predictable documentary videos or poster board displays. In the classes where we seemed to have a bit more creative freedom, we would test how much of our fifteen-year-old voices and perspectives were welcome. Usually the teacher's response was disappointment. Sometimes we really pissed them off. Clearly we were old and "smart" enough to discern between a thoughtful, academic reflection and an immature joke...right? They usually wanted to know if we were mocking the teacher, or had just slacked off. In most cases we hadn't done either, but we couldn't always justify why we made certain decisions. In the end, I usually empathized with the teacher's position. School was supposed to be serious, rigorous, and preparation for "the real world." Where would this playful attitude get us?

**And thus, the child acquires a new intelligence, that of the master's explications. Later he can be an explicator in turn... (Ranciere, 1991, p.8)**

What I found initially surprising, and later refreshing, was that our responses in Mrs. McCoy's class never seemed to be inappropriate. In fact, looking back, I can clearly remember her standing amongst sitting classmates



during one of my group response presentations and smiling. For one particular response I don't remember the text we had been interpreting, but I do remember the presentation including a friend of mine reciting lines from Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* while wrapped in foil (to look like a mirror). Mrs. McCoy loved it. Following another interpretation, this time of *Oedipus Rex*, our group transformed a stairwell into a multi-tiered stage for a postmodern, live-interpretation that incorporated direct action from the play laced with contemporary dialogue and references. Mrs. McCoy gave a standing ovation.

Understanding is never more than translating, that is, giving the equivalent of a text, but in no way its reason. (Ranciere, 1991, pp. 9-11)

Mrs. McCoy's pedagogical philosophy and methods seemed to exemplify Ranciere and Jacotot's insistence that students have the means to translate new material through what they already know how to do. There was no need for Mrs. McCoy to explain the texts to us.

All their effort, all their exploration, is strained toward this: someone has addressed words to them that they want to recognize and respond to, not as students or as learned men, but as people; in the way you respond to someone speaking to you and not to someone examining you: under the sign of equality. The fact was there: they had learned by themselves, without a master explicator.

Through her consistent support and enthusiasm, it had been clearly communicated that we had the capacity to read the texts and respond however we saw fit. Our unique ways of responding were valid, and the collective result was a diverse collage of media and means. Presentation days were always exciting and unpredictable. For my group, our interpretations usually included theatrical performances with a strong satirical strand. But while Mrs. McCoy's excitement was evident, the point of these projects was not. The significance of presentation choices and educational implications remained unexplored.

So what we need to seek out and apply when working with the children are some of the processes involved in the creative act, such as synthesis, exploratory tension, the intense relationship with things, symbolic invention, metaphor, evocation and analogy, cultural courage, and expressivity. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p. 15)

Mrs. McCoy had provided the “thing in common” (the text or essay), and some parameters (that we were to multi-modally respond to the current text), but that seemed to be where her involvement ended. Students were given complete freedom in brainstorming, planning, constructing, presenting, and then making sense of the projects. I don’t recall Mrs. McCoy asking for any sort of proposal, or initiating preliminary discussions within groups or as a class. We had complete control of all involved aspects. There was no teacher facilitation or further teacher-student collaborative development. Granting us control of our choices allowed us to be confident in experimentation, and in the power we had in the classroom. However, not asking students to make connections between the text and response elements made it possible for students to just play around without any meaningful direction.

Word, gesture, and mental image were three mutually nurturing elements of an indissoluble relationship. Words followed gestures, which followed words, which followed images, which followed gestures, which followed words...(Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p.30)

I understood these projects as having complete autonomy to create fun activities. I understood them as little more than an easy “A” and a joke. Because neither the teacher nor anyone else in the class was held responsible in making connections, asking questions, or offering any explanations in response to these projects I concluded that if you looked like you tried, you got an “A.” I remember appreciating that, as a break from the rigor of other schoolwork, we had the

opportunity to respond in ways other than written essays and standardized exams. I also appreciated that I could incorporate humor and references from my everyday life into school projects. I learned that I had the capacity to validly respond to assignments using what came naturally. I was able to use my own voice.

Rather than a teacher-centered classroom, or a space where the Jacotot's "master" feels it necessary to control learning, knowledge acquisition, and outcomes, intellectual emancipation implies that both "master" and students have something valid and valuable to contribute. Intellectual emancipation levels the hierarchical dynamic in a pedagogical space when both the "master" and students are sensitive to the fact no one is more ignorant than anyone else.

Ranciere claims that everyone has learned something by themselves: "...learn the fact, imitate it, know yourself, this is how nature works." Once this method is accepted and appropriated individually, individuals will gain the confidence to take charge of their learning and voice. They will not rely on, or expect, masters to tell them what and how to think. Students must use their own methods. They will then understand the power they always had, and be intellectually emancipated. (Ranciere, 1991, pp. 13-16)

While other high school teachers made it *seem* as though they wanted students to express themselves, or interpret class material as we saw fit, Mrs. McCoy stood alone in truly entertaining what this freedom produced. What seemed like meaningless directionless projects to previous teachers and classmates was perceived differently by Mrs. McCoy. Previous teachers were disappointed while Mrs. McCoy seemed excited and encouraging. Was Ranciere's claim that "understanding is never more than translating" true? Why did Mrs. McCoy support our varied and experimental interpretations?

In this spirit of looking anew, lying somewhere between play and scientific-aesthetic investigation, the children sought out and encountered the materials, and "listened" to them through visual, tactile, olfactory, and auditory explorations. They organized them according to personal and original criteria, sometimes very distant from those of adults...was this just aesthetic research? No. Underlying every compositional process are many reflections about space, form, measurement, quantity...By their choices the children showed that they have an

aesthetic sensibility and a thought process that enable them to design, to construct relationships, and to draw strategies and procedures from other languages. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p.39)

While I can't speak for my classmates' ultimate understanding, I can report that many friends referred to these response projects as "a joke." From the current vantage point of an Art Educational student and teacher, it seems that there was much more potential than was made overt in the classroom power dynamics that had been established. Allowing students to choose any media and means to express an interpretation, and having these projects be a collaborative endeavor allowed for us to feel confident in our individual media choices while working together. Mrs. McCoy provided the texts, but the rest of the process belonged to collective groups of students.

Whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies. And whoever emancipates doesn't have to worry about what the emancipated learns. He will learn what he wants, nothing maybe. It sufficed only to *announce* it (that anyone could do/learn whatever they wanted). (Ranciere, 1991, p.18)

Jacotot, through Ranciere, goes so far as to wonder why - since everyone is capable of learning on their own - is it necessary to have any "masters"? Sarason states that all students are capable of creative thinking and making, and Ranciere implies that all are capable of learning what they would like on their own. So what role does the Art Educator really play?

In contrast to Mrs. McCoy's classroom, during the second semester of my first "senior" year in college I took an Art Education course where the professor acted as a facilitator. Students were responsible for their own learning, and this professor was constantly checking in. This particular Art Education course was taught by Dr. Marjorie Wilson, spouse of Dr. Brent Wilson. The most rigorous Art Education professor I had while an undergraduate student, fellow Art Education

undergraduate students either sought out Dr. Wilson or avoided her at all costs. Dr. M. Wilson approached teaching and Art very seriously. She modeled high standards of presentation and performance through assignments and her own way of being. Our course syllabus was printed in color on heavy paper, and included images as well as text. At about 5' tall, Dr. Wilson silenced a room full of students when she entered wearing her trademark 4" black stiletto heels that set off her form-fitting black leather pants and complementary black sweater wrap. Her hair was a severe white, spiked, and from her ears hung earrings that resembled circular saw blades.

Her appearance spoke of her blunt countenance. In her class, everyone knew that you could not look to Dr. Wilson for answers. She let philosophical questions directed at her become property of the entire class. What did we think (about that question)? Rather than assuming that she had all the answers, what comprised *our* own Art educational philosophies? Students would get into heated discussions, but Dr. Wilson would let them work it out for themselves. In Dr. Wilson's class, we were responsible for our own learning. This included being clear about why we believed in teaching certain content in particular ways.

Jacotot had taught them something, yet he had communicated to them nothing of his science. (Ranciere, 1991, p. 13)

At the time when I had class with Dr. Wilson, her research included pursuing her profound interest in contemporary art forms, and how performance, installation and video relate to teaching. Not only through theory, but now also in practice, we were to consider the implications of the now vast array of media available to artists. Dr. Wilson's class employed, as well as asked us to use, some Contemporary Art practices (e.g. Performance, Installation, Video Art) as

pedagogical tools. Though I had taken a Modern/Contemporary Art History course the previous semester, my actual experiences with Contemporary Art were minimal. At this point, I was more open to accepting unconventional media and methods as valid for Artistic expression, but I still couldn't quite grasp why some of these Contemporary media were used instead of traditional painting, drawing, or sculptural materials.

Dr. Wilson spent much of the first couple months emphasizing the power and importance of visual metaphor. Just as in language, where a word can refer to many things, various media can do the same. Artists can use whatever is at their disposal to convey a particular message, or explore a particular concept. In Dr. Wilson's class, I began to truly understand how "The Everyday" could be artful.

Our class was assigned to use the Video medium. We weren't to think of this project as "making a movie or film." We were to begin exploring all the uses of video, and think of it as a medium with defining characteristics, with metaphorical potential. All of this conceptual exploration was new to me. I felt stupid for not knowing how to meaningfully approach this project. One afternoon as I was walking through campus with my headphones on, I suddenly had an idea. As I looked around at the passing students and traffic, I noticed how the change in music affected the way the same visual information was perceived. Could I play with this idea for my video project? I then felt doubtful. This answer was too easy. It didn't seem profound. It just felt natural. It was something I experienced everyday. Could this really be art?

The *fact* was that students had learned without [Jacotot's] intelligence. Without his explanations. He had left them alone with the text, a translation, not a school textbook, and their will to learn French. He had suppressed the imaginary distance that is the principle of pedagogical stultification. Everything had perforce

been played out between the intelligence of the author of the text, the translator, and the students. (Ranciere, 1991, p.9)

If students and educators are intellectually emancipated, students should feel comfortable exercising agency while educators act as facilitators rather than directors. This also leads to uncertain results. Is this a positive expectation? What does a democratic, pedagogical space look like?

## Collaboration

Life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it. (Dewey, 1934, p. 13)

Art Educator, Dr. Brent Wilson acknowledges three varying pedagogical spaces that describe teacher/student relationships and the implications of these differing dynamics. Wilson defines these spaces as 1<sup>st</sup> space, 2<sup>nd</sup> space, and 3<sup>rd</sup> space. (Wilson, 2005)

The 1<sup>st</sup> pedagogical space is where students engage in self-motivated, self-directed projects. This kind of engagement can be thought of as what students would do, or actually do, on their own time. Students' personal interests motivate and guide production. Specifically, Wilson talks about the visual culture, or the popular visual narratives and media (e.g. Comics, cartoons), children engage with and construct outside of adult influences. There may be collaboration between students in this space, but not between the educator and students.

In a 1<sup>st</sup> pedagogical space, there will be inherent uncertainty from the standpoint of the instructor. Students would have full control over what they choose to explore and how they choose to explore it, without any outside influences. The instructor could never quite predict where students would take their ideas. From the standpoint of the students, however, they would only take risks and grow as much as they are self-motivated to do so. This kind of space can allow for students to comfortably interact with one another, but it can also promote very isolated working conditions.



If students can do this kind of work anywhere, why then have them do in the Art classroom what they would at home? How can the Art classroom maximize its unique resources?

This lack of maximizing resources and space reminds me of the many hours I spent in one of my high school's Art room as a graduating senior. At that time, I took as many Art classes as I could fit into my schedule because most of my graduation requirements had been fulfilled, and the Art room was a place where I felt comfortable and able to relax. During my senior year, due to our regular Art teacher's unexpected hospitalization, we had a long-term substitute teacher: Mr. O'Laughlin. While he proved to be quite adept at drawing photorealistic portraits, his first love was sales. Mr. O'Laughlin was taking a break from his career as a car salesman to sub for our Art classes.

Within the context of Dr. Brent Wilson's pedagogical spaces, I feel as though our Art classes existed mostly within the 1<sup>st</sup> pedagogical site during that semester with Mr. O'Laughlin. On the first day with Mr. O, we were asked to talk a bit about who we were and what we had been working on. Mr. O surmised that we would be able to effectively and "maturely" self-direct this final semester of our high school Art career. Since we were a fairly confident group, he was half right. How we spent our time initially didn't matter to Mr. O. He was interested in pursuing his own portrait work on the school's time, and he knew that even if our class didn't make a lot of work we wouldn't do anything too disruptive. Initially, our class came in and worked as we always had: copying images from the piles of vintage National Geographic Magazines, making chalk drawings of still lifes, and using acrylic paints to make favorite drawings more "finished" pieces. Eventually,

however, a group of us tired of the lack of direction and motivation. This was stuff we could basically do at home, so why not talk and play with our classmates who we didn't see at home?

I don't remember who proposed it, and why, but at some point the images in the National Geographic magazines ceased functioning as source material for copying, and were now meeting with X-acto knives, blank paper, glue, and both appropriated and handwritten captions. We thought it was hilarious, and most of the time, Eric and I constructed these new narratives and one-liners, to outdo the other's newest constructions. Of all that I made or did throughout my high school Art years, that work is what I remember the most. Ironically, but not surprisingly, until I was in my last few years of undergraduate study, I didn't recognize that that sort of appropriative play had the potential to be Art. As with the literature responses in Mrs. McCoy's English class, Eric and I saw our creations as completely goofing around and exploiting the fact that Mr. O'Laughlin didn't monitor our production. We felt as though we were operating on stolen time.

Weeks passed, with the National Geographic narratives frequenting our time in the Art room. Without an authority to extinguish what we truly wanted to do, we felt free to play within the limits of the classroom. But we knew it was all a joke. The real "Art" were our still lifes, our chalk portraits, our paintings; things that took time and skill, not cheeky collages of found imagery that we saw as neither profound nor a display of any sort of technical expertise.

Some time later in the semester, Mr. O tightened the rules. He told us that he had noticed "no real progress, or work" was being made. In true car salesman fashion, each of us had to sign a contract in which we delineated what exactly we

would be making during the final weeks of the semester, sign it, and adhere to our own projections. I decided to return to the National Geographic magazines as source material, and spent most of those final weeks making an acrylic painting of a silhouetted lighthouse at sunset; however, whenever the painting was too wet to work with, I continued to make National Geographic comic narratives. Meanwhile, Eric, who had a passionate interest in music and Graphic Design Arts started a series of very ironic, and very skillfully drawn, Pop Art-inspired works about auto advertisements. Again, Eric and I both believed that his works were purely ruses. Eric always talked about how Mr. O was going to “sell us ‘Art’ by the end of the semester. Now Eric was sarcastically trying to “sell” the car salesman graphic marker drawings of cars as “Art.” Little did Eric, or I, or even Mr. O’Laughlin realize, but those works were the most truly artful works Eric made while in a high school classroom. As for me, those sometimes collaborative, and always dialogic National Geographic comics were the truest works I made. And I couldn’t even see them as valid Artwork.

After a few weeks of working on these newest Art works (i.e. the lighthouse painting, and car drawings), Mr. O’ Laughlin began encouraging us to display our works-in-progress rather than putting them away at the end of class. This way, we were able to see what our classmates, as well as students in other classes, were making. In one of the other Art classes, Eric had a few friends who were equally witty, clever, and interested in harmlessly subverting the system. His friends saw what Eric was making in class, and in response made a faux “Eric Gallery” on the wall adjacent to where Eric would hang his own drawings. In this gallery, Eric’s friends posted their own knock-offs of Eric’s drawings. His friends began mocking

the supposed emptiness and ease of reproducibility of Eric's Artwork. Initially Eric was annoyed, but then he started graphically responding back. This sort of play and dialogue now transcended class periods. Unfortunately, the potential implications of the National Geographic work, or the whole Eric car series and knock-off were never investigated. These works and actions remained understood as ploys to avoid participating in any "serious" artmaking since the car salesman allowed it to go on (as long as we also stuck to our contracts).

There was poignancy in what Eric and his friends created. Unintentionally, they addressed the heart of the Pop Art Movement, the movement Eric superficially chose to reference. Eric's drawings addressed the vapid but sleek commodity in advertisements. His Art was intentionally "soulless," which in our understanding wasn't Art. Meanwhile, the "Eric Gallery" mocked originality and reproducibility. While these issues addressing "art as commodity" and "artist as celebrity" were spearheaded in the 1960's, they are still evident in the Contemporary Art world. Aptly enough, Eric and his friends, under the disinterested direction of the car salesman substitute, were addressing the Art Market.

Conversely, the 2<sup>nd</sup> pedagogical space seems similar to teacher-centered learning. In this space, the teacher directs media and production methods. There is a disconnect between, or dismissal of, what students are interested in pursuing, exploring, or making, and what the teacher thinks students should be learning about and making. The values and judgment of the teacher ultimately decide what is most important for students to engage in and construct. This space is not conducive to collaboration

Lastly, there is the 3<sup>rd</sup> pedagogical space. In this space, there is negotiation between the teacher and students, as well as between the students themselves, regarding explored content and methods. This negotiation inherently creates a collaborative learning environment. The teacher notes what students do in their free time, what is important and exciting to them, and allows for that to enter into the pedagogical space. From there, the teacher complicates what it is that students are already interested in. This could happen in the form of questions asked, manipulating the physical space of the classroom, taking students off-site, watching a film, etc. In this space, teachers learn from students, students learn from teachers, and students learn from one another. In a 3<sup>rd</sup> space, collaboration is a dynamic negotiation between teacher and student; student and student; and the environment. In a true collaboration, no one knows more than another.

Within the Reggio approach both students and teachers affect the direction and form of assignments. Teachers observe and take note as children raise questions and discuss findings. Deciding how to begin a new project, or what might come next in a project, depends on where students have been heading and how teachers choose to guide their direction. Students' motivation for learning is their own curiosity and findings, not learning how to do as the teacher does or instructs. Teachers and students learn from one another, and move forward because of one another. In a true collaboration, no one knows more than another.

## Artful Process/Experience

It is quite possible to enjoy flowers in their colored form and delicate fragrance without knowing anything about plants theoretically. But if one sets out to *understand* the flowering of plants, he is committed to finding out something about the interactions of soil, air, water and sunlight that condition the growth of plants. (Dewey, 1934, p.4)

Art 100 had the potential to become a space like those which employ the Reggio-Emilia approach. While Contemporary art is not what drives the Reggio-Emilia approach, the similarities and connections between artistic processes and how Reggio children approach learning are strong. The emphasis is on freedom to freely explore and investigate using a variety of languages within an environment similar to a studio.

The Reggio approach is concerned with early childhood learning and knowledge. These philosophies are lauded in programs for preschoolers and young elementary students, but disappear after elementary school. A similar approach could benefit older students, especially when young adults are becoming set in their ways (beliefs, values, perspectives), and are much more reluctant to express, explore, invent, and play.

So what we need to seek out and apply when working with the children are some of the processes involved in the creative act, such as synthesis, exploratory tension, the intense relationship with things, symbolic invention, metaphor, evocation and analogy, cultural courage, and expressivity. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p. 15)

In any college course, the question of how to introduce influential contributors to the field is prevalent. These are the people who changed the field, questioned the field, or currently identify as participants in the field. In Art 100, the emphasis is on Contemporary Art, which is a broad and often unfamiliar space comprised of many methods and means. While students learn about certain

artists in relation to accompanying projects, there are many others who unfortunately get omitted.

Since this is an Art class, the question of what role artmaking should have is also prevalent. As instructors, we would often ask, what is learned, experienced, and different when creating something visual as opposed to writing a research paper? And we are confronted by the question, can art-making be a scholarly endeavor?

One fall semester, a team teacher and I decided that it would be fun and powerful for both students and us to perform a Contemporary artist or artwork in conjunction with Halloween. Since Halloween was a couple weeks after the midterm, students had plenty of time to prepare various parts of this on-going project.

In explorations of matter and material, there seemed to be the genesis of composition, or perhaps a compositional research already in place, with its own strategies and aims. This research involved all the sensory approaches that characterized the children's explorations of the single materials.

Some children chose materials (in this case, fabrics) to compose on the tabletop, first putting them up to their faces, as if to confirm the sensitivity of their cheeks. Other children, after choosing the materials, arranged them close together, and the composition was formed through a narration that created a relationship between them. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p.24)

In my section, students were asked to first go online, read about and look at works of various artists from a provided list of seminal Contemporary (and some Modern) artists. Next, students printed out color images of a few artists who they responded to, brought the images to class and talked with each other about their findings. That same day, I talked with each of them individually to see which artists they were leaning toward. The next week, students met with me individually

to talk about their artist and costume ideas. We talked about logistics, and how to best express what they wanted.

On Halloween students from both my section and my team teacher's met. The other teacher and I dressed up too. After everyone arrived, we paraded around and through buildings in the Art Education/Fine Arts area. We performed our artist/artwork. When we encountered Art students or professors, we asked them to guess who or what students were dressed as. After the parade, we returned to the room where we originally met, and had a Halloween party.

A week after the parade, students were asked to bring in documentation of their costume. The considerations of documentation had been discussed on the day that students brought in their original artist images. Students were to think of this photograph as its own artwork, and an extension of their artist's sensibility. If they referenced a particular artist, they were to pay attention to that artist's style, or how their referenced artist used documentation. If they used a particular work, they were to pay attention to how that work had been documented, and why.

...combinations, alliances, dialogues of materials; perceptual, pictorial, and material solutions with chromatic, formal, and compositional variations. The final compositions were the result of agreements reached, a sort of pact of alliance between the children and material. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p. 27)

Throughout this whole process, students were to be researching images and information about their artist and works. On the day they turned in their photographs, students also gave a five-minute Powerpoint presentation. They were to talk about who their artist was, what kind of work they made (i.e. media used), and why (conceptual considerations). Students were to highlight whatever inspired their costume, but also include three additional examples of their artist's work.



This multi-step project was conceived of with the question, “what is the importance of making?” in mind. What could be gained or experienced through varied expression? What could be learned at each step? And as a whole process?

...hands, brain, sensations, and material got to know each other...  
first forms embodied alphabets, the search for a material grammar...

Each composition bore the personal traces, thoughts, and imprints of the children and the quality, identity, and peculiarity of the materials. When these compositions were combined, they integrated each other, confronted each other, and were expanded to be recombined again in other compositions. A recombination that searched for equilibrium with other gestures and other thoughts: recombining means re-seeing, re-listening, re-imagining. It was a process of becoming that ended only when the compositional tuning was complete. A large final composition gave the children a sense of the dimensions of the work they had done. (Vecchi & Giudici, 2004, p. 27)

How is it that the everyday making of things grows into that form of making which is genuinely artistic? How is it that our everyday enjoyment of scenes and situations develops into the peculiar satisfaction that attends the experience which is emphatically aesthetic? (Dewey, 1934, p.12)

The sources of art in human experience will be learned by him who sees...who does not remain a cold spectator. (Dewey, 1934, p. 5)

I've never had firsthand experience with a Reggio-like space, but I have experienced a collaborative environment that while not a traditional pedagogical space was one of the closest times I've come to being a part of 3<sup>rd</sup> pedagogical site. This site was created at a part-time job I held while attending graduate school at Penn State. I worked at Wegmans, a regional supermarket chain recognized for providing shoppers with a unique shopping experience. A portion of their store is modeled after European open-air markets, and one of the departments Wegmans prides itself on is its artisan Cheese Shop. The cheese shop boasts hundreds of cheeses, many imported, and was also the department I called home.

Compared to other departments, ours was a small and intimate space. It was arranged so that three centrally located, rectangular tables faced one another. Only one person could work at a table at a time. Encircling the three tables were the backs of our refrigeration cases, a couple worktables that faced out toward the store, and a service case showcasing some of the more expensive cheeses and edible creations. On our busiest days the number of cheese shop employees working at once was six. Overall, the total number of cheese shop employees never exceeded fifteen. We knew well, and worked regularly with everyone in the department. While working, employees could spend a good portion of their shift chatting with co-workers. We never had the customer volume of other departments, and our products didn't have as short of a shelf life as, say, The Bakery. There was always consistent work to be done, but there wasn't the urgency felt by other departments.

During the two and a half years that I was employed with Wegmans, I worked under three different managers. The first and last managers organized the department and operated like most managers, and even educators, I had in the past; they were authoritarian, and mostly present only in their authoritarian dictates. The cheese shop under the first manager felt similarly to Mr. O'Laughlin's classroom; both workers and manager existed mostly within their own 1<sup>st</sup> spaces. The last manager could be compared to the high school teachers I had who tried to relinquish some power and allow workers to participate in decision making. However, that proved too uncertain, inefficient, and frustrating for those teachers and this manager. It ended up being frustrating for workers as

well. We could never guess what that manager was fishing for. This last manager would have been happiest structuring and operating within a 2<sup>nd</sup> space.

The cheese shop manager sandwiched between the two authoritarians was named Judy. She was noticeably different. Before Judy arrived, as with every other part time job I had ever held, work was work. I punched in, did whatever tasks were delineated, and punched out. Within a month of Judy's managing, I began to notice both physical and psychological differences in the work environment. I watched how she talked with and facilitated customers and employees. Judy listened to and respected people. She treated every issue and person as an individual. She wanted to know her employees and learn from customers. Judy was sensitive to how the cheese shop operated as a business, workspace and intimate community. She promoted equality and reciprocity. If I had a suggestion, I knew I would be heard, and Judy did the same. I remember many times when Judy would share plans for changes and genuinely ask for our insights. Judy shared the intuition of Mrs. McCoy in that she was truly interested in a democratic space and curious to see co-workers and customers insights in action. The cheese shop became a workplace that was bigger than any one individual.

Eventually, it became more than a workplace as its creative potential began to show itself as well. Neither my co-workers nor I could afford any of the products in the Cheese Shop, so the pretentiousness and excess of our department was often subverted or mocked. To test the playful waters, I began drawing and collaging on advertisements and didactic handouts that permeated our department and the store. In ways, this echoed the National Geographic comic

narratives from high school. I would draw and share with whomever I was working with and sometimes leave the drawings for others not working that day. Soon, my co-workers posted similar drawings. And what was initially surprising and distinguished Judy from someone like Mrs. McCoy, was that she occasionally participated with written notes on our public marker board accompanied by appropriate drawings. Judy's involvement and encouragement made it evident that this sort of play was okay, and leveled the workplace hierarchy. She was able to help part-timers negotiate the logistics of cheese shop and still be one of us.

Eventually, alongside cutting and wrapping the gouda, swiss, and blue cheeses, collaborative works started to occur. One major project was a "myth" about Judy's past and how she came to be manager of one of Wegmans' prime departments. Judy was kind, physically small, and seemingly unassuming, so we thought it would be fun to create a hidden strength for Judy within a parallel business world. A couple co-workers and I began incorporating the myth into everyday discussion. We nonchalantly talked about how Judy used arm-wrestling both for general power and to ascend the managerial ladder. Later, I began implicating newer employees by asking if Judy had arm-wrestled them as a way to test their strength and potential.

Other stories about Judy's mythical status, as well as co-workers as characters, were improvised whenever occasions warranted. I was always amused and sometimes surprised when someone would add to her myth unexpectedly. Judy even played along, sometimes literally by adding details, and other times just by allowing us to riff while working. Our own cheese shop language and world were developing. It was a very organic and collaborative endeavor that

transcended shifts (I would sometimes hear stories second hand), and added an additional layer to the workspace. This sort of creation and exchange allowed us to experience a space and each other beyond superficiality. Stability in certain understandings of this job - who Judy was, who all the part-timers were, what Wegmans was - were disrupted. There was room to question, re-imagine, and reframe our environment and all the components within.

Right before my last semester of graduate school, Judy announced that she would be leaving our department for another position. I had previously recognized the uniqueness of this working environment, but now felt an immediate sadness at the probability of this special balance of environment, facilitator, and participants being upset.

Following Judy's last cheese shop shift, most of the department met at a restaurant to say goodbye. A transcribed copy of all the oral tales the department had woven over the last year was read aloud. Many of my co-workers were mentioned throughout the story, so it was fun watching them react to their various roles (which were based on how they truly were day-to-day). Judy was given a hardcopy so she could both metaphorically and literally keep what she contributed to and allowed to grow.

The story and the collective sharing at the restaurant reflected the bigger implications of the collaborative and negotiated space we had all shared and contributed to over the last couple years. It seemed appropriate to collectively share in the culminating work at her farewell dinner. That piece of art could not have come without that environment, and thus without Judy. Of course, my playful, artful poking didn't hurt either, but our artful experiences were contingent

on Judy's presence and influences. She created the opportunity for this sort of exploration and play, watched as we did just that (sometimes with a bit of uncertainty, but always trusting) and facilitated.

## Conclusion

What might be carried on by participants who experienced an environment that allowed for improvisation, play, and democracy?

In writing this thesis, my aim was not to propose a methodical paper. Method implies clear causalities. Just as learning about Art does not have to focus solely on technique, these theoretical practices are not solely about method. What I have experienced firsthand has been a collage of personal experiences in which I saw certain theories in practice. In some spaces, like the cheese shop, many of these theories were occurring naturally. With some intention from the employees, awareness and collaboration started to flourish in the group. In the cheese shop, we learned about each other and from each other. We reflected more on our everyday experiences and positions in that space. Artful imagining and play became meaningful and expansive.

A month or so after Judy left The Cheese Shop, our full time employee, Elaine, mentioned wanting to playfully move one of the concrete referents from the Judy myth (a small, stuffed caribou) from our department to Judy's new department. Elaine and I joked about how to most effectively do this. She eventually came to an idea similar to that of the "traveling gnome": members of the Cheese Shop would take the caribou to sites easily identified with who they are and take the caribou's picture there. It would appear as though the caribou were searching for Judy all over State College. The last picture would be taken in her new department, the caribou's new home. This project was received very well, and over the next few months both current and previous Cheese Shop employees took

the caribou on photo shoots. The playful, creative, inventive spirit lived on...in our part-time job environment.

All of these theoretical components existing and working together is a delicate balance. A new manager came into the cheese shop who had a different value system and a different vision of the department and how it should operate. Within a couple of months, that space changed completely. We were no longer invited to participate as peers or equals. This new manager believed she knew best, which made collaboration impossible. Hierarchy took the place of negotiation. The cheese shop once again became a work place.

Is that the end? Once out of a negotiated space, is all artfulness lost? I don't believe so. While this paper explores conditions that facilitate collaborative, negotiated pedagogical spaces, this paper is also about individuals. Hopefully, it is understood by students who enroll in Art 100 that the class is not rooted in what makes good or bad art. Both in theory and in practice, Art 100 aims to connect contemporary artistic practices to everyday life. It's about gaining sensitivity to an individual's world, what is important and what compels. It's about learning to live artfully with awareness. Through seeing more carefully, individuals will hopefully gain more opportunities to reflect, reframe and express.

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and enviring conditions is involved in the very process of living. Often, however, things are experienced but not in a way that they are composed into *an* experience because of extraneous interruptions or inner lethargy. In contrast, we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment; its close is a consummation, not a cessation. (Dewey, 1934, p. 35)



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