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## Pragmatism And Art: Tools For Change

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In conjunction with other poststructuralist moves away from an objectivist world, neopragmatism can provide art educators with useful theoretical perspectives to guide interpretations of works of art, pedagogy and curriculum. Interpretive strategies that are drawn from the pragmatic tradition and that utilize concepts such as contingent wholes (belief), demystification (alternative interpretations) and recontextualization (change), can provide art educators with alternatives to objectivist interpretive strategies, such as those promoted by Feldman (1994) and Barrett (1994) in art criticism and Tyler (1949) in curriculum. A neopragmatic analysis can bring teachers and students into a more satisfactory relationship with contemporary works of art, such as Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977*, contemporary issues affecting curriculum, and contemporary perspectives related to art education's role in general education.

### Introduction

Throughout much of this century, powerful metaphors about learning and teaching have been transferred from 19th-century science (psychology and biology) to learning and schooling in general. In response to these interests, Franklin Bobbitt wrote *The Curriculum* (1918) as an objectivist argument for an ordered and measurable approach to teaching. Along with education, American pragmatism grew out of America's faith and interest in science. This paper is a reconsideration of the relevance of pragmatism as a tool for interpreting issues related to art education. Among the relevant issues that an analysis based upon pragmatism needs to address is the role of the contemporary, embodied in works of art such as Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977*, in shaping decisions in art education.

Progressive education in the early 20th century was driven by pragmatism's investment in science as an authoritative source. Early 20th-century educators such as Edward Thorndike were profoundly affected by the faith in scientific understanding of pragmatists such as Peirce (1878), James (1907), and Dewey (1934). This faith in science was incorporated into general education as "curriculum development" or "curriculum design." Over time, educators held onto a 19th-century vision of science as objective truth, emphasizing those aspects of pragmatism that spoke to a utilitarian approach to learning. Educators de-emphasized two aspects of pragmatism: one that valued belief as the ground from which learning proceeds and another that valued unforeseeable emergent forms as possible outcomes for educational processes. It is these discarded aspects of pragmatism that neopragmatists such as Rorty (1989) and Schusterman (1992) attempt to bring forward and integrate with ideas generated as a result of the "linguistic turn" in philosophy. Neopragmatists emphasize communication and, as a result, value the role of belief, contemporary culture, and the merits of open-ended outcomes as useful in inquiry.

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<sup>2</sup>According to Diggins (1994, p. 236), "Peirce convinced Dewey that truth and reality are only available to a scientific community of inquirers that would carry on investigation indefinitely, formulating hypotheses, testing theories, and revising ideas as a means not necessarily of reaching truth but of clarifying meaning and fixing belief. Dewey extended the community of investigators to include the democratic public itself."

Pragmatism began with the writings of C. S. Peirce (1878). Peirce, credited for his pioneering work in mathematics and semiotics, introduced to science the concept of fallibilism, wherein the fixation of belief is contingent upon future reinterpretations by the scientific community. Peirce's concepts of scientific verification and fallibilism were extended by Dewey<sup>2</sup> to a participatory democracy that included both a wider field of interpreters and a wider conception of consciousness. Dewey (1902) valued not only a relationship between propositions and observed behaviors but a full range of intellectual, emotional, and practical dimensions of experience. These non-instrumental aspects of pragmatism, contingency, emotion, and democratic conceptions of judgment had been left behind by educators, such as Thorndike and Franklin Bobbitt from the beginning of the century and E. D. Hirsch today, in favor of a more deterministic interpretation of the philosophy. Neopragmatic art educators value the process through which students reorient their beliefs to themselves and to the events that they encounter. Referring to Dewey, William James (1951), stated:

Everywhere, these teachers say, "truth" in our ideas and beliefs means the same thing that it means in science. It means, they say, nothing but this, that ideas (which themselves are just part of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get in satisfactory relationship with other parts of our experience. (p. 133)

Pragmatists devalue those times when inquiry processes use abstract concepts to mystify and inhibit relationships.

This visionary aspect of pragmatism, lodged in a historicized understanding of truth that is dependent upon possibility and practice, gives value to the viewer's power to develop an aesthetic of self and community awareness. It was James (1907) who stated: "The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it would make for you or me, at definite instants of our life, if this world formula or that world formula be the true one" (p. 130). This orientation suggests that a pragmatic analysis of an art education curriculum may be determined through life issues, including those embodied in contemporary artworks and their interpretations.

Some works of art provoke relevant questions about contemporary life. Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977*, is a work whose title alone provokes the question "How to conceive of a day?" Other questions might include: "What difference does it make if students appropriate beliefs instigated by *October 18, 1977*? What habits of action might emerge from an encounter with *October 18, 1977*? Following Dewey, how might a work of art such as *October 18, 1977* aid students and teachers to come into a more satisfactory emotional, intellectual, and practical awareness of the

world? How does *October 18, 1977* hold up in relation to pragmatists' interests in belief, questions, and change?"

Viewers bring to *October 18, 1977* beliefs about the function of art. This Richter-day is not painted in the most dominant tradition in Western art,<sup>3</sup> on a single canvas like Goya's *The Third of May*. Rather it is a group of 15 physically unconnected oil paintings. Richter has insisted that the series always be together when exhibited and never together when reproduced. These directives suggests that Richter intends for the work to be seen as a whole and "in person."

Each image is painted in cool shades of gray, a characteristic that links them to painting's tradition of grisaille and to the austere mystery of tombstones. For people today, symbols of memory are more frequently found in photographs and not in memorial stones. The bases for Richter's images were appropriated from a collection of photographs, including news photos, police documentation, family portraits, and snapshots that record images relating to the arrest, detention, and death of three members of the anarchist political organization, the Baader-Meinhof group (Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe) in Germany's Stammheim prison on October 18, 1977.

According to pragmatism, the veracity of any text, including a work of art, is not to be judged in the closed system of an abstract coherence or logic but rather for its value as a vehicle for linking present beliefs to future actions. Pragmatism values the intellectual history which grounds all belief, including folk answers to such questions as: "What is art?" "How does one paint a day?" or "What is the relationship between anarchy and the state?" Pragmatism calls upon the interpreter to focus on and take responsibility for the future implications of the theories that s/he espouses.

Dewey (1934) values the learning that takes place as the viewer of the art work surrenders their beliefs to unforeseen possibilities that, from some indeterminate future position, might be said to define the encounter. This discussion is carried on by Richard Rorty (1991) who proposes that to understand this encounter we need to change the mechanistic metaphors we use to understand belief. For Rorty, belief is like a web composed of interdependent networks of codependent relational states rather than determinate, insular and unidirectional connections.<sup>4</sup> Rorty (1991), in speaking of changes in belief, pushes the concept of interpretation in his own effort to secure an orientation toward knowing.

As one moves along the spectrum from habit to inquiry—from instinctive revision of intentions through routine calculation toward revolutionary science or politics—the number of beliefs added to or subtracted from the web increases. At a certain point in this process it becomes useful to speak of "recontextualization." The more wide-

<sup>3</sup>While there are traditions in Western art which utilize series, *October 18, 1977* does not depend upon sequence (stations of the cross) or determinate proximity (altarpiece triptychs) for its aesthetic resonance.

<sup>4</sup>Alternative support for these ideas are to be found in Varela, Thompson & Rosch (1991), who conceive of this web as a dynamic system, which is both emergent, in that it changes through its own dynamics, and enacted, in that it can intentionally commence its own restructuring.

spread the changes, the more we have the notion of a "new context." This new context can be a new explanatory theory, a new comparison class, a new descriptive vocabulary, a new private or political purpose, the latest book one has read, the last person one talked to; the possibilities are endless. (pp. 60-61)

Rorty (1989) maintained that truth, in this pragmatic world view, is not based upon the correspondence of language to an objective world (e.g., An objectivist world view might consider it important to ask the question "What does *October 18, 1977* really mean?"). Truth, in this world, is based upon intellectual histories that are susceptible to being recontextualized within an ever emergent cultural field (e.g., How might this work change the ways viewers see themselves and their world?). Although a pragmatic pedagogy acknowledges that principles which have been developed out of human histories, such as God's Law, pure selves, rational thought, and household values, may serve as foundations for a learner's identity, the pragmatist resists granting these principles eternal authority. Foundations may change or evolve over time. Learners base interpretations upon their beliefs. It is from these grounded interpretations, interpretations-as-contingent wholes, that education proceeds.

As art educators consider neopragmatism as a perspective from which to evaluate issues, such as those presented by *October 18, 1977* or issues that arise from the lives of students, it will be useful to consider three general dimensions of pragmatism that move learning toward Dewey's (1934) aesthetic vision of love and surrender. They are: a) the "*contingent wholes*" composed of the beliefs that learners bring to their encounters, b) the "*demystification*" of a learner's belief that occurs as one focuses upon alternative accounts of the world, and c) a nondeterministic "*recontextualization*" or holistic change that occurs within the learner as a result of his/her encounters in the world.

### Pragmatism and Pedagogy

In the present, art educators might interpret many of the developments in the mid-20th century as a junction where art educators abrogated the curriculum influence of the arts and instead used the instrumentalist interpretations of pragmatism, which corresponded with 19th-century scientific conceptions of truth. Such interpretations oriented education toward problem solving (as seen in art-education-as-design or school art projects) as opposed to pleasure-seeking, meaning-making or communicative practices. Dewey, in contrast, speaks of art making as an act of love in which the artist is not solving a problem but rather attracted to the ideas, emotions, and actions involved with art making and art viewing. For Dewey, the ideal audience nondeterministically surrenders to the world view presented by the work of art.

For the pragmatist, art education might be seen as an image-oriented metadiscipline, valued for its ability to attend to relevant issues and events and for its possibility to enrich and enlarge student orientations to those issues, themselves, and the world. A pragmatic analysis applied to artifacts like works of art can also be applied to systems and their practices. Art education, thus represents a historically situated and ongoing project defined by praxis and theory. Whereas art education is neither monolithic nor universal, it does depend upon a contingently related group of people and ideas that have an influence upon one another. Art educators develop ways of speaking and acting that contribute to conceptions of the field itself, works of art, students, art audiences, and other disciplines.

Neopragmatists, taking the lead from poststructuralist theory, suggest that education, like art, is not a transparent vehicle for the transmission of knowledge but rather is a field which deeply contributes to constructions of culture. For instance it suggests that art educators are the primary authors of classroom practices. Art educators who passively consign the understanding of curriculum to the mysteries of pluralism or critical inquiry, historical inquiry, philosophical inquiry, or studio inquiry may deny the unique contribution of art education as a source of knowledge.

Neopragmatists would value the ideas about critical language presented by the artist/critic Suzanne Lacy (1995). She speaks of the usefulness of a terminology which addresses relationships between artworks and their audiences. She notes a continuum of audience responsibility and begins with the artist, moves through a succession of more removed audiences (collaborators, performers, viewers, media consumers) which finds its most diffuse manifestation in the audience of the myths and memories. This final audience corresponds to the pragmatist emphasis on diffuse beliefs as the ground from which our interpretive positions emanate. Lacy's model may also be applied to art education classrooms that, like works of art, are interpreted by audience members beginning with teachers and extending to students, parents, staff members, administrators, and community members. By this process, the idea of what art education might be becomes part of a culture's folk consciousness.

Curriculum interpretation as a process contributes to this communal self-knowledge. Principles associated with schooling and art, through metaphor, form relationships with other actions and beliefs. Defining the good curriculum is much like defining the good work of art. Both are dependent upon the values of the communities that produce them and the values of the persons who interpret them.

Pragmatism as an orientation for the interpretation of art education and its methods contrasts with other aesthetic foundations such as formalism, expressionism, mimesis, instrumentalism, and pluralism. Efland (1995) provided a useful overview of the ideological relationships between

these aesthetic theories and complementary learning theories. He saw these relationships as a syncretistic amalgamation of ideology, learning, and aesthetics. For example, formalism in art can be said to value abstractly structured learning theories and environments.

Consider the implications for pedagogy when its value is determined by criteria borrowed from verification methods utilized by science as compared to values as determined through the arts. Philosophy and science are presented primarily through propositions; whereas the arts, and arguably much in education, are presented primarily through representation and expression. While abstract ideas such as creativity and associative thinking are valued in science as in art, scientific method requires that experimental results are repeatable by other scientists. Alternatively, while artists utilize aesthetic habits acquired from traditions and are valued by the degree to which they influence aesthetic traditions, it is not necessary for specific artworks to be reproduced exactly. Artworks are valued by the degree to which they are meaningfully interpreted by their audiences. The philosopher Daniel Dennett (1995) claimed that if forced to choose between the eradication of Newton's *Principia* or a work of art such as Picasso's *Guernica*, he would most certainly keep *Guernica* and discard Newton. His rationale is that Picasso's work is unique and it is highly unlikely to have been done by another artist; however, although not guaranteed, it is probable that Newton's *Principia* would have been written by some other scientist.

To illustrate the ineffectual influence of the arts in education consider that, although *Guernica* is frequently studied for its content, it is rare that the inquiry methods used by Picasso to generate this work<sup>5</sup> are provided as a model for classroom practices, whether in the studio, seminar or lecture hall. Compare this with Newton's *Principia*. Not only is Newton's work taught in a translated form as content in general education classrooms but also his deductive methodology is adopted in labs, his causal account of truth is taught and used as method in lectures, and his criteria for evidence is validated in seminars. Although art educators may use contemporary works of art as content in curriculum, they seldom use practices associated with their formulation<sup>6</sup> as methodological models for inquiry.

A pragmatic analysis of art education might take questions and stories from the arts and from the lives of their students and use them as tools to reconsider pedagogy in art education and education in general. An analysis of pragmatism itself might assess whether it can adequately confirm the relationships that exist between the arts and the lives of the people who use them. This argument or perspective proposes that both of these issues can be addressed through the use of contingent wholes, demystification, and recontextualization as tools for understanding practice.

5According to Howard Gardner (1993), Picasso's practice method required a prolonged reworking of his ideas and images. In addition, his creativity was simultaneously dependent upon desire and a continual incorporation and interpretation of culture (e.g. works of art by his father, Braque, Cezanne, Matisse,

Raphael, African art).  
6The range of interactions utilized by an artist such as Richter which required a dynamic understanding of art history, contemporary images, events and ideas and sustained personal history of insight and development are not incorporated into the project orientation of most art programs.

Dialectically, two related questions emerge: What methods derived from pragmatism can be used as tools for an analysis of practices in art education? And, what do the arts tell us about learning that more instrumentalist or scientific accounts omit?

### Contingent Wholes

Pragmatism grounds understanding within what Peirce (1955) referred to as "habit," what Rorty (1989) referred to as "vocabulary," and to which I refer here as "contingent wholes" or contingently held beliefs. Students bring their habits to *October 18, 1977* and teachers bring their habits to their understandings of curriculum and pedagogy. Consequently, in interpreting works of art such as *October 18, 1977* as well as interpreting curriculum and pedagogy, art educators might consider developing strategies through which they acknowledge and utilize the contingent wholes that comprise themselves and their students, and the interpretive positions that these subjectivities reveal.

A pragmatic analysis starts with the interpretive field as a holistic confluence of a person's experiences. Inquiry that is grounded acknowledges the subjective position of the interpreter rather than appealing to the authority of detached and objective observation. Such an inquiry acknowledges the responses that students and teachers employ in relation to schooling, works of art in general, and specific content in works of art. Contrast this with scientifically devised inductive interpretation theories, such as methods of criticism popularized by Feldman (1994) and Barrett (1994). Along with the benefits derived from their inductive and systematic approach to art criticism through description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment, teachers privilege encounters with the world that are disinterested, deferred, decontextualized, and goal-oriented.

In contrast to this objectivist method, a pragmatic analysis of a work of art starts with the students' own memories of past encounters, quotations from people who have influenced them, noncausal metaphorical associations, stories from their families and communities that are resonant with the encounter, rituals and postures that they reenact, and the questioning structures that they use to understand or to distance themselves from the world. Grounding interpretation in the contingent wholes that comprise a student's responses attends to three aspects of response to an art work: a) the dynamic historical condition of the students' own interpretive stance; b) the work of art as an evolving element of their culture's intellectual world; and c) the student as an activist participant in the construction of culture.

### Demystification

Demystification attends to two important aspects of interpretation that contingently held beliefs may obscure; first, that viewers are related to works of art in complex ways, and second, that the construction of meaning is an interactive process. Through demystification, alternatives to contingently held beliefs are brought to consciousness. Although a viewer's habits situate his/her relationships to the objects of their attention, such habits are, in Peirce's terms, fallible in that their usefulness may be limited or harmful in relation to new contexts. Strategies for understanding the differences between interpretations based upon prior experiences and those understandings raised by present circumstances can be said to work toward a demystification of the contingent wholes (beliefs or habits) that ground initial encounters.

Demystification is the most readily understood form of inquiry. It is similar to critical inquiry in that it works by relating conflicting positions; it differs from critical inquiry in that this relationship may not be construed as adversarial. Through class discussions and research and through a variety of discursive forms such as stories or arguments, students' beliefs are placed in relation to those of other students, the maker of the work, other artists, folk and academic histories, art educators, cultural critics, other disciplines, etc.

Demystification applied in relation to curriculum and pedagogy challenges those readings of postmodernism that fail to question a haphazard sampling of works of art and their theories. Using pluralism or postmodernism as an excuse for not deciding which artworks and inquiry techniques to employ is a passive, not a pragmatic, stance. Sampling is a curriculum strategy that is not new to the field. A brief look at *School Arts* magazine shows that art educators have a long tradition of sampling from a variety of aesthetic positions (Hamblen, 1995). Sampling is the continuation of a policy that values art knowledge for art knowledge's sake. This practice lacks a rationale for why students should spend time studying art. Pragmatists suggest that a criteria for valuing art education in general and specific works of art in particular is lodged within the differences that artworks have made in people's lives and within the power of artworks to affect identity. Artworks such as Duchamp's *Large Glass*, like other intellectual artifacts, paradoxically have the ability to perpetuate and demystify contingently held beliefs.

A pragmatic analysis of curriculum, pedagogy, and images uses an engagement that is not given and not received but constructed in a relationship between content covered and those questions and conversations that emerge from the lives of students and their communities. It is one thing to say that art educators must empathize with a variety of beliefs in order to understand those interpretive structures that have historically



framed the lives of their students and quite another to explain how a sampling of such beliefs, as a valid act in and of itself, clarifies the pedagogical metastructure utilized by the art educator. Demystification can be applied as a tool for interpreting the educational merits of specific artworks, (e.g. *October 18, 1977*), other practices in art education, and art education as a general practice.

For art educators, specific works of art such as *October 18, 1977* produce questions about the way understanding is structured. For example, *October 18, 1977* simultaneously provokes questions about the work's meaning and about the viewer's susceptibility to popular culture's fetishization of news images; orientation toward other artworks and objects; understanding of the events surrounding the Baader-Meinhof group; their general beliefs about culture, society, death, authority, prison, violence, commitment, courage, suicide, government deception, and the press. Demystification also offers the possibility that interpretations of images like *October 18, 1977* apply by extension to the viewer, who sees the world in particular ways.

### Recontextualization

A third dimension of a pragmatic analysis is an understanding that initial interpretations will be reconfigured into forms often unforeseeable from original interpretive positions. An example of this can be found in early Modernist practices where formalist and expressionist aesthetic beliefs influenced Picasso and others to appropriate African sculpture. Contemporary critics and art historians note that the West's aesthetic position can be said to have abused the intellectual, emotional, and practical aspects of the African work. Despite this, Picasso's work did have the effect of reorienting the West's understanding of African figures (Danto, 1992). African sculpture in turn, with the assistance of stories from Africans, may be said to have reoriented the West's interpretive stance, from formalist to pragmatic, which can be applied not only to African sculpture but to all works of art, including Picasso's own appropriations of African figures. At some point, the stories, including the aesthetic responses that audiences bring to art works, give way to novel emergent forms manifested in the works and the interpretations that accompany them. Viewers can be seen to reorient their aesthetic beliefs to new interpretive structures that differ from their initial competencies.

Artworks embody contingent wholes (sets of beliefs) that may be distinct from the viewer's own habits (e.g., African statues for Western viewers). Within that unresolved but resonant space existing between those habits that are brought to the encounter, the alternative interpretations from other sources and the yet-to-be-defined beliefs enacted by this new context, one experiences doubt. Recontextualization allows for a resolu-

tion of doubt through cross-modal knowing, in that the sensate, conceptual, and ethical are understood as interdependent, mutually constituted states that are altered by such encounters. As James (1907) concluded, meaning relationships are not a mental additive, suspended above experience like a patriarchal judge, but rather they are coextensive with other aspects of experience. As the pragmatist "turns toward concreteness and adequacy, toward facts, toward action and toward power" (p. 131), s/he opens up the aesthetic to an interdependent relationship with all aspects of human experience.

Modernist interpreters of curriculum, who embrace postmodern art works and pedagogical practices influenced by contemporary thought often fall back on those modernist conceptions of curriculum encoded in Tyler's (1949) positivist method for understanding curriculum. Tyler's program, including aims, objectives, methods, and assessment, forms a set of powerful tools for driving curriculum; whereas, a pragmatic approach would value alternative possibilities to develop, the specific form of which might be unforeseeable from the stance originally held by modernist curriculum specialists.

Both Feldman's inductive critical method and Tyler's deductive curriculum development model are dependent upon methods derived from science and philosophy. Although these examples have value in that they orient students, teachers, and curriculum specialists to problem-oriented visions of the world, they underdevelop those aspects of teaching and learning that correspond to Dewey's (1989) aesthetic ideals. Dewey advocated a concept of the aesthetic that is composed of intellectual, emotional, and practical dimensions of experience which simultaneously depend upon open-ended outcomes and contingently held systems of belief. Engagement with this capacity through art works is much like an act of love. The viewer/lover cannot instrumentally make a connection happen but paradoxically must extend her/his determinate expectations (e.g., as what one expects a work of art to mean, feel like, or move one to do) into a capacity to surrender to those yet-to-be-discovered cultural practices that s/he encounters. Recontextualization is Rorty's (1991) term for that which occurs as a viewer embodies a new perspective.

One can acknowledge that instrumentality and determinism represent useful, powerful, and seductive forms of cultural understanding yet consider the possibilities for learning created by an understanding of Dewey and Rorty. Their positions are more thoroughly developed articulations of the general position that Gablik (1991) took as she spoke of empathetic responses to the world or which Mitchell (1996) suggested when he asked, "What it is that pictures really want?" It might be useful to ask what education must lose in order to do this and what insights the arts might bring to bear upon these possibilities.

## Pragmatism and Artworks

### Contingent Wholes and *October 18, 1977*

How might a pragmatic analysis of a work of art such as *October 18, 1977* differ from the uses of an objectivist strategy for analysis? A pragmatic methodology for the interpretation of *October 18, 1977* would not construe detachment from the work of art as an ideal; it would acknowledge the viewer's intellectual, emotional, and practical strategies (Dewey, 1934) as the foundation from which subsequent interpretations develop. Objectivist methods, which utilize detached description as a means to establish consensus and focus the viewer's attention, would not be the primary device for initiating inquiry. Some consensus inevitably evolves out of attending to art work, however it is initially the relationships that the viewers bring to the work that are important.

A pragmatic methodology would proceed under the supposition that *October 18, 1977*, like the viewers who interpret it, depends upon a tradition of images. This image tradition includes not only fine arts images like Goya's *The Third of May*, but also images from popular and folk culture, such as old movies, newspapers, gravestones, and family photographs. A cultural history of images, including interpreters' orientations to them, comprises the relationships that make art works powerful cultural forces. The form and content of public images, such as Saturday morning cartoons, newspaper and magazine photographs, as well as internalized images from household and life circumstances contribute to a student's identity.

The interpretive positions that students bring to the classroom in turn contribute to the evolution of their intellectual histories. Evaluative positions such as "all art is boring;" or "the Baader-Mienhoff group deserved their death;" or "all anarchists are bad, all nations are good" are not frameworks to be surmounted so much as they are forces that expand or recede in response to the cultural power of art works. In this interpretation of curriculum, students are co-participants in the development of a yet-to-be-constructed understanding of the work.

### Demystification and *October 18, 1977*

Demystification occurs as a result of alternative interpretations of *October 18, 1977*. These may be developed through classroom discussions, lectures, debates, interviews, research, etc. As these interpretations inevitably clash, students develop an awareness of the implications that these images hold for their own and their classmates' intellectual, emotional, and practical identities, that in turn are subject to demystification.

How does such an understanding of *October 18, 1977* compare with ways of understanding that the viewer may have attributed to and found

verification in Goya's *The Third of May*, a family photograph, or a newspaper account of the events? What do students know of prisons and what experiences contribute to this knowledge? Is *October 18, 1977's* image network similar to a popular television show like *Cops* or is it something different?

Suppose one student brings to the work an aesthetic expectation characterized by dramatic moments. This expectation may have been produced and perpetuated by responses to works of fine art such as *The Third of May* as well as to popular arts such as adventure movies and comics. This aesthetic expectation in *The Third of May* is dependent upon a sequence of responses in which each part contributes to a rising theatricality, and in which the final crescendo awaits culmination in the next, not yet depicted but implied instant—a climax to be deflated with the firing squad's guns. Perhaps as an alternative to this framework someone else in the class notices that there is a different energetic quality in *October 18, 1977*. Unlike the explosive orchestration of parts to wholes in Goya's work, in Richter's work individual parts are more diffuse. This student understands that the individual elements are unfolded from around the event but that the event itself is not portrayed. Each part sits neutralized in its own contained but diffused space and offers alternative entrances into the series as a whole. This whole seems to be less like a definitive act or proclamation than a loosening, a sorting through, a nonlinear revelation. *October 18, 1977*, as an exemplification of inquiry, provokes resonance and disclosure rather than sublimity and drama.

One consequence of such an encounter might be an interpretation of *October 18, 1977* that would value the ironic possibility that in this age of increased speed and synthesis a useful plan for action is not a grasping for the quick, expedient, and recurrent, but a slow revelation of the image culture which contemporary audiences promote and consume. This interpretation of Richter's work suggests that a useful approach to understanding calls for an aesthetic of surrender to loosen the tangled line of identity. Surrender can provide an alternative to an aesthetic of critique in which grasping provides an expedient but perhaps forced methodology.

Art educators and art students alike may be affected by this work of art. Art educators might revision how art knowledge can be reconstructed metaphorically as a loosening rather than a tightening process. Through demystification students come to see ways in which their interpretive structures correspond and diverge from those of their classmates, their teacher, the artist, and the art critics.

### **Recontextualization and *October 18, 1977***

Because *October 18, 1977* is composed of separate canvases, in order to establish relationships between its elements the viewer must shift her/his

attention from one canvas to another. A redistribution of the viewer's body, as s/he moves from canvas to canvas, is a necessary aspect of the work's interpretations. This moving about contributes to some of the ways in which the series reconstitutes the experiential terms through which it and subsequent works of art, past and future, are seen. Seeing interpretation as a shifting process affords an aesthetic insight to those who take on these perspectives.

For Rorty, recontextualization occurs as the viewer's web of beliefs, manifested as ideas, emotions and actions, is forced to reconfigure itself in light of the new context. *October 18, 1977* constitutes a holistic context, that, when internalized by the viewer, sets in motion a new belief network through which s/he can subsequently access other works of art. More importantly, this recontextualized belief network enacts a potential reconception of fields, ideas, and interactions, including art education. It is possible, for example, that Richter's work might cause viewers to reexamine conclusions that they had previously identified with Goya's work. Conversely, it might deepen such closed interpretive traditions. More broadly, the viewer might temporize the question and consider under what conditions seeing the world as a Goya painting might be useful. Does one feel unfulfilled if s/he doesn't have such a carefully orchestrated hierarchical model as the one Goya presents? Why? Does any interpretive stance require the kind of movement, a continual oscillation of the organism into a variety of states, that *October 18, 1977* suggests? Can one look at Goya's work alone, or does one need to continually compare, coordinate, and triangulate an interpretation in relation to other images and other knowledge? What reasons does one have to believe that interpretive acts like meeting a stranger, walking down an unknown street, or even catching a ball are not affected by works such as *October 18, 1977* or Goya's *The Third of May*?

It is these kinds of questions that Richter's work and pragmatism open up. Recontextualization implies that the cultural self is comprised of those shifting beliefs denoted by Rorty's web. The concept of recontextualization provides a way to speak about relationships among the intellectual, emotional, and practical dimensions of complex encounters, with other people, cultures, and artworks.

### Summary

A pragmatic analysis suggests that closed pedagogical and curriculum systems drive but also limit, inquiry. Strategies for an art education propelled by a pragmatic agenda would open inquiry to: a) interpretive strategies that students bring with them to schools; b) interpretive outcomes that provide open exchange between works of art and other beliefs, such as other works of art, cultural images, private images, or other disciplines;

and c) open-ended expectations for learning outcomes. This is a learning model that is in keeping with ways of knowing that are valued in the arts, where tradition (contingent wholes), alternative interpretations (demystification) and change (recontextualization) are understood as pervasive operational forces. From a pragmatic perspective, art education's influence in education will be furthered when art educators construct programs through which students can articulate meaningful insights about their world through their interpretation of images. A pragmatic analysis requires that an image's meanings be seen as connected to those practices that it engenders. A pragmatic perspective similarly requires that art educators attend to how contemporary images, which are potentially relevant manifestations of belief, might provide a tool for interpreting curriculum, pedagogy, texts, other images, and the lives of students. Pragmatism's use as a philosophical tool depends upon the degree to which art educators and others use its methods to develop satisfactory relationships between issues raised by images and important aspects of students' lives.

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