Profile: Beverly Naidus's Feminist Activist Art Pedagogy: Unleashed and Engaged

BEVERLY NAIDUS

Various approaches to bringing a feminist and activist perspective to teaching art are explored. The author draws on both the writings and work of other artists and educators and her own development as a feminist and socially engaged artist and teacher in order to highlight crucial elements of this perspective. Practical suggestions are presented for curricula and teaching methods that may be adapted to a wide variety of educational contexts. The author concludes that the feminist critique of patriarchy and multiple systems of oppression have profoundly shaped her art-making and teaching and that art pedagogy can provide an effective means of engaging those who have not previously included such a critique or perspective in their world view.

Keywords: activist art / social engagement / permeable ego / cultural animator / media literacy / culture jamming

Learning the Dance

The steps toward becoming an artist can be precarious. The steps toward being a feminist can be more so. Ultimately, teaching how to be both seems to be the easy part. Maybe it is because you are able to look back for the teaching part and harness the energy that pushed you forward blindly, sometimes uncontrollably into the art part. For the feminist part, you need to let the anger and the grief push you in a boat until you meet another angry, grieving person. When you find each other you either have a support group or two people who cannot stand to hear the other speak—two cracked mirrors blurred by damage and miscommunication or two clear mirrors where the contrast and detail is splendid and nourishing.

First, it is crucial to know that I stepped very gingerly into my art practice. The family script and class ideology dictated that I was supposed to enjoy art, not *make* it. Only my inchoate rebellion against a narrow life based on secure bank accounts prevented me from hesitation. Perhaps there was a muse or two involved, but I could not hear them very clearly most of the time. My antenna was often set on the static of the early '70s; what came through and into my art practice was a miracle.

Two of those miracles happened when I was twenty, a junior in college, looking to understand why I had chosen art or why art had chosen me. The first was the gift of my printmaking teacher, who despite his attempts to reinvent me as a queen bee (the one woman distinct from all the others

and destined for some form of male-sanctioned greatness), had the insight to introduce me to a book that had been meaningful to him, Ben Shahn's *The Shape of Content* (1957). Although my first reading of this book was superficial at best, I did receive one message deeply: teaching art and making art could be inseparable in the quest for a humane society. As I learned later, teaching is often seen as a sign of being "less than," implying some sort of mediocrity as an art practitioner. Or it is seen as a career choice reeking of a pragmatism that drowns the spirit of the true artist. This is an attitude I still encounter when I meet artist peers, successful in the high art world, who wonder why on earth I would *choose* not to make art full time.

The second miracle was the first awkward embrace of my female peers, who showed me that queen bee-dom meant a lifetime of alienation and unnecessary suffering. The year was 1973. The work of the Feminist Art Program (facilitated by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro) at the California Institute of the Arts and the startling installations and performances emerging from Womanhouse (a site-specific project created by the students of Chicago and Schapiro) had just made their way to our campus via videotape and journal articles. Buoyed by the excitement of these West Coast projects, female art students on my campus began to meet together. In our discussions, we vented our frustration about having no or few female role models as teachers in our art history courses or in the studio classroom. In response, we demanded our own budget from those in power to bring feminist artists to campus, mount a women's art show, and organize women-directed and -written performances of poetry and theater. It was a watershed moment.

This second miracle included a little toxic waste that took me time to purge. The consciousness-raising session, which had been demanded by the female art students and was led by two well meaning, feminist, visiting artists from New York City, turned out to be more like a consciousness-shrinking affair. Their notions of what was liberated art and what was patriarchal were strange and uncomfortable. They critiqued the women students' art show, saying all the work that contained euphemistic "central" imagery was feminist and all other subject matter, be it landscape or portrait, was patriarchal. I was deeply disappointed by this formulaic thinking and swore off the f-word for a time, feeling no home within it.

A year or so later, as a token female student in my Canadian graduate program, I painfully realized I needed to find a way to make feminist thinking fit. I was angry and frustrated. I felt patronized by the male faculty and visiting artists, and the lone female faculty member seemed to be driven to the edge of madness by her male peers. She was joked about as that "neurotic, feminist artist." Is that what happens when you are isolated and attempt to claim your power?

At the time, a few female undergraduate students were discussing how they felt feminist thinking fit their working process, which helped me to see that I could reshape the theories I had found confining. I decided then that real feminist artists need a range of strategies and tools, rather than the woefully limited and sadly essentialist repertoire of images and objects representing boxes, eggs, wombs, vulvas, and openings. Publications such as *Heresies* magazine[1] and the ever-evolving writings of Lucy Lippard[2] also were helpful to me in integrating feminist thinking into my work.

Along with my investigations into gender as a marker of identity and power, I also began to look at the history of art for social change. Even though I came from a politically liberal family and had a radical, blacklisted father, I had only limited knowledge of this history. My investigations took me back to the broadsheets visually documenting the peasant uprisings during the Middle Ages[3] to the prints and posters made in response to the civil rights movement in the United States.[4] With this new version of art history and a reading of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), I began to build a method for deconstructing images and experiences of the world. This method required some comprehension of how class, race, cultural identity, religion, and other aspects of difference can influence our perception and value system. I was more than a bit mystified by the semiotic theory popular at the time, but I knew in my gut that I needed to raise these kinds of questions in order to offer the perspective my students needed and in order to make the art I needed to make.

Teaching Activist Art

After graduate school, I anxiously entered the job market (many of my early installations dealt with the perils of working life) and the New York art world at the same time. I had been advised that diving full tilt into New York City's art world would save me from a lifetime of academic exile in one boondock or another. Obviously, I had not yet examined the class and regional bias of such an attitude, as I was still invested in the ideal of the fiercely independent artist promoted in art school. Circumstances in the high art world at the time fostered a healthy environment for work with an activist bent, which encouraged my own practice. In 1984, I began teaching at my alma mater and for the first time had the chance to work with students for a more sustained period of time, allowing me to test out new ideas about how to mix content with process. Although the art department that hired me was primarily a traditional one with the standard fare of Drawing 100 and Composition and Color Theory, I was invited to develop some courses directly relating to my own art practice. One such course was Activist Art in Community. Since then, I have modified this kind of

course to be a two-week, two-day, or three-hour workshop. Some of the key ingredients are outlined below.

Activist Art in Community

There are many different ways to open up a dialogue with a new group of students. It really depends on how much time you have and the context and the focus of the course. In Activist Art in Community, I introduce students to the history of activist art through a slide show of artists' work, from the past and present. A major goal of my slide shows is to expand the students' notions of what activist art can be. They need to know that all art reveals a value system through what it depicts, who it is made for, and where it is displayed. I emphasize that even when art appears to be neutral or highly personal it has a political message. The latter is a lesson I learned from early feminist art.

Stereotypes about socially engaged art abound everywhere, but they are most prevalent in traditional art departments and art schools. The students in these programs rarely learn about socially engaged art, and if they do, they may be only presented with the most minimal understanding of it in the form of political posters, social realist murals, and various forms of "agit prop." There is also a deep, unspoken fear characterizing activist art as not really art. A possible source for this view is the old modernist attitude that art is not supposed to communicate a message, bend to any agenda, or be didactic. The pejorative connotation of the word didactic is in itself an interesting issue to ponder. When and how did it become inappropriate or out of fashion for art to teach something? Who does that attitude serve? Often I have found communities of artists and art students to be entrenched in the modernist assumption that art is not supposed to be about anything but beauty and form. So I make it my responsibility to present many alternatives: that art can question assumptions, tell the stories of the invisible, initiate dialogue about polarizing topics, heal traumas, provoke a personal awakening, or transform consciousness. In my slide lectures, I share everything from the anti-war work of Kathë Kollwitz to the interactive installations of Carnival Knowledge, a collaborative project created in the early 1980s to educate audiences about reproductive rights for women through the playing of carnival games. I also include the very intimate, poignant, and sometimes humorous work of Jo Spence that looks at the struggle to fight breast cancer and the challenge of being female in relation to the medical industry. We also look at the less solitary expressions of two polarized communities (Muslim and Hindu) in the Black Country of England by examining the issues of motherhood and daughterhood through dance and poetry, facilitated by the skillful cultural animators, Jubilee Arts, now known as The Public.[5]

After this introduction to the work of a diverse group of artists, I ask the students to think about their own life experiences and choose a social issue that has deeply touched them. I often talk about working from the gut. Without the authority of that gut feeling, students can lose steam and the work lacks the passion that allows others to connect with it. With the story each student selects, we can begin the brainstorming process, leading to each student making an artwork based on her or his gut experience.

In classes that meet regularly over the course of a semester or quarter, I can expose students to a wide variety of forms, from posters to site-specific installations. Students can work on individual projects and also have a collaborative experience in the longer classes. But in a short-term workshop, I have to concentrate the experience, by having the students collaborate right away. I believe the latter process is essential for developing a permeable ego, that is, an ability to maintain one's individuality and creative source while working cooperatively with others.

In the collaborations, students need to discuss how their core issues and stories relate to one another and develop an intention for the work they will create together. They begin by composing a skills inventory, listing every skill each person brings to the collaboration including drawing, writing, cooking, note-taking, sign painting, networking—in other words, the skills both within and outside the margins of traditional artistic practice. From the inventory, they can begin to imagine a form their artwork might take and figure out how to scavenge appropriate materials given the amount of time they have to develop the project. They also need to think about the context in which their work will be seen and the audience to which it is directed.

In the shortest workshops, only a proposal for the project can emerge, which is critiqued and discussed by the whole class at the end of the process. In longer workshops and courses, students have time to create the project and then share it for feedback.

Before we finish the workshop or course, we always discuss how we can bring what we have learned back to our home communities and what students might want to facilitate on their own as a *cultural animator*.[6] The latter term is used within community-based art circles to signify an artist/activist who does not impose her or his story upon the community but rather catalyzes the community to create art about its own stories. It is a powerful process that requires trust and sensitivity, social skills rarely taught in art school.

An Arts for Social Change Curriculum

After fourteen years of full-time teaching in a private liberal arts college and different state universities, eleven years of adjunct work at private interdisciplinary colleges, a community college, a radical ecology summer institute,[7] and a variety of museums in New York City (along the way receiving tenure twice), I now have a position at the University of Washington, Tacoma, which has allowed me to develop my dream curriculum. I teach art to non-art majors within an interdisciplinary context. These are working class, nontraditional students of diverse age and life experience, many of whom are the first in their families to go to college and are often connected with the several military bases in the area. I took this job because I knew I would not be preaching to the choir.

Through the new curriculum I have created, I am able to manifest many aspects of my feminist and activist thinking in more developed ways. In every course, we discuss the deleterious effects of patriarchy, how dominant culture permeates our lives, the ways oppression works, and the ways that art and telling our own stories provides an antidote. My current course offerings include Art in a Time of War; Body Image and Art; Eco-art: Art in Response to the Environmental Crisis; Cultural Identity; Fear of Difference and Art; and Labor, Globalization and Art. A new concentration in Arts in Community, which will include a practicum in community-based art, is currently being developed.

Because the majority of my students come into my classes with few opinions about art, little experience making it, and are largely uninformed about the topic of activist art, I sometimes think I have a unique and formidable challenge. But, in truth, if I am able to make true human-to-human contact with these students, allaying their fears about what they perceive as their artistic and intellectual shortcomings, and inspiring them with an image that speaks deeply to their own particular pain or grief, then my work is not so hard. If in the space of ten weeks I can raise consciousness about the particular social issue we are discussing and empower the students to tell their stories about the topic through art, I have done my job.

In the first week of every course, my students learn something about the various roles art has played in society as decoration, entertainment, propaganda, social and political satire, memorials, or calls for justice. They also learn the basics of visual grammar (line, shape, composition, texture, color), look at examples of historical and contemporary art examining the social issue we are discussing, and develop some rudimentary artistic skills that might include drawing, digital imaging, collage, site-specific installation, interactive performance, assemblage, poster-making, video, and book-making. There are extensive readings in each course to help

the students develop critical thinking skills about the topics the course addresses, and we discuss the topics at great length. But the primary goal of each course is to help the student to create art about her or his own experience. If the process does not intimidate students and they are not overwhelmed by the course content, there is enormous potential for them to access their voice.

I sometimes start the students on a project based on a lived or witnessed experience, and they bring the project in for several drafts and feedback sessions. In the latter sessions, we always start with the student's intentions for the work and then point out the strengths, while offering suggestions for how the work might be improved. Students worry about so many things: "am I doing it right?" being of the utmost concern. I often joke that this is not an art class where "you make your drawing of the pumpkin look like mine." Another worry comes from their fear of new materials and techniques, and my encouraging words about diving in and experimenting with them do not always work. Putting up unfinished or unresolved work in front of others is also frightening at first, but usually after the first few critiques, the students develop some resiliency. In our small classes of twelve to seventeen students, they cannot avoid being exposed from time to time.

Last week, a student in my Art in a Time of War class told me in our conference that she was really appreciated the course because it helped her to clarify issues and figure out what was important to her. This student has had several generations of military personnel in her family and had voiced some fairly conventional views in class. Earlier in the semester when I asked her what she felt was important to her she said, "No matter what, I support the troops." I responded, "What do you mean by 'support'?" She looked confused so I added, "support can mean many things: are you supporting them by demanding that the government pays for adequate counseling when they return home, or adequate health benefits? Are you supporting them by protesting to end the war, so that they can come home? Or by insisting that they get adequate protective armor, which the military has not given them, while they are on duty in Iraq?" She continued to look confused, but then replied, "I guess I have more thinking to do."

By the middle of the quarter, the students are ready to work collaboratively and develop a project that will be sited somewhere on campus. One eco-art, site-specific work was a pseudo-garden with furrowed rows for seeds but with labels that listed the heavy metals that "grow" in our superfund soil. An Art in a Time of War project was a chain-link fence into which was woven all the students' attitudes about war. It was quite controversial because the students, several of whom were veterans, decided to use actual U.S. flags as part of the weaving, which included some red, paint-spattered dolls. Veterans who were not in class but who were members of the campus community were very upset by the use of the flag in

the art. I told the class about this reaction, and they asked for a dialogue to happen between the two groups. It never happened formally because it was the end of the quarter and the students could not make the time, but the impulse was a good one (see *Art in a Time of War* in color insert).

Because the content of these courses is often very charged and potentially polarizing, I try to create a safe space in the classroom, so students feel their points of view and their voices can be heard. Similarly, in my Cultural Identity and Art class, the students have to work through some complicated and uncomfortable issues surrounding race and privilege. We read theories of Whiteness, look at racism in our everyday lives that was previously invisible to white people, and discuss the difference between economic and political oppression and emotional damage. Without fail, every quarter, when I start teaching this class, a well-intentioned, white student says, "but I am NOT a racist. I have lots of friends of color." And although there are students of color in each class, they are a minority and often get romanticized by the white ones. The process of making art about each individual's cultural identity allows all of the students to own both their pride and shame (if they acknowledge the latter) and to approach those of other identities with better grounding and respect.

In my Eco-art class, there is a different kind of experiential learning that goes on. On the first day of class, we do a walking meditation that takes students around the campus. They are required to walk in silence, following their breath, and contemplating what is in the air, earth, and soil around them. Our campus is built on a superfund site and the aroma of Tacoma (from the mills and rendering plants) is often unpleasantly palpable.

Altering the students' senses through this first unhurried walk on campus gives them a chance to pause and reflect on the four elements and the toxics affecting them in their own backyards and regions. I have been deeply inspired by the ecofeminist Starhawk in the work I do with students in this class and use some of the exercises from her new book, *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature*, to inspire creative problem solving (2004). One week the students create art that investigates water (for instance, where their water comes from, and how it might be affected by pollution), the next week they look at air, the following week at earth, and finally we study fire (energy). These units involve site-specific exercises using scavenged materials. One involves collecting 100 objects and creating metaphorical statements through their arrangement and placement on campus.

Depending on the quarter, the Eco-art students might look at local public art and write about how it relates to the community and the ecosystem. Alternately, the students will read an ecofeminist science-fiction novel[8] and write about how it reflects the content of the course and how the ideas discussed might impact their own work. We read texts by

Reflection by Victor Moreno, part of a five-part series of photo/text works about cultural assimilation and resistance from the course Cultural Identity, Fear of Difference, and Art, UW Tacoma, Fall 2005.

Vandana Shiva (1997), Chaia Heller (1999), Brian Tokar (1997), and Joanna Macy (1998) comparing deep ecology to social ecology and thinking about the feminist role in both movements, as well as other aspects of ecopolitics and history. While much of our discussions have to be cursory, given the time limitations and the amount of terrain we are covering, I have found that these students are so ignorant of this history that any amount of work on the topic helps. Sadly, most of them have never heard of the

World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, or Terminator seeds. I also introduce the concept of "green washing" in corporate advertising and discuss the limitations of being merely a green consumer and recycler rather than working actively to change the priorities of our current consumer society.

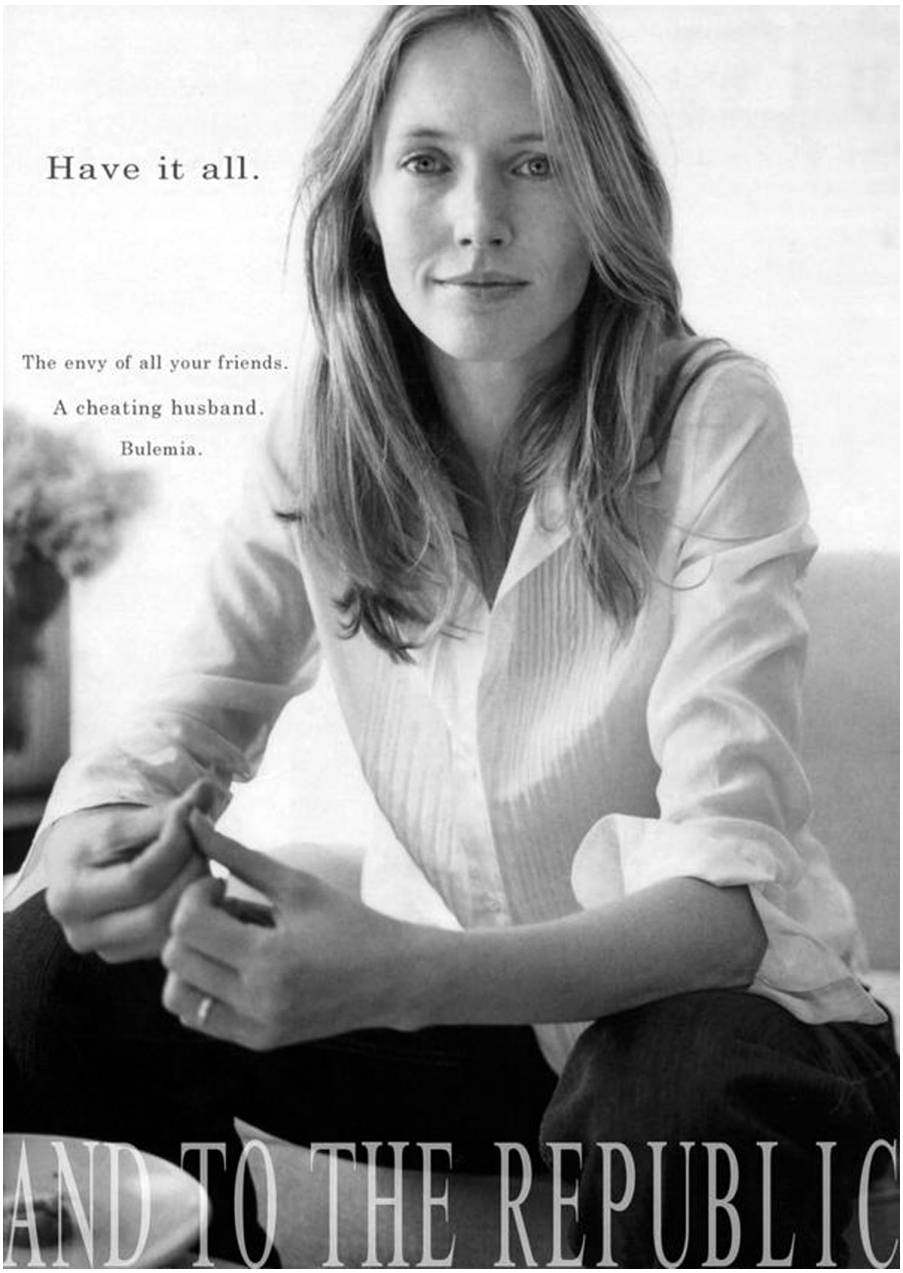
Media Literacy and Culture Jamming

An important aspect in all of my courses is the media literacy and culture jamming exercises. These exercises are some of the most adaptable to different contexts, so I strongly encourage the reader to incorporate something similar in your classes. First, I ask students to bring magazine ads that they find particularly offensive or ridiculous to class. They make note of what kind of magazine the ad came from as well as the audience the magazine is trying to reach. We put the ads up on the wall and deconstruct them in terms of the product being sold, the values the ads are promoting, and the ways visual grammar is used to serve those ends. In regard to the latter, we talk about what grabs our eye and why and how thousands of advertising dollars are spent deciding what visual strategy will be most effective at attracting "mindshare" (a piece of our minds). Our lists of what is being sold usually include sex, power, wealth, beauty, romance, adventure, nature, escape, celebrity, nationalism, patriotism, and safety.

That makes for a perfect segue into a discussion of culture jamming. Culture jamming, also known as subvertizing, involves a practitioner subverting the force of an advertisement through satire in order to reveal its real message. For instance, Ester Hernandez's well-known poster of a skeleton holding a basket of grapes entitled "Sun-Mad Raisins" redirects the original advertisement's message about the sweetness of Sun Maid Raisins to the issue of the poisoning of farm workers.[9]

The majority of students easily understand this new form and are eager to try out their newfound skills in Photoshop or for the few technophobes, freehand photo-collage created with old magazines or catalogs, a cutting tool, and a glue stick. For a few students, culture jamming is a sluggish process; some don't understand parody, others don't see the need to critique corporations or the American culture of consumerism they are embedded in. My hope, in the latter case, is that someday in the future this project will be of value to these students.

As part of this project, we discuss whether this form of satire will have an impact on anyone or whether it can just as easily be co-opted by art directors from advertising agencies. I ask the students whether it is the form or the intention being co-opted and whether the latter can truly be co-opted. We talk about the value of humor in a socially engaged project and whether certain kinds of parody will alienate rather than attract



And to the Republic by Janelle Cunningham, a culture jam digital art project from the course Body Image and Art, UW Tacoma, Winter 2006.

viewers. Over the past year, I have noticed an increasing interest in media literacy. Both students who plan to become educators and those who are parents have told me they want to bring what they have learned in my class into their teaching, parenting, or volunteering at schools. This is very encouraging news.

Body Image and Art: A Close Up

This quarter, Winter 2006, I am teaching Body Image and Art, and I have one of the most exciting groups of students I have ever worked with. In this case, there are thirteen women in the class (in a school that is 75 percent female this is not unexpected). I spent five weeks introducing them to questions about body image through the process of drawing and will spend the last five weeks introducing them to media literacy, culture jamming, and photo/text work. Most have never drawn before and/or were wounded by the careless remarks of elementary school art teachers about their creative capacity.

The first day of class they started with a body outline on a large sheet of paper. The work was done in pairs, and while one student drew, the other named what she liked and disliked about her body. They took their body outlines home and filled them in with symbols of how they felt about their body—there were no restrictions.

Then they read a variety of texts examining the history of body image, theories of the gaze, the diet industry, fat oppression, and the fat liberation movement. Readings vary from quarter to quarter but might include excerpts from *The Beauty Myth* (Wolf 1991), *Shadow on a Tightrope* (Schoenfielder and Wieser 1983), *Fat History* (Stearns 1997), *The Body Project* (Brumberg 1998), *Body Wars* (Maine 2000), *Unbearable Weight* (Bordo 1990), *Divining the Body* (Philips 2005), and *Fat?So!* (Wann 1999).

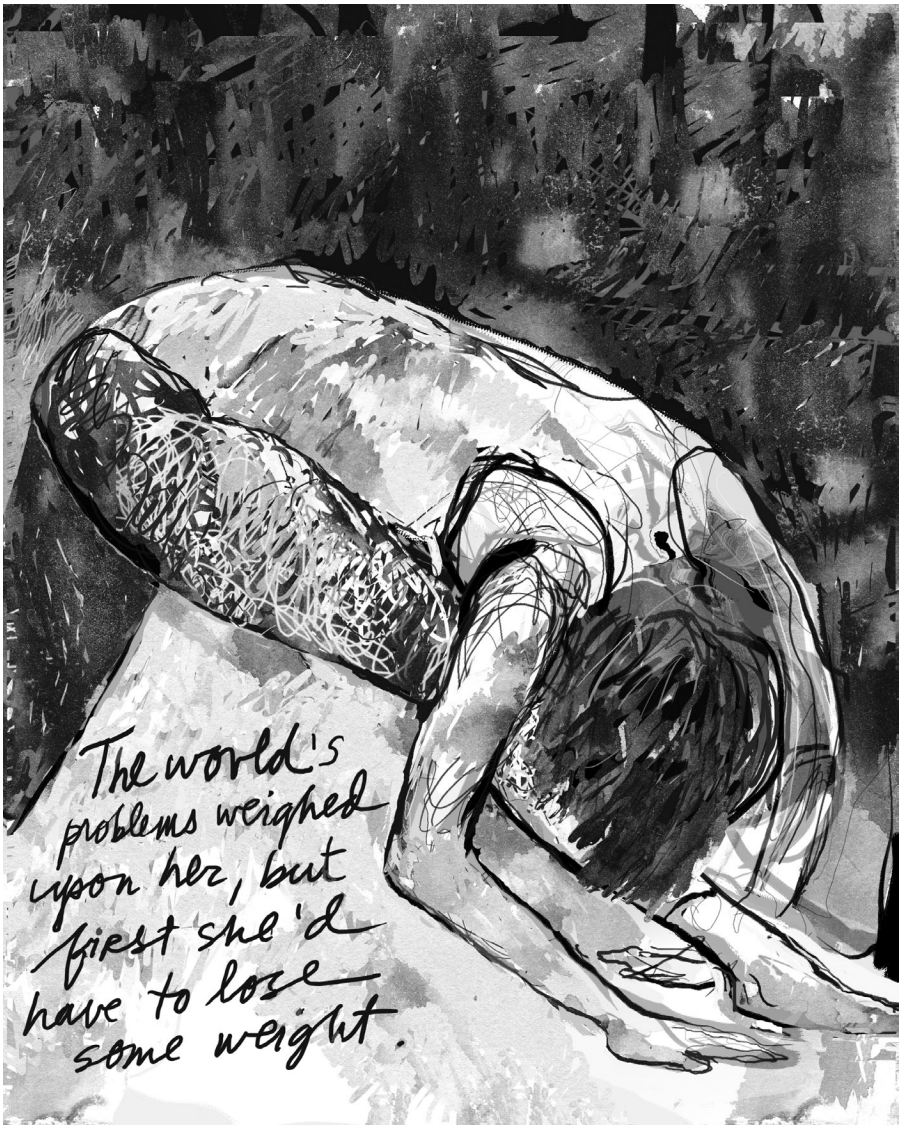
I instructed the students in an abbreviated breathing meditation to connect them with their bellies and asked them to send messages of love to the parts of their bodies they hated. After practicing contour and gesture drawing of their hands, feet, and faces, they had the opportunity to draw Rose, an experienced and self-confident nude model of ample proportions. The students were awed by her ease in her body. They remarked at how drawing her shifted their own body images. A practicing nurse said that before this experience the human body had always been the site of disease and ugliness, and now she saw beauty in folds, sags, and cellulite. She said it was wonderful to draw all of those supposed flaws, and that now she saw them as patterns of light and dark, "jewels in the shadows." The students talked to Rose about her feelings about her body and modeling. They stood in the poses she took and fell in love with charcoal and the sensuality of the whole experience.

Students in this class, as in all my classes, are required to do an oral presentation on a contemporary or historic artist whose work deals with the theme of the class. Their research must include the analysis of critical essays about the artist's work, and they must offer the class a question about the artist's work. Artists who are relevant to this course content are Hannah Wilke, Eleanor Antin, Joan Semmel, Judy Chicago, Ana Mendieta, Lorna Simpson, Vanessa Beecroft, Jo Spence, Carrie Mae Weems, Orlan, Louise Bourgeois, Frida Kahlo, Jenny Saville, Renee Cox, Young Soon Min, Hollis Sigler, Nancy Fried, Nan Goldin, Kiki Smith, Sylvia Sleigh, Shirin Neshat, Lynn Hershman, Carolee Schneeman, Laura Aguilar, Cindy Sherman, Spencer Tunick, and many others.

Using performance strategies to embody the content of the course has been an exciting new addition to the work I do in Body Image and Art. In this regard, I have been influenced by my study of the techniques employed by Theater of the Oppressed.[10] In the course, after a series of warmups, I have the students do "machines," exercises representing a celebration of their bodies as well as the ways they have experienced body hate. A machine starts with one student making a movement with a sound, the next student responds by "attaching" herself to the first student while making her own sound and movement, until all the students are making sounds and movements as one machine representing an issue or metaphor. They also get to practice Forum Theater and solve conflicts involving oppression of the body in different public and private situations. Forum Theater is a technique developed by Augusto Boal where performers act out a conflict that one or more of them have experienced, and the audience members (or "spect-actors") improvise ways of solving the conflict. Students also do some role-play about dancing in a club and dealing with unsolicited and unwanted attention and dealing with a cruel experience in a doctor's office. Students who had never acted before dove into this practice with such passion and humor, it made this teacher's heart sing. We were all transformed by the experience. The timing of our performance class was perfect. The students had just seen the *Vagina Monologues* over the weekend (V-day), and they were raring to go.

Some Exercises that Might Be Useful in the Women's Studies Context

Just before I started writing this, I had the good fortune to meet the Director of Women's Studies at Indiana University, South Bend, Rebecca Torstrick. Becky invited me to exhibit prints on her campus from my artist's book, *One Size Does Not Fit All*, about women's often-tormented relationship to their bodies and to food, with strategies for healing and responding to this social problem (1993). As part of my visit, I gave a talk



The World's Problems Weighed Upon Her by Beverly Naidus, from the series *One Size Does Not Fit All Revisited*, 2006. Digital drawing reworked from the original ink drawing published in *One Size Does Not Fit All* by Beverly Naidus in 1993 by Aigis Publications, Ltd.

on my own artwork and led a workshop on making art for social change. When Becky introduced me to the audience she told them how my book had changed her life. She told me the content of the images and seeing the photo-collage technique had inspired her to create similar works. She felt that this medium was user-friendly. In addition, she explained how the

book influenced her understanding of how art could deepen her students' experience of the topics being discussed and how she now assigns art projects in many of her classes.

Through talking to Becky I saw the usefulness of sharing more exercises that would help women's studies instructors enhance their teaching through a creative process with their students. In addition to projects using the collage technique, instructors might also find the following three projects useful.

(1) Have your students introduce themselves in relation to history, thinking of their identities as something in motion. Have them describe the moment in history that we are living in. In this way students can speak about the pain of their lives with authority and as each student speaks in the circle, the discussion gains momentum and velocity.[11]

(2) Have your students create a metaphorical bra using scavenged materials that speak of the students' relationship to the body, to patriarchy, to sexuality.[12]

(3) Have your students make feminist action figures using scavenged materials or clay. Have them think of these figures as alternatives to what Disney and Mattel offer young girls and women as role models and have a reconfiguring Barbie® party.[13]

Looking Toward the Future

Yes, I get frustrated. Institutions are sluggish. Colleagues with limited vision and layers of insecurity so thick it makes one breathless are often controlling budgets and making poor decisions. Bureaucrats in power are usually frightened of change and lack initiative. Good ideas languish. Teachers with a serious commitment to student learning are often taken for granted.

But there are miracles. Feminist colleagues come together as allies. People with Freirian pedagogical philosophies[14] who want to empower students to find their voices get hired. Occasionally, a person in power has vision, chutzpah, and creates a momentary space for innovation and collaboration.

Also, I have my own visionary moments that keep me sane. I imagine endless platoons of media literacy educators unraveling the consumerist trance and deconstructing mindshare with students of all ages from coast to coast. I see women and men discovering their voices through art and teaching their children and extended families to do the same. I see community potlucks on every block where neighbors shape a new common public space and foster cultural democracy

And every quarter, the little miracles of my students surprise me. For instance, in my Body Image and Art course a woman in her early twenties responded strongly to the topic of eating disorders in sororities and

the brutality of the hazing process. She became animated when talking about a friend who had had these experiences. As we talked more about patriarchy and the effects of dominant culture on our psyches, she listened attentively. In her midterm self-evaluation she wrote: "feminism was always a dirty word to me. I had learned that feminists were extremists. Now I understand why women who claim their power would be seen as dangerous and dismissed by those in power. Now I want to be known as a feminist and own my power."

Feminist Activist Art: A Coda

Outside of the classroom, I don't often consciously think much about my feminist identity. Yet, when I look down from the ferry into the polluted waters of Commencement Bay, when I read about inflated housing prices and the rise in homelessness, when I co-parent my eleven-year-old son, when I sit in my studio making feminist action figures for "sand tray" therapists whose collections were limited to the Wicked Witch of the West and the Little Mermaid, when I find a strategy for reaching a student who might not share my world view, and when I stand with my sisters in the local Code Pink chapter to protest the war, it is my feminism that informs and frames my response to it all. And it is my art that translates it into image, object, and intervention and puts it back into the world.

Beverly Naidus *is an Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts at the University of Washington, Tacoma. Her publications include two artist's books:* One Size Does Not Fit All *(1993) and* What Kinda Name Is That? *(1996), and several essays on activist art pedagogy that can be found in* Radical Teacher *(1987),* The New Art Examiner *(2001),* New Practices-New Pedagogies *(2005), and* Little Signs of Hope: The Arts, Education and Social Change *(2005). Her art has been exhibited at major museums and university galleries, reviewed internationally, and can be sampled at www.artsforchange.org. Send correspondence to bnaidus@u.washington.edu.*

Notes

1. *Heresies: A Feminist Magazine on Art and Politics* was published from 1977 to 1993. A newly selected collective of women created each issue, with the founding collective facilitating the process. The contributors came from varying political persuasions and artistic inclinations. The magazine was highly influential in the burgeoning feminist art movement.

2. Lucy R. Lippard is without a doubt one of the most significant writers about feminist and activist art to emerge in the art world. Her most influential feminist and activist works include *From the Center* (1976), *Get the Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change* (1984), *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (1990), *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (1995), and *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (1997).

3. Ralph Shikes's book, *The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic in Prints and Drawings from the Fifteenth Century to Picasso*, was the first book I discovered during my graduate school research that looked at the history of art with social content (1969).

4. Paul Von Blum's book, *The Art of Social Conscience*, was one of the few books available in the 1970s that examined why artists would choose to create socially engaged work (1976).

5. The Public, formerly known as Jubilee Arts, is one of the oldest and most successful community-based arts organizations in the world. Based in West Bromwich, England, documentation of some of their projects can be viewed at www.thepublic.com.

6. "*Cultural animation* from the French *animation socio-culturel,* is a term that has gained increasing use internationally to describe community arts work which literally animates, or 'gives life to,' the underlying dynamic of a community. The *animateur* is a community artist who helps people create and celebrate their own culture, drawing freely on the particular aspirations, myths, ethnic or historical heritage that bind them as a community . . . The process, as much as the product, enriches community life and imparts a sense of common identity" (Reynolds 1984).

7. The Institute for Social Ecology, co-founded by Dan Chodorkoff and the late Murray Bookchin, was an extraordinary experiment in radical ecological and anti-oppression pedagogy that existed from 1974 until 2005. Initially accredited by Goddard College, this program educated community organizers, organic farmers, ecotechnologists, international leaders in the global justice movement, alternative health practitioners and educators, anarchist theorists, and activist artists.

8. Among the utopic/dystopic novels I recommend are Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* (1993), Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1979), Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1994), Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985), or Sally Miller Gearhart's *Wanderground* (1984).

9. See http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/posters/process-noframe.html?/posters/sunmad.html.

10. See http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org/en/index.php?nodeID=3.

11. This exercise was first suggested by my colleague and mentor, Charles Frederick, a cultural theorist, community artist (formerly with PAD/D), writer, and activist based in New York City.

12. There are many venues and events for creating metaphorical bras, often to support breast cancer research. See http://www.showusyourbra.org/ for an example.

13. The latter exercise was drawn from Susan Cahan and Zoya Kocur's *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education* (1996).

14. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and his other works on radical education theory are not only responsible for transforming several generations of educators (literacy and otherwise), but his ideas are seen as a key factor in the sociopolitical shifts occurring all over Latin America today (1970).

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