Aesthetic Movements of a Social Imagination: Refusing Stasis and Educating Relationally/Critically/Responsibly[1]

Kelly W. Guyotte, University of Alabama

Abstract

Maxine Greene centered the arts as important sites for cultivating a more relational and ethical means of educating students. Advocating for an aesthetic pedagogy, Greene conceived of aesthetics as a philosophy that studies artistic making, perception, and affect as a means of understanding experiences, and the meaning of those experiences as connecting (and awakening) individuals to/with the world. In this philosophical work, I posit Greene's concept of the social imagination as both a call for action in education and as an artful and aesthetic movement—a doing. Grounded in Greene's aesthetic pedagogy and the social imagination, this article explores how encounters with and through the arts can nurture more relational, critical, and socially responsible education. Within and inspired by questions of relationality, criticality, and responsibility, examples from the visual arts are discussed. I argue that the arts create openings for encountering contemporary socio-political complexities that oppress and persist. The arts also provoke us to move—a type of aesthetic activism is borne.

Keywords: *social imagination; aesthetics; social justice; visual arts; Maxine Greene*

In *Releasing the Imagination*, Maxine Greene (1995) centered the arts as important sites for cultivating a more relational and ethical means of educating students.[2] Advocating for an aesthetic pedagogy, Greene (2007) conceived of aesthetics as a philosophy that studies artistic making, perception, and affect as a means of understanding experiences and the meaning of those experiences as connecting (and awakening) individuals to/with the world. Through an aesthetic pedagogy, Greene described the social imagination as a re/envisioning of social realities, considering what might be different and how individuals might *become* different through encounters with various "Others." It is not enough for individuals to critically engage with the deficiencies in their social world; instead, they must use imaginative capacities to move toward action by bringing ethical

---

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2016 Southeastern Philosophy of Education Society Annual Meeting.

2. In this article, I use the term arts in the plural designating all the fine arts. While many of my examples focus on the visual arts due to my background in this area, it is important to note the plurality of the arts and the potential in music, dance, performance, and any combination thereof to inspire aesthetic movement. It is my hope that others will consider and respond to the questions of relationality, criticality, and responsibility with other examples of educative encounters from diverse artistic genres.

concerns to the forefront, by resisting what she called "social paralysis" (p. 35). Thus, adopting a heightened state of consciousness, or wide-awakeness (and cultivating this in students), allows individuals to become aware of themselves as social-ethical beings who live in relation to others. The social imagination is more than imagination and more than intent, as Greene pointed out it "requires a wide-awakeness into action" (2010, p. 1). From an educational perspective, this active wide-awakeness requires a refusal of passivity or stasis and, instead, requires that teachers and learners actively disrupt centralizing structures that are often undetected (invisible through hegemony) yet perpetuate problematic ways of thinking, being, and becoming in the classroom and in the world. The social imagination requires teachers and students to *move*.

Since Maxine Greene's passing, I have been moved to revisit her writings on education, aesthetic education, and the role of the social imagination. As a former high school visual arts educator turned qualitative researcher/professor, my first encounters with Greene's work came in my doctoral studies when I engaged with her book, *Releasing the Imagination*. It was the blurring of her social justice orientation with a valuing of the role the arts in education that stirred *my* pedagogical imagination, giving me a renewed hope that juxtaposed apathetic feelings that drove me out of the public school classroom as a teacher and back into the postsecondary classroom as a learner. More recently, Greene's words continue resonate through a post-election climate of hate-filled rhetoric and racial division, and I continue to wonder how educators have and will respond. I incessantly (re)turn to Greene. Each engagement with her work stirs the artist, the social justice advocate, the optimist within, and I find myself thinking that there is so much Greene (and the arts) offer when it comes to nurturing a more postmodern, relational, critical, and responsible approach to education, made possible through an imperfect world.

In this philosophical work, I posit Greene's concept of the social imagination as both a call for action in education and as an artful and aesthetic movement—a *doing*. Grounded in Greene's notion of aesthetic pedagogy and her conception of the social imagination, I explore how encounters with and through the arts can nurture more relational, critical, and socially responsible education, working through three interrelated inquiries. First, a question of relationality: *How might arts and the social imagination inspire wide-awakeness to Others?* Second, a question of criticality: *How can we extend the imagination's purpose as Greene stated "not to resolve" but "to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexperienced"* (1995, p. 28)? And finally, a broader question of responsibility: *How might we artfully rethink education to break the habits of stasis?*

Within and inspired by each of these questions of relationality, criticality, and responsibility, I bring forth and analyze different visual artists and their work that create pedagogical possibilities for social aesthetic movements. Working through these questions and examples, I argue that the arts create openings for encountering the challenges and complexities within social and political issues that oppress and persist. They also provoke us to move—a type of aesthetic activism is borne.

Before engaging with these questions, I begin with an unpacking of the social imagination.

The Social Imagination

> *My interest in coping with diversity and striving toward significant inclusion derives to a large degree from an awareness of the savagery, the brutal marginalizations, the structured silences, the imposed invisibility so present all around.* -Maxine Greene (1993, p. 211)

As an educational philosopher and advocate for the arts, Greene ardently wrote about freedom (1988), social justice (1995; 1993), and the role of the imagination in aesthetic education (2001; 1995). Greene defined the social imagination as "the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools" (1995, p. 5). To begin with the social imagination is to acknowledge the shortcomings, the dead-ends, the limitations in both the educational system and the societal structures that organize our daily lives. These limitations are not intended to cause paralysis by critique; however, they operate to help individuals envision what might become and why such a becoming is desirable, even necessary. In seeing the social world as a space of possibility for movement, rather than as a static entity, the social imagination is always already at work.

Connected to the social imagination, Greene advocated for the arts as a catalyst for nudging learners toward a more relationally imaginative way of being—a being that is part *of*, not simply *in*, the world. This notion of *of*-ness is a helpful way to understand the social imagination as it speaks to both a process of becoming social beings as well as an emphasis on relationality. Greene envisioned that "one's 'reality,' rather than being fixed and predefined, is a perpetual emergent, becoming increasingly multiplex, as more perspectives are taken, more texts are opened, more friendships are made" (Greene 1988, p. 23). While Greene often referenced the "subjective in-between" (1995, p. 70) that connects humans, she also wrote often of the arts (as process and product) as connective spaces through which individuals might pursue new possibilities and alternatives toward a more ardently just world. The arts, then, create different ways of engaging with our social reality, fostering an interconnectedness between humans through art.

With the potential power the arts yield, it is important to consider the ethics of a social imagination, particularly in education. Greene (2011; 2005) was a staunch believer in the need to educate and equip young minds to question, critique, and become open to new possibilities. Through an aesthetic education, she believed teachers can expose learners to various languages and artistic texts (visual and verbal) from diverse perspectives that demonstrate our social world as more than hierarchical and more than one-dimensional—both of which are detrimental in the perpetuation of injustices. Instead, the social imagination operates in a world that embraces and values multiplicity and plurality. Through this lens, Greene addressed the challenges in attending to the diverse groups of students who may or may not feel empowered to speak up, much less willing to envision a different way of being in the world. There is certainly a danger that resides in this opening, an opening that has no definite form but that is always being realized. What will it mean for students who have never imagined alternative possibilities to suddenly believe in other realities that might be pursued/attained? What does opening possibilities do? What might the repercussions for social action be across various racial/ethnic/class lines? Questions like these point to the potential ethical considerations that resonate with a social imagination, both with the potential for positive and/or negative consequences. Thus, a certain responsibility emerges for the socially imaginative educator.

On the more optimistic side of the ethics dialogue, Greene's focus on empowerment is certainly consistent with a critical pedagogy and social justice agenda. The social imagination should bring forth a heightened social consciousness, or wide-awakeness, that helps students "find their own voices…find their eyes and ears" (Greene 2001, p. 11). Similar to Freire's notion of conscientization, wide-awakeness is not just an awakening but it takes on a critical consciousness through actively inquiring into and interrogating various realities and truths (Moon et al., 2013). Even as Greene explained wide-awakeness as *finding* one's voice, eyes, and ears, this type of consciousness does not lie dormant in individuals waiting to be discovered. Instead, it is through

an aesthetic pedagogy that educators might cultivate a different way of engaging in and with the world, as well as to create opportunities for voice, seeing, and hearing to resound on new frequencies. Such frequencies are inherently relational and connective to Others, and to the world. The social imagination, then, is an affective means of engaging in and with the world where "self-reflection and critical consideration can be as liberating as they are educative" (Greene 2002, p. 22). Is through connecting—with Others, with art, with possibilities—that aesthetic education becomes a productive and emancipatory search. For Greene, the arts have the potential to provoke, inspire, and, most of all, to move.

　　With this basis of Greene's social imagination in place, I now turn to the three questions. To begin…

A Question of Relationality

　　In considering the implications of the social imagination, the first question takes up the notion of the other and how we might use the arts to inspire a wide-awakeness to the Others in our social world. The process of othering (Spivak 1985) is often perceived as a negative action, one that emphasizes difference often leading to racialized stigma, denigration, silencing, and inequities. Through Greene's conception of the social imagination, however, coming to know the Other should be understood otherwise: not as one focused on difference as separation but one of difference as *visibility*. She proclaimed a need for educators to resist "the blurring over of differences" (1993, p. 219) and a concomitant need to address the silencing that occurs in many educational spaces. A current example can be seen in the pervasive comments of "I don't see color" or proclamations of "*All* lives matter" (rather than the recent social justice movement focused on valuing minoritized *Black* lives). These assertions point to the problems in collapsing bodily boundaries, where such collapsing actually reinforces oppressive normative and hegemonic structures. In other words, the unwillingness to see color or to acknowledge the systemic issues of racial violence and oppression, fold such underrepresented groups into the majority, rendering them, once again, invisible. A certain unproductive refusal emerges in this movement of blurring or collapsing. When one refuses to acknowledge difference, the majority subsumes the minority and voices that need to be heard are silenced.

　　Another perspective addresses the need to move toward a different idea of community, not community in the singular, but as encompassing plurality and difference (Todd 2004). How, then, do we conceptualize community differently yet still relationally? Here emerges a radical rethinking of self not simply in terms of "who am I?" but "who am I in relation to Others?" (Todd 2004) and, even more importantly, "who am I becoming as I encounter difference?" Certainly, the society, streets, and schools of which Greene (1995) spoke in terms of the social imagination become critical spaces for encountering other bodies and where possibilities for difference must be realized, named, and brought forth in dialogue.

　　Greene (1995) often emphasized the importance of dialogue as critical for the social imagination. Dialogue, she asserted, creates spaces for individuals to come together and also creates the potential for collective action. Not only should individuals come to know themselves, to take responsibility for our place in the world, but they should "feel themselves part of the dance of life" (p. 72). Here, she recalls Henri Matisse's famous image of circling-connecting-moving figures immersed in an intimate yet collective dance. The dance of life, then, refers to the plurality of the human condition (Arendt, 1958) where difference is necessary for community, even as one questions what community means and the ideals it may perpetuate. In this sense, the dance also requires

a perspective of multiplicity in our conceptions of community—where communities, just as identities, are many, nebulous, and evolving. The imagination, then, becomes an inherently social process of envisioning how relationality and community might come together in difference, and the possibilities therein.

In considering the social imagination as relational, I turn to what Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) termed relational aesthetics. Traditionally, the creation of art is often regarded as an insular process—the artist works in the studio, the art is exhibited, individuals view the art in public or private spaces then (often) leave with their respective experience of aesthetic interaction. Relational aesthetics, on the other hand, re/envisions the purpose of art as participatory, a social practice, an incitement of dialogue between artist and audience, and as Bourriaud concisely asserted it is "a state of encounter" (p. 18). In other words, relational aesthetics explores art as a complex and multilayered practice entangled in interconnected social-political-ethical-economic spheres. Thus, art as a relational practice is never as straightforward as concept and creation and is never as insular as initially conceived. Through a relational aesthetics, art is more than mere product, but it moves to fulfill the potential of creating social interstices, a term Bourriaud borrowed from Marx. These interstices or in-between spaces where differences meet are the relational webs (Arendt 1958) that connect individuals to other bodies and, to be sure, the openings that nudge individuals toward possibilities of different realities—toward a social imagination.

Moving into the social interstices is critically important in shifting the act of othering from erasing and silencing to making visible, dialoguing, and imagining. This is where encounters happen, and this is where encounters of difference might stimulate and provoke the social imagination. As consistent with Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics, Greene viewed the arts as more than passive creations or performances but as connective, ever-performing, and even *vibrant* bodies (Bennett 2010) that engage and pulse with their own aesthetic agency and energy. Greene (1993) explained, "I believe that encounters with the arts awaken us to alternative possibilities of existing, of being human, of relating to others, of *being* other…" (p. 214). Artful encounters run rampant in Greene's work as she often spoke of how text, music, and image cultivated aesthetic experiences (Dewey 1934) that affected her and caused her to engage differently with the Others of the world. To be sure, the social interstices that Bourriaud discussed facilitate the very encounters that Greene values in aesthetic education, creating possibilities for encounters in and out of the classroom.

Shifting possibilities for aesthetic encounters out of the classroom, bring forth an important aspect of Bourriaud's work. Relational aesthetics does not happen in the bounded spaces of the gallery or museums, but happens in and of the word. What might happen if students from any discipline are asked to engage aesthetically in their worlds, becoming *of* the world? Examples of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics might be embodied most effectively in the work of contemporary artist, JR. JR claims to use the largest gallery in the world (JR) as he moves his work outside of gallery walls and often to the walls that comprise the skylines of cities throughout the globe. According to his website:

> JR creates "Pervasive Art" that spreads uninvited on the buildings of the slums around Paris, on the walls in the Middle-East, on the broken bridges in Africa or the favelas in Brazil. People who often live with the bare minimum discover something absolutely unnecessary. And they don't just see it, they make it. Some elderly women become models for a day; some kids turn artists for a week. In that Art scene, there is no stage to separate the actors from the spectators. (JR, para 10)

His work blends a social purpose and a material aesthetic, where portraits of everyday people are made public to invoke dialogue about social issues such as immigration, gender, politics, voice, and age. Thus, JR flattens the hierarchies between high art and low art, art consumers and citizens, galleries and streets, while also creating social interstices in the cities of original exhibition to the cities where his work travels, places like London, New York, or Berlin. In making the art mobile, JR brings the portraits of Others into new spaces, creating new connections with non-local audiences, and cultivating encounters with a variety of social issues that pervade and plague our world. Through making the ordinarily invisible, visible, JR inspires a social imagination that connects and awakens.

Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics provides one such frame for the social possibilities in art while JR's activist street art serves as a tangible example of how this concept emerges in practice. JR's art inspires a social imagination that connects the materiality of people, places, spaces, and affects, moving to productive interstitial social, political, and aesthetic educative spaces. To be sure, educators can do much to cultivate the relational side of the social imagination by using work like JR's to inspire dialogue or by creating opportunities for students to *do*, to become activists in their own communities through the arts—visual or otherwise. The power of the arts to affect also creates possibilities for change—in behavior, in thinking—that mobilize bodies toward critical action.

A Question of Criticality

Moving from the relational, I now take on the second question of criticality asking how we can conceive of the imagination's purpose as Greene states not to resolve, but to awaken. To begin, it is worth acknowledging current conversations on the critical. Some have pointed to the increasing use of the term leading to a decreasing impact of what it means to be critical: everyone and everything is critical (e.g., Kuntz, 2015). In framing criticality, I look to the arts, drawing inspiration from the visual art's notion of the critique. The artist's critique is often situated within a studio space, where individuals (the artist and other artists or, in an educational setting, classmates/teachers) consider the artwork conceptually, aesthetically, and even socio-politically through dialogue. Though many understand the critique as simply a focus on negative perceptions of the artwork, it is intended to incite vibrant and constructive dialogues between and among the artwork, the artist, and the viewer. The critique is *productively* critical. As such, critique resembles what Kuntz (2015) described in relation to research methodology, "more than to simply offer criticism; it is to make newly possible, to expose cracks and interstices that otherwise escape processes of meaning-making so that we might live differently." It has the potential of being "endlessly optimistic" (p. 26).

Through a lens of optimistic criticality that moves toward difference, we turn back to Greene (1995) who explored the notion of social critique by explicitly taking up the problematics of stasis and the potential in transformation. She wrote,

> Social critique…entails an ongoing effort to overcome false consciousness by rejecting an absolute and static view of reality and its resulting subject-object separation. […] It involves the creation of new interpretive orders as human beings come together not only to "name" but to change or to transform their intersubjective worlds. (p. 61)

Here, Greene (1995) again emphasized her pluralist and postmodern vision of the social world—one that is fluid and changeable, one that is relational, one that holds the possibility for change. As

she elaborated, the productive nature of critique emerged again as she yearned for the envisioning of new social possibilities as becoming a normative "attitude of mind" (p. 61). Such optimistic social critique should not be imposed from a disconnected outsider but must come from within, Greene asserted. It must also come from a place of solidarity with a goal of emancipation.

To emancipate through the social imagination is for both teachers and learners to be equipped with the capacity for criticality and wide-awakeness so that they might choose to move toward collective action. As Greene (1995) explained,

> We should think of education as opening public spaces in which students, speaking in their own voice and acting on their own initiatives, can identify themselves and choose themselves in relation to such principles as freedom, equality, justice, and concern for others. (p. 68)

Here, opportunities for resistance emerge as individuals are nudged to consider themselves, their becoming, as the cultivation of a social imagination also assumes social empowerment.

As educators seek to emancipate through social critique, they might think of a question posed by bell hooks: How can we transgress and make our "teaching practices a site of resistance?" (1994, p. 21). Here, I envision resistance as affirmative, as productive. To move in this way is to awaken to the possibilities brought forth by the social imagination, to expose the cracks, and to create opportunities for learners to consider the shortfalls and inequities that persist. It is not a matter of finding commonality in shared vulnerability and dissent. It is not a return to "simpler times" through nostalgic reflection. It is, instead, a need to consider social issues as intricately entangled in a complex web of social-political-ethical structures as individuals, together, move productively toward difference.

An example of the complexity of this dialogue emerges in the artist Fred Wilson's installations/interventions, *Mining the Museum* (1992-1993) and, more recently, *Wildfire Test Pit* (2016). Both of these works speak to a lingering tension in contemporary society—that of how we come to see, frame, confront, and dialogue about issues of race and memory. For the earlier work, *Mining the Museum*, Wilson scoured the collection, archives, and storage of the Maryland Historical Society and pieced together a provocative social statement on the social-political-ethical power that objects hold. He presented his object-findings in the Historical Society's galleries initiating a dialogue on race with all attendees (Wilson and Halle, 2003).

In the galleries, Wilson's installation juxtaposed startling arrangements in the gallery rooms. One room housed the marble busts of Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Andrew Jackson on sturdy classical stone pedestals. Adjacent to these busts sat three dark in color yet empty pedestals simply containing labels with the names "Benjamin Banneker," "Harriett Tubman," and "Frederick Douglass." Situated in the middle of the arrangements of three sat a trophy, the "Truth Trophy" awarded for truth in advertising. The irony sets in when the viewer realized the three busts represent white men not affiliated with the state of Maryland while three prominent African American figures who lived in Maryland are glaringly absent from the Historical Society's archives. In this work, Wilson played with questions surrounding the visibility and invisibility of race—how can we question what we do not see?—and notions of the ownership of truth—what is visible becomes our historical "truth." Another room named "Modes of Transport" provoked viewer when, inside a circa 1880 baby carriage, they find a Ku Klux Klan hood peering out where a baby ought to be lying. Here, viewers might be brought to consider the legacy of hate, passed from one generation to another. Yet another room contained infamous Native American cigar store statues,

labeled with the names of those who commissioned them, standing with their backs to the viewer. Upon closer inspection, the statues are found to be investigating photographs depicting actual Native Americans in non-stereotypical clothing, poses, and places. Again and again, in each room Wilson curated, the viewer is provoked to pause and consider the racial narratives heard and seen, as well as those that are neither (Talbot, 2013).

In his more recent intervention at the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College, Wilson, again, mined the museum's collection and created subtle juxtapositions with marble sculptures and busts alongside traditional African art. The intervention *Wildfire Test Pit* continues Wilson's interest in challenging the dominant narratives that run rampant, though largely undetected, in these institutions by specifically playing with the contrast of white marble or plaster cast bodies alongside black (and brown) figural sculptures and masks made from wood or dark plaster casts. There emerges an interesting dialogue as the bodies are not White or Black racialized bodies, but they are bodies that evoke contrast through their color palette as well as their cultural origins. Sharp (2017) explained,

> The physical interjection of black bodies into a space occupied by white bodies is extremely pointed. In *Wildfire Test Pit*, black bodies are given central placement, sometimes literally dividing broken white bodies or using crumbling plaster casts as a kind of scenery. In the darkest corner of the gallery—darkest in terms of material, racial, and lighting connotations—black heads are rendered in paintings and mounted on stands, while one lone white head lies discarded on the floor, decapitated. (para 3)

Here, Wilson disrupts, challenges, and critiques a dominant narrative by playing with the placement of bodies that were not created as racialized but become symbols of racialization through their color (dark bodies become Black bodies and light bodies become White bodies). Wilson, using familiar classical European sculptures alongside stylized African sculptures, causes the viewer to pause as they consider the presence/absence of color, the difference of human form, and the historical and racial significance of the body (and different bodies) throughout time.

With these two examples in mind, presence/absence becomes an important and provocative theme in Wilson's critical intervention work. Greene (1988) frames provocation as an optimistic and productive action. To provoke is to encourage individuals to "reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space" (p. 12). It is an action that incites movement or the potential for movement as students envision what is possible (what is not, what is not *yet*) in their social becomings. In Wilson's work, viewers are provoked to consider the multiple layers of social, historical, political, and ethical considerations, to challenge assumptions, to consider this installation as a site of affirmative resistance. Certainly, this form of resistance is an optimistic movement toward critique as action (one that may or may not be overly optimistic given the power of images that pervade contemporary life). However, Wilson's statement might be considered through the lens of provocation-as-process. Rather than to resolve, stultify, to cease—an inherently counter-productive movement of critique—the goal is to act, to strive toward Greene's concept of wide-awakeness.

To become critical educators and to provoke a desire for criticality in learners, opportunities should be created for new possibilities toward collective action and optimistic social critique. This can and should happen at all stages of education, from elementary to postsecondary, for, as Greene (1995) asserted, quests toward the social imagination are never finished. The arts, like Wilson's aesthetic provocations, might serve as an effective means of sparking critical dialogue

that moves beyond the superficial, beyond the confines of the classroom and into the complexity of social interstices.

A Question of Responsibility

In exploring the final question of *responsibility*—how might we artfully rethink education to break the habits of stasis?—I first consider how the relational and the critical might dialogue with our social responsibilities. The social imagination encompasses Greene's notion of wide-awakeness as a heightened socio-ethical and pedagogical consciousness. According to Greene (1995), wide-awakeness is "an awareness of what it means to be in the world" (p. 35). As mentioned above, the social imagination can also be conceptualized as an awareness of what it means to be *of* the world—perceiving the self as an entangled in a myriad of living and nonliving bodies. Inherent here is a need for responsibility. Through becoming wide-awake, one begins to grasp an interconnectivity with these other bodies. There is an envisioning of the need to assume responsibility even through refusal and resistance. Thus, we have a responsibility because we are *of* the world.

What does this responsibility mean for education, what does it *do*? Here we must of think of responsibility as a process of becoming different where we allow it to also enact on us. Greene (1988) posited, "a teacher in search of his/her own freedom may be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own" (p. 14). Teachers must become open to disruption, become as hooks (1994) promoted a self-actualized risk taker, possessing a willingness to put oneself in the vulnerable positions we ask of our students. Releasing the imagination is, after all, a risky endeavor. One fall semester, I took a risk and led my introductory graduate-level qualitative inquiry class in an encounter with Norman Rockwell's (1964) painting "The Problem We All Live With." *What do you see?* They were asked. The artwork is quite different from the nostalgic American scenes Rockwell was famous for painting. Instead, the canvas depicts six-year old Ruby Bridges being escorted to a desegregated school past a wall with the graffiti of a racial slur, the scribbled letters "KKK," and fresh red stains of smashed tomatoes splattered a few steps behind her. Her crisp white dress, socks, and shoes are surprisingly unscathed from the red fruit and they stand out against her dark hair and complexion. Further juxtaposing the short stature of Ruby Bridges are the tall light-skinned yet faceless U.S. Marshalls (heads cut off by the top of the canvas), each body mid-step, inching forward. Ruby is situated in the front left of the composition, clutching books, a ruler, and pencils as she, too, moves.

This image *moves me* and, in the dark basement classroom, I feel a responsibility to engage with this painting in all its discomfort. As a White woman, I will always engage differently with this imagery than those who have been Othered through lived racism and exclusion. In this space, I begin to realize that my discomfort is actually privilege because I experience issues of race and injustice through paintings, not through daily life. I am, again, uncomfortable. Coincidentally, while I was writing this article, a cartoon version of the artwork popped into my social media feed that gave me a very different sense of discomfort. In place of Ruby Bridges, the political cartoonist Glen McCoy (2017) depicted United States Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos wearing a blue dress. She, like Ruby, is mid-step, in an almost identical posture, carrying a black notebook that reads "DeVos" in white script while the words "NEA" and "CONSERVATIVE" are scrawled as graffiti on the wall behind her. Just like in Rockwell's painting, a tomato is splattered on the wall, and tall headless figures walk protectively in front and behind her. If these visuals we encounter in our daily lives are simply disregarded, if we, as educators, neglect to engage with the power of

aesthetic pedagogy, we might glance and move on; however, the meaning of this image is entirely too disturbing to dismiss. Indeed, we have a responsibility to confront and interrogate what McCoy has put forth.

What I see in McCoy's image is a miniaturized adult White billionaire replacing the youthful Black body of Ruby Bridges. What I see is DeVos being ushered toward her newly elected position, past what can only be interpreted as the tumultuousness of her confirmation hearings and the public backlash of her nomination. This, instead of Ruby Bridges being escorted, for her safety, to a newly integrated public school in New Orleans where unseen White bodies are hurling tomatoes as well as racist slurs. What I see on the wall are the evils of the National Education Association (NEA) and liberalism as comparable and in place of the KKK and racism. What I see is a privileged White woman whose struggle is being compared to that of Ruby Bridges and others who broke through the segregation barrier in our schools and beyond. What I see is alarming.

The final question continues to pulse: *How might we artfully rethink education to break the habits of stasis?* To me, McCoy's cartoon speaks to the dangers of stasis. In the cartoon image, two female figures are thoughtlessly transposed by the artist, their struggles are irresponsibly conflated, and McCoy's message is troubling at best. The problem we all live with is not only racism or integration—it is the irresponsibility of not being *of* the world. Todd (2004) explained that what social justice education might strive toward is a type of responsible togetherness that is rooted in pedagogical ignorance. According to Todd, ignorance is not simply a lack of knowledge but an awareness that "knowledge alone cannot solve the issue of living well and responsibly together" (p. 349). What happens, then, when this type of ignorance is embraced as opposed to the perceived ignorance represented by McCoy? When privileges are interrogated? When the discomfort evoked (and provoked) through social media feeds cause pause and contemplation? Our responsibility in education should prod us to confront normativity and stasis, to inquire into what Greene calls the taken-for-granted, to confront knowing *and* being as inherently political and ethical, to teach through our ignorance. We, as educators, might do our best work by not only dealing with images and texts of social justice, but by confronting and interrogating those that speak of social *in*justice. This *is* our responsibility.

Conclusion: Inspiring Movement

It should be clear that the relational, critical, and responsible questions surrounding the aesthetics of a social imagination cannot be easily distinguished—they are interconnected and entangled. As I conclude, I pause to consider how those at various levels of education might move in (or within and between) the spaces of arts encounters. It is worth noting the largely marginalized role the arts often assume in education (Greene, 1995); however, as I have argued in this paper, there is much potential in looking to the arts to inspire pedagogical practice (and even policy) in education that values social justice. Each of the examples of artists and artworks brought forth above are a mere selection of countless examples from the visual arts that might serve as catalysts or conduits for confronting complex social issues. Those in education might consider using images like these to start (age appropriate) dialogue about what has happened and is happening in our world. In a different way, they might look to the ways in which artists work with and through the layers, contradictions, ambiguities, and subtleties and find ways to incorporate such a nuanced practice into their own pedagogies. To be sure, Maxine Greene's writings on the arts over the past two decades still provide a helpful lens through which we, in education, might consider questions

of relationality, criticality, and responsibility. "To conceive of the arts in relation to curriculum," according to Greene (1995), "is to think of a deepening and expanding mode of tuning-in" (p. 104).

Advocated by Greene and reasserted throughout this paper, the arts carry tremendous potential as we move toward inspiring a social imagination in our students and in educational practice. It is not simply about creating opportunities for individuals to engage *in* artmaking and *with* the art of others (though I do find tremendous value in these acts), but there is much to be gained from simply approaching education with an attentiveness to aesthetics and the movements of an aesthetic education—the *doing*. Artists do. Artists tune-in to complexities of experience. Artists often become both aesthetic and social activists. Being in education, we can draw inspiration from artists like those brought forth above and we can seek ways to activate our teaching (and education) toward social justice. Greene (1988) explained, "To undertake a search is, of course, to take an initiative, to refuse stasis and the flatness of ordinary life" (p. 122). It is not enough to seek openings for change, we must create them. It is not enough to find fault in the structure, we must become otherwise and encourage students to do the same, though differently and meaningfully. Alongside Greene I want to encourage a refusal of stasis, of mere compliance, and, instead, promote an aesthetic pedagogy that embraces more socially imaginative ways of educating. Hard work lies ahead, but to begin, we must refuse. To refuse, we must move.

References

Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational Aesthetics* [*Esthetique relationnelle*]. Translated by Pleasance, S., Woods, F., & Copeland, M. Paris: Les Presses du Réel.

Braidotti, R. (2006). *Transpositions: On nomadic ethics.* Madlen, MA: Polity Press.

Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as Experience*. New York, NY: Pedigree Books.

Greene, M. (2010). Prologue to art, social imagination, and action. *Journal of Educational Controversy 5*(1). http://cedar.wwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1100&context=jec.

Greene, M. (2007). Aesthetics as research. https://maxinegreene.org/library/maxine-greene-library/works-by-maxine-greene/articles.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Greene, M. (1993). Diversity and inclusion: Toward a curriculum for human beings. *Teachers College Record 95*(2), 211-221.

Greene, M. (1988). *The Dialectic of Freedom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hein, S.F. (2016). The New Materialism in Qualitative Inquiry. *Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies 16*(2), 13-140. doi:10.1177/1532708616634732.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress*. New York: Routledge.

JR. http://www.jr-art.net/jr.

Kuntz, A.M. (2015). *The Responsible Methodologist: Inquiry, Truth-Telling, and Social Justice*. New York: Routledge Press.

McCoy, G. (2017). Trying to trash Betsy DeVos. *Belleville News-Democrat*. http://www.bnd.com/opinion/editorial-cartoons/glenn-mccoy/article132525449.html.

Moon, S., Rose, S, Black, A., Black, J., Hwang, Y., Lynn, L., & Memoli, J. (2013). Releasing the social imagination: Art, the aesthetic experience, and citizenship in education. *Creative Education 4*(3), 223-233.

Rockwell, N. (1964). *The Problem We All Live With* [Painting]. http://www.nrm.org/2011/05/norman-rockwells-the-problem-we-all-live-with-to-be-exhibited-at-the-white-house/.

Sharp, S.R. (2017). Fred Wilson teaches us how to pay attention. *Hyperallergic*, February 13. http://hyperallergic.com/349838/fred-wilson-teaches-us-how-to-pay-attention/.

Spivak, G.C. (1985). The Rani of Sirmur: An essay in reading the archives. *History and Theory 24*(3), 247-272.

Talbot, D. (2013). Return of the whipping post: Mining the museum. *Underbelly,* October 10. http://www.mdhs.org/underbelly/2013/10/10/return-of-the-whipping-post-mining-the-museum/.

Todd, S. (2004). Teaching with ignorance: Questions of social justice, empathy, and responsible community. *Interchange 35*(3), 337-352.

Wilson, F. & Halle, H. (1993). Mining the museum. *Grand Street 44*, 151-172. doi: 10.2307/25007622.

Kelly W. Guyotte is an Assistant Professor of Qualitative Research at the University of Alabama. Prior to moving into higher education, she was a high school visual arts educator in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. Now, as a qualitative methodologist, she strives to bridge these experiences in teaching and studying visual arts education with her research, writing, and pedagogy. Her research interests include artful pedagogies, transdisciplinary and STEAM education, arts and learning, and the study of qualitative methodology (including arts-based and narrative approaches). Her work has been published in various inquiry and educational journals such as *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Journal of Curriculum & Pedagogy,* and *International Journal of Education & the Arts.*