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Bittersweet: Witnessing, Performance, Complexity

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Editorial

This year, our authors consider *witnessing, performance*, and *complexity* of trauma (Kwon), mental illness (Richardson), and women artists who have been all but forgotten (Han and Weida). Witnessing can be of your own life, of others' lives, or witnessing the act of witnessing itself (Pérez, 2011). Witnessing is performed and can be especially powerful when shared with others. Performance witnessing is public pedagogy.

Keywords: feminist analysis, trauma, mental health, performance artist Bobby Baker, O Gwisuk, Latin American Surrealist women artists, presidential campaign carnivalesque, listening, gender and climate change

Hyunji Kwon's art of "writing as witnessing and witnessing writing" in *working through* trauma uses performative autoethnography to address, respond to, and witness her own sexual trauma. She does this through weaving the memories of her own experiences with the sexual trauma experienced by a Korean woman, Duk-kyung Kang, who had been a "Comfort Woman" in Japan during World War II. Kwon learns from Kang's paintings and films of her making art, and from other experiences of her own grandmother, a refugee from North Korea, who lived during the same years as Kang.

Jennifer (Eisenhauer) Richardson gives readers the opportunity to better understand how women with mental illnesses have been stereotyped by psychiatric photography and to witness their trauma. Richardson introduces us to performance artist Bobby Baker and her performed critical parody of this history showing how Baker's work challenges preconceived ideas about mental illness.

Christina Han introduces us to the all but forgotten life and art of O Gwisuk who worked as a professional entertainer in early 20th century Korea. Using recently discovered art and literary works by O and interviews with O's family and students, Han develops "a complex portrait of an artist whose life and career manifested an intricate interplay of tradition and modernity, art, and gender" (2016, p. 28).

Courtney Lee Weida takes a new look at four Latin American Surrealist women artists: Frida Kahlo, Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington, and Leonor Fini. She focuses on their complex images of nature, the body, food, and considers how these issues are gendered.

Our editorial is a feminist analysis of events that took place in the past year. We explore feminist witnessing, performance, and complexity and invite readers to continue this exploration with other examples. The final section of our editorial introduces *VCG* transitions and transformation.

Witnessing

In the past year, the nearly instantaneous transmission of data onto our cell phones and other devices gave us the opportunity to witness acts of violence that might ordinarily have gone unnoticed, except by those in close proximity to the event. While we know that photographs always obscure a full picture of the event it pictures (Sontag, 1977), these intimate images that are thrust into our lives, compel us to *do something*. In one horrifying video, "Philando Castile's head slumps backward while he lies dying next to her, Diamond Reynolds looks into the camera and explains a Minnesota police officer just shot her fiancé four times" (McLaughlin, 2016, para. 1).

The tragic mass shooting at Orlando's LGBT nightclub, *Pulse*, on June 12, 2016, brought media attention to a long history of violent hate crimes of homophobic and transphobic violence, as well as outpouring of community support and allies to those who identify as LGBTQ.

> It was the worst act of terrorism on American soil since Sept. 11, 2001, and the deadliest attack on a gay target in the nation's history, though officials said it was not clear whether some victims had been accidentally shot by law enforcement officers. (Alvarez & Pérez-Peña, 2016, para. 13)

Looking back to 1973 at another act of mass murder, an arsonist set fire to a New Orleans gay bar, the *Upstairs Lounge*, killing 32 people in less than 20 minutes, but 1970s media and politicians ignored the tragic incident (Stern, 2016). In 1973, there was no visible outpouring of love by families and local community. Federal law did not explicitly criminalize anti–LGBTQ hate crimes until the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act passed in 2009 due in large part to the leadership support of President Obama.

In the United States, of 67 shooters in mass murders with assault weapons, 65 had mental health issues and 55 obtained weapons legally (Henriques, 2016). Research and resources for mental health care are necessary as well as legal action to ban assault weapons for these tragedies to end. It is possible as evidenced in Australia's ban of assault weapons in 1996.

The violence and senselessness of the act, the largest massacre in Australia's post-colonial history, so shocked that nation that within 12 days, comprehensive gun-control legislation was agreed upon. There has not been another mass shooting in Australia since. (Goodman & Moynihan, 2016, para. 1).

Many groups have mobilized to work toward cultural solutions to these and other social issues plaguing the world at this time in history.

Performance

As we write this editorial, the world is looking closely at the *carnivalesque* atmosphere leading up to the United States' presidential election. Mikhail Bakhtin (1941) articulated categories of carnival that includes bringing unlikely people together, unrestricted, often sacrilegious performances, and eccentric behavior. The world is turned upside down. Truths are tested and contested. Fools wear crowns.

As part of this contemporary *carnival*, patriarchy and sexism follows Hillary Clinton on her campaign trail. An excellent article in the Washington Post addresses this topic with a sense of humor (Petri, 2016). Author, Alexandra Petri starts with a quote by Donald Trump, which he made on September 6, 2016, that focuses directly on gender and visual culture: "Well, I just don't think she has a presidential look, and you need a presidential look" (para. 1). Petri (2016) continues: "Trump is not wrong that Hillary Clinton does not have That Presidential Look. She is, after all, female, something that no prior president has had the misfortune to be" (para. 2).

In the United States, it is rare to see women in powerful positions and there is a clear gender bias against women on presidential tickets. At the same time, women have been elected leaders of powerful countries in the past 60 years. Indira Gandhi took the office of Prime Minister to India in 1966 and then again in 1980, and she served until her assignation in 1984; Golda Meir became the first woman Prime Minister of Israel in 1969; Margaret Thatcher took the office of Prime Minister in 1979 and

was the first woman in this position; Mary Robinson became the first woman president of Ireland in 1990; Angela Merkel became German's first woman Chancellor in 2005; and Michelle Bachelet became the first woman president of Chile in 2014. These women leaders show that it can be done. It is time for the United States to reconsider what a "presidential look" can be.

Complexity

Perhaps because everything is too complex to understand in all its complexity, most people want to avoid complexity and find comfort in familiar routines and habitual ways of perceiving the world. The act of listening closely to others and participating in critical dialogue is a feminist praxis. For example, Judy Chicago's (2014) feminist art pedagogy requires active listening in a circle configuration of facilitators and participants where everyone is expected to listen and contribute to the dialogue.

U.S. presidents are elected because of their charismatic oration not because of abilities to form relationships and generate dialogue. United States presidential democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton's leadership style is rapport-coalition building through listening. According to an analysis of those who have observed Clinton for decades, listening is how she leads, motivates, and decides (Klein, 2016).

> The answers startled me in their consistency. Every single person brought up, in some way or another, the exact same quality they feel leads Clinton to excel in governance and struggle in campaigns. … Modern presidential campaigns are built to reward people who are really, really good at talking. So imagine what a campaign feels like if you're not entirely natural in front of big crowds. Imagine that you are constantly compared to your husband, one of the greatest campaign orators of all time; that you've been burned again and again after saying the wrong thing in public; that you've been told, for decades, that you come across as calculated and inauthentic on the stump. What would you do? … When Hillary Clinton ran for the Senate in 2000, she tried to do something very strange: She tried to campaign by listening. It was called her "listening tour," and the press did not like it. … Clinton began her 2016 campaign with a listening tour, as well … Laurie Rubiner, who served as Clinton's legislative director from 2005 to 2008, recalls being asked to block out two hours on the calendar for "card-table time." … When the appointed day arrived, Clinton had laid out two card tables alongside two huge suitcases. She opened the suitcases, and they were stuffed with newspaper clippings, position papers, random scraps of paper. … It turned out that Clinton, in her travels, stuffed notes from her conversations and her reading into suitcases, and every few months she dumped the stray paper on the floor of her Senate office and picked through it with her staff. The card tables were for categorization: scraps of paper related to the environment went here, crumpled clippings related to military families there. These notes, Rubiner recalls, really did lead to legislation. Clinton took seriously the things she was told, the things she read, the things she saw. … Let's stop and state the obvious: There are gender dynamics at play here. We ran a lot of elections in the United States before we let women vote in them. You do not need to assert any grand patriarchal conspiracy to suggest that a process developed by men, dominated by men, and, until relatively late in American life, limited to men might subtly favor traits that are particularly prevalent in men. … Tannen's research [Tanner, Hamilton, & Schiffin, 2015] suggests a reason for the difference: Women, she's found, emphasize the "rapport dimension" of communication — did a particular conversation bring us closer together or further apart? Men, by contrast, emphasize the "status dimension" — did a conversation raise my status compared to yours? … Talking is a way of changing your status: If you make a great point, or set the terms of the discussion, you win the conversation. Listening, on the other hand, is a way of establishing rapport, of bringing people closer together; showing you've heard what's been said so far may not win you the conversation, but it does win you allies. (Klein, 2016, pp. 6-11).

Can we listen to complexity, allow our thinking to evolve in a nonlinear fashion, and come to terms with the plethora of voices, images, and stories that connect the issues that face our world today? Among the previous examples of complexity, we believe that climate change, as one of the most essential, interconnected and interdependent system that envelops planet Earth is especially important to the wellbeing of all creatures, including humans.

Pope Francis makes a case for the role of religion, in particular the Catholic Church, "not only for climate action but also for climate change—that is, solutions that reduce emissions and vast global imbalances in wealth, power, and consumption" (Carswell, 2016, pp. 26 & 28). Projected population growth does matter in how humans will need to adapt to the "effects of the carbon already baked into the system" (Carswell, 2016, p. 28). However, forced population-control has "resulted, in some cases, in horrific violations of women's bodies and basic dignity. … Such atrocities are not entirely a thing of the past: Women in India are still paid by the state to be sterilized, and more than a dozen recently died in mass sterilization camps" (Carswell, 2016, p. 28). Instead, invest in "women's empowerment in a broad sense—access to education, economic opportunity, health care, and reproductive choice—[and] slower population growth will follow" (Carswell, 2016, p. 28). Carmen Barroso, former direction of the International Planned Parenthood Federation's Western Hemisphere Region, posits:

> If you respect women's rights, give them the resources [and] access to the means of controlling their own fertility as they wish, we also have the indirect effect of having fewer people on the planet. And that will be good for the environment. (Carswell, 2016, p. 28)

The complexity of dealing with climate change (e.g., droughts, floods, fires, air and water pollution) is integrally linked with gender equity including freedom from rape, genital mutation, child marriages, and human sex trafficking, and access to health care, education, and employment.

> The connections between population and climate change are complex and less linear than one might assume … that's because the extent to which each new person contributes to the emissions problem varies dramatically according to where and how well they live. … At current rates, it would take a person from Niger about 200 years to produce the carbon the average U.S. resident emits in one year. … In 2010, Brian O'Neill, a scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, … found that if the population grew at a moderate pace as opposed to a rapid one between now and 2050, we'd prevent about 1.7 gigatons of carbon emissions annually by that year—equal to about one-fifth of the reductions needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. (Carswell, 2016, p. 29)

Excessive consumption, the carbon footprint, of a relatively few people in the world's population is a problem that can be solved with gender, environmental, and social justice education. VCG contributes to such education.

VCG Transitions and Transformations

Debbie: This is my final co-written editorial for VCG. Leaving is bittersweet. I look forward to several new challenges, but I know I will miss this partnership with authors, reviewers, and especially with Karen Keifer-Boyd. For over a decade, the editorials Karen and I co-constructed gave us the opportunity to shape the international literature of visual culture and gender in a dynamic multimedia format. Our editorials became spaces to share our own connections and reactions to the authors' scholarship. Over the years, they have considered a broad range of gender and visual culture. Our authors have shared their fears, challenges, frustrations and life changes in well-written and thoughtful research. I am blessed to have been part of this process.

Karen: I will miss working with Debbie on VCG. From the first moment we decided to create VCG, to the moment on the beach when Deb said the time had come to retire from VCG, we knew our relationship was an extraordinarily enjoyable journey that would continue in other different

enterprises (Figure 1 & 2). Our partnership can never be replicated. It is unique to the ebbs and flows of our lives shared intimately for more than a dozen years. With the publication of volume 11, Yen-Ju Lin, will join me as associate editor to continue VCG goals in volume 12 and beyond by bringing her guru techno problem-solving and organizational skills, as well as her design and art sensibilities. She has already begun in setting up an online submission process, which is ready for submission for volume 12 of VCG to be published September 15, 2017.

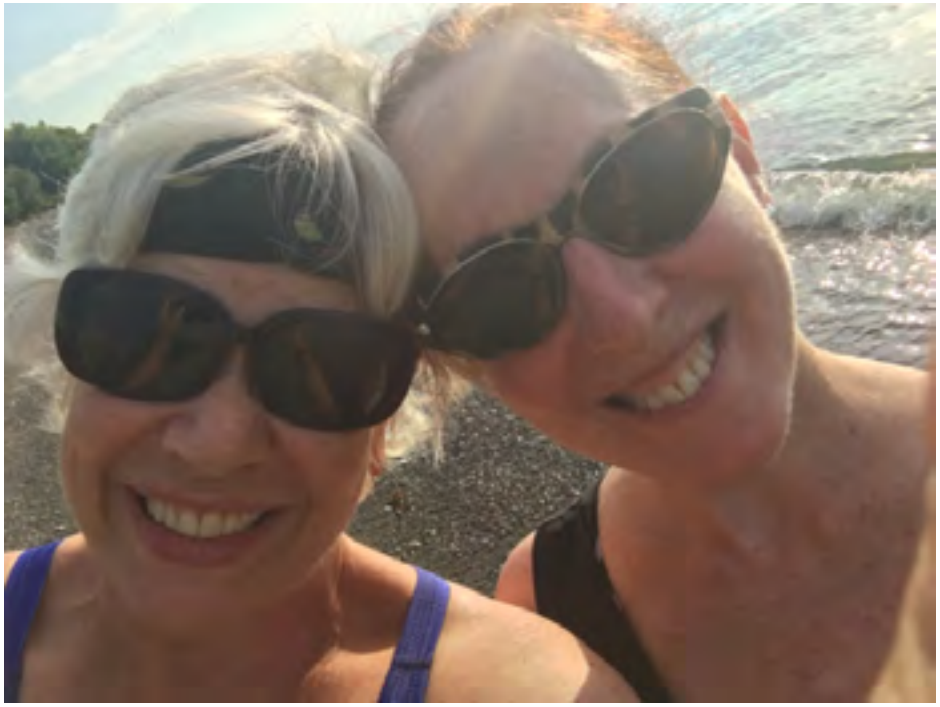

Figure 1. Deborah Smith-~~Shank~~ and Karen Keifer-Boyd meet on the shore of Lake Erie on the east side of Cleveland to discuss the state of the world and events of the past year in preparation for writing the editorial for *VCG*, volume 11. Photo by Deborah Smith-~~Shank~~, September 8, 2016.

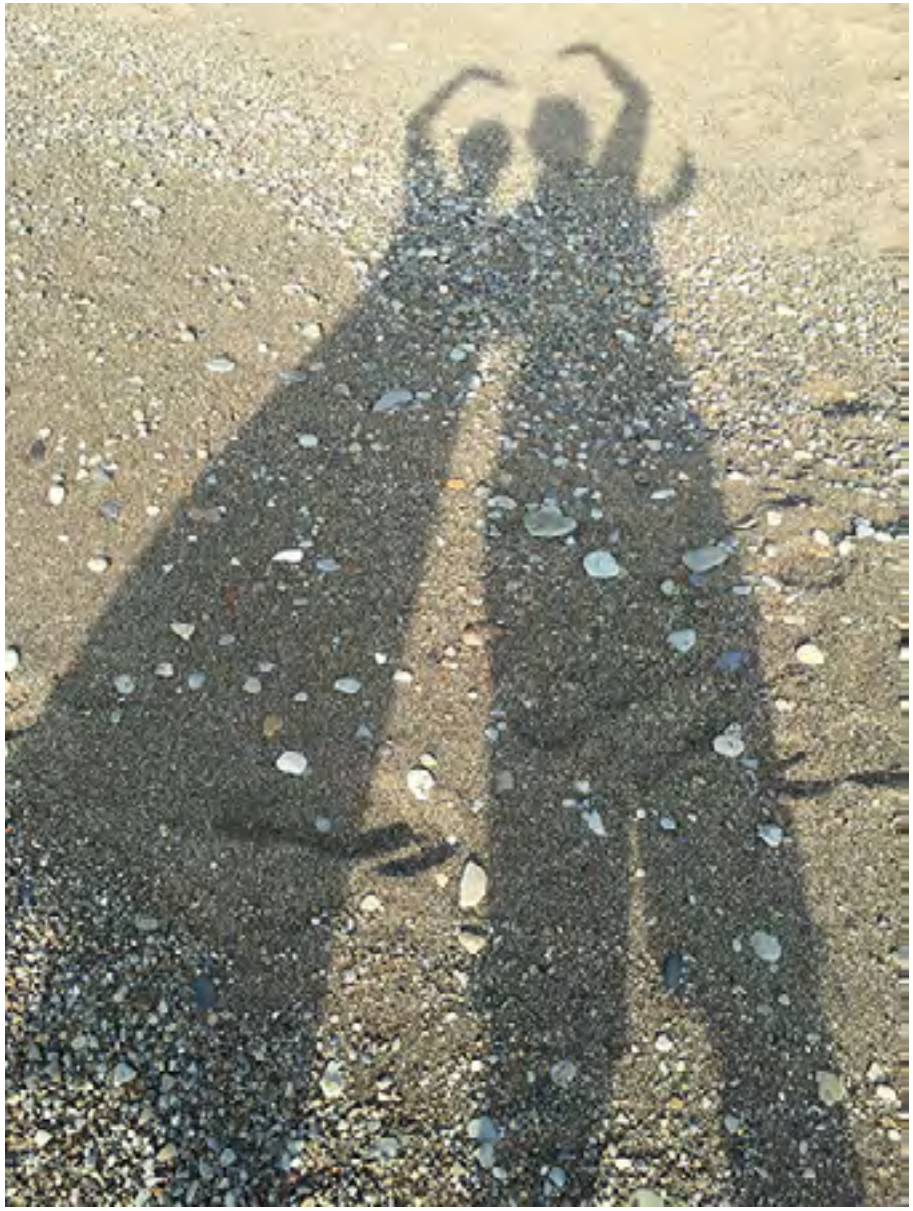

Figure 2. Photography gives permanence to the temporal nature of shadows that witnesses a performative act by Deborah Smith-~~Shank~~ and Karen Keifer-Boyd. Photo by Deborah Smith-~~Shank~~, September 8, 2016.

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About the Editors

Karen Keifer-Boyd, Ph.D., is Professor of Art Education and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the Pennsylvania State University. She is the 2015 Outstanding Research Awardee from the National Art Education Association (NAEA) Art Education Technology caucus, the NAEA Distinguished Fellow Class of 2013, the United States Society of Art Education's 2013 Ziegfeld Awardee, the 2012 Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Gender Studies at Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, Austria, Fulbright awardee for research in Finland in 2006, and NAEA Women's Caucus Connors Teaching Awardee (2005). Her writings on feminist pedagogy, visual culture, inclusion, cyberart activism, transcultural dialogues, action research, social justice arts-based research, and identity are in more than 50 peer-reviewed research publications, and translated into several languages. She co-authored *Including Difference* (NAEA, 2013); *InCITE, InSIGHT, InSITE* (NAEA, 2008); *Engaging Visual Culture* (Davis, 2007); and co-edited *Real-World Readings in Art Education* (Falmer, 2000). She served as president of the NAEA Women's Caucus from 2010-2012, and is the coordinator of Curricular Encounters with Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females—Tapestries & Sculpture by Linda Stein and the Judy Chicago Art Education Collection.

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