



## **Editorial:** **Cloudy Connections, Overcast Predictions**

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Floods, fires, and warming oceans, which in turn create atmospheric havoc on the planet, while predicted; the tragic frequency and intensity experienced in 2023 changes lifeways for all species. Breathing particulates in the haze from 2023 summer fires, I remembered how sunsets helped me cope with the stress of human loss and uncertainty of 2020. What is certain in 2023 is that collectively humans must breakthrough the overcast predictions of doomsday data in the clouds by recognizing the interconnections of life (Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* The photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd in June 2023 was the first breakthrough of the sunrays over Lake Erie, near Cleveland, Ohio, after weeks of haze due to the wildfires on the Canadian side of the Great Lake

What might we learn from non-human species on how to adapt and thrive? This is a question I posed to graduate students in the 2021 Art Education Colloquium course at Penn State University. The assignment was to study an unfamiliar lifeform as metaphor and/or inspiration to critique systemic oppression and envision equitable and inclusive art learning processes and environments. Early in the semester, students selected a lifeform or living system that they did not believe they had bias or much knowledge about and to learn about the ways of knowing and being of the selected lifeform. Each student presented their inquiry at the end of the semester in an online exhibition ([linked here](#)) through visual or performance or another creative mode inspired from the living strategies of the lifeform that might inform equity, diversity, and inclusion (ED&I) leadership in research, teaching, artmaking, and/or curating art. The exhibition explores ED&I leadership strategies through Fingerprints, Kombucha, Lichens, Mushrooms, Nymphaea, Codariocalyz Motorius, among other lifeforms.

To introduce the project, I shared examples such as Xalli Zúñiga's (2021a, 2021b) study of Mycorrhizae, a fungal lifeform, to envision relational systems of care. I also shared what I had learned about slime mold after a log on the beach that had served as a table the summer prior had what to me was strange living matter radiating from the center but most active toward the circle's periphery (see Figures 2 & 3). To my surprise, I learned that slime mold could make decisions and challenge past knowledge of ways of being (Aceves & Liota, 2020).



*Figures 2 & 3.* The photographs by Karen Keifer-Boyd in July 2021 are of the top of a log and a close-up of the same piece of tree tossed to the shore from Lake Erie waves, dried by the sun to become driftwood and the home environment for slime mold to thrive.

**Maggie-Rose Condit-Summerson and John Summerson**, article in VCG's volume 18, "**Nymphaea: Lover's Letter to Water Lilies**," began as Maggie-Rose's project in the 2021 Art Education Colloquium course. Their dynamic visual essay explores queer ecologies of water lilies as a "more-than-human model of feminist collectivity, relationality, and care" (Summerson-Condit & Summerson, 2023, p. 18). Their collaboration in creating the animations embedded in the essay is a tribute to water lilies as well as enactments of love to each other.

### **Cloudy Connections and Cantilever Infrastructures**

Data in the clouds is a threat to privacy, human rights, democracy, and physical safety. Especially in the United States with democracy's fair and free elections threatened in dangerous and violent ways since January 6, 2022, and the 2022 overturning of *Roe v Wade*, the data of age, gender, menstruation, and pregnancy has already caused serious harm, which disproportionately impacts



marginalized groups. What cantilever infrastructures can support the extensions necessary to breakthrough misogyny of abortion bans?

While I am not a design engineer, my father was, who designed my childhood home inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architecture of environmental harmony often with the engineering feat of cantilever structures (e.g., Fallingwater in Pennsylvania) (Ricci, n.d.). It has been 25 years since my father died but his cantilever design for the home I inherited has protected the house from many storms including the July 4th, 1969 Derecho that swept through northeast Ohio (National Weather Service, 2019). While police had received the warning of severe weather from the National Weather Service, the police decided not to issue a warning to the crowds gathering for fireworks with the rationale that they did not want people to panic. Instead, people died from what became known to locals as the Derecho Fireworks. Preventing panic was also the rationale given by the 45<sup>th</sup> president in 2020 for not warning and taking preventive measures when the coronavirus suddenly filled the air and caused *1,127,152 deaths* (World Health Organization, July 14, 2023).

The rotting wood of the lattice structure of my inherited home if replaced with superficial cuts would not last the storms coming off the Great Lake Erie, such as the August 24, 2023, tornado, causing the mighty Oak tree's release of its 200-year-old branches and the Mulberry tree to split in half with such force it fell a 60-foot Blue Spruce with a whack at its base about 8-foot from the ground (see Figure 4). Yet the house with its cantilever is structural balance, a metaphor for the interdependence of strength.



Figure 4. The photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd in August 2023 is of an entangled broken Mulberry tree and Blue Spruce hit by the 110mph winds of a tornado that whirled off Lake Erie through her yard and traveled inland.

The violence of abortion bans in the United States in the past year harkens to atrocities throughout the world such as discussed through portraits in **Isha Yadav's** essay, "**Memorializing Acts Against Gender Violence in South Asia Through Visual Portraits**" in volume 18 of the *Visual Culture & Gender* (VCG) journal. The creation of what has become iconic visual portraits resisting caste violence, tribal violence, and dowry violence, raise awareness and are catalysts to organize activism to stop such violence. The artists Priyanka Paul, Portia Roy, and Kruttika Susarala broaden the dialogue and impact by posting the portraits on Instagram. The stories of the women who are portrayed inform about horrific practices that continue in 2023 such as incarcerating Adivasi and Maoist women after police squeeze their breasts to see if they are lactating. If not, they may be imprisoned with the premise that they are not "family-oriented,"

if not continuously giving birth. In the United States there is also policing of pregnant bodies, and criminalization in some states of aborting a pregnancy. *Klaas Diersman's* (2023) animation informs how personal data uploaded to “the cloud” is collected leading to possible imprisonment for those who do not give birth (*Felsberger*, 2023). In the United States, lives are devastated and destroyed, at times to the point of preventable deaths, with the increasing restrictions to access birth control, gender-affirming care, testing for sexually transmitted infection (STI), emergency contraception, and abortion due to closures of healthcare centers (*Wiederkehr & Thomas-Deveaux*, 2022). Reproductive freedom is a global struggle for human rights.

Yadav's article provides examples of the power of visual art portraits shared widely through social media. The visceral impact and call to action through portrait paintings is also evident in Elham Hajesmaeili's (2023) augmented reality portraits of Iranian women, whose stories call for “Women, Life, Freedom.” Yadav's article also resonates with Laura Stetz's (2020) activism in mapping of art addressing violence against women.

### **Weathering the Oppressive Racist Patriarchal Storm with Spirit Art**

**Glynnis Reed-Conway's** visual essay in VCG's volume 18, “**aka Wolfwoman: A Poetic's Artist Book**” resists patriarchal control and revels in Black female queer sexuality. The dance between text and image is a metonym for spirit work evoked in imagining with visual veracity a critical consciousness necessary to reclaim self from the oppression of a racist patriarchal society. Reed-Conway's poetic artist book is an emergence of critical consciousness. Black feminist studies scholar Lindsey Stewart's (2017) exploration of the “conditions for the emergence of critical consciousness ... in centering black female experiences of agency” connects autonomy to choose with whom and when to have sexual relations to “forging a critical consciousness that spurs resistance” in “practices of freedom” (p. 104).

The reflective twin images in Reed-Conway's visual essay suggest self-love as such a condition for critical consciousness to thwart the effects of social alienation and to reframe *notions of misfit* (*Garland-Thomson*, 2011) as a site of empowerment, beauty, and agency. The doubled image of a Black woman in

Reed-Conway's visual art forges the “self's relationship to self instead of the self's relationship to oppression (Stewart, 2017, p. 105). I encourage everyone to spend time with Reed-Conway's visual essay as it is layered with “liberatory practices, agency, and resistance ... as a way to destabilize power relations of oppression” (Stewart, 2017, p. 108 & 112). The artist book presented in Reed-Conway's essay begins as a retort to a pervasive racist homophobic sexist world she has experienced but her work does not dwell in the oppressors' world, and instead turns to celebrating Black female queer identity.

### **Visibility Despite Overcast Predictions**

To cantilever infrastructures are reparation, remedial, and interconnected acts of holding to ethical practices in consideration of all people, all species, and the life of the planet. The articles in *Visual Culture & Gender's* volume 18 are breakthroughs of overcast conditions. The art and writing in volume 18 by Isha Yadav, Maggie-Rose Summerson-Condit, John Summerson, and Glynnis Reed-Conway make visible connections to love as rhizomatic paths leading away from current overcast predictions based in trajectories of hate and greed.

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## About the Editor

**Karen Keifer-Boyd**, Ph.D., Professor of Art Education and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Pennsylvania State University, co-authored several books: *Teaching and Assessing Social Justice Art Education: Power, Politics, Possibilities* (Routledge, 2023); *Lobby Activism: Feminism(s)+Art Education* (NAEA, 2021); *Including Difference* (NAEA, 2013); *InCITE, InSIGHT, InSITE* (NAEA, 2008); *Engaging Visual Culture* (Davis, 2007); and co-edited *Real-World Readings in Art Education: Things Your Professors Never Told You* (Falmer, 2000); and has more than 80 journal publications. Her research focuses on transdisciplinary creativity, inclusion, feminist art pedagogy, transcultural dialogue, action research, and eco-social justice art, and has been translated and published in Austria, Brazil, China, Columbia, Finland, Oman, and S. Korea. She is a recipient of a National Art Education Foundation grant (2017-2018) for social justice art education and a National Science Foundation grant (2010-2012) regarding gender barriers in technology. She is the recipient of several awards from the National Art Education Association (NAEA) including the 2020 Eisner Lifetime Achievement Awardee, 2015 Art Education & Technology Outstanding Research Awardee, 2014 Women's Caucus June King McFee Awardee, NAEA Distinguished Fellow Class of 2013, and the 2013 Ziegfeld Awardee. She was the 2012 Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Gender Studies at Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, Austria, and a 2006 Fulbright Scholar in Finland. Current collaborative projects include developing online teaching resources: *Wo/Manhouse 2022*, *Augmented Encounters*, and *Indigeneity & Disability Justice Art Exhibition*.

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