

## EDITORIAL

# Democracy 2.0

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*Democracy in America: The National Campaign*, a non-partisan public arts project, ran concurrently with the 2008 presidential campaign and election in the United States (US). The purpose of this project was to “take the temperature of artists’ relationships with, and reactions, to the historic roots and practical manifestations of the American democratic tradition” (*Democracy in America: The National Campaign*, 2008, p.1).

*Democracy in America: The National Campaign* included public forums, a 7-day exhibit at the Park Avenue Armory in New York, performances at the Republican and Democratic conventions, mobile projects in Queens and Brooklyn, and the publication *A Guide to Democracy in America* (Thompson, 2008). Impressive are the responses from artists and activists who participated in Town Hall Meetings in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and New York City. Participants described and imagined the ways in which art responds to local concerns; the identification of resources to support such work; how art builds community; the contemporary and historical context of such work; and the links between this work and democracy. These responses are available on the project website.

The focus of *Democracy in America: The National Campaign* has less to do with the institutional structures created to support democracy and more to do with individual and collective actions that contribute to social justice, and the public good as well as how to influence institutional structures to be more responsive to public concerns. *Democracy in American: The National Campaign* exemplifies Lummis’ (1997) promotion of a “radical democracy” based on participating in initiatives such as this public art project. In his view you do democracy by working with others, building consensus, designing inclusive discussions, resolving conflict, acting on common concerns and planning for the future.

At the University of Oregon (UO), where I teach, the student body is remarkably engaged with issues of social justice and the environment. This is evidenced in numerous student interest groups associated with student government on campus. The Associated Students of the UO (ASUO) set as their goal to register 3,000 students (on a campus of approximately 20,000 students) for the November 2008 election. They are likely to meet or surpass this goal, based on evidence from previous voter registration drives. However, despite their obvious commitment to political action, students routinely voice concern for the complex environmental and social problems that they are beginning to inherit from my generation and older as well as a lack of faith in our government institutions to respond appropriately

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and expeditiously. Like those who participated with *Democracy in America: The National Campaign*, many of my undergraduate and graduate students are gravely concerned with the state of the institutions created to maintain and advance democracy. This includes the institutions associated with all branches of government at the national, regional, and local levels. Students from across the political spectrum are routinely distressed as they have witnessed government institutions compromise civil liberties, the decision-making process associated with initiating a war in Iraq, responses to natural disasters, environmental degradation, and most recently an economic free fall due to a seeming lack of government oversight. I do not believe students on this campus are unique in this regard. Their distress is congruent with national polls showing significant numbers of people not having confidence in the presidency, congress, and the United States Supreme Court (Pollingreport.com, 2008).

Education, both formal and informal, is essential to preparing a responsible and engaged citizenry. Doctorow's (2008a) novel *Little Brother* was written, in part, to encourage young adults to take democracy seriously and to suggest a course of action for doing democracy. Set in the near future, the novel follows Marcus Yallow as he confronts questions of morality, reality, truth, and freedom that arise in response to high-tech anti-terrorism. Doctorow (2008b) states that his novel "is meant to be part of the conversation about what an information society means: Does it mean control, or unheard-of-liberty? It's (the novel) not just a noun, it's a verb, it's something you do" (p. 1). In conceiving his novel as something to do, he released, and distributed it, under a Creative Commons (CC) Attribution-Noncommercial ShareAlike 3.0 license. The novel can be freely shared and adapted by its readers. It is free for downloading from the web. Readers are invited to send their remixes of the novel to Doctorow for posting on his website. In addition, the technology associated with the novel is available through Instructables (2008). To assist educators in bringing the novel into the classroom, Doctorow's publisher, TOR, has made a teacher's guide to the book available online (TOR Teen Teacher's Guide, 2008). The book also has dedicated pages on Facebook and MySpace.

Creative Commons, the licenser of *Little Brother*, is also about doing democracy. Creative Commons (2008) describes its purpose as using "private rights to create public goods: creative works set free for certain uses" (p. 1). Creative Commons, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit, facilitates an environment in which people are free to share, remix, and reuse legally. Creative Commons provides resources significant to the arts and culture sector and by extension the field of Art Education. Numerous demonstration projects and case studies about open access and the free culture movement are available. Creativecommons.org includes a section of the site titled ccLearn, devoted to open access educational materials. Taken together, Doctorow's *Little Brother* and Creative Commons suggest a Democracy 2.0 that simultaneously honors the historical struggles and challenges associated with maintaining and advancing democracy while developing strategies for

maintaining and advancing democracy through the array of communication options available in the Web 2.0 environment.

In 1974 Professors Borchard and McCarthy at Ohio University introduced me to Lanier's (1973) essay, "Art and the Disadvantaged." It was through reading Lanier that I first began to fully understand democracy as something that I could learn more about doing through a university education and that it was possible to teach students to do democracy by engaging with the socio-political challenges of the day. Lanier's view of democracy affirmed for me how my chosen course of study, and eventual profession, Art Education, could be in keeping with Dewey's conception of democracy as a way of life with a primary goal of education being to prepare people to participate in this way of life to the greatest extent possible. The necessity of committing ourselves, as art educators, to assisting our students to embrace this purpose is as necessary now, possibly more so, than it was in 1973 and before. As a field we must never lose sight of this purpose and should affirm our commitment to it on a regular basis.

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