



CATALYST

A SOCIAL JUSTICE FORUM

Volume 1 | Issue 1 | 2011

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

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It is with great pride that we present to you the inaugural issue of *Catalyst: A Social Justice Forum*. Here we have attempted to create an innovative, peer-reviewed space in which people from numerous disciplines, or even those claiming no discipline, can present research, multimedia, and art aimed at furthering the ideals of social justice, broadly defined. Social justice is not a concept owned by the academy, for attempts to create a more just world can come from many professions, or even from no profession at all. By applying the traditionally academic peer-review process to work done by activists, artists, academics and others, we hope to retain the best aspects of the digital world, such as ease of creation and access, while producing high quality work in the face of a world threatened by information overload.

The purpose of this journal is to create a space for dynamic conversations that allow us to think about what social justice means and how we may be able to actualize such an ephemeral yet necessary idea. One of the only essential characteristics of social justice is its ever-changing nature. Though it is somewhat nebulous, we view social justice as a useful umbrella term that refers to thinking and action oriented toward making the world a better place. To reflect this idea of social justice, we have put much effort into creating a living document that can follow such a transitory thing wherever it may go.

As scholars, students, and activists, we view efforts toward social justice as working to bring about solidarity, increase access, and shrink perceived distances between people, while at the same time promoting diversity. We were therefore troubled by the ways in

which traditional, printed academic journals – often insulated within narrow circles of distribution – have privileged one modality of communication and style of writing, reinforcing, though perhaps unintentionally, the tradition of a one-way flow of information from “expert” to reader. What we viewed as problematic and troubling led us to develop, not just a new journal, but a new kind of journal, with the aim of tackling issues of social justice through non-traditional means of representation – forums which create space for multiple modes of communication and the possibility of response and dialogue. Therefore, we present this inaugural issue of *Catalyst* with several initial goals for its structure and function.

First, we wanted to push the boundaries of print journals in general, which tend to privilege written communication to the exclusion of all other forms. We did this by specifically seeking contributions that tap a range of modalities, including, in this issue, visual art and film. In the future, we hope to expand this repertoire to include other media combinations, such as texts and visual presentations with embedded sound, in order to establish *Catalyst* as a venue where diverse forms of communication and expression are valued singly and presented together.

Second, within this issue we have provided ways for readers to respond to the published articles, films, artwork, etc. by typing, recording a message, or uploading a variety of file formats for other readers and the authors to view and respond to. We invite readers and viewers to engage with the issue in a variety of ways and hope that they will give suggestions to continually increase access and widen circles of communication, moving us farther from a one-way flow of information aimed at a narrow audience. Though the often one-way-exchange of a traditional academic journal may evoke conversations, emails, rejoinders, or letters to the editor – all within the confines of academia – they may not often reach those communities and individuals that the journal seeks to represent or impact. In fact, the very notion of an academic journal's impact, or Impact Factor, is measured by the number of times other academics reference something contained in the journal. Thus, journals with greater prestige are not necessarily the ones that “impact” the greatest change, reach the largest number of readers, or address the most important issues. They are the journals whose work is used most often within academia. Though we value the ways researchers build upon one another's work as a measure of impact, we are also

interested in exploring other ways in which a journal might come to understand and reframe notions of impact and audience.

Third, within this issue, we have begun to take advantage of our open-access, online, format. By using social media sites, conference programs, and personal communication within and outside of academia, we have started the ongoing process of building a network of readers and contributors that go beyond the scope of traditional peer-reviewed journals. While we maintain a double blind, peer-review process and greatly value the scholarly contributions of our authors, we are equally excited to be able to present our journal for free to anyone with an internet connection. We look forward to exploring the possibilities of our open-access, online format and invite suggestions from our readers about ways to increase access and interest.

Concurrently, in an effort to support the open-access movement in journal publication, as well as to provide a conduit for readers to further explore the ideas presented here, we have provided hyperlinks to the original sources of all electronically available references included in the issue, and have invited our contributors to list links to websites and resources related to their submissions. This citation style works to make the flow of information and knowledge more integrated and more productive.

It is not only through the form of our journal that we hope to promote a more just world. The content within this issue makes for a far-reaching initial step toward actualizing the goals mentioned above. To start, Vickie Phipps presents three pieces of visual art, in a series called "Instant Racism," that show how even the most seemingly benign parts of our world can reflect the racism so deeply ingrained in our culture.

The first article in the issue, "Pushing Me Through" by Jessica Lester and Rachael Gabriel, exemplifies the idea that art and research do not have to be mutually exclusive. In fact, this article shows that the two can gain strength from each other by mixing the power of scientific observation with the emotional energy of poetry. By truly listening to a woman diagnosed as learning disabled, we begin to understand how an expert's labeling of "others" can affect undue emotional stress on, and unwarranted limitation of, early-age learners. The authors show that there is much to gain by listening to the voice of the so-called "other" – even when that other is labeled as less intelligent or apt than the erudite authorities given the task of instructing them.

In the second article, "Educating for Peace and Justice," Ian Harris and Charles Howlett help to embed our efforts at understanding justice in the larger historical context of peace studies. We find that there is a long road, travelled by many, leading us to this place. By linking peace studies into the larger sociohistorical context and showing the effects of different time periods on struggles for justice, the authors implicitly support the earlier contention that social justice is an essentially dynamic concept. The authors show us that peace is not just something to be studied, but a practice to be learned and taught through the ages.

Tema Okun's "Sound of Fury," draws on her many years of experience in teaching about racism to elaborate the many difficulties teachers may face in a world that now purports to be colorblind. Her article teaches us to face white privilege head on by enumerating many tactics that teachers can use to allow students to get beyond the usual victim-blaming and ignorance that are so prevalent in the classroom.

Billy Hall's work takes us out of the classroom and into the garden. His intricate critique of the neoliberalization of community gardens adds layers to the concept of social justice and shows that seemingly good intentions can sometimes have negative and unintended consequences.

We close out the articles section with a piece from Woods Nash in which he draws upon his background in philosophy to frame his field work among people with refugee status, asking whether or not refugee integration is an elusive goal. Attempts to standardize integration programs may lead to efficiency and calculability, but they also, Nash argues, lead to refugees being treated like devices, like unnatural bits of flotsam and jetsam washing ashore to be integrated into American society as mere pieces of the economic structure. We see, yet again, that actualizing a robust and rigorously interrogated form of justice will be more difficult than finding some universal, objective solution.

In the closing pages, we turn again to the work of Vickie Phipps. A year ago she created subversive graphic designs with the intent of protesting the "don't ask, don't tell" policy of the US military. Now that this policy has been repealed, we find a bit of solace in the idea that sometimes things do change for the better. These designs now stand, no longer as hopeful challenges to the status quo, but as affirmations of the contributions made by GLBTQI people to US armed forces.

We conclude the issue with Jason Mendez's documentary "Raising the Point." In this short film, Mendez takes us into the city to demonstrate that, even when laws are in place, environmental troubles can still idle by our doorsteps. R. Scott Frey moves us from monologue to dialogue by offering a critical commentary on Mendez's work. Mendez then adds his reply, adding to a conversation that, we hope, our readers will soon join and extend.

As the form and content of this inaugural issue of Catalyst: A Social Justice Forum show, multiple paths toward social justice may wind through uncommon areas. Within this issue we have brought together thinkers who take up multiple identities from a range of disciplines in multiple modalities because we believe that work for social justice requires diversity of thought and the blurring of all lines of difference. We hope you join the conversation as we take this first step forward.