

FEAR.....NO ART

On Mindfulness, Wellbeing and Transformation

Art Education as Identity work

The contemporary artworld has an awkward relationship with spirituality. One of my favourite writers between science and art, the Art Historian Barbara Stafford, is one of a number of current writers who has traced how our patterns of thinking and looking have shifted since the critical rationality of the enlightenment took hold. But these are grounds that continue to shift, as the sciences grapple with complexity. As an art educator it has been interesting to see the era of Discipline-based art education, our own desperate attempt to be like the big kids of the academy, give some ground to the development of various moves of arts-based research, where some of the big kids seem to want to be like us.



Untitled (Portrait of Peggy Bull)
George Littlechild 1993

The phrase **FEAR.....NO ART** suggest to me the role that art can play in working through the fearful elements of our lives, the distortion or loss of identity that seems built into this era of silicone injected memory. That thought took me to the artist featured in the first issue of CAT, George Littlechild, whose work, on many levels is extraordinary for its combination of gentleness and unblinking awareness of both history and the present. I see in his work a very dimensional spirituality. The idea of original and deeply committed art as an act of honouring has informed my teaching.

I have two doctoral students who are working with their spirituality in the context of art education. Andrea Avila, a doctoral candidate who has taught me about the complexity and necessity of addressing multiple ways of knowing, is currently working on a collaboration as an artist and an educator that involves the convergence of her Mestiza identity as a Mexican woman, with spiritual practice informed by Buddhism and how these can inform her work learning to serve as an ally to an indigenous medicine man in Canada. Sally Adnams, another of my doctoral students who is presenting at this conference, has taught me about the need to find a language that will recognize that the notion of transformation has a long history of practice and literature in spirituality globally, in psychology and in art as she works to find the language and concepts to introduce a full understanding of meditative practice to art education.

For others, the word spirituality is used more cautiously, expressed in terms of a postmodern sublime. Paul Crowther, wrote that

what is fundamental is not this or that moment of self-consciousness, but the urge to create or discover meaning that is embodied in every such moment. It is this primal urge into meaning which is made vivid in the experience of the sublime. The best art of postmodern times, therefore, restores some notion of an authentic self which is admittedly more complex than hitherto admitted, but which cannot be analyzed away in a mere play of relations. On these terms, if properly understood and explained, sublime art has the capacity to rehumanize (Crowther, 1995 p.17 as cited in Guion, 2008, p.57)

Considered through Crowther's, lens Canadian Artist, Tim Whiten, describes glass as a transcendent material that confronts us with the puzzle of simultaneous access and barriers, of hopes and frustrations. Art education is a place to work through fear. Complicated and quiet, inviting and challenging, transformative. I would suggest that one of our fears must be the absence, or sterilization of art in education.

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Rebis I

Tim Whiten 2010

FEAR...NO...ART

On Eco Imagination

Art Education as Ontological Adaptation

This was the most difficult version of the theme to discern, because the fragmentation suggested the falling away of the structure of language. The words function as independent sounds. Animal moans bracketed by panting wind. How do you find meaning that isn't nihilistic? The sky is falling and there is no place to run! Remember what I did in the earthquake?

How might art education be a part of, or a response to environmental crisis?

Not only is the sky falling, but I think I may be responsible.

... Oops! ... Damn! ... Sorry?



Saaltus Illuminati
Arleene Wasylynychuk 2011

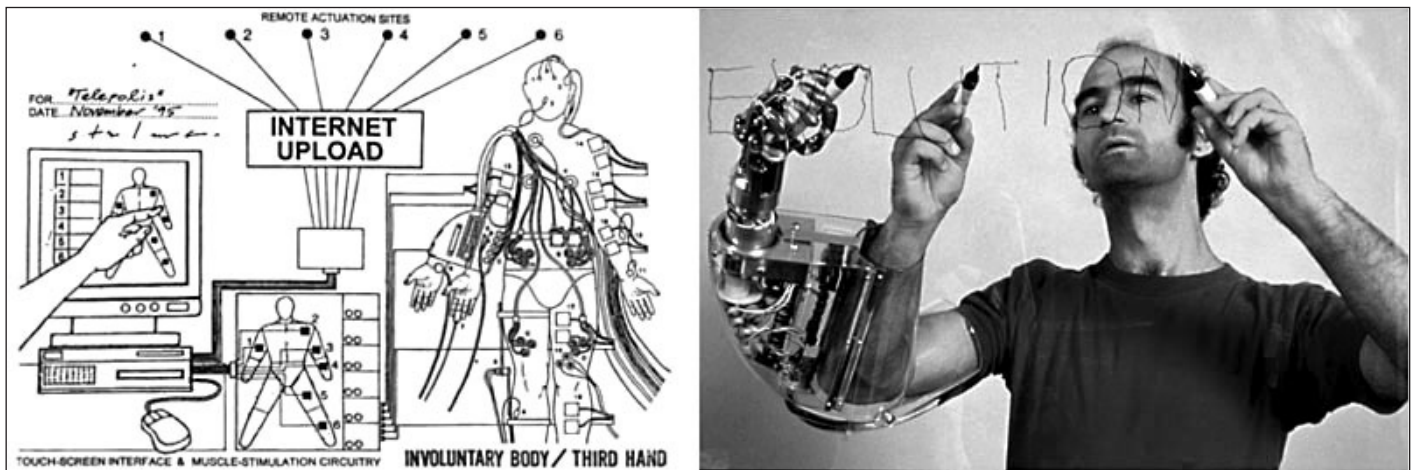
than what we typically imagine from a simply human perspective. This suggests a need for imagination that isn't limited as well and from there I think of another graduate student who has taught me that art process, as a seeking for and inventing structure doesn't have to limit itself to the merely human. Connie Morey is looking through art toward a kind of eco imagination that isn't simply about inventing a new design, but of recognizing in ourselves an expanded way of thinking or being in the world that might be reflected in words like 'ecological'. Like von Tiesenhausen and Wasylynychuk, I think Connie is trying to imagine much bigger. In 3-D. In 4-D. Interestingly, I think that what might be perceived as the vehicle for our fragmentation may also be part of what is needed to imagine beyond object individualism

All of these questions drew me to two artists who have been featured in the pages of CAT, both Albertans as it turns out, whose work could be described as sublime and who each work with materials or imagery that makes us aware of our human scale. Peter von Tiesenhausen, who has said, "I don't try to tell people what to think. I don't know what's right or what's wrong or smart or stupid. I'm just as aware as I can be", and Arlene Wasylynychuk, who was featured in the last issue of CAT, and who many of you will know was lost to cancer less than a month ago. Her *Saaltus Illuminati*, like von Tiesenhausen's 'Watchers' each speak to the life in nature as being much larger



Vessel and Watchers
(Figure burn, Strathmore, AB)
Peter von Tiesenhausen 2000

and isolation. One of the consequences of globalized digital being is the prosthetically enhanced capacity to experience simultaneity. To visualize consequences globally, Australian cyber performance artist Stelarc once wired himself to a database on the internet that tracked lightning strikes globally, so he could experience what



Fractal Flesh

Stelarc 1995

the earth was experiencing. While this is an extreme case, consider the work by Katerina Cizek with the NFB. On a site called *Highrise* that includes global and group sourced documentary about the ubiquitous concrete structure (figure 8), Cizek has created a marvelous composite structure that uses a shared experience to tell an



Out My Window

Katerina Cizek 2010

incredibly rich array of stories. The idea of imaging globally as a way of learning to imagine ecologically is an example of how our being in the world can be adaptive in ways that might be an artful response to this fear of fragmentation.

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- Cleary, R (2001) Calgary artist drops ‘Watchers’ at Flatrock. *The Telegram-Flatrock*. Retrieved on October 20, 2012, from: <http://www.tiesenhausen.net/press3.htm>.
 Zwicky, J. (2003). *Wisdom & metaphor*. Kentville, NS: Gaspereau Press.
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FEAR NO.....ART

On Participation in Power

Art Education as Community Activism

In this last iteration of the theme, the emphasis, to my ear, lands on 'no', on the capacity to pass judgment that immediately implies the power to exclude. In many ways, this is more familiar territory. Institutional critique was certainly the core of art and art educational discourse in the early 90s when I cut my teeth academically. One of the great ironies of teaching visual art in junior high, my classroom experience, is how hard it is to avoid being drawn in to the policing part of the school system. In the late 50s and early 60s, the philosopher of technology, Lewis Mumford, described hierarchical institutions that resort to accounting processes as a way of defining value as megamachines. Mumford also warned against the distortion of allowing technology to define our needs rather than our needs defining technology. As an artist and educator, I think I might be afraid of megamachines. I certainly don't want to be a cog in one. And yet, sometimes I think I am. This all sounds very serious and fortunately, the artists featured in CAT that come to mind because there work calling into question the institutionalization of 'no' are all seriously playful in their approaches. Lorri Millan and Shawna Dempsey are performance artists from Winnipeg who have been doing what Nicolas Bourriaud (1998) might describe as relational aesthetics as part of their practice since 1989. Along



Lesbian National Parks and Services Rangers
Lorri Millan and Shawna Dempsey 1997
Photograph: Don Lee, The Banff Centre



Pulling the Plug Roadsworth Berlin July 2007

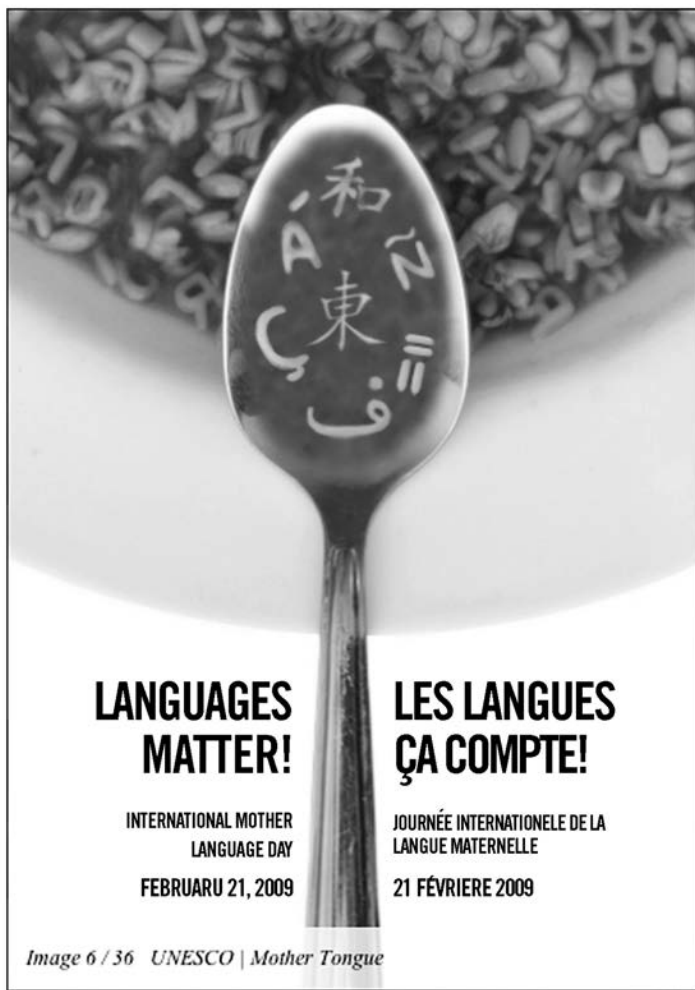
with more traditional, stage-based performance pieces, Millan and Dempsey have engaged communities through personae such as Lesbian National Parks & Services where they used humour and brochures as a way challenge people to expand their thinking. They also opened up a temporary grocery store in an urban gallery in response to the lack of access to resources that are often taken for granted outside of the city core. In both cases their humour and generosity also came with a pointed institutional critique intended to provoke long-term change. In a more recent issue of CAT, Roadsworth's graffiti also combines a sense of cartoonish whimsy with an awareness of the structures that quickly become the common sense of daily living. In Roadsworth's case, simply noticing seems to be the

primary goal, but as art educators we generally want more out of the experiences we provoke.

My grad student, Scott Marsden, who works as the curator of *The Reach* gallery in Abbotsford, BC, has a mandate to serve a semi-rural community that includes large Indigenous, South Asian and Mennonite populations. His work involves bringing Grant Kestor's (2004) notions of dialogical aesthetics into the gallery in the hopes of breaking down some of the class and race barriers that typically limit the interest, value and experience of the gallery. His work along these lines has included bringing together the quilting traditions of all three communities, featuring documentary photos of farm workers' rights protests from the area, and exhibitions of spiritually significant artifacts and transformed individuals



Man Turned to Stone L T'xwelatse



Poster Design Natalia Delgado 2009

that were sacred to one of the local communities. His work involves the “no’s” in the artworld, and particularly the gallery world. Natalia Delgado the final grad student I will mentioned, is also dealing with institutionalized “no’s” in her own field of Graphic design. As in the field of teaching, where we sometimes struggle with ‘the specialist’, ‘the generalist’, ‘the kids’ and ‘the parents’ as competing categories, the field of design protects itself from untrained people liberated by software. As a practicing designer who has worked at the University of Tijuana, Natalia is exploring the pedagogy of co-design as action research with activist groups.

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So... Where Are We?

In the final pages of his final work – *Chaosmosis* – Felix Guattari offers a provocative challenge, suggesting that our societies are in desperate times and that the way forward is through innovation and creation, of a particularly ethico-aesthetic kind (1995, p.132-133). He follows this statement with a question, using the institution of schooling as an exemplary site: How do you make a class operate like a work of art? (Sellars, 2005, p.1)

Sam Sellar (2005) suggest that teaching and learning often proceeds more like the creation of art than any other process – even if just for fleeting moments during a lesson. Some teachers are better able to generate artist-becomings, to deftly tweak the dance of learning. But I'm sure all teachers have experienced this feeling at some point: the buzz and excitement of the class as art, when talk of standards, testing and accountability made no sense and was just so much distraction from the real reason most teachers do what they do, from the learning that happens in spite of the latest curriculum or policy. (Sellars, 2005, p.9)

We are moving into a time
...when institution can be altered through crowds of individuals,
...where education has to imagine beyond simply human,
...where Art and all artists can seek its quiet and energy
to seize the openings, opportunities and insights
visible with the existing light.

Fear No Art!

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Paper presented at the AARE Conference, Parramatta, Australia, 2005. Retrieved October 2012. <http://www.aare.edu.au/05pap/sel05585.pdf>.

The C.D. Gaitskell Memorial Address is held annually in honour of the memory of Charles Dudley Gaitskell, the founding president of the CSEA/SCEA and the chairman of UNESCO'S 1951 Bristol Seminar which gave birth to the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA). Inaugurated at the CSEA/SCEA'S 1987 National Assembly in Halifax, these addresses bring to assembly delegates stimulating messages from prominent figures in art education and related fields. The previous C.D. Gaitskell memorial speaker was Cynthia Taylor from NSCAD University (see CATV10/N2). For a complete list of Gaitskell speakers, see the appendix of a recent issue of The Canadian Review of Art Education Research and Issues, or go to: WWW.CSEA-SCEA.CA