

Inter-facing Reflexive Pedagogy

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*“Inter-facing Reflexive Pedagogy” is a chapter excerpt from my doctoral dissertation: *Spectacle, Shock, and Surfacing* (2009) that calls attention to visual culture through performative inquiry by making connections between meaning making for everyday life and the practice of installation art by repositioning one’s own body through the installation art form. This becomes meaningful for the spectator/participant by incorporating a reflexive encounter both historically with visual culture and socially where constructed techniques and procedures are closed to contextual circumstances. In a system of relations, through an engagement in counter-constructed spectacle strategies, learning involves the whole person; it implies becoming a full participant. Encounters with an art form are never just an end point, since it may challenge the spectator/participant to new encounters of experience. Merleau-Ponty links these encounters as **a route**—an experience that proceeds through dialogue and evokes change. By presenting moments of possibilities through physical, emotional, and intellectual spaces for discourse on subjects in and around visual culture, the spectator/participant has the opportunity to reclaim his or her agency and autonomy by first speaking through the installation and then to the community of which he/she is a significant part.*

A reflexive pedagogy that integrates an art form and aesthetic education is one that encompasses a more informed and imaginative awareness; but it also utilizes creative critical analysis that empowers the spectator/participant to resist both the elitism and objectivism of the spectacle of everyday life, and allows the spectator/participant to read and name, to write and rewrite their own lived worlds. Educational theorist, John Dewey, insisted that the aesthetic is not an intruder from without, nor an affair “for odd moments.”¹ He used the example of a crowd being conducted rapidly through an art gallery by a guide. Learning to overcome passivity² then, is learning to notice what is being noticed—which may lead on and on to new encounters of experience and disclosures of understanding.

In investigating such encounters through referencing art installation works by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Luc Courchesne, I shall be positioning the spectator/participant as an active embodied presence who experiences decentering, and in becoming so, is required to reconsider centered notions of visual culture³, the human body, and who she or he is in the world of mediated images. Merleau-Ponty talked of these encounters of new experiences as

¹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, New York: Capricorn Books, 1958.

² The term ‘passive’ (i.e. passivity, passive encounters, passive spectator) is premised on the understanding there is a concern in contemporary society that we are mediated by images from our daily visual culture that become our dominant model of social life. I am attending to this concern through the performative inquiry lens in installation art. As cultural beings, we unconditionally accept and/or conform to what (visual) culture presents as the ‘norm’ and thus, allow the spectacles of visual culture to subjugate us, not allowing us to be alert, to critically question or challenge what is presented to us through the various mediums used to transmit visual culture practices.

³ Visual culture here is premised on the unprecedented importance of mediated imaging and visual technologies in contemporary society, and concerned with all kinds of visual information, its meanings, pleasures, and consumption.

“a route” being given to us, an experience that proceeds through dialogue and evokes change.⁴ The idea of making spaces for ourselves, experiencing ourselves in our connectedness and taking the action to move through those spaces individually and collectively is what Martin Heidegger⁵ writes about in how things happen now and then, when an open space appears: “there is a clearing,” or what theorist David Appelbaum refers to as *the stop*⁶ (the shocks of awareness in a moment of time)—pressing us to “reach beyond what we are sure we know.”

Rarely do we stand back from our encounters of experience and ask how we can come to actively understand the role visual culture plays in our inter-relationships, and further, how we can reverse visual culture’s effect on the way we think, act, and interact with it and one another. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s “Body Movies, Relational Architecture 6,”⁷ is a work activated by the participation of the passersby, and includes more than 1000 square metres of projections onto Linz, Austria’s Old City Hall building. In this work, thousands of portraits taken on the streets of Linz, Rotterdam, Madrid, Mexico City and Montreal are projected on giant screens using robot-controlled projectors located on towers around the square. Powerful xenon light sources placed at ground level wash out the portraits, and as people cross the square, their shadows appear on the screen and reveal them. Each time the shadows of the participants match the scale and shape of the projected images, an automatic command introduces the new set of portraits. As the audience discovers the process, the viewers become the participants, and the *playing* becomes more sophisticated. As the participants express their identities in the huge public forum, the result is an artwork that invites its participants to retake urban space. Although “Body Movies” takes place on such a large scale and public space, the work is intimate and allows the distancing for reflection between spectators/participants, themselves, and how spectators/participants present themselves publicly. Lozano-Hemmer says “the intimate relationship between the interactive art work and the viewer is an integral part of the artwork...personalizing experiences, establishing close relationships, but it is also important to look for more theatrical kinds of interactivity.”⁸

Enactivist, arts educator Lynn Fels, among others⁹, argues that knowledge is enacted through human participation (e.g. through conversations enacting situations with a mutual sharing of endeavours and ideas) in a dynamic and changing environment.¹⁰ There is a shared responsibility (in

⁴ Merleau-Ponty, “The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences,” p. 21.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, “Building, dwelling, thinking” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York: Harper Row Publ., 1971; and also see, *Being and Time*, J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, trans., New York: Harper Row, 1962.

⁶ David Appelbaum, *The Stop*. New York: University of New York Press, 1995.

⁷ Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is a Mexican-Canadian installation artist who installs large-scale, interactive artworks in heavy-traffic zones of cities around the world. He explores the intersection between new technologies, public space, and active participation. Lozano-Hemmer has received the Prix Ars Electronica Award for distinction in Interactive Art. *Body Movies*, 2001-2002, see a series of images from “*Body Movies*” @ [http://images.google.ca/images?q=installation+art+\"Body+Movies\"+by+Rafael+Lozano-Hemmer](http://images.google.ca/images?q=installation+art+\)

⁸ Randy Gladman, “Body Movies” in *Canadian Art*, Winter 2002, Vol. 19, No. 4.

⁹ For Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*, p. 172, the ‘negotiation of a middle path’ is action embodied. The actions are not presented as separate cognitive thoughts, but of one that depends upon the experience of sensorimotor capacities of the individual that are embedded in an encompassing, biological, psychological, and cultural context. This conception of embodiment has been most emphasized in cognitive science by H. Dreyfus’ *What Computers Can’t Do*; Johnson’s *The Body and the Mind*; and Lakoff’s *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*. Furthering Merleau-Ponty’s argument that the body and the world are one through a lived experience, enactivist theorist, Humberto Maturana constructed a theory which attempts to define living systems not as objects of observation and description, but as self-contained unities whose only reference is to themselves. See H. Maturana & F. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition, the Realization of the Living*, Boston, MA: D. Reidel, 1980, p. v.

¹⁰ Lynn Fels, *in the winds cloths dance on the line*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of British Columbia, (1998), 1999. Also see enactivist theorists, Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, & Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge Mass. & London, Eng: The MIT Press, 1993.

an enactivist setting), for the learning occurs through a transformation of active participation and inquiry. If an enactivist approach is adopted in an inter-facing¹¹ reflexive¹² pedagogy there will be a shift from the conventional learning paradigms¹³ to an ‘inter-personal’ paradigm of learning (which uses interactivity in a human-to-human relation with other users or in a human-relation with digital objects).

As Merleau-Ponty accounted in *Phenomenology of Perception*, our encounters are understood to be one through a lived experience; it is through the direct immersion in the world that we come to understand our relation with the world.¹⁴ Awakening our sensibilities through one’s own body, may be argued then, to be significant through 1) a reflexive encounter both historically (e.g., with visual culture) and socially where constructed techniques and procedures are closed to contextual circumstances; 2) an engagement in counter-constructed spectacle strategies which are open to multiple possibilities of any given context—a space where an installation art¹⁵ form can re-present action to resist predetermined assumptions and methods. The complicity and opposition to dominant ideologies contains the possibility for interventions¹⁶ of constructed visual culture spectacle through the installation art form. For Appelbaum, this space is neither poised nor unpoised, but a place where the moment of cultural and personal story stands at a crossroads:

Between closing and beginning lives a gap, a caesura, a discontinuity. The betweenness is a hinge that belongs to neither one nor the other. It is neither poised or unpoised, yet moves both ways—It is the stop.¹⁷

This is the unknown territory of the presence: the new, dangerous, risky active encounter in the installation art form. The human-to-human or human-to-digital media technology, for example, allows for a possible shift in making meaning from object to the process of human interaction. For Appelbaum and Fels, this relation is at the site of the body’s surface, the site of perception, the stop. Cultural theorist Homi Bhabha, speaks though of this ‘relational site’ as a liminal space (a space of perception, awareness), a place of negotiation of cultural identity across differences of race, class, gender, and cultural traditions. He argues that cultural identities cannot be ascribed to pre-given, irreducible, scripted traits.¹⁸ Bhabha’s liminal space of negotiation of cultural identity involves the

¹¹ The interface is the point at which two or more systems or pieces of equipment are connected. The body becomes the interface of engagement through assemblages in an open and connectable linkage, or blurring of the boundaries between domains of ethnography, linguistics, society, politics, technology, and so on. The interface in this sense is detachable, reversible, and susceptible to constant modification; since each domain is tied to each other and always fusing back together through the site of the body.

¹² I use ‘reflexive’ pedagogy as a way for spectator/participants and educators to identify the “what” and the “why” of learning about our inter-relationship with visual culture in the everyday. Reflexivity is not to be confused with reflection. Reflection, a wonderful tool for “after the fact”—reflection allows for moments of pause, moments to recall what was learned. Reflexive pedagogy in this article is based on the idea that if the spectator/participant understands his/her own active embodied practices of/with visual culture within an Installation art form, he/she learns to learn through the embodied engagement in the installation art form.

¹³ According to Thomas S. Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970, there is an epistemological viewpoint in paradigms that as an organising principle governs perception and determines what we shall and shall not see.

¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith, trans., London & New York: Routledge Classics, [1962] [2002], 2006, pp. 240-41.

¹⁵ Installation art is significant here, since the desire of installation art is to heighten the spectator’s awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space, and of our bodily response to this. Installation art appropriates congruent images from visual culture and aims to draw attention to the knowledge that we enact, yet is relegated to the background of conscious experience.

¹⁶ Intervention incites direct involvement of communication between participant(s) in deliberating whatever oppositions are being contested by the artist in the installation art form.

¹⁷ Appelbaum, pp. 15-16.

¹⁸ Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 2-5.

continual interface and exchange of cultural performances that in turn produce a mutual and mutable recognition or representation of cultural differences. There is an active pressing in his argument to re-present the body as a site of resistance, reclaiming and producing culture from the respective cultural identities. Henry A. Giroux, on the other hand, views liminal space as a wider context which represents a “contested zone”¹⁹ where cultural codes and binaries are intentionally challenged and reconstituted. It is this liminal space, the stop, where the spectator/participant is provided with agency, to act on and take responsibility for his or her education and understanding. This liminal space is one of reflexive inquiry of self and (visual) culture through active engagement where “perception is opened-up through affirmation and denial, effort and resistance, and creates tension within the confines of the body.”²⁰ The spectator/participant transforms from being a passive consumer of the dominant cultural practices within the visual culture, through effort and resistance, to being an active reflexive producer, thereby creating a dynamic relationship between the visual culture world and self. Cultural critic and artist Trinh T. Minhha offers the liminal space as a ‘reflexive interval’ space where “cultural workers challenge and resist cultural domination and where they construct and participate in public life.”²¹ For Giroux “it is within the tension between what might be called the trauma of identity formation and the demand of public life that cultural work is both theorised and made performative.”²² The possibility of a relational installation art form points today to art forms which have a radical upsetting of the aesthetic, cultural, and political goals of the real and the not-yet-real worlds introduced in modernity.²³

*‘I’m giving you this sugary thing; you put it in your mouth and you suck on someone else’s body. And in this way, my work becomes part of so many other people’s bodies...For just a few seconds, I have put something sweet in someone’s mouth and that is very sexy.’*²⁴

Embodiment in installation art forms interconnect possibilities for dialogue challenging the cultural codes and re-presenting the body heightening the principles of a ‘rhizomatic structure’²⁵ described by Deleuze and Guattari. In a rhizomatic structure, the interconnectedness through many entry points presents the liminal space as one where the participants are provided with agency to challenge their understanding which is neither linear nor contested, but rich with new possibilities and incorporates a structure which is embodied. Since the body is the liminal space within the installation art form, the body therefore serves as the principal means by which reversibility is

¹⁹ See C.R. Garoian’s *Performing Pedagogy: Toward an Art of Politics*, New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1999, p. 67.

²⁰ Appelbaum, pp. 99-101.

²¹ Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics” in *Communications Monographs* 58 (2).

²² Henry A. Giroux, “Borderline Artists, Cultural Workers, and the Crisis of Democracy” in *The Artist in Society: Rights, Roles, and Responsibilities*, C. Becker, ed., Chicago: New Art Examiner, 1995, p. 5.

²³ Giroux, “Borderline Artists, Cultural Workers, and the Crisis of Democracy,” 1995.

²⁴ Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Installation: *Untitled (Placebo)* 1991, one thousand pounds of identical silver-cellophane wrapped sweets were laid out in the shape of a long rectangle on the gallery floor for the spectators to partake as they entered the gallery installation space. Debate and dialogue became important aspects of Group Material’s practice of which Gonzalez-Torres the Cuban artist’s work emerged. Group Material began in 1979 with fifteen members (which dropped to three (Julie Ault, Mundy McLaughlin, and Tim Rollins). In 1988 after Rollins and McLaughlin left, Ault merged with Gonzalez-Torres. Group Material is best known for blurring installation art and exhibition making; there was always controversy centred around whether what they were doing was viewed as art, curating, or activism. See Group Material, ‘Caution! Alternative Space!’ (1981), in *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, Nina Felshin, ed., Seattle, USA, 1995. for images see:

[http://images.google.ca/images?q=installation+art+\"Untitled+\(Placebo\)\"+by+Felix+Gonzalez-Torres](http://images.google.ca/images?q=installation+art+\)

²⁵ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, B. Massumi, trans., London: Athlone Press, 1988.

expressed by the spectator/participant.²⁶ Merleau-Ponty referred to this interrelationship as ‘the flesh of the world’ where an intertwining of subject and object, self and body, body and world merge as one body. Amelia Jones argues in *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, that this as a reversibility of seeing and being seen and entails a reciprocity and contingency for the subject in the world.²⁷ Performative inquiry in liminal space becomes an evolving process, never completed, contingent upon cultural circumstances and the circumstances of its impossibility. In Gonzalez-Torres’ “Untitled (Placebo)” for example, the audience is invited to help itself to a sweet off the gallery floor, and the installation work gradually disappears over the course of the exhibition. This installation artwork exists as an instruction and can be endlessly remade, but its key idea is the spectator participation, since it is the gallery visitor who creates the work’s precarious physical identity. Gonzalez-Torres spoke of the interaction with his installation as a metaphor for the relationship between—

public and private, between personal and social, between fear of loss and the joy of loving, of growing, of changing, of always becoming more, of losing oneself slowly and then being replenished all over again from scratch. I need the viewer, I need the public interaction. Without public these works are nothing, nothing. I need the public to complete the work. I ask the public to help me, to take responsibility, to become part of my work, to join in.²⁸

Through one’s own body the creation of the event of presence through performative inquiry in the installation art form in a liminal, contingent and ephemeral space challenges the ideological absolutes of the constructed visual culture of the spectator/participant in real time, and makes possible the creation of presence where the spectator/participant situates his or her own identities and desires which are remembered, misremembered, interpreted and revisited. Fels argues that the purpose of performative inquiry is not about working towards a fixed goal, but rather through a “process of opening up”²⁹ supporting Appelbaum’s notion of opening-up through awareness as a way of perceiving through resistance,³⁰ because without effort and resistance, awareness of our perception

²⁶ The liminal space where through performative inquiry action and reflection, ideas, images, myths, utopias and so forth, can be contested and new ones constructed as they pertain to the spectator/participants’ experiences of reality and desires to transform that reality. The liminal space is an actual moment of poise, where the body’s physical, cultural and historical character is communicated through reflexive action. It offers choices, either to remain habit-bound or to regain freedom in one’s approach to an endeavor. Appelbaum refers to this space as the stop—a space-time interval where for example, performance artists create to expose and re-present the hidden codes of historically determined culture in order to evoke the body, memory, and cultural history (Laurie Anderson’s autobiographical work is a good example). See Appelbaum’s *The Stop*. The limen is a reflexive interval between for example, the private and the public spheres, or between high and low culture. It has been also been called a threshold, a border, a neutral zone between ideas, cultures, or territories that one must cross through, in order to become aware of the inter-connectedness with the body and the world. See Richard Schechner’s *The End of Humanism: Writings on Performance*.

²⁷ Art historian, art critic and curator, Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 41.

²⁸ Felix Gonzalez-Torres, interviewed by Tim Rollins in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, Los Angeles, 1993, p. 23. The ‘candy spills’ began in 1991 when Gonzalez-Torres’ partner died of AIDS. The weight of the candy spills alludes to the weight of both their body weights combined, thus an unbearable poignancy in the installation work. Further ‘candy spills’ are seen in *Untitled (Loverboys)* 1991. Comprising of 350 pounds of white sugar and blue cellophane-wrapped sweets. There is a sense of political-subjectivity in his work that has revolved around an assertion of political will and identity. Subjective activism also appears in works by Beuys, Oiticica and Group Material. See French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1991. Nancy proposes a vision of community as ‘inoperative’ or un-worked; one that opens us up to the threshold of others’ existence, and which is calibrated on the death of those we call its members. His theory provides a reading of politics that is not based on activism.

²⁹ Fels, 1995.

³⁰ Appelbaum, pp. 99-101.

would be without content. Fels, Appelbaum, Deleuze and Guattari all speak of an ‘opening up’ a rhizomatic way of connecting in a liminal space which challenges possibilities for new ways of understanding through installation art forms.

The contingent and ephemeral challenges the installation art form through the action and interaction by the spectator/participant in real time and in flux, however, it is only mapped after the moment has passed. Thus, the contingency cannot necessarily be identified as it occurs, as the spectator/participant interprets the subject installed by the installation artist from the context of the spectator/participant’s personal understanding of the content of the installation artwork. In Gonzalez-Torres’ installation work for example³¹, is an idea of community centred around loss, always on the verge of disappearance. The viewing subject in “Untitled (Placebo)” to be implicitly incomplete, existing as an effect of being-in-common with others rather than as a self-sufficient and autonomous entity. The embodied reflexive engagement in the installation art form invites the spectator/participant to work (drawing from theatre practitioner Augusto Boal) in moments of crisis in which danger and opportunity of action co-exist; there are always possibilities of change.³²

In a technologically-driven world, learning through active participation (in installation art forms) and practice concerns the whole person acting in the world. Conceiving of learning in terms of active participation focuses attention on ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations and inter-relations; a relational view of persons, their actions, and the world which are consistent with Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social practice in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.³³ a vision of ‘conductorless orchestras, regulation without rules, embodied practices and cultural dispositions concerted in class habitus’ suggests the possibility of a break with dualisms that has kept persons reduced to their minds (mental processes of engagement and learning).³⁴ Drawing on conceptual, performance, and installation arts’ historical nature of motivation, desire, and the very relations by which socially and culturally mediated experiences are available to spectator/participants through these art forms becomes significant in inter-facing a reflexive pedagogy of practice.

Reflexive pedagogy requires a reflective practice emphasizing the relational process of “bringing forth a world together”³⁵ of the spectator/participant and his or her everyday world through the engagement of congruent images. The ‘coming to know’³⁶ is the creative process of action and interaction from experiences and encounters that are shared. The meaning making in a reflexive pedagogy in an installation art form depends then on being in the world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history that is dynamic, constantly changing and reconfiguring through embodiment.³⁷ The materialization and acknowledgement of the body and its performative subjectivity in the installation form is not seen as (themselves) a transparent window on the world; instead the spectator/participants (as co-artists) and the installation art form draw attention to each of their(its) own constructiveness, and the fact that all are representations. It is through this continuously renewed set of relations, consistent with a relational view of persons, their actions, and the world through performative inquiry, which presents a reflexive pedagogy of social practice, praxis, activity and the development of meaning making through human-to-human (and human-to-technology) participation in the ongoing everyday world of the spectator/participant. For Fels, learning through performative inquiry embodies mind and body with a discernment, appreciation,

³¹ See footnote 24.

³² Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, C.A. & M-O Leal McBride, trans., London: Pluto Press, 1979.

³³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977.

³⁴ The Cartesian model of mind/body dualism as presented by Descartes (see Ch. 1, sec. 1.2, in Carla Glen’s *Spectacle, Shock, and Surfacing*, Doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2009) effectively segregates the everyday world from active engaged participation.

³⁵ Fels asserts that understanding as learning is a process in which the participants shape the world together. See Ch. 1, 1.2, in Glen’s *Spectacle, Shock, and Surfacing*, 2009. Also, see Freire’s Ch. 3 in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where he discusses “praxis” (action-reflection) as the way to transform the world.

³⁶ Refer to Ch. 1, 1.2 and Ch. 2, *Spectacle, Shock, and Surfacing*.

³⁷ Refer to Ch. 1, 1.2 and Ch. 2, *Spectacle, Shock, and Surfacing* for further discussion on enactivism, embodiment and phenomenology. Also refer to Garoian’s *Performing Pedagogy*, pp. 73-74.

understanding and an honouring of the person, thing or event in the interaction, and further, a respect (in which we look again more fully and appreciatively at who or what is before us) to educational drama [arts] programmes.³⁸ The practice of embodiment in a reflexive pedagogy includes moment-by-moment awareness, and fully engages all of our senses so that we can be present for everything in the interaction within the installation art form. The possibility to break with the dualisms that have kept spectators reduced to their minds, mental processes to instrumental rationalism and learning segregates the everyday world from engaged participation. Motivation, desire, and the very relations by which social and culturally mediated experience is available to the spectator/participant are significant in performative inquiry in a reflexive pedagogy and become entry points to making meaning.³⁹ Fels claims learning is through a ‘space moment of possibility’,⁴⁰ the knowing, doing, being, creating are relations among the participants in activity, with activity, and arising from the socially and culturally structured activity in the world.⁴¹ The embodiment simplifies and illuminates by linking our physical senses with our intuitive ones. The spectator/participant’s discernment is the seeing and knowing through active engagement of what is not immediately evident. Knowledge of the socially constructed world then is socially mediated and open-ended.

“When images determine and overtake reality, life is no longer lived directly and actively.”⁴²

If we take the spectacle as the social relationship between people mediated by images, then we must reverse this mediated relationship of the spectacle in order to understand it and its influence on us in our everyday life. The everyday is filled with a constant flow of images of mass media communication (predominately delivered through words, sounds, and symbols) stimulating our imagination to render a meaning making. In the pre-determined framed space of art installations become the place to challenge through active reflexive engagements the fast-paced production of images of visual culture (which has revolutionized the way we communicate with and influence one another daily).

But how do we come to *re-direct* this perceiver-dependent⁴³ relationship we have with visual culture? Possibly it may be to re-enact the relationship as a form of active-action dialogue(s). Perhaps that with which we are engaged is more related to face-to-face activities of speaking, viewing, and challenging the intersection of images where the process of negotiating and renegotiating meaning, pleasure, and affective investment are mutually bound and dialogically engaged through the re-presentation of subject/object and subject/subject in an “adaptive” construction through the body as inter-face. This would suggest that a rather ephemeral nature of image-based experiences might be

³⁸ Fels, 1999. Embodiment is a fullness of attention, a presence, awareness or an awakeness. It includes a compassionate awareness of thoughts, motives and actions.

³⁹ Theorising in terms of practice, or praxis, also requires a broad view of human agency, see A. Giddens in *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979; for emphasising the integration in practice of agent, world, and activity, see Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. A theory of social practice asserted by these theorists emphasises the inherently socially negotiated character of meaning and the interested, concerned character of the thought and action of persons-in-activity.

⁴⁰ See Ch. 2, “Body Embodied” in *Spectacle, Shock and Surfacing*.

⁴¹ Garoian in articulating on performance art pedagogy, claims as Fels, that learning is through active participation and reflection in order to identify the dialectical relationship between a group’s performance art making and performance art teaching.

⁴² S. Best & D. Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, New York: The Guildford Press, 1997, p. 88.

⁴³ Visual culture appropriates production, religion, politics, art, literature, family, state, law, morality, science, and so forth, as embodied in visual forms reflected back on us, the spectator and consumer, in the capacity of work, currency, clothing, shelter, family, foods, gods, moral codes, laws, art, and so forth. Thus, we are always striving to ‘fit in’ or conform to what visual culture presents as the ‘norm’. We are constantly re-presented through visual culture influences as ‘what we want, what we are capable of, what sacrifices we need to make, and what satisfies us’.

situated in an interactive process, which cannot be divided into image and spectator. It may be that the *possession* reveals itself as ephemeral, and the only space within which some order can be brought into this set of experiences is through moments of possibility in a space of inquiry. Arts educator and theorist, Maxine Greene in “Texts and Margins” ask (in the domains of arts teaching and aesthetic education) for a sense of agency, even of power for the participant.⁴⁴ Just as with Fels’ who recognizes that the location to be critical is to be creative.⁴⁵ For both Fels and Greene, things absent are revealed when the participant is enabled to present through the active engagement in art forms other ways of seeing, speaking to and understanding of (visual culture in) the everyday.

If we believe there appears to be an unstable relation between images, texts, and the spectator/participant in technologically driven visual culture, then active participatory inquiry (with inter-relations to the reflexivity to congruent images, texts, and technology) may be required. Situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning-making through active participation, which implies that understanding and experience are in constant flux (are mutually dependent) and implicated through performative inquiry, may upset or shock the instability and affect the way in which we think and interact with the content, context, and one another.

New media interfaces create many sites of resistance through spectacles defining relations between images and the spaces of seeing, doing, feeling, creating, and making meaning for the spectator/participant. Our everyday lives are driven by the power and seduction of technology. Luc Courchesne’s⁴⁶ “Portraits of Dialogue,” challenges perception of the two-dimensional image-space interface through the interactivity presented in the form of dialogue between people—an ethical relation in which questions of inter-subjectivity, seduction, and “the face” are all combined. These portraits prefigure a form of sociability (a type of relation with the “other”). In the “Family Portrait” (1993) installation for example, the spectator is invited to participate in the “group portrait”—a documentary in which a small community of friends is filmed by the artist, who ultimately inserts himself into the scene as well. The artist reconstructs this society in virtual space and then provides the spectator with entry points that allow the spectator to participate by interposing him or herself into the conversation between characters. In Courchesne’s video portraits, whether they are collective or individual, the interactivity manifests itself as active dialogue. Apart from actively engaging in a dialogue, however, there also needs to be incorporated a level of compassion (which is an essential feature of performative inquiry when learning through an art form) that allows the most significant questions to be asked. With a compassionate knowing there is no intrusion, no object, and no subject. Fels calls this “participatory knowing”⁴⁷—a different way of knowing when all pre-occupations with self are given over to a state of complete attention. The question of process as a form of dialogue between artists, spectators and participants becomes of paramount importance to a reflexive pedagogy of learning through installation art forms. The spectator/participant becomes the site (the centre and meaning of the work) which has resulted in a movement from the aesthetic dimensions of the artwork itself and the art-historical issues to a concern with the social integration and interactivity of the installation and the spectator/participant’s everyday life.

⁴⁴ Maxine Greene, “Texts and Margins,” in *Arts as Education*, Merryl Ruth Goldberg & Ann Phillips, eds., New York: Harvard Educational Press [1992], 2007.

⁴⁵ See Fels, in Ch. 1, sec. 1.2, *Spectacle, Shock, and Surfacing*.

⁴⁶ Luc Courchesne is a Canadian installation artist who has won numerous awards (such as the Prix Arts Electronics Award, 2002) internationally in ‘technology and arts connection’. He explores how new technologies create ties between people; to what extent the act of connecting with others is at the heart of artistic experiences in the field of new media. His works and activities at Montreal’s SAT (The Society for Arts and Technology) are based on encounters, networking and partnerships, and illustrate how the terrain of new media artistry is founded upon dialogue and exchange between individuals. *Portrait One*, 1990; *Family Portrait*, 1993, shown at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Sept.-Dec., 2007. For the exhibition e-art: New Technologies and Contemporary Art, Ten Years of Accomplishments by the Daniel Langlois Foundation. See <http://dynamicmedianetwork.org/people/luc-courchesne>

⁴⁷ Fels, 1999.

Interactivity, the ability for the spectator to become an active participant in the unfolding of a work and its meaning, is the dichotomy of the traditional more passive contemplation often associated with two-dimensional art works and traditional/contemporary⁴⁸ theatre. Dialogue as a conceptual form has resurfaced in the work of Emanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur, and in the philosophy of language.⁴⁹ Interestingly, dialogue opens up the notion of inter-subjective understanding of one's self-concept. This is crucial in *our affair* with the visual culture—the seduction of images only exacerbates the perceiver-dependent world and the control media potentially have over the meaning making life of its spectators.

In the art installation form, it is through performative inquiry that dialogue comes into play. Our relation with the world and its social context appears, according to Merleau-Ponty, to be 'only understood in the wider context of our immersion in the world'.⁵⁰ Our interpretation of meaning is due to our body's relationship with the world that it inhabits, which is charged with much meaning (such as the perceiver-dependent visual culture). Therefore, our inter-actions in an installation form both draw and contribute to our experiences and meaning making. Our everyday practices of looking, seeing, touching, tasting, hearing, and engaging are ways in which we try to make sense of the world. To see is a process of observing and recognizing the world around us. To materialize and acknowledge the body through performative inquiry in installation art has the potentiality to actively make meaning of the world that facilitates cultural transgression and transformation. Seeing is something we do somewhat arbitrarily as we go about our daily lives. Materializing and acknowledging is an activity that involves a greater sense of purpose and direction through the creation of installation art. Materializing and acknowledging involves learning to interpret what we see and how we see it, and like our other practices of engagement (strategies to challenge), materializing and acknowledging involves relationships of power.⁵¹ To willfully engage or not is to exercise choice and influence. Through critical performative inquiry, identity and agency of the spectator/participant in installation art forms provide the possibility of engaging with questioning strategies that challenge the body as 'the stage' the site (upon which the spectacle of our everyday visual culture enacts its social, political, economic, and aesthetic agendas) of resistance, to evoke a site of change.

With a perceptually guided knowledgeable action such as performative inquiry, our point of departure through dialoguing (negotiating and renegotiating) challenges our perceiver-dependent world (challenging the spectacle of visual culture) and makes the links between the world and the perceiver-independent world) one in a space of active reciprocal engagement. Despite all of this, Courchesne's video portraits are not simply illustrations of complex philosophies in and around dialogue, because if they were, they would not engage the spectator's complete sense of involvement (e.g., compassion and discernment). Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* implies that perception is not simply a cognitive activity—the embodied person can see, move around, and position his/herself in relation to things, and handle them.⁵² For myself, if "Family Portrait" and the

⁴⁸ Traditional performative theatre systems are based on Aristotelian drama. Aristotle in *Poetics* asserts that tragedy is an imitation of action of life through the arrangement of incidents (complex plot) presented in which there is also affected through pity and fear—a catharsis—a purging of emotions in the audience through the work of art. For further reading, see Aristotle's *Poetics*, Preston, H. Epps, trans. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1970, [1942]; also on Aristotle's ethics/philosophy, see *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed. Terrence Irwin, trans. USA: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999.

⁴⁹ For more on the philosophical consideration of dialogue, see Jean Gagnon's essay: "Blind date in cyberspace, or the figure that speaks," first published in *Artinact 2*, ZKM and Cantz Verlag, 1995. The essay is online @ <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/flash/f/stage.php?NumPage=158>. Also see Searle, Wittgenstein, and Habermas.

⁵⁰ See Merleau-Ponty, Ch. 1, sec. 1.2, *Spectacle, Shock, and Surfacing*.

⁵¹ M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews U Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed., New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

⁵² Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 203.

other portraits reached out and captivated my attention, it was because there was something else present: faces, voices—bodies. There was a seduction face-to-face.

Seduction's role here is aesthetic; it acts to transform a mechanical computer system into a successful work of art. The voices establish a presence and create an opening, a fissure, through which I feel obliged to enter and respond. I respond to this reaching out through voice(s), whether the dialogue is sustained or interrupted. The spectator/participant may respond positively or negatively, enter into the dialogue or withdraw from it, but either way, we are all drawn into the ethical dilemmas that hang upon our relationship as Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur present in regards to the "other" and ultimately to who we are.⁵³ For Levinas and Ricoeur, our relationship with the "other" allows us to see the differences; and by seeing these differences, we come to understand them in relation to ourselves; there needs to be a break-out encounter face-to-face with the "other" in order to evoke change in understanding the self. There is then, a sociability, a dialogue, an inter-subjectivity through the relational and inter-relational relationships that bind the "other" and the self together in reflexivity.

As with Lozano-Hemmer's "Body Movies," Courchesne's portraits incorporation of new media technology has grounded himself and his installations in a foundation of sociability, dialogue, intersubjectivity, and seduction. Whether the spectator/participants are moving across the square and re-acting and inter-acting with their shadows as in "Body Movies," or engaging in a dialogue with Courchesne's 'Marie' in "Portrait One," both these artists' installations prove themselves indicative of the new technological sociability that has emerged since the late 1990s with the World Wide Web. The spectator/participant has the tools already, and knows how to navigate the inter-face of the technology; however, what is important here is that it is in the active participation where the questioning of self is brought into the foreground from the technology. Marie from "Portrait One" said it all:

With me it's too easy. I can only be the impossible love, a detour which occupies desire at no risk!...[and] yes, but with me, your gesture doesn't bear any consequences. Will you dare as much with the person standing nearby?⁵⁴

Courchesne's interactive portraits allow the spectator/participant to question the condition of sociability itself, by pressing us (the spectator/participant) to recognize that part of our self is based on the "other." His portraits invite us to pass through the participatory inquiry of dialogue in space moments of possibility in order to awaken our responsibility to the self which requires the other; and of course, an experience that signifies our individual self's responsibility toward the other in return. Reflexivity becomes a way of decentring the spectator/participant in relational terms which is needed today in our encounter with visual culture in order for us not to over-identify with the other (through commitment, self-othering, and so on) that may compromise this otherness. Paradoxically, as Walter Benjamin implied in *Illuminations*⁵⁵, this over-identification may alienate the other further if it does not allow for the othering already at work in representation. In the face of too little or too much distance, *framing* the spectator/participant simultaneously *frames* the other.

The promise of today's technological interactivity—that the experience of visual culture can be something we *do* rather than something we are given is still situated in the "something done to" the spectator in a two-dimensional realm of technology's artificiality of the illusion of *doing* through

⁵³ For Levinas' discussion see: <http://www.mythousandlogos.com/Levinas.html> and see: "Ricoeur Between Levinas and Heidegger: Another's Further Alterity" @ http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~smith132/French_Philosophy/Fa99/fall99_Ricoe.pdf. Also E. Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, Nidra Poller, trans., Urbana & Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2006; and, Peter Kemp's "Ricoeur Between Heidegger and Levinas: Original Affirmation Between Ontological Attestation and Ethical Injunction," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 21, 1995.

⁵⁴ See footnote 46.

⁵⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Hannah Arendt, ed., Harry Zohn, trans., New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

something the spectator is given; thus Aristotelian. The way of sensing and the way of acting in an interactive two-dimensional technologically-driven experience is defining the way in which we are coming to understand our experience of being in the world. Through a design of a two-dimensional computer interface, creators have largely defined the user's quality of life while the user interacts with the system. Hence, with new media interfaces, our interaction with reality is an artificial interaction with simulations. Whether these interactions are multi-sensory, multi-media, or multi-modal—we can talk, scream, gesture, and pose—we can interpret, analyze, or simply enjoy the raw sensation. The danger here though, is in losing sight of the fact that our models and ideas of “reality” are drastically simplified representations. The user here is the “adaptive”⁵⁶ object, to which Freire refers, one who is incapable of changing reality. Our experience of being may be significantly diminished. If we lose the lived experience of negotiating/creating, being/doing, in space moments of possibility, the effort and resistance of the awareness of perception is lost—the world as it is lived is lost.

The disclosure of unexpected relationships that bring something new into the spectator's world can be achieved by experiencing the everyday (visual culture) either from the outside or from within. The spectators in “Body Movies,” or “Portraits,” for example, enter into a dialectic between body, space, and text. The art installation form as an epistemological art form challenges and allows for the spectators to discover ‘that there are things they are ‘coming to know’ through a creative process of action and interaction from experiences that are shared. If cognition is understood to be the ‘coming to know’, as argued by Davis,⁵⁷ and action is understood as knowing, doing, being, and creating, as argued by Fels,⁵⁸ then the dynamic, constantly changing and re-configuring relations of enactivism bind these experiences in action at the site of the body, the site of resistance through a relational encounter

Reflexive pedagogy in installation art is an open system of discourse: it includes technology, and all forms of media. As a strategy, reflexive pedagogy creates critical sites of learning, and makes it possible for all spectators to become participants and for all participants to be creators of cultural meaning. In doing so, spectator/participants learn about culture (and visual culture) as well as ways in which to question its hegemonic authority. The inter-relational and dialogic interactive participatory nature encourages the cultural experiences, memories, and perspectives of the participants' multiple voices as meaningful contributions. Reflexive pedagogy in installation art serves as a site where participants learn to take conceptual and emotional risks as well as responsibility for what they imagine and what they create. By confronting the spectacle of the technologically driven visual culture through reflexive pedagogy in installation art, one challenges the processes of representation: the contingent space wherein ideas and their means of representation are continually reconsidered.

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⁵⁶ Paulo Freire, *Education For Critical Consciousness*, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Davis, Sumara & Kieren, “Cognition, Co-Emergence, Curriculum” in *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 28, 1996. Also see Ch. 1, sec. 1.2, in *Spectacle, Shock, and Surfacing*.

⁵⁸ Fels, see Chapter 1, 1.2, in *Spectacle, Shock, and Surfacing*; and “Cross-Country Skiing with Madeline Grumet” in *Educational Insights*, 1995.

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