Beyond Aesthetics: Returning Force and Truth to Art and Its Education

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This essay argues for a fundamental change in the direction of art, its education and research that draws on Alain Badiou’s notion of inaesthetics and negative affirmation as well as Deleuze’s reorientation of aesthetics. I draw on the inspiration of Vincent Lanier’s critical spirit and Irwin Kaufmann’s ideas on art, creativity, and research as they appear in the first issue of Studies in Art Education to argue for such a line of flight. A number of neologisms are introduced that develop this potentiality of the force and truth of art that are ‘beyond aesthetics’ as it is commonly understood.

Vincent Lanier, one of the first generation of post-World War II art educators, had an influence on the field of art education that still remains with us to this day. He was a provocateur who would challenge the field from the margins and hold court in hotel lobbies and foyer armchairs during NAEA conferences. Fact or fiction, that’s how the legend goes. Vincent was certainly part of the ground floor that helped to establish NAEA and its journal, Studies in Art Education, in those formative years. He published “Implications of the Concept of Action Research” in the very first fall issue of 1959, where he questioned the division between pure and applied research, defending the necessity of scientific research for the field, a position he was to renege on later in his career. I was fortunate enough to attend several summer school courses Vincent taught at the University of Oregon in the late ‘70s. He was also my external dissertation examiner in 1980. I have held a long-standing affection toward him that is unlikely to go away.

For this 50th anniversary Studies special, I offer this article as a tribute to Vincent’s audacity of spirit, especially in the vein of two influential essays that were written around the time I was finishing my Masters and Doctorate degrees: “A Plague on Your Houses: The Tragedy of Art Education” (Lanier, 1974) and especially, “The Misdirected Eye” (Lanier, 1978) that raised the social import of art and questioned the field’s moral and social compass. There is approximately a 15-year gap between the thrust of Vincent’s first essay in Studies on research and these two key essays that articulate his challenge to the field. The first essay (“Plague”) is a historical review of the field that questions its overemphasis on creativity and studio practices, calling for an “aesthetic education” that addresses social transformation and expands art education to include the popular culture of film and television; the second essay (“Misdirected Eye”) comes closest to my own project. Lanier admonishes aesthetic and environmental education for failing to address social and moral issues. However, “Some art,” he says, “speak[s] to the human condition” (p.14, added emphasis). My orientation is similar but...
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the stress is on ethics (not morals) and on art’s ability to disperse power so as to reconfigure social relationships.

In a homologous fashion of renewed provocation, this essay addresses the contemporary field in order to displace “aesthetic education” to the affective realm of the pre-individual (to stand Immanuel Kant ‘on his feet’). This is a turn away from the field’s overemphasis on cognition; it is an attempt to rethink the limitations of visual studies of popular culture, and to steal back the ‘organ of the eye’ from its consumerist trappings by renewing the ‘force’ and ‘truth’ of some art so that its social transformative potential is not lost given the contemporary socio-historical context of designer capitalism. Creativity is not overemphasized but redefined, while research is rethought in a direction that has a number of affinities with Irwin Kaufmann’s (1959) essay in the inaugural issue of Studies.

By assessing the contemporary state of art and its education, I hope to present a viable alternative for the field by shifting the axis away from its continued grip on aesthetics and representation—which, in their Kantian foundations are ‘dead’ and in need of repositioning to place him on his feet. Yet, some sectors of art education either do not yet know this, or are not willing to part with Kant, or simply repress his passing. The ‘beyond’ in the title refers to the displacement of aesthetics by Deleuze (1994) and Badiou (2005b). Deleuze does this by turning Kantian transcendental idealism into a “transcendental empiricism” where virtual experience is actualized immanently through the potentialities of open-system thinking, rather than being confined to the legislative and judicial universal form offered by Kant’s closed system. Badiou, on the other hand, through his neologism of “inaesthetics,” severs the grip philosophy (as the discipline of aesthetics) has had on art as its captured object. In this essay, the ‘beyond’ now identifies the originary sense-related aesthetic (from the Greek *aisthetos* = ‘sensuous’, ‘perceptible’) as the realm of a-signification of the affective body without organs (BwO) discussed below.

This proposal is also a departure from the (more recent) coalesced direction to turn the field toward visual studies of popular culture in relation to the broader enterprise of cultural studies that was institutionally established around 1990 (Grossberg, Nelson, & P. Treichler, 1992).¹ A ‘third’ way is proposed that is characterized by “negative affirmation,” a concept developed by Badiou (2005a), which will be explained later. I argue that art and its education understood as an aesthetic object or as a cultural commodity within a productionist model of making (praxis/action/myth) must be abandoned for a postaesthetic and post-productionist position, which redefines art as an event that has a performative and transformative side for society through doing (poeisis/enabling/fabulation—not poeticus) as productive desire. The emphasis is on becoming rather than being, recognizing the significance of temporality. The subject is conceptualized along psychoanalytic topological lines where memory and recollection (anamnesis) is characterized by a virtual Real.² This introduces the importance of transitivity in the exchange between all the players in art and its education. To be presumptuous, this ‘line of flight’ alone can escape the utility of art and its education within global designer capitalism.

¹ From the mid-1980s cultural studies was a scattered practice. It was not until 1990 that an international conference was organized that solidified it paradigmatically as a disciplinary field. The conference entitled, "Cultural Studies Now and in the Future," was organized by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler through the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (April 4-9, 1990). The book that solidified the field, called Cultural Studies, came out in 1992.

² This concept is fully developed in Jagodzinski (2008). It refers to the virtuality of memory as culled from the writings of Gilles Deleuze, who in turn borrows from Henri Bergson. The Real (capitalized) refers to the unconscious as developed by the many writing of Jacques Lacan.
These shock waves are directed against critical theory that continues to forward the Hegelian centrality of negation in dialectical thought where the concept of difference remains caught by a logic of contradiction—a ‘thing’ is defined by what it is not. This is a difference of degree. In contrast, this essay follows the Deleuzian notion of difference in kind where difference is internal, temporal, and nuanced; that is, how a ‘thing’ differs from itself in the various phases of becoming. In the first case, entities are located in time; in the second case they are located through time.

This assertion is backed up by the roundtable discussion on criticism by a rather esteemed group of artists, theoreticians, and critics to celebrate the 100 issue of October, a cutting edge journal in the field of art (see October, 2002).

Radically, such a position also means a move away from those representational critical art forms as historically supported primarily by the National Art Education Association’s Social Theory Caucus, where resistance and negation are directed at the power circuits of capitalism; namely, those of us who still follow the “dialectical imagination” (Jay, 1973). Subversive identity politics along class, gender, sex, and ethnic lines prove to be, I argue, divisive rather than edifying in this alternative proposal that I suggest the field to follow. Critique and criticism, as well, become ‘more negative than negative,’ to allude to Baudrillard (1988) here, within this proposed direction. The importance of ethics supplants Kultur Kritik, and difference as the litany of qualifiable categorical subject positions offered by poststructuralist identity politics, and is rethought within this essay to grasp a different understanding of its force. Patterns of racial and sexual inequality and oppression are caught up in circuits of power. Identity politics and the critical art it supports simply fights power with power, often essentializing and idealizing categories.

All this has become urgent and necessary for designer capitalism has enslaved visuality, capturing the organ of the eye. Could art education ever entertain the quest of a nonretinal art as bequeathed by Duchamp? Visuality must be indesigned; that is, its proximity relativized within broader assemblages of lived social relations that escape the circuits of power. Art and its education, as presented here, abide by an immanent political economy that intentionally escapes the circuits of power; they exist at the vanishing point of the commodity where exchange value no longer applies. Art’s very uselessness provides it with a force or Spieltrieb (play drive), a concept retrieved from Friedrich Schiller’s Letters (1794-5), which harnesses life as zoë as opposed to the technicity of biopower. The affect of zoë indicates the creative force of life that has the potential to open up future contingencies. Education should draw on this same impulse. Art’s political economy is tied neither to the Marxist sense of work—the specific human practices of making—nor to labor as its socialized form that a worker (artist) sells to a capitalist. Nor is art and its education an extraction of surplus power from living beings via strategic relations as in biopower, so persuasively developed by Foucault. Rather, art and its education as doing escapes these forms of control only when the ‘play of its force or drive’ (Spieltrieb) undoes its own articulations as an “affirmative negation” (Badiou, 2005a) to create a new form of life. It is ‘negative’ in the sense that art must refuse the existing conditions of a situation; at the same time it must become ‘affirmative’ to offer a new ‘flight’ out.

Kaufman (1959) already signaled this insight of the uniqueness of an artistic ‘event’ (he calls it “the creative process,” p. 13) in the inaugural issues of Studies when he remarked on the impingement of psychology, sociology, and the scientific research method concerning its study. Kaufman further states, “The basic aesthetic drive [Spieltrieb] is not fundamentally dependent on these adjunctive understandings” (p. 15, emphasis added), and continues to


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with its attendant cult of beauty, hegemonically supported by a closed circuit between capitalist production (design, Internet art, work) and consumption (visual popular culture, holiday).
add, “in the process of creating,” the artist “moving ‘on the edge of the unknown’ creates a form which adds another digit to reality—a digit that was not there before” (p. 15). This is a position Badiou would support as the creation of an ‘event’ proper.

Such ‘inactivist art,’ if I can pit it this way, continually bumps against the multifarious social “limits of control” (Foucault, 1972, p. 233) to make them visible, not only to reveal them, but also to transform by acting on them. Such activities of ‘arting,’ which I refer to as self-reflexion (a concept that shall be explained later in the essay) is a form of ‘unworking’—déœuvrement in Blanchot’s (1988) terms—an ‘active idleness’ as play that surrounds such an œuvre. Arting figures a modality of thought that is an alternative to the power of technicity that constantly makes art into an object or a designer style. Art and its education have this potential ability to escape such circuits of power; that is the Foucauldian power/knowledge couplet, which has characterized the struggle of activist art in the 20th century. The potential new strategy confronts the ‘society of control’ anamorphically, in an oblique way and not head on. A new strategy is required because the ‘naturalized’ hegemonic context of the Right (Whiteness, class, masculinity, and so on) has been able to successfully incorporate activist identity politics of de-and re-construction—to turn this threat around like so many Colors of Benetton where difference is once again categorized.

Creativity proper—as Spieltrieb in art and its education—is an ability to engender a transformation of becoming that follows the same lines as Nancy’s (1991) reworking of political philosophy away from the shared identity of community (as an essence) towards singularity. Such is the “inoperative” (again, déœuvrement) community, of a “being-in-common” rather than “common—in-being.” This means perpetual exposure to/of Otherness (as “compearance”) to our own ‘being,’ which is where difference lies that escapes categorization of identity politics pre-packaged as Other in postmodernity, so prevalent in cultural studies. What we share in common is difference, not identity. This is a fundamental Deleuzian point.

Difference is what characterizes the unconscious as tied to productive desire. This ‘other’ to ourselves is the unconscious Real, the place of difference within our being, as the experience of the uncanny that resists signification—what I qualify elsewhere as the virtual Real (Jagodzinski, 2008). Such a position is a move away from representation as ‘story’ that dominates ethnographic research to the ‘surplus’ that is not intelligible—to the gaps, incommensurability, and incomprehensibility within representation itself. Lyotard (1991) called this dimension the “inhuman,” a ‘pre-subjective’ realm (infans) to which we all remain hostage and/or enslaved, but this unconscious realm is also the source, as he says, of enfance—what can effectively be thought of as the force of energy (zoë) of desire where life and death are intertwined in their becoming to enable the unthought to emerge—thinking itself. Art and its education through Spieltrieb—a term that invokes the irreconcilability and heterogeneity of Lyotard’s infant within the adult—works with that force of enfance to bring forth the new. Deleuze along with Guattari (1994, p. 204) once wrote that
it is not the empty canvas that the artist ‘classically’ faces, rather all manner of clichés already occupy its surface. The more difficult task is to empty and wipe clean that encumbrment; that is to perform the “unwork” (déœuvre- ment) where that void, or emptiness may be found for doing to begin. This is creativity proper. Kaufman (1959) in the inaugural issue was also concerned that “creativity” was being stifled through the constant recuperation of what I am calling the ‘arting process’ by the machinations of research to legitimate the field. Ironically, it was Vincent Lanier (1974) who felt that our field in the mid-’70s was overdetermined by creativity, whereas in the contemporary situation I argue, not unlike Kaufmann, it has been straitjacketed as innovation by designer capitalism.

W(h)ither Creativity? The Technicity of Learning to Learn.

Within our information “society of control” (Guattari, 1984; Deleuze, 1995), digital technologies, economic globalization, and increasing commodification have set the agenda for the neoliberal educational imagination as a qualitative managerial enterprise to sustain labor as the ‘soul/sole’ definition of life—as a logic of “bare survival” (Foucault, 1990; Agamben, 1998; Masschelein, 2001). Its rhetorical gesture of “learning to learn” (Smith, 2000) comes across as being liberal minded and democratic. Within an information society of control, schooling is mandated to produce flexible and active agents of transformation and change, releasing the potential of every individual’s capacity and competency made possible by rich or strong ‘learning environments.’ Learning should start from the experience of students—that is, from their needs and problems so that they are motivated to actively participate. As supported by cognitive science and psychological constructivism, teacher-centered knowledge is replaced by student-centered approaches that emphasize the active and constructed character of knowledge. Personal growth, development of potential and skills are made possible through facilities, resources, and flexible provisions that facilitate rather than direct the learning processes by mentors.

For all providers of education, responsibility and accountability are primary values for those who make use of their services and facilities—parents, students, teachers, and clients alike. Permanent monitoring and assessment are necessary to insure quality of learning and ensure creative freedom. The exemplary model is the Charter school where flexible time can be instituted, innovative curriculum set in place, and special emphasis placed on desired areas of specialization such as religion, technology, or language. Demands and needs are therefore the starting points for the evaluation of learning that is formulated in terms of quality; the idea being that the ‘learning organism’ continually responds and adapts to the requirements of the environment. This is what defines flexibility through autopoiesis. Such a neoliberal model sounds very appealing. Placing emphasis on an agent’s own ‘sense-making’ in an open and stimulating environment where new ideas are possible, co-operation enhanced, dialogue encouraged, and responsibility taken for citizenship and community living so that humankind can ‘survive,’ seems virtually exempt from any form of criticism. So, how is the
question of my sub-heading even possible? The education of art and design seem especially suited to thrive within such an educational Imaginary.

To begin: the neoliberal managerial model defined as ‘living is learning and learning is living’ becomes an all-encompassing permanent life-long process of survival. The future of educational reform is based on “learning to learn” as the hegemonic organizing principle in a society of control. There is no longer any need to hang onto the investitures of past industrial age with set chronological times, rigid subject divisions, teacher centered learning, developmental ages (also an industrial hangover), or even a school building. What enables such proposals of complex designer education to sound urgent, necessary, radical, and convincing to the general public is precisely because students and parents are held hostage by a system where one's very survival depends on achieving a skill or a post-secondary degree of one kind or another. Since the institutionalization of elementary schooling in the 19th century, public education has been chained to capital interests (Friedenberg, 1959). In the contemporary global market situation, it is no longer necessary to bar entrance into institutions or to deny anyone well-paying positions. Access to the system of economic opportunities and the ‘good life’ is played out on meritocratic grounds, downplaying identity politics, sex/gender distinctions, ageism, and the like (Williams, 1991). These are all reduced to a question of numbers. Availability of access is manifestly possible if one has the necessary tuition fees and has earned a ‘pass’ to continue further through personal initiative. This meritocratic system levels the playing field by strengthening the barriers for entrance along restricted conditions.

In a “risk society” (Beck, 1992) “learning to learn” comes down to acquiring the skills of cognitive self-regulation, self-reflexive problem solving, controlling one’s own concentration, working method, motivation, and concentration. Performance is instrumentalized through self-regulation, permanent self-determination, and conscious self-development, which then take into account proactively the requirements of the job market. The overarching organizing principle for such free and liberal learning is functionalism and active adaptation as theorized through complexity theory (Taylor, 2001). It is a continuous process since ‘informational’ needs constantly change. Feedback, co-evolution, self-organization, interdependence, creation of a ‘new order’ are its characteristics. The ‘freedom’ associated with creativity and initiative becomes innovation: information (knowledge) is actively decomposed, assessed, dissolved, and recomposed in relation to an internal criterion that is optimal for the development of one’s potential. The development of a designer self is the model sought. Objectivity and ‘truth’ are supplanted by the quality of fit between needs, activities, and the environment.

This permanent ‘life of learning’ is characterized further through complexity theory as autopoiesis, a self-regulating and self-transforming process ‘driven’ (Trieb) by an internal criterion from which one’s relation to the environment (a designated space of possibility) is guided. In the rhetoric of complexity theory this is known as emergence. Such emergence can only be facilitated internally within the self rather than guided or directed from outside as if by structural force. Everything is therefore counted in terms of its functional relationship.
with the learning/living organism, reduced as information. The becoming of \textit{time} is calculated stochastically as \textit{possibility} rather than the \textit{potentiality} of creative \textit{Spieltrieb}.\textsuperscript{5}

In the designer capitalism of a digitalized information society, it has become imperative to put art and aesthetics to productive use; that is to \textit{work} (Heidegger’s \textit{Machen}) by making it an intrinsic calculable and available source of technique. For art programs to survive, the demand is that their utility be manifest. Any number of possibilities can be given for art’s usefulness: art is useful to other subject areas—as a supplementary activity for social studies, drama, set design, English, and so on; art is useful when it aestheticizes the school, when art tracks around its premises showing that a ‘viable’ art program is in place; art is useful if it can be correlated to boost grades in other subject areas, such as math or social studies; art is useful as well, when graduating art students from high school to enter one of the myriad of available art and design schools where they will be find a job related to design industry—from fashion or computer graphics to industrial design and communications—even architecture; in the academy art has become useful as arts based education. It is rather amazing that Kaufman (1959), once more cautioned art educators as to the way art and its education was being hijacked via an instrumentalization. He has a similar list of appropriations, not once but twice on pages 12 and 14.

\textbf{From Eye-Wor(l)d to Brain-Eye: Reorienting Art Education From \textit{Praxis} to \textit{Poiesis}}

Given the state of affairs as presented above, how might art and its education escape or offer a ‘line of flight’ out from the grip of both the technologization of the aesthetic by designer education and popular culture? There is yet another way that some contemporary artists have taken where the traditional aesthetic categories no longer hold in terms of interpretation, perception, and judgment, nor do the usual sociocultural categories of production, manipulation, and critique. The selectivity of specific artists for the purposes of forwarding my argument of yet another ‘line of flight’ is based on the unevenness of history; there is no coherent ‘story’ of art, only a dispersion of competing socio-political chaosmosis. Hence, this direction, which I believe art, its education and research should follow, tries to restore the force of art’s truth as an activity of doing (arting)—to act as a “forcefield” in Ziarek’s (2004) terms. Its experience is grasped as an “encounter” in Deleuze and Guattari (1994) vocabulary, through the unconscious force of the “figural” in Lyotard’s (1971) case, whereby the relationality of power is freed up providing a form of post-productivity. In this sense, art is not an object, a commodity, nor a harbinger of encrypted meaning, but an “event” (Badiou, 2005a) with material effects that redistributes the flows of power.

Kaufman (1959) once again, utilizing a different language game, bravely makes a similar gesture when defending art against insidious research paradigms. He states “art is experienced and perceived as an \textit{immanent quality}, as a \textit{thing-in-itself}” (p. 11, emphasis added). He was calling for a rethinking of the orientation between artistic creativity and the research modalities employed.
in art education. Following Badiou (2005b), Kaufman’s view of art-ing can be identified as an “inaesthetic” direction between art and philosophy as a particular ‘research’ orientation. Philosophy (as aesthetics) no longer takes art as its object, but recognizes that art, in and of itself, offers us ‘truth.’ As educators, such a position should provide us with renewed energy. The force of this truth, however, does not follow the hermeneutic Romanticism of aletheia as a secret encrypted in art, which then must be ‘released’ by the critic/ teacher/or philosopher. Rather, the truth of the event of art points directly to the void or the Real (in the Lacanian) sense of a ‘situation’ so as to rework the understanding of the relations that circle around it in terms of dominant discourses and fantasies thereby freeing up relations that are in the grips of power. The art-ing process in its performative articulations sets up an encounter for a potential event to take place where the potential for exposing the flows and intensifications of power enable us to be loosened, healed, or free of them. This is an art and its education that is paradoxically ‘power-free.’

As educators, it is the force of the virtual Real as productive desire that needs our attention, so that we may shift our position from the dominant Eye-Wor(l)d of the visual trapped by designer capitalism of popular visual culture to the Brain-Eye of potential transformation by the art-ing event. This may well address that inaugural issue of Studies by its six authors where the relationship between the nature of art and its research remain as key questions. Ultimately, it is what the event of art as a shaped temporal product(s) is able to ‘do’ or ‘act’ in terms of its force on two levels that should concern art and its education. The first level—identified by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as the “body-without-organs” (BwO)6 and by Lyotard (1971) as the “figural”—refers to the flows of affect energy (zöe or jouissance) as the elemental constituents or materiality of ‘being’ prior to their relative stabilization into substances, objects, and bodies; that is, as signifiers. The second level is the force of the artistic event in its ability to change, rupture, and transform a system of set relations—the dynamics of being and unfolding as judged along ethical grounds. This doubled force of art is the process of art-ing, written as a gerund to indicate art and its education to be transitive, transitional, and temporal; that is, manifesting ‘time out of joint’ in its performative affect of becoming. This is not a question of form and content, images and artistic statements, the sensible and the intelligible, what is seen and said. Rather, these dynamics of art’s force operate on and around the edge of a void as the Real of a situation. This is a non-site that forms the unconscious kernel as to what holds the ‘situation’ in the present state of its power dynamics. As Badiou put it, “the idea that what the state seeks to foreclose through the power of its count is the void of the situation, and the event that in each case reveals it” (in Hallward, 2003, p. 100, emphasis added). Theorizing art as event in this way, where the void is necessarily always already there, does not confront the power/knowledge dynamic that characterizes dialectical critical art and its education. Rather, the ability for the artistic event to redefine, expose, and redispose the constitution of reality in terms of its production as relations to the ‘outside’ world (audience, society) at the microlevel of molecular forces in a “power-free” way, as Ziarek (2004) persistently maintains, is what is called on as

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6 This well theorized concept refers to the pre-subjective state of the body. In my usage it is the affective body of the unconscious Real.
foundational for an alternative art and its educational practice and research. The artist can only ‘show’ and bring about the unthought as the void of the situation. This is not knowledge as argued by many strands of arts based research, but knowledge yet to come (l’avenir in Derrida’s sense—the unpredictable future as the unexpected coming of the Other).

Rethinking ‘Action’ in Art and its Education: Three Indesign Circuits of Force

This force of art suspends violence. Rather than an art and its education based on forms of praxis as in ‘action research,’ which have structural violence already inherent in them by their very attempt to negate power structures, the direction for art, its education and research proposed here can be distinguished by at least three nonproductive responses to power as a way of dissipating, annulling, and dissipating it, by inverting the inside of its relations through what I call indesign. Indesign may well be a response to Irving Kaufman’s (1959) search for a research strategy that speaks to, as he put it, the “concealing” (p. 15) nature of art. It further addresses his concern for art’s “state of becoming” (p. 10), as well as its “immanent quality” (p. 11), along with it being a “realization of life in form” (p. 12).

Indesign has a kinship to Deleuze’s (2003) idea of a “diagram” that displays the relations between forces. I reserve this term for specific performative articulations of art-ing that display a form of déoeuvrement or nonproductivity. Such artistic events—from which we can draw pedagogical lessons—engage in the non-sense of language and hence are not a matter of ‘experience’ as generally thought in a relation of a subject’s experience with an object. The encounter with indesign processes of art-ing place the subject in a different mode—as a reconfiguration of relations at the unconscious a-signifying level, the level of the BwO; that is, below the threshold of presentation and meaning—apart from images, forms, content—at the molecular aesthetic level. Badiou’s (2005b) neologism, inaesthetic, demarcates such a displacement.

This level of poiesis (not poetics) supplants praxis. The dialectical principles that underpin the relations of form/content, subject/object, activity/passivity do not hold on this level of fractal force flows. Artists who perform such artworks are operating at the level of self-refleXivity (jagodzinski, 2008), exercising a middle voice where subject and object meet in an in-between space, what Deleuze (1992) called a fold. This is where subjectivation happens and change occurs. The “X” in self-refleXivity refers to the void of the Real, the level of molecularization of forces, which certain artists point to through their oeuvre. The void is a “nomadic” site in art—the site of the Real. It is not locatable spatially and locally in any of the three paradigms for site-specific action art research—phenomenological, the social/institutional, and the discursive—as influentially categorized by Kwon (2002). Such an X, the unconscious place of the situation that must be negated, cannot be represented, only alluded to anamorphically.7

The forcework of eventual art as poiesis that disperses relations of power is mobilized on at least three economic fronts that ruin the production of designer

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7 Unfortunately, the controversy surrounding “relational aesthetics” as championed by Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) in relation to my thesis cannot be taken up here due to space. I would argue that only some aspects of “relational aesthetics” would align with my thesis, but this has to be articulated on another occasion.
capitalism through various speeds and intensities. They mobilize a re(circuitry) of the BwO for the spectator and the social public space through (at least) three indesigns (or differentiations) that overload the circuits of power, short-circuit power, and in(direct) power anamorphically. These processes of doing art, or art-ing do not confront power, but through poiesis, transform the situational relations of power. We might call these ‘strategies’ to reveal the void of the Real of the nomadic site. The tonality or nuance of power is inflected differently in each case to enable the transformation of relationships between elements to present a force of truth as an alternative to power. The forcework (what Ziarek (2004) ends up calling “aphesis” (p. 22) that connotes releasing and liberation) cannot be presented positively, for it would then fall into the field of representation and be caught up in the circuits of power. It is, as mentioned earlier, a “negative affirmative” process in Badiou’s terms. It is negative since it must pull away from the given sociocultural situation that is presented, but must remain affirmative because it must provide a way to change that can only be completed by continual social and political transformation. Such a force of art remains outside the scope of aesthetics and culture critique as it is currently theorized.

Indesign Overloaded Circuits: Bill Viola

An overloaded circuit taxes the system to a standstill, the flow has to oversaturate and stop or slow down the means of our attention. Bill Viola’s many video/sound installations are exemplary of the technicity of vision turned against itself, attaining the criterion of undoing its own articulations mentioned at the start of the essay. Viola stutters perception by slowing down the speed of the image to a threshold where it cannot be quickly eaten—he stretches and manipulates the accompanying sound. The brain-eye circuit is overloaded by too much and not enough information. As witnessing-viewers, Viola focuses our attention on what has ‘always already’ been there but was never ‘quite’ seen. A situation’s ‘thingness’ begins to emerge as an uncanny Real dimension. We have to dwell on what does not usually enter into our visible scope—a supplementary ‘extra visibility’ that the temporality of experience constantly misses. Slow motion places us in an economy that seems absolutely contrary to calculation and measurement, expanding the present—making it a fractal ‘thing-like’ space.

Why should this be important within the realm of technicist power? Viola utilizes digital technology to make visible the folds (Deleuze) within technology, to free up vision so that the ‘brain’ can begin to seize the ramifications of our watching. The body of a witness/observer in front of a Viola video feels awkwardly positioned, for Viola explores the unseen world of feelings, memory, and the impossibility of wholeness—that is the Real of his unconscious desire. An ethical face emerges, especially in his amazing series of twenty video works, The Passions, which he began in 2000 and continues to make. Against the post-emotionalism of media visuality, Viola’s study of the expression of emotions in The Passions series is presented in almost imperceptible movement forcing the viewer to wait and then ‘look again’ if there indeed had been movement. In Passage, memory and the distance of perception play a role. The sensuous level of perception presents an overwhelming amount of confusing data. Sensations
are experienced that no longer seem to conform to conventional time and space, estranging images. The BwO in front of this video installation becomes self-conscious and uneasy. The force of truth of Viola’s video/sound installations show how the speed of modernity has compressed life, constricted the body, and converted data into efficient calculability.

**Indesign Short Circuits: Alfredo Jaar**

To short-circuit a situation/or site so as to expose the void of the Real is to create an abnormal condition between two points of differing potentials, especially when they are related hierarchically. It is a way of causing a shock by crossing wires that do not usually touch. This is done intentionally to cause unexpected connections and shifts in intensity, which arises in a particular failure that ends up in a zero voltage in the network condition—bringing it to a standstill so that another step must be taken to make it “run” again. My primary example of an indesign short-circuit is an installation performance done by the Chilean-born New York artist Alfred Jaar, who was commissioned in 2000 (one assumes a millennium project) by the city council of Skoghall, Sweden to build a cultural place of community gathering because the city did not have one. Skoghall was the site of the world’s largest paper mill. It was a company town shaped by industrial paternalism but bereft of culture. Jaar proceeded to build the **Skoghall Konsthall** entirely out of the paper made by the mill and then preceded to have an exhibition of young Swedish artists, inviting the press and the government to the opening. Twenty-four hours after the festive opening, and according to Jaar’s plan, the building was ignited and allowed to burn down and collapse in on itself, despite the protests and pleas to salvage the wood (Jaar’s background as an architect made this a possibility). The immolation of the building highlighted the community’s impoverished cultural life. Jaar’s spectacular orchestration of heightened expectations brought on by the exhibition and then his withdrawal and destruction of the community’s desire by his act staged a trauma of loss and shock.

Jaar’s claim was that the community could not invite an outsider artist simply to produce a sense of ‘art’ and ‘community’ in a site where they weren’t supported in the first place. It was now up to the city council along with the paper mill company to form their own cultural initiative. Jaar’s installation performance certainly took aim at the void of Skoghall’s Real: the unwillingness, silence, and the lack of political initiative to generate a cultural center. Jaar staged an artistic event that is for the world; despite its negativity (destruction) it remains an affirmation as a trace that must now be followed by the community of Skoghall if a new body (BwO) is to emerge. Jaar’s installation performance inscribes the inexistent Real and it practices a new sort of politics of action without place—as non-site.

**Indesign In(direct) or Anamorphic Circuits: Krysztof Wodiczko**

When relations are influenced indirectly or anamorphically there is a mediation by a third party. In its simplest of forms, X and Y are mediated by A, where A has bi-directional connections to both X and Y; through A, X and Y are connected indirectly. A direct confrontation is by-passed in such a way that the
relationship of X and Y can be changed. This can be a therapeutic and healing approach to an otherwise irresolvable deadlock in terms of power or psychic blockage. The artist, situated as A, orchestrates a performative process with X and Y (and Z, and V, and W and ...) to defuse the existing blockages, and to have the circuits flow ‘otherwise’ at the molecular levels.

The master of the indesign indirect circuits who deals with the void of the Real is Krysztof Wodiczko. His public art mobilizes technology (like Bill Viola) to expose the X, Y, V and … and … relationships of power in economic, political, and symbolic realms. His events are “performative articulations,” harnessing Otherness, rupturing and evacuating power by exposing its circuitry in the way these relations come to be formed, distributed, and configured by in dominance, resistance, ideology, critique and so on. As Wodiczko (1999) puts it, his performative articulations are not meant to represent (survivors, the vanquished, immigrants, and so on) or to stand in or speak for them, rather indesign in(direct) circuitry should be developed with them so as to present a critical inquiry into the conditions that produced the crisis in the first place, for this is where the void lies. This enables those with no voice to relate to their cultural surroundings differently.

Wodiczko is not playing identity politics. His events have nothing to do with representing the other, or “making” art, but everything to do to release the existing relations from the grip of power so as to initiate a different dynamic. This is ‘inaction research’ that does not confront power directly, but opens up currents that could flow differently by disrupting the silent transmission of trauma from one generation to the next—as his The A-Bomb Dome, Hiroshima and Bunker Hill projects did. Mobilizing memory of the nameless in the tradition of the vanquished, he undoes exclusion and forgetting, defuses the visibility/invisibility power couplet so that voices are released to speak to and encounter power.

In Summation

Rather ironically, Vincent Lanier’s 1959 essay in that first Studies journal on “action research” defended scientific research, a position that he later abandoned while Irving Kaufmann was searching for a research direction that would be more true to the creative process. It is my conviction that art, its education and research should be about a particular kind of action that is nonproductive—characterized by désœuvrement—a radical (non)praxis. Such art-ing works the spaces between action and inaction, activity and passivity, not signifying within the practices of power, but redirecting its relations through indesigns as a challenge to designer capitalism of a consummatory oral eye, escaping its optics of power. This is a research direction (if it can still be called that?) that remains specific to the creative artistic process necessary to meet the demands of contemporary society in a direction other than the one assigned to art and its education by designer capitalism. I have tried to invent a new vocabulary for such ‘useless’ art-ing and its education and research that aims at a mid-voice that ‘speaks’ at the edge of the void. Besides the neologisms of indesign, self-refleXion, virtual Real and the homonym site/sight/cite, within such a postaes-
thetic position, art criticism now becomes kritik, an ethical assessment of what the act of art-ing has done in terms of diffusing the power/knowledge couplet.

I have a special term for such artistic engagement—Da-Da-sein (an allusion to Heidegger’s famous Dasein, but also to Dada, as a double inflection). The neologism refers to the disturbed presence of existence (Dasein) and to the Dada avant-garde who caused such disruptions. This is a mode of relating that is anterior to subjectivity, which disrupts the power/knowledge couplet that binds subject and object rigidly and hegemonically together. Art and its education should pursue this post-Duchampian Brain-Eye trajectory of ‘research,’ rather than being swallowed by the Wor(l)d-Eye of designer consumerism. There are avant-garde artists who are already doing this, and as art education researchers, we can continue to draw our lessons from them to initiate a contrary Imaginary to “learning to learn.” Our survival depends on it!

References


Beyond Aesthetics: Returning Force and Truth to Art and Its Education


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