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**QUEERING OURSELVES:  
PERFORMANCE AS A SITE FOR LEARNING**

A Thesis in

Art Education

by

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## Abstract

The following study examines learning communities that are involved with art. It is an investigation of culture in action and community as interactivity. Here learning and culture are both examined “as” performance, as a happening only understood in hindsight, as an event that becomes *known* through experience. By employing queer criticism, I engage in a process of re-considering, re-investigating, and re-examining what I thought was familiar about the cultures that are near me. In this study I ask how various performances of my art classroom are and are not related to one another.

In this report queer theory is combined with performance theory to articulate alternative notions of subjectivity. The combination of queer and performance theory is useful because it forces knowledge to be understood as activity. On the one hand queering is about the use of direct address to gain insight through the inclusion of the other. And, on the other hand, performance theory is about the development of subjectivity through critical reflections on what has been done. In the space of performance art new meanings for the relationships between subjects can erupt. This work with queering and performance is an attempt to understand how experiences of difference can be used as sites for learning in the art classroom. The intention of this paper is to push us to find those queered points of engagements between ourselves and the students, the curriculum and our experiences in the world. It must be understood however that knowing is always difficult because it is the learned application of a particular relationship to a subject. There is nothing that we just “know.”

All of the events cited in this writing come from performance works done in and around my university art classes. Performance art is a useful medium for the critique of difference because it forces individuals to confront the responsibility of being *present*. The interdisciplinary nature of performance invites individuals (on their own terms) to participate in an evolving critique of culture, genre, identity, and the very idea of knowledge. The texts, criticism, and performances that have been included in this paper deal explicitly with the challenges of visibility and the oppressive results of social invisibility. Like knowing, seeing is also difficult. Here, performance art is used to make visible the terms and conditions of our relationships to one another.

This dissertation explores how performance art undertakes the process of decontextualizing concepts, ideas, or observations in order to recombine them into new ways of perceiving and including the other in the body of the self. As such viewer-participants are compelled to see themselves in a polymorphic vision with the performance. Here it is argued that with the use of performance, the artist and audience, teacher and student, or author and reader can be queerly re-positioned so that they both feel as though their presence matters *in conversation*.

Specifically, this study mixes ideas from critical theory, race criticism, and feminist pedagogy with practices of performance pedagogy. I have also tried to create a lively interplay between the writings of gay theorists, media philosophers, art educators, sociologists, performance artists, and queer theory. The exploration of *social invisibility*

through the observation of being *in conversation* is the one common characteristic of all the texts mentioned in this work.

As curriculum researchers, this study pushes us away from an obsession with what will be learned and how it will be taught, and toward an investigation of the process of identification within the classroom. This study demonstrates that the meaning of identity must be performed. Through this work it is clear that identification is always a process pushing and pulling between what is and is not. Identities are spaces of difference-between subjects. It is the perpetual movement of identity that makes knowing difficult.

An important conclusion of this study is that self-awareness combined with a subjective understanding of otherness is a necessary part of experiencing the world critically. And, critical experiences are required for bringing about change and learning to see differently. It should be understood that I believe education is about learning to see others as well as ourselves differently.

This work involves learning to love the process of understanding, because it is through understanding that we become participants, not bystanders, in each other's fight for life. This is the only position that a teacher can perform—co-participant with the other's struggle for understanding.

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## Prologue

Queering is a performative way of creating social critique that compels a viewer or audience member to psychologically see the self within the issue being explored.

Queering uses direct address to layer viewers' experience so that they feel that they are in a concrete, immediate, and personal relationship with the work in the indexical present.

The indexical present is the conceptual space between the artist/artwork and the audience that is only recognizable within the immediate here and now.

In this study, queering is a "verb."

Here, it is important to understand that I am not speaking about the popular use of the term queer. Queer is not simply gay, and things thought to be gay are not merely queer.

To say only that a thing is "queer" does not indicate from what this thing is differentiated.

Indicating that something is queer must point to what the thing is and at the same time what it is not, what is normal and what a freakish deviation is, what is ordinary and what is not.

Queering is a useful device for social criticism because it exposes multiple points of "epistemological curiosity" within a dialogue. Queering reminds us that communication

is about what will become *known*. By juxtaposing what is and what is not, queering

fosters a lively search for deeper and deeper positions of understanding. This work is an indication that “knowing” is always difficult.

Knowing requires recognition. Moral, spiritual, institutional, intellectual, sexual, class/race-based, ethical, and even unofficial commands of knowledge all require recognition and this recognition confers a sense of responsibility to the other. Queering—the inclusion of the other through direct address—reminds me that knowing is not as easy as speaking and then hearing. “If you think it easy you are a fool. If you think it is natural you are blind. It is a learned application without reason or motive” (1998, p. 196). These are some the words that Toni Morrison uses in her novel Paradise (1998) to describe *love*. But, this language is also helpful in describing the process of *knowing*.

Morrison complicates the matter of love by insisting that it is a learned application. She demands that love is not natural or innate; instead it is a diploma that confers the “privilege of expressing love and the privilege of receiving it” (p. 196). Through queering, *knowing* is characterized as a learned application in which we earn the right to express and accept. Through a practice of queering, I learn to demonstrate and receive my responsibility for what is *known*.

In this study I am examining learning communities that are involved with art. However, this is not an exploration of community or culture as the fixed and final property of a subject. This is an investigation of culture in action and community as interactivity. I am examining culture “as” performance, as a happening only understood in hindsight, as an

event that becomes *known* through experience. Through the employment of queer criticism, I am lead toward a process of re-consideration, re-investigation and re-examination of what I thought was familiar, about the culture that is near me. Here, I am asking how performances of the classroom are and are not related to one another.

This work deliberately does not include a commentary on the definitive nature of performance, teaching or experiences in the art classroom. Reading this work is a step toward being in conversation with me as I revisit my experiences through the lenses of social criticism. Kobena Mercer, a British film and art critique, has interesting thoughts on the “reading” of postmodern criticism:

Instead of an authoritative position, in which criticism reaches for the definitive judgment of value, it may be helpful to conceive of it as an ongoing conversation or dialogue that seeks to deepen our knowledge [recognition] of the way texts “work” as they circulate in the contingent and contradictory circumstances... It is not even necessary to construct a general or definitive frame work for interpretation, as what arise instead is a practice of interruption...which recognizes the contextual character of the relations between authors, texts, and audiences as they encounter each other. (1994, p. 252)

This criticism uses performance not to make any final judgment about performance itself. Here performance is used in a practice of interruption. Specifically, I use queer theory combined with performance to articulate alternative theories of subjectivity, as they become known through my experiences of difference.

Queering is a verb.

- The audience is queered
- The relationship to our American history is queered
- Sex is queered
- Homosexual acts are queered
- The understanding of everyday life is queered
- My education is queered.

Performance art is often about queering. Performance is about individuals addressing and receiving messages. In the space of performance, new meanings for the relationships between subjects can erupt.

Is it in you?

Is your work important?

Is your teaching “helpful” to others?

What do you do? Do you use generic recipes? Are the outcomes of your work guaranteed?

In my teaching, I have pushed to find those queered points of engagement between myself and the students, the curriculum, and our experiences in the world.

I have encouraged art students to look inside what they understand in order to explore the uncertain process of perception. My students are required to look inside their understanding of our classroom, to look inside their understanding of the relationships they form, to look inside their understanding of their own lives, and to look inside what they know in order to become familiar with an estranged sense of themselves and our world.

Is it in you?

I urge students and teachers alike to allow *difference* to become a primary site for learning in the classroom. Today, however, many educators are more interested in celebrating sameness and promoting “togetherness.” Often teachers are “inspired by a desire to make whole a division in the ranks” (Williams, 1997, p. 4). Yet, I wonder aloud ‘what is the role of *difference*?’ Obviously, all individuals and organizations cannot neatly fit together. What happens with identities that are not accepted or perhaps not easily seen? How do students and teachers engage identities that are socially inappropriate or invisible? What if a boy is called a girl in the classroom? Are you prepared for someone to call you a faggot? What if people never speak?

Educators as well as artists are too eager to prompt meaningless and uncritical notions of “togetherness.” Patricia Williams thinks such talk re-affirms the ideal notion of colorblindness, encourages the overlooking of difference, and forces the acceptance of sameness. In 1998, she wrote,

I worry that we tend to enshrine the notion [of colorblindness] with a kind of utopianism whose naiveté will ensure its elusiveness. In the material world ranging from playgrounds to politics, our ideals perhaps need more thoughtful, albeit more complicated, guardianship. By this I mean something more than the “I think therefore it is” school of idealism. “I don’t think about color, therefore your problems don’t exist.” If only it were so easy... But if indeed it’s not that easy then the application of such quick fixes becomes not just a shortcut but a short-circuiting of the process of resolution... I do wish to counsel against the facile innocence of those three notorious monkeys, Hear No Evil, See No Evil, and Speak No Evil. Theirs is a purity achieved through ignorance. Ours must be a world in which we know each other better. (p. 4)

In and outside of the classroom, knowing is always difficult. Learning through difference requires the negotiation of real division, the re-consideration of actual boundaries, and the pondering of multiple perspectives and conflicting values. My work addresses a need to formulate a critical language of difference that continually complicates the subject’s performance and the performance of culture. I also intend to trouble the construction of the classroom as a “community of sameness.” (Eisenhauer, 2003)

I have begun to apply notions of queer theory to my thinking and teaching. This has led me away from an obsession with what will be learned and how it will be taught, and

towards an investigation of the process of identification within the classroom. I prefer to think about queer as a verb: to queer, or perhaps queering this or that. Speaking in this way, queering seems to provoke action, specifically the act of identification from within.

It is important to understand that as an art teacher I am not telling my students what to say or even how to say it. This is not the job of an educator. Philosophies and theories of education are simply reflections of reasoning about the world around us. They are glimpses into the rationale of how others establish and instill notions of “being.” Education is about learning to understand each other through the recognition of difference.

As art educators investigate the use of art, we must ask how this work can help in queering aspects of reality among our students. Art should become a performance of identifying a student’s different perceptions. Today, performance art is one of the most useful mediums for helping students to see differently. In the classroom, performance can create an environment for the ongoing critique of difference. Charles Garoian (1999) believes performance art is an essential tool for art educators. He explains,

Performance teaching takes its cues from the exploratory and experimental strategies employed by artists throughout this century. The interdisciplinarity and interculturality of performance art represents a context for curriculum instruction, and evaluation that is divergent, open, complex, and contradictory in character. (p. 29)

Garoian cites the work of Rachel Rosenthal and Bill T. Jones as examples of performance's "interdisciplinarity" and "interculturality." He believes performance mixes disciplines in order to highlight personal narratives that critique cultural codes, struggles for agency, and a general resistance to conclusion, boundaries, definitions and limits. In their teaching and social activist work, performance artists respond to the queer notion "that both- what we are and what we are not, are implicated in the construction of identity and community" (Pinar, 1998, p. 21). Garoian writes that Rachel Rosenthal and her students,

work toward a "spontaneous and collective ordering of chaos," which they assemble from their personal memories and cultural histories (Roth, 1997, p. 46-47). She describes her pedagogical process as a way of blurring the boundaries between the self and its cultural context and the self and other human beings... Rosenthal's "doing-by-doing" strategies enable her and her students to challenge contemporary cultural issues such as women's oppression, cruelty to animals, and the ecological devastation of the earth. (p. 52)

Knowing is always difficult. Through the direct engagement of performance our relationship to women's oppression, cruelty to animals, and the ecological devastation of the earth will become *known*. There is nothing that we "know" simply because it is so. Knowing is the understanding gained through the learned application of a particular relationship with a subject. Performance makes the terms of our relationship with subjects explicit so that we are able to see them, work with them, and then re-arrange and re-perform them.

The texts, criticism, and performances that have been included in this study deal explicitly with the challenge of visibility. Like knowing, seeing is also difficult. Many people have developed a twisted notion of morality that allows them to avoid seeing what is near. Our bosses, politicians, religious leaders, health officials, artists, educators, and parents throw around the notion of *choice* to make us feel as though we can (or should) absolutely control our relationships to the circumstances that surround us. Sometimes this helps us to feel safe and distant from the problems near us, and it also naturalizes the terms and conditions of everyone's existence. "If there is homelessness in our streets it is the fault of those who have no home—they *chose* to live that way. If there is a disease such as AIDS it is somehow the fault of those who contract that disease—they *chose* to have that disease. If three black men are shot by a white man on the subway train—somehow they *chose* to be shot by that man. And life goes on and on and on" (Wojnarowicz, 1991, p. 150). What occurs is assumed to be happening because of our "life style choices," "life decisions," "career paths," or "professional associations." This has led to an obsession with what is or is not shown. Therefore what we *allow* ourselves to "see" is what is accepted as "real." If we do not "see" an immediate relationship to a subject, then does it really matter? We believe it does not. That which is near us is important, but only what we "choose" to see actually exists.

Many of us do not prefer queering. Some would rather not include the other. Sometimes we are afraid. In Close to the knives: A memoir of disintegration (1991) the late David Wojnarowicz explains that in our lives we have erected ridiculous borders in order to

maintain a sense of “control.” Behind these fictitious networks of association oppression occurs more easily because the terms and conditions of all relations are unquestioned, unspoken, unconditionally accepted, and invisible. Wojnarowicz (1991) writes,

I grew up in a tiny version of hell called the suburbs and experienced the Universe of the Neatly Clipped Lawn. This is a place where anything and everything can and does take place—and events such as torture, starvation, humiliation, physical and psychic violence can take place uncontested by others, as long as it doesn’t stray across the boundaries and borders as formed by the deed-holder inhabiting the house on the neatly clipped lawn. If the violence is contained within the borders of the lawn and does not mess up the real estate in any way that would cause the surrounding properties devaluation, anything is possible and everything permissible. (p. 151)

I am unwilling to accept that any division between individuals is “natural.” Staying within the parameters of a single social structure, organization, institution, family unit, text, or discipline of study has always left me feeling empty and curious about the other. I am only satisfied in environments where individuals are *working* to understand one another across barriers of difference. All other forms of existence seem deceitful and rather implausible to me.

It is for this reason that I have not allowed myself to focus this study only on the writings of critical theory, race criticism or feminist pedagogy. I have not stayed within frameworks created by gay theorists, ethnographers, or media philosophers. Instead, I have worked to create a lively interplay between these texts and also the discussions of

art educators, sociologists, performance artists, and queer theorists. All the texts, criticism, and performances mentioned in this study share only one common characteristic: they speak to the experience of *social invisibility* through the observation of being *in conversation*.

Here, let me be clear that what is at stake is the responsibility that comes with the acknowledgement of recognition. As a Black man living the United States I have come to understand that being invisible and being left out of conversation can lead individuals to feel paralyzed by the terms and conditions of their existence. In his novel Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison (1947) characterizes the problem of social invisibility much better:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imaginations—indeed, everything and anything accept me.

Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of biochemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through

their physical eyes upon reality. I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy. It's when you feel like this that. Out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel that way most of the time. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful. (p. 3)

I am reading, studying and re-telling these stories of performance not to distance or silence you, but to include you directly in what I see. I am striving to make you and the context of our shared reality visible. In this study as well as in my other work, I am not searching for well "behaved" and passive listeners. What I seek are active participants *in conversation*.

## Chapter One

### TEACHING ART & LEARNING PERFORMANCE

It seems to me that anything that can be taught to another is relatively inconsequential, and has little or no significant influence on behavior...I have come to feel that the only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning. Such self-discovered learning, truth that has been personally appropriated and assimilated in experience, cannot be directly communicated to another. (Rogers, 1977, p. 276)

*I have been teaching for my entire professional life, but what have I been doing?* Today while watching *Angels in America* and then *Adaptation*, I was thinking, what is my identity? I am a teacher—an art teacher—an African American art teacher. Is that it?

Does the role “art teacher” define who I am? Is teaching a state that I occupy or a pre-occupation of my existence? The role of teacher is socially constructed, and therefore the act of playing this role is partially conditioned by the terms of its construction. Like the actor who is bound to his script, the individual playing the role of a teacher must confront expectations that precede and encompass any of his desires or attempts to make meaning. How then can I reclaim the experience of teaching for myself? Is there any relationship between the engaging process of making meaning and the ambivalence of role-playing?

What are the boundaries between socially recognized roles and the variations in an individual's particular identities? None of this is very clear right now. What is a teacher? Who am I? Sitting here on my couch watching TV, no wonder I'm stuck. I am watching others participate in the process of exploring meaning and merely speculating on the actions I might take. I am not learning from my experiences of teaching because my own experiences are invisible to me.

### **is it in you?**

I have always wanted my work to be important, and I have tried to make teaching "helpful" to others. Maybe this is why the activities in my classes do not seem like traditional "art teaching." I do not look for recipes to create guaranteed art products. Instead, I have pushed to find those queered points of engagement between myself and the student, the curriculum and our experiences in the world.

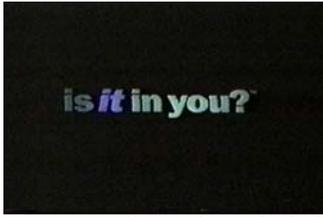
Following the lead of researchers such as Susanne Luhmann and William Pinar, I have begun to apply notions of queer theory to my thinking. This has led me away from an obsession with what will be learned and how will it be taught, and towards an investigation of the process of identification within the classroom. Luhmann links "queer" to the term "pedagogy," to create a noun. She speaks about the "queer pedagogy." I prefer to think about queer as a verb: to queer, or perhaps queering this or that. Speaking in this way, *queering* seems to provoke action, specifically the process of identification from within. Yet, in both its verb and noun form, the concept of queer has

liberating possibilities for re-thinking what *happens* in the classroom. Luhmann (1998) speaks quite poignantly about these possibilities,

A queer pedagogy aims at the infinite proliferation of new identifications. A queer pedagogy suggests that, rather than finding the self in knowledge and representations, learning is about the process of risking the self...Instead of focusing on the common concerns of teaching, such as what should be learned and how to teach this knowledge, pedagogy might begin with the questions of how we come to know, or how knowledge is produced in the interaction between teacher/text and student...This shift is one of pedagogic curiosity, from what (and how) the author writes or the teacher teaches, to what the student understands, or what the reader reads. Accordingly, pedagogy then begins to shift from transmission strategies to an inquiry into the conditions for understanding, or refusing, knowledge. (p. 148, 151)

I have encouraged art students to look inside what they understand in order to explore the uncertain process of perception. My students are required to look inside our classrooms, to look inside the relationships they form, to look inside their own lives, and to look inside what they know in order to become familiar with an estranged sense of themselves and our world.

### From Dee's "New" Wal\*Mart Commercial



Snapshot, *is it in you?* Video art, Dee, 2002, Figure 1-4

“is it in you?” is the opening caption from a video project that was submitted as a student’s assignment several years ago. I was the supervisor for this undergraduate student’s independent study in the School of Visual Arts. Her name was Dee, and together we explored video art, filmmaking, feminist theory, and community activism. Dee decided to use her bedroom television set to create a work intended to be viewed as a “new” commercial for Wal\*Mart. At the time I was writing a funk rock opera called *Jeremy is a Girl*, which was also about Wal\*Mart. The title for *Jeremy is a Girl* was taken from an article in *Teaching Tolerance*<sup>1</sup>. (Ewing, 2001)

I do not recall talking much about *Jeremy is a Girl* with Dee, and she and I had met only a few times to discuss the progress of her work. Because it was an independent study, we were not required to follow a fixed schedule of class meetings. We met several times for about a month. Then I received a telephone message from Dee. She simply said, “Gabriel. I have a video art piece for your performance.”

The following is a transcript of all the dialogue from Dee’s commercial. She did nothing to alter the original recording of the commercial. She simply rearranged the order of the

<sup>1</sup> In Chapter three I discuss this article in more detail.

images and added lots of pictures from other television advertisements. The dialogue reads,

I love where I work / There is never, never a dull moment at Wal\*Mart /  
 It's more than a store; it's a fun place to visit / Might be a school car wash,  
 maybe kids selling cookies for a good cause / Shopping's not bad either /  
 We come here to socialize / I might as well work here cause if not I'd be  
 hanging around here anyway / You never know what you're gonna find at  
 Wal\*Mart / They just come in for fun / It's like my morning routine, free  
 coffee and waking-up at Wal\*Mart

Dee's re-working of the Wal\*Mart commercial shifts the possibilities of what the viewer understands. Dee directly confronts the viewer within our performance of re-watching the "same old" commercial. As in Luhmann's queer pedagogy, where the concerns are shifted from what and how the teacher teaches to what the student understands, Dee shifts the concerns of the viewer from what Wal\*Mart is saying to how do I identify or refuse to identify with this "new" commercial. This work is not about Wal\*Mart or learning the "tricks" of re-editing TV commercials. When viewing Dee's work my concerns are not about what the author is saying or how she is speaking. I am not interested in the labels, titles, or components of this commercial. Dee is engaging us in a queer social critique that is taking place psychologically within the space of each viewer's process of identification. When viewing Dee's commercial, I identify forms and structures that I thought were familiar like cheerleaders, swimming pools, old men, white southern accents, bread sticks dipped in tomato sauce, wholesome living, the good life, and shopping. Yet, these "familiar" things are rearranged so that the story behind this "new"

commercial is twisted just enough to make me, its viewer, question how I am identifying what I *thought* I knew. This re-identification happens when an individual participates in a process of “queering.”

### **Queering is a Verb**

Queering is a performative way of creating social critique that compels a viewer or audience member to psychologically see their selves within the issue being explored. Queering uses direct address to layer the viewer’s experience so that he or she feels that they are in a concrete, immediate and personal relationship with the work in the indexical present<sup>2</sup>—the conceptual space between the artist/artwork and the audience that is only recognizable within the immediate here and now.

When I think of direct address, I am referring to the act of speaking or engaging the other in such a way that they are immediately “touched” by the terms, conditions, and thesis of a message. (Piper, 1991) In pushing for direct address I am urging educators to consider the “positionality” of individuals who are involved within a communicative event. A communicative event can happen in the classroom, on the football field, at the street corner, watching a movie or Dee’s “new” TV commercial. Direct address puts the audience within an immediate relationship to the message. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997), a feminist film theorist, believes that all messages have a *mode of address*. Ellsworth writes,

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<sup>2</sup> I am using Adrian Piper’s notion of *indexical present*. In an essay, “Xenophobia and the Indexical Present” (1990) Piper explain that her performances work within the concrete, immediate and personal relationship between her and the viewer. She believes this is the space of the indexical present.

Film, like letters, books, or television commercials, are *for* someone. They have intended and imagined audiences...most decisions about a film's narrative structure, "look," and packaging are made in light of conscious and unconscious assumptions about "who" its audience "is," what they want, how they read films, which films they'll pay to see next year, what makes them laugh or cry, what they fear, and who they think they are in relation to themselves, to others, and to the social and cultural passions and tensions of the day...Films have intended and imagined audiences. They also have desired audiences...The concept of mode of address is built on this contention: In order for a film to work for an audience, in order for it to simply make sense to a viewer, or make her laugh, root for a character, suspend her disbelief, cry, scream, feel satisfied at the end—the viewer must enter into a particular relationship with the film's story and image system.

(p. 23)

By insisting on direct address, I am demanding that the mode of address for communication in the classroom be about the immediate relationship between each student and the curriculum.

This study will critically examine behavior in the art classroom "as" performance. I am studying how performance art provokes queered engagements in the classroom in order to challenge us to look more deeply into the process of identification. The performance of how an individual in the classroom identifies their role as teacher or student and even the

meaning behind the relationship between the teacher and student is troubled. My intention behind the use of performance is to compel each of us to reconsider what is known as familiar. Again Ellsworth can add a considerable amount of insight to what I am trying to express,

So reinscribing *teacher* and *student* means keeping “both the old and new hierarchies off balance” (Chang, 1996, p. 143). Rewriting the teacher-student relation this way means refusing to let the question of teacher-student relation be settled. It means working in and through the oscillating space of difference between teacher and student as positions within a structure of relations. And it’s in the space of difference-between that a new concept of the teacher-student relation erupts. But paradoxically again, it’s a new concept that refuses to settle into any single meaning... The teacher-student relation is undecidable. The teacher-student relation is something that can’t be named.

By “undecidable,” I don’t mean enigmatic, equivocal, ambivalent, or romantically rich in inexhaustible meanings. No, undecidability here refers to the way in which the values or meanings of the terms teacher and student “both urge choice and prevent that choice from being made” (Chang, 1996, p. 144). They urge us to choose: Am I a teacher or a student? Who am I “as” teacher, who are you as student, what do I do as teacher, what do I want from you as student? The terms teacher and student urge me to choose

among the many answers currently circulating and competing for these questions. (1997, p. 140)

As I will discuss throughout this paper, performance more than any other art, allows for queering in the classroom. Strictly speaking, performance is about the medium of a message. The work of performance oscillates in the space of “difference-between”, a space where new meanings for the relations of subjects can erupt. (p.140) Performance is about individuals addressing and receiving messages. In this way performance art is often about queering.

Queering is a verb; it must happen between individuals. For example, in her interpretation of the play *Angels in America*, Alisa Solomon employs the use of “queer” as a verb. In the following passage Solomon refers to the Rabbi, the Bolshevik and a guy named Prior; these are key characters from the play that she believes queer the audience. Solomon is discussing the way each of these characters directly addresses their audience—the Rabbi and the Bolshevik are addressing a fictional audience that is constructed in the play as well as the live audience of the theatre. On the other hand, Prior queerly addresses just us, the play’s viewers. Solomon writes,

If the Rabbi and the Bolshevik constructed the audience as Jewish and communist, in his direct address Prior queers us. “You are fabulous creatures”[A statement Prior makes while looking directly into the camera at the end of the movie version of the play] is not a sop to a crowd that needs to be congratulated for sitting through a seven-hour epic drama (though it can,

alas, be played that way) (2:148). Rather, Prior's closing lines, as reproving and hortatory as the Rabbi's and the Bolshevik's, include us in order to challenge us. "Queers will be citizens," he declares, "Without giving up their queerness, just as Jews in France demanded citizenship without assimilation." (1997, p. 133)

The idea of including difference within the interaction between individuals is the goal behind the employment of a queered address. When Solomon writes, "Prior queers us," she is not saying that Prior addresses us as though we were queer, or that Prior makes us queer. If so the term queer would mean that Prior is separating himself from us, the audience. His performance is about inclusion. Solomon explains later in the paragraph, that "Prior's closing lines...**include us** in order to challenge us." (p. 133)

Here it might be helpful to say a little about the social context in and around the play. Among other things, *Angels in America* is about the people in the Reagan administration who had intimate awareness of homosexuality, but publicly refused to acknowledge its existence, and tried to ignore the problems caused by the AIDS epidemic. The play dramatizes the facts concerning thousands of gay men who were dying from AIDS throughout Ronald Reagan's entire term in office. Much of *Angels in America* evolves around Roy Cohen, an actual counselor to the President who identified himself as a "heterosexual...who fucks around with guys" (Kushner cited in Solomon, 1992, p.121).

As the subtitle of this wonderful work by the award-winning playwright Tony Kushner (1993, 1994) indicates, this is a “Gay Fantasia<sup>3</sup>.” Kushner re-arranges and re-tells what we understand about the 1980s, AIDS, homosexuals, Mormons, Jews, Christianity, WASP heritage, women, homosexual sex, drug abuse, misogyny, sexism, drag queens, Ethel Rosenberg, communism, motherhood, marriage, racism, Rabbis, Bolsheviks, angels, and stories of life-after death. However, Kushner does not *just* re-arrange what the audience sees, he does not *just* tell a good story; he weaves wonderfully seductive scenes and dialogue that positions the viewer within the drama. Kushner pulls the viewing audience into his “fantasia,” so that he can personally re-connect the dots of our reality. After being engaged with *Angels in America*, we leave the theatre (I get off my couch) wondering, questioning, thinking, and unknowing The Big Story of History. Our relationship to our own American history is queered. For example, instead of arguing about what happened during the Reagan administration, we are compelled to discuss our identification with government policies about homosexuality at the time. Also, even though the setting for *Angels* is in the United States during the early 1980s, while watching the play today we are pushed to re-consider the meanings of many things that are familiar. After watching the play I am wondering how President Kennedy could respond so idealistically to student sit-ins in the South. (D’Emilio, 2002) I am wondering why I know so little about the personal life of any Mormon. I am wondering how specific individuals are affected by President Clinton’s 1993 policy of legally forcing homosexuals in the armed forces to stay in the closet—“Don’t Ask; Don’t Tell.” (www.diversityinc.com, 2005) I am even wondering what exactly Michael Jackson

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<sup>3</sup> The entire title of Tony Kushner’s seven hour play that is written in two parts is *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes. Part One: Millennium Approaches*. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993) and *Part Two: Perestroika* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994).

means when he says that he has shared his bed with children. (Branigan, 2003) Could a sexual encounter happen just by sleeping next to a child and dreaming of having intimate relations with them?

Kushner's method of delivering "new" stories of reality leads me to question, how I have come to know familiar situations in my experiences of the world. One of the clearest examples of this provocation is the way *Angels in America* pushes me to re-consider the identification of homosexual acts (and in turn the identification of all sorts of sex). Tony Kushner queers what I have come to know as sex. And, Alisa Solomon's writings about this attempt to queer homosexual acts are particularly inspiring:

Joe Pitt's (a married Mormon) first homosexual act in *Angels in America* is to inhale. When Louis (a gay Jew who has left his dying boyfriend) takes him home in the second scene of *Perestroika* (Part two of *Angels*), he seduces Joe by teaching him that "Smelling Is desiring." Louis sniffs "Little molecules of Joe...Up my nose" and instructs Joe to do the same. "The nose," Louis proclaims, "is really a sexual organ." (1997, p. 118)

Isn't this wonderful? Kushner uses fiction to introduce real questions about the reality of homosexuality. Where is homosexuality? When does it begin? How does it happen? If sex can take place in the nose, then perhaps you could be "doing it," right now. Kushner makes me, the viewer; want to feel his inquiry. I want to participate in this queering of sex, this queering of homosexual sex. This is one of the most seductive scenes in the play. The scene has to be seductive in order to draw in and challenge us to queer homosexual sex, after all his primary audience are stuffy overdressed and under-sexed

heterosexual Americans. I absolutely agree with Solomon, “This exchange offers the play’s most erotic, most satisfying depiction of sex.” (1997, p. 118) There is a lot of sex in *Angels*, but most of the scenes are either comical set ups, depictions of “quickies,” or cold, unmoving interludes.

Kushner’s erotic “play,” a complex psycho-sexual-political landscape, invites me to re-explore realities that I thought I already knew including: the monolithic identifications of Jewishness, over simplified notions of modern masculinity, reductive stereotyping of gender roles, unimaginative imaginary of Mormons and religion in general, uninspired thinking about terms around racism, drug abuse, domestic violence, the definition of marriage and all sorts of “issues” of contemporary everyday life (Solomon, 1997). When, in an effort toward queering, an artist adds “new” layers to a familiar subject or situation, he or she is trying to encourage the audience to examine what they understand within the indexical presents of the work. Once again, like Susan Luhmann’s (1998) employment of queer pedagogy, here the term queer pushes us away from an obsession with “what and how the author writes or the teacher teaches, to what the student understands, or the reader reads” (p. 151). It is clear that the queering provoked by the performance of *Angels* demands that we ask not what or how an individual is a homosexual, but instead what does the one who engages the homosexual story understand.

### **Queering Race Relations**

I have also been inspired by Marjorie Wilson’s (2001) use of this notion of *queering*. In unpublished lecture notes for an undergraduate honors art class, she references the

previous Solomon quote and considers how racial difference might be challenged through the queer address of artist and philosopher Adrian Piper. Wilson writes,

In this quotation by Adrian Piper, she is also dealing with the concept of “queering.” As in Solomon’s quote, even though it is race of which she wishes us to become aware, it is queering nevertheless (e.g., the Rabbi, the Bolshevik): “My purpose is to transform the viewer psychologically, by presenting him or her with an unavoidable concrete reality that cuts through the defensive rationalizations by which we insulate ourselves against the facts of our political responsibility. I want viewers of my work to come away from it with the understanding that racism is not an abstract, distant problem that affects all those poor, unfortunate other people out there. It begins between you and me, right here and now, in the indexical present” (1990, p 286)...it (queering) is about making individuals aware of themselves, about who they are and what they think, and about others and who they are and what they think.”

While reading this study it is important to understand that I am not speaking about the popular use of the term queer. Queer is not simply gay, and things thought to be gay are not merely queer. This is completely nonsensical. To say only that a thing is “queer” does not indicate from what this thing is differentiated. “Queer is not only queer; it is not identical with itself. We (homosexuals) are now clear that both, what we are and what we are not, are implicated in the construction of identity and community” (Pinar, 1998, p. 6). By its very definition the term queer must be used to describe that which is unconventional, curious, freakish, eccentric, weird, or not ordinary. Indicating that

something is queer points to what the thing is and at the same time what it is not. Queer is about how something is conventional and how it is not, what is normal and what is a freakish deviation, what is ordinary and what is not.

Using performance art I explore how we learn by critiquing the inextricable relationship between our identity and what we are and are not doing—our behavior.

### **Performance: What is It**

The term *performance* is useful because it draws our attention to the roles people “play” in a social structure and the effects of their interactions. From the perspective of performance, social theories are more easily developed, practiced, and revised. So, what is performance?

Marvin Carlson (1996) thinks the term performance relates to three categories of activity.

1. Those activities that are a display of special skills or talents.
2. The recognition of particular sets or patterns of behavior.
3. And a viewer or observer who can use the concept of performance to render judgment on the success of an activity with respect to some standard of behavior or achievement.

Carlson’s third category of performance is about sexual and linguistic performances are common examples. An individual can become the observer of queer impressions of himself or herself performing. Carlson gives a fascinating example of an individual judging himself as the other against an unarticulated yet harsh and rigid standard of behavior. He writes, “Ultimately, Hamlet himself is the best judge of whether he is “performing” his melancholy actions or truly

“living” them” (1996, p. 5). Here the idea of performance is used to position the self queerly in relation to Hamlet’s familiar way of knowing himself. Hamlet’s madness brought about by his obsession for living a too truthful life. He is compelled to reconsider what he has come to know of himself after looking queerly at his activities. Hamlet queers his memories of himself.

Erving Goffman, a widely read anthropologist, dealt extensively with the concept of performance in the daily social lives of individuals.<sup>4</sup> In his popular text, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, (1959), Goffman offers a brilliantly useful theory of performance,

A “performance” may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute to the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. (p. 15)

In Goffman’s theory it is clear that a performance relies on the stipulation of identifying or delineating the participants. However, the identification of these participants is only momentarily apparent and can be seen only in their movements and relationships within the performance. [The subjects of a performance are defined by their behavior.](#) It is interesting that Goffman uses such “general” terms to label the subjects of a performance: the participant, the audience, the observer, or the co-participant. I believe he is trying to

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<sup>4</sup> Most of Goffman’s work focuses on the social interactions between Western white male middle and upper class individuals. Like other thinkers of his time, Goffman’s theories are limited by the over generalizing and universalizing of human interactions. Today, I cannot imagine even entertaining the notion that middle or upper class white males are anything like “normal” sample group. However, understanding Goffman’s work within the boundaries of this extremely small study group provides much useful insight into the language and terms for examining performance in everyday life.

maintain the focus on the liminal reality of circumstances surrounding a performance. For both Goffman and Carlson the reality of a performance does not depend on the stereotypes of its subjects. In other words, a performance is not simply the activity that “the performer” or “the actor” does.

In Performance Ethnography: Critical pedagogy and the politics of culture (2003), Norman Denzin goes into great length proposing and then re-considering the idea of performance. He believes performances are actions that employ the use of language in the identification of oneself. Performance is a way of defining and highlighting *difference*. It is the act of articulating *difference*. Denzin (2003) explains,

Performance is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency. Performance becomes public pedagogy when it uses the aesthetic, the performative [an aesthetic of interactivity], to foreground the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experience. In this way performance is a form of agency, a way of bringing culture and the person into play. (p. 9)

As such culture and language are inseparable from performance. It could be said that culture and language are performance. The individual participates in culture or calls upon the use of language through the act of performances. In fact, perhaps the individual can only exist through performance. Denzin borrows from Richard Schechner’s (1998) performance theory to explain,

As fluid, ongoing, events, performances “mark and bend identities, remake time and adorn and reshape the body, tell stories and allow people to

play with behavior that is restored or ‘twice-behaved’” (p. 361). The way a performance is enacted describes performative behavior, “how people play gender, heightening their constructed identity, performing slightly or radically different selves in different situations” (p. 361).

In this context, to perform is to resist what is given, what is obvious or what is apparently natural. A performance is an act against what is observed. The works of contemporary artists have helped me understand the necessary role of resistance in performance. Even the “performing” of my own life story is grounded in the act of resistance.

In a critique of the political potency of Tim Miller’s autographical performances about accepting his own homosexuality in the face of a homophobic culture, David Roman (1992) claims that what is at stake is “not so much a recording of his (Miller’s) life but, rather a deliberate displacement of this life through performance” (p. 215). In a performance, bits of one’s life are pulled apart, temporarily detached from the other and then analyzed. These “bits” are examined and compared for their individual relations to generalized theories about ordinary (standard) everyday life.

Indeed, performance must include the deliberate choice to “show” what is, has, ought to, or could be (Schechner, 2002). Performance is more than simply “doing” activity. It is a “showing doing” that is done in order to encourage reflexivity on the part of its participants. *Reflexive thought* is a vital ingredient of all performance. In fact, “the [reflexive] recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially

sanctioned modes of behavior raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as “performance” or at least all activity carried out with a consciousness of itself” (Carlson, 1996, p. 4). For the purposes of this study I consider a performance to be the presentation of “twice-behaved behavior” (Schechner, 1990, 2002; Carlson, 1996; Denzin, 2003; Mckenzie, 2001). The exchanges that I am explaining were carried-out in response or reaction to experiences in the art classroom. These performances were done for the explicit purpose of soliciting questions and arguments, and to provoke other performances from participants in the communicative engagements of the classroom.

Like the definition of the term queer, a performance cannot be defined by looking for information about “what” it is. To understand a performance one must dig below the surface of an experience to know what it means to be “in” the performance. The only way to *know* a performance is to be in relation with it. Therefore, the critiques in this study are more than just observations about what has *happened* or commentaries on the surface effects of behaviors in the classroom. Again, I am not trying to define the role of the teacher, student, curriculum, or a good and bad performance of the classroom. In fact, “what is or is not performance does not depend on an event in itself but on how that event is received and placed” (Schechner, 2002, p. 31). When any behavior is placed in context with other behaviors, it can be understood as performance. Any presentation of culture, language, and learning is the repeated displacement and rearrangement of patterns of behavior. In this study, what the viewer understands during the observation of a performance is more important than the label of the activity.

In an address to the planning committee of an international conference on ritual and theatre Victor Turner (1980), expressed what benefit he saw in using performance to study cultures. “We will know one another better by entering one another’s performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies” (Turner in Apple & Schechner, 1990 p. 1). I believe educational researchers, teachers, and students will know one another better through understanding each other’s performances. I believe what is to become *known* in education are spaces of difference-between ourselves, and the spaces of difference-between us can be understood while seeing one another in relations to our demonstrations of language, culture, and learning—entering “one another’s performances” (1990, p. 1).

Many social scientists have recognized the usefulness of the term, performance. In his critical analysis of performance Marvin Carlson (1996) insists there is great deal of enthusiasm about the concept of performance in modern academic circles.

With performance as a kind of critical wedge, the metaphor of theatricality has moved out of the arts into almost every aspect of modern attempts to understand our conditions and activities, into almost every branch of human sciences—sociology, anthropology, ethnography, psychology, linguistics.  
(p. 6)

The work of my study is influenced by cross associations with performance studies, sociology, anthropology, art education, and aspects of cultural studies. Even though the art classroom is the physical setting of this investigation, it is specifically the social

structures of that site and the enculturation of individuals within these structures that is being analyzed. I am critically examining the art classroom “as” performance. I am pulling apart, re-arranging and re-telling the stories of my experiences in the classroom in order to launch a social critique that queers how we have come to *know* the teacher-student relationship and meanings of learning.

In this way, this educational investigation is an analysis of culture. And like all cultural analysis, “the more deeply it goes the less complete...” this investigation of performance in the art classroom will appear to be (Geertz, 1973, p. 10). For this reason much of the study will be about conversation. I cannot predict and prescribe the behaviors of the art classroom, and I cannot even give proof for the rationale behind the motives of particular individuals. However, I am able to provide rich, descriptive interpretations of interactions between some of its participants. Because there is so much uncertainty in this work, I find a great deal of comfort in being able to record and represent pieces of conversations.

### **Queering the Art Classroom**

In writing about curriculum research it is liberating to look at queering in the classroom because, as stated earlier, it shifts my concerns with pedagogy “from transmission strategies to an inquiry into the conditions for understanding or refusing knowledge” (Luhmann, 1998, p. 248). Instead of looking at how “best” to approach teaching, I am becoming driven to discover the actions, reactions, and interactions between my art making and my experiences in the classroom, between the comments and behaviors of my students and my understanding of the world, between the classroom community and

life beyond the school. I am no longer looking for objects that represent learning. Now, I am trying to read, compare, re-arrange, re-create, re-write, and re-tell stories about the experiences individuals have while learning to “understand or refuse” identifications with knowledge. The writing of this study is structured so that the reader is compelled to reconsider over and over again what they understand about performance in the art classroom.

In an art classroom where does the search for *knowing* lead us? What is communicated during this search? How do communicative exchanges transform our participation in social orderings? How does any art teacher or student know what to say, what to do, or how to understand one another? In fact, is ‘knowing *what* to say’ an important pre-occupation for an art teacher as well as an artist and art student?

### **Not *Knowing* Art Teaching**

Some curriculum researchers believe that art teachers simply instruct students on lessons of drawing and painting. Many of my colleagues assume that art teachers encourage students to appreciate specialized practices and techniques in the visual arts. But what is behind these beliefs and assumptions? Instead of queerly turning the question back onto the questioner, many curriculum theorists have tried to question the subjects of the art classroom. How is the “art” being taught? Why is it being taught? What is being taught? Who are the best teachers for it?

Some contemporary art educators believe the best references for understanding art can be found in museums, galleries and art history textbooks. However these educators also understand that there is not “fair” or “equal” representation of all people in these institutions. The modern art world appears to be strictly segregated along lines of race, class, gender and sexual bias. Many educators and writers have pointed out as a matter of circumstance that most of the visual art in these locations are related to Western European paintings and drawings done by and for white males (Nochlin, 1970; Berger, 1972; Roberts, 1997; Wallace, 1998). Therefore, educators have encouraged their students to look for “art like art” outside museums, galleries, and traditional art history textbooks. Recently, educators have encouraged the exploration of “art” through the subjects of surveillance cameras, craft making, material cultural, women, toys, play, games, and issues of diversity among children (White, 2001; Duncum, 2002; Keifer-Boyd, 2002; Marshall, 2002; Sweeny, 2004; Congdon, 2005). However, is urging us to look beyond museums, galleries, and art history textbooks for representations of minority people, also reinforcing the idea that all art can or should be understood in relation to what is exhibited at “official” art world locations?

For example, recently a group of curriculum researchers goes to great lengths trying to “prove” that there should be great women artists (Clark, Folgo, & Pichette, 2005). Their critique is based on a gross mis-reading of Linda Nochlin’s (1974) popular essay, *Why have there been no great women artists*. These three curriculum researchers respond to the rhetorical question about “no great women artists” by replying that there are no women artists cited in well-known art history textbooks. They write:

Women artists had only just barely managed, by 1974, to get their works shown in museums. They'd only recently gotten their toes in the doors of "one-man" shows and art galleries. Perhaps most striking however, White (1976) [the author of an essay *A 1974 Perspective: Why Women's Studies in Art and Art History?*] observed that "in basic art-history textbooks—Janson, Gardner, Gombrich—not one woman artist was mentioned!" (p. 341). How could there have been any great women artists if art historians failed to acknowledge any women artists at all? (p. 6)

Do art historians, gallery owners, and museum curators determine who will be an artist? For example, since an exhibit curator decides what will be shown to the public and because many art educators encourage people to look towards or away from traditionally recognized institutions of art, it would appear that exhibit curators are directly influencing what the art students do, and in turn it also appears that curators are indirectly controlling who will be an artist and what art will be produced. Do professionals from formal art institutions have the absolute and final say over what we see as art? Certainly not! As I will discuss later, things become *known* as art through action, interaction, and reaction. Yet, I do recognize that there is a large collection of artworks seen only in museums, galleries, and textbooks. Off-handedly I refer to such work as "museum art." Museum art is not necessarily created for viewing in museums. It is simply work that is most familiar to us within the context of museum institutions.

Through the years, museums and textbooks (more than galleries) have become salvage yards for the cannon of classical *Western* art. Countless numbers of visual artworks have been laid to rest in museums or documented in textbooks because they are “great.” Thousands of people visit museums expecting to find “great” works of visual art. From specimen after specimen, from one great work to another, these visitors get what they expect to find. In fact, the scope and weight of a museum’s collection of great art can be exhausting. The art historian and cultural critic, John Berger (1972) writes,

Visitors to art museums are often overwhelmed by the number of works on display, and by what they take to be their own culpable inability to concentrate on more than a few of these works. In fact such a reaction is altogether reasonable. Art history has totally failed to come to terms with the problem of the relationship between the outstanding and the average work of the European tradition. The notion of Genius is not in itself an adequate answer. Consequently the confusion remains on the walls of the galleries. Third-rate works surround an outstanding work without any recognition—let alone explanation—of what fundamentally differentiates them. (Berger, 1972 p. 88)

In the “museum art” there is no room to consider the space of difference-between works, visitors, and social conditions of our society.

The confusion over the museum’s representation of great art can be passed on to an uncritical art educator. Because *museum art* sits idle, waiting to be “discovered,” these pieces might seem to be designed simply to hang motionless on pastel walls while being

gawked at in silence. Hence the art educator, like any other visitor, can interpret the variations between the patterns and forms of the *museum art* as an indicator of different degrees of greatness. In an effort to make associations with “greatness,” the educator might then instruct their students to imitate those forms and patterns found of the “great” *museum art*. The art educator often assumes he or she is cultivating the “great” artists of the future.

In fact, Laurie Hicks (2003), a professor of art education at the University of Maine, is certain that most educators mistakenly believe “cultivating greatness” is their mission. She writes, “Classroom teaching of art students seems to presuppose this mission. Art students are expected to master the elements and principals of design and composition, skills such as perspective drawing, structures of formal analysis or the techniques involved in ceramics and painting.” (p. 2). These become the primary focus of the art educator because these are the materials, techniques, and practices observed in the great works of *museum art*.

Hicks states that when students enter her art education classes they already presume that the practices and techniques of museum art contain “the basic rules by which to determine their own and their future student’s success” (p. 2). These art education students have the impression that their work must be related to the legacy of canonized movements of American and European fine arts. “As a consequence of this dominant approach to art education, neither art students in the schools, nor art education students in the universities are faced with the opportunity to confront a wide range of visual

phenomena that play an important role in [their] everyday life.” (p. 3) Is confronting the real world visual phenomena the objective of teaching art? Laurie Hicks requires her art education students to create works from concepts such as memory or place—concepts broader than a simple relation to *museum art*. But, if so, I wonder why?

Patricia Stuhr, the current chair of the department of art education at Ohio State University, believes the work of an art teacher is bound to the task of helping students create meaning and understanding in their lives. “Who am I anyway?” is a question taken on by the students in her courses. In fact, Stuhr does not believe it is only the art teacher’s responsibility to assist students in exploring who they are. She is arguing instead that this is the objective behind all teaching. Stuhr simply sees the work of art educators as dealing with subjects of “cultural production and investigations of images and artifacts” (2001, p. 304).

I wonder however if students really need help understanding the complexities of their own lives? Is this the purpose of teaching? With the help of her colleague, Christine Ballengee-Morris, Stuhr states empathetically that yes this has always been the mission of art teaching:

Since prehistoric times, all peoples have had informal and, at times, formal teachers who have helped the younger generation to understand and create meanings of and for life. We have lost sight of this essential teaching mission, of life’s meaning, and we may have become bogged down in the teaching of school subjects or disciplines in a way that they are no longer

connected to the students' lives in contemporary institutional education.

(2001, p. 303)

Is it the job of an art educator to connect her class materials to her students and to help them make meaning from life? Could the art teacher also be challenged in the process of making meaning from life? What if he or she is lost in their relation to the students? And what comes or came first: life, the classroom, or the students?

Kevin Tavin of the Chicago Art Institutes demands that life must be “problematized” for the art educator in the same way it is for art students. Our identities are constructed by our world of experience, the influence of history, and various power dynamics. Tavin sees popular visual culture as an important site for engagement by the art educator. However, he does not believe it is enough to ask art students, simply to broaden their subjects of inquires or to require literal connections between class materials and the real world. Tavin urges art teachers to use theories of critical pedagogy from writers such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Maxine Greene, Joel Kincheloe, and Michael Apple. He argues that in doing so the educator will be accessing the tools that can help their students juxtapose experiences of everyday life with the artifacts of popular culture. Tavin explains:

In this project, art teachers can position popular culture in a dialogic engagement with everyday experiences in order to understand how certain texts are embedded in and react to specific historical and political situations. The texts can then be understood as both “performing” in culture and being “performed” through active interpretation. Consequently, the art classroom

can become a site of performativity where popular culture is interpreted through ‘citational practices, drawing upon provided cultural signs [and] resignifying them to address the local politics of home.’” [(Morgan, 1998 p. 126) 2003, p. 200]

In other words, Kevin Tavin is convinced that educators can help students re-discover themselves by searching for lively art-based critiques of popular culture. As such, it is presumed that the educator’s role is to help the student gain access to a self that has been lost in the midst of popular culture’s oppression of individuality.

Yet, how is it that the art teacher has regained his/her access to the individuality that popular culture has oppressed in the student? Also [it is hard to imagine that any educator, just because they are, “the art teacher,” would or should lead a search for the self and individuality.](#) To me schools have never seemed particularly well suited for actually exploring one’s self. In fact, for many people in our society the very definition of school is rooted in a commitment to institutionalizing identity.

Some educators as well as non-educators believe schools require a cast of clearly defined traditional characters including principals, teachers, support staff and lastly students. Too many people have a hard time even imagining what a school would be without its typical pre-set structure. Marjorie Wilson (1977) writes about this over reliance on predetermined structure:

At its best, structure is the means by which desirable cultural values and norms are preserved; more often it refers to all that which is deemed orderly, practical and

useful; at its most oppressive, it represents all that regulates and regiments, restrains and represses; all that attempts to fit individuals into a common mold; all that produces conformity and anonymity. (p. 4)

It is impossible to conduct a search for individuality or the self in any environment that privileges conformity and anonymity. Perhaps its not just mass mediated popular culture that represses the individual; schools with their obsessive devotion to class periods, bells, schedules, adherence to the rules, examinations, planned activities, grades, structured “play,” determined roles, finite relationships, and non-ambiguous identities might be another important cause for the death of the individual. Schools appear to be too neat, pristine and clearly laid-out. Concepts in education are presented to the student as if they precede the student. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, in school even our gender-specific behaviors and then the redefinition of more appropriate gendered behaviors is describe before and for us. The pre-determined structure of the school characterizes, transcribes and alters our “personal” narratives and then forces our bodies to fit these constructed stories.

In re-thinking more dynamic strategies for including the students’ bodies within teaching, Wilson (1977) recommends that we critique our relationship to anti-structure as well as school structure. She explains,

With the great amount of emphasis in the school being placed upon the vessel (structure), too little seems to be given to the space within (anti-structure). Such being the case, the problem is that educators look at only one half of the factors that affect educational outcomes. We know that

outside of the restrictions that one encounters in the school—the rules, the schedules, the bells—anti-structure is where rules may be bent, opinions voiced, schedules subverted and alliances formed. We know that without the vessel, there is no space within and no space within exists without the forming of the vessel...It would seem that if education is to be more effective, the other half of the factors which influence educational outcomes [anti-structure] must bear closer examination. (p. 7)

I have chosen to observe conversations as a way of beginning to understand how the interactions of students, teachers, and individuals outside of the school influence the “forming of the [classroom] vessel” (p. 7). And, [understanding our conversations requires an examination of the relationship between our histories and experiences outside and inside of the classroom.](#)

However, Wilson’s critiques of the necessary focus on anti-structure as well as any attempt to mix the outside with the inside of a classroom are not an easily accepted in most “school lessons.” I have found that within the walls of a school individuals are required to keep their connections to home, family, community, and each other at a safe distance. In school, all individuals are recognized first as students, teachers, or administrators, and secondly as people. School propaganda speaks as if identity construction is a democratic process open for everyone’s “equal” participation. Yet, like a theatre marquee that promises “The World’s Greatest Extravaganza,” this propaganda never delivers. There is a wide spread belief that schools, especially those in our country, are open for individuals to be

whomever they want. The idea that critical pedagogy can help shape each student's personal experiences is speculation. Reading critical pedagogy alone encourages teachers and student to take on the search for empowerment without requiring the real incorporation of personal histories and the complex social identities of particular individuals. Schools, not unlike other social organizations, are composed of groups of individuals acting in various *roles*. The anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) called the complex matrix of inner actions between the roles of a social organization, its "social structure."

There is no imperative for encouraging an art teacher to "position" him or herself within the context of the life of a student. The work of an art teacher must fit appropriately within the social structure of the school. Then if given the permission, students will fit the teacher and social structure of the school into their own lives.

### **Queering Knowledge: Seeing "as" Performance**

"Seeing" as performance requires that an individual's behavior be critiqued, but not as bi-products of a structure or as the resulting effects of positive or negative forces in an experience. The behaviors being critiqued "as" performance are simply examined as a collection of events that are followed by other events. I am looking only at the interactive that is performative, effects of my experiences. Here, John McKenzie's (2001) considerations of performance and performatives might be useful:

On the level of performances and performatives—performances are territorializations of flows and unformed matters into visible bodies, while performatives are the simultaneous encoding of these bodies into articulable subjects and objects. (p. 219)

It is important to understand that a performance is action while performatives are interactions observed during performances.

McKenzie believes that performance and performatives are the materialization of behavior that makes the actions of a behavior visible. In this study the activity of the art classroom is characterized into patterns of visible actions (performances) in order to make apparent performatives—the expressions of articulable subjects and objects created during interactions with learning. In my curriculum research, learning is demonstrated through the understanding of the interrelations created when students and teachers enter each other's performances.

Framing behavior “as” performance encourages a search into the act itself as the primary unit of analysis. This act can be thought of as a happening that is related or unrelated to other events in the classroom. This study is an investigation into the beginning, middle, and end of such events. Using “as” performance as the frame of analysis raises questions into how a particular behavior is a response to other behaviors. It also pushes us to consider how sequences of behavior can be edited and juxtaposed with other sequences of behavior. We are compelled to ask: what happens after the event? Who was present? How did those present participate? Or what new performance might be created in response to this event?

Like the viewers of Dee's “new” television commercial, when a reader is directly addressed a queer destabilization occurs, and a process of re-identification is initiated.

Then, a critique of “positionality” becomes the reader’s primary focus. To repeat Luhmann’s (1998) idea of queer pedagogy, these critiques generate questions not about what and how the author writes but instead what the reader understands. As such during a queer social critique, reading becomes a type of writing performance.

This leads me to ask, what if writing was examined “as” performance? Would it become known as one in a series of events? We could look for particular participants who are doing certain behaviors during this event of writing. And what about the event of reading? Of course it too could be looked at “as” performance. Finally, what about the text itself? How does the work of a text “work?” Could it be considered performance?

Using Richard Schechner’s (1990, 2002) notions of performance I am encouraged to ask how does a text work? However, to even entertain this line of thought, I must accept that the uniqueness of a text is not in its “materiality” but its “interactivity.” For example, by accepting the importance of the interactivity of Dee’s text, she is able to simply re-arrange the showing of dozens of pre-existing television commercials in order to re-tell her story. The uniqueness of each commercial is only understood in its interaction with each viewer.

In Performance Studies: An introduction (2002) Schechner very poignantly explains that the performance of a work is not in the physical arrangement of its form but in the ways that the work “works” with the other things. Schechner writes,

A painting “takes place” in the physical object; a novel takes place in the words. But a performance (even of a painting or novel, when treated “as”

performance) takes place only in action interaction, and relation. Performance isn't "in" anything, but "between"...To treat any object, work, or product "as" performance – a painting, a novel, a shoe, [Wal\*Mart commercial] or anything at all – means to investigate what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or being, and how it relates to other objects or beings. Performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships. (p. 24)

Texts perform and can be easily examined as performance. However, to understand its performance one must see a text "in action." It is the interactivity with the text that becomes known to its readers. In this way, there is a healthy criss-crossing between the events of reading, writing, and re-reading.

### **The Performance of Wreading, A Telewriting Event**

Hypertext theorists, Esa Saarinen and Mark Taylor (1994) believe that with the aid of digital technology and the pervasiveness of mass media in contemporary culture, scholars should consider linking the events of reading and writing. They suggest a brand new hyper-bred form of study called *telewriting*. Telewriting will even change the objectives of scholarship itself. No longer will taxonomy be a means to the end. Reading will become more than protecting and rarifying truth, claims, and knowledge. Educators will be committed to the mixing and intermingling of divergent texts. Here is small part of their description of telewriting:

Telewriting corrupts the modernist search for purity. In the worlds of hypertexts, art forms are not autonomous but overlap without end. Word,

image and sound intersect in the bowels of the machine and are projected in such away that one must read, look and hear simultaneously.

Telewriting is imagoscription. The texts of media philosophy are not figural translations of non-figural concepts but are imaginary inscriptions that do not presuppose the conceptual. In the media, the body becomes an image that is the text (1994, p.6)

In the conceptualization of reading and writing “as” performance there is no separation between the body of the text, the body of the telewriting communicator, and the events that make the perception of these subjects possible. Neither writing nor reading is allowed to lie idle, not even for a process of identification. This is much different than the typical use of communication in education. Finding, ingesting, digesting, and regurgitating objects of language are typically the educator’s oppression.

I however refuse to participate in such an oppressive articulation of subjective. I refuse to ignore the text, myself or how we perform while reading and writing. For this study writing and reading become inaugural occurrences that instantaneously lead to other writing and reading events. The participant of a telewriting performance is pre-occupied by the search for the self *in conversation* with the text. I will be concerned with finding myself *in conversation* with the text of my art classroom activities.

This idea of being *in conversation* with the text is very similar to Schechner’s performance theory, and both of these are closely related to the study of destructing language. During our graduate colloquium (2001) Marjorie Wilson performed a

wonderful introduction to the communicative practice of transformation through the deconstruction of language. One week before the colloquium each participant was given a performance handout. I kept mine. In Table 1 is an excerpt from that handout.

*Table 1*

<p><b>colloque:</b> 1 A place for conversation, 2 A conversation, a conference.</p> <p><b>colloquium:</b> 1 A conversation, a dialogue, 2 A conference; <i>spec.</i> an academic conference or seminar</p> <p><b>text:</b> In <i>Postmodernism</i>, Harvey writes:</p> <p>“Postmodernists tend to accept, also a rather different theory as to what language and communication are all about. Whereas modernists had presupposed that there was a tight and identifiable relation between what was being said (the signified or ‘message’) and how it was being said (the signifier or ‘medium’), poststructuralist thinking sees these as ‘continually breaking apart and re-attaching in new combinations.’ ‘Deconstructionism’ (a movement initiated by Derrida’s reading of Martin Heidegger in the late 1960s) here enters the picture as a powerful stimulus to postmodernist ways of thought. Deconstructionism is less a philosophical position than a way of thinking about and ‘reading’ texts. Writers who create texts or use words do so, on the basis of all the other texts and words they have encountered, while readers deal with them in the same way. Cultural life is then viewed as a series of texts intersecting with other texts, producing more texts (including that of the literary critic, who aims to produce another piece of literature in which texts under consideration are intersecting freely with other texts that happen to have affected his or her thinking). This intertextual weaving has a life of its own. Whatever we write conveys meanings we do not or could not possibly intend, and our words cannot say what we mean. It is vain to try and master a text because the perpetual interweaving of texts and meaning is beyond our control. Language works through us. Recognizing that, the deconstructionist impulse is to look inside our text for another, dissolve one text into another, or build on text into another...”</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> In this sense, we might broadly define reading, as George Landow has proposed, as “wreading”—the “w” refers to reading’s handmaiden, writing—wherein the reading also becomes a writing.</p> <p>When we are asked to read articles for colloquium, we—both presenters and those engaged in the conversation with the presenters and the text—are asked to engage with the reading, to problematize, to question, to deconstruct, to otherwise write, as Barthes has said “the text of the work into the text of our lives.”</p>
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Excerpt, *an invitation to a conversation*, performance handout, Wilson, 2001

It is through “wreading” that meaning is made. Wreading is the search for understanding through performance of communication—it is not simply about knowing “what to say.”

Wreading dissects the process by which messages are heard by some and are rendered inaudible to others. The liminal space of character, context, expression, place, perspective, and perceptions also play important roles in communicative practices like wreading. The way a message is performed, by all its participants, influences the quality of its interpretation as well as the understanding of its content or form. “Color is not incidental to message. If I say the “same” words in different tones, their meaning is transformed. Tone changes substance” (Saarinen & Taylor, 1994, p. 6).

For the remainder of this study I will consider the act of interpretation to be linked to the performance of deconstruction that is initiated by a process of wreading. Conceptualizing wreading as a deconstructive performance puts liminal conditions on meanings of the subjects being wreaded. And, this process is quite appropriate for understanding stories about performance art. Performance art highlights the events of wreading that make multiple points of interpretation possible. Through an engagement with this art form the “reader” or “viewer” is forced to consider their position *in conversation* with its text. Like no other practice, performance art makes use of the bridge between the text being observed and the self. It allows individuals to practice wreading themselves into the work.

### Theory, the Performance of Specificity

In the communicative practice of transformation there is a tendency to move towards theorization as a guide for routine action. Daily activity is theorized through our understanding of what has happened in the past. Theory “situates its movement within a matrix of sociotechnical and onto-historical forces, while also allowing it to deviate itself into idiosyncratic passages of experience, something that can only be done with immanent partiality and detachment: one’s own past in the unfolding machination of generalization” (Mckenzie, 2001, p. 20). When individuals make texts of any form they are creating images of or from their body as it is situated at one particular moment in time. Theorization is the articulation of the way a body is *known* at one particular site. Theory is the communication of a tremor in the absoluteness of an individual’s knowledge. Despite popular opinion, theory is not separated from what individuals do, and it must be queerly included within the context of its making. It is impossible to conceive or execute if there is “no place” to theorize. Theory can only be employed within the context of its own conceptualization. All other uses of theory are wholly implausible. All other uses of theory are not theory but speculation.

Speculation is very broad and non-specific while theorization is always direct and very specific. Here once again there is an importance to the position of author and reader because theory is “the imprint that an author leaves on his or her text” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 12). Theorization is a matter of differentiation; it entertains unique points of view. What *is* occurring and what *has* happened must be understood in relation to what *will*

happen. The uncertainty of this performative process can be very discomfoting. What is my role as an educator if individuals gain understanding via their unique processes of theorization? What really can educators teach?

In reply, Western scholars have generally paid more attention to the “show” of knowledge. Many curriculum researchers are more concerned with “telling” what they know about education rather than theorizing about what *is* occurring around them. Because the future is unpredictable and behavior is impossible to affirm, the “modeling” of ideal human interactions has become an acceptable research outcome. Some curriculum research strives to create a standard of behavior based on the most efficient, safe, and economic ways of being and a universal way of thinking about the teacher-student relation, and even a school’s performance. Yet it is perhaps impossible to apply a “general” theory of behavior to particular individuals in a school. Derrick Jensen (2004), a writing teacher at Eastern Washington University and at the Pelican Bay State Prison, urges educators to ignore our cultural impulse to universalize everything. He writes that people in our country completely avoid talking and thinking about specificity:

One of the great failings of our culture is the nearly universal belief that there can be anything universal. We as a culture take the same approach to living in Phoenix as in Seattle as in Miami, to the detriment of all of these landscapes. We believe that students can be given standard lesson plans and standard tests, universally applied, to the detriment of all of these students. We turn living wild trees into standardized two-by-fours. We turn living fish into fish sticks. We turn living carrots into carrot sticks. But every carrot is different from every other

carrot. Every fish is different from every other fish. Every tree is different from every other tree. Every student is different from every other student. Every place is different from every other place. If we are ever to remember what it means to be human beings, and if we are ever to hope to begin to live sustainably in place (which is the only way to live sustainably), we will have to remember that specificity is *everything*. It's the only thing we've got. In this moment, I'm not abstractly writing: I'm writing these specific words on this specific bed next to this specific cat. There is nothing apart from the particular. Now, I can certainly generate abstract notions of writing or humanity or cities or nature or the world, but they're not real. What is real is immediate, present, particular, and specific. That's true in life. It's true in writing [and making performance art]. And writing is as good a place as any to start. (p. 60)

### **Performance Art and Specificity**

Specificity is almost essential in discovering a performative engagement with art. For example in Adrian Piper's work she uses a specific call to shake her views out of the "hypocrisy and self-serving rationalization by which we now justify the continuation of our personal habits of racism and sexism, while espousing abstract indignation at institutional ones (gestures of racism and sexism at sites like school, church and the family)" (1990, p. 289). Piper believes what is real about the performance of racism is "immediate, present, particular, and *specific*." (My emphasis) She insists that the object called institutional racism is merely individual interpersonal manifestations (or performances) of racism. Piper writes that these interpersonal racist "performances" are,

“the off-color remark, the anxiety at the mere presence of an ethnic and cultural other, the failure of empathy with an other that causes insensitivity, the failure of imagination and self-awareness that elicits the imposition of inappropriate stereotypes and xenophobic behavior in response to them” (p. 287).

Piper launches her work exclusively within the context of individual interpersonal transactions. One reason that she does this is because she believes that it is within these small interpersonal exchanges that “blacks learn from whites that they are unwelcome in mainstream society” (1990, p. 287). Because it must be about interpersonalization, Piper’s work is “very personal.” Piper queers us. Her address is about her as well as all the participants of the work. How might you “re-position” yourself upon receiving “My Calling (Card) No. 1” (p. 295) at your next social outing? Here’s a copy of the text from this “reactive guerrilla performance for dinner or cocktail parties:”

Dear Friend,

I am black.

I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this when they do.

I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.

Sincerely your,  
Adrian Margaret Smith Piper

Reproduction, *My Calling (Card) No. 2*, reactive guerrilla performance, Adrian Piper, 1986-present, *Table 2*

### **Art Education and the Absence of Specificity**

I have gone into such detail explaining one of Adrian Piper's use of specificity because I wonder if specificity plays any role in art education. Right now, it does not because in art education we are often trained to rely on pre-written scripts. Scripts about teaching that are based on stories of general actions that hypothetically might take place. These scripts become demonstrations of what teachers "generally" can or cannot do in an art classroom. In his article about encouraging art education students to study the growing trend of using everyday life and environmental issues in the development of art lessons, Don Krug insists that students will better understand the dynamic nature of diverse social perspectives by being shown the metaphor of a flowing stream. He explains that like the currents of a stream, perspectives of individuals are always moving and shifting:

From the many perspectives that different people hold, no one current (or perspective) ever quite dries up and its residual effect occasionally reappears. When the weather or conditions are suitable, a weaker or less powerful point of view might emerge and assume more force and prominence only to decline when conditions particularly conducive to its new found strength no longer prevail (2004, p. 188).

So what? As intriguing as the dynamic metaphor of a flowing stream might be, simply making an observation about it does not automatically help students to understand behaviors or perspectives. Just because a stream is part of nature and the perspectives of art educators are constantly shifting, the behaviors of students cannot be "naturalized" by employing the analogy of the rushing stream. Like any metaphor, the relationship

between research perspectives and a stream must be talked about, argued, and contested. Just observing the patterns of a stream and the general behaviors of art educators will not “spark” theories that can be exchanged in conversation. And, without theorization we are unable to explore our relationships to teaching, routines in everyday life, art, or other metaphors. There is nothing natural, spontaneous, automatic, or uncritical to be observed in the behaviors of art education researchers or the appreciation of a stream. In teaching about art education, as in teaching writing or creatively exploring performances of racism, we must entertain conversations that engage theories about *specificity*. We must discuss how actual people learn to see themselves and others differently through specific interactions in the world.

### **Do People *Simply* Learn from the Performance of Teaching**

So, what is learning? Carl Rogers believes it has nothing to do with teaching. Here is a confession that he makes on the separation between learning and his teaching:

When I try to teach, as I do sometimes, I am appalled by the results, which seem a little more than consequential, because sometimes the teaching seems to succeed. When this happens I find that the results are damaging. It seems to cause the individual to distrust his [or her] own experience, and to stifle significant learning. Hence I have come to feel that the outcomes of teaching are either unimportant or hurtful (1977, p. 276)

If learning is not the automatic result of teaching, then where does learning happen? What can the curriculum researcher teach the teacher? In writing this paper, I have come to believe that learning is risk taking. It is a process of coping with the uncertainty of perception and feelings of estrangement. The teacher does not play a “primary” role in

the learning process, and neither does the curriculum researcher. Learning must directly involve the individual who is its subject, the learner. Learning is a response to phenomena in the life of the learner. Learning is very much like a conversation with your self. At the very beginning of this Chapter I wrote that while watching *Angles in America* and *Adaptation* I was thinking about my identity. While this observation is not in itself a demonstration of learning, it is the beginning of a learning event for me. The learner is the one who generates its dialogue, the learner raises the questions for that dialogue, the learner creates perceptions, reconsiders ideas, and communicates new understandings from that dialogue. It is a popular misconception that classrooms are simply places where individuals learn while others teach. Instead of assuming that we are “providing” learning, both the art educator and curriculum researcher might ask, “What is it I that have been doing?”

In an extensive survey (1997) of elementary schools, Christine Thompson observed that the job of the art teacher has changed “remarkably little from the first teaching position I assumed twenty years ago.” For many years educators have assumed that what happens in the art classroom can simply be called “art.” Teachers exchange lesson plans as if they were recipes for the successful preparation of art, and learning was simply assumed to be taking place.

In her survey Thompson includes the observations of all sorts of educators who teach art. At one point she quotes an interesting comment made by a student-teacher. This young educator states that she was disappointed in her supervisor’s approach to teaching art,

“My teacher was very good—great in fact—in every respect. But art always had to be so structured—ladybugs had to have two black eyes and they had to be placed just so. I ended up spending the whole semester cutting *things* out of construction paper” (p. 16). The student-teacher goes on to explain that she believes this is a typical elementary educator’s approach to teaching art.

Does teaching art to children require an affinity for construction paper? What if, like myself, a teacher can’t cut a straight line? Uncritical notions about the performance of learning lead to repetitive predictable routines for teaching art. And, it is the predictable “recipe routines” of the classroom make the act of art teaching either “unimportant or hurtful.” (Rogers, 1977)

### **Polite Conversation, A Lifeless Dialogue**

Lifeless dialogues are created by inquiries that have nothing directly to do with the lives of their participants. In such dialogues it doesn’t matter what is being said, because it also doesn’t matter who is talking or who is or is not listening. These encounters are dull and unmoving exchanges between bodies interacting in contexts (such as the home, the church, the art classroom) that are assumed to be neutral, permanent and of no consequence to the individuals who are communicating. The contexts for these social settings are thought to be constant, so the social roles of individuals interacting within them are assumed fixed and taken for granted as natural. In the ART CLASSROOM it is assumed that individuals are or are not behaving simply as students or teachers.

A friend and philosophy professor, Alphonso Lingis, insists that we should critique these lifeless exchanges between absent bodies that are so common in “polite society.” In his best selling philosophical treatise, *Abuse*, (1994) Lingis writes about his worldwide search for beauty, lust, and desire beneath the ruins of capitalism and the crushing weight of global patriarchy. He speaks of the specifics in particular engagements with the Other. Elegantly, Lingis travels from his position *in conversation* to theories about the performance of standard routines in his everyday life. One passage called *Antarctic Summer* begins with the narrator standing on the deck of a cruise ship watching “sea swallows careen in the wake of the ship advancing across Drake Passage.” (p. 91)

The passengers ask me to identify myself, situate myself; they situate themselves for me. This one lives in Z, does Y, is sustained by spouse N and kin NN, is making this trip motivated by X. These benchmarks are so many *garde-fous* to cling onto in case of a fall. I sense them turning me into a prop in future narratives: There was even this state university philosopher on the ship! He said the unlived life is not worth examining. They know, as I do, that time is sweeping us all away; we could do a cruise tryst that would make a fine narrative for later. But I think of encounters where one did not even tell one’s name, but held nothing back from trust and craving and pleasure, and that will never turn up as stories told later. (p. 91)

Curiosity about the subjects of conversation is entirely absent from the exchange between Lingis’ narrator and the other passengers. Their words are not important. None of their behavior really matters. These characters are “acting” in a script of polite conversation.

They do not want to know anything that does not already matter: anything that is not already scripted and determined. All that matters to these individuals is their position or situation in the social structure of things, and of course these structures precede them. Family, school, home, great stories of adventures embarked on by others, all of which exist outside of them and beyond their conversation on the ship's deck. Yet, these conversations are somehow thought to be important because of their location—the deck of a cruise ship. However, nothing really matters, not even the extravagant forms of Antarctic itself.

There is no curiosity found in the currency of this exchange. The words of this conversation are faceless tags anonymously marking the fall of the passage through time. As the narrator says, “An un-lived life is not worth examining.” Why ask any questions or look any closer? Questions of curiosity are utterly unimportant. The concerns of the characters on the cruise are entirely about saying, doing and even thinking the “right thing.” And, of course the “right things” are always those terms that fit appropriately into the structure of scripted social orders that precedes us.

### **Curiosity in Dialogue**

The “polite conversation” on the deck on the cruise ship is an elegant story about saying nothing. There is absolutely no communicative engagement there. A communicative engagement requires a dialogical practice, and dialogical practices are driven not by pre-written orders, but through “an epistemological curiosity about the very elements of the dialogue.” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 382) In other words, for a communicative

engagement to occur there must be a continuous source of curiosity between the self and the other, the subjects and objects of the dialogue. In turn, prior to the conversation, the self and the other can never exactly know where they will be. Positions occupied in a conversation are simply the result of the exchange and acquisition of information.

Information cannot be used to understand anything other than more information itself. The images of information are always incomplete and contradictory because they must be understood with respect to their context. Time, for example, is an element that introduces contradiction into the exchange of information. The information that was clear to the self prior to asking a question is altered not only in lieu of the other's response, but also by time itself—the time before, during, and after the question is shared. Developing an understanding of knowledge and a curiosity for conversation is a discursive act, not a position that one can possess or imitate.

The truth claims of the discursive process can only be discussed during critiques of the performative acquisition of knowledge. To understand a thing one must be *in conversation* with it, and knowing what “to say” is a state that can only be performed through questions generated by curiosity for the object of knowledge. The discursive is a space observed performatively between the self and the other.

### The Performance of Identification

The identities of any self or other, any mis-fit or normalized subject, short acquaintance or long time companion, artist, art object, art genre, art teacher, or student will come to be understood only “by their performances” (Turner in Apple & Schechner, 1990, p. 1). This is because understanding is not an endpoint arrived upon and then detectable to the observer. The observation of understanding is the articulation of subjects and objects that are created within the discursive spaces of knowledge. So, what the observer (a teacher for example) “hears” from the self is actually a selection of expressions of subjects and objects performing different exchanges about theories of knowledge. For the self, as well as the would-be “observer,” the developing of understanding is a result of an act of consummation initiated during the collision between divergent points of view/critique. These diverging ways of thinking have *become known* through the performance of theories of knowledge. They did not exist prior to the engagement of their performance. Hence, the identity of any self or other is never simply seen or shown, told and detected. Identity will *become known* only through performances of identification.

### **Imagology and Identification of the Self**

*“... By their performance shall ye know them”<sup>5</sup>*

Before one can recognize him or herself, the body of this self must be presented and observable. The various social positionalities that are both occupied by and beyond the approach of this body must be identifiable. Even a mis-fit, for example must be aware of his or her relationship to the dominant structure, which he/she does not fit. However, speaking of and articulating an appreciation for the awareness of their performance of identity can be difficult if not impossible for individuals.

Who is the mis-fitted self? Who is the normal self? Could we make a log of the travels of these bodies? In the art classroom, could a map be created documenting the movements of bodies? What about using a mirror? How do we know what this self, or any other, looks like? Could we gather images and put them into a composite of a self? Perhaps we could stare for long periods of time into a bathroom mirror. Would we discover impressions that we could label “mis-fitted” or “normal selves?”

Of course, if undertaken all these attempts to locate a self would be the mere reflections of a self caught in one instant gaze. They would not be embodied references to any particular self; they would simply be pictures of a body. There is nothing wrong with pictures, paintings or images of a body. By themselves however they are nothing more than what they are—pictures, painting, and images.

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<sup>5</sup> “So began a short statement written by Victor Turner in the December 1980 addressed to the planning committee for the upcoming series of conferences on ritual and theatre held in 1981 and 1982 in Arizona and New York.” (Appel & Schechner, 1990 p. 1)

Artists deal primarily with the re-ordering of images. In my performance artwork, for example, I re-order the fragments of conversations that I overhear or document in everyday life. These bits and pieces of language are added to the written texts which make-up the body of a performance. I once performed recordings of myself saying the word “Hello” on thirty different audio tracks played simultaneously while sung live into a microphone.

Artists might be called “imagologists;” a term coined by the media philosophers Esa Saarinen and Mark Taylor (1994). They wrote, “The imagologist can only figure through figures. Images are not merely the object of study but are also the medium of thought, action and communication”(p.8 – 9). The question is not what, where, or how has an image of the self been gathered. Instead, for artists the important question is: how might an image of the self be *used* in understanding the relationship between it, the body of its subject, and the context for the performance of its display. What is the image? What was its meaning where it was found? How does it function performatively in the performance of making meaning right here, right now?

The methods of making art that are suggested in the beginning of this section are useless in helping the individual to locate oneself. Art teachers typically require their students to make illustrations of themselves and do exercises about learning to simply “see” themselves. However, these typical productions of art do not reveal any understanding of relationship between the self and the other. These are *just* pictures, perhaps pretty, but nothing more.

### ***Who am I: Paul Marco Stares at Himself***

One scene of the movie musical *A Chorus Line*<sup>6</sup> (1985), opens with a young effeminate, male Puerto Rican staring hopelessly at a picture of himself. He is gay, but hiding it. He is also trying to pass for Italian. (Paul San Marco is his stage name. And, Ephrain Ramirez is his family name.) The character is waiting for his turn to stand on his “mark” in the center of the stage—a taped line on the stage floor—to tell the director *about* himself.

In a dry monotone voice from the center of a dark and empty theatre house, the director speaks into a microphone to instruct the group of auditioning performers, “Starting from stage right, step forward. Tell me your real name, your stage name if it’s different; where you were born and, how old you are” (Attenborough, 1985).

In the wings, softly, Paul Marco begins to sing a melancholic ballad about insecurities, the inability to identify himself, and not fitting in. “Who am I anyway / Am I my resume / That is a picture of a person I don’t know / What does he want from me / What should I try to be / So many faces all around and here we go / I need this job / Oh god, I need this show” (Attenborough, 1985).

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<sup>6</sup> The musical was written and conceived in large part by Nicholas Dante, a gay Puerto Rican musical theatre actor who died without getting due credit for his accomplishment on this piece. Nicholas Dante, an Italian stage name, shared the writing credits with James Kirkwood. Michael Bennett was proclaimed to be the sole creative genius, choreographer and director of the *A Chorus Line*. The musical ran on Broadway for over twenty five years, and Bennett and Kirkwood went on to be wildly famous following this production. On the other hand, Dante had trouble gaining any interest in his other scripts or screen plays. He died in relative obscurity. (Sanchez, 1999)

The process of self-discovery undertaken by the character in the musical—staring hopelessly at a picture of himself while singing to himself—will only generate more images of other selves. No understanding will be gained, only more information. The gathering of information cannot lead to knowledge. And even if it could, knowledge exchanged with it self has nothing to offer to the process of gaining understanding. Like learning, understanding occurs when an individual applies and enacts theories of being the world. “Information is not knowledge; knowledge is not understanding. How can we create understanding in a world in which information and knowledge are out of control” (Saarinen & Taylor 1994, p.12). I believe that we just have too many “pictures” of ourselves and not enough experiences performing ourselves.

Later in the song Paul Marco sings, “so many faces all around and here we go.” But where is he (or any of the other actors) “going?” Everyone has a headshot, and everyone wants the job, or more poignantly the “role.” Yet, in the proliferation of so many headshots is there room for the embodiment of any individual’s particular stories, desires, or ambitions? And how is the relationship between any individual’s story and their desire for the job/role articulated?

The challenge of imagologies is to transform institutional technologies dedicated to the production of information that is non-knowledge, into institutional technologies dedicated to the production of knowledge that advances understanding. Understanding presupposes information and knowledge but information and knowledge less and less lead to

understanding. Communicative practice transforms the information and knowledge of *simcult*<sup>7</sup> into a new understanding that is transformative.

(Saarinen & Taylor, 1994, p. 12)

Saarinen & Taylor's analysis of the relationship between information, knowledge, and understanding is based on Jean Baudrillard's critique of the culture of the simulacrum. The media philosophers refer to the simulacrum as the *simcult*.

Saarinen & Taylor explain that here in the *simcult* the proliferation of mass media has spawned the reading of images as information. The headshot of Paul Marco is supposed to "represent" not only the dancer, but also "information" that the director can use in evaluating the dancer's performance. However, the information transmitted in this headshot is only relative to the stack of eight hundred headshots on the director's desk.

### **Social Roles, Masking Identity and the Inability to Perform**

In the musical, as in real life, most male dancers on Broadway appear to be white, heterosexual, young, middle class, American, and very masculine. This is "information" that Paul knows. Therefore, he decides that it would be more profitable to be presented on stage as well as in his photograph as a "good" Anglo-American, sexually ambiguous, well cultured, self-assured, determinately masculine male dancer. The character in *A*

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<sup>7</sup> *Simcult* refers to Jean Baudrillard's idea of a culture constructed on the proliferation and acceptance of images as the determination of reality. He once wrote a critique of America as a culture of simulacrum. Las Vegas was the agent of the focus of this critique.

I find Esa Saarinen's observations about the tendency of American student to become offended at this label quite telling. In an email correspondence re-printed in *Imagologies*, Saarinen writes, "Baudrillard's book is a collection of snapshots, self-assured and strong, superficial and brilliant, objectifying and image-bound, ultra-quick and bigger-than-life. Baudrillard treats America like America treats everything, yet for may of your students the book seemed something like an offense...Perhaps this is because you cannot be dissociated from your body and your social history. Nor can you escape the bombardment of the images produced by your local simulacrum industry" (1994, p. 7).

*Chorus Line* is taking *proactive* measures within the culture of the simcult to show his “best” or most profitable side. And in the face of the racist, sexist, class-conscious universalizing culture of Broadway (and the simcult in general), Paul Marco’s decision to hide his mis-fitted self seems completely understandable and perhaps even wise.

In the cast of *A Chorus Line* and other musicals non-white delegates are represented on Broadway (as well as in the simcult), but “Their participation is more for reasons of tokenism. Their characters do not develop and they are not essential to the dramatic component and development of the action in any significant meaning making process” (Sanchez, 1999, p. 90). Non-white characters have no bearing on the terms that define any aspects of the simcult, including the meaning of the plot of a Broadway musical.

Yet, what meaning might the audience make of Paul’s song? The “theatrical” representation of Paul’s re-examination of the *self* is only one more “second look” at the static, unchanging image of an ideal self. This re-examination cannot lead to a self-defining discovery because it is a response to a call or *demand* from the other, a white heterosexual male. The questions for “Paul’s” examination were inspired or *provoked* by the other. Therefore, Paul really cannot, even if he weren’t a fictional character, claim this re-examination as an act of self-discovery. And even if he did ask these questions of himself—who am I—it would not lead to the development of any understanding of the self. Paul would merely be gathering more information as he stares at the headshot.

The “category crisis”<sup>8</sup> that is provoked by the command of the other—the male white heterosexual director—to reveal the self is a question of the relationship between Paul Marco’s “white representation” in the simcult and the truth of being white. Information is being critiqued by more information in hopes of gaining knowledge about the truth of universal representations. The director (and even Paul himself) might be asking if Paul’s picture appears to be a white person, then what about the other pictures of white people? How will any of us know what picture of white representation is the “truth” and can be universalized?

Any understanding beyond the picture is not an option and probably not important to any of the “actors” involved. Being white or not being white affects only the “actors” participation/performance in the market place of the information/images. Living in the simcult forces the individual to ask *who am I* in relation to the collective and universal definition of multiply reproduced images of a dominant self. All individuals survive in the simcult only when they are accepted as the other while passing as a reproduction of the self. In the simcult as in the musical *A Chorus Line*, the self, like “the boy that did not fit in anywhere finds his (its) place in the act of *performing* the story of his life and his marginality.” (Sanchez, 1999 p. 98) Paul Marco is expected to “perform” like any other “white” musical theatre actor who is slightly (not “queerly”) “different.”

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<sup>8</sup> In his endnotes, Alberto Sandoval-Sanchez includes a poignant definition of “category crisis.” Marjorie Garber discusses “category crisis” as follows: “Since, as I will argue, one of the most consistent and effective functions of the transvestite in culture is to indicate the place of what I call ‘category crisis,’ disrupting and calling attention to cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances, there has been, no attempt here to produce a seamless historical narrative of the ‘development’ of the transvestite figure—indeed, as will quickly become clear, I regard appropriation of the transvestite as a figure for the development, progress, or a ‘stage of life’ as to a larger extent a refusal to confront the extraordinary power of transvestitism to disrupt, expose, and challenge, putting in question the very notion of the ‘original’ and stable identity...” (Garber, 1995, p. 16).

Paul's only options is to perform the stereotyping of identity in accord with the simcult's accepted notions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class difference. I wonder then, if Paul is really "performing?"

In the face of the simcult, the difference between Paul, Ephrain, and Nicholas Dante can only be understood by observing the performance of these identities in response to a representation of the self that is generated by dominate culture. Here *difference* is always negotiated with respect to the status quo. I would argue that any of Nicholas Dante's attempts to perform within the roles of Broadway stereotypes can only render identities that are invisible. Again I say, to perform is to resist what is given, what is obvious or what is apparently natural. A performance is an act against what is observed. Even the "performing" of our own life stories is always grounded in the act of resistance.

Nicholas Dante can never be the immediate concrete subject of what he is performing. So, is Nicholas really performing? To perform, Nicholas (and any individual), would have to engage in a direct act of resistance. For this study, the question: is Paul Marco or Nicholas Dante really "performing?" is unimportant. A more useful question is: what do I, the viewer, understand after observing the performances of these invisible identities?

In my work I am investigating how individuals are able to embody or vacate performances of identity. Using performance art I am learning how we are re-positioned queerly inside of ourselves while performing ourselves. Laurie Anderson once wrote that

performance helps her to be in her body “as other people are in their cars” (1997, p. 137). Where will this performance trip take us?

## Chapter Two

### FITTING PERFORMANCE INTO ART EDUCATION

From *Conversation Project #4*



*Details, Conversation Project #4, performance, Gabriel, Jake Hoffman, and Todd McCannon<sup>9</sup>, 2004, Figure 5*

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<sup>9</sup> I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who organized or performed in each of the *Conversation Projects #1-4*. Some of these individuals include Lilly Kalani, Peeter Tammeveski, Ian Bapstiste, Dean Blackstock and the employees at Webster's Bookstore Café in State College, Pa.

A funk rock opera with recovering drug addicts, strippers and performance artists, **Gabriel & Friends** / The Roof is on Fire, **Suzanne Lacy** / Preaching to the Perverted, **Holly Hughes** / Running Fence, **Christo & Jeanne-Claude** / *Naked a gay man theatrically performs his coming-out story, while occasionally sitting on the laps of audience members*, **Tim Miller** / Make a Salad, **Alison Knowles** / *One Year Performance 1980-1981* (Time Piece), **Tehching Hsieh** / Underneath the Arches, **Gilbert and George** / Tapp und Tastkino, (Touch Cinema), **Valie Export** / Cut Piece, **Yoko Ono** / *In his bedroom a man will perform an activity every morning for one month; he will step over an 18-inch stool at the rate of 30 steps per minute*, **Vito Acconci** / 4' 33", **John Cage** / Doris Day and the Dust Bowl, **Joe Goode Performance Company** / Paradox of Praxis I: Sometimes Doing Nothing Lead Something, **Francis Alys** / A black man sells snow balls on a Manhattan street corner, **David Hammons** / *In Los Angeles a man organizes people to build twenty rectangular enclosures of ice*, **Allan Kaprow** / A white woman and Taiwanese man tie themselves together for one year, **Linda Montana and Tehching Hsieh** / *At art schools a gay man gives lectures on the politics of dying with AIDS*, Do Not Doubt the Dangerousness of the 12-Inch-Tall Politician, **David Wojnarowicz** / Jeremy is a Girl, **Gabriel & Friends** / *Activist group stages homosexual kiss-ins in the turn stalls of the New York City subways, at rush hour*, **ACT-UP** / Silence=Equals Death, **Gran Fury and Keith Haring** / *Urban Bush Women*, **Jawole Willa Jo Zollar** / The Homeless Vehicle Project, **Krzysztof Wodiczko** / *A woman becomes the artist in residency for the New York Sanitation Department*, **Mierle Laderman Ukeles** / *A collective of homeless people perform in vacant lots, artist' lofts, and small theaters across the US*, **Los Angeles Poverty Department – The LAPD Inspects America** / *A performance art group performs the physical memories of one man's grandfather working on an assembly line. The grandfather dies one evening at home while the group is performing in Europe*, **Goat Island** / *An illegal alien performs naked. He is painted entirely in green with an American flag draped over his shoulder*, Penn State University, **Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Roberto Sifuentes, Juan Ybarra** / Clit Notes, **Holly Hughes** / The Chicken Show, **Linda Montana** / My Calling (Card) No. 2, **Adrian Piper** / Swimming to Cambodia, **Spalding Gray** / An older black man crawls from Wall Street to Harlem, **William Pope L.** / United States Parts 1 and 2, **Laurie Anderson** / *Overnight a woman has 100 boulders deposited throughout downtown Chicago. On each boulder is commemorative plaque honoring a woman from the city*, **Suzanne Lacy and A Coalition of Chicago Women** / *A block party is organized for an outdoor exhibition of video art by Latino gangs*, **Street-Level Youth Media** / Aztechnology, **Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Roberto Sifuentes** / Hedwig and the Angry Inch, **John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask** / *A man paints cartoon illustrations of male sex on all the walls of Men's bathroom at the New York City Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center*, **Keith Haring** / Funk Lessons: A collaborative experiment in cross-cultural transfusion, **Adrian Piper** / *A black man is taped to a school chair and sits across from an empty chair in a lobby at Penn State University*, Conversation Projects, **Gabriel and Jake Hoffman**

## **Performance, the Body and Moving Beyond Theatre**

In the text, Performing Pedagogy: Toward an art of politics, Charles Garoian (1999) insists performance art is a medium that is very different from the theatrical arts. It is involved directly with the body of the artist and explicitly with their experiences of living in the world. Quoting from Marvin Carlson (1996), Garoian writes:

Performance artists, unlike traditional theatrical performers, “do not base their work upon characters previously created by other artists, but upon their own bodies, their own autobiographies, their own specific experiences in a culture or in the world, made performative by their consciousness of them and the process of displaying them for audiences.

(p. 67)

### **Conversation Project #1-4**

I was taped to chair for over three hours. Actually, the performance itself was only three hours, but it took about twenty minutes to put on and then take off the tape. The performance was constructed in the middle of a huge university ballroom. It was a Saturday morning in the beginning of March 2003. I was a competitor in the Annual Graduate Research Exhibition.

Each competitor in the exhibition was required to set-up a display and talk about their work to strolling visitors. There were over 500 display booths and lots of visitors. All of us were given up to \$75 and a four by eight foot display space.

Cash prizes were promised to the winning displays, but this was not why I re-entered the exhibition. (Four years earlier I had entered, but the night before the opening I dropped out. The artwork that I was creating, a brick wall with an imploded school desk, fell on top of me.) The Research Exhibition was an opportunity to talk with large numbers of people who know nothing about art.

I had never been successful explaining or understanding my work, yet somehow I thought speaking with non-art people would be more helpful. I knew performance art was about learning to see the world and ourselves differently. Yet, even for the sake of an exhibition (or thesis), it is impossible to “write” this idea down. No lecture or power point presentation can adequately explain why I or anyone else has *used* art. I decided not to “explain” but to “do” my work.

Jake Hoffman was the artist who covered me with the tape. He was a former student in a studio and lecture general education course that I taught called *Art 100*. Jake was an art education undergrad interested in sculpture and very good at making things. I was delighted when Jake agreed to help me with the performance.

He started at my feet, and while I sat motionless and in silence on a school chair, Jake stuck thick strips of black duct tape on all parts of my clothed body. When he started taping me, the exhibition hadn't officially opened, but there were dozens of graduate students running everywhere. They were doing last minute

touch ups on their exhibits. I was sitting in front of my exhibition area—the display consisted mainly of posters about a group that I worked with in Grenada. (I am still not sure why these posters were included so do not ask me to explain.) At first no one noticed what Jake and I were doing. But when he began sticking tape to my ankles people immediately stopped, came over, and asked the obvious question, “What are you doing?”

Neither, Jake nor I responded. We had already agreed that while installing and taking down the exhibition both of us would remain silent and expressionless. Jake stayed extremely attentive to his work, stopping often and stepping back to see what direction the “sculpture” was taking. I focused on my breathing and only moved if the position I was in felt uncomfortable. This was very important. After Jake finished taping a part of my body, it had to stay in that pose for the duration of the performance.

I remember Jake being extremely sensitive and very concerned about me. In class he openly shared his thoughts, but we never exchanged too much personal information. He was nice and a very good artist, but he was also a “straight” white male. It just never crossed my mind that Jake could be particularly sensitive<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> In the simcult just as the image of Paul Marco is understood only in relation to the stack of eight hundred headshots sitting on director’s desk, my image of Jake in the classroom was understood in relation to one-dimension representations of straight white guys created mostly by the producers and merchandisers of products for dominant culture. Until the *Conversation Projects* I had no relation with Jake that went beyond the surface of appearances. However, an actual individual straight, white, male or otherwise “is *never* exactly who the film [or their representation] thinks s/he is... [The individual] is never exactly who s/he thinks s/he is either, but we’ll save that one for later” (Ellsworth, 1997 p. 26).

As he worked he would whisper,

“Are you alright? I don’t want to make this too tight. Are you sure that you want to do this? We don’t have to go through with it.”

To each of his questions I would simply respond, “No. Keep going. Maybe you should make it tighter. We don’t want it to come off.”

My eyes were finally the last part of the body to be covered. This first time that we did the performance, covering my eyes freaked me out a little bit. Suddenly I felt so alone and lost. It was so dark. I started having trouble even breathing. My nose was covered (Jake didn’t want to but I insisted), but my mouth was completely open. I could easily breathe through my mouth, but it took a few minutes to figure out where I was and what I was doing. As soon as I realized that the sounds around me seemed more amplified, my attention was drawn to my ears. I started relaxing and breathing normally through my mouth.

Jake placed a second school chair 6-inches in front of me and then stepped back to see what it looked like and to take a few pictures. Immediately people started asking what I was doing. I replied by stating the obvious, “I’m taped to a school chair. Would you like to sit and talk?” From the moment Jake finished taping me there was always someone sitting and talking.

After a while, Jake patted me on the shoulder and said, "I'll be back at 12:30; are you sure that you want me to leave? Earlier we had agreed that Jake would place a tape recorder under my chair and leave me for three hours. (This was the duration of the entire Research Exhibition.)

The tape recorder didn't work, but later I'll tell you what I can recall.

### **Performance Is and Is Not**

As Charles Garoian (1999) explains, performance art re-writes the traditions of theater. Even though magic and suspension of disbelief are primary elements in the work of traditional theater, the actor as well as the audience knows before hand what will "happen." It is understood that a group of people will enter the theater; other people will move across the stage and tell a story, the first group of people will applaud while the other group accepts this applause as a sign of praise. Then everyone leaves the theatre and goes back to their separate homes. Now, in proposing a definition for *happenings* (a precursor to performance art) Michael Kirby (1965) pitches a further revealing explanation of theatre:

In traditional theatre, the performer always functions within a matrix of time, place and character. Indeed, a brief definition of acting as we have traditionally known it might be the creation of, and operation within, this artificial, imaginary, interlocking structure. When an actor steps onstage, he brings with him an intentionally created and consciously possessed world, or matrix, and it is precisely the disparities between this manufactured reality

and the spectators' reality that make the play potentially significant to the audience. (p. 14)

In traditional theater, no matter what story is being told, it is important that members of the audience play their expected roles; they sit, watch and interact with the script as the actors present it. In addition, the primary work of the actor is concerned with following the instructions or guidelines of the script. Hence, there is no direct interaction between the actor and audience. In traditional theatre, indirect interaction mediates what individuals do or observe in the script.

How is performance art different from theatre? Performance art grows precisely at the point where the breakdown in a social structure begins. The location, formation and even implications of a stage, audience, set, backdrop, script, applause, pre-show announcement, program, body of an actor, and sometimes even the presence of human beings themselves are never taken for granted by the performance artist (Carson, 1996; Garoian, 1999; Garoian & Gaudelius, 2001, 2004a, 2004b). Performance art is the physical expression of the postmodern desire to transgress boundaries, collapse conceptual barriers, inter-mix disciplines, and re-arrange accepted social ordering (Schechner, 2002). It is not the creation of a manufactured reality but a shared reality between the artist and audience.

Therefore, a performance artwork by definition must create the rules for its own engagement. Ideally, these rules should be in line with the particular ethic (or set of ethics) that the work seeks to establish. For example, the individuals invited into

*Conversation Project #1-4* had no prior way of “understanding” how to approach the performance. There are no rules for how to engage a man sitting taped to a chair in a public lobby. None of the performances for *Conversation Projects* could be wread by knowing or referencing simply the acceptable, standard, or even anticipated social ordering. All of the participants, including Jake and I, had to rely on guidelines within the performance to structure our interactions. *Conversation Project* was not just a man or a woman sitting on a stage covered completely in tape attached to a chair, or a typical conversation in a lobby, or a protest, commercial advertisement, personal ritual, exercise, demonstration, or acts of overt social defiance. Understanding the project requires wreading ourselves into the meaning the performance itself.

As I stated earlier, performance art uses direct address to psychologically make the viewers feel as if they are a concrete part of the performance. In the *Conversation Projects* viewers of the performances are very aware that their participation—sitting on the chair and talking with me—keeps the performance *happening*. If no one talks to me, I, “the performer,” am unable to perform. This set-up queers the viewer. And, just like Luhmann’s use of queer pedagogy discussed in Chapter One, the queered viewer became concerned with not “what” is the performance but rather what they understood about their engagement.

I wonder, how did this performance (or any work of performance art) maintain such an open yet definite form and shape?

### **Performance and Structure**

To provide a sufficiently open structure and composition, many practitioners of performance art have found it necessary and ultimately very useful to establish guidelines for their actions and engagements. The challenge in creating such works is to establish a set of rules that will “aid” the development of the performance, and not become a script for what will happen. It is easy for any performance artist to create a set of rules or even follow their unspoken intentions, but if the artist only follows these instructions it is like creating a “manufactured reality” not a *performance*. In other words, when performance fails to transgress, collapse, intermix, or re-arrange any aspects of our social structure, the performance is simply *read* as a theater piece.

Many artists have found that engaging creatively with the *structuring* of a performance can be the key to maintaining the intrigue of their work. In the early 1970s artists such as Allan Kaprow, Vito Acconci, Suzanne Lacy, Yoko Ono and Alison Knowles began to understand the importance of creating and communicating ingenious methods for engagement (Molesworth, 2003; Kwon, 2004;). The very process of *structuring a performance* became an essential element in their artwork (Kirby, 1965; Kaprow, 1976; Carlson, 1996; Garoian, 1999; Schechner, 2002; Molesworth, 2003; Kiwon, 2004). By including the rules for engagement within the structure of the performance, the focus of the artist and audience is kept on the shared reality. Having structure keeps the performance from being random and chaotic.

Allan Kaprow (1976) insists that the audience must be part of the structure of a performance. Here he explains:

It would still be theatre if spectators gathered to watch an artist on a television monitor watching herself on a different monitor in another room...It summarizes a kind of sophisticated performance seen in galleries and art lofts, but is structurally similar to others that might appear more conservative in content. Take away the video, take away what the artist is doing, and she could replace these with Shakespeare and gymnastics.

Non-theatrical performance does not begin with an envelope containing an act (the fantasy) and an audience (those affected by the fantasy). By the early 60s the more experimental Happenings and Fluxus events had eliminated not only actors, roles, plots, rehearsal and repeats—the special outgrowths of this twofold division of theatre. They also dispensed with audiences, the single staging area, and time blocks of an hour or so.

...But it *is* difficult not to conventionalize such performance possibilities. What tends to happen is that the performances are referred to by photos and texts presented as art shows in galleries; or the whole situation is brought intact into the gallery, like Duchamp's urinal; or art audiences are taken to them as theatre. The transformed "artification" is the focus; the "cooked" version of non-art, set into a cultural framework, is preferred to its "raw," primary state.

For the majority of artists, art agents and their publics, it is problematical whether it could be otherwise. Most could not sustain enough interest and personal motivation to dispense with the historic forms of legitimization. The framework tells you what it is: a cow in a concert hall is a musician; a cow in a barn is a cow. A man watching the musician-cow is an audience, a man in a cow barn is a farmer. Right? (p. 50)

Playing and re-organizing the framework is exactly how performance art is able to wage its critique for new ways of *knowing* the self, other, and the context for our shared reality. How the audience is engaged defines the performance. If the artist does not play with or re-organize the structure of their performance, then the audience is not invited to wread themselves as part of its structure. In other words, the physical and psychological elements that give form and shape to a performance must be a part of the critique in order for the audience to re-consider their presence as being significant. The audience does not (in fact cannot) wread what the artist does not raise for critique. The audience is able to create their own interpretations of an artwork, but if the artist does not challenge the structure of a work, then the whole set-up of the performance will not be apart of the audience's re-interpretation. Hence, the audience will assume that this work is generally like all other artworks and that they are like all other people.

Structure in performance art is not linear; it does not have predetermined outcomes that have no direct connections to the artist or the subjects. Such work is easy to consume, and perhaps entertaining, but ultimately it has no impact on anyone's understanding of the world in the indexical present. Take the text (by text I mean "work") of advertisements

for example. “Television commercials are 15- or 30-second mini-dramas, exquisite from the technical point of view, emotional and convincing – but ultimately empty except in stimulating the urge to buy. Surfing the internet brings viewers into contact with multiple texts and links, most sporting hyperactive banner ads blinking or beeping for interaction.” (Schechner, 2002, p. 116) When the ad is closed however or the commercial fades from the screen, viewers do not understand themselves or any part of their world differently. The structure of the television is to persuade the viewer to buy where the structure of a performance is intended to engage you, the viewer. Considering how the audience might be included in the re-working of a TV commercial could make the commercial more like performance. In Chapter One, for example, Dee re-arranged the images from dozens of commercials to “create” new meaning from a Wal\*Mart advertisement.

The performance documentation of Vito Acconci’s *Step Piece* (1970) is an excellent example of a “raw” work of art that embodies the rules for its engagement as a literal part of its construction. When reading Table 3, the reprinted documentation of Acconci’s performance *Step Piece*, notice how he is trying not to take any aspects of participation with the work for granted, especially the time for its “viewing.”

Table 3

**Vito Acconci**

STEP PIECE (STEPS: STEPPING-OFF PLACE)

**Apartment 6B, 102 Christopher Street, New York City.  
February 1-28, 1970; continuing thereafter, indefinitely, every day in  
alternate months.**

*8AM each day.*

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- An 18-inch stool has been set up in my apartment and is being used as a step.
- Each morning, during the designated months, I step up and down the stool at the rate of 30 steps a minute; each time, the activity lasts as long as I can perform it without stopping.
- At the end of each performance-month, a chart will be sent out – noting the results of the repeated activity, the course of changes in duration.
- There will be a month's layoff, after each performance-month, before the next series of performances.

(The public can see the activity performed, in my apartment, any morning during the performance-months.

Whenever I cannot be home, I will attempt to perform the Activity wherever I happen to be.)

(Molesworth, 2003, p. 107)

Here in Table 4, notice the rules that Jake and I established prior to our performance of *Conversation Project #1*. We were trying to consider how the audience might participate before, during, and after the performance.

*Table 4*

**Gabriel & Jake Hoffman**

*Conversation Project #1*

**Rules & Guidelines, Conversation Project #1**

- Jake and Gabriel agreed to meet Saturday around 7:30 am in their art studio classroom. At that time they will start carrying all the supplies to the student union – the location of the Graduate Research Exhibition. Here's the supply list:

Five large rolls of black duct tape / one stocking cap / one roll of Scotch tape / two school chairs / two empty boxes / three extension cords / a TV with VCR / two pairs of scissors / several posters of CCDRE<sup>11</sup> / an unedited videotape of CCDRE's research in Grenada / CCDRE brochures / copies of an open letter to: University Students, Faculty, Staff, Friends and Neighbors.

- After each of the objects have been placed (30 minutes prior to exhibition's opening), Gabriel will sit in front of their research display on a school chair.

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<sup>11</sup> CCDRE is short for the Committee for Community Directed Research and Education. This is one of several organizations that I work with which fosters political empowerment through community directed research.

- Without saying a word or showing any visible expression, Jake will immediately begin taping Gabriel to the school chair. He will start at Gabriel's feet and work his way up the body.
- Gabriel will not speak to Jake unless there are physical problems with the tape or the way that he is sitting. Jake will not stop until Gabriel is completely covered with tape and securely fastened to the school chair. The mouth will be the only portion of Gabriel's body that will remain exposed.
- Before leaving Jake will place the second school chair about 6-inches in front of Gabriel. It will be facing him.
- Jake will return at 12:30 pm. This is approximately three hours after taping Gabriel to the chair and 30-minutes before the official close of the Graduate Research Exhibition.
- Upon returning Jake will pick-up a pair of scissors and begin cutting Gabriel out of the tape. (For the entire performance two pairs of scissors will be displayed open on a box with brochures and copies of the open letter.) It should take roughly 30 minutes for Jake to cut away all the tape and then each of them will pack-up and leave the exhibition. This will all be done without saying a word.

In the structuring of *Conversation Project*, was their room to consider how the audience and each of the performers might interact? After the performance did Jake or I discuss our participation? Were audience members interested in discussing their participation? What was being transcended and who was being transformed in this *Conversation Project*? Are transcending and transforming important parts of a performance? What makes a work “work?”

### **Transformation in Art**

We can liberate ourselves and others only by forging in resistance identities that transcend narrowly defined limits. Art constitutes one of the rare locations where acts of transcendence can take place and have a wide-ranging transformative impact...experiencing art can enhance our understanding of what it means to live as free subjects in an unfree world.

(hooks, 1995, p. 8)

### **This is to Scare You**<sup>12</sup>

If, as one of my graduate advisors is also fond of asking, art can be the site of “transcendence” and if art has the ability to have “transformative impacts,” then how does this happen? Another question we might ask: what or who is being transcended?

And of course: when has a transformative impact occurred?

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<sup>12</sup> My next four chapter subtitles were also the titles of posters done by Gran Fury from 1988-1989. Gran Fury was a group of AIDS activists that used many forms of visual media to protest the public silence around the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s. These four posters are typical examples of Gran Fury’s work. One of these posters is an ordinary snap from an anti-gay demonstration, a piece of pornographic imaginary, the recognizable image and text from a pre-existing public service announcement, and the image and caption from mass media news source. Reproductions of these four posters can be seen in *Reimagining America: The arts of social change* (1990) page 265-268.

Gran Fury, an anonymous group of artists-activists, “collective of AIDS activists opposing government and social institutions that make those living with AIDS invisible” came together not to answer the questions of art, transcendence, transformation and impact but to energetically engage with their *call*. (Little & O’Brien, 1990, p. 264) This collective of artist-activists gathered regularly throughout the eighties (and perhaps still does today) to conceive, to construct, and to execute “visual projects... (and) to inform a broad audience and provoke direct action to end the AIDS crisis.” (p. 264). Certainly the art of Gran Fury was a site for provocation as well as change. They executed well-crafted and highly effective *visual* campaigns against the U. S. government’s public policy of silence and denial about AIDS. This small group of artist-activists (some say as few as twelve individuals) was able create a huge number of visual projects that included a wildly diverse range of media, sites for installations, funding strategies, focal topics, and target outcomes. How did this happen?

### **This is to Inform You**

In their compelling and quite poignant mission statement the anonymous members of Gran Fury leave a possible hint as to why this work was able to transform symbols of fear and hatred about homosexuality into rallies for public action on AIDS. The organization combined an array of art mediums and a wide range of community locations to create artwork that were loud public forums. In part of Gran Fury’s mission statement, it is clearly that their intent is to directly transform how individuals in communities engage the problems of AIDS:

Gran Fury recognizes that “direct action” and “culture activism” are expressions of different communities’ differing needs, and this process can range from poster projects to street demonstrations to free needle exchange to peer education. We consistently attempt to situate our work in the “public realm” in an effort to include a diverse, non-homogenous audience. (Little & O’Brien, 1990, p. 264)

Gran Fury is speaking explicitly about a commitment to 1) breaking down boundaries created by particular aspects of the social ordering 2) breaking these boundaries down through direct engagement 3) opening-up their entire working process to include whatever practice is necessary (i.e. making poster, demonstration, needle exchange, peer education) 4) appreciating and understanding of their work in context with their audience (in the “public realm”). Like postmodernist theorists and performance artists from the early 1970s, my *Conversation Projects #1-4* and Gran Fury’s works are aiming to collapse and transgress those social barriers that are taken for granted and assumed to be “natural.”

### **This is to Enrage You**

Table 5 is a copy of the open letter to public that was placed on a podium beside me while I was taped to a school chair in the lobby of the Kern Building at the Pennsylvania State University, main campus. It is interesting that Kern is also the location of our Graduate School.

*Conversation Project #4: The open letter.*

March 4, 2004

Dear University Students, Faculty, Staff, Friends and Neighbors;

This is a performance art project concerning me in conversation. More specifically, it is about the absence of me, the abstention of my body during the act of speech.

I speak, but far too often the weight and history of those experiences that characterize the relationship between my body and you are not considered. I am not present in my talk.

As a PhD student in the Art Education Department at Penn State, my dissertation work involves building a community-based performance called *The Purple Door: A performance staged as a party*.<sup>13</sup> I also work with several organizations that explore issues of political empowerment through community directed research. The group that I am most closely associated with is called the Committee for Community Directed Research and Education or CCDRE.<sup>14</sup> I speak, and I work in State College. Yet, am I present?

I teach a course at the University on the use of art for elementary school teachers as well as an elective course, *Art 100: Concepts and Creations in the Visual Arts*. I also work closely with artists and many creative thinkers throughout State College and the surrounding area. In my work, what history do I bring to the words that I use? What will happen to me after or during this talk? Where are the black spaces between this work, my words, and you? In the face of these black spaces what is the relationship of our bodies to one another? What are you doing? Would you have time to talk?

This performance piece is titled, *Conversation Project #4*. It was inspired by the work of two undergraduate students. During the Art 100 course in the fall of 2002 both Jake Hoffman and Steve Kamakanda created performance art pieces using tape, black spaces in conversation and the abstention of their bodies. After observing Jake and Steve's performance work I decided to do this. What action will you take?

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely  
G.E. Washington

Reproduction, *Conversation Project #4*, performance, Gabriel, Jake Hoffman, and Todd McCannon (2004) *Table 5*

<sup>13</sup> For an invitation to the Purple Door go to: [www.purpleoo.com](http://www.purpleoo.com)

<sup>14</sup> Please take one of the descriptions of CCDRE from the podium.

### **This is to Incite You**

The writing of this study is an attempt to understand why performance more than any other art, allows for queering in the classroom. It is important for you to know that I am not discussing the performing arts—that is, the act of simply “putting” on a show or the nonsensical idea of bringing a painting to life. When thinking of performance art I am looking at real time events that have shaped some aspect of an individual’s social ordering.

My students and I study many examples about performance art and the relationship between the artist and the audience: Yoko Ono’s critiques of citizenship, government, war, and the power of private acts; Suzanne Lacy’s critique of the relationship between teenagers of color and police officers in Oakland, California; and Vito Accouni’s investigations of the distance between private life and public space. These works are about relationships between individuals. They are specifically about those relations that develop during the use and critique of performance in pedagogical practices. As such, performance art work is ideal for modeling the study of relationships in the classroom.

By using performance art to look at the relations between people, situations, and things, I am able to cultivate an interest in how the students and myself are at different times the participant, audience member, observer, or co-participant within the performances of the art classroom. This pushes for a critical examination of these positions occupied by individuals. In other words, I am examining the queer results of actions, interactions and relationships between performance art, my art teaching, and difference. Perhaps we

should consider whether there is room for a performance artist, like myself, and for performance in the field of art education.

### **How Can Performance Fit into Art Education**

In the development of contemporary art education, there are fundamental misunderstandings about the *use* of art, and because of this misunderstanding, performance does not seem useful or even practical to many art educators. Many educators do not understand that art is about building and critiquing relationships between the works and viewers. They do not value engagement in the process of learning through art. Some believe that art is simply an “activity” that people practice in their “free time,” or an exercise for enrichment. Many have advocated for the importance of art as a vehicle only to escape from everyday and ordinary experience. Some educators characterize art as a collection of free floating idiosyncratic utterances created by individuals and read only by those same individuals who created it. Art educators are fond of proclaiming that artwork is made simply, “to express what can’t be said with words. Or to give in to your mind and let it wonder.” (NAEA newsletter, 2004, cover story) Art is about awareness of yourself and the world around you, and performance art is about a queer sense of that awareness.

As I stated in Chapter One, Tim Miller’s autobiographical performance about accepting his homosexuality in the face of a homophobic culture, allows the viewer, as well as the artist, to deliberately pull apart and to temporarily detach bits of life. The power of this work is that it allows individuals to see how they compare to generalized theories of

ordinary (standard) everyday life (Roman, 1992). Performance is one way for a student to investigate the relationship between themselves and almost anything else. And, it is also a deliberate way for each student to “show” what is, has, ought to, or could be. However, this might be too much direct interaction between the student and his/her learning experience. This might be why perhaps there is no room for performance art in the classroom.

Too often in schools, it is indirect interaction that is expected. The structure of many classrooms is similar to that of traditional theatre. The script directs the activities of the actor and the audience is primarily engaged with this same script. The script of the curriculum directs the activities of the art teacher and the student interacts mainly with the scripted lesson. However, the use of performance brings all of the attention of the students as well as the teacher back to themselves. When using performance, our relationship to each other and the school itself becomes the primary focus for understanding ourselves differently. However, this is too much uncertainty for most educators to accept.

Elementary art educators, often use half-baked notions taking art out of the learning process and taking the meaning of learning for granted. In the introduction to their book Contemporary Issues in Art Education, (2002) Yvonne Gaudelius and Peg Speirs write,

Too often art at the elementary level is perceived by teachers to be a series of make-and-take activities devoid of any meaning in relation to students' lives or the learning that is taking place in the elementary classroom. When

art is used only as recreational time filler or revolves around holiday themes it demonstrates the lack of awareness that teachers have for the potential of art at the elementary level. (p. 4)

The use of performance art in any learning setting must involve literal engagement with the participants. The engagement in the art classroom must be about interactions with the world as perceived, understood, and responded to by the bodies of each and every participant. Unfortunately, for the art educator who is not willing to become invested in the critical process of “engaged pedagogies,”—a teaching practice that is always “striving to create participatory space for the sharing of knowledge”—performance art is always going to be a difficult, if not an impossible, tool to use effectively (hooks, 1994, p. 15).

Brent Wilson wrote an essay in 1997 titled *The Second Search: Metaphor, Dimensions of Meaning, and Research Topics in Art Education*. In this essay he describes what I believe could be useful goals for art education:

The principal goal for art education is students’ acquisition of special knowledge, insight and understandings—of self, of the realities of past and present worlds, of imagined and future realities, and of the norms by which individuals govern their lives—that come from works of art. The goal for art education is for students to connect the idea-filled works of art they create to the artworks of others—artworks from other times and their time, from other places and their place, from other people and their people—whose meaning students interpret. (p. 3)

In the following study, I would like to explore not how performance can be used by an art educator to make better, faster, more popular, more exciting, easily accessible, simpler, cheaper, and easy-to-do art. Nor am I interested in using performance to create mistake-proof, multi-cultural, healing or spirit-based art lessons. Instead I am investigating how performance allows queering in the classroom. I want to learn how this helps participants to actively engage in understanding themselves, their communities and their world.

Art, including performance art, is certainly not a safe, uncompromising exchange where individuals do not have to contend with the burdens and ordinary complexities of social life. Too many art educators however as well as artists and activists try to “sell” the idea that in art we can avoid entanglements with others. Far too often, art is touted as a “free get away” from your husband, school, work place, family, children, values, beliefs, politics, hopes, failures, unshared dreams, desires, and all the other many “stuff” that makes life a challenge. This concept of “getting away” is in opposition to act *queering* and the purpose of this study. Not only is there room for performance artists, in fact there is a need for performance in art education. It reminds us the discussions of art must involve *queering*.

### **Queering Leads to Obligation in Art Education**

Art is about obligation. And, queering is about direct obligation. In queering you become a part of what you are seeing. When art “scares, informs, enrages, or incites” you, it is affecting *your* perceptions. In engagements with art, the viewer momentarily becomes

displaced and then re-included as a part of that which they are wreading. In *Conversation Project #1* the viewer's perceptions influenced the engagements between them and I.

Each person that came near me would ask, "What are you doing?"

I would always reply, "I'm taped to a chair."

Once a little boy asked, "Are you man or a woman?"

"What do you think?" I replied.

"A man"

"Why?"

In an excited and very loud voice he shouted, "Because I can see your Adam's apple!"

Then, I asked, "What are you? Do you know I can't see you?"

"Daddy, what am I?"

Just off to my left and maybe four feet behind my shoulder, I heard a deep, protective voice say, "You're a boy. Tell him you're a boy." I didn't realize there was someone else *in* our conversation, so startled I asked, "Who is that?"

The little boy wildly laughed and replied, "That's my Dad." Then the boy continued, "Are you black or white?"

These questions about how I identify myself were getting to what I had in mind when conceiving the *Conversation Projects #1- 4*. I was very ready for the little boy's questions about my color. I replied quickly,

"What color do you think I am?"

"You're black [or maybe he said brown, I can't remember]."

"How can you tell?"

At this point there was a slight pause. He hesitated, and then said, “I can see your red lips.”

What a complete surprise. I had forgotten the inside of my lips appear much redder than some other people’s. In fact, some people’s lips are so small that their inside is completely hidden. Mine are typical black lips. I laughed sharply and then proclaimed, “You are exactly right!”

Suddenly, the fatherly voice interrupted, “We’ve gotta go. Come on buddy.”

This was probably the only time during the performance that I wanted to see whom the person was that I was speaking with; I wanted to see this co-participant of the performance. Yet, without the performance being structured the way it was, I wonder if this conversation could have happened. I guess not. After all, it is not “polite” for a little boy and adult African American man who do not know each other to talk in public about why the man is black.

Figure 6 is a newspaper photograph of *Conversation Project #4*. The caption at the top of the picture reads, “Is he looking at us?” The newspaper photographer was watching the performance for more than an hour. Afterwards, someone told me that the photographer was watching the reactions of everyone in the lobby very closely. I had no idea that pictures were being taken, but I seem to recall in the performance someone sitting with me who was a photographer. I believe that is what he told me so, but I can’t be sure. I really don’t recall anything about being *in conversation* with him.

**Penn State Newspaper Photograph,**

**March 4, 2004, Figure 6**

Is he looking at us?



Garnell E. Washington (graduate-art education) conducts a performance titled “Conversation Project #4” in the Kern Building. The purpose of his project is to interact with others only through speech, not by sight.

PHOTO: Prince Frederick Spells

Conversation Project #4 (Spells, 2004, [www.collegeian.psu.edu/archive/2004](http://www.collegeian.psu.edu/archive/2004))

**Figure 6**

A friend told me the photographer won a newspaper award, photo of the week. Isn’t that interesting?

The entire context of the world around us and how we relate comes to bear through the process of interpretation. When engaged with art, we learn “what it means to live as free subjects in an unfree world” (hooks, 1995, p. 8).

In order to be wread, performance art requires active engagement. In fact, performance art demands participation. Even audience members who consider themselves “observers” of performance art are made critically aware of their *presence*. In the picture of *Conversation Project #4*, Figure 6, the girls appear to be asking, “Is he looking at me?” Even though most of my body is completely hidden with duct tape, these “participants”

still feel uncomfortable standing in the presences of the performer. Using performance pushes us to queer our positions within the social critiques that I am waging. In *Conversation Project #1 & 4*, I was critiquing my perception of my own social invisibility. In some ways, my performance is similar to the queering provoked by Kushner's story of a "Gay Fantasia." Though Kushner's queering is set against the backdrop of a social critique about the Regan Administration, viewers are still pushed to participate in an array of re-identification processes. They re-watch situations and subjects that they *thought* were familiar in the re-plotting of reality by *Angles in America*. This play was not at all about Ronald Regan or homosexuality, and likewise my *Conversations Projects* were not about me or simply my invisibility. This performance was about questioning what we (me and the viewers) understand about the Graduate Research Exhibition, the public lobbies in the Kern Building, and the meaning of the university student projects, terrorism, racism, bondage, pain, causal conversations, and each other. The *Conversation Projects* queered us by making the space of difference between others and me decidable and uncertain. It is no wonder that the women in Figure 6 are nervous about what they are doing; they literally have no idea what is *happening*.

### **Wreading the Self into Art**

Wreading is required in order to appreciate and interpret most contemporary works of art. Performance art, like most contemporary works of art, demands that an audience member situate him or herself socially, politically, historically, and sometimes ethically in relation to the work. Making meanings from contemporary art cannot happen simply by "looking" at objects. The people, things, and situations that are arranged in the

composition are part of their creation without the separation between the art and non-art world. Ideally, contemporary art is for the world in which it is created. One must use wreading in order for queering to occur.

Seeing, or more preciously queering, being able to identify my “black lips” is an important part of understanding the artwork and also understanding the viewer’s relationship to the performance. Identifying black, white, young, male, single, childless, scared, nervous, excited, loud, or anything else makes a difference to the wreading of the *Conversation Projects*. It is only through the performances that we come to know ourselves. In some ways, contemporary art is about us, yet it is only through the understanding of who we are that makes contemporary art “work.”

### **Performing Meaning**

The components of performance and most contemporary artworks convey many meanings, and these meanings signify a variety of experiences in the world. Much of the art created today facilitates the postmodern imperative of wreading across the borders of understanding. However, I find performance art to be most useful for pedagogical investigations because it requires the direct involvement of the viewer in the meaning making process.

Performance art does not let me or my students slip into the routine of creating representations or merely symbolizing the act of making art. We are not pretending to perform “like artists.” My students do not construct work simply in response to historical

stories. Such a process would lead the students' "artwork" to be mere representations of the ideas that previous artists have already explored. In another educator's classroom the student teacher was trying to make a representation of art. She was asking her young pupils to make "drip-paintings" like Jackson Pollock. Even if the process of creating a contemporary work of art seems fun, wild, entertaining, or chaotic, it can not be useful in the classroom until there is room for the students to wread their own experiences into this process. The classroom is not a place to study "avant-garde art-like art" (Kaprow, 1983, 38). The classroom is a site for students to develop an understanding of their own experiences. Avant-garde art-like art is what Allan Kaprow (1983) calls work that is not created in response to a lived experience of the world:

Simplistically put, art-like art holds that art is separate from life and everything else... The maker of art-like art tends to be a specialist...Avant-garde art-like art occupies the majority of attention from artists and the public. It is usually seen as serious and a part of the mainstream Western art-historical tradition, in which mind is separate from body, individual is separate from people, civilization is separate from nature, and each art is separate from the other. (p. 36)

In the classroom an individual is exploring their relationship to art, life, and the social order. "Playing" with art in isolated and de-contextualized ways has limited and perhaps no use in the classroom. The student is not working with art to only understand other people stories. "It must never be forgotten that the aim of art appreciation is not to "analyze" pictures or to "learn to understand" a world of art. It is much more important to make the individual sensitive to its [a work's] values in order that he [or she] can relate

himself [or herself] to it meaningfully” (Lowenfeld, 1957, p. 33). Students, or any other readers, of art are using art as a vehicle to learn more about themselves and their existence. A teacher can be tempted to use disciplines like history to provide interpretations of how to relate to art. However, history, even art history, must be used to understand our relationship to the present. There is no consequence in the events and dates of history by itself (Bolin, 2004; Wilson, 1997). Even the wreading of historical events must be an interpretative performance that *happens* between the student and the text. Historical discourses like critiques of art and all wreading events are performative. In The Archeology of Knowledge Michel Foucault (1972) writes about the performance of history:

We must be ready to receive every moment of discourse in its sudden irruption; in that punctuality in which it appears, and in that temporal dispersion that enables it to be repeated, known, forgotten, transformed, utterly erased, and hidden, far from all view, in the dust of books. Discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs. (p. 25)

If someone is investigating art for the sake of art—to know when, where, and how works of have already been made—then this is a matter of simple reiteration and contemplation of what is already known. However, when art is used as a site for learning, there is a serious consideration of what is *happening*. In learning we must ask questions about what the object of art is *doing* in the concrete, immediate and personal relationship with the student in the indexical present—the space between the student, the classroom, and the work of art.

The people, things, and situations taken from life and rearranged into works of art should be wread as fragments that are performing meanings—they are interacting, inter-related sites of potential meaning-making. If someone wishes to look at the relationship of art beyond the world of art and if someone is using art to understand something about themselves and their own experiences, then the creation and interpretation of “lifelike art” must become a preoccupation. In other words, the person who is using art to study life must learn to question how an artwork “works.”

### **Art as Action**

Richard Schechner believes art does its work when it is performing in our lives—when we are able to look at it “as” performance. “To treat any object, work, or product “as” performance – a painting, a novel, a shoe, or anything at all – means to investigate what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings. Performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships...Performance isn’t “in” anything but “between” (2002, p. 24). And, I might add, that [the meaning of anything, including works of art, is not “in” but “between.”](#) [Meaning making occurs between things – students, teachers, artworks, classroom, worlds and even ideas.](#)

Looking at art “as” performance requires the wreader to queer the relationship between the structure of the work and the surrounding circumstances that make it wreadable. Such a critical awareness of art requires a serious investigation of our appreciation and interpretation of life itself. In fact, Allan Kaprow goes so far as to insist that lifelike art

makers are more concerned with interaction and life than with identification of their work as art. “Despite formalist and idealist interpretations of art, lifelike art maker’s principal dialogue is not with art but with everything else, one event suggesting another. If you don’t know much about life, you’ll miss much of the meaning. Indeed, it’s never certain if an artist who creates avant-garde lifelike art is an artist” (Kaprow, 1983, p. 38).

In my classroom, the student who does not know much about life or is unwilling or perhaps unable, to share his or her experiences in life usually finds my art teaching relatively useless. I like to inform my students that we will not be working with “art” that you might imagine Picasso, Van Gough, Matisse, or Dali would make. Instead we will try to understand how artists like Yoko Ono court acts of queering through direct engagements with their work. (Most students usually slide to the edge of their seats when any reference to John Lennon or the Beatles is included in a class.) In the very first class I like telling my students about her exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art during the summer of 1970. Yoko Ono had only a set of instructions that were sitting on a podium. These instructions asked the reader to “draw an imaginary map...then go walking on an actual street according to their map.” (Goldberg, 1988 p, 154)

I am entirely committed to exploring how each student’s queering of the world can become the uncertain ground by which new relationships are built. I wonder openly, whether each student can speak queerly about our shared reality?

As I said before, there are misunderstandings about the way art can be used in the process of learning. Performance art and theories of performance seem completely inappropriate in most art classroom. Art educators however must begin to understand that art is an *investigation* into our own existence. It is not merely a collection of interesting or beautiful images.

Unlike the image that appears stripped of its context on the cover of the daily newspaper, art does not speak about “the big event, the untoward, the extra-ordinary: the front-page splash, the banner headlines” (p. 205). This quote comes from a book written by philosophy Georges Perec, Species of Spaces and Other Pieces (1997). His writings point out that an investigation into our existence is really about developing “our own anthropology, one that will speak about us, will look in ourselves for what for so long we’ve been pillaging from others. Not the exotic any more, but the endotic”(p. 206). Art is largely about these investigations undertaken into ourselves. The activity in art – the blood, sweat, and tears – involves mining the terms of our existence in order to lay claim to veins created in a life that we live but can only “see” in hindsight. The *activity* in art essentially looks at what is *happening* around us, in us, with us, to us, because of us, in spite of us, beneath us, above us, on top of us, outside and inside of us. The art educator must push him or herself to ask questions about how we exist right here and right now. “What’s really going on, what we’re experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it? How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? ...We sleep through our lives in a dreamless sleep.

But where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space” (Perec, 1997, p. 206)? Art educators must encourage learners and other researchers around them to drive the activities in art towards investigating the connections between our lives, our bodies, and our spaces. First, however the art educator must insist that there is *activity*—movement, change, transcendence and transformation—in encounters with art.

### **Vision, Embodiment and Sight**

When “looking” at a painting hanging motionless on a wall, the insistence on an active engagement can easily be overlooked. However, if the person who is peering at the painting can be reminded (literally as well as metaphorically) that they are presently engaged in the process of seeing, then that “observer” can be rocked from their removed, disconnected, and paralyzing gaze *at* the painting. The experience for the viewer should be no different than that of the participants of the *Conversation Projects*. Like the little boy who could see a black man because of my “red lips” and the two girls who worried, “Is he looking at me,” the topic of conversation for the viewer should move away from “What is it” to “Who am I?”

For the little boy, two girls, and viewers of a painting, art does not simply *appear*; it is the ground and figure for a world of experience. When looking, the “observer” is not simply seeing what is already *there*, but is recognizing the process of seeing—and seeing always and forever will be an act of choice. In this way, “we only see what we look at.”(Berger, 1972 pp 8)

As an art educator, I try to use my work to help art observers to become a participant in the performance. When looking at a painting as it hangs on a wall, we are not simply seeing the beauty or truth of an object as it might *appear* in reality or in our “mind’s eye.” What we are really *seeing* is the painting, the wall, the image, the room, the building, and even others who are and are not looking at the painting. In fact, the philosopher George Perec once wrote that the painting should remind us of the wall. The wall is always part of the painting because seeing it is always a process of choosing to situate ourselves in relation to the object of our gaze. It is like hearing a sound and immediately positioning yourself with respect to the location or site of the sound. I hear the train in the distance and I decide how close to stand next to the track. Likewise my sight is a *queer process* that involves the participation of others and the self, the object and the subject of the gaze—you and I.

The work done by us as educators should remind the casual art gazer that they are *seeing* not only the painting but also the wall, image, room, building, and others who are and are not looking at the world which contains these things and themselves. John Berger, in his book Ways of Seeing (1972), offers a critique of the oppressive tradition in Western art history of classifying and prescribing precisely how observers of visual art ought to see and goes to great length explaining the ways he understands the activity involved in the act of sight. He writes,

What we see is brought within our reach — though not necessarily within arm’s reach. To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it. (Close your eyes, move round the room and notice how the faculty of touch is like

a static, limited form of sight.) We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between thing and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are (p. 8).

In this study, as in my classrooms, I am exploring how people use this process of sensing the world to share personal expressions of their experiences of life. We live in a world that is always changing. Yet, our stories are always told from the perspectives within this world in flux. Standing still and knowing precisely what is happening and can only be done as a theoretical exercise to describe the way something was, might be, or ought to be perceived. I am learning how to help participants of art liberate themselves from the temporary structures of theory. “An image is a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved—for a few moments or a few centuries” (Berger, 1972, p. 9). The challenge for the art student is not to imagine operating beyond or without theory. The challenge for the art student, as well as the teacher, is learning to wread themselves into theories generated during their own creative processes.

*Seeing* is an act of creating sight at that particular moment in time. The seeing of the painting, conversation, television commercial, homosexual sex, headshot, image, or any other performance is understood by learning about the observer or participant’s way of *seeing*. Nothing about the sensory process is ever complete; it is a matter in utter flux. We would like the process of perception to come to a conclusion. We would like to simply

call a painting a painting so we can compare it to other forms of art that are or are not painting. By naming all the things that we see, we are often trying to use our sense of perception to create a feeling of certainty in the world. People talk about “seeing” the work of Paul Cezanne. We look at his artwork and say that he is not only a painter but also a great artist! Yet, what does this tell us about ourselves, the world in which we live, or Cezanne himself? What does the term *painting* tell you about your engagement right now?

### **Performance Allows Queering in the Art Classroom**

In response to a question from a pre-service art education student, Marjorie Wilson (2003) insists that art must allow a teacher’s students to see themselves and their world differently:

If the purpose of teaching about and through art is to allow students to see themselves—and to see the world—differently (as I strongly believe it is) then we need to address issues and ideas explored by artists in visual cultural works that allow—even force—us to see the world, and ourselves in relation to that view of the world, i.e. in ways other than we currently do (p. 2).

Today, performance art is one of the most useful mediums for helping students to see differently. As art educators investigate the use of art, they should be looking at how works can queer some aspects of the reality among students. Art should become a performance of identifying a student’s different perceptions.

Are the students more than a captive audience? Is the body of the art educator more than just a static bridge for the learner to cross in their quest to find the “right” art? Is education more than the act of bestowing literacy on the illiterate? Should education involve more than merely programming and de-programming the naïve mind of the non-artist or ignorant other?

I absolutely do not believe art educators should encourage students to memorize, verbalize, reproduce, or re-organize the works of others. There is absolutely no pedagogical benefit in training a student to reproduce Jackson Pollock’s “drip paintings.”

It must be understood once and for all that something that is only a personal expression within a framework created by others cannot be termed a creation. Creation is not the arrangement of objects and forms; it is the invention of new laws on that arrangement. (Debord, 1957 p. 1)

It is performance art that offers the individuals the most immediate and direct options for the re-invention of laws on the arrangements of their interpersonal relationships, and much of our experience in schools is about learning to socialize. Therefore, in the 1960s many art educators became excited about the possibility of working with performance<sup>15</sup>. However, it was Allan Kaprow who was more than simply “excited” about performance

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Garoian (2001) one of few art educators researching performance art, believes this art in popularity with the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s because it directly challenged how patriarchy and capitalism allowed authority figures to oppress, dismiss and silence the bodies of individuals who are thought to be outside the social norm. Like its contemporary political movements, performance has always “shown” that individuals have the right to fair treatment in the workplace. (Molesworth, 2003) It has insisted on the recognition of African Americans, Native American and others as equal and un-separate participants in our legal system and public spaces at-large. (O’Brien & Little, 1990) Along with activists, performance artists have declared that women and homosexuals have the right to live in their own skins as *they*, not as the laws of God or man, decides. (Carr, 1993; Montano, 2000; D’Emilio, 2002)

art, conceptual art and happening. He looked at art as guides for re-structuring all educational exchanges. Kaprow has created and shared many ways of using body-centered mediums in art classrooms. He sees a great deal of wonderful possibilities for the process of learning when the work of art is centered directly on the body. Kaprow believes that the power in body-centered art mediums, such as performance, is in how they help the works' *participants* learn themselves in new ways (Kaprow, 1979). The focus of these works moves the art "viewer's" attention away from non-interactive and static objects towards their perception to include themselves, *all the participants*. This change in attention can charge an entire educational exchange in utterly new ways, and presents the art educator with a whole new set of possibilities for understanding the process of learning. However, "the radicalism, or intelligence, of such art does not merely lie in its non-object status" (Kwon, 2003, p. 85). Kaprow has always considered the strength of this art to be the unique ways of re-arranging the exchange between the artists, audience and the society in which they are both located. Performance is more than an experience about, "Hey, come look at what I made." It provokes much more profound questions than, "Do you want to buy it, have a copy of it, or hang it on the front of the refrigerator?" "Art as idea, art as action, Conceptual art, Performance art, Happenings, and so on attempt to install alternative models of exchange that counter, complicate or parody the dominant market, and profit-based system of exchange...The art work in such cases functions as a mechanism to instigate social exchanges or interactions that specifically put into motion a circuit of obligation and reciprocity" (Kwon, 2003, p. 85). In body-centered artworks the interaction with the work itself, the "art exchange," can be harnessed as a site for critical pedagogical investigations.

Performance art pedagogy exposes the body as the palimpsest on which academic culture continually inscribes its ideologies. By using the body as material, process, and site, students learn to rewrite and re-present the cultural codes inscribed on their bodies and, in doing so, to construct their own identities and create new cultural myths with which to challenge the body politic (Garoian, 1999, p. 67).

By now it might be clear that I see every aspect of art as “event!” The construction, installation, presentation, participation and interpretation of art are all small happenings within the event of a work. Also, I believe the entire process of learning can only be understood as “event!” Furthermore, the “witnessing” of “event” can only occur in the space and exchange between the artist and audience, the teacher and student, the author and reader, and even you and I. Hence, queering is necessary in both art and education.

The writing of this study is an attempt to more fully understand how a work of performance art can itself be a site for learning. Using Luhmann, Solomon, Pinar, and Kushner’s notions of queering, I am focusing not on what or how knowledge is formed but instead on what the reader understands when addressed directly by the work. This is an attempt to ask: How can performance be a site for examining the learning experiences of those who are actively involved? How are the self and the other provoked to see differently? How are you and I pushed towards queered perceptions of our shared reality? This is the re-consideration of the way we see ourselves in relationship to the other in our classroom, our communities, and our past experiences of the world.

### **Seeing “as” Performance, Moving towards Queering**

This study concerns the pedagogical implications in the “work” of performance art. For students, as well as their teachers, [there is a considerable amount of active engagement required in constructing, appreciating, interpreting, and researching any work of art, but this is especially true for performance art.](#) Performance art is never an experience for idle observation.

Performance art is much more than organizing objects into rational modes of aesthetic appreciation. Among other factors there must also be movement, collisions or drifts involved with experiences of this art form. Performance art is involved directly with the evolution of perceptions. It is the process of de-contextualizing concepts, ideas, and observations in order to recombine them into new ways of perceiving what is known. One could say that performance art is the live re-organization of movements of the mind.

Even in the *Conversation Projects*, there is a great deal of action taking place within the performance. This action does not always embody the overt and obvious melodrama, but none-the-less performance art always includes active and engaging sites of *happenings*. In 1983 Matthew Maguire wrote an essay or manifesto, as he calls it, “The Site of Language”, exploring the relationship between experimental theatre and visual art making by applying the word *action* to the process of *collaging*. In his manifesto Maguire goes to great lengths to illustrate how the metaphor of collage is a good way to understand the work of art.

Collage is warfare—two images in collision. It sets off a series of internal explosions, and causes free associations. It is this collision that constitutes the dynamism of the work of art...The structure of collage produces a series of self-contained interlocking ambiguities that do not resolve easily but enrich the mind that seeks multiple resolutions. (p. 66)

At the essence of collage, and also performance art, is conflict. And because conflict is at the root of drama, Maguire believes collage is the ideal theoretical model for structuring a good play. Conflict in some form is necessary to sustain an active (rather than passive) engagement with art learning. The mind looks and does not recognize what it sees. So, it looks further into the re-construction of its own imagination, and it is bombarded by collisions of visual, audible, tactile, political, sensual, sexual, personal, historic events, and experiences of the mind which become a perceptual event that pushes the observer to look at more than what they appear to be *seeing*:

It (performance art, experimental theatre or collage) thrives on tensions jammed with information. Anarchy is implicit in the use of collage; its one purpose—the reinvention of the world...I fragment, suspend and recombine the many stories coming into my eyes. Each one is a straight linear story—but I don't experience reality that way. They're all flooding me at once, interweaving, overlapping, intercutting, overriding, interbinding, and overtoning. I take the pieces, I chop them up, I keep them all floating at once, and then I reintegrate them so they fit at the same time. Then I go into a vast rushing free fall (p. 66).

Performance art is not about this or that object. Any object can be part of schemes for performance. Performance art, not unlike experimental theatre or collage, is about the integration of a known variable within the context of the unknown. Performance art invites the student to participate in the journey of the mind where presence is understood as an inscription of the past and present. Performance art is action of re-claiming and re-presenting one's own body.

Performance art, conceptual art, happenings, and many other related forms of creative expression gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s as a way of constructing art that could not be used as objects to sustain or legitimate the ruling-classes' privileged social-economic status. (Moleworth, 2003) At that time, as well as today, these types of art works functioned as a way of queering the relationships between individuals. Performance art was, and still is, about the ideas, content, conflict, and the activity within the work, and not the material or its economic and social value.

Whether concerning the body of the artist or the audience, this art is coping with the performance of subjectivity. (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2001) By facilitating the fusion between unrelated and diverse ideas, performance becomes a site for social exchanges and interactions. Performance and other forms of *art as idea* or *art as action* make explicit use of engagement, interaction, and participation to establish between the artists and audience an overt sense of obligation and reciprocity within the structure of the work.

Miwon Kwon's describes in her essay, "Exchange Rate: On Obligation and Reciprocity in Some Art of the 1960s and After" (2003), the way the very structure of performance art demands action with audience. The audience, artists, and often the detractors of a performance feel responsible to listen, question, react, and interact to one another. These participants observe for themselves how the real consequences of their inner actions may be linked to their sense of responsibility within the performance. "In addition to reorganizing the relationship of the art maker and the audience, such art works test each person's sense of honor, dishonor, shame, power, risk, fear, status, humiliation, and prestige" (Kwon, 2003, p. 85). Performance art uses the individual's personal background, cultural history, and unique experiences of the world. This art is largely about the reinstatement of full *subject hood* (Molesworth, 2003). This is [why performance art is an ideal site for exploring the act of learning to know differently.](#)

In this study, performance art is being considered because I believe it is about queerly reversing the process of questioning and the questioner. In the *Conversation Projects* participants began by asking: "What is it?" and through the course of their active engagement with the performance they are provoked to ask: "Who am I in relationship to what I believe it is?"

### **Direct Address & Adrian Piper**

Adrian Piper is an artist whose professional works became popular in the early 1970s and who also has had a long history of using *direct address* in the crafting and execution of her performance work. Her work is made specifically for the [people she encounters on a](#)

regular basis in her everyday life—the people on the bus, in restaurants, or at her own art exhibitions. These performances are definitely not intended for a general “art world” audience. In her work, Adrian Piper is addressing real people in real situations. In “Xenophobia and the Indexical Present” (1990), her deeply thoughtful essay on the theories that inform her artwork, she goes into great detail characterizing the specific world for which she has made some of her works. As she writes:

I want my work to contribute to the creation of a society in which racism and racial stereotyping no longer exist. In such a society, the prevailing attitude to cultural and ethnic others would be one, not of tolerance, but of acceptance. We *tolerate* bitter pills, castor oil, and the dentist’s drill. We put up with these things because we recognize that they are good for us. This is the attitude that prevails among most concerned, thinking people in this society towards interlopers in their community. The alien values, practices, habits, and modes of self-expression of cultural intruders may get on our nerves, but we grit our teeth and endure them anyway, sometimes, for a while, secure in the conviction of our own virtue. Toleration is consistent with deep-seated and virulent xenophobia...In the society I want to live in, for example, there are no subliminal racist hatreds and fears “I Embody.” Nor need I delineate a “Self Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features” (1981), since my racial heritage is never called into question. In this envisioned society, it is unnecessary to give “Funk Lessons” (1983), because idioms of Black working class culture are not objects of acrimony and contempt. Neither “My Calling (Card) No. 1 nor No. 2” (1986-on) are

necessary antidotes to the arrogant presumptions of racism or sexism: No one needs to be warned about my racial affiliation at dinners or cocktail parties because no one is inclined to insult it; no one needs to be asked not to invade my privacy in a public space because no one is inclined to do so...In this society I want to live in, my personal, social, and professional interactions are not crippled by these symptoms of social disease...Members of mainstream society do not presume the intimate access to my person that expresses itself in fantasies of rape and violence, personal remarks about my appearance, behavior, or self-presentation, or morbid speculation about the quality and content of my personal life. These are all invasive forays into my selfhood designed to render my interiority transparent to an eye widened in terror, unable to blink for fear of being blinded by the ineffable. In the society I want to live in, I get to navigate effortlessly through the social world, and take my freedom, value, and sense of belonging as much for granted as do white, middle-class heterosexual males. Like them, in this society I can't even fully comprehend the problems because I've never personally experienced them! This is my idea of heaven, in which ignorance truly is bliss. (What kind of art would I make in such a society? I can't say. Perhaps the kind of art that Frank Stella, whose work I like very much, makes in this one.) (p. 285).

In order to wread ourselves into works like those of Adrian Piper, a change in perception must occur. We are moved by what we are sensing while simultaneously our assumptions

are shifting in light of our encounter. The work of Vito Acconci's, Gran Fury's, Adrian Piper's, or the *Conversation Projects* leave no room for idle, passive, readings because there is no room in their language of form, presentation, or delivery that is idle. In other words, nothing about these performances is passive. To "complete" the work active engagement is insisted upon. There is a demand that the individual who is wreading the work evaluates who they are, what they believe, and what is *happening*. Performance and conceptual works like these are deliberately operating in a world where nothing is stationary and everything is part of the flux. In these works change is guaranteed, and because they are a response to the very world that they inhabit, *change* itself is an essential element for the works.

This element of change is not predictable and cannot be harnessed or intentionally directed toward any kind of outcome. These performance and conceptual art works are themselves "events!" "Event," however, *is* occurring between the bodies of each and every participant. Nothing in this occurrence is quantifiable.

No one can predict what will "happen" between the participants who while sitting in a tavern, receive a "calling card" (1990, p. 287) from Adrian Piper that reads,

Dear Friend,

I am not here to pick anyone up, or to be picked up. I am here because I want to be here, ALONE.

This card is not intended as part of an extended flirtation.

Thank you for respecting my privacy.

Reproduction, *My Calling*<sup>16</sup> (Card) No. 2, reactive guerilla performance (Piper, 1986—present) *Table 6*

A possible outcome that can be anticipated from such art events is that those who participate will ask: why am I doing what I am doing? In the same book that includes a discussion of “My Calling (Card) No. 2”, Lucy Lippard, a very popular and respected art critic, proposes an exciting rationale for doing such “work.” Lippard writes (1990),

An art that believes, an art that bears witness, an art that brings people together, an art that envisions a better world should be able to take its place alongside of (or merge with) other kinds of art that are also formally, intellectually, psychically, or psychologically provocative. Making art of any kind, but especially making art for social change, is an act of faith, not to be taken lightly, not to be done as an exercise in subject matter or to get into another show. If we are not honestly moved to make art, and if we are not honestly moved by our own movement’s art, we should take a hard look at what we’re doing, and why (p. 234).

<sup>16</sup> Piper’s use of the term “calling” is interesting and seems quite deliberate. It reminds me of the concept of call and response that is studied widely in the art of drumming and African America worship services. I hope to explore the notion of “calling” in some detail through other papers.

In its direct insistence for obligation and reciprocity, performance art can become an unpredictable, uncontrollable, and subjective site of social change. Furthermore, if there is change (even change that is hard to observe) then there is growth. Where there is growth (especially unmeasured growth) then there is the possibility for learning and transformation.

My performance artwork, like the writing of this study, has explicit pedagogical goals. I am a performance artist who has spent my entire professional life *teaching*. I am comfortable with the performance of teaching. And now, I am anxious to see how teaching can influence my performance art work. Because this is not simply a show—there is room for a serious critique of the pedagogical aspects found in these performance projects. This is an investigation of how the “event” between you and I will happen. And I am completely prepared; in fact I insist that we include our difference in order to be queerly challenged during this engagement.

THIS IS TO INCITE YOU.

## Chapter Three

### EDUCATION AND THE INCLUSION OF DIFFERENCE

#### Smiles

Look at the girl smile! The more she smiles, the more certain it is that she represents something trivial, something shocking, or something failed.

George W. S. Trow, 1981, p. 56

By “acting-out” my social invisibility in *Conversation Project #1*, I was able to perform the masking of my identity. Hiding most of my physical body beneath black duct tape compelled others to participate with me in the process of constructing identity. These conversations became sites where the importance of performing identity was openly expressed, debated, and re-performed by each of the participants of the performance.

Now in this section of the study, I will explore three different social settings where the body of a student was performatively made invisible, erased, or transformed into an unrecognizable ‘Other’. In the stories of Megan, Jeremy, Jamie, Nate and Jason (the five students in question), how the body will be *known* through the performance of identity is either overlooked because it does not fit into the normal classroom structure, ignored because such an exploration is thought to be inappropriate or too conflicted for the structure, or used as a potential starting point for discussing the re-presentation of identity

as part of classroom structure. What are some of the ramifications of mixing the performances of identity and the structuring of the art classroom?

### **The Process of Knowing**

Learning to understand individuals through the performance of identity is not an extra activity that educators can choose to do in their spare time. There needs to be direct interaction between the student and teacher. It is vital to understand the performance of identity in order to *know* the student. All participants in a social ordering of a classroom have different experiences of the world. If students and teachers are not engaged in the performative process of *knowing* one another, can “learning” really take place in the classroom?

Do you have time to talk in the art classroom? How do we know what to say to one another? Is there room for a teacher to *know* each student’s way of knowing? Can the structure of the art classroom be shaped by the direct engagements of participants? How is the relationship between the teacher and student mediated? What role does each student play in the teacher’s understanding of life? How do experiences in the art classroom affect conversation? What are the black spaces in conversation between the student and teacher? How does the weight and history of their experience affect their participation *in conversation*? When does a student choose to abstain from conversation? Can the sexuality, race, gender, social class, religion, and heritage of each student and teacher be allowed *in conversation*? What parts of an individual might be made invisible?

Is it possible to directly address each individual? Is making individuals aware of themselves, who they are and what they think, possible in the art classroom? Is making these individuals aware of who others are and what others think also possible in the art classroom? Can queering occur in the art classroom? Can the difference between you and I be included in the art classroom? Can the participants read and write rules for the performance of their participation in the art classroom? How do these rules become about you and me?

### **Learning is a Shared Experience**

Far too often teaching is constructed as the type of theatre activity where it is acceptable for the student to only be indirectly affected by the classroom's structure. What actually happens on the stage of the classroom does not matter because its scripts (i.e. lesson plans, rules, codes of conduct, rationale, objectives and goals) are written with out direct connection to any particular audience member (i.e. student). At times it appears that students are viewed only as students and not as individual people. Some experts in education believe that in an efficient and "smoothly" managed classroom the teacher delivers their daily lesson, the students respond appropriately and everyone returns to their separate homes having learned exactly what was scripted in the lesson. There is no direct interaction between the student and teacher; there is only "interaction" between the scripted lesson and the student. But, learning is not like theatre where the teacher is delivering scripts to students. Learning is a shared experience in which students and teachers engage each other.

Often teachers perceive themselves to be actors of a pre-written script. Many teachers believe their role in the art classroom is to give clarification. And, they think it their job to tell students what things mean. Telling students the “right” answers or the “right” way to be is the general “philosophy of education” which dominates the conceptualization of most teachers’ way of thinking about themselves and their jobs.

Philosophies of education, according to Frankema are either analytical or normative. That is, they are essentially attempting to describe, discriminate, and establish meaning for terms, or they are essentially sets of statements about what should or should not be included in education and what should or should not be done during the educational process. (Pinar, 1975, p. 8)

How does the teacher’s need to explain, establish and maintain a sense of reason and order affect his/her decisions in the art classroom? How many of us still believe the teacher must be the one who speaks the most? Should the teacher strive to establish the appearance of control by any means necessary?

“It’s my way or the highway,” announced my favorite grade school teacher. She did not tolerate any interruptions during story time.

Usually, I wondered what “my way or the highway” meant? Was she being funny? Maybe this was a threat? Was it a joke posed in the form of intimidation? The announcement was always delivered with a touch of sarcasm and just enough wit to provoke a few chuckles from the handful of students who were actually paying attention.

None of us ever found out exactly what the line meant. No one in the class was ever sent to “the highway.” And no matter what transpired, during story time my favorite grade school teacher always appeared to be in absolute control. There were never any interruptions. We (the student/audience) always sat and listened. There was only indirect interaction between the teacher/actor and us.

However, teaching must be more than all this. Teaching is a process of learning, and learning can only be measured by the performance of the receiver (the student) of the event (teaching). It is the onus of the student to make any determination about the whole teaching event (Pinar, 1975). There needs to be interaction between the student and teacher. Nothing about the relationship between students, teacher, and the school lessons can be guaranteed to be good or bad. The performance can be understood only as interaction with the experience of each student. The teacher can say, “It’s my way or the highway,” but it is still up to the student to determine what happens next.

In fact, my grade school teacher’s announcement showed a complete lack of appreciation for the queering that must occur in learning. To multiply, draw, or even write this paper, all involve a sense of estrangement from how I know myself. Learning is the hyphenation of the line between how I knew myself before writing this paper and how I *know* myself now. It is a never-ending process of reconciliation between what *is* known and the knower; what the student brings and what knowledge *is* gathered (Grumet, 1978). While learning, the juxtaposition of the familiar and the unfamiliar is negotiated and integrated within the body of the subject to form a new “subjectively” defined body of knowledge.

In this process, the student is learning to know him or herself differently. In other words, during the queered engagements of learning, there is a direct address that breaks down the neutral distance between the learner and the object of study. The learner recognizes a familiar yet mis-fitted self, and also an unfamiliar but presumably more appropriate self. When an individual is addressed directly in learning, there is a queer inclusion of difference that challenges them. Learning is never simply about an exercise in knowing the “right” answers or “right” ways of being.

Learning can be understood and shared most effectively through engagement therefore the student and teacher has to interact. These engagements cannot be discussions of disembodied suggestions, but rather the performance of learning must completely engage us in order to challenge us—to teach us. When talking about learning I am discussing specific ways of being *in conversation* at specific moments in time. The student is *called out*. As discussed in Chapter Two, Adrian Piper’s use of the term “call,” for example the title of her interactive guerilla performances: *My Calling (Card) No. 1 and No. 2*, is particularly inspiring for me. Here I am thinking about the practice of call-and-response in traditions of drumming and African American worship rituals. I am also playing with the notion of *being called* as when a preacher announces that they have *been called* to the Word of God. There seems to be a relation between a preacher’s call to testify on the Word of God, Piper’s call to directly address individuals about racism and sexism, and a student’s call to engage the process of learning. Perhaps students feel that they have *been called* when directly engaged with the testimony of pedagogy?

### **Megan's Call**

Today a former student named Megan called. She was on her way back to Los Angeles after a holiday. Megan has been working, writing, painting, and doing performance art in the city for the past three years. After exchanging greetings and the news of the day, the topic of our conversation turned to wellness and personal growth.

“Do you know,” Megan said, “my therapist is helping me to become happy not fitting-in?” Megan, like so many artists and creative thinkers, has never properly fit into a mold or pattern of traditional social structure. She has usually appeared to be slightly off center. Her topics of discussion, pastime indulgences, dreams and aspirations are often laughed at, frowned upon, discouraged, misunderstood, or simply ignored by the people around her.

Even as an undergraduate art education major, Megan was considered an extraordinary student. As I recall one of her public performances in particular, she sat in the middle of the floor on a large piece of plastic surrounded by lots of beautifully arranged piles of food. The lights were dimly lit, and audience sat about fifteen feet away. And in a flat deadpan voice, Megan named all the foods that she had never eaten while on a diet. While reciting the list, periodically she would shout short, negative impressions of herself. All this was happening as she quickly ate the food from the piles. The performance lasted no more than ten

minutes, so rather than “eating” Megan was actually “shoveling” the food into her mouth. When she got to the end of the list, there were no more piles of food left on the plastic. Megan vomited the food into a green bowl that was sitting on her lap. And oddly, for the entire performance Megan held a slight smile on her face.

Obviously, this performance was about pain, anger, rage, heartache, and deep feelings of despair. Nothing made this point more clearly than the eerie smile that Megan held. After a while her smile bothered me. I remember thinking, “Why doesn’t she stop smiling? Turn your head, just for a few seconds. Look down or something.” I remember thinking the smile never faded, Megan never turned away and neither did I.

Even in classes Megan wore this eternal smile. The persona that she displayed was always one of a happy, cheerful girl, bright-eyed and gay. She was quick with compliments and pleasant compliance. Eventually however, this persona became yet another mold that she could not fit.

Today during our phone conversation, Megan told me a story about one studio professor in our department who was very disappointed in her course projects. It seemed that some of her work disturbed the male professor. He, however, never shared the specifics about how or why the work bothered him. Then one day in a critique, he spewed a series of viscous attacks on the formal qualities of one of Megan’s works. At the end of the critique he informed her, on top of everything

else, that her artwork seemed out of character for Megan. “You are the happy smiling cheerleader of our class. This work is too negative for you.” (Megan was never actually a cheerleader.)

What could I say? There was nothing that could be done. She was no longer a student in our college, and my interaction with the professor in question was limited. Obviously, this was a misogynistic and out-of-line comment. The male art professor’s opinion was grounded only in the ideologies of sexism that colored all engagements of the modern art classrooms. Megan and I both were already aware of this but during the class she did not say anything to the professor. Megan still feels hurt.

Softly, into the phone she said, “I know why I didn’t say anything: I wanted so badly to fit-in. I wanted to be liked and accepted by everyone - even him.” Then solemnly she added, “Now, I am happy not fitting in.”

I asked Megan if she would mind hearing a short verse from a collection of essays by George W. S. Trow. The book is called Within the Context of No Context (1980). These essays are about modern society’s relentless push towards conformity, anonymity, and the loss of any desire for individual identity.

“Smiles,” this is how the verse begins. And into the phone I continue reading, “Look at the girl smile! The more she smiles, the more certain it is that she represents something trivial, something shocking, or something failed.” (p. 56)

There was silence. Then in almost a whisper she says, “That was beautiful.”

We changed the subject and stopped talking about her behavior.

Who Megan is cannot be separated from what she is doing. If we perceive a student to be happy, joyful, hurt, enraged, or even mis-fitted, then the performance of her identity must appear as such. To *know* an individual is to become familiar with the gestures of their performance of identity. It is through her performance that Megan shall become known.

Performance has the possibility of being a vehicle for the articulation of one’s experience as well as a springboard into the theorization of an individual’s social condition. For example, knowing that Megan wears a smile (perhaps unconsciously) in the performance of the classroom, leads to interesting interpretations of her (probably conscious) decision to smile while shoveling and then vomiting of food. In both cases the gesture of smiling was an attempt to control our impressions of her, and wreading these gestures leads me to ask if the smile “represents something trivial, something shocking, or something failed” (Trow, 1997, p. 56). Megan smiled in order to manage or influence the impressions of others.

If it is the task of education to help individuals see themselves *differently*, then why is the teacher unable or unwilling to see Megan through her performance of identity? How is it that Megan becomes identified in the art classroom as *just* a happy cheerleader? How does Megan's performance become unrecognizable to others? How does Megan become invisible to the art teacher?

### **Difference, A Matter of Multiple Realities**

If we imagine those witnessing an individual's performance of identity to be like the audience members of a play, then we can begin to see the possibility for a wide range of interpretations of these performances. For anyone to *know* Megan they must know memories, perceptions, and impressions of her. The girl who smiles and the girl who smiled and puked are both a part of Megan. For her to become *known* to us, her differences must be *known*.

As an audience member of Megan's performance, it is through action, reaction, and interaction that I come to understand my relationship to her presentation of her identities. It is not the object of Megan that is important, but the daily interaction that is important and always changing. Life is not static; we are always changing. When daily interaction is used to structure relationships, then the teacher can learn how to respond to the student's performance of identity—even if the student proclaims, "I am happy not fitting in."

The student and teacher's individual identities are demonstrations of their unique points of view on the shared reality of the classroom. Yet, the impressions created by these demonstrations can be challenging to accept. Such a variety of impressions present a challenge to any single understanding of reality. Coming to *know* the reality of difference is a matter of *knowing* multiple realities. The definition of difference is the degree in which one person or a thing differs from another. It takes two or more to be different—again it is matter of multiple realities. And, for those who want to define the reality *for* others this causes “trouble” because they accept only one understanding, the “right” answer and the “right” way to be. Perhaps this is why some teachers feel it is their job to only tell students what things mean. Maybe this is why teachers are striving to make everyone fit into one ideal model.

Megan never felt like she fit in.

In many art classrooms, the teacher determines not only the meaning of reality but also the terms by which this reality will be appreciated. Most often the person who adopts the role of “teacher,” “guardian,” or “knower” makes the final judgments on what is accepted and valued as “real.” Take for example how adults relate to children and their fantasies. “We say ‘Yes, but what really happened?’ ‘I think you are just imagining things.’ Or ‘You know there really is no tooth fairy.’ **But what is this reality that we insist upon sustaining...** We often talk to children as though there were only one real reality” (Wilson & Wilson, 1982, p. 23). At times teachers like most adults gain a certain amount of satisfaction by proving what they know and forcing a child (or student) to believe what

they know. Sometimes “teachers” even control what happens so that an event appears to proceed according to their own proclamations. However, if there is a lack of engagement, the “teacher” cannot *know* what the child *knows*.

Of course, individuals who are forced to sit in silence and listen can only offer a limited and restricted challenge to the teacher’s understanding of reality. There was nothing cooperative about the shared reality of my grade school teacher’s story time. The teacher’s single understanding of reality was the only experience that any of us could share.

### **An Investigation of Relationships**

#### **Jeremy Is a Girl**

The following passage is the re-telling of a short story from Teaching Tolerance.

After recess, a fourth grade teacher returned to her classroom to find a boy, Scott, scrawling on the chalkboard, “Jeremy is a Girl.”

Jeremy was curled up in the corner. Shocked at first, the teacher did not know what to do. Then, she turned to address Scott, “I assume you are very angry at Jeremy, and calling him a girl is the biggest put-down you can think of.”

Scott nods, "Yes."

At this point the teacher decides to rearrange the class into a circle for a conversation. Then she poses this question to the entire group, "I wonder why calling a boy a girl is the biggest put-down anyone can think of. Could you help me understand that?"

The class is silent. So, the teacher continues talking. She explains that all of us constantly absorb "GENDER STEREOTYPES" without knowing it. Together the students make a list of what boys and girls are supposed to do. They practice identifying gender stereotypes in Disney films. And sometime later, the class even tells Jeremy how to address his softball coach who regularly encourages the team to "get tough" and stop playing "like a bunch of girls" (Ewing, 2001, p. 15).

In reading this story I wondered where the investigation of relationships was. What was the relationship between Scott, Jeremy, their classmates and the teacher? Was there any connection between Scott's act of writing on the board and other events that occurred in the class? How was the word 'Girl' related to Jeremy? Even though the story was written to "teach" a lesson about tolerance in the classroom, it seemed to be missing key details about the actions, reactions, and interactions in that social establishment. When I read the story *Jeremy Is a Girl*, I was curious about what was happening in and around this situation. For me, the relevance of gender stereotyping is not the important question, but

a more useful question is: [how did the event occur and what came before, during and after this situation?](#)

The fourth grade boy is being insulted because his appearance contradicts something about his behavior. Scott perceives Jeremy's behavior to be like that of a girl. And, girls are understood to be bad. The author of the insult, Scott, doesn't write, "Jeremy is a whatever I hate; Jeremy is a rabbit; Jeremy is a great kid; or Jeremy is a Boy." Here the word 'Girl' signifies very specific meanings. 'Girl' is used precisely because Scott believes that his readers, his classmates including Jeremy, will understand this message as being negative. Scott's intention is to juxtapose the idea that girls are negative with the physical reality of Jeremy. Clearly the goal here is to influence the perceptions of others. By wreading and then re-telling for himself the meaning of the word 'girl,' Scott is able challenge how his classmates (including Jeremy) *know* Jeremy. By writing performatively, Scott uses performative writing to reinforces the stereotype that girls are bad while also claiming for himself Jeremy's identity.

### **How Far is the Teacher Willing To Go?**

My study wages an investigation into the discursive qualities of the relationships between individuals who are engaged in school social settings. The interaction between these participants is being explored by using a performance to question what is taken for granted. The concept, *performance*, is useful because it draws our attention to the individual roles people "play" in a social establishment. From the perspective of performance, social theory is more easily developed, practiced, and revised. In addition to performance I am also curious about the space of difference-between individuals in the

same social ordering. Even though a group of students and their teacher will come to *know* each other within the shared space of the classroom, explorations of “difference” are still at the heart of their interactions and my curriculum research.

Many teachers will certainly say that they embrace the concept of *difference* within their lessons, and that they are excited about exploring students’ unique identities within the boundaries of the classroom. Yet, this notion of “embracing” *difference* objectifies and individualizes it, and hence this objectification removes the discussion of *difference* from any social, political or lived context. Also, if exploring difference is only an exercise or activity that all students are required to do in the same space at the same time and in the same way, then really how far is the teacher willing to go? When the fourth grade teacher summarized the interaction between Scott and Jeremy as an affect of GENDER STEREOTYPING she demonstrated for the entire class, including Scott and Jeremy, how to “read” this engagement. Here the question, “Can you help me understand?” became an introduction to a one-dimensional explanation of GENDER STEREOTYPING. If *difference* is understood as something that only “unique” characters “bring” to the classroom, or *difference* is examined through the “safe” windows of teacher’s lessons on tolerance, then really how invested is the teacher in the exploration of understanding different ways that people are related and unrelated to each other?

In many classrooms I have found that *sameness* is valued, not *difference*. Pointing out the ways that students are like each other is often the focus of a teacher’s lesson. In school there is too much time devoted to having all students understand the same

meanings, discuss the same subjects, and interact in the same ways. Sometimes teachers even use representations of “difference” to make their lessons appear fully integrated, fair, and equal. Proudly teachers have long argued that their schools are models for true social equality. For example, in the preface to White Teacher (2000) Vivian Paley writes that a white teaching colleague at her predominantly white elementary school in 1973 told a panel of concerned African American parents, “You’re wrong. There’s absolutely no color line here. All children are treated same” (p. XIV). Too often there is a misunderstanding of equality—not realizing that “equal” does not need to mean “same.”

Obviously the performance of identity cannot inspire learning if all the art students are treated as the same—the same desk, same name tags, same art supplies, same assignments, same goals and expectations, same critiques, same exhibition spaces and the same art projects. What about the impossibility of knowing? What about the uncertainty of learning, the uncertainty of the creative process and the performance of identity? The feminist curriculum theorist, Elizabeth Ellsworth believes:

Too often, the unknown is allowed into pedagogy and celebrated in teaching only as a tease before finally reaching and ultimately achieving the known. Too often in discourses of critical or humanist pedagogies, the as yet unknown of human and social “possibility” are thought to be decidable. Possibility becomes a thing that can and will eventually be named and pursued. Such pedagogies address me, as teacher, as someone who is to teach “for possibility,” or to name, through assisting students in discovering their

authentic voices, what is possible for them so they can pursue it. (1997, p. 172)

Often in the today's art classroom reality is decided and the identities of individuals are fixed within prescribed boundaries. Teachers as well as students can be uncomfortable not knowing what will *happen* next, so they construct classroom performances that are simply about telling one another how to see, what to think, and when to feel. In such an environment it is impossible to learn how to *know* each other through our individual performances. In such an environment *difference* can only be discussed within conceptual and hypothetical parameters. The presence of any specific student or teacher is ignored and not embodied within this "tolerant" classroom. "We *tolerate* bitter pills, castor oil, and the dentist's drill. We put up with these things because we recognize that they are good for us" (Piper, 1990, p.285). But, what happens if the difference between individuals in an art classroom is intolerable, unpredictable, or perhaps painful? When the teacher decides what is possible for everyone in the classroom, the ideal becomes the only possibility. What if, like Megan however, the student feels like they do not fit?

What if Jeremy really is a girl?

### **The "Right" Way To Be**

The actions that many art teachers take are intended to lead students towards the "right" answers or the "right" way to be. Therefore, the actual performances of the classroom are ignored, and instead there is a relentless push towards the so-called "normal student." Within the art teacher's curriculum there is little reason to include the details of a

student's individuality because they can never compare to the ideal student. The student is not encouraged to look inward, but instead they are encouraged to look outside themselves to imitate ideas about whom they ought to be. The ideal student is an illustration of the "embodiment of norms, a reiteration of norms, an impersonation of racial and class norms, a norm that is at once a figure" and yet an unattainable model. Hence, this model of the "ideal normal body" is a "figure of a body, which is no particular body, but a morphological ideal that remains the standard which regulates the performance, but which no performance fully approximates" (Butler, 1998 p, 454). In this "learning" environment *difference* has no value because the unattainable standard is the only acceptable form of existence.

### **Teaching, Simply an Inaugural Event**

Vivian Paley's teaching cohort must insist that all the children are treated the same because he or she is defending the "realness" of the assertion that their school (like American society at-large) has "no color-line." Just as Scott is challenging the way his classmates *know* Jeremy, Paley's fellow teacher is challenging the way African American parents *know* the school—there is no difference between the white and black children. It is not the truthfulness of these proclamations that interests me. What does interest me is how these assertions are preludes to a series of actions, reactions, and interactions. In Paley's case, the assertion that there is "no color-line," leads her to "collect the goods" on herself. She started observing her behavior in an effort to investigate whether or not of the children in her school really were treated the same. Paley states:

In the beginning it was more comfortable to pretend the black child was white. Having perceived this, I then saw it was my inclination to avoid

talking about other differences as well. Stuttering, obesity, shyness, divorced parents—the list was long. My awkwardness with black children was not a singular phenomenon. It uncovered a serious flaw in my relationship with all children.

As I watched and reacted to black children, I came to see a common need in every child. Anything a child feels is different about himself which cannot be referred to spontaneously, casually, naturally, and uncritically by the teacher can become a cause for anxiety and an obstacle to learning.  
(2000, p. xviii)

For the purposes of this study, “teaching” is not simply what the “knower” or “teacher” does, nor is teaching just assertions about the “right” ways of being. Teaching is one of many inaugural acts within the art classroom. Teaching is followed by many events. The act of teaching alone does not make the class experience what is. Nor, does teaching make the student who they are. Teaching is at best one of many happenings and from my point of view—that of a teacher—simply an inaugural act.

Ellsworth (1997) speaks elegantly about teaching as an inaugural act:

When, precisely, is learning produced? Is it stated or produced when the teacher declares; “Now you’ve got it!” or when the student declares, “I get it!” The question of when learning happens can’t be decided, because “all thoughts are afterthoughts” (Phillips, 1995, p. 102).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In writing this chapter of her book Ellsworth combines thinking about pedagogy with the psychoanalytical theories of Adam Phillips. In his essay *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life* (1993). On the nature of learning and teaching Ellsworth includes a revealing quote from Phillips: “*The mind always comes in afterwards* [after insight or learning] (to repair, to reflect, to reconstruct, to

That which “is learned” does not exist until the self-who-learned performs an afterthought. And paradoxically, the self-who-learned did not exist until after the learning. The “primal scene” of learning, in other words, did not exist when the learning took place, for it “came into existence only when one (re)visited the [staging of learning] *afterward for the first time*” (Chang, 1996, p. 213). The commonsense notion that teaching is a cause-effect relation, that there is a temporal precedence in teaching (the teacher-teaches, the teacher causes learning, first comes teaching and then comes learning) is in deep trouble here. Teaching is a performance suspended in time.

There is undecidability to teaching. The good teacher is the one who give what s/he doesn't have: the future as undecidable, possibility as indeterminable. (p. 173)

Of course, like Scott in *Jeremy is a Girl*, the “teacher” could control the events of learning in order to influence the perceptions of students. In such a case the students would believe that they are engaged in learning. Yet, if they do not sense for themselves the *call* of learning, can this event *happen*? Like Scott and Jeremy's example, the teacher “in control” of the event is merely claiming for him/herself the students' identity. Here, the teacher-student relation is decided: the teacher always declares how the student is and what they will do.

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formulate, to consider, to fetishize, etc.) ...because the mind always comes in afterwards...it always runs the risk of being a pre-emptive presence. (p. 102).

### **Teaching, An Uncertain Event**

The content of an art teacher's curriculum must be more, and at the same time much less, than statements about knowing exactly how to behave. Like the world around the art classroom, the relationships between its participants are forever changing. All social structuring is composed of individuals and components that are in states of perpetual flux. The students, teacher, and the curriculum itself are constantly performing how they will be *known*. Therefore, education must work to help each person continually articulate how they will come to see themselves differently in relation to the changing world as well as the evolving curriculum. Furthermore, engagements with education must strive to create "in a person the ability to look at the world for (her or) himself, to make (her or) his own decisions, to say to (her or) himself this is black or this is white, to decide for (her or) himself whether there is a God in heaven or not, to ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions" (Baldwin, 1969, p. 4). Madeline Grumet (1978) believes that curriculum should be "the process of persons coming to engage form, not content;" no matter how multicultural, fair, dynamic, or engaging a lesson might seem. Here she explains,

Content [itself] is salient only in idealized isolation. The gaze of the student transforms its [the curriculum's] opaque surface into a reflective one that sends back images of the student and his (or her) situation...the student's response to curriculum reveals his (or her) possibilities for action within the particular domain of experience—natural, social, aesthetic—that the curriculum as content symbolizes" (Grumet, 1978, p.278).

In studying education my attention has slowly turned away from “what” is or is not teaching and towards methods for learning what a student understands. “The only real job of any teacher, especially a writing (and art) teacher, is to help students find themselves. Everything else is either distraction, or at best, window dressing” (Jensen, 2004, p.14). In my teaching I am learning to guide students to look at their own behaviors “as” performance and to help them respond to these behaviors performatively.

### **Jamie Performing Himself**

One of my students, Jamie, did an extraordinary performance about the relationship between a reading assignment on sex slaves and conversations with his friend who was HIV positive. The structuring of the performance was simple, but the way Jamie applied the concept of social invisibility was wonderfully complex. Before telling my version of what *happened*, let me explain the set-up of the performance.

When the undergraduate students arrived at their Sociology 119 course, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, they were greeted with an array of performance artworks. Each performance dealt with some direct connection between the artist and the class reading – Disposable People: New slavery in the global economy (1999) by Kevin Bales. An announcement was made during the previous class session that performance art would be part of the next lecture. This was midway through the semester, and all the students thought that they were comfortable with the

atypical format of Sociology 119, but the set-up for this lecture on contemporary slavery was very “different.”

In the lecture there were two focal questions: What do you know about modern day slavery? And, how do you support modern day slavery? The professor of the course, Sam Richards, wanted to engage each of the students on a direct and personal level with the critical issues of modern day slavery. He decided to use performance art as the vehicle to move towards such an engagement.

Twenty students from the class volunteered to participate in a three-day workshop on performance art and the investigation of their relationship to contemporary slavery. I was an artist-resident for the Department of Sociology, so I led the workshop. The goal was to help each student volunteer create and execute a performance about their connection to the assigned reading. In other words, the twenty students had to demonstrate through performance how they wread themselves into the text of Disposable People. Each performance on modern day slavery was staged in the hallways, entrances, and seats of the classroom. And, all the performances began as the five hundred Sociology 119 students arrived at the lecture hall.

First, let me quickly describe Jamie. He is an attractive and youthful-looking, half Puerto Rican and half white, nineteen-year-old male from New York City. At a glance he looks like a smart-ass and the type of guy who is ready to take

advantage of people. However, as soon as you meet Jamie you realize that he has a heart of gold and would do anything possible to help others. Most of his sociology classmates however had not met Jamie and this is maybe why most of them didn't hang around very long to examine his performance.

Jamie's performance was staged in the main entrance of the classroom. As people walked through one set of the room's double-doors, Jamie would slam open another set of doors in the opposite direction. As the students entered Jamie would exit. Then, he would turn immediately to his left and re-enter the classroom through the other set of double-doors, right behind the students who had just used these doors for their entrance. These second doors were also slammed loudly.

Each time Jamie slammed open a door, he would recite a verse from the text that he had written. In a deadpan and clear voice as he walked-out the classroom, Jamie would say, "When can I get HIV so I can go home?" And, as he "walked-in" the classroom he would utter, "After they raped her, she told me that she was HIV positive." The first verse and many others like it were taken directly from the personal narrative of a sex slave in Thailand, and the second verse and everything Jamie uttered while walking in the opposite direction was lifted straight from conversations he had with a friend.

Over and over again, the performance of exiting and entering was repeated continuously for roughly twenty-five minutes. Jamie started fifteen minutes before class and continued for about ten minutes into the lecture.

And like I said before, most of the sociology students didn't stop to examine Jamie's performance for very long. However, a few students who already knew him did. Everyone in this course is required to meet once a week in a small discussion group. One by one the students from Jamie's recitation group came to see his performance, and one by one each stayed to watch for the entire duration. At first they tried to greet and speak with Jamie. "Hey, What's up Jamie?" "What are you doing?" But, when they got no responses each of Jamie's friends simply stood back and watched the performance *happen*.

Afterwards, Jamie said he was completely surprised by the looks on the faces of his friends. He could not believe for the entire length of the performance they just stood there and became more and more captivated. He was also surprised that some of them really were saddened by what he was performing. Jamie had no idea this work would be so moving for his friends.

I did not have the opportunity to meet with members of his recitation group, though I wish I had.

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1967) Paulo Freire states that all humans have the right, privilege, and gift for being able to re-conceptualize their realities through the representation of the terms that defines it. As an art teacher, I am not telling my students what to say or even how to say it. This is not the job of an educator. Philosophies and theories of education are simply reflections of reasoning about the world around us. They are glimpses into the rationale of how others establish and instill notions of “being.” A single perspective into the changing life of a stranger is all that can ever be gained from any educational investigation. We must nurture a sense of faith in order to become comfortable with this flux in engagements with education. As William Pinar (1975) states, “There is an article of faith involved which is analogous to Dewey’s comment that educational philosophy was the essences of all philosophy because it was ‘the study of how to have a world’ (p. 12).

### **Thinking, Questioning, Changed and Moved**

In my work, I am interested in both having my own experience, and in leaving people to interpret me into theirs. I don’t need someone to get the same thing that I do out of the work, or to walk away clear about why I chose the particular actions and elements that I did. What is important to me is that they walk away having been shook-up somehow—that they leave thinking, or questioning, or changed, or moved (jenny strauss, 2000, [www.sirius.com/~jenny/PAF/Performanceartfront.html](http://www.sirius.com/~jenny/PAF/Performanceartfront.html)) (no longer extant)

In re-making my teaching more like my performance art work I have slowly become more interested in whether my students leave the classroom thinking, or questioning, changed or moved. However, in order to know if the students have been changed or moved, there must be a relationship that involves more than just “knowing” them as art students. I began to wonder what excites and inspires these students, what brings them to the course material. I also began asking questions about the behaviors they exhibited in class, the relationships they developed with other students, and what they tell others about themselves.

In other words, I have become more conscious of the classroom “as” performance. In school relationships are being formed and re-organized. Individuals are constantly exchanging small pieces information about themselves. Someone is always trying to hear what someone else is saying. In short, I have come to understand that a communicative practice of transformation is always occurring.

In adopting these “pedagogies of listening” I have had to search for more performative ways of *knowing* my students (Thompson, 2005). I started by asking my students, “Please talk about what you are *really* thinking?”

To which one student cried, “What do you want from me? I talk more in this class than all my others put together!”

This student, like many of the others, believed that she was *just* who she is, and it was my job as her teacher to *just* tell her what to do. She had been “herself” and only herself for her entire life. Therefore, critical questions concerning her identity were completely irrelevant. My student, like most people, [was not in the habit of asking herself, who am I?](#)

People must be compelled to examine who they are. This is a very important idea for art educators to understand. “Since it’s my experience that, [as Carl Rogers wrote, the only real learning is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning](#)...it’s my job to create an atmosphere where you can teach yourself” (Jensen, 2004, p. 20). Yet, learning how to see one’s self really is the challenge.

### **Question Everyday Life**

Students must be compelled to examine themselves outside of the routine of everyday life. Through participation in the habitual routines of daily life, people come to embody their performances of identity. Through this embodiment we are able to “live” our identities. However, it is also because of [our familiarity with our daily routines of life that identity to be fixed and unchanging](#). Being compelled by the “living” our identities, we are inclined to behave as who we believe we are (or ought to be) every day. Identity roles are molded into compulsive imperatives for how people believe others perceive them. Each of the behaviors we do (i.e. eating diet food, writing on a chalkboard, walking in and out double-doors) occur as single individual gestures in our particular performances of life, but it is our unconscious repetition of these behaviors that creates the ordinary and invisible “routines” which make up the compositions of our everyday life.

Life in and out of the art classroom “consist(s) largely of routines, habits, and rituals; and the re-combination of already behaved behaviors” (Schechner, 2002, p. 28). Those behaviors that are believed to be *just* part of our role as art teacher or art student or those gestures that we call *just* “me” are made invisible and accepted as merely natural parts of being a teacher or student.

### **Reclaiming One’s Self in the Everyday**

The critiques in this study encourage looking back at the events of daily life in order to account for the value of our existence. I am enthused by the very terms that shape the existence that I share with my students as well as you, the reader. If performance art is about direct engagement with the life of its participants (and I firmly believe it is), then the “shake-up” it creates must take place right here in everyday life. **We must examine our everyday routine to *know* ourselves.** We go through every single day as ourselves, but each and every day we are different. With the help of performance art, educators can encourage individuals to take value in their previously overlooked daily engagements. Such a critique opens the possibility of new methods of self-identification. The individual queerly includes themselves within the performance of their own identity. In his book, Walking on Water: Reading, writing and revolution, Derrick Jensen (2004) includes a poignant message from a friend that might be helpful to consider:

We all have cultural, learned behavior systems that have become embedded in our subconscious. These systems act as filters for the way we see the world. They affect our behaviors, our speech patterns and gestures,

the words we use, and also the way we gather our thinking...I have to constantly school myself in the deconstruction of what I believe and perceive to be the way things are, to continuously break down in my own mind what I believe, and continuously add to my knowledge and understanding. (p. 20)

I believe a critically conscious individual becomes who they are by reclaiming their perceptions of their own performance of identity. Two years ago in the courses that I taught, Art Education 225 – *Diversity, Pedagogy and Visual Culture*, Art Education 303 – *Art for Elementary Education Majors*, Art 297B – *Race, Class, and Sexuality Explorations in New Genre Art*, and Art 497G – *Independent Studies in Art*, I began requiring students to follow a map of their own experiences. Each student was instructed to create a map of their course in the course and then they had to prepare a three-minute video of this map. I was asking the students to *perform* themselves. I was learning to *know* my students through their performances while they were learning to *know* themselves also through their own performances.

As you see the assignment in Table 7 notice, the “rules” of the assignment were used as guidelines for structuring the how each student might interact with their own performance of identity.

Table 7

**Assignment:** Map Your Course of the Course  
*Mid-term Video Taped Evaluation (50 pts.)*

In a private part of the classroom each student will make a three-minute presentation that will be video recorded and evaluated by Gabriel. During this video taping the student must “demonstrate” what they have done; what they would like to do; and what they hope to learn during the art course. What each student does for the video recording should be connected literally to the meaning and the main points behind their map of the course.

**Here is a list of items that will be evaluated in the videotape:  
Each student will receive 10 points for accuracy including or addressing each of these evaluation items:**

- Create a map, diagram, drawing, chart, illustration, slide show, audio recording, or even a video recording of what YOU propose to do in this course. This item should include a description or presentation of ALL work that YOU have already done and work that YOU will be doing. YOU should also demonstrate how your life outside the art course has influenced or is related to YOUR work in this course.
- Describe all of the required readings that you will complete for the course. And describe five selections that you have chosen to read. These descriptions should relate to your questions for critical thought.
- Are there critical thoughts, questions, or concerns regarding the relationship between this course and YOUR artwork?
- Describe a series of activities that YOU will follow to help YOU find topics to investigate and consider in your remaining art projects.
- Gabriel will also be considering your use of creativity in expressing the ideas of the map and in demonstrating connections between YOURSELF and this course.

From Nate's Video Taped Mapping



***This is my map of the course. It's kind of hard to decipher. That's how I feel about the course; there are no set paths. There's a lot of different ways you can go...Circular.***

Details, Assignment: My Course of the Course, video mapping, Nate, 2002, Figure 7



**The questions that I have are strung throughout this map:  
Am I part of the problem?  
Is it a matter of religion?  
Is it community?  
Gay rights? Lesbian?**

Details, Assignment: My Course of the Course, video mapping,  
Nate, 2002, Figure 8

For his final project Nate created a proposal for an art exhibition at a local African American church. Because of a troubling conversation with a friend, he included the work of an African American classmate in the proposal for this exhibition.



***Doing a show in that church that you mentioned, but not necessarily an art show; moreover me as a white student and Jamison being black will come together to do this show in a Baptist church. I think there is a lot that could be said and I am looking forward to that.***

Details, Assignment: My Course of the Course, video mapping, Nate, 2002, Figure 9

In my teaching I am using performance art to observe, highlight and investigate a process of identification that incorporates the real life recognition of *difference*. In performance individuals come to *know* themselves differently through the process of re-identification with their own performances. Performance is a concrete, immediate, and personalized method for meeting critical pedagogy's demands for individual self-awareness.

From Nate's Video Mapping



Details, Assignment: My Course of the Course, video mapping, Nate, 2002, **Figure 10-15**

In his performance Nate is posing to queer the comfortable and familiar perception of his self. He is seeking to present himself not as an isolated disconnected and independent idea of what he “believes” his body to be, but rather he is challenging me, his viewer-teacher, to *know* his body through the performance and its relation to the very world that contains it. Nate is forcing the viewer-teacher to ask, “Is what I see what I know from the classroom, the video image, popular media, or social folklore?”

Nate positions himself queerly within the frame of the video. In this performance he is actively seeking a bendable polymorphic image of his body. Here is a body queerly positioned within the world that is being challenged for questioning. In the performance, Nate's body is part of the question being asked: what is understood about blackness? It is his hand that viewer sees and his voice that the viewer hears. It appears to be his white hand holding the black images that it created and his white voice telling stories about playing with black culture. Or, is it? Whose stories are these? Whose hand is this? How

do they become *known* as black and white? What makes me think that that voice is connected to that hand and these stories are about this body? Where is Nate, the student that I know? What do I, the teacher, viewer and reader, understand?

This performance queers us. In it Nate and I are both confronted with the challenge of re-identifying with our life through our *difference*. In this confrontation there is the potential for growth and the possibility of coming to *know* a self that can be reclaimed as mine. In this performance, learning is a real possibility for me as well as Nate.

As discussed in Chapter Two, learning must be understood as performance even for studies in history. The art historian, Dave Hickey, thinks students want to know *how* teachers become enthused about the things they discuss in their classes. He states:

When I was a student, this was exactly what I wanted to know, and what I want to see. I wanted to see someone who embodied a passionate and ethical regard for the materials. I wanted to see how someone whom I respected, cared about things, respected them, and forgave them (1998, p. 11).

As a teacher, I am also trying to gain understanding about *how* people come to certain beliefs, *how* these beliefs influence their lives, and *how* particular beliefs lead them to certain actions. Even as a student, I have never looked to be indoctrinated into life. I have always been keenly aware that life is an ongoing conversation. It bends and wounds around the places we go and sites that we are afraid to visit. Life queers us so that the hopes and dreams we harbor for the future are included in our actions today.

Life is...

## Chapter Four

### QUEERING OURSELVES

Rather than assuming and affirming identities, can a queer pedagogy confront the complicated the problem of how identifications are made and sometimes refused? (Pinar, 1998, p. 21)

#### **Everyday Life, Performance, and Identity Construction**

Everyday life can be understood through performance. Everything that we do can investigate “as” performance. (Carlson, 1996; McKenzie, 2001; Schechner, 2002) Though most performances go unnoticed, it is the habitual repetition of performance that has significant influence on how we think of others as well as ourselves. Hence, one way to understand people is to observe their daily performances. “We all have cultural, learned behavior systems that have become embedded in our subconscious. These systems act as filters for the way we see the world. They affect our behavior, our speech patterns and gestures, the words we use, and also the way we gather our thinking” (Jensen, 2004, p. 20). How we know, interact, react, relate to, and even present ourselves to each other can be understood through performance.

However, each of us has learned to maintain a performance of who we think we must be. Often we try to perform a type of ideal normal “self.” Over time, we become skilled at

learning to perform our ideal normal selves. Then ironically we become less aware of ourselves in daily life. We stop performing ourselves and instead act in routines and rigid caricatures of our identities. “We develop an identity as “this kind of person”—someone who does certain things and feels certain ways. Anything other than that, most of us think, would not be “true” to “who we are” (Holzman, 1997, 108). We behave as if there is single exclusive way of knowing our self. We start presenting monolithic archetypes of what we perceive our identity to be.

For example, I identify myself as an African American, but my behavior cannot be understood simply by only “knowing” this identity. In the *Conversation Projects* I hid most my body beneath black duct tape in order to engage people in a process of self-identification. I did this because often people react to the sight of my skin color before they notice my behavior. And, in a similar way Megan hid her identity beneath a smile. Typically people notice a smile and assume that a girl is simply happy. Megan “wore” a smile in order to be questionably accepted and liked. However, when she performed her “everyday smile” while vomiting diet food the critical implications of *her* performance of identity were made shockingly clear.

Though no matter how we twist our identity with duct tape or a smile, we are never in control of impressions that others form or the image of who we are. The boundaries between the self and the other are in no way clear. Knowing, even knowing the self, is always difficult. Like everyday life, the self can be understood through performance. The “self” is a word that is used to describe a set of reactions and interactions between a

network of self-defining tissues, structures, vessels and organizing bodies. The “self” is a marker of borders that contains a system of relations which are identified as mine and yours. “Each one of us has a particular signature, ecology of somatic markers ...[However] the boundaries of my body are invisible, a floating shield of self-production, unaware of space, concerned only with bonding and unbonding” (Varela, 2004, p. 42). There is no definitive or final organization that can be called absolutely and solely “my self.” The self as well as the other is an indistinguishable part of a dynamic system of relations.

Certainly, I can speak about my physical self, spiritual self, emotional and psyche self. We talk about our political bodies, and our patriotic, foreign, healthy, immune suppressed, and well rested bodies. We know ourselves on a personal, local, communal, national, international, planetary, and even cosmic scale. We believe being “in touch” with the inside of ourselves is extremely important for a good life. And, in schools healthy interpersonal communication is praised, discussed, and insisted upon. Yet, knowing the self is, and will always be, difficult!

Who am I? This is precisely, the question asked by a well-known cognitive scientist and Buddhist practitioner, the late Francisco Varela<sup>18</sup> in an essay, "Intimate Distance" written in the summer of 2000. After undergoing a liver transplant Varela states,

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<sup>18</sup> In the winter of 2004 a friend of mine sent me an incredibly enlightening article by the daughter of Francisco Varela. Most of the article is a reprint of his essay “Intimate distance” (2000). In the middle however his daughter, Amy Cohen Varela a clinical psychologist, includes some very interesting background information about this gifted scientist and philosopher. Amy (2004) writes, “FRANCISCO VARELA WAS AN UNUSUAL SCIENTIST. He knew that it was one thing to grasp a concept as an object, intellectually, and quite another thing to inhabit your ideas and be inhabited by them. His life’s work may be characterized as the integration of scientific, philosophical and personal research, animated by a powerful vision of a concrete, embodied ethics of

I've got a foreign liver inside me. But: Which me? Foreign to what? We change all the cells and molecules of a liver every few weeks.” (p. 42)

The borders of the physical self that Varela is trying to understand clearly are not settled, absolutely determined, or even visible. Maybe the borders of the physical self are best *understood* through interaction with world near it? On this matter Varela writes,

The boundaries of the self undulate, extend and contract, and reach sometimes far into the environment, into the presence of multiple others, sharing a self-defining boundary with bacteria and parasites. Such fluid boundaries are a constitutive habit we share with all forms of life...The intrusion is always already happening—the constant intrusion and extrusion dancing at the edge of a tenuous, fragile identity (my self, then), with no boundary defined except as a fleeting pattern. But the boundary is reinforced and sharply marked nonetheless, and easily irritated when alteration is imposed too fast, too soon, too much. As when a new microorganism penetrates the mucosa, and the organism mounts an intense reaction (inflammation, fever, allergy). It is too much change, too quickly. (p. 42-43)

In terms of this study [it is important to understand simply that the self as well as the other are part of dynamic systems always already in flux](#). And, these changes proceed towards outcomes that are either harmful or helpful depending on the perspective from which one is observing. Once again, the changing identities of the self and the other are best

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life” (p. 43).

understood through performance.

Identities are constantly being shaped and twisted by interactions with the world around us. Hence, our experiences in the world, as well as our interactions and reactions, have great deal of influenced on “who we are.” In *Conversation Project #1* I was completely surprised when the little boy responded to the question, “What color do you think I am,” by saying that he thought I was black because he could see my “red lips.” For an African American and everyone else, even the process of “self-identification” is influenced by my interactions with others.

Educators should use performance art to foster a performative understanding of the process of identity formation. It is through intimate exchange with the other that we come to *know* the self. Performance, when used queerly, can be a site where individuals demonstrate to each other the complicated ways “identifications are made and sometimes refused” (Pinar, 1998, p. 21). Through performance students can explore, comprehend, and respond to William Pinar’s queer notion “that both what we are and what we are not are implicated in the construction of identity and community” (p. 21). Identification is always a process pushing and pulling between what is and is not. Identities do not rest, waiting to be simply reiterated; they are movements within the space of difference-between subjects. It is this perpetual movement that makes the process of identification always difficult.

Judith Butler's opening statement in the essay, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* (1991), is a poignant example of the complications that arise in the process of identification. In this passage Butler is discussing an invitation to lecture on "being" gay. She is raising questions about the process of self-identification. The essay begins,

At first I considered writing a different sort of essay, one with a philosophical tone: the "being" of being homosexual. The prospect of *being* anything, even for pay, has always produced in me a certain anxiety, for "to be" gay, "to be" lesbian seems to be more than a simple injunction to become who or what I already am. And in no way does it settle the anxiety for me to say that this is "part" of what I am. To write or speak *as a lesbian* appears a paradoxical appearance of this "I," one which feels neither true nor false. For it is a production, usually in response to a request, to come out or write in the name of an identity which once produced, sometimes functions as a politically efficacious phantasm. I'm not at ease with "lesbian theories, gay theories," for as I've argued elsewhere, identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for liberatory contestation of that very oppression. This is not to say that I will not appear at political occasions under the sign of lesbian, but that I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies. (p. 307)

Even for the sake of "teaching," it is always difficult and perhaps impossible to write or diagram the problems of identification. Neither the student nor teacher can be simply told how to identify the self or the other. For the homosexual, non-homosexual, lesbian,

feminist or any other, the understanding and mis-understandings of identity must be performed.

No lecture or power point presentation can adequately illustrate the performative process of identification. The meaning of identity must be performed in the same way that an individual must wread himself or herself into a work of art in order to understand it. In the Everyday Work of Art (1997) Eric Booth, a professor of art and education at the Julliard School in New York, wrote, “Never once have I been asked *the question* [How are the arts useful] during or after a substantial workshop in which participants have had the chance to engage in the work of art” (p. 13). It is through its performance that an individual shall *know* the work of an artwork. Like wise, it is through performance that individuals shall *know* themselves and the other. Here I would like to repeat what Victor Turner expressed so elegantly, “We will know one another better by entering one another’s performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies” (Schechner & Appel, 1990, p. 1). I use performance art in the classroom to learn the grammar and vocabulary of the other. However, I must accept that this *knowing* is only part of an evolving understanding gain through the performance of interpretation. In the classroom and throughout life, it will be permanently unclear what a sign signifies. Meaning is made, argued for, and then re-performed.

### **Performing Critical Thinking**

Performance art demands critical engagement. As an educator I have learned to use this necessity for critical engagement to highlight the sense of obligation and responsibility

placed on the bodies participating in a performance. In performance there are no fixed terms for the relationship between the artist and audience, author and reader, or teacher and student. Performance reminds us that in order to understand the ideas found in a work one must be *present*. I use performance in the art classroom because it lifts the invisible partition between the audience and the stage; it urges the reader to write on top of the words of their book; it pushes the listener to sing along, and it demands that the text of an art object be not only displayed but also “played” and wread into the lives of teachers and students. Wherever it is employed performance art ushers its participants into positions where they can *use* the encounter to 1) put things together “with meaning” 2) attend to things in order to understand and explore other people’s choices in putting things together with meaning 3) and make sense of life “through the serious interplay of life and work, by asking, attending, and making connection” (Booth, 1997, p. 23).

For me performance art is the live presentation of an aesthetic argument that reveals or unmask an assumed organization of thought. It challenges what “I thought” I knew about a situation or social arrangement. Performance is useful in critiquing and analyzing those structures that seem to define existence and yet go beyond or beneath interpretation. Performance is the challenge of describing and determining the terms that create everyday lives. This artwork is concerned with mapping the unfamiliar ways a body might exist within a familiar but slightly altered context. Performance art is a demonstration of the reaction and interaction between the self and the other.

In my classes I have combined the direct address of performance art with its necessity for

critical engagement to help students queer the interactions between themselves and the other.

A queer pedagogy suggests that, rather than finding the self in knowledge and representation, learning is about the process of risking the self (Luhmann, 1998, p 149).

### **Performing A Road Crossing**

It is Friday, 8:30 in the morning on October 9<sup>th</sup>. I am sitting on Pollock Road between the Carnegie and Willard Building in the middle of Penn State's main campus. I am trying to remember the day when a student in my Art 100 course, *Concepts and Creations in Visual Art*, invited us here to "see" her final project. That was also a Friday morning. Perhaps that's why she has come to my mind today?

I cannot remember the title of the performance, and I am not even certain what the student's name is. However, I will never forget what she did. Those gestures and patterns of movement were so beautiful.

This student was a senior nursing major from somewhere in eastern Pennsylvania. Part of her family was from Afghanistan, and in class she was always interested in the exploration of otherness. I believe we had discussed the work of Merle Ukeles, Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring, and the criticism of

Lucy Lippard. I remember several minority students in that class were particularly outspoken about representations of otherness at Penn State as well as in art. Because of our diverse backgrounds the discussions about interpretations of art were often heated and somewhat decisive. Many of the students, my teaching colleagues (this course was team-taught) and I often became emotionally charged about the different arguments that were being waged.

As I recall, the nursing student did her final studio project right here on Pollock Road. That's right; she performed in the middle of the road. It isn't a heavily traveled road. About seven or eight cars pass down it every five minutes and it is not easily accessible to non-University traffic.

When I first saw the performance, the student was simply standing on the opposite side of the road. She was slightly hunched over with her shoulders rounded, and her head was hanging straight towards the ground. I was walking down the sidewalk in front of the library about fifty feet away. That was all I could see and I don't remember hearing anything at that point.

Once I came directly across from the student from the other side of road then I could see what was *happening*. Her face was hidden. Her long straight black hair was covering it. Her eyes were looking straight down. At first, I thought she was standing at the edge of the cross walk. Then I realize, she was in fact walking into the cross walk. The performer was walking so slowly that she appeared to be

standing still. Her steps were no longer than her big toe, and she never picked up either foot. She let each drag as she walked.

I walked across the road and joined a small crowd that had gathered behind her on the sidewalk. In the crowd was about twenty of her classmates and about that same number of other students that I didn't recognize. We each stood in silence just watching the nursing student. Maybe we were waiting for something to *happen*.

After five minutes, a female student/faculty/staff member approached the girl who was performing. By now she was five or six feet into the crosswalk. The lady asked, "Can I help you? Do you need some help? Here, let me help you!"

The performer never stopped taking those tiny steps. She never turned her face towards the woman who was speaking. My student simply raised her left forearm. She slowly bent her arm at the elbow until it was parallel with the road. Then, with her palm facing down she slightly turned the forearm towards the lady who was asking, no insisting on helping. Together they both crossed the road, but the performer never changed the length or tempo of her steps. It took them roughly ten more minutes to cross.

When the woman who was "helping" decided that my student had safely crossed far enough, she dropped her hand, letting the performer's forearm fall back to her

side, took a few seconds to look at the girl who was still taking tiny steps, shook her head, and walked up the side walk toward the library. The woman who was “helping” looked back every so often until she was out of sight.

During those ten minutes of crossing, the time to change classes had occurred. Now behind the performer on the sidewalk, a large number of people had amassed. There must have been about one hundred people standing on the sidewalk just watching the performer cross the road. As the crowd had grown the people started talking more to each other, “What’s she doing? What is happening?” “I don’t know. Some lady is crossing the street, but she’s walking real slowly.” “What’s wrong?” “It’s probably art or something!” “Is she sick?” “Is she blind?” “What’s wrong with her?”

No one from the large crowd came to offer the performer “help.” No one walked closer to see what was happening. The performer never spoke, looked or even gestured towards the crowd or any of the people walking and standing near her. She kept taking those tiny steps across the road and the crowd just stood there watching.

The pattern continued for about forty-five minutes. Each time the performer got to the other side she would turn and walk back across the road. It seemed like her steps coming back towards us were faster and slightly longer, but once again I can’t be sure. There was only one break in the pattern that I can remember. It

occurred when the performer stopped dead in the center of the cross walk. Her back was still hunched, her long hair was still hanging straight down, and her shoulders were rounded. At this point the performer turned her head slowly and looked at a boy who was sitting perpendicular to the crosswalk in his jeep, waiting.

The boy in the jeep looked at her, looked to his left at the crowd on the sidewalk, looked at the performer again, and then shook his head. He kept doing this until the girl was “safely” away from the front of his jeep. Then he drove off.

Not long after the encounter with the boy in the jeep, a male student from our studio class walked over to the performer, and without saying a word, firmly took her hand and they both walked across the road more quick and deliberately. This student was from Nigeria and he was partially sighted though legally blind. To this day however I have no idea why that student walked with the performer in such an abrupt and deliberate fashion.

As the blind boy and the performer cross the road, she walked straight to the lawn on the side. He guided her head as she quickly collapsed into the grass. The crowd cleared away. And I walked back to our studio classroom, and waited quietly, for something to “happen.”

### **An Artwork, The World, and Myself: It's Okay, I Don't Know**

People outside of my classes have asked, how can such works be critiqued? What is the relationship of this work to other works of art? What happens when we start discussing an act as simple as crossing the road as art? Why should anybody care about this work? How can a thing so impermanent be discussed? What can be read into the act of crossing the road? What does such an act do for the student? How does this work “help” the world?

I respond by saying, “I don't know.” And today, I feel it is okay for me to say that. For sometime I have felt that it was not okay- not knowing what to say, what will happen, or what the right answer is. Now, all I can say is, “I don't know. What do you understand?”

### **The Work, the Body and Presence**

What makes a work of art “work” and why? Matthew Goulish (2000) insists that the infinite possibilities for existence can always be found somewhere within any work. This is a much more dynamic and pedagogically useful thesis than simply asking what is or is not art. In art, things *are* becoming. One of my teaching partners, Jack Richardson, often told a story about Picasso saying to Merit Openheim over a cup of tea, “I bet you can cover anything with fur; can't you? If you wanted, you could even cover this tea cup, couldn't you?”

*Object*



*Object.* Meret Oppenheim, 1936.  
Fur covered cup, saucer, and spoon,  
The Museum of Modern Art, New  
York. Purchase **Figure 16**

For our students where did this work begin? Is the conversation part of the work? If so, how do we know this conversation happened? Does it matter? For our students where does this work end?

Where there is no life, there is no art, at least there is no “life like art” (Kaprow, 1983). However, critiques of art—that is conversations with art—are merely glances at strips of life that have been removed.

It is a funny position to be *in*: living within the very life that is being segmented for examination. We are the subjects of art’s critiques. Art, especially performance art, is an endeavor wholly committed to queering our relationship to it, to its maker, to its audience, and to the objects of its speculation. Performance art makes us understand how we are a “product” of the very world that it is critiquing. Here our bodies are positioned within the very context that is being raised for questioning. Neither our body nor the world that contains it stands apart from the exploration of the performance. In performance there is the image of a body that has potential for growth and also holds the possibility of being reclaimed as a self that could be recognized as mine – “my self.”

Yet, the re-claiming of “my self” or seeing the inside of “my self” is forever a new beginning. In thinking about what is a “work” the Chicago-based performance artist, Matthew Goulish, insists that we must question what the inside is. This looking inside of the “inside” of “work” folds onto other performative investigations. Poetically, Goulish (2000) writes,

Where is inside. What does inside mean? Inside means inside my car. What is my car doing? It is traveling along its own particular road. What is inside my car? I am inside my car, and since I am inside my car, I cannot perceive anything outside my car until it enters my point of view, which is inside. Thus we can say that not only am I inside my car, but in fact, everything is inside my car...Does my car have windows? No, it is a windowless car, because how could it have windows when everything is already inside? In fact, there is no outside; there are only more windowless cars. Each one speeds along its own particular road and all the other windowless cars. But each everything inside has a certain pattern of emphasis, of clarity and obscurity, depending on the car’s specific speed, direction, and point of view. In this way there are different everythings. Each car comprises a different everything. We are not speaking of closure, but of infinite convergences. The convergence of all the windowless cars my body and mind comprise the windowless car of my self, in which everything happens. But not every everything, only my particular everything. So this is not to say that there is nothing outside of myself, but rather that every

everything is inside of itself and every other everything including me. (p. 101)

In a video taped documentary *Goulish* (Bendau, 1997), the founder of a performance group called Goat Island, tries to explain why he does performance work. He says that performance is an attempt to tell stories about the body's experiences of *being* present. Goulish believes that in performance our bodies are sharing what they are currently experiencing in memory as well as in the physical here-and-now. So, performance is a type of re-doing of what has been done but not experience personally. In the documentary Goulish talks about one performance in particular, *How Dear to me the Hour When Daylight Dies* (1996). He explains that performance seems to implicate the presence of others as well as himself:

I think that a big part of this performance is about the presence of people who are no longer alive. Mr. Memory (one of the characters that he performs) is a kind of personification or emblem of the past in the present—in the human form. (Bendau, 1997)

Later in his book called 39 Microlectures: Being in proximity to performance (2000), Goulish talks about performing the physical memory of his grandfather working on an assembly line in a United States automobile factory. He has never directly experienced this work, but through hearing and then re-telling these stories over and over again Goulish's body performs its connections to the assembly line. The performance queers Goulish's memories as well as his physical relationship to his grandfather's stories. In the book he writes that his grandfather died one evening at home while Goat Island

premiered the assembly line piece in Europe.

### **Not Acceptance, Presence**

I am not waiting for your acceptance.

In fact, I am bothered by the amount of effort that so many artists, educators, and activists put into trying to give a voice to the voiceless; trying to represent those unfortunate others who are not (for reasons unexplored or perhaps unknown) present. I am sick of listening to people trying to feel compassionate about the pain and suffering that they did not inflict or endure, but nonetheless feel certain is their responsibility to alleviate. In order to wread anything, understand anything, say anything, suspect, feel, sense, reason about, or respond to anything, we must be specific about the details of the events of our engagements. The information that is down loaded into our bodies, experienced, and observed in our lives must be understood in context. Having “good intentions” is not good enough. To understand the other, the performance of the other must become *known*. And, to “help” the other we must be included in this performance.

Was the lady “helping” my student cross the road, or was she a participant of the performance? In theory being included in one another’s performance is easy. However, to know the other is to be familiar with a multitude of divergent realities. What if we do not want to be exposed to other’s reality? What if we believe that we do not have time to *know* the other? What if we are afraid? Can we all *just* get along?

No! We cannot all *just* “get along” because existence is not a simple matter of being or not being. We must *work* to understand each other’s performances—it is a matter of recognizing, interpreting, and making meaning of the work of a performance. Instead of wishfully hoping for togetherness, it is more useful to ask, “How the work of our performances “work”? In order to do this we must begin to understand what “work” is. Again, I would like to turn to the performance artist Mathew Goulish. He writes,

A work is an object which is infinite and singular. By infinite, I mean that the singularity of the work, which allows us in fact to refer to it as a work, is itself comprised of infinite events. We can divide those events into two kinds of infinities: first the infinity of micro events on a molecular, atomic, and subatomic level, because anything which is noticeable must be made up of parts which are not; and second the infinity of macro events, that are happening in our present, and that have happened in our past, and that clearly define a work, and temper and shape our perceptions of it, and our responses to it. (2000, p. 99)

In looking at my experience in the classroom “as” performance, I am beginning to understand these encounters as objects that are composed of micro and macro events. I can see in these events—in this “work”—different types of actions and forms of participation. Some of these activities and interactions have been negative and others positive. In these events my participation has sometimes been desirable and at other moments I am ashamed of these observations. However, I am certainly beginning to see that my experiences in the classroom are much more dynamic than I *thought*.

### **Fuckin' Faggot**

It's a Thursday evening in February 1996. I am a performance art teacher in a Washington, DC school for teenagers with learning disabilities. I am standing at the front of a school bus, looking back as students take their seats. We are leaving to perform in a Black History Month program. I make an announcement, "Could everyone please sit down so the bus driver can quickly get us to the program."

We were late, so I walk down the bus aisle and ask each student one by one to be seated. As I approach a fourteen-year-old, female African American, she yells, "Get-out my face, you fuckin' faggot!"

I stand there stunned! Not moving, not saying a word, I just stared blankly through the window of the emergency exit door behind the student. A co-teacher grabs the girl by the arm, pulls her past me, and they got off the bus. She is dismissed from the performance, and is told to telephone her guardian for a ride home.

\*\*\*\*

Until that incident, I *thought* that there was a healthy distance between my private life, the class activities, and the lives of my students. I *thought* my personal experiences in the world had no bearing on what, how, and why I taught. In class I did not look too closely at any subject outside of the immediate boundaries of our daily lessons.

A friend once told me, “If you don’t want to be seen, then don’t look.” (Once again, I am reminded of President Clinton’s 1993 policy: Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.) This was the attitude that I adopted while teaching: I didn’t look too closely at my students and I *thought* they didn’t look at me.

My sexuality was nobody’s business. And after all, I *thought* I was no different than most young African American males. I just happen to sleep with other men. I believed as long as I “looked” very male, then I could not be identified as gay. In a New York Times - article, *Double Lives on the Down Low*, (Denizet-Lewis, 2003) an eighteen-year-old African American, told the reporter that he does not call himself gay. “I’m masculine...There’s no way I’m gay.”

The reporter asked the boy what his definition of gay was, “Gays are the faggots who dress, talk and act like girls. That’s not me.” (p. 5) And, I *thought*, “That’s not me either! I am an art teacher. Not a homosexual.”

Is this it? Are these the only guidelines for structuring the performance of an art teacher? Must the art teacher simply be Male or Female, African American and “straight?” Should the art teacher be heard but not recognized? Should the art teacher inhabit a body that is seen but unidentifiable, invisible, and unknown?

What can the invisible teacher do? Nothing! I believe the process of teaching art requires the recognition of the self and the other as tangible locations in one’s everyday

experiences. Art learning involves recognizing, interpreting, and making meaning from the world near us. How then can the art educator who is “hidden” play an effective role in the classroom?

I was terrified of not only the term “fuckin’ faggot,” but also at the very idea of a student recognizing me. Usually it is not anticipated that people will develop direct, immediate, and real relationships in the classroom. So, I really had no reason to be critically aware of my presence. In addition it was my assumption that bad things happen to educators who are called “fuckin’ faggots” and it was easier for me not to be recognized as “gay,” than to consider the real consequences of negotiating such identification. In a 1992 conference paper at the National Art Education Association, Ed Check (2004) described some of the fears of “gay” art educators. The educators he interviewed talked about, “terrors, harassments, missed promotions, firings, and physical, emotional, and intellectual incidents of abuse within university and public school settings...Many of those academics compromised their teachings, research, and social lives in order to not stick out. They were afraid” (2004; p.180). Instead of negotiating gay identification, I thought it was easier to pretend that homosexuality did not exist in school.

I should make it clear that I was shocked not only at being verbally assaulted but also at the very idea of being “called-out.”(Butler, 1998) I was completely surprised that any student would identify *me* as a homosexual. This event was an utter violation to the ideal performance of identity that I had carefully constructed. In school I identified myself as a teacher, a male African American performance art teacher, but not a homosexual. This

was the performance of identity that I strove to present to my students.

There are details about the “fuckin’ faggot” story that could be added. Earlier in the school year this student was inappropriately aggressive toward me, some of her classmates, and many of the other teachers. I worked with this student in other courses, but I was not her primary instructor for that performance program. Maybe she didn’t understand how she was accountable to me. There is a lot that could be considered.

Today, however, it is not the particular circumstances surrounding this story that has drawn my attention, but rather the sheer violence of the whole exchange. In fact, the attack and my response are both very good illustrations of how violence is accepted, condoned, perpetuated, and sometimes even expected within the culture and social structure of school. Even though we all do it, masking identity is a very violent act. We sense this, but because masking is part of our daily experiences, the violence of the act is easy to overlook. However, when my students or I re-present these performances of masking or hiding identity (i.e. covering the body in duct tape, smiling while vomiting food, telling stories of a friend while walking in and out of double doors, or crossing the street until a blind man comes to take your hand), the harshness of this critical act becomes shockingly clear.

### **Masking Identity and Hiding**

What happens in the art classroom when the individual is masked, concealed, or completely hidden? In school we learn quickly to hide our individual differences. While

making observations of herself and her five year-old students, Vivian Paley (2001) noticed, “a common need in every child. Anything a child feels is different about himself [or herself] which cannot be referred to spontaneously, casually, naturally, and uncritically by the teacher can become a cause for anxiety and an obstacle to learning” (p. xix). In the classroom, there must be a conscious effort to make time for questions, inquiry, and critical reflections about ourselves.

Students are constantly coming into contact with people different from themselves, their families, and the realities that they know. “As a part of their socialization in school, children [and all students] learn to act, interact, and react when they encounter people who are different from themselves or ideas that are different from their own” (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2001, p. 2). Art can be a primary tool in learning from these experiences of differences. As I quoted in Chapter Three, Marjorie Wilson believes,

“the purpose of teaching about and through art is to allow students to see themselves—and to see the world—differently...[Therefore] we need to address issues and ideas explored in and by artists in visual cultural work that allow—even force—us to see the world, and ourselves in relation to that view of the world, i.e. in ways other than we currently do. (2003, p. 2)

Such self-awareness and subjective understanding of others is a necessary step in experiencing the world critically. I would like to make it perfectly clear that critical thinking is necessary for bringing about change, and I believe it is the mission of every single school to foster and nurture seeds of change. Again, education is about learning to see others as well as ourselves differently.

In their text on issues-based elementary art education, Yvonne Gaudelius and Peg Speirs (2002) express a poignant and powerful understanding of critical education and its possible implications for the classroom. They write,

Criticality can be understood as not accepting the world at face value but instead recognizing and challenging oppressive practices, behaviors, or ways of thinking in order to create alternatives. Provided with tools to participate in a dialogic relationship with others, including the teacher, students move from the position of passive acceptance to become active participants in the learning that is taking place in the classroom. (p. 14)

The critically engaged student is also the art student who can become “actively involved” in recognizing, interpreting and making meaning of the work of artworks. This critically engaged student is also able to develop for him or herself the theoretical tools to sustain direct, immediate and real relationships with issues of difference and the body of the other.

However, critical thinking is often overlooked by many educators. Too often school is simply a series of conformations of pre-determined identities. Too many school experiences support and perpetuate violence against the individual. These are assaults against any attempts to construct individual thought, conceive unique actions, or share utterances from any personal perspective. As far back as 1963 James Baldwin made this point explicitly clear.

September 1963, Baldwin gave a talk to approximately two hundred New York City teachers. It was titled “The Negro Child—His Self Image.” Then, in the December 21, 1963 edition of *Saturday Review*, portions of this lecture were reprinted under the title *A Talk to Teachers*. In *A Talk to Teachers* Baldwin, a best-selling canonized African American homosexual writer insists upon “a child’s right to critically challenge social reality” (1995, p. 131). He was demanding that schools and teachers allow children to explore themselves and their own worlds. Baldwin believed that the obstruction of self-determination enables the violence of racism to continue unabashed. He insists,

America has spent such a long time keeping the Negro in his place...it was not an accident, it was not an act of God, it was not done by well-meaning people muddling into something which they didn’t understand. It was a deliberate policy hammered into place in order to make money from black flesh. And now, in 1963, because we have never faced this fact, we are in intolerable trouble. (Baldwin reprinted in Schultz, 1995, p. 134)

Here Baldwin is pulling his audience, the two hundred New York City teachers, directly into the conversation on race relations by referencing his body and his immediate experience of their world. Baldwin does not talk in general about Black people. He speaks directly to the teachers about the specifics of *his* black body. He goes on to explain,

In order for me to live, I decided very early that some mistake had been made somewhere. I was not a “nigger” even though you called me one. But if I was a “nigger” in your eyes, there was something about *you*—there was something *you* needed. I had to realize when I was very young that I was

none of those things I was told I was. I was not, for example, happy. I never touched a watermelon for all kinds of reasons. I had been invented by white people, and I knew enough about life by this time to understand that whatever you invent, whatever you project, is you! So where we are now is that a whole country of people believe I'm a "nigger," and I *don't*, and the battle's on! Because if I am not what I've been told I am, then it means that *you're* not what you thought *you* were *either*! And that is the crisis. (p. 134)

By openly questioning the processes of identification Baldwin is throwing the entire notion of presence into flux for himself as well as his audience, the teachers. He is not questioning just who am I, but also where, why, and who are *we* right here and right now. How have *we* become known? How have these identifications "worked?" I would say that Baldwin queers us by asking, what is it that "*you*" understand. He is demanding that which becomes *known* can never be taken for granted, simply accepted, or uncritically and unthinkingly understood. "So where we are now is" that you and I both must strive to re-examine, re-evaluate, re-tell and re-relate what has become *known*.

However the way individuals relate in the classroom is not privileged. How identities do and do not fit into a social structure is ignored. Time and time again, a student's identities are cited only to confirm their role "as" student and the teacher's role "as" the teacher. And, in the school's environment of pre-determined "appropriate" character roles, the identification of the homosexual confirms the stigmatized, abnormal other. (Goffman, 1963) This is unapologetic, school-sanctioned violence against the individual. In such an environment it is completely impossible for students to "learn to rewrite and re-present

the cultural codes inscribed on their bodies and, in doing so to construct their own identities and create new cultural myths with which to challenge the body politic” (Garoian, 1999, p. 41). In such an environment it is impossible for the student to “be” a learner. My work addresses a need to formulate a critical language of difference that continually complicates the subject’s performance and the performance of culture. I also intend to trouble the construction of the classroom as a “community of sameness.” (Eisenhauer, 2003)

### **Seeing the Other – Queering Ourselves**

Queering is an act, a verb. It is the creation of a type of performative social critique. As stated in Chapter One, through queering a viewer or audience member is compelled to psychologically see him or herself in direct relationship with the issue being explored.

The curriculum theorist, William Pinar (1998) insists that queering as well as creative experience must be integrated within learning. In the forward to, *a/r/tography: Rendering self through arts-based living inquiry* (2004), he writes,

artist-researcher-teacher dwell within “in-between” spaces, spaces that are neither this nor that, but this *and* that. Such in-dwelling expresses and animates “a desire to explore new territory, a borderland of reformation and transformation, a geographical, spiritual, social, pedagogical, psychological, and physical site inter-subjectively and intra-subjectively situated in and

through dialogue” (Irwin, 2004). In such complicated conversation, aesthetic experience integrates knowing, doing, and making. (p. 9)

I am an art teacher, a critical theorist, a community development worker, and performance artist. I teach and I perform. I use these engagements with communicative practices of transformation in interchangeable and knowing ways. Instead of “helping” students I am struggling to learn to see the other.

In her widely read text On Edge: Performance art at the End of the Twentieth Century (1993), Cynthia Carr proclaims,

“Here at the end of the twentieth century, few things are truly subversive truly unprocessed and unlabeled or more than just fashionably shocking. But what can still push an audience to either catharsis or panic is graphic, angry, impolite talk from the Other...In the postmodern era, the traditions to be challenged exist in the world beyond art.” (p. xviii)

However in our struggle to “hear from” or see the other, I believe artists, activists and educators must critically examine the terms of our engagements with the other. How is our communication with the other determined, examined and then re-considered performatively in relations to our work? Is there room for a critical appreciation of the relationship between who we believe we are, what we intend to do and how we try to communicate?

In our rush to use various methods of critical theory to “hear from” the oppressed other, we have often taken for granted what it means to be *in conversation* with this other. As

such the performative aspects of dialogue have been too easily over looked. By using performance art, I would like to ask: who is talking, who is listening, what is being said, what is not being said, who is not talking, and who is not listening? Yes, let's look not only beyond the world of art but also beyond the boundaries of "polite conversation" and indirect engagements. Critically conscious individuals must abort the idea of looking for "good communication." We must learn to respond to *calls* that we perceive in the shared realities of our presence. With the help of performance, I urge for the re-positioning of our bodies to queerly understand the implications of direct address as it is felt *in conversation* with the other.

### **What Does It Mean To Talk?**

The presentation of this study is a critical challenge to the traditional idea of what it means to talk. The goals of this work are to *use* performance to investigate, speculate, tell stories, and ask questions about the spaces between the author and reader, the artist and audience, the teacher and student, you and I.

*In conversation* we often rely too much on our "sense" of being close, being on the same page, being in the same shoes, being connected, being familiar with or being able to "know" the other. We cannot *know* the other with whom we speak. It is only through their performance that the other shall become *known* to us (Turner cited in Apple & Schechner, 1990, p. 1). Also because our witnessing of the other's performance is itself a performance of interpretation, we must understand that being on the "same page" with the other is implausible and of no consequence. Being *in conversation* is not linear; it

does not turn from one page and then another. Engagement *in conversation* is more than a process of identifying, listening and responding to the other. Being *in conversation* is a matter of performing the relationship between the self and the other. The spaces of difference-between the self and the other are performed as commitments in response to developments *in conversation*.

In fact, understanding the very nature of otherness requires an appreciation for the performance of juxtaposing the self and the other. Otherness is not positioned comfortably outside of the self; it does not rest in the static and quiet gaze of the self. Even the observation of a performance of crossing the road can only be understood in the space of difference-between the self and the other. Furthermore, this space must always be explored, negotiated, and contested within the context of the observations of the performance.

The space of difference-between the self and the other might be thought of as a territory, quadrant, realm, or maybe even a genre. These “territories” have terms and boundaries that define their limits. Rules for engagements with these spaces can only be created, written, and performed within those spaces themselves. The spaces of difference-between the self and the other can be found at specific locations. Clearly there are places where genres belong and areas inaccessible to them. Yet, in Perform or Else (2001) John McKenzie indicates that these spaces of genre are understood and re-made performatively. He states,

Marking genre [or identifying the self and the other] involves a citation and displacement of borders. The law or clause that genres cannot be mixed only emerges out of the law of genre, the troubling clause that the mark of belonging does not belong, that property rights involve writs of impropriety. This citation and displacement of borders, of limen, opens the gates to the generation and degeneration of genre. (p. 211)

All territory is in a state of perpetual flux. The word order indicates not a permanent or essential line, but rather the performance of marking territory or genre. Recognizing the self and the other is a process of situating one's self in relation to the object of one's observation. This is how the performance of being *in conversation* precedes—one voice at a time, exploring what is differently important about each of us (Paley, 2000).

What if however the other is invisible to perception? On the matter of social invisibility and what the possible ramifications might be, I would like to re-quote Ralph Ellison (1947), who writes,

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imaginations—indeed, everything and anything except me...I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves... You often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds...it's when you feel like this that. Out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel

that way most of the time. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful. (p. 3)

### **“Talking” with Monstah Black**

The following passage are the lyrics to a three minute song that one of my best friends, Monstah Black, and I created. We performed this song several times in Washington DC with a performance group called *Bang Bang Machine*.

Punk Punk Punk Punk / Faggot / Faggot Faggot / Punk /

Punk Punk / Faggot / Faggot Faggot / Punk Faggot

### **I am Gay**

What can I say? I am gay. This is not an explanation, qualification, or pronouncement. In this statement there is nothing for you to learn, accept, deny, tolerate, exclude, include, reject, see in others, or see elsewhere. Identifying myself as gay is not a demonstration of my “alternative lifestyle choice.” I am me.

In fact, the only reason that I have told you that I am gay is because in my past other people have been offended, outraged, depressed, and even hurt that I was. I cannot do anything about the way other people feel. And, I cannot control what you now believe, perceive, or will do. My sexuality does not directly have anything to do with you unless

you want it/me to, but you already knew this.

So now what do we say to one another?

### **This is not a Conclusion**

I have turned to queering as a strategy for social criticism because it forces the understanding of participation in art learning. Through the direct incorporation of the experience of students and teachers, we can explore how these individuals participate with their interpretation of difference. When performance, direct address, queer theory, and the inclusion of the other are combined with art learning individuals are lead to exchange intimate stories about their own experiences and observations within in the indexical presence of the other. This is the only education of *difference* that is possible.

In this study, I have been inspired by interesting applications of art in the social learning of people. I have sought places where the “work” of art demands the queering of identification. I have searched for stories such as the one told by Bradford Venable (2005) who writes inspirationally about two pre-service teachers that learned about the “work” of art education while creating a forty foot mural with juvenile delinquents. The tremendously positive outcomes of this project were about changes in the perceptions of people as a direct result of their participation. As the mural project engaged them in different types of interactions, the pre-service educators, delinquents, and staff of the detention center all change the way they saw each other and themselves.

Here is a short list of some the positive reflections included in Venable's article:

The residents, as well as the staff, began to eagerly anticipate each day's developments.

One staff member even participated in painting.

[After being praised one juvenile delinquent] confided in me [a pre-service teacher] that no one had ever told him that he was doing a good job. I [the pre-service teacher] was more shocked than he was.

They [the pre-service teachers] soon began to look forward to the next opportunity to work at the center.

Conversations became more relax and open.

An exit survey filled out near the completion of the mural yield responses that reflected a sense of accomplishment and pride about their participation.

(p. 51)

In the process of creating the mural these teachers, youth and staff members also constructed new pathways for seeing differently. Hence, the site for the "work" of the mural was in body each participant as well as on the walls of the detention center. This work queerly included the experiences and observations of the pre-service teachers, the juvenile delinquents, and the staff. In using direct address, queering, performance art, and the inclusion of others an argument can be made that the "work" of art cannot be seen in simply the physical materials that are used.

Where do we go from here?

Are students more than a captive audience? Is the body of the art educator more than just a bridge to cross in the quest to find the “right” art? Is education more than the act of bestowing literacy on the illiterate? Should art education involve more than merely programming and de-programming the naïve mind of the child or non-artist?

I absolutely do not believe art educators should encourage students to memorize, verbalize, reproduce, or organize the works of others.

Much of the school experience is about learning to be our self and to socialize with others. This is why performance is essential to the art educator. Performance art offers individuals the most immediate and direct options for the re-invention of laws on the arrangement of our relationships. Performance involves learning to be with each other.

Performance is more than, “Hey, come look at what I made.” It provokes much more profound questions than, “Do you want to buy it, have a copy of it, or hang it on the front of your refrigerator?” (p. 101) In these types of body-centered artworks, the interaction with the work itself, the “art exchange,” can be harnessed as a site for critical pedagogical investigations.

By now it might be clear that I see every aspect of art as “event!” The construction, installation, presentation, participation, and interpretation of art are all small happenings

within the event of a work. Furthermore, I believe the entire process of learning can only be understood as “event!” However, the witnessing of “event” must occur in the space and exchange between the artist and audience, the teacher and student, the author and reader, and you and I. Hence, queering is necessary in both art and education.

### **Love is Understanding**

In looking at behavior “as” performance I have made explicit use of engagement, interaction, and participation to establish an overt sense of obligation and reciprocity between artist and audience, teacher and student, author and reader, and you and I. There is a considerable amount of active involvement required for the construction, appreciation, interpretation, critique and research of performance. Art, especially performance, must always be understood as more than organizing objects into rationale modes of aesthetically interesting arrangement (Debord, 1967). As stated previously, there has got to be movement, collision, and drifts involved with experiences around art. In this dissertation I have explored how performance art undertakes the process of de-contextualizing concepts, ideas, or observations in order to recombine them into new ways of perceiving and including the other in the body of the self. Once again, I insist performance art can employ queering. And, by queering, I mean, performance can make use of direct address to layer the viewer’s experiences so that he or she feels that they are in a concrete, immediate, and personal relationship with the work in the indexical present. I am looking for acts that compel viewer-participants to see themselves in a polymorphic vision with the performance. Here I have argued that with the use of performance, the artist and audience, teacher and student, author and reader, or you and I can be queered so

that we both feel as though our presence matters *in conversation*.

My work is about learning to love the process of understanding. In fact, love, is understanding. This is a line from the Madonna song, *Rescue Me* (1990). The title is ironic. Throughout the song Madonna declares that she does not need “help,” just understanding. In the middle of song she sings,

Love is understanding / It’s hard to believe that life can be so demanding /  
I’m sending-out an S.O.S. / Stop me from drowning / I’ll do the rest.

Through understanding I become a participant, not a bystander, in an individual’s fight for life. This is the only position that a teacher can perform—[co-participant with the other’s struggle for understanding](#). [We cannot provide escapes from life](#). Life is about understanding. Life is about love.

I do not use the word love “lightly.” There is nothing “light” about it; it is an exchange and interaction. Love is not given, granted, or bestowed. It is earned *together*, through experience. On the subject of *love* Toni Morrison (1998) writes most elegantly,

Love is divine only and difficult always. If you think it easy you are a fool. If you think it is natural you are blind. It is a learned application without reason or motive except that it is God.

You do not deserve love regardless of the suffering you have endured.  
You do not deserve love because somebody did you wrong. You do not

deserve love just because you want it. You can only earn—by practice and careful contemplation—the right to express it and you have to learn how to accept it...Love is not a gift. It is a diploma. A diploma conferring certain privileges: the privilege of expressing love and the privilege of receiving it.

How do you know you have graduated? You don't. What you do know is that you are human and therefore educable, and therefore interesting to God, who is interested only in Himself which is to say He is interested only in love. Do you understand me? God is not interested in you. He is interested in love and the bliss it brings to those who understand and share that interest.

I teach because I am interested in love. I am learning that understanding is love. I am learning how to accept, express, and receive it. (p. 196)

## A Performance

The story behind the following performance idea comes from a conversation two men were having while sitting at Faccia Luna Pizzeria in State College, PA.

*This is how the performance begins:* A naked man turns on a single light hanging in the middle of the room. There are rows of white plastic chairs facing each other with people sitting in most of them. There are two empty chairs on either side of the hanging light in the front row.

Sitting in one chair the man starts speaking. Then, walks to the other chair, sits down and replies to himself He is performing the conversation with the audience members around him.

### The text:

**You know last night on the street when I was holding your hand I was a little afraid. I know this isn't right, but I have to tell you. More often than not I'm afraid when we are holding hands in public.**

Yeah, I was thinking the same thing.

**The thing that I fear most is the one person in the crowd who will act unpredictably hostile toward gay people and physically attack**

**us.**

Violence is seldom random. You should always be ready for anyone to attack you.

**People aren't like that. Not all people are going to attack each other.**

No, all people wouldn't, but you can never tell who likes or dislikes you. So, it's best to assume that no one does.

**I am not going to assume that people hate me.**

**I would be judging people before knowing them! This is exactly what I don't want people to do to me.**

Yes, it is prejudging. But, you have to be prepared to protect yourself. Are you prepared for someone to call you a faggot?

**No. Are you saying that I need to be? That's like saying gay people deserve to be bashed or something.**

The fact is that most people in this society hate us. They don't want us here. It's not just random individuals that can bash you. When I hold your hand in public, I am ready for anyone anywhere to attack me.

**I'm not going to accept that. You are still saying that gay people deserve to get hurt because we are gay. Why do you believe this?**

Because it happens.

Maybe some gay people don't want to accept it, but as a black guy living in the United States I have learned that people are mean. You have to expect that people dislike you unless they prove otherwise.

(pause)

**Before talking to me did you think I hated you?**

(pause)

I didn't, you know

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