The thesis of Jorge R. Lucero was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Stephanie Springgay  
Assistant Professor of Art Education and Women’s Studies  
Thesis Advisor

Charles R. Garoian  
Director of The School of Visual Arts  
Professor of Art Education

Wanda Knight  
Associate Professor of Art Education, Art Education Graduate Coordinator, Post-baccalaureate Certification Officer in Art Education, Honors Adviser in Art Education, and Coordinator of Student Teaching in Art Education

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.
Abstract

How do we learn learning? Being near one who does it the way one would like to do it. This project identifies the “learning” dis- and re-orientation that can occur for both teachers and students by examining the characteristics of a few contemporary art practices and attempting to extrapolate from those works a character or ethos that allows individuals to behave in a liberated pedagogical way. Using four related –however independent –essays, this project attempts to highlight the ethics that have become more keenly visible in contemporary art forms such as performance art, collage, photography, and new projects in both popular music and television. I’m looking at examples in these art forms for two reasons. The first is because of their still developing and –unlike something like painting-practices – under-canonized and still developing theorization which up until now has left the working definitions of these newer practices ambiguous and brimming with possibilities. The second reason for why I’ve chosen to focus on these types of art practices is because of their associations with and use of “time” and “audience-participation”, two components that present those art works’ characteristics as fruitful models for a pedagogical practice which is heavily temporal and about relationships. The models which I’ve identified in the works analyzed in this project serve as permits; I call them “permits” because I’m presenting them as modes of working that encourage a rupture with the usual motivations and systems of how a “learning” can be engaged in actual –very tangible –classroom praxis.

The first of these investigations is limited to the teaching practice of performance artists Goat Island (U.S.). I’m interested in how their pedagogy traverses, transgresses and even transcends usual educative exchanges. Unlike a “banking” system, and not
unlike Paulo Friere’s “liberatory” pedagogy (2001), Goat Island’s pedagogy prioritizes relational interstices of collaged *anexact* bodies prior to any specific transference of knowledge. These interstices foreground integrity, collaboration, and love—meaning generosity, patience, and respect—as the philosophical imperatives in the embodiment of a *living* pedagogical rhizome. Although irreproducible, showing how my learning-body “being next to” Goat Island’s *teaching-body* “being” is an attempt to mimic what I am trying to point out in their pedagogy as a model for a renewed engagement in the truly life-altering pedagogies. I’ve defined this “being next to” as a *pedagogy of nearness* which is essentially “teaching” and “learning” bodies creating a fusion or mélange that is dependent on intimacy rather than proximity to sustain its potency. That intimacy, because of its independence from actual physical nearness relies on trust, integrity, selflessness, courage and invention to sustain and generate itself and its resultant “learning.”

The subsequent parts of this project investigate this similar ethos—further expanding the pedagogy of nearness—through an analysis of the contemporary art works of John Stezaker (England), Barbara Probst (Germany), Althea Thauberger (Canada), and Thomas Hirschhorn (Switzerland/France), along with the musical experiments of DJBC (U.S.) and Kimya Dawson (also U.S.), as well as the 2007 Oscar-nominated film *Juno* of which Dawson contributed most of the soundtrack to. This ‘*teasing-out-permissions/directives-for-the-possibilities-of-nearness*’ project is interrupted periodically by performative acts that the reader of this project has to enact or take a break to “do.” In the third part of this project there is a third kind of pause which investigates a philosophical tome by the contemporary American pragmatist Richard Bernstein, in
whose text I’ve identified the “undone-ness” that both phenomenology and pragmatism allow to this project. These performative and philosophical “pauses” also seek to incarnate the spirit of the pedagogy of nearness by playing with the formal workings of the “traditional” thesis project in order to stay conscious of the reader and how they perform in conjunction with any text to create a “pedagogy.” This collaborative making of a “text” is also key to the pedagogy of nearness.

The big question that reoccurs in this thesis is: How does simply being next to one another –or near to an “other”– effect the vigor and potential of a pedagogical exchange that seeks to go beyond the curricular boundaries of projects, “course-work”, standardized achievement and institutional assessment towards an ethical self-recognition which ultimately leads towards a more loving and hopefully truly educative exchange? And how does the phenomenological interplay between works of art and the people who experience them model such a practice? Put another way we might ask, “how can a pedagogical practice predicated on the fragilely collaborative and hermeneutic qualities of relationships produce a curricular practice that expands the limitations of where and how a learning can or should happen? How does the pedagogy of nearness purposefully and adamantly blur the division between life and work, coalescing them into a hybrid type of learning for both teachers and students; fully engaging the participants in something that is more like art and less like schooling or more like generativity and less like mimicry.
# Table of Contents

**List of Figures**

*………………………………………………………………………….viii*

**Acknowledgements**

*………………………………………………………………………….ix*

**Introduction: Notes on a Methodology**

*………………………………………………………………………….1*

**Part One: (Pr)Essence Training**

*………………………………………………………………………….9*

  - Light Hyphen
    *………………………………………………………………………….9*
  - A Note on the Light Hyphen
    *………………………………………………………………………….13*
  - Introduction to Lecture
    *………………………………………………………………………….16*
  - The Pattern the Root Models
    *………………………………………………………………………….20*
  - Guest Performance Interlude
    *………………………………………………………………………….29*
  - Lecture Reumes
    *………………………………………………………………………….34*
  - Ending that’s a Middle
    *………………………………………………………………………….37*

**Part Two: Be Near to Me (for and from a pedagogy of nearness)**

*………………………………………………………………………….39*

  - To Carry
    *………………………………………………………………………….42*
  - To Transparency
    *………………………………………………………………………….43*
  - To Alongside
    *………………………………………………………………………….47*
  - To Energy
    *………………………………………………………………………….51*
  - To Homeschooling
    *………………………………………………………………………….55*
Part Three: On Richard Bernstein’s ‘Ministry of Disturbance’

Gesturing in Opposite Directions .................................................................63
Coexisting Alterities .................................................................................66
Even Though We Say We Don’t; We All Want Reconciliation ......................69
Wide Awake, With Toothpicks Propping Open My Eyelids ..........................72

Part Four: The lo-fi Teacher

The Stomach Knot .......................................................................................78
The Freestanding Beginning .................................................................80
The Buttressed Next .................................................................................81

Epilogue .....................................................................................................89

References ...............................................................................................93
List of Figures

1. *The Weather Project*. Olafur Eliasson's installation shown at Tate Modern (London) from 10/16/03 through 03/21/04. Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. Retrieved October 13, 2008 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:OlafurEliasson_TheWeatherProject.jpg

2. The Talking Bridge. By Jorge Lucero

3. Alex’s Performance Interlude


5. Jorge and Lucas’s Animal Study Pictograms

6. The Essay Structure

Acknowledgements

This collection of essays would have been impossible if it wasn’t for the people that I am blessed to have near me day-in and day-out. Those of you with whom this perpetually constructed education becomes a reality. I hope that this project speaks – not only to the support you all have allotted me – but more importantly to your contributions in making a pedagogy of nearness a reality in my everyday. There is not a day that doesn’t come with new learning, except for the days when no one “touches” me. Thank God I haven’t had one of those days yet and I attribute that to you.

To begin, I would like to thank my students. Cameron, Emily, Erin, Russ, Liz, Sasha, Alex, Ariel, Richard, Rainer, Miriam, Claire, Evan, Carla, Hosu, Hannah, Simon, Adrian, Seth, Tim, Katie(s), Kate, Madelyn, Mari, Stella, Niki, Olivia, Jane, Rachel, Nick, Sarah, Aisling, Gordon, Mieka, Steve, Dan, Carl, Alice, George, Sam S., Rhiannon, the more recent Emily, Charles, Vanesa, Vanessa, Camille, Teresa, Allison, Josh, Sam A., Jesse, Paul, Justine, and Zach. You are my best teachers.

Second I would like to thank those who were paid to be with me and who chose to give me an excess time in comparison to whatever they were being compensated: Mrs. Dorothy, thanks for letting us make “stuff” during summer school Mathematics. Barbara Rossi, thanks for encouraging my personal curiosity and to look into the crevices. Goat Island, thank you for being so generous and for expecting the same of others even though you never say it, thank you for striving for peace. Matthew Goulish, thanks for always saying, “yes” and for making failure acceptable. Dr. Charles Garoian, your invitation is perpetual and has transformed, not only my life, but that of my whole family. Dr. Stephanie Springgay, you are the model that I want to emulate, the way that you extend
yourself to your students, fearlessly standing to the side, and allowing us to ‘step up’ – you are “the pedagogy.” Thank you for all your help through the construction of this text, through these initial Graduate years, and in the pursuit of rethinking the institutions we’re glad to be a part of.

I’d also like to thank the community of scholars, educators, artist, and administrators that I had the privilege of working alongside with for many years in Chicago: Cynthia Weiss and Nick Rabkin, your support and enthusiasm I’ll never tire of. Thank you for your commitment to the arts, young artist, students, and the belief that these kinds of things are even possible. Thanks to the CAPE family for all your support, for introducing me to my abilities as a researcher, as a community artist and educator, and for always including me in the conversation: Arnie, Scott, Erica, Jessica, Stephanie, Mark, Kelly, Amy and Yanira and let’s throw Mario from the Chicago Public Schools Fine and Performing Arts Magnet Cluster in there too. Thank you to my colleagues at Northside College Prep. High School, you are an unprecedented batch of intellectuals. You taught me how to play this game, thanks for being forgiving, encouraging, and truly “best-practices.” Thank you Joanne, Chris, Diane, Mike, Nythia, Leo, Tim, Neil, Bobby, Barry, Jeff, Mike, and of course, Jay.

Finally, those who have supported this project intimately since I was a small child until now. Mom and Dad, Toty, and Sandra – thanks for always letting me be who I am and maybe even liking me that way. God and Christ thanks for the same, and for always letting me talk about you two as if I could see you. Albert, “heaven on earth” might come if everyone could have such a friend like the one I have in you. Jorge, as our firstborn you introduced the new school, the school of love, into our house. Your energy, charisma, and
inquisitiveness overflow and inspire me. Lucas, your patience, self-sacrifice and loving approach, not to mention your humor, fill our home with the most radiant of lights; you’re the one who can make me cry with the same intensity as you make me laugh. Mateo, your swiftness and cunning courage is an attribute I hope to be able to have when things aren’t as bright. You’ll always be a “first” to me. And Lucia, what you brought to our lives is unmatched and we anticipate the great things that will come from your intelligence and valiance, as we already see characteristics that are true to your Narnian namesake, you are a “bloody mighty girl.” Of course, not one word of this paper would have been written if it wasn’t for you Maribel. I can only write a sweet word because of everything that I’ve learned from being near to you. Sometimes in silence, sometimes distracted, while driving, in the dark, on the lawn, in the kitchen, sighing, or laughing; sometimes with the most concentrated intention, even when we’re miles apart. You are the “nearness” before it was even thought of as pedagogy. As the poet Li-Young Lee writes in his poem *Self-help for Fellow Refugees*:

What matters is this:
The kingdom of heaven is good.
But heaven on earth is better.
Thinking is good.
But living is better.
Alone in your favorite chair
with a book you enjoy
is fine. But spooning
is even better (Lee, 2008, p. 16).

I am dedicated to you Maribel and this project is also.
Introduction:
Notes on a Methodology

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened)” (Mark 9:2-8).

This “high mountain” where the Transfiguration of Christ occurred is believed to be –by scholars, laymen, and clergy alike –Mount Tabor, the second highest mountain in what is known as Lower Galilee. The light emanating from the unified presence of Christ and God in this passage has since been labeled Tabor Light and has taken on a slew of meanings for a variety of practitioners and theoreticians of the Christian faith and is sometimes referred to as “uncreated light” (Bowker, 2000). It has been interpreted as something like a halo emanating from the face of Christ in artworks from Byzantine Mysticism to the Kitsch of today. This singular supernatural moment in the life of Christ serves as both a metaphorical firmament for the essays in this project, highlighting the essays’ two major philosophical threads, as well as illuminating the tumultuous contradictions that are teased out from my experiences as a philosopher of art and its pedagogical practices. The two philosophical threads that The Transfiguration presents carry something phenomenological and something pragmatic in them. Encounters with the Transfiguration-like ineffability of what begins as art education and interchangeably
melds with the Socratic question “how shall we live” (Hornbrook, 1989, p. 121) proposes –although stumblingly –that the success of a pedagogical project often hinges on the development of both integrity of character in relation to others or ethics and a specific courage in the face of the awesome incomprehensibility of time and the radiance of intimacy.

In the four essays contained in this project, I’ve identified the active interplay between phenomenological relationality and pragmatic motivation as a pedagogy of nearness. The pedagogy of nearness is essentially “teaching” and “learning” bodies creating a fusion or mélange that is dependent on intimacy rather than proximity to sustain its potency. That intimacy, because of its independence from actual physical nearness relies on trust, love, selflessness, invention and as mentioned above integrity and courage to sustain and generate itself and its resultant “learning.”

Like “[the] Byzantine mystics…[thinking] of their navels as ‘circles of the sun’, expecting [while navel-gazing] to observe a refraction (italics mine) of the light streaming from [that] sacred Mount Tabor” (Porter, 2001), so this project situates itself. Philosophically refractive, this series of texts attempt to articulate and collate at least a small portion of what they are subjectively reflecting, hence my use of the term of “refractive” in lieu of the more mimetic “reflective.” Two paragraphs prior, I prefixed both my phenomenological and pragmatism threads/filters with the uncommitted and vague word “something” intentionally pointing to the manner in which this re-searching is neither a wholly phenomenological nor pragmatist investigation. This project, not unlike what those mystics expected to see in their navels is a mere refraction that – although cautiously attempting to mirror some of its original sources – clumsily points in
an inordinate amount of opposite directions that –ultimately –might be out of my hands. These essays are attempting –on limited grounds –to purpose a proactivity that is ideologically based on what I saw was possible during my ten years of teaching in Chicago coupled with a multiplicity of often contradictory and feverishly utopian hypothesis that currently find a framework in the ideas of certain Continental Philosophers and American Pragmatist alike.

What I am doing with this investigation of the possibilities of nearness for a pedagogy is similar to Peter’s reaction in the introductory Biblical narrative. I am cautiously, (aware of the overwhelming glow of history, philosophy, and cultural/pedagogical praxis) making suggestions. These four “suggestions” in the form of essays, may be born of the intimidation caused by the objects of my observation and my reply in front of them which is also like the apostle Peter’s, “[teacher] it is good that [I] am here.” I would like to think that –like Peter’s awkward suggestion to build temples in light of what he was witnessing –my suggestions in this project are born of a certain comfort with my fears and misunderstandings of the text that blind me. I recognize that those “text” which are artworks, artists, the form of this thesis, and the teaching field are forgiving and will, not unlike Christ to Peter’s suggestion, treat my modest suggestions kindly.

Identifying this project as a refraction of a multiplicity of simultaneous sources I believe ties it principally to what Maurice Merleau-Ponty would call the fold (1973, p. 227) and what Deleuze and Gauttari might identify as coexisting plateaus (1987). To not veer to far from that imagery we might want to label this project as having a phenomenological bent to them, a variation of the phenomenological act of reflection if
you will. Which is, after all, according to Edmund Husserl a functionary practice not a simple expository engagement (1954). In this way, my approach here is equally pursuing a pragmatist bent. However, Charles Peirce would re-label this lens as “pragmaticism” (Peirce, 1998, p. 335) adding an additional “ci” in order to distinguish it from the more common and as Perirce would say “abused” (p. 334) term Pragmatism. It is important to note the distinction here because what pragmatism first was established to mean is more attune to my particular project as a “doing” motivation which relates to a “definite human purpose” (p. 333) rather than a mere measurement of the “done” which in its abstraction never has any “solid ground under [its] feet” (p. 333). Through this “pragmaticism” lens the essays of this project will always be incomplete, but this incompleteness has the motivation of a social good that is both palpable and concerned about the well being of others. This text is not just a contribution to the dynamics and conversation of a philosophical or art education literati—it wants to do not just talk.

To escape the “literati” temptation we can keep an example in mind. Returning to the Byzantine “navel gazers” we find a Greek monk whose primary theorizing was around the Transfiguration. St. Gregory Palamas—under threats of blasphemy—claimed that the Tabor Light could be replicated through an intensely introspective approach of personal or introspective prayer that is known in Eastern Orthodoxy as Hesychasm. Palamas’s idea for this meditative practice was, “that God really communicates knowledge of himself to humans (italics mine), and that the experience of the uncreated light of the Godhead in [private] contemplation, claimed by the Hesychast monks, is veridical” (Bowker, 2000). This attempt at attaining the refracted light—not dependent on an exterior body—either one’s own or a communal one, i.e. a religious body like a church
—is my methodological base for these investigations. It is a contemplative approach in the true sense of the word *theory*, which finds its etymological root in the Greek *theoria* meaning "contemplation, speculation, a looking at, things looked at" (Barnhart, 2006, p. 1132) and which shares its root with the English word for a more commonplace activity that *also* involves a presenter/actor *inter-acting* with a contemplator/audience in that cultivating or culture-making project we identify as *theatre*.

Looking at the shared etymology of theory and theatre, I present the following project as both theory *and* theatre in that it not only seeks to reflect but also to *inter-act* with objects and as subject. I use “*inter-act*” not really as a “doing together” but more with the rupture of the hyphen which in its separation allows us to look at the word parts differently. I present them as *inter*, meaning, “to put in the ground” an *act or doing* that Husserl might call an alive “sediment” (1954, p. 149) or a constantly reevaluated and *reconstituted* foundation which is both *nurturing* and nurtured into.

In *Part One: (Pr)Essence Training*, I’ve juxtaposed both the theoretical and the theatrical in an experiment that functions somewhat like a “Choose Your Own Adventure Book” (Cherny, 2001, p. 34) except it is more like “enact your own performance.” Although, the main purpose of this essay is to discuss the *nearness pedagogy* of the performance art group Goat Island, the essay is *interluded* about three-fifths through with a performance that can *only* be activated by the reader. Both the essay and the reader’s interlude hope to present the acutely phenomenological pedagogy that is situated in Goat Island’s specific teaching approach which forefronts persons before product, and production before verbal analysis.
The second essay, *Part Two: Be Near to Me, For and From a Pedagogy of Nearness* again looks towards the “behavior” of art works to extrapolate characteristics that might help define what “nearness” can bring to the politics of learning, in particular when it comes to—again—forming relationships that will be transformative for all of that particular situation’s participants. By looking at the uniquely and purposefully underworked collages of artists John Stezaker, the multiplicitous sonic layering of DJ BC, and the simulcast photographs of Barbara Probst amongst others, I’ve identified three characteristics that can be coupled with what we’ve found in Goat Island’s teaching approach in order to present a fuller model of what it might be like to be a “pedagogue of nearness.” The collages of these artists function well for the defining of the “nearness pedagogy”, not as mere metaphors, but rather as full examples of a type of behavior or manner of being that, although presented as objects, opens up permissions for a teacher to exist in a manner which may be unusual to what we might customarily see in classrooms that foreground the transmission of content over the development of a perpetually transforming learning community. The characteristics that serve this project’s objectives—in both the art works and the *pedagogy of nearness*—often ooze the messy and somewhat uncontrollable potentiality of unpredictability, simultaneity, and moments of contradiction which although pronounced in their alterity manage to cohabit fruitfully, if not always harmoniously.

In *Part Three: On Richard Bernstein’s “Ministry of Disturbance”* we take a pause to delve into some of the philosophical implications of all this “nearness” by closely looking at Richard Bernstein’s book *The New Constellation* in order to further situate the phenomenological task of being in a *pedagogy of nearness* within a clearly
delineated pragmatic practice. Looking at the works of some of the more important Continental philosophers of the twentieth century Bernstein points to a mental functionalism that might begin to solidify what a nearness practice might look like in actuality and as I’ll point it towards an actual classroom practice. True to my form though and one of the main characteristics of the pedagogy of nearness the investigation of The New Constellation concentrates on Bernstein’s accentuation of formlessness, bringing up some of the central questions of the pedagogy of nearness’s project-ness:\footnote{1} what happens when there is an attempt to academicize something that is based in the situational? What is the singularity of the ‘carrying’ pedagogy? and How is a pedagogical existence primarily a philosophical existence? or vice versa. By avoiding the privileging of a specific philosophical linearity or by resisting the tempting homogenization of alterity, with its faux promise of cleanliness and order, the analysis of Bernstein’s text focuses on the elevation of failures and their capacity –if left uncovered –to be the driving force behind the vitality of and ultimate survival of all the learning that a pedagogy of nearness can do and not just the “schooling” or training that happens in the classroom.

In the final essay I return to an attempt at pulling out “permits” from phenomenological encounters with artworks. Except this time it is a particular type of permission: it is the one the Bernstein starts us off on, the one of being incomplete, messy, and maybe even other-worldly “failing.” I’ve termed it the lo-fi teacher after an aesthetic movement that has recently become prevalent in independent music, movies,\footnote{1 I should note here that I’ve opted to use the word “project” for this thesis very consciously. I wanted to connote the “thrown forth” sense that is found in its multiple meanings, because in many ways I have found that this “project” has not resolved for me as much as it has complicated, hence its relationship to the other uses of the word “project” which allude to the future such as “to plan”, “ to stick out”, “to cast an image”, “to convey to others” and “a draft” (Barnhart, 2006, p. 846) also lend a more nuanced essence to what I’m trying to project here. This project then, “acts” more like the pedagogy of nearness and the artworks that inform it.}
and visual arts. The *lo-fi* aesthetic finds its origins in an initial lack of financial and technical resources but has subsequently been appropriated by very well funded outlets to produce works that simply carry the “lo-fi” look, giving the appearance that in its shoddily ad-hoc construction a cultural work somehow is more pedestrian or common, meaning “belonging to all” (Barnhart, 2006, p. 195). Whether we observe genuine *lo-fi* in the various artworks under examination in this project or not is irrelevant because the driving question of this part of the project is “how do we live next to the energy of that apparent *lo-fi*, especially when it is evident in the differences manifest through the integrities of a specific community of learners?” In other words, in the midst of a pedagogy of nearness how does this “living-next-to”, in all of its seemingly unpalatable appearance and sensations forge courageously towards—not only peaceful cohabitation—but ultimately a life-generating and unified project.
Part One:
(Pr)Essence Training: Learning to Learn through the Becoming of Performance Group Goat Island. (An essay interluded by a lecture that is then interluded by a performance –performed in part –by you).

“What is to be thought and hoped of me as a teacher if I am not steeped in that other type of knowing that requires that I be open to caring for the well-being of my students and of the educative experience in which I participate?” (Friere, 1998, pp. 124-125)

“If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing” (St. Paul, 1996).

Light-Hyphen

Goat Island, an internationally heralded performance art group, has committed half of their existence (literally ten out of twenty years) to performance/writing workshops with students all over the U.S. and Europe. On July 26th, 2008 –the very last day of the very last Goat Island Performance Summer School in Chicago –at the end of a three week “intensive” that would bring to a close the final one of these unique Goat
Island performance workshops, Lin Hixson, the director of the company prompted us to write by proposing this: “Consider an imagined community that supports you and your creative practice – [describe] this imagined community’s characteristics and activities in detail” (Hixson, 2007, p. 212).

At a table, in the main performance space of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s basement –surrounded by the final twenty-nine, soon to be Summer School alumni –I responded to this question with the following string of wishes:

My “imagined community” would have more time. We’d work without the fear of death and without the *things* that rupture relationships. We would work hard and never get tired. And when we finally did rest, it would only be because of the “working” benefits of sleep. Our memories would retain many things and our timing would always be right-on. We would eat really good and travel whenever needed. Planes would never crash. We would all get very excited by various kinds of light. That light would be something specific, like thunderstorm or hospital light. Nothing scary would ever happen and everything unpredictable would always be a welcomed surprise.

After a pause, we were asked to imagine and “record a dialogue between [ourselves] and an individual in [that] imagined community” (p. 213). I imagined the light of Arezzo, a small Tuscan village located slightly southeast of Florence and I began to write as if remembering that place. As I was writing –somewhere near the moment where the dialogue was becoming unnatural –Lin let us know that at this point an interruption occurs because “something unexpected transpires in that imagined community” and that we should continue to write “describing this unexpected event” (p. 
213). I wrote it all like this –designating the voices as $A$ and $B$ since I didn’t know which one was actually mine:

A: “Do you remember, when we saw those Piero della Francesca frescos in Arezzo?”
B: “Yeah. I’m not sure if I remember them from seeing them in person or from seeing them in *The English Patient*.”
A: “Well if you try to imagine the light…”
B: “Yes, but the light is so indescribable.”
A: “Yeah, Yeah. Don’t try to talk about the light, just think about it – imagine it.”
B: “You mean, try to recall the sensation?”
A: “Yeah.”
B: “O.K. (closing eyes). I see it!”
A: “How do we make that?”
B: “Well, you can’t do it with painting.”
A: “I know –because it wasn’t the paintings.”
B: “Was it the church?”
A: *(Surprised and confused)*, “The church?!”

At this moment enter Lin’s “*something unexpected*.”

Later, inexplicably sitting in that Arezzo Chapel where *The Legend of the True Cross* frescos are, a comet at the speed of a wrecking ball, meaning slow but not forceless, broke through a wall that was uncharacteristically painting-less. It broke through the upper half of the wall cutting a cleanly defined hole-shaped-parenthesis for the sun to radiate through. Although this sun was so obviously breathing millions of years in the distance, the imaginary tube that connected all three circles (A or B’s head, the parenthesis-shaped hole in the wall, and the sun) reminded me of an image I had seen in a magazine. It was of an Olafur Eliasson installation in the Tate Modern’s main entrance hall (see Figure
1). It was a glorious, brick-bracketed radiating circle that gave the appearance that the sun *could* live intimately and harmlessly alongside a handful of lucky or *blessed* London tourist. The light blindingly touched everything and everyone yet burned nothing.

Figure 1. Olafur Eliasson's installation *The Weather Project*, 2003-04. Tate Modern.
For the last part of this imagining exercise, Lin asked us to “describe the steps we might take to actualize the ‘imagined’ community from the actual community that we have now” (Hixson, 2007, p. 213). To me, that directive sounded like, “take what you have in this hand, along with what you have in that hand and mush them together like so, making some kind of hand cupping/squishing gesture.” That resultant “mush” actually looked like something I already had, I mean something that existed in my life at the time that I did this writing exercise. So I wrote it like this:

My wife texted me yesterday to say that she, my mom, and the kids, meaning our kids, were coming to pick me up after class (the penultimate day of the Summer School) so we could go to the beach by the planetarium. When we were close to that beach, due to much construction, we discovered there was no place to park! We turned the car around and drove towards Montrose Harbor, which is about nine miles north of downtown Chicago and where we knew there’d be plenty of free parking. Due to the heavy traffic on Lake Shore Drive it took an extraordinarily long time to make this trip. When we arrived at the alternate beach the sun was already making its descent towards the horizon line. For about two hours as the sun set, the kids played in the sand on the shore of Lake Michigan. The light in the air above the shore was palpable. I could’ve grabbed it if I had the right kind of hands. I can, at this moment imagine it but I can’t tell you about it. I can’t say anything else about it. I’d have to take you there, on that Thursday.

A Note on the “Light-Hyphen” that You Just Read.

The preceding text points to a pedagogy Goat Island has helped me, not only to imagine but –in a manner –to actualize. I would like, however, in order to avoid a hastened concretization of the potential synthesis between arbitrary memories of the
sensing of light and its possibilities for a pedagogy of nearness to momentarily forgo any attempts at further extrapolations on the metaphors involved in that “sensing.”

I will return and pose some thoughts on the preceding phenomenological encounters with light in the final section of this essay, but for now let me identify this preceding text as a mere “hyphen.” It fits as a hyphen in two modes. The first mode is as a pacing device; a device, as is modeled all over this essay by the hyphen-like en and em dashes, that create a “performative” pause in the progression of the reading of this project. This pause is read differently than the automatic decoding triggers that are set into motion by the words that bookend the “dash.” This hyphen-as-pause-action is what I’ll come back to at the end because it finds a parallel to our experiencing of the ineffable as in the example of the Transfiguration that is spoken about in the introduction of this entire project.

The other reading of a hyphen is as an actual location or functioning middle, an actual gap in between two sets of durations or meanings. It is not so much a pause as it is a bridge, a connector where thought occurs more legibly because you stick around long enough in order to create a synthesis of what lies at both ends of this hyphen. In other words, you traverse “the hyphen.” Like the lecture that intersects part one of this project and the interlude that interrupts that lecture, the texts at the beginning of this essay is the second kind of hyphen—a kind of threshold or in-between that proposes to be a juncture between two worlds. For the sake of this essay we’ll posit the two worlds that bracket this part of the project as the worlds of pedagogy and of relationality, which contrary to their similarity aren’t always found hand in hand. And because pedagogy and relationality are not indistinct enough from each other to be in complete contrast either, they can be
thought about in different enough realms to create the needed tension for this part of the project.

Hyphen, from the Greek “hypo” meaning under and “hen” meaning one, may have at one point been a musical directive that indicated two parts should be brought together “under one” (Barnhardt, 2006, p. 501). This essay is a collage of sorts whose partnership’s newly resulting center would be non-existent if not for its bulkier bookending counterparts. The compounding of these two separate parts initiates a resonance in the newly created “middle.” This vibrating middle is often wrought with an initial incomprehensibility. But upon further contemplation, the uncomfortable moment that accompanies this “middle” is tempered by its surprisingly unpredictable yet vibrant musicality, meaning its aesthetic phenomenological potency.

The talk about the “light-hyphen” at the beginning of this essay is the last documented thought that I have to show for my three weeks at the Summer School. It literally became the “bridge” between the three weeks of the Summer School and the day after the last day of the Summer School, which was a Saturday. On that Saturday I was scheduled to present a lecture at a celebratory/retrospective-like symposium on and around the idea of Goat Island’s extensively articulated pedagogical arm. This symposium was called Goat Island: Lastness, Raiding the Archive, and Pedagogical Practices and it was described as a “cross-platform event [that] combs papers, performances, and readings responding to three major themes suggested by Goat Islands work” (promotional materials, 2008, np).
Introduction to the Lecture

At the symposium, the keynote lecture was presented by Stephan J. Bottoms, theatre professor from the University of Leeds. Bottoms was followed by a panel consisting of a dozen or so “micro-lectures” (Goulish, 2000) interwoven and simultaneously delivered by Carol Becker, Abhay Ghiara, Marin Blazevic and Judd Morrissey who are all stalwarts of the Goat Island community and scholars and artists in their own right. After a free lunch, the five attending members of Goat Island performed a joint reading. The lecture portion of the event was then capped off with three alumni of the Summer School speaking to the statement, “What I have learned cannot be generalized, but it can be shared” (Cixous, Cornell, & Sellers, 1994, p. 7). Those three speakers were Judith Leeman, Rebecca Groves, and finally – rounding out the bunch – me. Although it seems like a mere logistical or aesthetic choice, I want to draw attention to the placement of Judy, Rebecca and myself at the end of this day of lectures. I believe that – as is the air of most of Goat Island’s “doings” – there is something to be highlighted about their pedagogy in this choice. I might add that this highlighting also brings to bear the prominence of Goat Island’s persona-infused pedagogy or pedagogy of nearness which is ultimately what this essay is trying to offer for those of us involved in the exchanges that can be labeled, “learning to learn.”

I asked a member of the group, Matthew Goulish, about the decision to place Judith, Rebecca, and myself at the end of the symposium in an email and this is how he explained it:

As I recall, the conversation that resulted in setting the final order for the day focused on a couple of ideas. One was that we did not want to overstate the importance of Goat Island's contribution to the symposium
by giving ourselves the last word. The last position, with us in it, would have had a connotation of emphasis, and that emphasis would have been on the significance of us and what we had to say. With your panel in that spot, it might instead connote ‘the future’, because that was your subject and your position. I mean you were all once students of ours, and now you all have your own students, and you were being asked to address this position as a subject: the future (of our teaching) in the form of what you have done with it, and how you have transformed it. Thus we would end with a beginning, which made perfect sense in so many ways with the symposium, and the entire project of ending the company. The second idea was that, once we learned you had invited quite a few of your former students to participate in your talk, we wanted that gesture of opening up into the room/future/unknown to be allowed to resonate as a closing gesture…

As is hinted in Matthew’s email, for the past ten years my work has been circulating around ideas of “teaching.” “Ideas” that acting as questions –slightly removed from the strict connotation of the academy –can be more plainly summarized as, “what do we pass on?” This “what” needn’t be followed up by a question of “how do we pass that ‘what’ on” because it is implicit that the “how” is also part of the “what.”

In preparation for my lecture at the symposium I sought to grapple with Cixous’s quote by –in some way –attempting to incarnate it. The only way that I thought this could be done was by copying what Goat Island was attempting to do with us, their invited presenters, on that same day. I had to move the “connotation of emphasis” from myself and put it somewhere that was related to me but was an independent sovereign “self.” To do this, I put in place a structure and then invited others to behave as they saw fit in and around that structure. I composed this structure for a 22-minute lecture/performance and
invited thirteen of my former students, plus a guest musician to participate in it. This was the structure:

- 10 minute - conventional lecture. (*Me*)
- 7½ minutes - performative interlude. (*students and Hanna singing and playing the banjo*)
- 4½ minutes - conventional lecture. (*Me again.*)

For this seven and half minute guest-performance-interlude I provided those participants with only three parameters. I discovered while this seven and half minutes was being performed that what I really wanted was for there to be a moment during my “own” lecture-performance where I would be totally surprised; where I would feel nervous about the unpredictability of what was occurring; where I would be learning also. I gave my collaborators the above time-constraint, a prop, and a prompt. The prop was originally sent to each participant in the form of a diagram that I asked them to interpret and construct according to their own understanding or misunderstanding of it (see Fig. 2). I was interested in what the generalized articulation of my directions would generate from my former students because I felt that in the missed registration between my imagined “guest-performance-interlude” and what they actually created lay the “magic” or “art” of what became “our” lecture-presentation. It was that “magic” that I could borrow to illustrate the *nearness* I had identified and felt in Goat Island’s pedagogy. The photographs in this essay document some of the student’s interpretations of this diagram. The prompt asked them to compose a non-fictional storytelling act that was concise enough so that it could be repeated in its entirety four times within the span of those seven and half minutes by speaking directly into the ear of random members of the audience via this prop which we eventually labeled “the talking bridge.”
What follows in this paper is the body of the lecture that I presented on that day with an aptly placed marker for when this “guest-performance-interlude” occurs in the lecture. Because it is impossible to recreate what actually happened in those seven and a half minutes, I have opted to re-create the “interlude” in two different ways for this publication. The first is an actual interruption that the reader will perform. By this I mean, that the reader should stop reading when they get to the designated marker and at an internet-ready computer view the YouTube archived video footage of those seven and half minutes of “performance-interlude” that occurred during the actual lecture. The second option for performing the seven and half minute “interlude” will be that I have asked some of my original collaborators to contribute a portion of text in relation to what they created for that day reformatted for the occasion of this project. The whole of those guest participant contributions exceeds what can be looked at in the span of seven and half minutes so the reader will have to then pick and choose material to read that

---

2 I’ve opted not to include the URL at this point in the essay since it is not actually time for the reader to view it. When that part of the readers participation arrives I will indicate the URL.
accommodates –but does not exceed –the amount of time that it takes for the “interlude” to be complete. During a second reading, the reader can certainly configure their choices differently therefore creating –in actuality –a new essay every time this project is read.

When the lecture-text is concluded, I will come back to the “hyphen-as pause-act” which I placed at the beginning of this essay, hopefully allowing this “imagined community” to serve as a juncture or a place of reflection that can further trouble the human pedagogical project that is “what do we pass on?”

Lecture interlude: The Pattern The Root Models
Originally delivered at the Goat Island Performance Summer School ‘ending’ Symposium, Goat Island: Lastness, Raiding the Archive, and Pedagogical Practices on July 26th, 2008 at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

0, Where We Begin to Measure.

Get to know a member of the performance group Goat Island and you have enrolled in a school at which you will be asked to participate not merely as a student but also as teacher. As teachers, our responsibilities in this pedagogical project are directed, not only towards those whom we might teach, but also to those whom we give permission to be our teachers. Not too long into your tenure at this rhizomatic institution you will recognize that –although the amounts of directives and parameters can be extensive – there are really only three rules that this community of learners is led by. I should say that I’m using the word “rule” not as a verb, meaning to control –but rather as a noun, meaning a measure or a pattern. I wanted to separate this in order to allow for the notion that any adherence to these rules by anyone associated with Goat Island –including its members, associates, students, families, colleagues and friends –is mostly voluntary,
sometimes coincidental, always pliable and usually occurs through kinship with the groups philosophical “radiance” rather than any kind of subscription or ordinance to a dogma or curricular standard.

Although I will spend the next few pages outlining what those three patterns or “rules” are, I think you will find –in the end –that they are in fact all the same rule.

1.

The first of these rules – the perfect attendance rule– is a catchy manner of saying, “a pattern of integral-knowing.” It is birthed from the idea that no matter how confusing, lame, boring, disastrous, or discombobulating something appears –there is always something to look at; something –that will inspire us to act with creation. In his book 39 Microlectures (Goulish, 2000), Matthew Goulish presents a dissection of the overly used and maybe even ignored word “respect’s” word parts. By doing this he offers us the opportunity to reevaluate that words potentiality. If we look at “respect’s” “Re-“ as to do again and its second syllable “spect”, which means to look, then in fact we see that “respect” means to look again. This is curious because if we can believe the idea that the second looking, the one done out of respect, is also a first looking due to its unique
situationality –than actual respect might be suggesting to us that we should look indefinitely.

Looking indefinitely –although daunting –asks us to look through a progression of time. Giving the opportunity –through that suspension of judgment that only duration can permit –for the object, which is itself a subject to change, to be different, to be alive. The rule of perfect attendance is about taking into account life, not conclusion. It is not unlike the Hagia Sophia –one of the original sources for Goat Island’s final performance entitled The Lastmaker. The Hagia Sophia is a building, whose life has never ended but whose difference, in all three of its separate stages, empirically proves that it has remained true to its namesake which is roughly translated as “holy wisdom” –or as those separate word’s etymologies suggest: integral knowing. A knowing that is attained not by a singular encounter with finished things or persons, but by a constant living-near-to with phenomena or people who never remain the same –if not because they are in a perpetual state of flux –than because we are.

2.

The second of these rules –the more dangerous one –has something to do with love. At first I thought that I would call this rule, ’love thy neighbor as thou love thy
plants’ hoping to allude to all of the gardening metaphors that speak to nurturing and cultivation. However, I think that in many ways this metaphor would be leaving out the most important lesson I’ve learned from Goat Island’s pedagogy. That lesson is not the lesson of the plant garden, but rather the lesson of the *kinder*-garden.

For the past seven years, my wife and I have had the privilege of homeschooling our four children. Now, this might seem obvious, but preceding any desire to impart to our kids the “knowledge of self” “knowledge of social skills” “intrinsic motivation for learning” “literacy and language skills” (Seefeldt, 2002, p. 2) which have been identified amongst other “Cartesian” subject areas such as science, math, and even art as the “standards” of elementary education—we first—love our children. I say that “loving them” is obvious only because it seems like common sense that parents would have this priority towards their children. This love—although intimate—is not quite a romantic love. This love is as William Blake penned, a self-sacrificial love that,

> seeketh not itself to please,  
> nor for itself have any care,  
> But for another gives its ease,  
> and builds a heaven in hell’s despair (Blake, 1953, p.37).

This is nice. But I would like to emphasize that the affection I’m describing here is rarely the first rule for the intended efficacy of what we have come to know as “schooling”, which actually looks more like training. This children’s-garden-kind-of-love introduces the foregrounding of the “other” as the primary tactic in an attempt to dissolve the hierarchical tensions that usually exist in environments where teaching is being attempted. As you can imagine—although highly educational—love rarely ever looks like
“schooling” and consequently is dispensed with once its unpredictability which makes it so much like play, is not the preferred mode for engaging the world. Goat Island reintroduces the non-spectacular, harmony, flow, open-mindedness and simulated lifeliness of “play” into our so-called “maturity.” Goat Island has given us permission to be unspectacular or maybe (and this isn’t contradictory) to be truly sophisticated in the sense of the sophist who constructs learning through oppositional viewpoints not hierarchical didacticism. By this I mean, that like a kindergartner or child – as John Dewey might note – the learner is not as concerned about the looks of things or the spectacle as much as the “totality of experience” (Dewey, 1988).

Dewey can further push us in this direction, with his inspiring take on those of us who have the ability for “creative effort” which he notes – and I would agree – is everyone due to our capacity for experience. He points out that when we have an experience with an artwork although I would argue an experience with anything or anyone, we participate in its/their making by re-creating it or them. Then he says, “We talk about re-creation. Now if we pronounced it a little differently and call it recreation (italics mine), we get, I think, the theory that art [experience, or learning] is a form of play” (Dewey, 1988, p. lw.13.365). Now, having already stepped out of the realm of schooling and into the realm of recess we can give ourselves license to think of the pedagogue, not strictly as a scholar or facilitator towards knowledge but also, if not mainly, as a lover. And for the sake of imagining a love that extends beyond the broadness of its history and the multiplicity of its individual manifestations I would like to propose the most bodily oriented sensuous notion of “lover” that only occurs via nearness and genuine attempts at the aforementioned “integral knowing” or holy wisdom.
I’m obviously not proposing a sexual breech in the student/teacher relationship. However I do imagine the closest type of embrace possible, although allot less like a hug or a *lovemaking* and more like a pregnancy or a nestling. Now, never having personally experienced a whole body inside of my body, I wish to present the viscerallity of this symbiosis as a metaphor for the pedagogue wanting through this nestling’s miraculous an “alien” nature to point towards the same other-worldliness that potentially exist in the pedagogy of nearness if one can muster the courage to enact it. This intertwinemment can then serve as a vehicle carrying both participants towards or through a learning; a learning that all participants of the pedagogy traverse in tandem.

The word “pedagogue”, as Joe Kelleher mentioned during one of the *Goat Island Summer School* lectures reveals that in ancient Greece a *paedagogus* was “a slave who took children to and from school…” (2008, np). We can look to what educational philosopher Michael Peters said in regards to “the maternal body, with its two-in-one, or one within, [which] becomes a model for all subjective relations” (Peters, 2004, p. 23) to understand that the pedagogue is not the teacher but a transport that like the “maternal body” is a host as well as an extension of the being inside her being. This whole made up of two is a mutualisitic embodiment that carries and covers for the sake of each “other.”

There is a moment in Goat Island’s 1998 performance *The Sea & Poison* when Bryan Saner, another member of Goat Island is exhaustedly circling the performance space carrying Matthew while occasionally stopping at a microphone so that Matthew can ask Bryan a series of persistent yet unanswerable questions. In this sequence Bryan always patiently offers reasonable yet inadequate answers. I came across this scene again a few months ago while reading the education portion of Goat Island’s semi-instructional
book *Small Acts of Repair*. In that text, Peggy Phelan compares the moment described above from *The Sea and the Poison* to this relationship of *paedagus* and the “young boys” who he takes to school. This relationship, Phelan describes as a tenuous yet amorous one, eerily describing the complexity of the student/teacher relationship in all its simultaneous vulnerability and impossibleness. She says,

In *The Sea & Poison* the teacher carries the questioning student, knowing full well that the facts he (the teacher) proffers do not and cannot fulfill the student’s desire, because the student wants a response that cannot be given by the other...[t]he student asks and the teacher answers once again and together they produce their repetitions. Some consider these repetitions love (Phelan, 2007, p. 189).

Through this seemingly prosaic, yet obviously intimate activity, Phelan continues

[Goat Island exposes] the ways in which love itself provokes and provides access to questions and responses. Love despite its toxicity and violence, can bring us closer to the softness of words, and therefore closer to the possibility of expressing human tenderness. If one is ambitious enough to want to create a shared history (italics mine), then one must be willing to risk an impossible dance, one that pivots on a desire strong enough to outmuscle exhaustion, a desire alive to our wavering capacities and what motivates and blocks them, repeatedly (Phelan, 2007, p.189).

As inconsequential as this might sound, our first motivation in our pedagogical existence and our attempt at a “created shared history” *must* be love. And if that love, because of its inarticulateness bring us to an “impossible dance” – impossible to fully document, replicate, or test –than we have, in many ways created a garden of children; an
enclosure or aggregate of kindred who live in a *non-Cartesian* world of constructed, not
discovered, inter-disciplinary inquiry which I’ve already identified as play, creative
response, relationships, ethics, and musicality.

Goat Island’s *garden of kin* opens its *doors* in celebration of all that is illegible,
analog, and irreproducible calling it performance pedagogy but making it feel like
“recreation.” My use of the term *garden of kin* is positioned as ironic considering the
inventor of the kindergarten, Freidrich Fröebel, opened the doors to the first kindergarten
on June 28, 1840 in celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of Guttneberg’s
invention of movable type (Fröbel, 1893) and this technology’s consequent initiation of
the democratic struggle for education initiated by the reproducibility of books. This
mechanism of reproduction is what has become ironic and is in direct contrast to Goat
Island’s *everywhere/all-the-time school* which instead is educative through the
*specialness* of the “thing” that exist *only* here and now. Although contrasting from the
standardization that a “book” education can become, a pedagogy like Goat Island’s –
primed through love –is “democratic” in that it is about persons “ruling” or “patterning”
with the betterment of *all* in mind.
3.

It is in the misses between the “betterment of all” and “the here and now” where we arrive at the last rule and where I would like to formally address Cixous’ quote that was given as a prompt for the panel this lecture was originally delivered for. I’m going to talk about it a few pages from now, but I want to make a pause here so that you can see how this root grows.

For the final five years that I taught at Northside College Preparatory High School in Chicago my students and I had the great privilege –through the sponsorship of Chicago Arts Partnership in Education – of constructing a working and social relationship with Goat Island that had us doing everything from sharing meals and workshopping to ultimately making works together. Among these works were a small poetry book called North True South Free, a hypertext webpage inspired by the assemblage films of Joseph Cornell, a short video, a series of book-sculptures and a performance at the OPENPORT International Performance Festival.

I’ve never made a secret of the fact that the relationship I’ve been blessed to have with Goat Island has indeed transformed my pedagogy. What Goat Island’s pedagogy offered me was a license to suspend my teaching professionalism. When this “suspension” occurs in a teacher, what then remains is what Edward Said implied by stating “that perhaps he has nothing else but a pedagogy” (Ulmer, 1985, p. 157) when asked about the ambiguity of Derrida’s pedagogical position in relation to the rhetorical question that Derrida used as a title for one of his essays: “Où commence et comment finit un corps enseignant” or “Where a teaching body begins and how it ends” (Derrida, 2002, p. 67).
This pedagogical epoché was Goat Island’s gift to me and as Matthew reminded us on the second day of the 2008 summer school after I resisted killing a spider that I could’ve very easily squashed with my foot, “with great power, comes great responsibility.” So I made it my work to respond to an “other” and gift what I was given to as many people as I come in contact with. On the day this lecture was delivered, thirteen of my former students –whom I now would consider very good friends –were in the audience. And for seven and a half minutes they made an “interlude” at this point of the lecture. They performed independently, with only the three directives that I outlined earlier in this essay. Before they began to perform, I cued them by speaking these words, “What [we] have learned cannot be generalized, but it can be shared.”

**Guest Performance Interlude occurs here for seven and a half minutes.**

This can be done, as I said earlier, in two ways.
The first is to visit this link: [www.jorgelucero.com/performanceinterlude.aspx](http://www.jorgelucero.com/performanceinterlude.aspx) if you choose to view the video link, I would suggest that you do it using headphones for a maximum experience.
The second is to pick and choose seven and a half minutes worth of material to look at from the following assorted text. When you reach the part that says “End of Guest Performance Interlude” please return to the lecture proper.

**a. Hannah**

I have only seen three dead people in my life. One was my great-grandfather. I put a rubber duck in his coffin to keep him company. The second was my friend’s mother. Her face was smooth. The third was the baby, the dead baby. In the morning I heard pigs outside of my window. I went into the other room. The woman with the pink or sometimes blue skirt was there. She took me into another room. The white table was
small. The little blanket mound on top of it was small. The wrinkled baby was even smaller. Its pinky finger was the smallest of all.

b. Alex, Ashley, Allison, Patrick
Holy shit there was an earthquake!
Hillary dropped out of the race!
Oops false alarm
Heath Ledger died
c. Erin

Imali smo vrlo malo para i manjak sapuna.
Noæu mi pevamo.
Ja ga teram da mi priæa istu prièu svake put.

Ja sam otkrila da kafa u samoæi nije kafa.
Ja pokušavam.

d. Claire

We were dry with a few Amstel Lights at our feet, standing only with the support of our discarded life preservers. I felt you looking at my shoulders as I rowed the boat, bare for the first time you've seen. We don't spend our summers together.
Oh, what a fantasy I've made of you! No, no, that's a different you, when
in fact, it was only sister sitting at the back of the canoe. She's seen my shoulders, my stomach, my flesh and blood under her own arms, her own chin, her own thighs.

Better yet that you didn't trail me passed papa fishing for Big Mouths or listen to me go off on a loop about herons, cranes, king fishers, egrets. Better yet for me to have spent the day out on the lagoon without you staring me down, and to feel again what a religion fishing birds can be.

Rowed right up to the Great Blue. Just feet away, he looked me back and forth; his head was always high. He disappeared looking me straight on, his beak waxing and waning like the hinge of a moon.

Got mighty close and he took to flight. Perched again up on a pier, crooked like a spiral staircase with the blue king on top. Rowed right up to that one too. He caught our drift though, did a hop and flew again.

e. Olivia

I can't stand constricted blood: to think of fingers grown fat on either side of wedding rings and rubber tubing yanked around arms in movies about drug addiction make me really queasy. Last year in my dorm's bathroom entire rows of girls would wind floss around their fingertips and I couldn't be in the same room.

This week my wisdom teeth were removed. The room was taller than it was wide and the walls were covered in photos of oral surgeons, the "emeritus" men had the same last names as those currently practicing. A little clamp was placed on my index finger and a cuff was on my arm to monitor my heart, and I could watch myself panic as the frequency of beeps raced on and the green line jumped. Then they put me under and it was okay.

f. Sasha

I remember the chocolate and her smile.
We met on a train to An’yang, a small city of 5 million, notable only for, well…I spent a weekend there and still don’t know why it’s notable. But it was on the train from Beijing to An’yang that I sat across from her. We had the hard seats, as they are called, 3 seats facing three seats, and then the aisle. All 5 other seats in my section were ladies, and I wasn’t unhappy to be spending the eight or so hours on the train with them. Three were Americans, girls in my program, and two were their roommates. After a short time I busted out my first salvo of snacks—Koala Yummies—memories of my childhood refound in china, to be shared with all who would partake. And then she spoke. She shyly asked me:

尝尝，可以吗？

我说：

当然！吃吧！

那时候以后我越来越喜欢她，那时候这个故事被变成一个爱情的故事

Pretty soon she had taken out her own snacks, wonderful snacks. Chocolate from the chocolate fields of Guangdong province, rice crackers from the great fields of Hangzhuo, and cookies, picked fresh from the ancient groves of cookie trees in Xi’an—and my eyes opened. I saw that this girl was beautiful.

Later, we played cards, Bullshit to be specific, and she kept on winning. How wonderful to see this beautiful Chinese girl being tricky and devious, to watch the evil little smile play across her face, it was then that I fell in love.

**g. Carl**

Yesterday we went to a Taoist temple. The line to get in was four hours long. I remember thinking, ‘nothing could be worth this.’ Lucky I couldn’t communicate such a thought. Three and a half hours into the line, I
noticed many people going into the temple where there was no line at all. So I guessed we were going into a different part, a more exciting part. Right at the door we were going to use, there was little, dirty corner on the entrance arch where everyone was rubbing their hands as they entered. I figured this was like taking holy water as you go into church: most people do, but you don’t have to. I was torn, given I don’t practice Taoism, but decided I should rub my hands on the corner anyway. It’s a good thing I decided to rub it. After passing through the gate, I saw that we were all going to the same place, line or no line. The line was to touch the corner. Go figure. Once inside, there were lots of people, lots of incense, and lots more touching of special things. I even touched my animal on a big Chinese calendar.

End of Guest Performance Interlude.

Lecture Resumes.

What you have just experienced was a school. Obviously, not a school in any conventional sense, but the third pattern or rule embodied: the rule of restraint. The shared origin of the term school, and its cousin- word scheme which is “schein” (Barnhart, 2006, p. 968) point to Goat Island’s pattern of the courageous, very non-academic, act of holding-back or staying-in-place. Waiting –and with a tremendous amount of courage – allowing things to germinate with minimal intervention from them as “teaching bodies.” Goat Island’s stepping aside permits the student to be late, to be small, to be slow, to be inaudible and sometimes even invisible. Ultimately, like we do with breath, to be so alive, that we eventually have to allow the breath to be gone; even when we may have missed its coming.

To enact this act of “self-restraint” Goat Island promotes limits. They encourage their students to imagine, but they loosely direct the imagination. Goat Island while
instructing students during the construction of a performance or the writing of a piece of text might give a directive that sounds something like this: “imagine yourself as a machine” or “perform your movement in 55 seconds”, perhaps “imagine that you could fold what you’ve written in half and see both the end and the beginning simultaneously.”

One of the members of Goat Island might provoke the “student” imagination, as I wrote about earlier by asking the student to “Consider an imagined community.” They’ll ask you to filter it any number of seemingly contradictory ways and then they’ll just step out of the way, letting “the student” teach themselves; allowing the teaching to teach. Goat Island *returns* to the learner sovereignty. Sovereignty of their ‘island’, an island of which the shores may be determined but not what happens within those ‘limits’ and where there is no rule about going into the uncharted water that surrounds each individual’s piece of land.

Reflecting on an audience member’s reaction during one of Goat Island’s performances, Bryan Saner wrote, “Our controlled silence and stillness allows for life elsewhere to be recognized” (Saner, 2005, p. 7). Bryan wrote this in response to a man’s pronounced response to a 377 second *stretch* of stillness during one of the showings of *When will the September Roses Bloom? Last Night was only a Comedy*, a 2004 Goat Island performance at The Athenaeum Theatre in Chicago. This “stretch of stillness”, unlike many Goat Island “moments” can actually be described. It literally looks like this: Lito Walkey, a member of the troupe stands still with one of her legs perpendicularly extended from her body, bent at the knee with here foot about twelve inches above the ground. Lito looks like the letter *h*. She stands like this for the duration of two James Taylor songs (377 seconds) and it is –indeed –excruciating to watch, but not because
“nothing” is happening, rather because what is happening is so incredibly nuanced that one can imagine Lito’s struggle to maintain this pose. Anyway, the man in the audience marched out noisily alerting us all that his fear of the appearance of “nothing” was much more than he could bear. The “rule of restraint” is –in fact –a very frightening place, because it is an interior space that is eerily noiseless and whose possibilities often reek of an impending loss-of-control or at least no assistance as one might be striving for that “control.” Considering the fact that this space of “restraint” is not a place through which we pass, but actually a place that one must live in, one doesn’t need a teacher or a guide to show the way. Actually, “control” may actually be a misplaced objective in this “alone” place. Rather, one just needs others who have been living there one more day than we have and who are willing –lovingly – to live there, near to us.

In this way, Goat Island is a “prophet” having arrived one day before us. And as a prophet, they are an inspired person. “Inspired” –meaning to breathe in order to “to animate with an idea or purpose” (Barnhart, 2006, p. 532). Both Goat Island as a pedagogue and those of us inspired by their pedagogical “breath” are a representative of what Seamus Heaney would call the “Republic of Conscience”, a place where there are “No porters. No interpreter. No taxi. You carry your own burden and very soon your symptoms of creeping privilege disappear. [It is a place whose] embassies [are] everywhere…operate independently and [where] no ambassador would ever be relieved” (Heaney, 1987, p. 251). As I noted at the very beginning of this lecture, “get to know a member of Goat Island and you have enrolled in a school at which you will be asked to participate not merely as a student but also as teacher.”

Lecture Ends.
Ending that’s a Middle, a Hyphen, that is.

As I noted before the lecture interlude, the idea of the hyphen—in its “pause act”—foregrounds in the reading of a text or a learning from anything, the element of time. In that way the earlier thoughts about my personal refracted phenomenological experiences with the ineffability of light are nothing more than experiences of time and in many ways directives towards an investment with this idea of a nearness pedagogy. If Goat Island is our first model, then a pedagogue that is like “light” is a phenomenological experience who in their overwhelmingly sensory emanation and their temporalness will automatically retard the impulse towards articulation or definition for those who come near to them and wish to categorize what they may be experiencing. This slowing might happen because of confusion; it might happen because of irregularity but whatever the impetus is, it will demand those who come in contact with the groups pedagogical-persona to dwell in the irresistibility of their “nowness.” Can we imagine a working or learning community that is like light? Irresistible and dumbfounding, serving as a juncture or an entity of reflection that can further trouble the human pedagogical project which is “what do we pass on?” In the subsequent essays I point towards models that are slightly more stoic than Goat Island in their articulation of this nearness pedagogy
because they are art objects not humans. These art objects, although not “alive”, continue to generatively offer a rather useful, and maybe “cleaner” articulation of the “characteristics” that I’ve begun to identify as “permissions of behavior” in pedagogical relationality that seeks to predicate “nearness” over content transmission. The difference between looking at artists/teachers versus other more inanimate types of “text/teachers” for a “learning-how-to-learn” is that the light\(^3\) that is the artist like the members of Goat Island feels more like a reflection which is uncomfortable and sometimes in its familiarity, deceiving; and the light that comes from objects feels more refracted and hence not as blinding. So I’ll conclude this essay by reestablishing the point that notes the peculiar “singularity” of Goat Island and my limited, very personal understanding of what I’ve seen manifested in their approach. Although I have no doubt that there are a variety of strong interpretations out there on this particular phenomenon I have learned how to learn by being “near” to a group of learners known as the performance group Goat Island; who learn the way that I want to learn, together.

\(^3\) I should note before ending this essay that I’m using light as a way to talk about indescribability not some of the more familiar tropes associated with light as enlightenment, purity, or salvation – although I must admit that one can’t wholly escape those allusions and since I understand the utopian and idealistic implications of my project I won’t reject that type of a reading with all of its inevitable controversy.
Part Two:  
Be Near to Me: For and From a *Pedagogy of Nearness.*

The Gift of an Abstract

I have a purpose. That purpose, however trivialized it may appear, is to learn how to live alongside others more radiantly; to achieve an intimacy with my fellows that supplants models of *living* alongside one another which are predicated on fear, linearity, competition, homogeneity and the self(ish)-seeking of comfort. In other words, my purpose is to articulate, investigate, and adopt a *pedagogy of nearness* that overflows and transfuses with *living.*

To further clarify what I mean by a “pedagogy of nearness” I’d like to outline an abstract of this second part of my project for you. Consider this “abstract” a gift. An abstract presumes to serve as an indicator for the reader to decide whether or not they would like to continue to read any further into the project. My hope is that this abstract will stand as an example “in the flesh” of the pedagogy of nearness in regards to the three, previously outlined, principles that Goat Island employs in their pedagogy of nearness. By telling you about this essay in the next few lines I hope to enact “attention”, “love” and “restraint” towards the reader. It is my sincere hope that my execution of the “pedagogy” would give precedence to your best interest before mine. My interest –which was not to give away the whole of this essay in this second paragraph –will be set aside for your sake. In this abstract I’d like to anticipate the three characteristics that I have identified for this pedagogy in specific art examples, as well as the example of how I activated them in an actual “teaching” situation.
As noted, each characteristic in this second essay was discovered by means of experiencing a creative work and my hope is to present both the artworks and their partnered ideas as another example of this form/content/practice/theory assembly that is a *pedagogy of nearness*. Firstly, I’m going to point to the *lo-fi* aesthetic. This way of making is readily evident in the collage works of British artist John Stezaker. His work permits us to exercise minimal labor in our work. This work ethic, in its very nature, attempts to avoid superficiality, capitalizing on the energetic and generous ambivalence of what I have labeled “transparency.” The second issue that I see dancing around a *pedagogy of nearness* as identified in artworks is the heavily loaded “spending-time-next-to” and working alongside “difference” that seems to be permeating curriculum literature at the moment. Barbara Probst, a German photographer creates a participatory art of simultaneity and “differences” that is incomplete without audience interaction. My hope is to propose an engagement of those “difference” through a conscious participation that equally works within the realms of criticality and creativity. Then, I will conclude my examination of the possibilities within artworks for the *pedagogy of nearness* by looking at the amplification of what I have identified as an “energy” that, although tangible, is often difficult to define. To do this, I’ll employ the musical *mash-ups* of Boston’s DJ BC. In his work we sense *that* indecipherable energy caused by acts of assemblage, which Barbara Kennedy pinpoints in the films of David Lynch as, “certain sequences…which have a specific intensity and an effect on the viewer that is almost inexplicable” (2003, pp. 99-100). To end, I will present a personal example that demonstrates the characteristics outlined in this essay integrating with each other in the most generative

---

4 I will return to the ‘lo-fi’ in *Part Four* of this project, but for now the definition outlined in the introduction to this volume (p.7) should suffice for the purposes of understanding the pedagogical implications of Stezaker’s collages.
non-insular manner possible. In the collaborative works that I make with my children, I’ll try to demonstrate the cumulative effect of “transparency”, “performing-alongside-difference”, and irresistible “energies” as our home-practice has becomes this pedagogy of nearness.

This analysis of art-work is important because this “pedagogy” is first and foremost an “art-work” itself. I’m not referring to it as an end, nor do I see it as a means. Actually, I’d be hard pressed to identify this pedagogy of nearness as any specific way of doing “a school.” I’d like to present it more in terms of a way of being—which is actively, both a “means” and an “end” that creates a residue of its activities in the body (body-residue) while simultaneously leaving behind evidence of its workings in the world (world-residue). To be more clear, I would identify the “body-residue” as learning and the “world-evidence” as art. However I don’t want to fix these ideas so tightly yet. I’m borrowing the phrase “live(d) curriculum” from Ted T. Aoki to further articulate the functionalism of the pedagogy of nearness which produces residue both in a “body” and in the “world” (2007, p. xx). Aoki’s phrase is juxtaposed by Springgay and Freedman in their text Curriculum and the Cultural Body next to Bill Pinars understanding of the act of curriculum which “provides students and teachers with an embodied understanding of the interrelations between knowledge, life experiences, and social reconstruction…[it] is an intensified engagement with daily life” (2007, p. xxi). A way of looking at this blended practice between moments of “knowledge” and “life experience” might be through the pragmatic eyes of John Dewey as “a pursuit, not a coming into possession of the immutable” (1920, p. 263).
To Carry

The “pedagogue”, some think is the teacher who holds and disseminates coveted learning. I’ve often heard teachers who see themselves as educational constructivist, wanting maybe to distance themselves from the connotations of the label “teacher”, call themselves “facilitators” even as they continue to actuate themselves in the role of disseminators. In the role of facilitator, the teacher is still exercises a hierarchical strategy. Going back to our example of “teacher as lover” and lover as “carrier” which was introduced in Part One of this project I’d like to invert it one more time to reconfigure the “teacher” in what Michael Kimmelman pinpoints in the word “amateur,” which etymologically also means “a lover” or one who does something for the “love” of it (2005, p. 5), as opposed to the “professional” or a know-it-all who may “do what they do” because they’re good at it. This amateur spirit reinvigorates the practice of teaching by perpetually reinstating a self imposed “dumbness” on oneself with a willingness to put others before themselves. Convoluting the usual teacher/student roles of a pedagogical relationship takes into account what our students have to offer even before what we think we have to offer them. This amateur spirit, in other words, positions the teacher or “carrier” as having the confidence or humbleness to allow themselves to be “carried” by those whom it may appear they usually have to “carry.” Through this act of love and respect towards one another the teacher may take on the characteristics of many of the artworks examined in this second essay, in that the works being examined here, seemingly give more than they take even at the risk of losing a part of themselves during the hermeneutic calisthenics that occur between the objects and those who look at them,
frequently taking wide freedoms during the interpretive engagement that is ingrained
with “sign” literacy.

To Transparency

For all the ways that love can be defined, I’d like to use John Stezaker’s collages
to examine one possible characteristic of love that we might find useful in executing our
pedagogy of nearness in a practical way. This characteristic is transparency. Stezaker’s
work shares with Goat Island’s pedagogy blatant attempts at creating transparency; its
see-throughness, potentially subjecting it to all sorts of mistakes due to its naked fragility
and vulnerable strangeness. Similarly, Stezaker’s collages carry a certain degree of
unabashed dumbness or “amateurness” in their unpredictable humanity, with all its
complexity, and consequently can edge us closer towards our goal—which is to derive a
learning through nearness. The nearness that is can be experience through a certain
uncovering.

Now, the best way to describe Stezaker’s work is to show it, however, for the sake
of articulating a more generous ground that can service our conversation, I’m going to
attempt to describe merely with words the properties of these works that I believe might
be useful for us. I’m going to leave these up to your imagination. Without minimizing
Stezaker’s output, I want to call attention to only three variations of his collages. The first
is a kind of collage that is created by making a single, straight cut down a strategic part of
the “face” of the celebrity in a vintage black and white or sepia-colored Hollywood
headshot. These halves are then matched-up with another headshot-face-half attempting
to line up as many of the facial features as possible. The resulting hit or miss moments
along this cut vibrate as a creepy anamorphous hybrid –usually male/female –that via this simple cut and rearrangement creates an uncanny reaction in the viewer. These individual face-halves or now independent hybrid-bodies are like what Kennedy calls in Deleuzian terms, “not stable units, but…elements in assemblage, fluid and mutable, constituting life through ‘becoming’” (2003, p. 99).

The second type of collage might be slightly more blasphemous to anyone who equates time and effort with quality in artworks. In these, Stezaker simply paste a 4”x6” postcard over the face of one of these mid 20th century glamour-shots. They’re utterly ridiculous! The post card is often some tourist image of caverns or mountains placed sideways over the face so that it parallels the length of the portrait virtually eclipsing the entire head. The postcard-heads present a surreal nightmare that can potentially be both confusing and infuriating. Confusing because these collaged head forms initiate a truly discombobulating proposition: that our heads, indeed, are mountains or caverns. Infuriating, once again, because these collages function as a permit for minimal effort yet impacting effect in the construction of “texts”, all of which is usually frowned upon by “blood, sweat, and tears” advocates who usually arduously labor to lesser effect. As the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn stated in an interview with Sarah Douglas, “I like the idea that everybody is making a collage in his life. I like that collages keep their universality. I like that making collages seems to be easy, I like that collages are still considered non-professional, something dilettante, something non-serious, something suspicious (italics mine)” (2006). As a testament to this logic, Stezaker’s Reclined series (the third kind of collage) teeters dangerously close to the line that separates collage from sheer conceptual art. Simply put, he identified some of these same movie star headshots
of women who may have been tilting their heads slightly back as they gazed beyond the camera dreaming of their leading man. Then he merely rotated the photograph ninety degrees to one side or the other to give the illusion that this image is that of an actress who is now reclining or laying down. The comparisons to Matisse’s arabesque ink drawings of women in repose would suit these images if it wasn’t for the fact that Stezakers images are a lot funnier, more irreverent, and essentially “nothing.” Making, not one alteration to the images themselves, John Stezaker presents a revolutionary blow to ArtWorld audiences everywhere fixated on a somewhat antiquated “work-ethic” left over from the Renaissance. With this seemingly nonchalant act of “suspect” art, Stezaker presents us with “mereness.”

This mereness, in its extremeness introduces for the pedagogy of nearness the encouragement an unabashed transparency. Working in through this mereness whose intention to be as honest as possible is the equivalent of a lowest common denominator, not in a derogatory sense, but in its most useful manifestation. Its baseness allows it to create bridges between “fractions.” In other words, mereness levels the playing field allowing for disparate entities to coexist in a manner that is not forcibly homogeneous although mutually communal. This mereness in the production of cultural artifacts has come to be known as the lo-fi aesthetic, what some would also refer to as the DIY (do-it-yourself) aesthetic. It is important to point out that lo-fi doesn’t imply trashiness or lacking intention. It’s difficult to point out what the characteristics of this “type” of work might be, given the fact that it doesn’t always have to do with shifts in effort or “stabs” at the status quo. Instead, the lo-fi aesthetic is often contending with the properties of such
things as materials, presentation, audience, and ideas of beauty; as well as work ethic, the history of art and its accompanying discourses.

One thing that seems very prevalent in work that I might classify as having the lo-fi look is that it doesn’t seek to hide its inner workings, containing very little artifice. The energy that would normally come from mimicry or illusion and the resonance of the signifier exchange often is replaced by a heightened sense of awareness of how that particular artifact exists in the experience of those who come in contact with the work. Works of the lo-fi are exposed, their skeleton is protruding, their mistakes aren’t hidden, and ultimately the works feel “lower” and closer to those of us commoners standing on earth. The lo-fi is the work by the people, for the people and for good or ill, it feels like work anyone could do. And this is the key for the pedagogy of nearness in the lo-fi: How can my teaching presence be something that every person around “it” can access? Is the simplicity of my mereness and the authenticity of my transparency communicating an openness to inquiries of “how my inner workings are working? And does my transparency welcome and promote kinship towards collaboration? Is the potency of my “teaching-body’s” presence contrasted sufficiently enough with the apparent ease of its execution, like in Stezaker’s work, that my collaborators could question my pedagogy’s competency and value, while simultaneously finding it difficult to ignore or forget? This last question, I’ll more widely examine in the context of DJ BC’s work and the type of energy that his work is able to stir up.
To Alongside

So now that we’ve transformed the “appearance” of the teaching-body and turned it into a skeleton without skin, or better yet, a transparent and permeable skin, we will see that those “inner-workings” and the things oozing out from the inside aren’t being perceived and interpreted the same way by everyone. The tension that is created by difference in the hermeneutic process presents us with our second point of investigation in this task of fleshing out what it might be like to have a pedagogy stemming from merely existing next to each other.

As mereness illustrates, in its attempts at breaking down the power dynamics that can exist in educational settings, some attitudes the teacher may have to model or initiate before the student can reciprocate them. However, difference seems to be a characteristic of every individual regardless of what their role is in any given pedagogical situation and as such, that difference need only be allowed to be near to others who are afforded that same freedom. If what Mollie Blackburn says is true that, “individuals also contribute to the work of identity formation: they have agency… [that we] conduct [our] identity work” (2004, p. 251), then we find ourselves dealing with what Hirschhorn called, “everybody making a collage in his life” again.

The task of allowing the mereness of individuals to coexist becomes a matter, not of how those “collages” are constructed but instead, how are those “collages” read. This is the trigger for complicated conversations that—and I can’t emphasis this enough—are long term. The educative discourse that begins by putting mere bodies “being” next to one another is an ongoing–ever changing–process. According to Blackburn, “Teachers can create a context that helps students to be open to changing their thinking about
differences…” (p.268). She adds, “it is also important for us to allow one another to change our minds. To do so is not hypocritical but an indication of listening and learning” (p.268). This flexible, almost forgiving mindset, I find to be a major point because it lacks the usual didactic urgency that most calls for tolerance espouse. What Blackburn seems to be saying has more to do with tolerance to change, rather to what eventually becomes an overly generalized understanding of what we perceive to be the “other’s” difference. It is this interpretive pliability that allows us to reevaluate any given “difference” even when we think we know what “it” is already. As Alison Jones wonders in regards to Roland Barthe’s “arguments about the power of the reader to make the text, and his point that understanding ‘lies not in [a text’s] origins but in its destination’” (2004, p. 65). Jones then says, “it is not so much the other’s voice but its ‘heard voice,’ its audience in the classroom, that becomes the key player in meaning” (p. 65). The thing with the “heard voice” is that recontextualized or reheard, it will always sound different. So to assume an acceptance of “difference” based on the last time the difference was encountered doesn’t take into account the possibility for change, not in the status of the “difference” but in our interpretive action towards it.

So what if one could take that “heard voice” as well as their interpretation of it and freeze it momentarily in order to examine it for it’s pedagogical implications? To gather evidence that would help us to see if something does –in fact –read different depending on when and where one is standing, and to ultimately get a glimpse of what this might offer for a the attitudes and ethical characteristics that feed into a pedagogy of nearness. For this we turn to the work of Barbara Probst, who unlike the work of John Stezaker, the actual “looking-at” of the picture is vital to the understanding of these
works in terms of what they can offer this project. Although I’m providing an example of this work here, it might not be as obvious to gauge what exactly is going on in this photograph until one spends some time with it. So here is one, take a rest from reading and just look at it:

This image, composed of twelve different photographs is both documentation of a performative moment and a participatory performance involving whomever is looking at it. What we are looking at is an instance, photographed simultaneously with twelve different cameras using a remote control device. What this multi-image accentuates here are not only the “differences” in simultaneity but also the puzzle that is our everyday moment-to-moment existence as singular objects in a world of constant interpretation. Not unlike what Cubism was trying to simulate with its fractured picture plane, this work seeks to initiate an inquiry into the phenomenological “flatness” of existence and the pliability of perception. However, it is distinguished from those modernist concerns by employing our semiotic inclinations towards reading codes by using the more illusionistic medium of photography and by arranging the images in a grid which prohibit the
components from coalescing into a mere representation. What happens to me when looking at these works is not unlike the process I go through when trying to solve a rebus or a visual riddle; my seeing dances from one image to the other trying to find correlations and relationships between the choices that are before me. This “performative” engagement with the differences presented in this work propose the act of living with difference more akin to a pedagogy of nearness than just an undiscerning acceptance which often times is buttressed by the same prejudices that permeate intolerance. To perform or respond creatively when encountering difference, to me seems proactively searching as opposed to passively subscribing, especially when our sometimes, guilt-driven-desire to learn from the “other” often leads to a subtle –albeit ignorant- form of imperialism quietly taking under the ignorantly well intentioned guise of “empathy” or education. As Jones says, “we might reduce our romantic expectations of dialogue, and set about working alongside and with each other in different ways. Dialogue, if it occurs, will most likely be a serendipitous by-product of that more oblique engagement” (p. 66). Time spent with this work –to summarize what I might be proposing as the second facet of this pedagogy of nearness that can be pulled from an artwork –ends up turning into the second performance act of this photograph. That “spent time” is marked by “respect” which (if we remember from the lecture in Part One) is what Matthew Goulish defines etymologically as “to look twice” (2000, p. 82). Re-specting is something the non-pliability of judgment, whether its prejudgement or not, leaves little room for.

What we must call into question then, in order to make the performative act of re-specting successful, is a grappling with the “cultural production” notions of duration and
documentation both of which tend to be demands of a very specific culture of the white-
cube, Cartesian, capitalist driven, Western narrative; a narrative which demands that
“things” not last longer than the amount of time where they cease to be entertaining and
that they be documentable and packaged, presumably so that they can be sold.

**To Energy**

In the electronic version of this essay you would be able to click on this link
[http://www.djbc.net/mashes/discog.htm](http://www.djbc.net/mashes/discog.htm) and listen to the *mash-ups* made by DJ BC. For
what it’s worth, I cannot do them any justice in this text. Attempting to describe them
wouldn’t suffice not even with the most vivid imagination –the way I did with the John
Stezaker collages –because they are sound and need to be engaged somatically in order to
interpret them in their situational generosity. One needs to be in the same space with the
mash-ups, they need to be infiltrating the body. So, I’m just going to give a quick
description and then present two disparate digressions that I think might illustrate my
point for this part of the essay more tangibly. Basically, DJ BC takes songs from Pop
music subgenres and mashes them together. By “mash-up” I mean collage. Each new
composition is a symbiotic whole that is experimentally choreographed from barely
altered original parts. Different from “mixes” –where a D.J. takes different recordings
and makes one sequential stream of music –these mash-ups take individual parts and lay
them on top of and inter-spliced with one another, rhythmically presenting a *battle* for
prominence in the fore of the audioscape. I say “battle” not to denote any form of
violation or aggression on behalf of the song-parts or the “masher”, but rather to allude to
the frequent use of the conjunction *vs.* to indicate who the participants are in the mash-
ups. DJ BC’s combinations—among others—include *The Jackson 5 vs. Madonna, Hall & Oates and The Supremes vs. Beck*, and *The Beastie Boys vs. either The Bee Gees or The Beatles*. The latter one of these arrangements composing a nine-track album entitled *Let it Beast* performed by the hybrid band “The Beastles.” A simple Internet search retrieves dozens of examples of this relatively new, technology-facilitated musical form. Sites such as [www.goodblimey.com/tunes](http://www.goodblimey.com/tunes) stock over 2000 of these musical collages containing works by some of the more prominent mash-up makers, including McSleazy, DJ Earworm, and DJ BC. Although many of these DJs exemplify moments of brilliance in their mash-ups (DJ Earworm, even constructing mash-up videos), I chose to highlight the mash-ups of DJ BC because they contain an intensely fearless-precariousness, of the homemade sort equal to the *lo-fi* aesthetic, that I want to examine in terms of my proposal for a *pedagogy of nearness*.

In order to elucidate what I mean by “fearless-precariousness” I’m going to digress momentarily. In 2006 I attended a lecture by Thomas Hirschhorn at the Art Institute of Chicago. He concluded an hour long slide-show of his monumental, crassly constructed/cardboard/photocopy/cellophane/packing tape/wood/ and tinfoil collage installations with—which has become his motto—“Energy yes, quality no.” This incendiary and somewhat provocative saying returns us to a question I posed at the end of the “transparency” section earlier in this part of this essay: “Is the potency of my ‘teaching-body’s’ presence contrasted sufficiently enough with the apparent ease of its execution …that my collaborators could question my pedagogy’s competency and value, while simultaneously finding it difficult to ignore or forget? This—not really being a question but rather a probing suggestion—accompanied by Hirschhorn’s *motto* as one form of an
“answer” is where we can reconcile our relationship to the *pedagogy of nearness’s* need for the energetic product that can only be achieved through a “fearless-precariousness.”

Quality, because of its analyzability and propensity to elicit *critique* must be courageously tampered with in order to ratchet-up the intensity and consequent embodied reception of the potential energy coming from the object emanating it. Messing with expectations of quality or craftsmanship can often be perceived to be “coming apart at the seams” or “on the verge of collapsing” especially when it comes to schooling, this is why it needs to be approached with an attitude of fearlessness. In objects we might call the energy produced by this “coming apart” as an *aura*. When it’s seen in people it might come off as confidence or *charisma*, but I revert to the more generic term “energy” with the hopes that it will remain a more generously exchangeable feature of many “things” and so it doesn’t carry with it a necessary value, meaning that in the art or even in the teacher it will always produce immediate, desirable results. Like we can *feel* in DJ BC’s mash-ups, in Thomas Hirschhorn’s motto and works, and in the upcoming *Taco Town* example, the energy that is produce by this gargantuan conglomeration of components is paradoxically frightening and irresistible. The “energy” which I’m identify here but asking teachers to generate is not stagnate nor predictable and most importantly ‘it’ – although indefinable – is something that can be added to and subtracted from. Our ability to control this characteristic’s magnitude or subtlety is the potential it has for a *pedagogy of nearness*, as Canadian artist Darren O’Donnell states, “The dispersal of holding patterns, of energetic excesses and deficiencies, will usually generate discomfort, the social equivalent of confusion [which is] a necessary part of any learning process” (2006, p. 50).
To further digress, permit me to virtually present one final example of this “confusing/precarious energy” in order to introduce one final idea that might propose a practical application of this final leg of the pedagogy of nearness into our lives. In October of 2005 the sketch comedy television show Saturday Night Live ran one of their faux commercials for a Taco-Bell-esque restaurant called Taco Town. In the commercial three young men are sitting in the restaurant raving about how much they “love tacos.” When one of the men rhetorically ask, “Can tacos get any more kick-butt than this?” The off-camera announcer chimes in enthusiastically and says:

“Oh, ho, ho, they're about to, all right!” He then rattles off one thing after another exasperating the extent of all the imaginable things you could do to a taco to make it ‘more kick-butt.’ He says, “we wrap it (the original taco) in a soft, flour tortilla with a layer of refried beans in-between... then we wrap that in savory corn tortilla with a middle layer of Monterey Jack cheese... then we take a deep-fried Gordita shell, smear on a little of our special ‘Gaucamolito’ sauce and wrap that around the outside. Then we bake it in a corn husk filled with ‘pico-de-gallo’, then wrap that in an authentic Parisian crepe, filled with egg, Gruyere, Merguez sausage and Portobello mushroom.” At this point one of the young men in the restaurant looks upward towards the supposed announcer and exhaustedly ask, “can I eat it now?” The announcer of course continues by saying, “Sure. But not before we take the whole thing and wrap that in a Chicago style deep-dish meat lovers pizza!” Another one of the obliviously mesmerized young men exclaims, “Pizza? Now that’s what I call a taco!” The announcer doesn't miss a beat and proclaims, “Well, it’s not a Taco Town taco until we roll it up in a blueberry pancake, dip it in batter and deep-fry it until it’s golden brown. Then we serve it all it in a commemorative tote bag filled with spicy vegetarian chili. It's fifteen great tastes all rolled into one!” The commercial ends with the three young men toting their ‘taco'-in-a-bag mess, unanimously shouting, “Taco town!”

I’ve tried to mimic the sensibility and congestion of the spot by presenting it in a different form than the rest of this project, but in order to bridge the gap between the commercial and the “energy” that it is a metaphor for in our pursuit of characteristics for the nearness pedagogue I offer you this URL http://www.hulu.com/watch/1447/saturday-night-live-taco-town. Obviously this ridiculous juggernaut of a product is parodying the exaggerated concoctions that are presented in actuality by major fast food chains in an attempt to corner the market on the “I want it all, at the same time” consumerism that permeates American society. This however, is not why I want us to look at this skit. In many ways I see this “taco” as a wonderfully awkward representation of the “energy”
that I’m trying to posit into the *nearness* pedagogue, which as I talked about earlier can be anyone who “carries” another to a “learning” sometimes via their mere messily exaggerated conglomerate of a *presence*. In many ways, what the folks at *Saturday Night Live* intended as a commentary on the excess of our desires, I’m appropriating to advocate for a teacher that is –in fact–overflowing, beyond the ability of being “consumed”, a never-ending teacher. The *nearness* pedagogue must be an irresistible, hodge-podge of unbridled, fragile, sometimes contrasting ingredients, that transparently presents oneself, interrupting finiteness, continuously seeking to intensify their integrity in order to generate confusion, laughter, courage, forgiveness, democracy, invention, inclusiveness, respect and the indescribable energy that is love from those whom they chooses to be near to, or from those who come near to them. This “energy” is what makes students want to be near the teacher and it is what makes the teacher love to be near her/his students.

**To Home Schooling**

Unlike the capitalist forces of originality and creativity, I want to invoke “transparency” and difference’s mere “being” as the propellants of this “energy.” Although not wanting to promote laziness, I also don’t want to end this essay without positing the singular, maybe even most ludicrous idea this *pedagogy of nearness* tries to purpose – and it’s that the vibration that occurs *because* of nearness should never be laborious. By this I don’t mean that “it” is not work, after all, our *transparency’s* and *difference’s* unique vitality comes from the continuous refinement of our integrity which can never be left uncultivated and that is a lifetimes worth of “work.” What I am saying is that a *pedagogy of nearness* should never be forced. If by some reason, in our most
integral selves, we are dissatisfied with what we have to offer those who come near to us, then the answer is not to force another ‘I’ into existence, but rather to examine where the separation is between our pedagogy and our choices and attempt to graft those things together. By using the graphic term “grafting”, I’d like to avoid giving the impression that this is a singular task aimed at concluding, defining, or fixing. Instead this process is a practice as e.e. cummings (1938) once wrote of “never being born enough”, continuously allowing ourselves that often ignored characteristic of temporal difference which I spoke about earlier. “Difference” as a continuously mobile perspective composed of our knack and need for change. As givers and receivers of pedagogy –somewhere in our Cartesian reception of it, we accepted that things are separate. Now, as teachers and students involved in developing into overly conscious givers –we acknowledge that things are –in fact –not separate, yet we continue to reify the demarcations that we’ve been taught with some false illusion that they are for the smooth operation of these systems we’ve set up for ourselves in the name of education.

I want to end Part Two of this project with a personal example. My wife and I, as I mentioned previously, have chosen to homeschool our four children. In this choice, we’ve clearly delineated our desire to not hold “school” at home, for it is not the school environment that we are seeking to avoid, but rather the school structure. As such, we subscribe to a very fluid seemingly invisible method of teaching our children. At the top of our list of important activities are literacy, art, and play –loosely following the Classical pedagogical concerns of literacy, music, and sport –but each one of those activities meld into one another becoming completely indecipherable as any kind of fixed or reproducible curriculum. If we wanted to label it something we would just call it
aware, inquisitive living, maybe always re-creation as John Dewey might call it.

Although my wife has chosen to stay home with our children in order to establish some routines my somewhat sinuous schedule allows us to create persistent deviations in those routines. This rupture of curricular practice has taken us to a place where our entire family has become equal participants in a collective heavily constructed pedagogy of nearness, which effectively offers all of us the opportunity to learn about all the things that strike our family’s curiosity. In the years since our first son was born, our family has immersed itself in the unavoidably rhizomatic world of oceanography, paleontology, astronomy, mathematics, human physiology, the social sciences, puppetry, physics, theology and Bible studies, civil-rights, presidential and American history, cartography, economics, poetry, dance, meteorology, philosophy, representational drawing, sport, children’s literature, children’s cinema, nutrition, geography, sculpture and installation, costume design, marketing and visual culture, music, ethics, museum studies, family histories and zoology, just to name a few.

During a recent weekday family trip to New York City we took the time to visit the Central Park Zoo. While at the Zoo, our two eldest sons – six and five years old – used our cheap hand-held digital camera to shoot short videos and photographs of some of the things we saw during our visit. After we returned to our home in Pennsylvania, we began to reminisce about our trip to the Big Apple and remembered that we had a camera full of footage that needed to be revisited. The boys, heavily influenced by the BBC nature film’s hosted by world renowned naturalist David Attenborough said that they wanted to create a voice-over type of nature video using their footage from their zoo visit. After discussing the possibilities and explaining the actual probability of its doability, we
decided that the best thing to do was to focus on one animal each, do a bit of research, develop a script and then record their voices over some of the footage.

Individually, the two boys joined me in my office on two separate occasions to look for relevant information on the Internet regarding their respective creatures. Our eldest child chose to do his research on the Red Panda and our five year old chose to do his research on the Emperor Penguin, but we had one critical issue which was that their reading skills were still developing and their writing wasn’t as sophisticated as one would need in order to take notes that eventually could be used as a script. This limitation gave us the opportunity to devise an alternative plan. The solution that I proposed was to make pictograms that represented the individual facts that they wanted to convey during their video. As our research indicated, the Red Panda was traditionally a herbivore who occasionally ate bugs and eggs, this was illustrated on paper with our oldest son’s drawing of an ant and a fried-egg, his favorite manifestation of a prepared egg. Our second son indicated the fact that Emperor Penguins “don’t fly, rather waddle” by drawing a couple of penguin legs seemingly in an up-and-down waddling motion; these drawings which you see below, were used as cues during the voice over sessions that were held after the scripts were constructed.
1. Penguins eat fish and squid.
2. Penguins live in Antarctica (This is and igloo)
3. Penguins cannot fly, they are grounded.
4. Penguins are good divers.
5. This is a drawing of a number two, to indicate the 2 million penguins that are in Antarctica.
6. Penguins waddle. (this is a drawing of waddling penguin legs.)
7. these “heat” indicators have something to do with how penguins capture air in their feathers to keep warm.

1. Red Panda's are found in China
2. Red Panda's are found in India
3. Red Panda's have an extra thumb to help grab bamboo
4. Red Panda's eat fruit, grass, and bamboo leaves.
5. Red Panda's nest with their moms for the first three months of their lives.
6. Red Panda's are in danger because their homes are being forested
7. Red Panda's sometimes eat insects and small eggs
8. Red Panda's are good climbers.
During these recording and editing sessions they watched the videos on the computer and chimed in when they thought it was appropriate using their “pictogram scripts” to improvise their monologues. We chose some stock sound effects that came with our video editing software and found some additional royalty free animal-like noises on-line to add some ambiance to the footage. We then added text to introduce the individual segments and some credits at the end just to mimic a more official type of production, similar to what we are used to seeing on Attenborough’s nature videos. At this point of our work session the boys needed to go to bed, but in my enthusiasm for the project I stayed up, cleaned the video up a little, formatted it and burned it onto a DVD. In the morning they invited their youngest brother, their little sister, and their mom to join them in front of the television for the screening of their movie. It is a real work. Everyone was astonished by it, in particular their two-year old brother who not only doesn’t know anything about false compliments, but wanted to watch it repeatedly, essentially learning everything there was to know –in our home at least– about the Red Panda and the Emperor Penguin. My wife paid her compliments by asking that copies be made to send to our friends and family which added another layer of complexity to the project due to the fact that our mothers first language is Spanish. This unforeseen “problem” provoked us to add Spanish subtitles to the video. This with a couple of minor revisions that the boys wanted to make, gave us the final work which is now available on the world wide web at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mjh11b4jhq4.

This is but one example—a particularly educative—example of the kind of relationship my wife and I have tried to foster with our children. A manner of having a pedagogical relationship which we actively seek to promote in all our other interpersonal
exchanges, whether they be in a classroom, with fellow teachers, artist, family members, friends, and even strangers. An indecipherable space that requires a collaborative construction in order to thrive, grounded on a willful act towards transparency, an active interaction with the pliability of “difference”, and a vehement cultivation of an extraordinary integrity which we’ve seen create an irresistible and inexplicable “energy.”

I am not a pedagogy because I’ve been certified as a teacher, not because I am involved in schools, not because my degrees have the word “education” on them and not because we are home-schooling our children –I am a pedagogy because I live near others and others live near me –because we are a pedagogy. In the writing of this collection of essays I was questioned by someone who reviewed this manuscript, as to why I revert in my suggestions to the pronoun “we” so much and who that “we” actually is. This question, in the revising of this text, has consistently perturbed me. Now, trying to identify all the “we” uses and reevaluate their context, asking myself the same question: who is “we?” my simple answer would be “us.” Us is we, you and I. When I speak of “we” I’m hoping to not only allude to our collective project of devising a pedagogy that seeks to be more integral, make a “better” work, and take advantage of our juxtaposed “nearness” but also to point to the phenomenological idea that Husserl calls the “we subjectivity.” Husserl says,

…we, in living together, have the world pregiven in this ‘together,’ as the world valid as existing for us and to which we, together, belong, the world as world for all, pregiven with this ontic meaning. Constantly functioning in wakeful life, we also function together, in the manifold ways of considering, together, objects pregiven to us in common, thinking
together, valuing, planning, acting together (1954, p. 109).

All of us, in our differences rubbing against each other, “living together” even before the “I” because the “pregiven” world “existing for us” as leading Husserlian Scholar Dermot Moran might say reiterates that “the personal arises out of the social” (2005, p. 217). If not for students, teachers would be non-existent; if ever anything is written about teaching it will always come from a “we-subjectivity” or else it’s not teaching, it’s pontificating.
Part Three:
On Richard Bernstein’s “Ministry of Disturbance”, a Pedagogical Probing Through Rationality and the Arts

Is there a “pedagogy” to be found in the philosophical behaviors of thinkers like Michel Foucault? Of course there is. This is, seemingly, a simple question and I didn’t circumvent asking it by leaping straight to answering the subsequent question *what is it?* because what’s important in asking this question is that the pause it creates in it obviousness –might in fact –posit the potential of the pedagogical theory I want to elucidate in this third essay. There is a hybrid made of Foucault’s *phroneis* and *praxis* that can serve as a model for approaching “a teaching.” Is it difficult to attain? Possibly, but only if it’s *made academic*. By this I mean, if it is formulized and marketed as a fixed or standardized “curriculum.” If it is identified as a way of *doing* a pedagogy or a manner of “running a classroom.” In fact when I talk about a pedagogy –I’m not referring to it in any kind of institutionalized manner –I’m referring to it in the classical notion of which I’ve referred to several times in this project, of being carried to an education. So once again we return this question of what does this *carrying* look like? Well that’s where the crux of the curricular/administrative battle is identified because “it” doesn’t look *like* anything. The pedagogy will always look like itself.

Richard Bernstein, would offer, that for Foucault specifically, his pedagogy –in its simultaneous form and content –is one of rupture. He says,

Transgression is not only a constant theme in Foucault, it is embodied in his rhetorical style –a style that makes us acutely aware of the exclusionary tactics of all forms of discourse, including the discourse of
philosophers. Just as he is an anti-historical ‘historian’ he sometimes appears to be an anti-philosophical philosopher (1991, pp. 26-27).

And I would add, an anti-pedagogical pedagogue! What I am trying to get at here, is that Foucault, like all other thinkers –including “us”–presents a pedagogy that is situational and particular to the individual executing it; it is non-duplicable and largely reliant on the student’s hermeneutic capacities to engage that specific pedagogues particular presence.

So if the pedagogy is with the pedagogue, then how can we experience their special ability to carry us towards “a learning?” Luckily for us –the bulk of many philosopher’s pedagogies is captured for us through their writings. For good or ill, this leaves us with a different version –albeit equally eminent manifestation of their pedagogical presence–for us to grapple with. So at this point, it should be noted –that in this third essay –I will be using the term “pedagogy” interchangeably with “philosophy”, while trying to extrapolate from both a manner of “being” in the world that is both pedagogical and philosophical. This pliability of terms, for me, is predicated on the aforementioned idea that the individual and the pedagogy might be one and the same. Looking at Jacques Derrida’s inquiry into “what constitutes philosophy?” to further synthesize a tri-faceted investigation that melds together the disciplines of pedagogy, philosophy, and mere “being”. Derrida says,

to say to oneself that one is to study something that is not philosophy is to deceive oneself. It is not difficult to show that in political economy, for example, there is a philosophical discourse in operation…Philosophy, as logocentrism, is present in every scientific discipline and the only justification for transforming philosophy into a specialized discipline is
the necessity to render explicit and thematic the philosophical subtext in every discourse (1988, pp. 114-115).

So with Derrida’s permission, we will venture forth allowing pedagogy, philosophy, and “being” to enact the perpetual and difficult task of coming apart and staying together simultaneously. My hope would be to showcase the tension in this exertion as the thing or characteristic to be desired for a pedagogy of nearness in this philosophically leaning section of the this whole project.

Now –although I will talk a little about Foucault –he is not the principle philosopher under my lens for this essay. Bernstein’s pedagogy –who we see making this analysis of Foucault’s unified “phronesis/praxis- pedagogical device”, will be the subject of this paper. In particular his 1991 The New Constellation where he scrutinizes some of the twentieth centuries most prominent Post-Hegalian European thinkers’ critical grappling of the history and the future of philosophy and how they examine and magnify the tenuous juncture where history and invention collide. Bernstein tome presents us with a pedagogy or nearness that is predicated in vibrations, of instability, of fearlessness and of “true” science. By “true” science I’m not speaking of the positive sciences; what I am referring to is sort of “Ministry of Disturbance” of which Dewey quoting the British biologist C.D. Darlington put it, “[is]a regulated source of annoyance; a destroyer of routine; an underminer of complacency”, a science as Dewey adds, which is “a pursuit, not a coming into possession of the immutable” and as he quotes Darlington again as saying, “[the great innovators]…are the first to fear and doubt their discoveries” (1920. p. 263). I examine this pedagogy of Bernstein’s with that type of “fear and trembling.” I want to posit –in anticipation of continuing a discourse –not resolve the issue(s). As
Bernstein himself would say, “I not only reject the idea that philosophy itself can be grounded on permanent foundations and that philosophy itself is a foundational discipline, an arbitrator for the rest of culture; I also reject the idea that history—in any of its forms—is or can be a foundational discipline, that it can answer the questions we ask in philosophy” (1995, p. 28).

So this seems as good a place—as any—to begin. By looking at Bernstein’s notion of what philosophy can be and what it does, we can arrive at a semblance of what a pedagogy might begin to behave like as a practice of philosophy. In this essay, we’ll look at Bernstein’s pedagogy in terms of four separate legs, all of them responsible for aiding with the burden of the other three, none of them indispensable although they may vary in width and/or height.

In my reading of Bernstein’s interpretations of Hegel, Derrida, and Habermas I’ve identified four concepts applicable for a pedagogical philosophy. The first thing, which I’ve alluded to in the above text, is that the pedagogy doesn’t seek to resolve itself. In the words of Derrida it is like the impossible “gesturing in opposite directions” (1988, p. 119). Secondly, the pedagogy is a complicated (yet maybe simpler than we imagine) understanding of how to coexist with “difference.” Thirdly—and I suspect this is a subcategory of the second one—the pedagogy carries an air of simultaneity. It is both Derrididian and Hegalian, in that it is deconstructive and pluralistic, yet aims towards a totality or reconciliation which is often seen to be in opposition to the more postmodern agenda of relativism. Finally, although not necessarily taking the position of the “leader” in this essay—the pedagogue is fully responsible in the project of becoming a nearness pedagogue propelling the teacher towards an active cultivation of his/her integrity and the
ethical considerations that I began to present in *Part Two* of this project. This illuminates and sufficiently troubles one of the most constricting aspects of what is usually seen as a “self-sacrificial” occupation, particularly at the elementary and secondary levels; and the false pretense that the pedagogue has no personal intentions.

**Gesturing in Opposite Directions**

There’s no need to point out the fact that this pedagogy, if not merely for its situationality, is complex. However, I’d like to note that the reason why it is complex—the fact that it causes labor—is of maximum importance to Richard Bernstein’s understanding of *reasoning* and *learning*. As I’ve begun to hint in my introduction, the pedagogy that Bernstein presents is an irresolvable one. Unlike, what the Cartesian organized, capitalist motivated more traditional notion of pedagogy might indicate “failure” is not frowned upon in the philosopher’s pedagogy—it is rather encouraged and a sign that all things are running as they *should*. Failure, in fact, is not evidence that things are being done “wrong”, but rather that things are being agitated sufficiently to pressure the parameters of what is already known to the point where residue, accidents, and serendipitous outcomes become the gauge of the activities vehemence and vitality. As Bernstein notes Kuhn to say, “[it is a] science that can emerge from the historical records of research activity itself”, (p. 23) or as Bernstein himself notes—a difference between how “the debates of the last century [where] practice was understood as application of science to technical tasks [consequently degrading] practical reason to technical control” (p. 25). This can be put in contrast to Bernstein’s thoughts on
Gadamer’s idea “where knowledge is not detached from our being but is determinative of what we are in the process of becoming” (p. 25).

It is in this “becoming” where the process of learning or science needs to facilitate and encourage oppositional forces to rub up against each other. As Bernstein says about Foucault, “[he] frequently leaves us with more questions than he resolves” (p. 27). and what he paraphrases from Kuhn’s analysis of the tension caused between “proponents of competing paradigms” inability to convince each other. Bernstein outlines three reasons why –in Kuhn’s understanding – “proponents of competing paradigms must fail to make complete contact with each others viewpoints” (p. 60). He notes that besides the different facets not coming to an agreement about what problems need to be addressed or tackled, there’s also “within the new paradigm (purportedly the agreed ‘solution’), old terms, concepts, and experiments [that] fall into new relationships one with the other,” (p. 60) finally leading to the acknowledgement that “the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds” (p. 60). Bernstein’s investigation of Kuhn obviously position the different proponents to “see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction” (p. 60). The result of all this is not a disparaging disagreement, rather something more like the work of Barbara Probst, the photographer I mentioned in my discourse on ‘difference’ in Part Two, which purposes the temporary suspension of time by presenting multiple viewpoints simultaneously.

I’d like to call attention to Kuhn’s refusal to purport this as some kind of impenetrable version of relativism. Because –at least according to Bernstein –it doesn’t appear as if Kuhn was trying to further bifurcate the divisions between the individual factions, but rather to call attention to the space that is generated in between them as a
pragmatic space of possibility; in other words, to energize the activity that in some ways delineates oppositional viewpoints, who may also be latently seeking the same thing—to progress. Bernstein, introducing Richard Rorty’s note, “[that] epistemology proceeds on the assumption that all contradictions to a given discourse are commensurable” without prematurely introducing my third point, hints at the Hegalian idea of a reconcilable end to which even divergent viewpoints and “difference” point to, whether they want to or not.

**Coexisting Alterities**

In Bernstein’s investigation of these divergent points of view which posits wanting to live well *alongside* our fellows we discover that in our attempt to identify the vibration that is perpetuated by the pairing of “difference” we inevitably come across the seemingly cumbersome notion of the “other.” Trying not to be overly delicate about the issue, Bernstein bluntly says, “It is the Stranger who genuinely dis-turbs or ruptures the being at home with oneself” (p. 70), immediately directing the benefits/brunt of the work towards “oneself.” Finding, oneself consciously making an effort towards some type of working collaboration with the “other” brings us face to face with the shortcomings of the desired kinship we wish to create when near another. As Bernstein reminds us, “We can never escape the real practical possibility that we may fail to understand ‘alien’ traditions and the ways in which they are incommensurable with the traditions to which we belong” (p. 65). I’m not sure that Bernstein is trying to say that there is absolutely *no* possibility for kinship amongst difference, but rather that one *whole* could never merge completely with another equal *whole* without losing some of its integrity. As the art historian James Elkins references literary theorist Stanley Fish’s take on the matter, “He points out that
no matter how well intentioned a person may be about understanding other cultures, there will be a point where further understanding involves giving up something essential in one’s own culture” (2002 p. 148). This, Elkins was saying in reference to the vacancy that exist within the practice of Western art historicism that excludes cultural artifacts that don’t fit into the neat, linear, narrative of art that is the academically perpetuated standard of normativity in Western Art History courses. The “other” of the Cannon of Art History, a constructed story that seems to find it’s beginnings in Neolithic Art, its climax in the Western Renaissance, and its anticlimax in Modern and Post-Modernist investigations of Art, often times only takes works of Non-Western cultures or even “deviant” contributors of western sub-cultures (such as untrained art or children’s art) for a ride as some kind of footnote or awkward step-sibling. The upheaval that exist in the debate over the canon of art history is a great parallel for our investigation, due to the fact that we are talking about disparate actions done in wholly situational circumstances, trying to –not only coexist with each other in a manner that is both democratic and empowering –but also because its overarching motive is to find some kind of fluidity from which to present itself by, no matter how different its individual contributors are. So even in the face of infinite differences humans are pulled towards sense; towards trying to resolve what they are experiencing.

Philosophy, of course, does not escape this discourse and by default –at least in this essay –neither does pedagogy. As Bernstein describes it, “‘Incommensurability,’ ‘otherness,’ ‘alterity,’ ‘singularity,’ ‘differance,’ ‘plurality.’ These signifiers reverberate throughout much of twentieth-century philosophy” (p. 57) and he uses Derrida as a filter to tease out what the problem is and what the potentiality in the scheme of reason this
problem may offer. First, he shows us how Derrida posits the “other” as an equal, essentially leveling the playing field, “the other, than would not be what he is (my fellowman or foreigner) if he were not alter ego…the other is absolutely other only if he is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I” (p. 72). But then he troubles that by speaking to the complexity of so called equality by stating, “we must cultivate the type of imagination where we are at once sensitive to the sameness of ‘the Other’ with ourselves and the radical alterity that defies and resist reductions of ‘the Other’ to ‘the Same’ (p. 74). This once again puts us in the push and pull of the first point which is essentially the irresolvability of the second tenet of the pedagogy of nearness, the leg of “difference”. It is a failure of the homogeneous inclination from the one towards the “Other.” It is a glorified “failure” though for Bernstein, which he intensifies by shedding this light on it:

But the response to the threat to this practical failure should be an ethical one –to assume the responsibility to acknowledge appreciate and not to violate the alterity of the “the Other.” Without such acknowledgement and recognition no ethics is possible. We must resist the dual temptation of either facilely assimilating the alterity of “the Other” to what is “the Same” (this is what Levinas so acutely emphasizes) or simply dismissing (or repressing) the alterity of “the Other” as being of no significance – “merely” contingent. We must also resist the double danger of imperialistic colonization and inauthentic exoticism when encountering “the Other” (p. 74).

So to this point in the project, we’ve seen the failure to create a philosophy of linearity and the failure to make “differences” the same. Both of which find their contradiction in the fact that they are not resolvable yet are under continuous pressure to
be so. This is not a recalcitrant ignorance that is set on homogenizing all differences into one and the same but rather the vibration that is the energy of life. For differences not to be resistant to resolution and for us to –almost innately –insist on making the commensurable is, ironically what Hegel would call Aufhebung, a contradictory term which proposes that the dialectal takes priority over the components or the commensuration of those disparate parts. What Bernstein calls, “the problem of human living” (p. 75) and through his italicization of the word ‘the’ points to the Aufgabe (or task) properties of this endeavor, meaning the intentionality of the “task,” meaning that it is perpetual labor.

**Even Though We Say We Don’t; We All Want Reconciliation.**

So if the whole endeavor of reconciling differences is wrought with failure and contradiction then what is the role of the pedagogy in this mess, and if “it” is irrevocably fallible –a boat without a paddle –then where does that leave the crew of this vessel, the pedagogues who are simultaneously student and teacher? In these final two segments I hope to assign some of Bernstein’s text to the armature of these questions. As I’ve already established, not in the hopes of making anything “fixed” but rather to offer up some things to “disrupt” those things that we already subscribe to; just like a good philosopher would.

In talking about Derrida’s idea of “gesturing in opposite directions at the same time” I’d like to offer a very tacit, if not, highly visual example of what the simultaneity of that tension might look like. He purposes that we not fix ourselves on any philosophical ground, not even anarchy, for even it is a “metaphysical position” (p. 215).
This makes me think of one of the grandchildren of Cubism, *Expressionism*. Whether it is Abstract Expressionism or Figurative Expressionism this kind of work is mostly defined by its immediacy and vagrancy in relation to the act of representation. Unlike Cubism, which, although abstract, found it describing a subject and referencing a real phenomenon in the world through observation, *Expressionism* points to supposed inner impulse which leaves its mark and doesn’t seek to hide the choices that led to its final presentation or its “Spirit.” As Hegel would say, “[spirit] wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself…[it] is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being” (1998, p. 19) This “being” –if I would have us imagine it –is like a chalkboard of which its erasures are still visible and part of the “whole” presentation. A determinate negation as Bernstein would put it,

> where the results of negation is conceived as it is in truth, [where] a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the completed series of forms comes about of itself. The logic of Spirit is the logic of determinate negation (dialectic) where a given “moment” is at once negated, affirmed and superseded (p. 300).

With this I would like to purpose, that the pedagogy that Bernstein is presenting here, is not only acknowledging of its own irresolution, its own attempts and failures to reconcile “differences”, but also is attempting to show all of its “workings” at the same time. It is a *palimpsestic* chalkboard with the workings of all of its “failure” available to be deciphered, erased, and redrawn on by everyone who encounters it. It is reconciliatory
because it proposes, not a solution, but a conglomeration/aggregate of all the “workings” rewarding the *effort* in the process *and* the product. It seems rather rudimentary for me to have brought it all the way back to this, but essentially the pedagogy that Bernstein seems to be presenting here is the one that advocates for aptitude testing, meaning a reconciliatory pedagogy; as opposed to achievement assessment or a stylized and criticizing pedagogy. Through this lens of “reconciliation” we can begin to lean towards the life laden possibilities of generativity as opposed to pointless and sometimes hurtful dissection.

This minor jab at what has become stylized versions of *Critical Pedagogy*, I understand to be the kind of reconciliation that Bernstein is discussing when outing the “[Marxist Hegelians as] always [being] suspicious of the appeal to reconciliation. They are drawn to the potential revolutionary power of negativity—the contradictions that burst forth and rupture “false” reconciliations. “Right Hegelians” tend to gravitate toward the healing moment of reconciliation…” (p. 302). And to me this is the importance of this notion of “reconciliation”; that it, very simply, is not founded on finding all the things that have gone wrong, but rather taking the good and the bad and having a “creative response” as a result of a mental conversion that is driven by an optimistic ideology which seeks to perpetuate creation and seeks to halt the destruction that often accompanies destruction. This is why, ultimately, Bernstein’s call to observe philosophy as a “constellation” or a “force field” resonates more deeply with the *pedagogy of nearness* that I would like to propose where “findings” or “learnings” are not building on top of each other—or for that matter destroying the past in order to create the future—but rather existing cumulatively, not in a building (or scaffold) but in a growing (or rhizome).
As Bernstein calls it, “a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle” (p.309). Ultimately being more Frierian in its unfinishedness than so many of the critical pedagogy variations that have tried to freeze, academicize, and disseminate Paolo Friere’s emancipatory idea about a relational pedagogy.

**Wide Awake, With Toothpicks Propping Open My Eyelids**

Let us go back to the classic Socratic question, “How should one live” that I posed at the beginning of this entire project and which originally stemmed from this Bernstein text. Bernstein says, “I am not suggesting that philosophy (or any intellectual discipline) can answer this question definitively. Any answer is always open to further questioning” (p. 311). And this brings me to identify –actually –how one should live. For what its worth, the only thing about using the term “should” that is negative is that it comes across as forceful and dogmatic, but I guess at this point –if it hasn’t come across that this is not my intention –than the whole project might be due for some major revisions. I want to use the strong “should” however because I want to put forth that –as of this essay –I believe what I am saying here. I certainly would give the reader the right, and would hope that the reader would do the same for me –to change their mind in the future and write something contradictory to the things that I’m proposing in this project.

My motivation for making such a bold strokes goes back to my chalkboard analogy, which I see more and more as incomplete, asking that you debate it, attack it, play with it, forgive it, and not accept it. But in the end, we might have something to look at, together and then this text will also be the pedagogy of nearness.
A pedagogy/philosophy is a responsibility. Already addressing the notion that pedagogy is not a point of totalitarian leadership, all of its participants—who are simultaneously student and teacher—are required to take responsibility for the entity that is the pedagogy. So here is something to look at: the pedagogy of Bernstein says it is democratic, like he says, “Dewey [and] Habermas [believe] in the normative ideal of democratic society in which all share and participate” (p. 207) and “[Derrida] would insist that it is not the task of the philosopher or theorist – as some sort of ‘master’ intellectual – to lay out blueprints for such a democracy. This can and should be decided by participants” (p. 223). These quotes only define what a democratic group of learners might look like, not what Bernstein thinks, but my speculation is tied to his root-like palimpsest proposal of The New Constellation, where difference and pliability were coupled with social, political, and spiritual responsibilities that foreground rationality as a means to establishing our mark in that democracy. The next thing to look at is that the pedagogy is playful, like his descriptions of Derrida’s philosophy with its “uncanny ability to make the familiar appear strange and alien” (p. 26), and its constant “working on the margins, fascinated with the “logic of supplementarity” (p. 212). Metaphors of “exile” and “parasite” [weaving] through his writings coupled with Bernstein’s non-committal stance in his book which offer us a picture of his take on science and its possibilities for invention and true deconstruction. And finally, the pedagogy is walking around with a disciplined sense of “wide-awareness.” What I mean by disciplined is that it is conscious and sometimes contrary to any “feelings” the learner/teacher might have. It is dependent on a commitment to being awake, not a wanting or ability to be awake.
“Pragmatically this means that the philosopher, especially the social and political philosopher, must be responsive and alert to what can be learned from the social disciplines” (p. 223) is what Bernstein has to say about our commitment “to be awake” and I would couple that with one of his other thoughts about “the awareness and sensitivity to radical contingency and chance that mark the universe, our inquiries, our lives”, (p. 328) to say that from this springs forth our philosophical base for the pedagogy of nearness and our pragmatist vocation or “invocation” as Cornel West (Gilyard, 2008) would call it towards a “ministry of disturbance.”
Part Four:
The *lo-fi* Teacher

This fourth essay is an experiment. What I’ll be trying to investigate in the following pages hopes to *perform* my research not just present it. The form of this essay is equally, if not more, important than the content, as some of the content in this part seeks to embody the *nearness pedagogue* in the “form” of this written essay. This part, as a “teacher”, shifts between two structures. The first of these structures attempts to exist without superfluous support. It is a minimally researched part and I call it the “freestanding beginning.” The second acquires “buttresses” through a tiny research excursion and so I’ve called that section the “buttressed next.” In many ways the most unresolved and *dreamy* of the four parts in this project, this fourth part is the open-ended tip of the root that I’ve been grafting onto for the previous seventy-plus pages and a manifestation of what I am advocating for us, whether teacher or student, to behave in spaces which we have deemed to be pedagogical.

As I’ve interjected into and teased from this *pedagogy of nearness*, so now these words, however incomplete, are soon to become the bookending “text” to the next hyphen which now belongs to the reader. That’s why the second section of this fourth part is referred to as the “buttressed next”, implying that the reader would then take the next step in the conversation surrounding the *pedagogy of nearness*. This conversation, of course, need not be mediated through written text and it certainly doesn’t need to interact with me directly, rather—I would hope—through a “performed” text, it would begin to “show” itself within all or our teaching situations.
This essay works through a simple question: how do we interpret artworks and what do those particular interpretive methods offer us for this project of a pedagogy of nearness? The differing structural approaches in this essay try to point to two marginally distinct ways that this interpretive process may occur. Those two process can be distinguished in the following way: the freestanding beginning is a “gut-reaction”; it is a phenomenological reading that attempts to presuppose the “makers” intentionality, history, or other works. I would akin the “freestanding beginning” to going into an art gallery an simply looking at the works without reading any of the placards or promotional materials offered by the curating institution. The second part, the buttressed next is written after having gone to see the works first-hand, or researched periphery information about the artist biographies or intentions in creating those works. Although, more likely to collapse because the freestanding beginning is based on mere assumptions, the “gut-reaction” is not intended to be a “pure” experience. This “under-researched” experiencing is complicated by everything that I bring to the interpretation of these artworks that inhibits my experience from standing unadulterated. I also suspect that the nominally more informed “buttressed next” will equally have similar hermeneutic challenges, so I’d like to add that by separating my experiencing of the same exact artworks into two equally subjective experiences, which are merely separated by degree is only being done to see what this intermediary gap can offer to the idea of nearness and its interpretive qualities.

I will write the freestanding beginning first. I will then take a “research break.” I will take some time to examine my purposefully under-informed first-impressions. The buttressed next will follow, not attempting to clarify or coalesce the beginning but simply
trying to propose how the space between the two experiences will offers an enactment of the nearness pedagogue.

**The Stomach-Knot**

It all begins with a knot in my stomach. As I am writing this there is a tangible knot in my stomach –some kind of tightness, presumably caused by anxiety or maybe indigestion. I can trace the origins of this “knot” to three possible causes: (in order of their onset) 1. Overeating at lunch. 2. Kimya Dawson’s music on the album *Remember that I Love You*. 3. The anxiety that is churning with my precarious act of skipping out on the research for the primary part of this essay; it is the nervousness of working “without a net.” This last possible cause I’m doing at the risk of seeming ignorant about the artworks that I’m reacting to. I ask myself Questions like, “What does this work actually look like?” “What has been written about the ‘aesthetic’ I’m pointing to here?” and “What do others say these works are about?” However, I will temporarily ignore those pressing questions in order to focus only what presents itself in the work initially.

As an additional structural parameter for this “performative” text –besides separating this essay into the two aforementioned “freestanding” and “buttressed” parts – I want to use the onset of the three causes that lead to this stomach-knot as an overlaid directive for sequencing the three prominent subtopics I hope to touch on in this essay. These “causes” provide a three-pronged sinew that collates the freestanding beginning with the buttressed next into one permeable whole as shown in Figure 6 below.
I will be following the sequence of the “stomach-knot” causes in reverse. The first –
*anxiety of deprivation* i.e. “working without a net” – that actually happened last will set a
rule for delineating this paper. That part is this part. The second portion triggered by
Kimya Dawson’s music will involve talking about the works of several artists including
Mrs. Dawson’s work. And finally, we will tackle the first part last. The “overeating at
lunch” -sinew will inject a touch of gratuitous nonsense and poetry to the “performing” of
this essay. This messy, final element is intended to fray the end of this entire project to a
point beyond mere codification. My intention in this final essay is to rev up the
possibilities not give a direction.

**The Freestanding Part**

The *freestanding beginning* began with the arrival of a parcel. This parcel came to
our house as a collage. By collage, I’m not referring to the two-dimensional works
traditionally created with paper. What I *am* referring to is that somewhat “suspect”
behavior Thomas Hirschhorn talks about in Part Two of this project which is the juxtaposing of two disparate things, sometimes with a seemingly minimal effort, to “energetic” results. The parcel that arrived “collage-like”, which then prompted this portion of this essay is not examined in its entirety here; rather the in-between space that resonates from the juxtaposing of the parcel’s components will begin this investigation. My momentary refrain from investigating the periphery content of the contents of this parcel offers an undistracted concentration on that “in-between” space by temporarily suspending the need to know “what is this about?”

This parcel came from my best friend. Boxes or envelopes decorated by him and his children make their way five hundred and seventy miles from Chicago to State College, PA carrying notes, drawings, photographs, magazine cutouts, books, and CDs brimming with whatever is being listened to in their home at the time of that mailing. Our family opens the parcels anticipating that these gifts will behave like proxies for our distant friends; “conversationally” offering us renewed vigor, moments of curiosity, inspiration and the occasional laugh. When those parcels are opened we are virtually together with our friends again.

A musical recording by Kimya Dawson, the woman who contributed the bulk of the songs to the 2007 film Juno’s soundtrack, arrived in one of these packages bringing to a halt the spinning tumult of theories, objects, and personas that were trying to figure out how to coexist harmoniously in my “body” during the construction of this pedagogy of nearness project. Amongst those whose works were vying for audibility in this mélange at the time were the Canadian artist Althea Thauberger, previously mentioned Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, the homemade internet videos of Brandon Hardesty, and finally all
the rage and publicity for the movie Juno, of which at this point I had only seen the theatrical trailer for. Kimya Dawson’s songs materialized a unifying aesthetic that had drawn me to all of these artists’ works and although I hadn’t see Juno, the movie’s advertisements use of Dawson’s songs to create a specific “feel” in relation to these other artist sparked the following propositions.

Being a stranger to Mrs. Dawson’s work, I inserted her Remember that I Love You record into the kitchen CD player while making lunch for my kids. In a prior phone conversation, my friend had said that the music he was sending me reminded him of one of my favorite bands Rilo Kiley, an Indie-Rock band fronted by Jenny Lewis a former child television and film star. Rilo Kiley had previously been touted by SPIN Magazine recently as the “new Fleetwood Mac” (2007). On the phone my friend said, “It’s like Jenny Lewis except…coarser.” When I heard this description I wasn’t sure what it meant. When I thought of a “coarser” Jenny Lewis I imagined Kimya Dawson’s music might sound like melodic folk-rock with poetically acerbic lyrics which make one aware of the simultaneous terribleness and allure of things that are both lovely and remorseful?

Although it’s impossible to illustrate in this paper what it feels like to listen to Kimya Dawson’s work I thought maybe the vernacular of some her lyrics can give a hint of the aesthetic that I’m going to point to which will be helpful for the pedagogy of nearness. It would be unfair for me to only give you a snippet due to the fact that it’s actually in the “over-doneness” of her oeuvre that the aesthetic of her work begins to spill out. So instead I’m offering here an overwhelming three snippets that I would ask be read sequentially. In an effort to help the reader imagine the music, think of it this way: all three of these songs begins with a coffee-house-style acoustic guitar that sounds like it’s
playing scales at that nerve-wracking pace that one’s leg taps like during test-taking or medical examinations. Couple that with a dirty xylophone or other percussion instruments breathlessly stumbling to keep up with that frantic guitar and then throw in these lyrics piled on over that musical “run-away train”:

1. My Mom
Have you ever had a dream that your favorite baby's drowning and you grab him by his sweater sleeve and pull him up on to the ground and you can hear the water slosh around inside his tiny gut/ push his belly up and down but he can't cough the water up/ suddenly a flood comes out his mouth till there is nothing left/ inside of him he's empty now there isn't even one small breath/ and he goes limp in your arms/ all the people's mouths are moving all you hear are car alarms/ and you wake up and start to cry/ I will lose my shit if even one more person I know dies/ so please don't die (2006).

2. Loose Lips
So if you want to burn yourself, remember that I love you/ If you want to cut yourself, remember that I love you/ If you want to kill yourself, remember that I love you/ Call me up before your dead we can make some plans instead. Send me an I-M, I’ll be your friend (2006).

3. The Competition
When I delivered newspapers, they said I was too slow/ When I was a barista, they said I made lousy foam/ When I worked in retail they said I was a slob; much too dumb for school and much too lazy for a job/ So I rode my bike like lightening and I made cappuccinos that would make the angels sing/ Took two showers a day and I dressed up like a princess/ /Shook my fist in my own face and said I’ll show you who’s the best/ I wrote the kinds of papers teachers hang up on their walls/ I was employee of the month at seven different shopping malls and one time playing football, I pulled the tendons in my leg/ To prove that I was tough I hopped on one foot…and finished up the game (2006).

These songs carry on like a three-and-half minute run-on sentences dinnning incessantly like buzzing bees slightly behind your ear, forever, nonstop. The intensity that I’m attempting to describe here permeates the entire album. Usually when I’m cooking, I can pleasantly background the music that I’m listening to, not unlike when I’m in the
studio, but this time while I was cooking, I could not ignore this music. I stood there gripped—maybe clinging—in between the counter that the stereo was sitting on and the stove waiting for the *macaroni and cheese* to coagulate; listening, just like when I was thirteen. In the 80’s, laying on my suburban tan-carpeted bedroom floor, hour after hour, listening to the tricky—and quite frankly bad—songs of Weird Al Yankovic, the American parody songwriter. Transfixed, I couldn’t stop paying listening. Yankovic’s songs were awful, but irresistible. This time, however, gripped by Kimya Dawson’s beautifully dumb singing, a more pressing question arose, “Who can live with this music?”

I want to clarify two points about this question and what it directs us towards. The first is that my puzzled reaction to the music didn’t have to do with my taste in music and didn’t carry any detectable trace of cynicism; in fact, as I’ve alluded above, I found the recording irresistible. So much, that I’ve decide to continuously listen to it during the entire construction of this essay. Her songs are looping in my *iTunes* player continuously perpetuating the intensity of the “stomach-knot” throughout the writing of this entire final essay. This “performative” imposition of keeping the music playing while trying to write this essay is a way of introducing the unpredictability and absurdity that the “overeating-at-lunch-sensibility” might bring to this essay. By means of creating a sensory interruption that will force me to take continuous breaks during this writing process and hopefully keep me connected to the initial feelings I had to the music.

There is another thing I’d like to clarify about the question “Who can live with this music?” and that is what does it mean to “live with?” I don’t mean this question as, “How can anyone stand this?” but rather as an inquiry about genuine cohabitation by people *with* this “kind” of art, which I will later tie back to my overarching examination
in this entire project of “how can anyone live next to anyone else?” or how do we carry out a pedagogy of nearness?

Before addressing this question though, as a means to further ascertain what I might mean by “this kind of art” I’d like to talk to some of the other artist whom I mentioned above who had a resonance with the invasion of Kimya Dawson into my psyche. Thomas Hirschhorn, as I mentioned in Part Two of this compendium often closes his lectures by saying, “Energy, yes. Quality, no” (Tateshots, 2007). and looking at his work one can see how this tagline applies to his overwhelming monstrosity-installations that not only attack the intellect; they try to suffocate the body. Perhaps “suffocate” is overly harsh since once again, I’m not trying to communicate what my personal preference is for this type of work, I actually really enjoy the work. But it’s in the bombardment of stimuli and the claustrophobia of the constricted space that we find Hirschhorn’s work “suffocating.”

What I really want to point out is an aesthetic that acts like an oversized locomotive; with scrawny arms and hands clumsily constructed out of cardboard, twigs, and Styrofoam blazing aflame towards us at two simultaneous speeds; one fast as jets, the other blimppier than icebergs. What I’m trying to point out here is “energy”; particularly the anti-Sistine Chapel (rebirth of the Classical) energy that propels every YouTube contributor –like Brandon Hardesty –into the fore of the contemporary art discourse. This energy is what some would call the lo-fi aesthetic. It is an “ugly”, almost careless –if not carefree –re-baroque. My ever-morphing question can then be transformed into “how do we live near the energy of the lo-fi aesthetic?”
In the buttressed next part of this essay and starting with my viewing of the film *Juno* I will look to see if I can find some thicker root for the *lo-fi* I’m proposing here, but for a few more paragraphs I’d like to keep inventing or hypothesizing –hoping that the momentum of the freestanding part can propel me into something more than a mere critical analysis during that second part. I will continue to lean on the crutch Michael Kimmelman provided for me earlier about ‘the spirit of an amateur…I mean amateur in the original sense of the word, as a lover, someone who does something for the love of it, wholeheartedly (2005. p.5).

Thinking about this “amateur spirit” lets us tease out the definition of the *lo-fi* a bit more. I want to point our attention to the works of artist Althea Thauberger. At first glance we might gather that this work has nothing to do with the *lo-fi* aesthetic. The truth is that the works of an artist such as Thauberger are a good contrast to someone like Hirschhorn. Thauberger’s works carry a similar democratic motivation as Hirschhorn’s work, yet with very different materials and a less physically imposing approach. Hirschhorn works with plastic wrap, clunkily assembled 2x4’s, cardboard, duct tape, mannequins, stuffed toys, thousands of Xeroxes, halogen light bulbs, industrial decals, magazine pages, ballpoint pen marks, mass produced porn, and tinfoil to make entire rooms look like libraries vomiting into themselves, mainly differ from Thauberger’s work because they don’t involve people as the material of their work even though people –in many ways –activate the “energy” in his spaces. Hirschhorn’s installations appear to be, from a certain point of view, sheer chaos, but not unlike libraries themselves. Short of some kind of sleuthing device like a card catalog or a computer database Hirschhorn’s
spaces turn into galaxies where we are left to weightlessly float in and around all its constellations.

Thauberger’s work, although slicker in its presentation shares with Hirschhorn’s work the potential to generously gift its participants sovereignty over their level and manner of engagement. Since for Thauberger the works are simultaneously collaborative actions with non-art communities and heavy documentation of those actions, one can be fooled into thinking that she is primarily an object maker; a choreographer/director whose main goal in working with communities or non-artist is the finished product. And since those objects, which are namely video and photo installations, have a marketable sheen to them, it might be difficult to make the connection to the lo-fi aesthetics of Hirschhorn and Kimya Dawson. But I’m going to propose that in Thauberger’s inclusionary work which doesn’t require any specific kind of skill base on behalf of her collaborators – in fact, just their mere willingness to be a part of Thauberger’s works – we find a lens by which we can look at the lo-fi aesthetic and garner for ourselves a pedagogical model based on presence and energy in place of the more easily measured and marketed “mastery” and “achievement.”

The lo-fi is work made from this point of “amateurism”, sometimes lacking in financial and technical resources, but more recently just carrying the appearance of the lo-fi, which as I said in the introduction to this project, that work gives “the appearance that in its shoddily ad-hoc construction a cultural work somehow is more pedestrian or common, meaning ‘belonging to all’” (Barnhart, 2006, p. 195).
The Buttressed Next

First, I’d like to note that at this point in the essay I have completed an approximately two and a half hour “research” break during which I drove to the movie theatre and paid $6.25 to watch *Juno*. Thinking that I was in for a *lo-fi*, self-consciously quirky, coolly existential teen-flick with witty banter and pop culture references sprinkled all over I readied myself for the *indie-ness* of Kimya Dawson to become incarnate right before my eyes. I expected a gritty and overtly experimental production laced with amateur-like ambition that aimed for something like Hirschhorn’s nonconformist, exposed skeleton, energy and sensory overload which leaves one with a sense of having witnessed something indescribable. What occurred was more along the lines of what Althea Thauberger’s “subjects” might think when they see –in a gallery –the works they created in tandem with her. The film was a clean looking, well edited, not gritty, emotionally touching, *entertaining* Hollywood-esque movie about a young girl who unwittingly becomes pregnant and consequently is thrust into the complexities of that reality. Apart from the opening credits which incorporated some MTV-like stop-animation using everything from crayons to graph paper, accompanied by one of Mrs. Dawson’s tunes, the film progressively shed it’s *indie, lo-fi* feel and made me forget I was watching a movie. In other words, the movie slyly sublimated its form to deliver its content.

Despite *Juno*’s slickness, Thauberger’s work troubled my definition of the *lo-fi* because of what the works intentions are. I found myself thinking, “*lo-fi* can’t be merely aesthetic; it carries an energy, a democratic energy. And that energy can live in both the form and the *content*.” When the *lo-fi* is the form however, the energy is so present that it
practically slaps you in the face like in Hirschhorn’s work. In formal lo-fi the interior workings of what makes the thing alive are exposed and oozing. In Kimya Dawson and Thomas Hirschhorn the way things are made punctures the content like exposed bone. The intentional lack of fluidity, of smoothness, aggravatingly interrupts the sanitized landscape which is adamantly trying to cover itself with new flesh – new coverings. A futile attempt, it is an infinite battle incarnate right before our very eyes. Like a snake eating its own tale the form-based lo-fi is a möbius strip that feeds into itself, but unlike the snake, “in the möbius strip through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes the other. Inside and outside are no longer separate but intertwined, interconnected and contiguous” (Springgay and Freedman, 2007, p.xx). Not unlike the musical force of rap and punk music, the formal lo-fi holds back nothing because in holding back anything there is very little to gain.

So where in these more “well covered” entities, such as Thauberger’s work and Juno, does the energy-initiated awe come from? If we can’t derive it from a formal presence we must examine the content. It is in the content of these seemingly slicker works that Hirschhorn’s, “Energy yes. Quality no” is manifested. And the content of these more subtle works is people; and “we the people” with all of our différence are a möbius strip who rips through the senses with the energy of being with each other.

Difference creates an energy that teeters on the edge of art and non-art; it is transient, impossibly complex, sloppy, horizontal, “very slow”, and abject (Bois & Krauss, 1997). Exemplified by Thauberger’s organization of choirs made up of eclectic selections of community members, collaborating with young German boys on an installation and performance that served as social service in lieu of their required military
duty, documenting the daily activism of young environmentalist as if they were doing some kind of dance in the midst of a logged Canadian forest, and placing ads in the newspaper giving opportunities to a vast array of “amateurs” of all ages to be models, singers, and actors amongst other seemingly glamorous (although truly banal) activities. Her art like Juno’s energy depends on nearness, not so much answering our original question, “How can we live next to this…art?” but instead grappling with a more impossible question, “How can we live near to each other?”

This question of “How can we live near to each other?” is at the nexus of a curriculum that seeks to learn through invention rather than, simply, through mimicry. However this inventing via coexistence is a hard task to undertake because its not forged with talking or understanding but rather through action. By which, I don’t mean activity; what I’m trying to point to is “ways of being”, namely with one another. This issue of “action” seeks only to be sustained, not to be resolved; its lifeblood is in its ability to remain a magnified question. The question morphs every time it is engaged, so the “answer” that one might produce, very quickly is inadequate considering the instability of the inquiry. As I quoted Alison Jones earlier in saying, “we might reduce our romantic expectations of dialogue, and set about working alongside and with (italics mine) each other in different ways” (Jones, 2004. p.66). These different ways often are void of talking, in fact, they may be seen as transferences of energy that occur simply by living with each other, like a collage, like the way we absorb light –where the syncopated gap in between the reflecting surfaces produce a vibration; and that vibration can produce newness.

Each participant in this “transference of energy” needs to have a whole presence
and that presence, if in the context of a situation where there is an imbalance of power, such as there often is in classrooms, needs to be facilitated by the powerful towards the power-lacking. This is what both Thauberger and Juno do for those who participate in their worlds. These “worlds” are precarious spaces that rely on the liveliness of play in order to sustain themselves. In Thauberger’s work it is the “trust” of play, as she trust her participants that who they “are” is enough to make the “works” fantastic. In Juno it is the the “humor” of play that brings into the fore the tenderness of the narrative. Elizabeth Ellsworth notes that “playing breaks down, according to Winnicott, when either inner or outer reality begins to dominate the scene, just as conversation stops when one of the participants takes over or becomes dogmatic” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 73). And this is the pedagogical model that we are left with: a lo-fi teaching, amateurish and exposed in all its gory incompleteness, in its trust and humor, which seeks something that is genuine and touching. A teaching driven by nearness and an integrity of presence by all of its players, particularly those who are seeking to level the playing field (i.e. the teachers). We teachers, have a significant hand in this orchestration and not unlike an orchestral conductor our job rarely requires us to do anything but point and allow someone else to shine. This is an integrity that is irresistible, unabashed, and that could take a lifetime to generate. Luckily, that’s the only currency we have to invest in this project, a lifetime. It can then only be done by one, in a singular manner, to only one “other”, in that specific instant. The pedagogy of nearness is to “have a small plot of new land at all times” (Deleuze and Guattari p.161). The pedagogy of nearness is completely and situationally human: partially acting, sometimes interpreting, always discovering and reevaluating, constantly trying to squeeze the integrity out of oneself for the benefit of others.
Epilogue: Maybe Not for Everyone

In the acknowledgements of this project I thanked a handful of former students and acknowledged them as “my best teachers.” In *Part One* of this project a selection of that handful contributed to an interlude for that essay in order to demonstrate how they are an off-shoot of the Goat Island and my pedagogical “root” or “rhizome.” Because that rhizome is perpetually growing into itself, it only makes sense that I would conclude this project with a creative response to those contributions. I feel like this process is never-ending and so I offer the incomplete end of this Thesis as yet another “in-between”, another “hyphen”, another “collage”, and another “situation.”

I am as much; as you are of me, still a part of you.

**Alex**
There was a couch in front of my desk at which you sat. Your legs over the side, your ears pointed in my direction. Your hands wanted to knit, to stitch, to print something; to put it into the world. You left and went to live in the woods; at least that’s where I imagine you. By a lake, by skinny kids who ride bikes.

**Olivia**
You became ill and I took your place. You danced and I watched you do it for almost half an hour. Slowly moving across the screen I always waited for the joke. It never came but it was always so funny.

**Sasha**
The first time I met you I put my hand on your shoulder. I asked you, “did you have a nice summer?” I don’t remember what you said. You left a wet turd on my desk and a Kanye West CD. Your grandfather kissed me and I loved it. Your mom and my wife talk more than we do.
Hannah
I heard that you used to play with boxes and go exploring in your backyard. With Jake and your brother and other sunflower kids. I look at my four children often and am reminded of you. The way that you make boats from cloth and scarves that connect people while they’re eating. Those scarves are like speaking bubbles.

Carl
I always wanted it to work out for you. I think she love you too. Whenever you hugged me I felt the warmth of your body transferring to mine. Those were nice embraces. You taught me to hug my father as if I wanted to stay with him. As if I was not going to see him ever again.
References:


Hirschhorn, T. (2007) *Tate Shots Episode 2*  


www.oxfordreference.com/views/entry.html?subview=main&entry=+128.e907


Sisson, J. (2008) Photographs from the Goat Island Symposium, used by permission and © John Sisson


