

Contexts That Gather:
Authorship and Collaboration; Bodily Gesture and Boundaries

By

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Abstract

In this thesis, I discuss two media installations and the process and reasoning behind their creation. These include *The Monster and The Explorer* a three channel video installation that addresses marginal voices and pathology and my final thesis project, *Bed, Door, The Order of Things* an interactive nine channel video matrix dealing with intimacy and boundaries. Growing out of a desire to collaborate and choreograph a composition of elements these two works explore relationships and storytelling. Specifically, I investigate authorship as an emergent interaction and collaboration as they relate to desire in the negotiation of intimacy, bodily gesture and boundaries. I act as artist/instigator to examine the creative process as both set and provisional using rules and improvisation toward the recording of performances for the camera. The media installation and interactive components within the resulting exhibitions work to extend the collaborative experience into the space of the gallery. I consider these two projects through their art historical antecedents from artists coming out of Black Mountain College and the traditions of the Situationist International to the conceptual avant-garde. I am especially invested in theoretical concepts that draw from philosophy to investigate what is essential to my work.

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Dedication

To my fellow students, family and friends. Especially Alan Reed.

Introduction

In this thesis, I offer an investigation into the charged and intertwined spaces between the performed text and my own subjective position. This approach recognizes how others are implicated as agents in my practice. While I choreograph a composition of elements, I seek to explore relationships and storytelling by blurring the boundaries between my own artistic agency and the contributions of those involved. Ultimately I am the artist who is responsible and whose name is attached to the work even as I invite a form of co-authorship.

The two projects discussed facilitate the mutable configurations and processes between individuals, objects and spaces while negotiating rules and chance. For both of these projects, the performances initiated in Montreal, and the resulting media installations, are considered for how they negotiate forms of interaction, collaboration, bodily gestures and authorship. As artist/instigator and through the advancement of my own aesthetic sensibilities, I negotiate with others who in turn become central to the process.

Personal History

I have a BFA in sculpture from Concordia University where a conceptual approach to art making was prioritized. This experience allowed experimentation using a variety of mediums and across different artistic disciplines, so that ideas conveyed through the work and the meaning made through the discussion around it were more important than using particular materials. This process triggered curiosity in storytelling and collaboration, and I completed a theatre design program at the National Theatre School of Canada to pursue this.

In traditional theatre, the collaborative structure maintains a kind of hierarchy - the designer carries out the vision of the main artist/director who works to convey a particular text. The set designer is limited to traditional techniques used to facilitate the director's vision according to that text. I am interested in a different, expanded approach to set design, one that embraces a loose conceptual framework to generate storytelling and collaborative creation within an artistic context. This is drawn from the practice known as Devised Performance, which shifts authority from the director to all the collaborators, in order to avoid alienation for more pleasurable and challenging experiences. In line with Artistic Research, my practice aims to produce new information and methods for interaction, increasing understanding of the link between art and its broader social contexts to develop the life, learning and living environment within a community, to generate impact within sense experience contingently with others.

Method

My method is to invite collaboration and facilitate co-authored event scores to be performed, which I turn into media installations. An event score is a schedule of provisional rules expressed as text, images, or sounds used to guide and structure a performance that is recorded for camera. I insert into this, timeframes for improvisation where there are no rules. The rules for invitation I employ in this process are: introduce myself as an artist facilitating a collaboration that will result in a performance and/or a media installation; inform potential collaborators that the project is grounded in a consideration of contingency; introduce myself within the context of the Masters studies - that I am writing a thesis on the implications of collaboration in my work which entails installations to be shown at exhibitions in Vancouver; ask potential participants if they would like to come to a brainstorming session with a group.

Methodology

My methodological approach addresses four theoretical discourses involving authorship, collaboration, bodily gesture and boundaries. This is drawn from the philosophical writing of Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan and Jean-Luc Nancy; and art history and theory of Claire Bishop, Arjen Mulder and Katja Kwastek among others. My art is influenced as much from philosophy and theory as from art history as they both offer the potential to interpret concerns that underpin my work.

Firstly, I address authorship as an emergent interactive negotiation. Authorship refers to Barthes' notion that refutes the author/artist as the sole genius of a work but rather as indebted to others. Art does not solely originate from one artist/author but is drawn from endless centers of relation that are in flux (Barthes 4). This leads to a consideration of interactivity as defined by Mulder as inviting action and decision-making. It calls on the recipient to relate action to reflection in that he or she must be an agent in the experience of meaning in the art (Mulder and Brouwer 53).

Secondly, I consider collaboration as engagement corresponding to desire. Desire refers to the Lacanian concept that is an essence of being intrinsic to oneself which in turn determines outcomes as attraction and impulse. Although desire does not obligate others and cannot be attained, a person can articulate it through language as sensibilities to be navigated – particularly through the observation of unintentional slips (Evans 36-39). Bishop warns against a stern ethics of collaboration to privilege a Lacanian approach within creative collective situations. This helps the group become aware of their particular situation (Bishop 26). My methodology attends to how each collaborator communicates desire within (often uncomfortable) situations, making present an awkwardness that feeds and energizes the process through negotiation.

Thirdly, I address performing bodily gesture as Nancy writes of it. For him, sensing and navigating through bodily gesture is essential for experiencing meaning and pleasure as a reflective agent (Nancy *Pleasure* 93). In interactive art, for experience-oriented uses of technology, the aesthetics of interaction as Kwastek writes of it, is concerned with the bodily performance of the recipient in relation to the art. For the art to exist, the recipient must play a part in sense-making (Kwastek *Aesthetic* 293). In my thesis work I have emphasized my role as artist/instigator, as someone who puts things into motion dependent on the readiness of the recipient to play a part.

Lastly, I consider boundaries as sites of separation, collision and transgression. I consider the implications of establishing and transgressing boundaries within collaborative situations looking to theories of contemporary performance. Transgression, difference, intimacy and agency become negotiated through material in liminal space.

Artistic Influences

The Monster and the Explorer: Althea Thauberg

The Monster and The Explorer, was first exhibited as part of the Masters of Applied Art second year group show in the Concourse Gallery at Emily Carr University. The work is an 8-minute three channel video installation on the theme of marginal voices and pathology. It was made through collaboration with Klara Du Plessis, Elisabeth Gill, Anna Sigg, Ali Pinkney, Adam Rosaduik, Carina de Clerk and Isobel Mohn. I wrote a text and asked my collaborators to help transform it into an event score by responding to it with images, drawings and ideas for how it could be performed. The boundary I set was to avoid literal representations of the text to encourage interjections, personal associations and articulations of social concerns. Collective contributions became the new rules or elements within the event score for performance. Collaborators negotiated their roles and the extent to which they wanted to be involved. Video recordings of the performance were transformed into the resulting installation.



Fig 1: *The Monster and The Explorer*, 2013. Three Channel Video Installation. Concourse Gallery, Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Photo Credit: Jill Banting

Rather than start with particular media, the project *The Monster and The Explorer* evolved out of a desire to share something that felt important – an impulse to read a text that resonated within a group. In ‘Make-Up: Conversations about Medium KERRY TRIBE, ALTHEA THAUBERGER, MELANIE O'BRIAN’, Melanie O'Brian asks the artist Althea Thauberger the question: “how would you describe how you work with media, not in particular media?” Thauberger responds:

It's difficult for me to separate media from subject matter, from concept, or from form. My projects usually begin with an image or sense of something that feels important. Then the way of bringing it into being implicates its various dimensions (media, subject matters, etc.) that overlap upon each other and can't be understood separately. These "pre-images" are always transformed by the processes of coming into being—by what could be called media, by the people I work with, by how I plan their display. (9)

The focus is on an emergent process rather than on isolating particulars. Thauberger's work is transformed by its various elements and how they relate to each other. This is important in my process as well. I work with a variety of media for their emergent qualities, which allows for an investment of interaction as a negotiation of aesthetic sensibilities as well as unanticipated responses.

Thauberger's work blurs agency even as she takes responsibility as an artist. She welcomes and acknowledges the most powerful moments as the interjections others make to her process. For example, she explains that in making her work *Songstress* which involved planning each female singer's performance to fit within 3-minute takes on camera, some of the women challenged this containment. She says: “These awkward moments are the most powerful ones” (9). This resonates in relation to *The Monster and The Explorer*. I too was most interested in the awkward moments within the collaborative process, as that is where I learned the most and felt most affected. As with Thauberger's experience working collaboratively, my collaborators challenged the containment of the rules and text I had set up for them by interjecting in unexpected ways. In *The Monster and The Explorer*, the unexpected powerful moments made the most impact where I felt I was evolving, becoming energized and experiencing pleasure contingently with others.

When I was introduced to Thauburger in 2012, she was editing a video of a performance she had facilitated in collaboration with a Prague based theatre company. The performance was as its title suggests: *THE PERSECUTION AND ASSASSINATION OF JEAN-PAUL MARAT AS PERFORMED BY THE INMATES OF THE ASYLUM OF CHARENTON UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE MARQUIS DE SADE AS PERFORMED BY THE PRAGUE-BASED EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE COMPANY AKANDA FOR THE PATIENTS AND STAFF OF THE BOHNICE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL*. I had been writing the text for *The Monster and The Explorer*, and found the documentation she shared inspiring for how it confronted pathology within a collaborative process. It involved others in ways I aspire to through the way it set up a transformative context without shying away from contradictions. As Melina Tomic writes in her article called “Althea Thauburger”:

Thauburger brings together doctors, patients, theater professionals, the art world and the general public not to facilitate new understanding but to underscore the uncertainties they all face under neoliberalism. Against the backdrop of a real hospital undergoing deinstitutionalization, the work casts new light on the debate between collectivist fervor and libertine individualism present in *Marat/Sade*. (1)

Thauburger initiated artistic collaboration with a theatre troupe using a story that had parallels to people affected within the site of the performance. The stakes seemed high for those Thauburger involved whose lives were being affected on fundamental levels by the changes within the site of her investigations. In this sense, my focus was less politically charged as the stakes seemed lower for my collaborators, however personal concerns were addressed that connected to larger social dynamics. In the context of being mostly female in bilingual Montreal, Quebec, we reflected on experiences of pathologization and mental institutions - on the ways society deals with marginality and pathology. We created a fictional institutional ward by relocating the bathroom door and single bed in my apartment to make a set within which to imagine and perform perspectives of mental patients. We recorded performance on the site of a real hospital with mental patients. Collaborators involved themselves in the process by interjecting with personal narratives, ideas for performance and in thinking through the sites and the text.

Thauburger's audio/visual installation drew out personal reflections and interjections of the participants. In line with this, I turned performances into installations. I was inspired by the way her material was made available to the viewing public to confront their subjective predicaments as I hoped mine might as well. Thauburger's work relates to and considers the intrinsic qualities of pathology in order to make challenging material available for aesthetic confrontation. It informs my own negotiation of the blurred borders between the empowering experience of artistic creativity and the disempowering experience of pathology and alienation.



Fig 2: Photo of Althea Thauburger on the set of Marat Sade Bohnice, 2012

(Permission from and courtesy of the artist)

Bed, Door, The Order of Things:

Joan Jonas, Merce Cunningham and Franz Erhard Walter

Bed, Door, The Order of Things, my final thesis project, is an interactive nine-channel video matrix dealing with intimacy and boundaries. It was exhibited as part of the Masters of Applied Art graduate exhibition in Vancouver at the Charles H. Scott Gallery. I invited collaboration with artists working across a range of material practices including Simon White, Nicole Raziya Fong, Klara Du Plessis, Melina Stinson, Michael Mercereau, Elena Stoodley, Nada Wood, Tanya Stasilowitch, Levana Irena, Manuel Shink, Marie Cécile Gimenez and Cameron Mitchell. I provided a set design of a bedroom with labeled sites and asked them to engage the sites through associations and stories. I transcribed everything that was said in the initial meetings from video recordings, and that transcription as read by the digital voice *Heather* became the foundation for further engagements. As with the first project, I asked my collaborators to respond to this text read by *Heather* with images, drawings and ideas to make up the event score.

This resulted in performances involving dance, sound and a multi-lingual text made up of moments of co-operation and transgression that were recorded for the camera. The recorded performance was followed by a discussion with the audience on May 30th in Montreal. The audio/visual material and set were then transformed into an interactive media installation that required recipients to engage in an array of button pushing to affect their experience in the gallery.

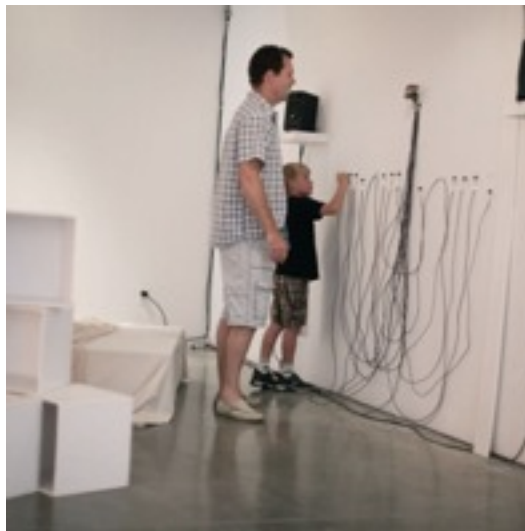


Fig 3: *Bed, Door The Order of Things*, Interactive media installation, 2013. Charles H. Scott Gallery.



Fig 4: *Bed, Door The Order of Things*, Interactive media installation, 2013. Charles H. Scott Gallery. Photo Credit: Scott Massey



Fig 5: Stills of *Bed, Door The Order of Things*, 2014. Mainline Theatre, Montreal

My practice is informed by the work of Joan Jonas, an artist who choreographs various elements and materials within collaborative processes in performances, installations and video. In the article, "Finding the Emotion in Images", Susan Morgan quotes this pioneer of video and performance art: "Although many of my performances have been solo works, there really is no such thing."⁽¹⁾ I understand this comment as the gathering together, and hopeful ways we might engage others through art. The proposition that there is no such thing as solo works is a sensibility that I employ as the artist/instigator and author/collaborator of my own works.



Fig 6: Joan Jonas, *Mirror Piece 1: Reconfigured* (1969/2010) - An exclusive re-performance at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern
filmed by Carl Amnert.

(Permission from Estelle af Malmberg deputy director art & design at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern)

I am inspired by Jonas's early work called *Mirror Pieces*, a series of performances held in large spaces. They included mirrors to reflect the performing body in movement which resulted in the fragmentation of the experience to highlight both spectators and performers. In this way the spectators were included as part of the performance. Through this work she blurred the disciplines of dance, painting and sculpture, which led the way for artists to bring together and enmesh various genres. In my experience, this mode of working, blurring disciplines and genres, can allow audiences to engage in a multi-sensorial experience of movement, sound and text.

Among many diverse practices, much of Jonas's work grew out of the traditions of the Situationist International and the conceptual avant-garde happenings of the '60s and '70s, which strove for the blurring of art and life, categories and genres. For example, Allan Kaprow compares Clyfford Still's canvases to the side of an old building (Kaprow 81); Anna Halprin says art is ritual, we should let change occur in our body while working in it like a Calder sculpture (*Breath*); Yves Alain Bois considers Edward Ruscha's oil drip on canvas the melting of the solid ink that is writing (Krauss and Bois 124); Gerhard Rühm combines drawings, musical scores and performance compositions (Rühm); Trish Brown climbs perpendicular on city walls as a stage (Lepecki 1) and so on. This blurring has allowed for many experiments and artistic emergence and I owe my work to this legacy.

In many ways my practice also responds to artists coming out of Black Mountain College (1933-1957) and specifically, to choreographer Merce Cunningham's collaborations with such artists as Robert Rauchenberg and Nam June Paik. These artists were invited to offer costumes, props as well as architectural and wearable installations. Their approach broke with traditional stage design techniques by privileging gestural, improvisational and more responsive collaborative methods. Choreographers that took up Cunningham's example of blurring genres and categories are particularly inspiring. These include Yvonne Rainer, Rosemary Butcher and Simone Forti and a whole range of instruction based work - for example Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure*. These artists engage others to reflect in their own bodies as interactive elements within constructed situations.

Bed, Door, The Order of Things is also informed by the interactive and kinesthetic work of practices exemplified by Lygia Clark, Santiago Sierra, Franz Erhard Walter as well as interactive artists such as David Rokeby, Myron Kruger and Edmond Couchot. In the video called “Wege in meine Stadt #8: Franz Erhard Walter” that he made in collaboration with the Immanuel Kant School in Bremerhaven, Walter’s interactive installation is transformed by the way visitors engage with it and the video through sensors. This unfolds through architectural forms that illustrate how gallery goers can position themselves next to or in relation to each other. The sensors and video enable interaction so that their bodily traces in the video are affected as they engage with the work, encouraging an awareness of being bodily with others. While *Bed, Door, The Order of Things* as an interactive installation inspires a limited range of bodily movement, it does require recipients to engage in an array of button pushing to affect their audio/visual and collective experience. In this way it encourages an awareness of being bodily with other subjects and objects and that these interactions produce the display and experience of the work.



Fig 7: Franz Erhard Walter, *Wege in meine Stadt (Ways into my City) #8*, 2009
(Permission from Martin Kemner at Immanuel-Kant-Schule in Bremerhaven)

Authorship as Interaction

When authorship as interaction is working, it seems to provide momentum for how the experience of art and text is held within relation and circulated between collaborators. The French professor of political philosophy and media aesthetics Jean-Luc Nancy offers a wealth of helpful analysis here. Having been influenced by Surrealists of the 40s including Georges Bataille's writings on transgression, he considers political issues of being together in a global world, also writing about art and stressing contingency. His notable works include: *The Inoperable Community*, 1982 which deals with how to develop modern society by redefining community as resistance against dominant powers leading to violence; *The Experience of Freedom*, 1988 which re-defines Heideggerian freedom through acknowledgment of the existence of the other and our always already being-in-the-world; *The Sense of the World*, 1993 where the world is conceived as no longer above but as that which we are in; and *Being Singular Plural*, 2000 where he argues that being is always 'being-with', 'I' is not prior to 'we', existence is essentially co-existence. In *Being Singular Plural* he suggests that as we sense each other, we are the circulation of being and meaning. He writes: "There is no meaning if meaning is not shared"(2). As I have come to appreciate, making and experiencing art is comprised of a series of shared interactions in which we each together have something at stake.

In both projects discussed in this thesis, confronting the stakes and sensing each other through negotiation became central to my practice. In particular a meaningful engagement has come to life in the interaction between the collaborators. The involvement of others has allowed multiple voices to emerge within a criss-crossing of narratives. The projects initially evolved through the openness of casual conversation. Through this process, I invited participation in the merging of movement and the performance of text and an event score. Though I took responsibility as the initiator of the work, others actively chose their orientation within the group configuration. Collaborators responded to the invitations through a negotiation process of being together as both singular and plural.

I ground my understanding of authorship as interaction in the tradition of the French philosopher Roland Barthes who reminds us in his seminal text *The Death of the Author*, 1977 that authorship of all kinds are multiple and continually indebted to others. The important things are the ideas and experiences that emerge from these interactions. This de-centering of authorship onto other dimensions and perspectives allows for circulation within interactions through the juxtaposition of differences within a network of relations.

Gilles Deleuze, a French philosopher writing about philosophy, literature, film and art and Félix Guattari a French psychiatrist and political activist offer insight as agents of post-structuralism and post-modernism. Their notable two volume work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* including *Anti-Oedipus*, 1972 and *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980 critique modernist's discourses and institutions that repress desire and maintain static identities to perpetuate violence. They counter modern beliefs of hierarchy, foundations, unity, subjectivity and representation to privilege difference and multiplicity. A 'network' in *A Thousand Plateaus*, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, refers to erratic processes that resemble 'rhizomes' which are non hierarchical. Rhizomes are named after the horizontal, branch-like network of roots found in certain plants, such as ginger, which allow for multiple entry and exit points. So while I aim to make work according to my own sensibilities, I am open to the sensibilities, personalities and diverse approaches entering and exiting within the network I set up and operate within. I privilege the sensibilities that emerge over a loyalty to hierarchical structures, categories or even genres of art if they stop being meaningful. I remain attentive to what is at stake within articulations of desire and pleasure within the particular group situation.

Claire Bishop, a UK born, American art critic, curator and professor of art history, provides insights in her critical publications on installation, relational aesthetics, participatory art and performance. She suggests in her seminal book *Artificial Hell: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, that every project must be understood as a singular event, each with its own set of symbolic ruptures, ideas and affects generated for “its participants and viewers, rather than deferring to the social pressure of a pre-agreed tribunal in which a cautious, self-censoring pragmatism will always hold sway” (26). While Bishop’s point about the symbolic ruptures has many potential implications for art audiences and focuses more on the reception as opposed to the production of work, I find that the necessary attention paid to each project resonates in the production of my own work. I will return to the relevance of her ideas in the reception of my work in ‘Reflections on *Bed, Door, The Order of Things*’. In the production of my work, I seek to facilitate collective input within a negotiation process that is in line with articulations of desire in each and every project. Because it is not prescribed in advance it echoes Bishop’s rejection of social pressure, caution and self-censoring so as to enable the collaboration’s singularity. Existing within a network of relations, the group is porous and emergent rather than predetermined, so that the articulation of desire shifts and re-adjusts itself not only within the group but in relation to new recipients as well.

This is not an easy process. For example, sometimes in deferring to artistic agency as blurred, there is the sense I am obligating others to come up with the work; or that there is not enough to push up against resulting in frustration or loss of interest. Sometimes, collaborators want more direction or parameters through which to know how to involve and invest themselves. Providing parameters, such as rules for how the text and event score can be responded to, stimulates more ideas and input from the group. When there is a lack of ideas, I provide them as a way to stimulate responsiveness among us. This is informed by my own sensibilities as the artist/instigator as well as research that consider networks in relation, being singular plural as well as non-hierarchical and rhizomatic processes.

Bishop refers to the way that consensual dialogue “risks becoming a new kind of repressive norm – one in which artistic strategies of disruption, intervention or over-identification are immediately ruled out as ‘unethical’ because all forms of authorship are equated with authority and indicted as totalising”(25). In this sense, it is a fine balance between taking responsibility as author assuming some authority within a negotiation of desire and abandoning or dismissing authorship all together. The latter could result in feelings of alienation for riding on the backs of others, or finger wagging. Bishop warns that it allows for “simplistic oppositions to remain in place”(25). She lists various oppositions including: “active versus passive viewer” and “egotistical versus collaborative artist”(25) and focuses more on a gradation in accordance with an ecology of a group to avoid these.

Within the ecology of each of our group situations, I focused the discussion around texts and set design to gather and determine rules for the event scores. The approach of gathering rules as a way of setting boundaries facilitated divergence and interjection and ensured an ongoing responsiveness. It was a strategy for dealing with the challenges of authorship and authority by both blurring authored intentions as well as guiding the process. The event scores consisted of timeframes corresponding to collective ideas, text and drawings. How performers transgressed and interpreted rules and where we improvised during timeframes without rules remained provisional.

As an artist who works collaboratively, my process is to invite others to ‘complete’ the work. The multi-faceted artist/ curator/ writer team from India called Raqs Media Collective is influential here. In their article “HOW TO BE AN ARTIST BY NIGHT”, they consider a tendency for work to be completed by initiates as ‘a radical incompleteness’ - “an openness to unintended consequences”(78). They write: “The work of art is never done, and so there is always room for another author. And then another. Contexts gather people”(78). What I do as an artist is create the context that gathers people.

In *The Monster and The Explorer*, the initial material dealing with pathology became the context for our gathering and formed the basis for the event score. Who performed each rule was decided in the moment while timeframes for no rules remained fixed in the schedule. A sense of risk was built up in having to choose between rules. Choices among rules were prioritized on the spot with the help of corresponding cue cards, which acted like a mutable storyboard of drawings. In *Bed, Door, The Order of Things*, the context for the gathering circulated around discussions of a set design of a bedroom that eventually came to form the event score. I instigated brainstorming associations to three labeled sites. While I provided a structure and procedure, the associations themselves were unexpected and unique. Stories and social concerns in French and English overlapped and interrupted each other moving beyond what I had set up. In both cases we had to improvise, negotiate, interpret and translate.



Fig 8: Illustrated cue card, still and rule from the video play day for *The Monster and The Explorer*, 2012



Fig 9: Original illustration of the set for *Bed, Door, The Order of Things*, 2012



Fig 10: Group notes and drawings for *Bed* and *Door*, 2014.

In her paper “Devising Cybernetic Fruit: A Posthuman Performance Methodology”, the emerging interdisciplinary artist and American doctoral candidate Nico Wood, describes what she sees as a double bind. She writes: “I wanted to suspend authority so that the work could be better than it could ever be if it were mine alone. At the same time, I needed to maintain a certain level of responsibility [...] There were times when members really needed to be heard, and others when they simply wanted to be told what to do. Sometimes taking a position of authority is not an oppressive act, but a generous one”(121). This relates to my own experiences. Too much authority seemed to result in disinterest and alienation but so did too little. My challenge in this work was to constantly negotiate within an ongoing interaction simultaneously providing space for guidance and individual interjections.

In the editorial of a book they edited called *Interact or Die*, the Dutch media art theorists Arjen Mulder and Joke Brouwer present interaction as a defining characteristic of being alive. They write:

Bodies and objects build connections, form networks, and then, through interaction, achieve organization, structure, memory and heredity. Interaction is often seen as a process of action and reaction between two already existing bodies and objects, but this is too limited a view. Interaction causes bodies and objects to change and variation to arise. (4)

This is important in the emphasis of the dual nature of being that is in constant flux while acting in relation. Mulder goes on to suggest that interactive art is created when the viewer acts on it to make change. Interactive art invites action and decision-making among recipients while calling on the recipient to relate action to reflection in that he or she must be an agent to experience meaning in the art. It is experienced differently as recipients engage with it. In *Bed, Door, The Order of Things*, the narrative order of the original live performance was disrupted and changed by the sequence and quantity of buttons pressed by one or numerous recipients in the gallery. In this sense, the interactive installation also encouraged authorship as interaction. The recipient was invited to act upon the artwork to generate the aesthetic experience.

The Monster and The Explorer installation initiated the potential of interactivity in my own practice. Though a person could experience the work as a simple media viewing station, what interested me was the potential of recipients to become aware of their relationship to others sharing the space. I was interested in its capacity to change and be a different experience for each person. The elements of the installation were both fixed and unpredictable. For example, the three video channels looped unevenly in relation to each other. The timing of the three viewed together was offset making the overall narrative disjointed. In this sense, each person's viewing experience was slightly different as a result of when they sat down to engage the work. But to be clear, it was not changed by how a person interacted with it. This initial foray into considering the potential of different viewing experiences was a precursor to the installation of my final thesis project and its consideration of interactivity.



Fig 11: *The Monster and The Explorer*; 2013. Three Channel Video Installation. Concourse Gallery, Emily Carr University of Art + Design.



Fig 12, 13: *The Monster and The Explorer*; 2013. Three Channel Video Installation. Concourse Gallery, Emily Carr University of Art + Design.

Collaboration and Desire

My understanding of collaboration is grounded in Lacanian philosophy which privileges paying attention to generative ruptures related to desire. Jacques Lacan was a controversial French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist who, in the 1960s-70s, influenced many French intellectuals including those already mentioned above. His writing influenced critical and literary theory, philosophy, linguistics, sociology, feminism, film, art theory and psychoanalysis. In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Book VII*, Lacan suggests that desire is never personal but the subject is always already emerging from it and it is better not to be blind to it. We can become aware of desire particularly in our un-intentional slips and adjust to create appropriate narratives to our own particular situation (314-319). Lacan's analysis asks: "Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?" (314). Conforming to desire through personal reflection and articulation becomes important in a collaborative process to negotiate as we become affected by each other. Lacan's complex understanding of desire is a quality that is withdrawn and absent even as it is emergent between people. Both Nancy and Bishop echo his call to be attentive to and articulate desire as elusive kinds of sensibilities and navigate in relation to it.

In both of the art projects discussed here, situations were set up to invite performers to articulate desire through improvisation and interjection. Collaborators could choose how to embrace whatever quality of movement they were drawn to. One such situation was in *The Monster* and *The Explorer* where a random reading of the text was scheduled. This activity although seemingly chaotic, had the effect of stimulating attentiveness among us. The performers sometimes added their own words sometimes cutting each other off, other times speaking in unison or on top of each other. Emergence and divergence happened through repetition and playful struggle. As these gestures emerged, a whole range of emotional energies were generated. This made the group aware of our senses and our bodies in relation to one another paying particular attention to what was unexpected and what was withdrawn. This helped us stay in tune within ourselves and with one another making available unexpected material for reflection and articulation.

In his recent book *The Pleasure of Drawing* 2013, Nancy refers to art making as a gestural process of formation related to desire and sense. He broadens drawing as a notion to relate it to other dimensions of sensing in our bodies. What is at stake in art for him is a question of how each of us embraces the withdrawn movement of formation, to share it. By being sensitive to it, he suggests we love. (57) For Lacan desire also remains withdrawn as a continuous force. It cannot be attained as it relates to absence, only navigated through how it is articulated. How desire is sensed can be adjusted through articulation. And Nancy suggests that by embracing a gesture, a choice is made according to desire (93). He writes: "I embrace the line that I am gazing at or the musical movement that I hear. Their desire is reborn in me and for me—or rather, in a withdrawn body [corps retiré] that is not "me" but the other "self" in me that harmonizes with this motion and emotion"(93). What remains important here is the powerful affect of articulating desire within what is withdrawn.

Working with an event score seemed to encourage readiness to respond within different registers of desire – to encourage choice in how each addressed the situation. Thoughts and gestures were stimulated to keep the collaborators responsive to one another through a negotiation process. The setting up of choices within timeframes and the possibility to improvise resulted in ruptures, collisions and discomfort as well as increasing pleasure. Changing according to the unexpected informed the importance of improvisation. In this way the event score was designed to be both set and provisional. For example, in one collaborative encounter, weather conditions triggered me to change the order of how the event score was performed – there was the desire for warmth, as we were getting cold as the day progressed. Anna ran and others rolled around on the ground jumping over each other and wrestled to stay warm. Each of us benefited from negotiating desire in this regard. Each of us was better to adjust the rules and adjust how we each responded to them rather than firmly sticking to them.



Fig. 14: Stills from the video play day for *The Monster and The Explorer*, 2012

Bishop argues that art should address the duplicitousness and perversion of desire. She suggests there is impact in setting up circumstances for both participants and spectators as: “paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse, and to elicit perverse, disturbing and pleasurable experiences that enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew” (284). How can attentiveness to different registers of experience transform us and give new insight? Bishop writes: “I would argue that unease, discomfort or frustration – along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity – can be crucial to any work’s artistic impact”(25). While her comment, again, is oriented towards how the work is received by audiences or participants, I am equally inspired by its implications for the collaborative process of making a work. In both projects discussed here, it was the moments of emergent complexity that were the most meaningful for the participant collaborators.

I am fascinated with discomfort in the creative process and what it means to work collaboratively. Gaston Bachelard, the French philosopher and historian of science who informed the philosophical writing of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida considers on our poetic relationship with others. In *The Poetics of Space* he considers the ethical dimension in being with others as well as the intimate objects within our homes where subjects and objects have agency. He writes: "If we give objects the friendship they should have, we do not open a wardrobe without a slight start" (81). Bachelard suggests we should remain vulnerable within these relationships, attentive and sensitive rather than simply using one another. This applies to both the production and reception of an artwork. For the latter it suggests how we might approach an art installation with openness and perhaps treat it as a friendship. This relates to the role of interactive art in how it invites agency from the recipient. It requires a type of observation where agency becomes the basic challenge of the artwork, especially when the recipient engages with the subject-object experience, oscillating between reflection and action, vulnerability and openness. The art comes to life in the interaction between the viewer and the artwork.

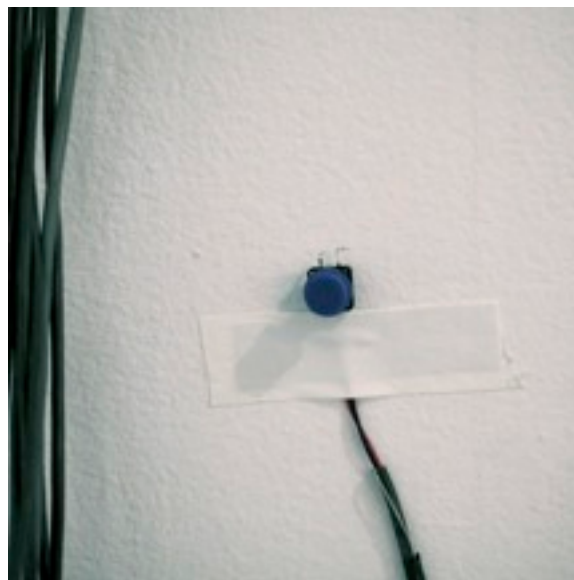


Fig 15: *Bed, Door The Order of Things*, Interactive media installation, 2013. Charles H. Scott Gallery.

Bodily Gesture and Sense

In *The Pleasure of Drawing*, Nancy privileges acting within and across movement in the body. This is relevant to the process I initiated as it attempts to activate collaborators within their bodies in relation to each other. Nancy considers the common dimension of worth in all aesthetic fields, “to receive and give, indiscernibly”(21). For him, existence is never simply being, but always being-with. There is no senselessness. Sense is always a question of being-with through an emergence of movement. This is the crux of my passion for art, that any artistic gesture connects us through our movements in the body – that sense is shared. And in this way sense must be navigated.

Nancy relates drawing to other dimensions of sensing in our bodies exploring related terms such as gesture and delineation among others. He writes: “Visual, sonorous, gestural, or tactile, delineation distinguishes, differentiates, distributes, and disposes at the same time as it disappears into its own movement”(101). The focus here is on the body as moving fluidly and responding through different registers of sense. The importance is how we choose to perform movement from within our bodies to respond sensually to those around us.

How each of the labeled sites within *Bed*, *Door*, *The Order of Things* was taken up by collaborators through associations had much to do with relating to each other in terms of our bodies. Most of the associations referred to experiences in the body in one form or another even as they connected to larger social issues within Montreal, Quebec including national borders, language, sexuality and private space etc. Some people relayed their intimate experiences of their bodies and those of their loved ones in *Bed*, relationships, sensuality, maladies, nightmares, death and birth, sexual transgressions, awkward encounters. *Door* brought up issues around privacy, safety, intrusions, transgression, conflict as well as feelings of alienation within social architecture and institutions. *The Order of Things* dealt with systems of maintenance in relating the body to the external world – keeping time, ordering life, organizing the gear, clothes, images and objects as individually appropriate in relation to certain climates and social situations. These discussions related the intimate body to public space and the political implications of collectivity.

Some of my collaborators gravitated to perform movement in one of the three sites in relation to the other two. Others responded through sound composition, text or drawings. I made an event score out of the gathering of ideas that happened with this experimentation, like the first project, to be performed and recorded on camera. We explored co-operation, collision and transgression as different contingent qualities of sensing bodily with each other.



Fig 16: Group experiments in *Door*, Montreal Studio, 2014

As the artist/instigator of these projects I advanced my own aesthetic sensibilities by inhabiting my body in relation to others and the world around me. Bachelard associates inhabitation in relation to intimate space with the bodily movements of animals, nesting and gathering. He warns: “all corners are haunted, if not inhabited”(140). When we inhabit our bodies and our physical spaces, we breathe life into our intimate, personal spaces. One way I did this was to print quotes related to themes in each of the sites, *Bed*, *Door*, *The Order of Things*, and place them within actual corresponding sites in my own living space. This was in line with an impulse to make knowledge tangible, sensual, meaningful, intimately alive within my home – to live with knowledge.



Fig 17: Quotes for *Bed* in artist's own living space, 2012



Fig 18: Gestural impulses in *The Order of Things*, 2013

Katja Kwastek, professor of modern and contemporary art in Amsterdam, curator and media theorist, in her conference paper *The Aesthetic Experience of Interactive Art* differentiates interactive art from historic works of visual art presented in gallery exhibitions. She writes:

Interactive art manifests itself in its full complexity only through the ever new realization and actualization by the visitor – the active experience of the work is considered the basic source of aesthetic experience. The visitor is thus turned from audience into actor, although they retain the role of observer, expected to perform and contemplate at the same time. (293)

Kwastek highlights how interactive art emphasizes the activity over any static result. This was what I privileged in making an array of buttons to engage recipients in affecting the collective audio/visual experience. They oscillated between being observers contemplating and performers operating. Unless they were only observing other people's actions, they could know something only by doing, and experience meaning only through a fluid interaction with the installation. Interactive art is often concerned with the bodily performance of the recipient in relation to the art. For the art to exist, the recipient must play a part in sense making through the bodily interaction with the material.

In her paper "Embodiment and Instrumentality", Kwastek refers to interactive art as an artistic instrument that differs from musical instruments by its quality of being multi-model. That is, there is an interrelation between visual, acoustic and gestural information that is artificially constructed which is subject to each recipient's openness for exploration and experience. The installations I created out of collaboration were meant to engage recipients to become sensitive to the objects in space through sonorous, visual and tactile means. In hacking a keyboard to turn it into an array of wires leading to different buttons, I encouraged recipients to push the buttons in order to activate sound and video. I presented people with a tactile, acoustic space that produced a sometimes fluid though often ambiguous interaction through a process of discovery. This is reflected in Kwastek's foregrounding of flow within the interactive experience as opposed to goal orientation.

Boundaries

As I invited collaboration across various genres and crossed borders of the everyday, people sometimes experienced confusion if there was too much blurring of elements, disciplines and potential engagements. There had to be a balance between fluidity and the delineation of rules that would allow for differences in experience.

Fischer-Lichte, a prominent historian and theorist of theatre, professor and director of the Institute for Theatre studies at the Free University of Berlin writes on theatre, intercultural performance, and the aesthetics of performance. In her book *The Transformative Power of Performance, A new aesthetics*, she states: “The aesthetics of the performative focuses on art to ‘reenchant the world’, “collapsing binary oppositions and replacing the notion of “either/or” with one of “as well as”. (204) The relationship I set up between improvisation and rules was one of “as well as”. The process was structured as well as improvised. It was delineated between the sites as well as blurred existing boundaries. This approach provided guidance but also allowed for collisions and transgression.

Fischer-Lichte writes of “the radical betwixt and between” required to transfer participants into a bodily awareness of each other in a transformative way (200). Emotional crisis, catharsis, dissolving individual identity and bodily co-presence were important to transform the experience for participants. She refers to the auto-poetic feedback loop, which is the process by which energy is fed into a performance space by the bodily co-presence of performers and audience. She suggests that this is an experience of liminality that can re-enchant us (204). In my projects, it was important to experience a sense of being enchanted with each other. What we discovered is that boundaries and thresholds can be desirable in the experience of meaningful engagement which in turn intensify an awareness of each other within our bodies.

According to Fischer-Lichte in the above quote artists have a desire to transform non-aesthetic liminal experiences into aesthetic liminal experiences and vice versa. She writes:

Artists in particular endeavor to cross the borders between art and non-art, between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, so as to blur and erase them entirely. They ceaselessly work on creating situations which complicate or render impossible one's ability to view the liminal experience itself as the goal. These situations require decision-making which refer to goal-oriented actions. At the same time, the aesthetic experience, that is, the experience of liminality as such, regulates and structures the non-aesthetic experience of liminality. (200)

Aesthetic experience involves a kind of navigation of experience and the blurring of art and life. In light of this it seems important to become aware of how our experience of art and art making is structured, to stake a claim in the negotiation of its becoming and therefore to interject and participate. This is why I emphasize agency in the negotiation of aesthetic sensibilities, to allow for choice and responsiveness as an emergent quality of being bodily with others.

Reflections on *Bed, Door, The Order of Things*

As much as *Bed, Door, The Order of Things* successfully became an interactive installation to engage people within their bodies, there were challenges in that the complexity was also a hindrance. Viewer responses were contradictory. While some couldn't seem to keep their hands off the buttons and sat on the bed, others were overwhelmed by the many elements. A distance was created in the fragmentation and layering of spaces and performances that prevented some people from being drawn in. This same fragmentation and layering was experienced positively as creating emotional responses, tones and ambiance, while others wanted it to be easier to understand how to engage or access content and narrative. While some expressed pleasure with the dance elements, excitement with the effects of the button pushing, interest in the role of the feminine and a strong emotional impact in the contrast of active and slow movements, others were lost with how to engage the installation. And some people were frustrated that pushing buttons interrupted their experiences rather than adding to it.

The problem or challenge that I set for myself was how to present the collaboration in a way that could engage viewers in the space of the gallery. The process of making was complex. The question was how to produce an exhibition, knowing that the experience of the production could not possibly be represented and that the original collaborators could not be physically present. An interactive installation was a strategy for engaging the audience through visual, tactile, and sonorous means to thicken the space and impact the senses. But all these elements in the final installation distanced some people from wanting to engage with the work.

One of the key learning outcomes has been how a fluid collaborative process can create a balance between structure and improvisation. I also discovered that interactivity within a media installation, while it can produce innovative ways to involve others in their bodies, can prevent flow rather than encourage it; it can ask too much of its recipients. Though the objects in the room helped people to project the performance into the gallery space, to sit on the bed to implicate themselves or push buttons, overall the many elements created too much distance from the core of the work.

In some ways, a simple viewing station would have been easier to engage with if the footage explained the collaborative production, to expose the role of video rather than seeming neutral. I could have provided more direction, planted more seeds and anchored the work better. This relates back to and reflects how my collaborators at times wanted more direction. If we take Bishop's lead in conceiving of participatory processes that allow for interjection within the reception of the work, how might the audience be afforded the same care and attention that I brought to my collaborators in its production?

One way is if I provided a clearer logic of engagement within the installation – some guiding principals like the instructions I gave for inviting collaboration such as asking others to brainstorm on sites within the bedroom. I could make the actual bedroom installation more habitable for personal discussions that link to larger social concerns such as those that emerged for my collaborators. The installation could be simplified with less video channels, more explanation, scheduled guided talks and the various components more resolved.

Other strategies could include: keeping the production and reception distinct within the statement of the work; to expose more clearly concerns that proved to have larger stakes for my collaborators; make an accompanying website that includes more of the production process documents that were not in the installation including the *Heather* recording, the image of my partner in our room with quotes, group drawings and notes, video making methods, versions of the event score with clarifying texts. These too could be incorporated into the installation. The exhibition could also be gallery curated to happen in a theatre. But I am satisfied with the project as a whole and what I learned from the risks I took with the collaboration and interactivity all the way from production to reception.

Summary and Future Considerations

In my art practice I set boundaries and rules to provide structure and choreograph a space that allows for interpretation, fluidity, improvisation and transgression. I think of myself as working in between practices, spaces and disciplines while fostering opportunities where desire is made manifest through bodily interaction and experience. My own desire is to allow for a composition of elements that are both set and provisional and to assert myself as an artist/instigator in negotiation with others.

I have discovered that a media installation does not necessarily require extensive interaction to engage the viewer even if the inclusion of interactive elements can implicate the gestural body in innovative ways. What I am envisioning in future work is to bring the collaborative process of making into the reception of the work.

The two projects I discuss in this thesis were inspired by a desire to explore a composition of elements that investigate authorship as an emergent interaction, collaboration as a way of engaging with desire and the beautifully fraught relationship between bodily gesture and boundaries. Methodologies drawn from philosophy and art history provide an appreciation for the relevant contemporary and art historical context as well as its theoretical underpinnings. Throughout the thesis work I stayed attentive to desire and sense through an awareness of my body in relation to others. This has meant openness and receptivity to the unexpected, a willingness to negotiate tensions and contradictions and ultimately a desire to collaborate. I will continue working to balance between set and provisional artistic processes as a means to explore networks in relation. In the process of this degree program, I learned that rupture, movement and gesture within bodies matter as do negotiation towards a sense of vitality and pleasure. I am inspired and grateful.

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