

## **Learning With/in Processes, Relations, and Situations:**

### **Expanding Understandings of Networked Art for New Understandings of Network Culture**

The research for this project will examine notions of network and learning in the production, dissemination, and reception of contemporary art. The relational aspects of a network are often overlooked in a society that has become dependent upon the electronic information systems of the Internet – *the* network of all networks. This study proposes an understanding of “networked art” that is not based on art objects, nor digital instruments, but on the relationships and processes that occur between individuals (Bazzichelli, 2008; Kimbell, 2006; Saper, 2001). Through qualitative research that employs hermeneutic methods of aesthetic analysis, I will address the following questions:

- 1) How might networked art make available new understandings of network culture?
- 2) What might networked art practices contribute to teaching and learning?

This research intends to examine a series of interrelated projects produced by artists and educators working out of Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, British Columbia. As an artist and educator myself, I intend for this study to contribute a vital perspective to research exploring the intersections between art, science, technology and culture.

### **Theoretical Framework and Context for Research**

Understanding art today requires a conceptual shift away from the aura of the art *object*, to the *encounter with* the artwork and an acknowledgement of the social *relations* produced from this experience (Bishop, 2004, 2006; Bourriaud, 1998/2002). Networked art, sometimes described as participation art (Frieling, Pellico, & Zimbardo, 2008), consists of multiple connections made through generative processes, often, but not always, incorporating digital technology. In many cases, the production and dissemination processes become the artwork itself. Contemporary art practices share conceptual overlaps with current discussions about pedagogy, particularly those that encourage interactive and collaborative methods of meaning-making. Complexity theory in education embraces a multilinear experience of learning in which teaching and learning is described as moving away from the concept of one individual passing established knowledge on to another, to the concept of collectives elaborating emergent knowledge (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008). The notion of emergent knowledge has been extended beyond complexity theory and applied to an understanding of knowledge termed “temporal epistemology,” a quest for knowledge that is not based on developing accurate understandings of a finished reality but rather, “discovering more and more complex and creative ways of interacting with our reality” (Osberg, Biesta, and Cilliers, 2008, p. 215). In the history of relational art practices, representations of reality are replaced with performative creations and active negotiations *with* reality (Patrick, 2010). In this research, I embrace a theoretical framework of temporal knowledge to explore how we might engage with networked art in an attempt to better understand our relationships with/in network culture.

Networked art practices often utilize the connective possibilities of the Internet. Since its beginnings, the Internet has served as a space for artists to create and disseminate work, and continues to be used by artists critically engaged with new media and social practices. This research will examine the use of the Internet within contemporary art, but will focus on the meanings that emerge in and between the multiple relations produced, as opposed to exploration of digital characteristics alone. With the exception of the literature cited above, critical research in this area is lacking and documentation of Canadian networked art is extremely limited. New understandings of network culture may require us to understand that technology *enables* social and economic activities, as opposed to something that determines society (Castells, 2001). This research will examine how art addresses aspects of network culture, in terms of it being a sociocultural shift that is not limited to digital technology (Varnelis, 2008).

### **Methodology for Research and Description of Study**

By employing a broader understanding of the notion of network within analysis of networked art, this research aims to provide deeper understandings of network culture. I will employ a research

methodology that integrates hermeneutic processes of understanding aesthetic encounters (Davey, 1994, 1999, 2005, 2007) with information gathered from active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004), including narrative accounts from artists and educators associated with two networked art projects: 1) *Animal Lover* by Julie Andreyev (Visual Artist and Associate Professor), with Dr. Maria Lantin (Director, Emily Carr Intersections Digital Studio), and 2) *Catch and Release: mapping stories of cultural and geographic transition*, by Dr. Ruth Beer (Visual Artist and Associate Professor) and Jim Budd (Associate Professor, Industrial Design) from Emily Carr and Dr. Kit Grauer (Associate Professor, Art Education) from the University of British Columbia (Faculty research, n.d.). *Animal Lover* explores our modern relationships with animals and looks at their methods of communication as creative beings. Several projects have evolved in this research, including networked and interactive installations (May, 2010), and an exploration of new techniques that combine motion capture of participants. *Catch and Release* examines the interplay between socio-cultural, historical and environmental aspects of community in relation to the historic fishing village of Steveston, British Columbia. The art installations, exhibited in both gallery and educational museum spaces, require viewer participation with sensor technologies and data projections. These works, which will also include interactive websites and social media, intend to produce a more immersive experience of storytelling and self-authorship.

My research will explore encounters with these two art projects and will employ “hermeneutical aesthetics” to break through pleasurable distractions in an attempt to engage with cultural realities (Davey, 2007). To complement this interpretive approach, active interview processes with the artists will embrace constructivist understandings of temporal knowledge, and will be used to inform the process of understanding the networked art. The results of these projects will be examined for their potential of learning new understandings of our relationships with/in network culture.

#### **Program of Research at the University of British Columbia**

My experiences as an artist and educator have helped to shape my research in art and education and have compelled me to explore new media and relational art in a critical manner with a multidisciplinary approach. In 2000 I completed a Masters of Fine Art that involved art production and research of experimental video art critical of media culture, for which I received an award for top thesis paper. Since then I have been an instructor in several post-secondary art programs including Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Langara College, and Simon Fraser University. In addition to maintaining an art practice and teaching, I continue to develop online curriculum at Emily Carr, which has allowed me to gain insight into the interplay between networked art and education. I am currently in the third year of my doctoral program in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, with a specialization in art education. During the 2008/09 and 2009/10 academic years, I made seven refereed conference presentations that included the International Conference of the Arts in Society in Venice, Italy, the Canadian e-Learning Conference, the Canadian Society for Education Through Art, and the National Art Education Association conference in Baltimore. I have completed my required course work and comprehensive exams and am refining my dissertation proposal. Plans for the 2010/11 include presentations at the International Digital Media Arts Association Conference, the College Art Association conference in New York (including two publications in the refereed conference proceedings) and the implementation of an undergraduate course I have designed that examines understandings of remix and network culture. My fourth year (2011/12), for which this fellowship would apply, will involve consolidating my research and interviews acquired from examination of networked art and conducting interviews with artists located outside of Canada.

#### **Contribution to the advancement of knowledge**

The results of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between contemporary art and network culture, and how the Internet is being used for artistic research. This project could lead to more effective and creative ways of utilizing new media in art and in education. Additionally, this research could lead to transnational projects implemented through artistic inquiry.

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## RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

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### • *Refereed contributions*

- R May, H. (2010) Julie Andreyev: I Tweet, Therefore I Am, *Canadian Art* online, May 27.  
R May, H. (2009) Reece Terris: Houses Beautiful, *Canadian Art* online, Sept. 2.  
R May, H. (2009) Ingrid Koenig: Navigating the Uncertainty Principle, *Canadian Art* online, July 2.  
R May, H. (2001) Interrupting the Program, *Canadian Art*, 18(2), 66-73.

### • *Other refereed contributions*

- R May, H. (2010). Dialogical Process: Critical Dialogue and Creative Process via the Internet, 2010 *NAEA National Convention*, Baltimore, MD, April 14-18.  
R Baker, K. & May, H. (2009). Digital Graffiti. *Canadian Society for Education Through Art*, Inside\_Out Conference, Oct. 22-24.  
R May, H. (2009). Art in the Age of Networked Learning. *Canadian e-Learning Conference*, June 17-19.  
R May, H. & Mallett, K. (2009). Teaching Art Online: Disrupting the Teacher-Student Hierarchy, *International Conference on the Arts in Society*, Venice, Italy, July 28-31  
R Baker, K. & May, H. (2009). The Bigger Picture: Digital Graffiti Transnationally, *International Conference on the Arts in Society*, Venice, Italy, July 28-31  
R May, H., Mallett, K., Baker, J., & Lowry, G. (2009). Critical Dialogue in Online Learning: Shifting Curriculum to a Networked Space, *Investigating Our Practices Conference*, UBC, May 2.  
R May, H. & Mallett, K. (2008). Teaching Art Online. *Educational Technology Users Group*, Creativity Conference, Vancouver, BC, May 28-30.

### • *Forthcoming refereed contributions:*

- R May, H. (officially accepted). Shifting the curriculum: Decentralization in the Art Education Experience, *Art Education*, National Art Education Association. VA: Reston, approx. 5 pages.

### • *Forthcoming other refereed contributions:*

- R May, H. (2010). Processing: Understanding Art as Encountering Ongoing Narrative, *The International Digital Media Arts Association Conference 2010*, November 4-6.  
R May, H. (2011). Art that Decodes: Making Sense of Data Process, 2011 *College Art Association* conference, New York, February 9-12.  
R May, H. (2011). Processing Digital: Opening up to a Space of Emergence in Art Pedagogy, 2011 *College Art Association* conference, New York, February 9-12.  
R May, H. (2011). Art in an Age of Networked Learning, 2011 *Mid America College Art Association* conference, St. Louis, MO, Mar 30-Apr 2.

## Literary and Artistic Works

- R 2007, *AAHLUMINEX*, Art Gallery of Mississauga, Mississauga, ON, CA  
R 2003, *Let's Get Lost*, group showing with Sean Alward, Helen Pitt Gallery, Vancouver, CA  
R 2000, *Convergence*, Dynamo Gallery, Vancouver, BC, CA  
R 1998, Hart House Annual Juried Exhibition, Justina Barnicke Gallery, Toronto, ON, CA  
R 1997, *Glimpse*, SOLO EXHIBITION, Arbor Room, Hart House, U of T, ON, CA  
R 1997, *Matter of Emergence*, Del Bello Gallery, Toronto, ON, CA

### • *Non-refereed contributions:*

- 2010 and ongoing, Internet art, *Selfpost* | *Postself*, <http://postself.wordpress.com>  
2009, 2008, 2004, Faculty Exhibitions, Emily Carr University, Vancouver, BC, CA  
2006, Video screening with musical collaboration, Rime, Vancouver, BC, CA  
2004, Video screening with musical collaboration, Western Front, Vancouver, BC, CA  
2000, *Masters*, Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, Vancouver, BC, CA

### Published reviews of artwork:

- Birse, A. (1997, November 11). "May's Murky Memories," *The Medium* (U of T newspaper)  
Passmore, H. (2003). "I Fall to Pieces," Exhibition catalogue, Vancouver: Helen Pitt Gallery, October.  
Rourke, R. (2000). "MASTERS," UBC Masters of Fine Art Exhibition Catalogue, Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, September.

### Public lectures related to artwork:

- 2003, Helen Pitt Gallery, in conjunction with *Let's Get Lost* exhibition, Vancouver, BC, CA  
2003, "Visual Language and Psychological Survival," Emily Carr University, Vancouver, BC, CA  
2001, Visiting artist lecture, University of British Columbia, BC, CA