ART EDUCATION AT THE SPEED OF LIFE:
A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO
AN ONLINE ARTS LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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By

Vicki Daiello, B.F.A.

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The Ohio State University
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Master's Examination Committee:
Dr. Candace J. Stout, Adviser
Dr. Terry Barrett

Approved by
Candace J. Stout
Adviser
Department of Art Education
ABSTRACT

This thesis is a philosophical inquiry that explores issues surrounding the online art education course Art Education 160D: Art and Music Since 1945, currently offered to undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university. The purpose of the thesis is to establish the foundation for future dissertation research of the ontological and epistemological experiences of students in this course. Subsumed under a hermeneutic approach, the discourses of pragmatism, phenomenology, poststructuralism, and psychoanalytic theory are drawn upon to conceptualize a philosophical and theoretical framework for the future qualitative study. Further, a grand tour question for the future dissertation is proposed: How did students interpret their experience and construct knowledge in the online course Art and Music Since 1945?

Methodological topics addressed include: Issues in the development of a philosophical inquiry, problems in conceptualizing and performing online social research, and intersections of theory and philosophy for planning the future study. In addition, the terms student, knowledge, and space-time perceptions are introduced as key concepts and are investigated with the goal of exposing assumptions and suppositions that may influence research into the online course Art and Music Since 1945. Moreover, to draw attention to the tensions that can arise when meanings long associated with concepts
undergo transformations in different contexts and historical milieus, the theory of remediation is examined.

Supporting development of a philosophical and theoretical foundation for the future qualitative study, the review of the literature presents a survey of select issues in art education, technology and aesthetic experience, and online qualitative research methodology. The literature indicates that research of online social and education environments presents special challenges for qualitative research, particularly in studying the textual representations of people in their online communications. Further, the literature suggests that, although technology issues have been of interest to art educators, additional research into electronic learning contexts such as online arts education courses is needed.
Dedicated to Erik and Anna
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey toward this thesis began several years ago when I accepted a Graduate Teaching Assistantship position for the online course Art and Music Since 1945. Little did I know at the time, my choice in teaching an online section rather than a traditional classroom version of this course would spark myriad questions that to this day continue to fascinate me. I wish to thank Dr. Robert Arnold for both the opportunity to work as his teaching assistant and for his patience, good humor, and sensible advice as I learned to navigate the world of online arts education.

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VITA

February 1, 1964.................................................. Born—Sandusky, Ohio USA

1999................................................................. B.F.A. Metals, Computer Art
Ohio Wesleyan University

1999—2002............................................................. Artist in Residence,
Delaware City Schools

2000—2001............................................................. Art Teacher,
Buckeye Valley Schools

2002—Present ....................................................... Graduate Teaching Associate,
The Ohio State University
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the issue

One day the ‘why’ arises and everything begins
in that weariness tinged with amazement.
~Albert Camus

Within a traditional classroom, the physical boundaries of spaces and objects are usually quite clear: walls, floor, furniture, bodies, and a clock that measures a defined place in time. Many take for granted that this space and time constitute a particular reality, or experience of learning. How then, does one understand, or make use of, an educational experience that bears so little resemblance to that familiar space or time? In my first year of teaching the online art education course Art Education 160D: Art and Music Since 1945 at a large Midwestern university, I stepped into an unbounded environment and discovered the disorientation of entering a new, uncharted instructional world. Equipped with expectations and assumptions from my past teaching and learning experiences, I found myself unsettled and intrigued by the ways in which a typical contemporary art appreciation curriculum, when experienced in an online learning format, began to develop a new significance for me. Indeed, the notion of an arts learning experience, liberated from a traditional professor-guided slide lecture format and
appearing upon a computer situated within the mundane activities of my home, was at first quite difficult to reconcile with my own art education background.

Disruptive and disorienting to the idea of education as an event that depends upon interactions within the same time and space, my experience with *Art and Music Since 1945* compelled me to examine and reexamine what it means to be an art educator, and equally, a student today. Aware that the development of new information and communication technologies were transforming higher education and the knowledge activities of teachers and learners (Burbules & Callister, Jr., 2000), I began to sense that the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* might represent a significant shift in not only the ways in which art educators interact with their students, but also the ways in which art and arts learning are experienced and valued. Therefore, within the contrast of what I expected my new world of online teaching to be, and the actuality of what I experienced, a corpus of questions began to develop: broad sweeping questions about teachers’ and students’ expectations, values, and goals in an art education experience, as well as specific questions about the meaning of arts learning in the lives of my online students. Although these ontologically and epistemologically oriented questions originated within the scope of my personal teaching experience, they have, through their resistance to simple answers, managed to transcend the personal and become linked with complex issues in the context of contemporary art education and in the field of qualitative research.

Out of myriad characteristics that might be studied in online arts learning, it is the ontological (nature of being) and epistemological (nature of knowledge) experiences of
students in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* that are of particular interest to me. Ontology and epistemology are inherently phenomenological in that they refer to qualities inextricably joined with the specificities and contingencies of all human experience. Moreover, questions of an ontological and epistemological nature lead to the life world, the "whole sphere of everyday experiences, orientations, and actions through which individuals pursue their interests and affairs by manipulating objects, dealing with people, conceiving plans, and carrying them out" (Wagner, 1970, p. 15-16). The intersections of art, education, and people that occur in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* are particular arrangements of actions and meanings that shape a person’s encounters with art. I believe a study of these encounters will yield insights that promote an understanding of not only the meaning and value of art education in a world increasingly dominated by Internet experiences, but also evoke critical reflection and practical responses to issues of curriculum content and design, and accessibility of art education experiences as they are increasingly encountered online.

While research of students’ subjective experiences in the online course *Arts and Music Since 1945* has the potential to promote insights into the role of art education in an increasingly technologically mediated world, the very distinctive arrangements of actions and meanings that constitute an online arts learning experience are a challenge to phenomenological descriptions and interpretations, since the researcher is not usually present within the same time and space of the research participants. Thus, research of an online arts learning experience necessitates careful consideration of three intertwined issues: the contexts of online arts learning experiences, the student’s interpretations of
these experiences, and finally, a researcher's choices of methodologies and methods for studying the intersecting online and offline worlds of students. In developing this philosophical inquiry into the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, I have identified two factors that have contributed to my inquiry and to my methodological choices: instability of boundaries of the online art education classroom and instability within the art education discipline itself.

First, the online "classroom" of *Art and Music Since 1945* does not use traditional spatial or temporal classroom boundaries, thereby dissolving any physical containment of students, teachers, or learning and communication activities. Thus, my object of study is slippery, and resistant to traditional definitions of arts education. Second, pressures stemming from debates about the inclusion of visual and popular culture in art education are causing the conceptual boundaries around arts education's subject matter to dissolve and as a result, arts education's teaching and learning goals are shifting and changing. Thus, my research topic is deeply embedded in arts education's current philosophical and ideological flux.

As a result of the instabilities inherent in the course I am studying and the flux that presently characterizes my disciplinary milieu, I am drawn to methodologies that are capable of productively and responsibly engaging with indeterminate and shifting concepts and boundaries. My expectation of productive and responsible research is that my study will not only trouble traditional assumptions about the times and places of learning events in art education, but also trouble some assumptions inherent in research
itself, namely assumptions that privilege an embodied presence in arts learning events, and embodied representations in qualitative research.

The revitalization of a perspective: Philosophy and phronesis

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus writes, “One day the ‘why’ arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.” This statement brings attention to the way in which simple questions and subsequent reflections can lead to the awareness of alternative ways of knowing and being—even the revitalization of existing perspectives. Indeed, the impetus to research *Art and Music Since 1945* began with simple questions of why and how. In the beginning, I wondered, *Why would a student choose to learn about art in this way?* And, *How are students experiencing arts learning in an online environment?* These questions, since joined by many others, fueled a growing interest in understanding how an online arts course, by virtue of Internet accessibility, might become entwined with the personal contexts and activities of the everyday life world.

Philosopher Edmond Jabés (1993) writes “the question means that for the time of its formulation, we do not belong. We do not belong with belonging; we are unbound within bonds” (p. x). With this statement, Jabés reminds us that a question is also a risk—a leap into the indeterminate, a journey at the blurry, undefined edges of a system. Often in such situations, where questions bump up against indeterminate edges and unclear structures, systems of philosophy or theory provide a sense of security. While such systems of security can provide epistemological stability, neopragmatist philosopher
Richard Rorty (1979) eschews the pursuit of commensurate philosophical systems of truth, offering instead a view of philosophy as an edifying proposition. Edification, in challenging the notion that philosophical systems must be built upon justified true beliefs, revitalizes philosophy, becoming a means for generating new descriptions and sustaining conversations. In short, while questioning or problematizing the notion of online arts learning is an edifying proposition that, in interrogating undefined areas in art education, may risk destabilizing the security of existing belief systems, such a risk is necessary in understanding how the arts and arts learning might remain a vital component of today’s life world.

Like pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, Richard Rorty maintains that philosophy should be employed in “breaking the crust of convention” (1979, p. 379). Of course, in breaking the “crust of convention,” questions will inevitably be raised, and as a result, traditions will be challenged. However, by raising questions and initiating new conversations, connections can be made to existing issues, perhaps even leading to a revitalization of perspectives on issues in art education. Although raising questions about the role of learning context and technological change in art education is an effort directed toward breaking the crusts of convention, this thesis is also an endeavor of respect and optimism: respect for art education’s traditions, and optimism in believing that art educators will meet the technological challenges that lie ahead with creativity and scholarly rigor. The inspiration for this thesis lies in the belief that the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* is representative of a noteworthy and dramatic shift in art education philosophy and methods. Moreover, this thesis proceeds with the confidence
that, in piercing "crusts of convention" by considering innovative arts learning formats, a
revitalization of perspectives in art education will be encouraged—the ultimate goal
being that arts learning experiences remain a vital and relevant presence in the life world.

Finally, this thesis is inspired by the philosophical concept of *phronesis*, that is, the effort to give voice to, and take heed of those "questions about the meaning of life
and human values that cannot find a proper language" (Gustavsson, 2002, p. 20). Finding
myself unable to find the language to adequately express, or the theoretical constructs to
rationally explain, the strange disequilibria experienced early on in my teaching of the
online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, I sought a sense of stability in philosophy.
Traced to the Aristotelian division of knowledge into episteme (theoretical-scientific
knowledge), and *techne* (practical-productive knowledge), *phronesis* complements
episteme and *techne* by exemplifying a flexible knowledge that bridges dichotomies of
knowledge that exclude or oppose one another (Gustavsson, 2002). Phronesis offers a
way of reconciling the rational and irrational, acknowledging that humans will meet their
particular life circumstances in ways that necessitate the use of overlapping knowledges
that can adapt to the contingencies of life. In short, the practical wisdom of *phronesis*
consists of an "ethics of the particular, an "ability to meet concrete situations with
sensitivity and imagination" (Gustavsson, 2002, p. 22).

**The phenomenological attitude and the online learning experience**

In seeking to understand the lived experiences of students who learn about
contemporary art and music in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, I am
approaching research with a “phenomenological attitude” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 45). According to researchers and social theorists working in the area of human-computer interactions (Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1997; Walker, 2002; Zemblyas, Vrasidas, & McIsaac, 2002), it is the phenomenological experience of being and knowing, or in other words, the subjective construction of individual and collective realities, that is changing with the increasing reliance on computers in the social world. The phenomenological attitude compels me to ask questions about the lived nature of an arts learning experience in Art and Music Since 1945 because, if personal and social ontological and epistemological realities are indeed undergoing changes, then the nature of arts experiences, even the notion of aesthetic experience, might be changing as well.

A phenomenological attitude is also equated with interest in constructions of reality that are otherwise understood as pre-theoretical, pre-reflective conceptualizations of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Therefore, not only has a phenomenological standpoint led me to an interest in the pre-theoretical, pre-reflective conceptualizations of students’ arts learning experiences in the online course Art and Music Since 1945, it has, by illuminating the relational continuity of lived experience, also compelled me to avoid essentializing distinctions between online and offline existence. In short, it is the connective, relational, and transactional particularities of the situated life world that have led me to considerations of the contextual nature of experience.

John Dewey (1938) believed that experience, born of the interplay between situation and interaction, is inseparable from the conditions it unfolds within. Noting that “an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an
individual and, what at the time, constitutes his environment” (1938, p. 43), Dewey maintained that a learning environment was influential in not only what and how an individual learned at the time, but could even impact attitude towards, or desire for, future learning. Similarly, in their research on the development of identity, motivation, and interest in a museum education settings, Schauble, Leinhardt, & Martin, (1997) place emphasis on the activities and behaviors situated in one’s life as a determinant of a person’s learning potential. The implication is, that in the process of learning, subjectivity is inextricable from context—not just the context of the learning event itself, but also the contextual conditions of culture and history, and that this subjectivity is a key component of the quality or meaning of a learning experience.

Poststructural considerations of the online learning experience

The entwined nature of culture, history, and subjectivity imply that conceptualizations of contexts are relational and transactional, and as stated earlier, a phenomenological attitude looks to pre-theoretical, pre-reflective conceptualizations of the world. Keeping this in mind, how are these epistemological and ontological issues to be reconciled in interpretive descriptive research of the spatially, temporally indeterminate situations created through online learning experiences? In a related query, Internet researchers Leander & McKim ask, “In carrying out an (online) ethnographic study, where is it that the ethnographer goes? Where does the collection of data take place?” (2003, p. 213). As Leander & McKim (2003) and Annette Markham (2003) point out, research of online environments will necessitate reconsiderations of the assumed
characteristics of social situations. Leander & McKim (2003) posit: "Imagining where the ethnographer would go in terms of Internet research suggests an expansion or revision of social situation to include locations that are not physical settings as we have typically thought them to be" (p. 213). As a result of this conceptual expansion of social situation, Leander & McKim (2003) conclude that, "(m)oving from traditional research sites to online spaces compels a shift to fields of relations [italics added] rather than bounded physical sites (p. 214).

Conceptualizing the online learning experience as being constituted in a "field of relations" (Leander & McKim, 2003) is important to my study of the online course Art and Music Since 1945 because I am interested in understanding how the online arts learning experience is integrated into the lifeworlds of students, a research interest that necessarily requires consideration of both online and offline experiences. The position taken in this thesis is that place and time are socially constructed (Lefebvre, 1991). As a result, my research will endeavor to deconstruct a technocentric dichotomy of cyberspace and real world presence (Leander & McKim, 2003) when exploring the issue of online arts learning experiences. The deconstruction of dichotomous relationships between online and offline worlds is not only essential for opening the imagination to how arts learning experiences might be "otherwise" or "more and other" (Lather, 2004, p. 4), but also essential for acknowledging the poststructural implications of online social research wherein identities, times, and spaces are held to be shifting, contingent, and relational.

Researcher and theorist Anne Galloway (2003) points out that poststructural thought, including Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a rhizomatic reality, shifts beliefs in
central, unified identities to ideas of decentering, relationality, and "in-betweeness" (p. 20) performed in spaces and flows. It is the position of this thesis that, in the manner of Dewey's conceptualization of experience as transactional and contextual, the conceptualization of online learning contexts cannot be productively separated from traditional classroom learning contexts. To do so is to deny that online and offline worlds overlap and inform one another. In other words, online and offline learning events should not be understood as separate, static, and boundaried learning environments, rather they must be considered "social spaces [that] interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 86). In fact, as Leander & McKim (2003) point out, "the distinction 'online' and 'offline' is perhaps best seen as an analytic heuristic, a holding place until a more grounded means of understanding and discussing technologically mediated human experiences is formulated" (p. 223).

The notion of interpenetrating contexts in online learning, while complicating an ability to make discrete distinctions between online and traditional offline classrooms, does open up a space to explore the transactional nature of the spatial-temporal experience of the online course Art and Music Since 1945. The transactional nature of experience is phenomenological, reminding us that what we know, indeed all questions of knowledge and being in the world, "always refer us back to our world, to our lives, to who we are and to what makes us write, read, and talk together" (van Manen, 1990, p. 46). In short, the very experience of what each person or society deems to be "reality" is a complex and contingent interplay of meanings that shape—and are shaped by, the transactions we have with our environments and with each other. Moreover, viewing
experience as a contingent interplay of meanings that constitute a sense of reality, shifts focus from simply the tools, activities, and participants in online learning to the complexly contingent "between spaces" (Galloway, 2003, p. 20) and performative acts that shape epistemologies and ontologies.

The epistemology and ontology of learning are profoundly affected when people, objects, and cognitive processes, acquire new associations and meanings as education activities traverse both online and offline learning situations. For example, the elements, student, knowledge, and space-time perceptions—fundamental aspects of the online learning experience in *Art and Music Since 1945*, are also elements of a traditional art education classroom experience. However, by locating and performing each concept within the online arts learning experience, these elements take on new connotations and new significances. Key to this significance is the context within which each element is located, for the context of online arts learning enlarges the elements of student, knowledge, and space-time perceptions into more complex, and more expansive territories of experience and meaning. Moreover, significance can also be found in the negotiations and transactions of reality that enable these elements to slide back and forth between online and offline experiences in the arts learning event. As a result, shifting an arts learning experience away from traditional education times and spaces to a student's environment of choice—whether it be bedroom, coffee shop, or library—creates new understandings of the performances and places of learning.

These augmented understandings of the times and spaces of arts learning might affect not only the subjective experience of the student, but also might influence the ways
in which a student perceives an arts curriculum. Therefore, I am compelled to ask, if contextual conditions and performative acts of learning are so intertwined with, and influential to, the quality, meaning, and subjective experience of learning, then how is an online arts education course like *Art and Music Since 1945* interpreted by students? Might the distinctive experience of encountering art and an arts education curriculum through the relative privacy and intimacy of a personal computer influence the subjective experience of art—particularly perceptions of what art is, what art means, even one’s beliefs about the social significance and purpose of the arts?

**What is arts education at the speed of life?**

The title of this thesis, *Arts Education at the Speed of Life*, was chosen to bring emphasis to an education experience that is flexibly accommodative to a variety of times and spaces. Thus, arts education at the speed of life implies an arts learning experience that “moves in time” with the variable pace of each student’s life world. In addition, art education that moves at the speed of life is a departure from traditional, classroom-bound models of education by exemplifying the credo, “Education should go to people and not the other way around” (Moran & Myringer, 1999, p. 60). Further, the title is intended to draw attention to specific characteristics of online learning—speed and immediacy—that may stimulate adjustments in art education’s philosophical and theoretical paradigms. Finally, in choosing to use the phrase *the speed of life* in the thesis title, I am setting the stage for a sustained consideration of speed and immediacy as a significant determinant of subjective experience. In addition to its implications for subjectivity, according to Nick
Mansfield (2000), the imagery of speed has been historically linked to technology, generating both an attraction and fear of technological innovation. This interpolation of fear and desire arises from the fact that

(i)n speed, the limits of the human body are constantly being reconsidered. With this remapping of limits comes also a refiguring of the scope of subjectivity, the conditions of feeling, of interrelationship between the self and society, and, inevitably, the subject and its being in the world. (p. 149)

Clearly, from the Italian Futurists of the early twentieth century who saw speed and specifically the motor car as “harbingers of a completely new humanity” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 150) to contemporary cultural theorist Paul Virilio who saw speed as “the complete remeasurement of human experience” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 152), the prospect of accelerating aspects of human experience has dominated the imagination.

Speed has also been implicated in the modification of human-space relationships. Virilio finds that the speed and immediacy of electronic information transmissions, originating with the cinema and extending to all human-screen relationships (such as those created through television and computer experiences), have resulted in an architectonic dissolution (Friedberg, 2004). In addition, a dissolution of space through the effects of immediacy and speed will, according to Virilio, hold consequences for human-historical perception. He (1995) explains:

Up to now, history has taken place within local times, local frames, regions and nations. But now, in a certain way, globalization and virtualization are inaugurating a global time that prefigures a new form of tyranny. If history is so rich, it is because it was local, it was thanks to the existence of spatially bounded times which overrode something that up to now occurred only in astronomy: universal time. (para. 9)
If immediacy of experience eliminates a need for procuring and conserving space, and if the significance of history is dissolved through access to a perpetual present, will there be a shift from place-centered ways of knowing to the contingencies of knowing in action? And, might such a shift hold consequences for place-centered arts experiences like museums, and, of relevance to this thesis—art education’s classrooms?

The “reduction of space by speed” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 155) not only changes the dynamics of art education classrooms and arts learning experiences, it also impacts the nature of communication and representation. Because an immediacy of presence in the online classroom is effected through the texts and textual communications that occur there, of concern as I design my study of the online course Art and Music Since 1945 will be the issue of textual representations of students—an issue that has important implications for the conceptualization of subjectivities. On the issue of presence as textual information, Mansfield (2000) finds that, “in being dispersed amongst an endlessly proliferating number of information streams” (p. 155), subjectivity is redefined. In addition, he (2000) argues that

\[(w)e\] gain information instantly at the cost of becoming information ourselves, outside of any consideration of personal choice.... New possibilities open up to us, but only as they become technologically efficient, manageable and therefore standardized. The horizons of the subject are simultaneously expanded and reduced [italics added]. (p. 155)

The concept of immediacy is inextricable from the online arts learning experience. Education that occurs through Internet experiences is characterized by expectations that not only will learning experiences have an element of speed, they will also be readily available for immediate access. Immediacy implies a power and control of
access—an ability to fulfill one’s desires instantly. Together, speed and immediacy remove obstacles to gratification, reducing the distance between desire and fulfillment. Paradoxically, online arts learning experiences represent a tension of distances—for while one achieves distance from the physical boundaries that enclose traditional classroom learning experiences, there is simultaneously an illusion of close proximity with the objects and information one accesses with immediacy. The paradox of distance and proximity in an online arts learning experience is, like the speed and immediacy that produce the experience, an aspect of contemporary life that likely influences subjectivity.

Regardless of the effects it may have upon subjectivity, online learning experiences continue to proliferate. A shift in the time and place of learning is, in both advanced and developing nations, linked to changes in university teaching caused by “declining funds, advancing technology, and the demography of students” (Moran & Myringer, 1999). The changing demography of students is, according to Moran & Myringer (1999), “partly a function of the shift from elite to mass higher education, and partly a consequence of a growing demand for recurrent, lifelong education” (p. 58). Also creating the necessity for an education that is flexible enough to accommodate the diverse needs of students and educators is the reality that rigidly constructed times and places of education cannot meet the needs of those who must balance work and family responsibilities with their education requirements (Moran & Myringer, 1999).

In summary, the title phrase, “Arts Education at the Speed of Life” is chosen to call attention to a distinctive art education experience that is flexibly accommodative to a variety of times and spaces. And, an arts learning experience that “moves in time” with
the variable pace of each student’s life world is considered to be representative of paradigm shifts in both human subjective experiences and functions of higher education.

An Internet connection to new arts experiences

The online course Art and Music Since 1945 meets a university-wide art credit requirement for undergraduates. As a result, this course is populated by students from diverse programs, many of whom relate that they have had minimal experience with visual arts classes. Further, if a student has had visual arts experiences, more often than not, these events occurred in high school studio art classes, many of which were taken to satisfy a school requirement. For many students, the online course Art and Music Since 1945 is a first foray into online education as well as arts learning experiences.

Of course, university-mandated arts courses are not unusual, however, what is unusual about the online course Art and Music Since 1945, is that it introduces people to art in a most non-traditional way. That is, this course brings an introduction to the arts directly into a student’s life world through the Internet, instead of the student experiencing an introduction to the arts in a traditional art history or art appreciation classroom. This difference in learning format is especially significant in light of arguments which suggest that setting, mood, and ambient activities can influence aesthetic experience (Fenner, 2004). Equally significant is research which reveals that the manner in which an art experience is introduced is influential to subsequent perceptions of the art (Funch, 2004). Therefore, an online arts learning experience like Art and Music
Since 1945 is noteworthy in that it disrupts traditions long associated with art history or art appreciation courses in college classrooms.

Finally, in offering an Internet connection to new arts experiences, the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* introduces arts learning into the multiple, shifting, and intercontextual social practices that characterize online activities. This is significant in that to date, the manner in which "the intensified digitization of daily life" is affecting "what it means for people to know things and what kinds of things it may be most important to know" is not well understood (Lankshear, 2003, p. 167). In fact, Internet educator and theorist Colin Lankshear (2003) argues that "the information superabundant world of the Internet and other searchable data sources" as well as the infinitely shifting assemblages of knowledge that are briefly brought together in the individual "may be more properly understood as a collective assemblage involving many minds (and machines)" (p. 184). Viewed thusly, "arts education at the speed of life" not only refers to an Internet connection to new arts experiences, it also evokes questions about the very nature of arts experiences, specifically, what are the effects of, and meanings associated with an immediacy of arts experiences that overlap with other experiences, or even other minds and computers in an Internet-based art education course?

**Statement of purpose: Seeking reflection, not definitive answers**

Through philosophical inquiry, this thesis will promote a dialectical engagement with issues surrounding the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. Further, by surveying literature in and around the field of art education and by drawing upon cogent
themes in philosophy and theory, this thesis will establish a rationale and foundation for
the future dissertation research—an in-depth qualitative study of student learning in the
online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. In building a foundation for the future research,
this thesis will develop a framework of essential concepts believed to hold merit for a
study of the epistemological and ontological dimensions of students’ online arts learning
experiences.

Neither at this time, nor in the future dissertation research, will I be seeking
determinations that an online arts education format is better or worse than traditional,
classroom-based art education methods. Instead, my interest is in exploring the
distinctive qualities of students’ online arts learning experiences—qualities that may
influence students’ subjective experiences of the arts, influence the construction of arts
knowledge, and perhaps even influence students’ perceptions of the personal or social
significance of the arts.

**Key concepts**

Colin Lankshear (2003) recommends the adoption of the concept “*digital
epistemologies*” (p. 177) to bring a fine-grained focus to the distinctive circumstances of
“knowing” through the Internet. Lankshear (2003, p. 167) cites several issues “associated
with profound changes in our conceptions and experiences of time, space, relatedness,
and what it is to know things.” These issues are

1. changes in ‘the world (objects, phenomena) to be known’ associated
   with the impact of digitization;
2. changes in conceptions of knowledge and processes of ‘coming to know;  

3. changes in the constitution of ‘knowers’ which reflect the impact of intensified digitization. (Lankshear, 2003, p. 167-168)

Lankshear’s identified issues emphasize the influence of digitization on conceptualizations of the world, constructions of knowledge, and subjectivities. These issues are in need of study, especially in relationship to online arts learning experiences. Lankshear’s issues, as well as my interest in students’ subjective experiences in the online course Art and Music Since 1945, have guided my choice of the following concepts to be explored in this thesis: student, knowledge, and space-time perceptions.

In this thesis, the concept student is equated with Lankshear’s issue “changes in the constitution of knowers” and will be related to my interest in students’ subjectivities. The term knowledge is equated with Lankshear’s issue “changes in conceptions of knowledge and processes of coming to know” and is selected to engage a discussion of arts knowledge in the context of my research topic. Finally, Lankshear’s issue “changes in ‘the world (objects, phenomena) to be known associated with the impact of digitization” is represented by my chosen phrase space-time perceptions in order to initiate discussion on spatial, temporal qualities of phenomenological experience in an online arts learning event.

Although I have identified specific concepts to be investigated in this thesis, it must be stated that I do not consider these concepts to be discrete categories of study, all

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encompassing issues, or essentializing themes in an online arts learning experience. Moreover, I view these concepts as merging, blending, even troubling one another in dynamic relationships that exemplify the fluid, contingent nature associated with interpenetrating contexts of online and offline activities. Most importantly, these concepts are chosen to function as preliminary coordinates for mapping my philosophical inquiry. And, finally, these concepts will not only establish direction and focus in this thesis, they will also establish the roots for dissertation research of the epistemological and ontological qualities of students' online arts learning experiences.

By choosing to shape the thesis through concepts associated with Art and Music Since 1945, this philosophical inquiry will function as a lens that follows and magnifies issues relevant to an understanding of student experience in an online arts learning course. The issues and ideas revealed by this lens will, in hermeneutic fashion, be treated as interpretations. Accordingly, these interpretations will be subject to continued examination for insight into the assumptions, biases, and positionality that inevitably influence a research project. A hermeneutic interpretive approach is vital to my inquiry because, as distance education researcher Desmond Keegan (1993) explains, when researching an evolving concept like online learning, conceptual analysis is crucial, for the "meanings we choose to use for things and how we and others conceive of things subtly and surely directs the actions that we and others take" (p. 114). Therefore, not only will an interpretive hermeneutics influence the philosophical and theoretical framework taking shape in this thesis, it will also be carried forward into the dissertation research to
support critical analysis of the evolving concepts associated with online arts learning experiences.

Research questions for the future qualitative study

Influencing both the direction of philosophical inquiry in this thesis and the planning of the future qualitative study is my interest in the distinctive epistemological and ontological characteristics of student experience within the variable online learning contexts of *Art and Music Since 1945*. In particular, I am interested in how an online arts learning experience influences a student’s relationship with, and perceptions of, contemporary art. I am also interested in how the phenomenon of online arts learning is emerging within the current socio-cultural context of the art education discipline. From an ecological systems perspective (Gibson, 1993; Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004), the issue of student experience in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* and the socio-cultural context of the art education discipline are not discrete entities, rather these issues are woven into a larger framework wherein technology and attendant attitudes regarding progress, innovation, and human relationships constitute particular views of reality.

The philosophical inquiry undertaken in this thesis has influenced the development of a grand tour question for the future dissertation research: "*How did students interpret their arts learning experience and construct knowledge in the online course Art and Music Since 1945?*" Implicit in this question is an interest in the multiple, variable, and contextual issues that come into play in the formation of students’ interpretations of their experience, and in the distinctive nature of arts learning in this
course. Further implied is an interest in the contextual milieu of the art education discipline, that is, the social-cultural constructions of reality within which this course is situated.

Subsumed under the grand tour question are three embedded issues in need of consideration in the future dissertation study:

1. *Subject matter:* How is the subject matter of *Art and Music Since 1945* (art and music of the Western world within the time period of 1945 to the present) being interpreted by students in the online learning context? Questions of relevance for the dissertation are

   a. How will an online education format affect the design and content of an art education curriculum?

   b. What will art educators consider to be meaningful, productive learning experiences in an online arts education course?

2. *Interaction of students and teachers:* According to distance education researcher Raven Wallace (2003), issues of transactional distance and social presence in relationship to the subject matter being taught have not been adequately researched. Questions to be considered in the dissertation include

   a. What influence does a contemporary arts curriculum have on the manner and frequency of student/teacher interactions in an online arts education course?

   b. How do students perceive the social presence of others when interacting with peers and teachers in an online arts education course?
What is the nature of these interactions, and what impact do they have on the learning process?

3. Methodological choices for studying online social environments: As a text-bound and boundaryed field of inquiry, the online course Art and Music Since 1945 presents some challenging issues in respect to methodologies and methods, raising the following questions for the future dissertation research:

a. How will I study and write about arts learning experiences while preserving the strange tension of disembodied words and embodied lives that gives rise to a distinctive teaching and learning experience?

b. Moreover, how will I meet the challenges of representation itself and research validity, especially when the researcher and the researched are present to each other only as text on a computer screen?

While a complete investigation of the grand tour question, embedded issues, and methodological dilemmas is beyond the scope of this thesis, these issues are both directly and indirectly addressed in the chapters of this thesis, thus becoming the first step in establishing a firm philosophical, theoretical, and methodological foundation for the future qualitative study of the online course Art and Music Since 1945.

Significance of the issue

Studies that examine students’ learning behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes are not unprecedented in art education, however, studies that address these qualities as they occur in an online arts education situation are infrequent. In the Handbook of Research
and Policy in Art Education (Eisner & Day, 2004) Mary Stokrocki offers, that in the matter of distance education in electronic contexts, there is little research on arts teaching and learning. She explains that most research is “descriptive technical information on electronic media and its issues” (p. 459). In addition, Stokrocki (2004) points out advantages believed to be associated with an arts education that is staged over the Internet: “cost efficiency, quick access to students from a wide variety of age levels and international locations, accommodation of large enrollments with a number of part-time tutors who have smaller student loads, and empowering of students as co-learners” (p. 459). Missing from Stokrocki’s report is an indication of how Internet-based arts learning experiences are perceived and interpreted by students. This is an absence of important information that my study will begin to address.

As more classes across the education spectrum are being taught online, and as more professors are encouraged to consider developing online versions of classroom-based courses, art educators must contemplate what the widespread trend of virtualizing the classroom might mean for the art education discipline. A growing consensus of researchers (Voithofer, 2002; Vrasidas & Glass, 2002; Walker, 2002; Lai & Ball, 2004) indicate that, rather than merely duplicating a traditional classroom in a virtual environment or simply extending a classroom discussion, the online class is a unique, multifaceted entity, exemplifying a wide range of social, economic, and philosophic issues. Even while several online arts education courses have been discussed in recent literature (Akins, Check, & Riley, 2004; Lai, 2002a; Lai, 2002b; Lai & Ball, 2004; Erickson, M., 2005), there are few substantive discussions of how this learning format is
contextualized within the field of arts education, or how it fits into the pedagogical interests and goals of the discipline.

The significance of the study of student experience in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* lies in its focus on the ways in which students incorporate online arts learning into the myriad contexts and subjectivities that constitute their life worlds, and how this course fits into the context of arts educations pedagogical concerns and goals. Further, by taking a poststructural, hermeneutic approach to the research of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, this study will promote a deeper understanding of epistemological and ontological issues of learning in an increasingly electronically mediated world. Of significance is the position taken that online and offline worlds both blend and inform one another. This theoretical stance is consistent with established lines of thought such as ethnomethodology (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003) and Foucault’s (1972) conceptualization of discourses, yet it also acknowledges an openness to emergent ideas such as Colin Lankshear’s digital epistemologies (2003). Finally, it is emphasized that studying students’ desires for online arts learning experiences that fit seamlessly within the myriad activities of their lifeworlds is vital for ensuring that art education remain an important, relevant aspect of contemporary life.

Conversation about online learning in art education is timely and important, for as a “complex social process that can have nonfocal effects,” (Ferneding, 2003, p. 230), technology, over a period of time, can become difficult to untangle from the web of subjectivities and social structures it constitutes and becomes constituted within. Therefore, as Ferneding (quoting Winner, 1986) warns, “the crucial time to debate about
a new innovation is before adoption takes place, for once infrastructures are in place and become constituting processes within economic and sociocultural spheres, they are next to impossible to change or remove” (2003, p. 230). It is my hope that research into the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* will begin to answer questions of how, why, when—or even if—the use of online arts learning experiences benefit students and teachers in art education.

**Contributions to the field of art education**

Offering advice to new researchers in art education, Kerry Freedman (2003a) stresses the importance of selecting research topics that, by their extension from or relationship to “lines of thinking based on previous research” (p. 4) are considered important to the members of the field. Furthermore, art education research topics should be selected for their potential to contribute intellectual growth through the introduction of new conceptual frames of thinking about the field (Freedman, 2003a). Research on the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* meets Freedman’s criteria in several ways. First, research on *Art and Music Since 1945* can be considered a logical extension of previous conversations (Stokrocki, 2004) on learning contexts in arts education, expanding upon what has to date been a focus primarily on context as physical space or event to include exploration of the contexts of virtual learning spaces.

Additionally, research of this online course is expected to build upon recent discussions (Stokrocki, 2000; Lai, 2002a; Lai, 2002b; Krug, 2003; Akins, Check, & Riley, 2004; Lai & Ball, 2004; Erickson, 2005) of online learning in art education.
Further, a study of this course could become a catalyst for the development of new conceptual frameworks in its potential connections to emerging research in diverse fields like cognitive learning science, sociocultural studies, and instructional design, among others. And, lastly, because of the unique challenges that online studies pose to traditional methods and methodologies in qualitative research—issues that are only recently eliciting substantive discussion and debate—a study of this course places art education at the cutting edge of developments in poststructural qualitative research design for online social contexts.

Scope and limitations of the thesis

The primary focus of investigation is the undergraduate level online class, *Art and Music Since 1945*, offered within the Department of Art Education at a large Midwestern University. The thesis is not an exhaustive investigation of *Art and Music Since 1945* or a complete survey of the myriad issues and themes associated with online learning in arts education. Instead, this inquiry is limited to opening a dialogue on online art education classes with the intention of establishing the rationale and theoretical basis for a future qualitative study of student learning in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. Employing a review of related literature in art education, investigation of interdisciplinary connections, and discussion of themes relevant to online arts education, this thesis will identify salient issues that shape or contribute to the context within which *Art and Music Since 1945* is situated.
The language of this thesis is not only a means of communication and tool of interpretation, it is also the very shifting ground on which meanings rise, fall, and play. As Laurel Richardson (2003) has noted, poststructural qualitative research "directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing as particular positions at specific times [and] it frees us from trying to write a single text in which we say everything at once to everyone" (p. 509). Thus, I understand that this thesis is neither the final word on my topic, nor will it contain a complete representation of issues relating to the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. Instead, it is the beginning of a conversation that I invite others to join.

In conclusion, although my research focuses on adult learners in a college-level course, this research may hold relevance for other age groups and learning situations due to its interdisciplinary connections and its philosophical questions linking issues of epistemology and ontology with considerations of learning contexts in arts education.
References


CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A philosophy is characterized more by the formulation
of its problems than by its solutions of them.
~Susanne Langer, Philosophy in a New Key

Introduction

In this Review of the Literature, several categories of research relating to online
arts education classes will be examined for their relevance to this philosophical inquiry,
as well as for their relevance to the future study's grand tour question, How did students
interpret their experience and construct knowledge in the online course Art and Music
Since 1945? Moreover, in addition to identifying gaps and openings where further
research is needed, the review of the literature will function as a metaphorical clearing
wherein ideas can be assembled, reflected upon, and related to issues unfolding in the art
education discipline.

The topic of online learning is enormous, spanning not only diverse disciplines,
but also connecting with numerous other important topics including cognition, computer
literacy, communications, and design. Myriad aspects of online learning have been
studied, including student performance, instructor perceptions, instructional methods, and
course objectives. Consequently, after much reading, I have chosen to narrow my range
of focus to issues most relevant to my interest in epistemology and ontology in online arts
learning experiences. Within the readings I encountered, several general, yet distinct
issues began to emerge. These issues are the context, the online class itself, and the
problems inherent in conceptualizing research of online social settings. Reflecting these
three concerns, the literature review is organized into three parts. Part One contains a
survey of issues that either explicitly or implicitly deal with the notion of context. Part
Two explores recent literature in art education on the topic of online courses, as well as
visual culture, and related technology issues. Part Three focuses exclusively on recent
issues in online qualitative research methodology.

I acknowledge that constructing a literature review is above all, a subjective
process. According to Laurel Richardson (2003), “what we can study, how we can write
about that which we study—is tied to how a knowledge system disciplines itself and its
members” (p. 525). In constructing the literature review, I have become ever more
acutely aware of how my own interpretive framework shapes my ability to see and
question the world. Therefore, the literature assembled in this chapter is not a final
statement on my thinking, for I continue to seek out more information, challenging
myself to both test and think outside of the boundaries of the words assembled here.
Part One: The issue of context

Learning contexts in art education

Why should art educators be interested in the online arts education experience and the online student's learning context? Simply put, this is an investigation that is timely, necessary, and significant in its potential to increase understanding of students' aesthetic experiences and education contexts in a culture of fast proliferating, ubiquitous computer and information technologies. While art education scholars have frequently explored the topic of computer technologies in art education, many studies focus on use of the computer as art tool (Freedman, 1991, 1997), the use of hypertext as facilitator of intertextual connections in learning and writing about art (Carpenter & Taylor 2003; Wilson, 2001), or the proliferation of computer-generated forms of visual culture (Krug, 2003). In spite of several recent articles on online courses in art education, this is an area of art education that is under researched. Specifically, while art educators have expressed interest in arts learning contexts (Koroscik, 1996), relatively little attention has been given to the contexts of arts learning as they are situated in the space and time of computer mediated learning experiences (Stokrocki, 2004).

According to Judith Smith Koroscik (1996), there is much we have yet to learn about the ways in which the contextual knowledge conditions surrounding the learning of art relates to meaningful learning experiences and "student discovery of the personal relevance artworks may have to offer" (p. 16). Specifically Koroscik questions how contextual knowledge may influence the extension of one's "knowledge base, nurture
positive dispositions, direct the choice of search strategies, and promote transfer” (p. 16). Although Koroscik’s discussion occurred in 1995, to date there have been few studies of the knowledge seeking activities and personal behaviors associated with the contextual conditions surrounding the online arts learning experience.

Recently Laura Lackey’s (2003) discussion of the “multiple practices and complex relationships among [art education] providers” (p. 101) confirmed that there is an abundance of art education learning experiences occurring outside of traditional classroom spaces. Drawing upon June King McFee’s 1986 article “Describing the Network Called Art Education” as inspiration, Lackey (2003) advances a view of art education as an expansive network of “diverse contexts” and uses experiences from an art program at a community recreation center to illustrate that context, or the “internal and external conditions” of a learning situation are influential to art education practice (p. 101). Lackey asserts that “acknowledging the vast number of out-of-school domains for art learning” (p. 101) will not only promote a broad view of the potential scope and reach of art education but will also increase awareness of the “unique orientations to practice in which art education takes on diverse meanings” (p. 102).

This thesis builds upon Lackey’s (2003) view of art education as a network inclusive of myriad activities, sites, and theoretical orientations of practice. Like Lackey (2003), I believe that by exploring the ways that art education takes place in different contexts and social situations, we can see how each setting creates unique environments with which learners and teachers interact [and that] detailing these environments can help us reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions and practices. (p. 102)
While in agreement with Lackey that it is important and timely to investigate out-of-school learning contexts, I offer that the proliferation of Internet technologies and the explosive growth of online education has created yet another area of learning context—the intersections of online and offline experience, that must be considered. Intersecting with formal and non-formal learning experiences in daily life, online arts learning presents unique challenges to existing paradigms in art education. Therefore, in order to move beyond rudimentary comparisons between online and traditional education—comparisons of students’ grades, motivation, or attitudes—that dominate numerous studies of online education in general, art educators must formulate questions that address the particularities of art education’s paradigms and practices, as well as its immediate and long term disciplinary goals.

Context and arts knowledge

The interrelated issues of knowledge contexts and arts experiences is explored in research by psychologist Bjarne Sode Funch (2004), who investigated art introductions and how they subsequently affect a viewer’s emotional, cognitive, and phenomenological reception to art objects in an exhibit setting. Funch’s study was “based on the idea that the character of an art introduction influences the art experience which follows” (2004, p. 50). In Funch’s study, prior to entering a gallery displaying selected artwork, participants were asked to make a choice between a “recording of a musical introduction, a poetic introduction, a child’s response to the work of art in question, or a dialogue between two art historians” (2004, p. 47). Funch’s goal was to discover how well each introduction
prepared the participant for the subsequent art encounter. Further, this “explorative, phenomenological study” (2004, p. 49) was designed to gather information that might explain why participants made a particular choice, and how the introduction itself affected the participant’s mindset and expectations of the art experience.

Funch’s findings are significant in that they offer insight into the attitudes, perceptions, and affective responses that arise from the situations or events that precede a person’s initial exposure to art. Finding that certain art introductions facilitate cognitive arts appreciation, while others effect greater emotional arts appreciation, Funch determines that “attitudes represent a certain kind of readiness for an art encounter and, at the same time, they represent each in their own way the limitations a person has in his or her approach to and understanding of art” (2004, p. 55). According to Funch (2004), the results of his study “leave no doubt about direct influences of an art introduction,” demonstrating that each introduction created a “certain intentionality” that prepared the mind to “tackle the work of art in a specific way” (p. 56). Funch’s research, while investigating introductions to art that occurred within the same time and space, raises questions about how other art introductions, such as the introduction experienced in the context of online arts learning activities, may influence perceptions of subsequent arts encounters.

Other scholars (Lemke, 1994, 1998; Voithofer, 2000) are enlarging the scope of questions about learning contexts, examining how locational context affects learning experiences—a process that necessitates attention to the effects of “situated cognition” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Researchers Lave & Wenger (1991), theorizing learning as a
socially, contextually constructed endeavor, find that there are significant unexplored areas in the "interconnections of activity and activity systems" and in "communities of practice" (p. 121-122). Conceptualizing art education as an activity system that extends outside of institutional boundaries presents a unique opportunity to not only examine the relationship of learning and locational contexts, but to consider how the contingent spatial, temporal realities of online learning influence responses to the subject matter presented in an online context.

Spatial and temporal concerns as related to online learning events in art education are not well represented in art education literature, however research in the area of museum learning offers some compelling observations about how "behavior settings" (Falk & Dierking, 2000, p. 54) influence the learning process. Falk & Dierking (2000) posit that "people learn to associate certain settings with learning—for example, museums, and libraries and other settings with not learning—for example playgrounds and theme parks—despite the fact that learning can and does occurring in all of these settings" (p. 55). Behavior settings, and the embedded expectations, assumptions, and emotions they engender in humans, are, according to Falk & Dierking (2000) key to understanding how and why learning occurs despite a history of learning research that tends to deemphasize the issue of context in favor of attention to "cognitive and biological" processes of learning (p. 56). Falk & Dierking do acknowledge that in “recent years there has been a growing awareness of the importance of physical context on all cognition” (2000, p. 57) and they specifically reference the research areas of memory and situated cognition. Specifically, they point out that memory processes cannot be
separated from the context within which they occur. Drawing upon memory-context research in the field of psychology, Falk & Dierking (2000, p. 57) posit that contexts not only affect strategies that aid recall, but also affect perceptions of the recall task itself.

In suggesting connections between learning contexts and a person's feelings about the quality and meaning of a learning event, the behavior settings research of Falk & Dierking is of importance to a study of online arts learning. For, if their discovery that "learning occurs best under conditions of positive affect" (Falk & Dierking, 2000, p. 63) is correct, then what sort of affective responses might be evoked by the behavior settings associated with online arts learning events?

**Technology and the context of aesthetic experience**

A Deweyan emphasis on the primacy of embodied experience in learning has informed practices in education for much of the twentieth century, and Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934) has influenced art education theory and practice. Noting that it is the "degree of completeness of living in the experience of making and perceiving that makes the difference between what is fine and esthetic and what is not" (p. 26), Dewey locates the potential of a complete and informed life in the sensual qualities of the world. In particular, Dewey's discussion of an aesthetic art experience is rooted in the understanding of the spirit in and intuition of "a penetrating quality that runs through all the parts of a work of art and binds them into an individualized whole" (p. 192). Building on the philosophy of Dewey is Richard Shusterman, who believes aesthetic experience extends "beyond the historically established practice of art" (2000, p. 47).
Shusterman upholds the value of Dewey's project of achieving a "global redefinition of art as aesthetic experience by describing the formative features of that indescribable experience," however, Shusterman aims to make "a more specific case for widening art's borders to forms of popular culture and to the ethical art of fashioning one's life" (2000, p. 58). Shusterman's project of approaching art as a "pragmatist aesthetics" defends the appreciation of aesthetic experiences that can be found in everyday life, and he carries Dewey's Art as Experience forward to the contemporary world, finding aesthetic experiences in "ritual and sport, in parades, fireworks, and the media of popular culture, in bodily and domestic ornamentation"—an expansion of aesthetic sensibilities that includes "all the countless colorful scenes and moving events which fill our cities and enrich our ordinary lives" (2000, p. 47).

In acknowledging the aesthetic experiences that give meaning to everyday life, Shusterman, like Dewey, views art and aesthetic experience as capable of transcending compartmentalized roles and connoisseurship. And, following Dewey's logic, Shusterman (2000) posits that "while art as a collection of sacralized objects may be locked up in a museums, segregated from the rest of life, the same cannot be said for art's experience, whose effects flow into and enhance our other pursuits" (p. 53). Shusterman (2000) believes that viewing "art as experience" can help to bridge the "presumed gap between life and art" (p. 53) perpetuated by assumptions that true arts experiences are somehow separate from the everyday life world. Dewey's and Shusterman's ideas relate to the online class Art and Music Since 1945 in that through its insertion into the activities and routines of the everyday world, this online course may help to bridge gaps
believed to exist between art and life. Bridging such gaps may even result in a kind of arts experience that arises from “alternative ways of knowing often not permitted in many public, social, or educational venues” (Akins, Check and Riley, 2004, p. 34).

Some scholars take a less idealistic view of the proliferation of arts experiences that transcend traditional boundaries. For example, the issue of alternative ways of experiencing the arts in the contemporary world is addressed in *Technology, appreciation, and the historical view of art* (Fisher & Potter, 1997) by calling into question the effects of computer technologies and advanced forms of digital imaging which amplify the decontextualization of art objects and arts experiences. Noting that the practice of museum display already abstracts art objects from their original contexts, Fisher & Potter (1997) also find that contemporary technological practices which accelerate the access to, and reproduction of, arts experiences to greatly amplify the decontextualization of art.

According to Fisher & Potter, art theory and philosophy have neglected the issue of technological decontextualization of art by ignoring “the ways in which the arts have come to be experienced by modern audiences” (1997, p. 175). Potter & Fisher explain the dilemma: “historical contextualist theories imply that artworks cannot be appreciated in abstractive contexts (without suitable background knowledge)” while on the other hand, “(l)ate twentieth-century appreciative practices presuppose that artworks can be appreciated appropriately in such contexts” (1997, p. 175). Regarding the growing popularity of digitized artworks, reproductive technologies, and online museums which imply a transformation of “historical concepts of artworks” into “presentational concepts
of artworks," Potter & Fisher ask, "what determines the right way to appreciate a given type of artwork" (p. 176)? With no clear answer to this question, they speculate that reproductive technologies not only challenge historical concepts of art by creating a "double abstraction from the originating context," they also might create a "less public, more solipsistic relation between the spectator and the images or sounds experienced" (p. 182).

Fisher & Potter (1997) also question the role of aesthetic experience in the realm of decontextualized artworks which may ultimately be conceptualized in an historically reductive way—as merely symptoms or signs to be read in relationship to other signs of the times. This conceptualization, warns Fisher & Potter (1997) tends remove aesthetic experience from consideration in the appreciation of art. Being far from resolved, the issues that Fisher & Potter present also complicate consideration of online arts experiences, suggesting that close attention be paid to the effects of arts learning experiences that are decontextualized or abstracted from traditional contexts. Perhaps most thought-provoking are Fisher's & Potter's (1997) musings on the rationale behind what they refer to as "new technologies of art appreciation" (p. 180). They note, "whereas the ways that museums... have displayed artworks have obviously been influenced by the prevailing winds of art theory, new technologies of art appreciation are not governed or influenced by art theory, but only by technological and entertainment values" (1997, p. 180).

Many questions about the technologizing of art education and aesthetic experience are prompted by Fisher's & Potter's observations. For example: Can the art
education discipline recognize as legitimate an arts learning experience that resides outside of the physical and temporal boundaries that have come to shape and validate current art theories and practices? And, if it is possible to accept that aesthetic experience can reside in everyday experiences outside of museums or classrooms, is it possible to accept that an appreciation of aesthetic experience can be cultivated through an online arts education experience?

In summary, the issue of context has been of interest to art educators, however at this point, little is known about the distinctive qualities of learning about art in the context of an online art education course. As art objects and people are released from traditional spatial temporal boundaries to be connected through Internet learning events, new relationships with art may be possible. Richard Shusterman, like John Dewey, views art and aesthetic experience as capable of transcending compartmentalized roles and connoisseurship, however, it remains to be explored if this sort of transcendence might be associated with Internet arts experiences.

Part Two: Recent literature on online arts education and related technology issues

Eight years ago, in the book *New technologies in art education: Implications for theory research and practice*, Diane Gregory (1997) asked: “Can art education be reformed? How should it be reformed? Can we make it more relevant to our students needs?” (p. 164). And, on the matter of technology in art education, she wondered: “Should we use technology in the classroom? Will art education survive? Is technology the right vehicle for our own salvation? And if so, will technology be enough to save art
education?" (1997, p. 164). Today, art educators have moved beyond seeking salvation in technology to take a wide spectrum of positions on the use of technology in art education. From exploring ways in which computer technologies enhance art making and arts learning experiences (Freedman, 1997; Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Carpenter, 2002) to questioning how computers and information technologies may change the nature of knowledge in art education (Wilson, 2001) and future directions of art education (Ascott, 2001; Gigliotti, 2001), art education literature evidences diverse approaches to the concept of technology.

As of late, art education's research focus on technology seems to be growing increasingly more subtle and diverse, leaving far behind the questions about computers as art tools or saviors to broach issues of epistemology and ontology. Carpenter & Taylor (2003) address the issue of hypertext as an ill-structured and ambiguous method of learning that can be used in classrooms to promote ways of knowing that may be "more meaningful and relevant than those art education practices that are linear or compartmentalized" (p 50), and Pamela G. Taylor's (2004) proposal of "hyperaesthetics" is directed toward an examination of "technological media on human needs, roles, and identity formation" (p. 329).

Alison Colman's (2004) study of internet art is an example of recent art education literature that acknowledges how the distinctive nature of interacting with computers and how an increasing familiarity with other common technological devices may hold consequences for perceptions of art. The simple question that Colman asked of her study participants—"Do you think Internet art is art?"—belie more complex epistemological
issues. Specifically, Colman’s study, in investigating how students’ perceptions of Internet art were influenced by their non-art Internet activities (information gathering, communication, etc.) points to the very real issue of art’s meaning in the digital age. Perhaps a sign of an evolving aesthetic studies, Colman even introduces a list of what she perceives to be “Internet art’s aesthetic qualities” (p. 67).

Garoian & Gaudelius (2004) revive the issue of technology and salvation, but with a new twist by asking “Is technology our salvation from the struggles of living in the world, or is it yet another contested ground where we can examine the meanings of culture”? (p. 48)? This question, like my own questions about online arts learning, points to unresolved issues in how computer technologies may provide a new site of exploration for understanding human subjectivities. Most interesting in Garoian’s & Gaudelius’s question is their stark contrast of salvation, or release from struggle, with its opposite—grounded, complex struggles. Garoian’s & Gaudelius’s (2004) article does follow up on this question of contrasts, offering, through description of several performance artists, a view of a highly contested site: the body and subjectivity in a world of ubiquitous technologies. In this article, the human body and subjectivity are theorized as a “contested ground” that resists being reduced to technology and “informational patterns” (p. 58). Garoian’s & Gaudelius’s article is significant in that it highlights a shift in art education’s attention. Less common today are the idealized, romanticized notions of technology celebrated in stories of virtual worlds and cyborgs; we are now in an ideal position to evaluate technologies for their very real, very pragmatic roles in our everyday lives.
In the midst of the recent attention to technology and the manifestation of epistemological and ontological changes in art experiences and in culture, several studies or discussions of online arts education courses have appeared. Studies by Lai (2002b) and Krug (1996) represent important work in exploring the collaborative relationship and community building potential of online learning in art education. Further, Lai’s 2002 dissertation on an online art education course, *Visualizing art education: An educational ethnographic case study of a distance art education course* and her 2002 article, *From Chatrooms to Classrooms: Virtualizing Art Education*, represents a critical turning point in art education literature wherein a specific call is made for “educators to understand not only the new technologies themselves, but also more importantly, the dynamics of virtual class interaction and learning processes” (p. 34). An important issue that links Lai’s studies to my interests in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* is the concern about the textual representations of online students. By problematizing the representation of self and interpretation of others in the asynchronous discussions in an art education online course, Lai has drawn attention to what has become a key methodological issue in my own study—the ethics of online social research.

Lai & Ball continue to explore the issue of textual representation in an online arts education course in the 2004 article *Students online as cultured subjects: Prolegomena to researching multicultural arts courses on the web*, and they urge art educators to “simultaneously theorize online education and produce detailed observations of the online classes they teach” (p. 30). While this article (Lai & Ball, 2004) specifically takes up the issue of how students and teachers are “cultured” through their textual expressions
in online art education contexts, it also addresses general issues inherent in research that occurs in contexts of spatial-temporal flexibility. To this end, Lai & Ball (2004, p. 20) propose that researchers must become familiar with the “mechanisms” unique to “asynchronous, text-based learning environments.” Of relevance to guiding my research of student perceptions and interpretations of their experiences in the online course Art and Music Since 1945 are mechanisms of online education listed by Lai & Ball (2004), namely “disembodied text-based performance of identities, speech-like writing, space flexibility, student geographical location, space-time flexibility, class attendance/participation, time-flexibility, and asynchronous discussion threads” (p. 20).

In addition to Lai’s & Ball’s (2004) discussion of the online textual representations that position students as “cultured subjects,” the 2004 article Technological Lifelines: Virtual intimacies and distance learning by Akins, Check, & Riley establishes a view of online arts learning as a “technological lifeline” and way of forging meaningful connections with others in a unique and intimate venue. Of significance in this article is the acknowledgement that their WebCT based online art education course created arts learning experiences that resonated with students in personally significant ways.

Observing that their Internet classroom was not only a source of learning, but was also an “informational support system” (p. 35) for students, Akins, Check, & Riley (2004) report that the informal and non-authoritarian settings of an online art appreciation class seemed to positively influence students’ attitudes, even impacting “intensity and joy of learning” (p. 45). What does it mean for the discipline of art education when a
computer is the means by which students participate in meaningful, perhaps even transformative, education experiences? In addition, if assumptions about education are indeed undergoing a transformation within technologically mediated lifeworlds, might the notion of experience, or what constitutes a valuable, desirable educational experience also be changing? How might these changes relate to the concept of aesthetic experience, or being able to have, as John Dewey (1934) would say, "an experience?" Moreover, how might the changing contexts and concepts of an arts learning experience affect students who come to the art education experience with very little familiarity with art or aesthetics?

Relating to my questions about how students interpret their experience in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, Akins, Check, & Riley (2004) make reference to a connection between online courses and epistemology. They remark that "transgressive influences of digital technologies such as distance learning, e-mail, and chat rooms on the lives of artists, teachers, and students" seem to promote "acts of knowing often not permitted in many public, social or educational venues" (p. 34). For example it has been speculated that an increasing reliance on forms of technological mediation such as cell phones, text messaging, and even the extent to which identity is shaped and influenced by online interactions, suggests an infusion of the personal with electronic communication devices (Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1995).

Further, these "technological prosthetics" (Stone, 1995) seem to be defining a new ethos of communication, enabling people to engage in "nontrivial social interactions through the use of their computers" (p. 15). According to Stone (1995) these are "social
interactions in which [people] change and are changed, in which commitments are made, kept, and broken, in which they may engage in intellectual discussions, arguments, and even sex" (p. 15). Most significant is the way in which computers are viewed “not only as tools but also as arenas for social experience” (p. 15; italics in original). If, as John Dewey believed, all knowledge is transactional and inextricable from context, then “informational support systems” or technological “prosthetics” or “lifelines” are likely quite significant in an online arts learning experience.

While art education research that specifically focuses on student interpretations of online arts learning experiences is uncommon, other technology themed art education literature bears mention for relationships with my topic. From the Stankiewicz & Garber (2000) descriptive study of their experience teaching a graduate course in the history and philosophy of art education, to Hyperaesthetics: Making sense of our technomediated world (Taylor, 2004), a study of a “technology-inspired art appreciation class” (p. 328), art educators have been wrestling with the implications of teaching art in an age of proliferating computer and communications technologies. Very recently, an important study by Mary Erickson (2005) on knowledge transfer in both online and offline arts learning experiences brought to light numerous essential questions about the quality of learning in online courses.

Erickson’s “exploratory, design-based research study” (2005, p. 170) focused on both a traditional and Web-based unit of art study, specifically seeking evidence of cognitive knowledge transfer. Noting that the “integration of web-based instruction with traditional instruction” has resulted in the increasing complexity of a learning
environment” (2005, p. 170), Erickson offers some preliminary findings concerning issues that are in need of additional research. Of relevance to my study on students’ interpretations of their online arts learning experience, Erickson (2005) identified online education issues in need of further research: effects of prior computer experience, the role of student writing, the importance of teacher feedback, student-to-student interactions, practice of arts knowledge, design of course information. Erickson’s ongoing study of knowledge transfer comparing Web-based and traditional classroom units of art study will be valuable in providing insight into possible links between course content, student achievement, and students’ perceptions of their experiences in the online course Art and Music Since 1945.

Outside the discipline of art education are other relevant discussions of online courses. For example, in Teaching art history as distance education, Patricia Briggs (1998) discovered that teaching a distance education art history course caused her to take notice of how “normative teaching paradigms” influenced the content of her courses. Specifically, Briggs noticed that the distance education format (streaming video) used in teaching the course necessitated abandoning the traditional two slide comparison and contrast approach for a single image analysis. As a result, Briggs (1998) discarded a strong reliance on aesthetic and stylistic concerns in favor of a new focus on conceptual, theoretical, and historical issues raised by the visual material. Related to Briggs’s observations, I have noticed that in my experience of teaching the online course Art and Music Since 1945, I also receive very few questions or comments on formal issues such as art composition or style, rather, most questions reference social/cultural issues related
to the art. Because the online course format allows for greater access to an instructor through email, it would be worthwhile to track and analyze the content of communications between teacher and student, an area of study also advocated by distance education researcher Raven Wallace (2003) in *Online learning in higher education: A review of interactions among teachers and students*.

Finally, Ron Burnett, president of the *Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design*, calls attention to the importance of drawing distinctions between information, communication, and knowledge in a learning experience. He also makes note of the absence of substantive research on the ubiquity of learning events that are dependant on screen based environments, an absence of research that he finds ironic given the intense focus on visual culture in education. Burnett’s concerns about drawing distinctions between information, communication, and knowledge in a learning experience are inherent in this thesis. Specifically, these issues are addressed in the thesis through an examination of the concepts of student, knowledge, and space–time perceptions, with the goal of gaining an understanding of how epistemological and ontological assumptions may be evolving in the digital age.

**Literature on visual and popular culture in art education**

No strangers to shifts and changes within and surrounding their discipline, art educators are presently debating the direction and goals of art education in a world steeped in visual culture. These debates have transformed discussions of art education’s values and goals into sites of contestation and innovation. Much discussion has been
focused on the pedagogical implications of changing views on art objects, as in distinctions between popular culture and fine art; however, in the midst of this focus on the changes portended by visual culture studies, it is important to heed the possibility that the same technologies that make visual culture a ubiquitous presence also influence ways of knowing and relating to art objects. In short, visual culture literature in art education relates to my study of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* for its implications on the nature of arts experiences in the contemporary world. Relevant themes detected in literature on visual culture are *concerns with boundaries* and the idea of *play*. The issues of boundaries and play are together significant in that they seem to suggest a growing concern with, or interest in, theorizing flexibility in the objects of study or practices in the discipline of arts education.

In *Visual culture isn't just visual: Multiliteracy, multimodality and meaning* Duncum (2004) implicitly addresses boundaries as he advocates for moving beyond considerations of the visual as an exclusive domain of knowing. He points out that “the visual was never exclusively visual,” and to “focus on the visual in this morphological way is to ignore the visual as a social practice” (p. 258). In turning the focus more squarely upon the social practices and multimodality of access in visual culture, Duncum has opened the door to further explorations of how practice and process construct knowledge in an age of technology. Referring to technologies like “television, the Internet, zines, video games or simulation rides” as a “hybrid of communicative modes,” Duncum (2004, p. 259) brings attention to the complex ways in which many people negotiate ideas of reality in contemporary Western society.
Duncan’s article relates to my research because the multimodality of visual culture extends to the process of acquiring the objects of visual culture—a process exemplified in the interpenetrating activities of online arts learning, web-surfing, music downloading, and instant messaging. By incorporating the virtual objects of a visual culture, technologically constructed and mediated communication practices, and specific rituals of interaction in contexts outside of educational institutions, online learning is also a “hybrid of communicative modes,” a veritable mélange of changing educational practices.

Other changing educational practices associated with visual culture are linked to the notion of play. Describing theme parks as “sites of experiential learning” in the article *In a cultural vortex: Theme parks, experience, and opportunities for art education*, Carol S. Jeffers (2004) advises that in opening up a “dynamic territory between dualistic notions of place and space, myth and reality, work and play” (p. 221) today’s theme parks offer art educators an opportunity to understand the educational process of “aesthetic manipulation” (p. 232) in hybrid spaces. Jeffers’ argument, while built upon the example of the theme park, relates to my research in that the blurring of work-play distinctions and the creation of hybrid learning spaces is also associated with the proliferation of Internet use and computer technologies. Moreover, by acknowledging the educational value of the theme park, Jeffers is also acknowledging the opportunities for non-institutionalized, experiential learning in art education. To this end, Jeffers (2004) quotes Boughton, et. al., in her recommendations that art educators and their students might “explore how theme parks ‘reflect and contribute to the construction of knowledge, identity, beliefs,
imagination, sense of time and place, feelings of agency, and the quality of life at all ages”—explorations that might also prove fruitful when applied to the phenomenon of online arts learning experiences.

The issue of play and visual culture also surfaces in an article by Laurie Hicks, *Infinite and finite games: Play and visual culture*. In this article, Hicks makes the case that the concept of play is important for encouraging a flexible and dynamic art education discipline that can respond to the challenges of the times. Specifically, Hicks references the her own difficulties in traversing boundary lines between “aesthetic/formalist analysis and social and political theory” (p. 287) and posits that the pursuit of new “theoretical tools” (p. 288) is essential to “continuing the play” in an art education discipline that eschews the limitations of “finite play” for the freedom and challenge of “infinite play” (p. 290).

Hicks insists that engaging with the aesthetic practices and visual forms that fall outside of dominant art education traditions is vital to understanding the consequences of the boundaries we often maintain in art education. In effect, Hicks is advocating that art educators heed the transformations wrought by the objects and experiences of visual and material culture so that art education can continue to be a dynamic force of teaching and learning. Hicks’s article is important to my research in that she promotes exploration of art education practices outside of disciplinary traditions. As a learning format that is not yet widely accepted as a viable means of arts education, online courses deserve close attention—not just because of their implications of technological innovation, but because
there is little known about what sort of "play," that is, what sort of non-formal, non-institutionalized learning events they might promote in the realm of the arts.

In problematizing the notion of finite boundaries in art education, Hicks is building upon the literature of other art educators who have advanced ideas about opportunities that might arise from blurred boundaries. For example, writing in 2003, Brent Wilson questioned the possibility of mapping the content of art education. Asserting that Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) was inadequate for meeting the challenges of a visual studies-centered art education. Conceding that it might be impossible to map art education's content, Wilson offered the metaphor of the rhizome as a model for conceptualizing the content of art education.

By calling attention to the failure of static disciplinary boundaries in a world where information technologies make visual images immediate, accessible, and overwhelming in number, and by proposing a rhizomatic curriculum model that traverses the betwixt and between spaces connecting schools and home, Wilson offered art education alternatives to traditional practices. While Wilson did not specifically mention online courses in his promotion of rhizomatic art education content, his vision for a flexible connective site of arts engagement fits well with the idea of an art education experience that is free from rigid space-time boundaries. In short, Wilson's suggestions for a new, unbounded direction in art education curricula are naturally compatible with online learning formats.

A subversion of traditional art education practices is also explored by Robert Sweeny (2004) in Lines of sight in the network society: Simulation, art education, and a
digital visual culture. In this article, Sweeny uses the metaphorical phrase “lines of sight” to refer to the “contemporary forms of vision related to the use of networked digital technologies—specifically the Internet” (p. 74). Most importantly, according to Sweeney (2004), art educators must heed the “contemporary developments” resulting from current forms of visuality being created in a variety of educational spaces—both actual and virtual” (p. 74). Sweeney (2004, p. 79) reminds that visual culture is not only about the images themselves, but the social constructions of image production and consumption. Quoting Mirzoeff, Sweeny asserts: “Visual culture directs our attention away from structured, formal viewings like the cinema and art gallery to the centrality of visual experience in everyday life” (p. 79). In particular, this point about the construction of visualities in everyday life is of great importance to my research, for it not only builds upon Duncum’s (1999) argument for the necessity of studying everyday aesthetic experiences, it also confirms that the issue of boundaries in art education—whether in subject matter, or location of learning is far from settled.

Finally, Paul Duncum (1999) urges art educators to embark upon research that will establish a credible knowledge base for understanding the everyday aesthetic experiences driven by the technological, economic, and social conditions of the postmodern era, pointing out that such research is essential in understanding how aesthetic experiences function in the context of people’s lives. Further, Duncum wonders if “the everyday aesthetic experiences outside the world sanctioned by art institutions are likely, through their sheer volume and familiarity, to be even more powerful in forming and informing minds” (p. 296). He asks, “Is one’s perception of the world likely to be
formed through relatively unusual and isolated events like a gallery visit, however striking, or through very common and oft repeated experiences” (p. 296-297)? To Duncum’s question, I would add my own: Is one’s perception of art and aesthetic experience influenced by a transition of classroom based arts learning experiences to computer mediated arts learning experiences? Going further, I would ask specifically: How does an online arts learning experience influence attitudes about art, formal art institutions, and perceptions of the artist’s and audience’s roles in contemporary society?

Part Three: Recent issues in online qualitative research methodology

In a prologue to Online social research: Methods, issues, & ethics, Norman K. Denzin (2004) offers that online, critical, interpretive qualitative research is a key transformation in qualitative research in that it “folds virtual and real-world inquiry into the same set of interpretive practices” (p. 1). Denzin (2004) posits that online researchers in the “seventh moment of qualitative research” (p. 1) represent a hybridity of actions, “moving back and forth between real and virtual sites, research about the Internet as well as Internet research” (p. 2). Like much of the qualitative research in the seventh moment, online research requires an “interpretive bricoleur” (Denzin, 2004, p. 3) who can move between approaches, methods, and techniques in the fashioning of a study that is informative, transformative, and meaningful as well as responsible and ethical. Denzin states that “online research is many things at the same time” (2004, p. 4) emphasizing that even as it cuts across disciplines and paradigms, it is also “inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions” (p. 4). Moreover, as Denzin (2004)
remarks, "as a commodity and a communication technology" the Internet is "bound up in issues of gender, race, class, and power" (p. 11).

Denzin finds that "as bricoleurs, researchers in virtual worlds are fitting traditional research methods, and theories, to new problems, new research questions, and new technologies" (2004, p. 10) In addition, as a text-bound field of inquiry, Internet research presents new challenges for researchers seeking to understand the "semiotic self," an electronic presence "established in and through language, the printed word on the screen" (Denzin, 2004, p. 10). A significant challenge in my research of Art and Music Since 1945, the representation of self and others in online research is an issue of moral and ethical dimensions—a complex issue that entails responsible, considered reasoning, for, as Denzin (2004) states, the "self exceeds language; its meanings overflow, and spill off the computer screen. The self and its plenitude can never be reduced to the traces on (the) screen" (p. 10).

**Tensions and complications in Internet research**

In Disciplining the future: A critical organizational analysis of the future field of Internet research, Annette Markham (2004a), like Denzin, acknowledges the hybridity of practices and the cobbling together of old methods and new technologies in the bricolage known as Internet research. On the other hand, instead of merely describing the practices that are gathering to give shape to this emergent research concern, Markham (2004a) argues for careful, deliberate consideration of the decisions made in doing Internet research because actions taken now will shape future organizational structures.
Markham's concern is that, in the zeal to subsume Internet research within the academy's established practices of research, the ability to move freely and creatively within the open, indeterminate, and generative idea now called Internet research, will be restricted.

Markham (2004a) points to the problems inherent in "legitimization" arguing that as "Internet research grows and shakes off its quotation marks, it will become a legitimate body of knowledge which acts as a referent, marker, and measure for individual practice both within and without its walls" (p. 15). And, as a legitimized body of knowledge, the practices and theories associated with Internet research might become ideological paradigms that, in Foucauldian terms, will serve to reproduce particular discourses (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). Markham (2004a) admits that "to discuss ideology and control so early in the organizing of Internet research may seem precipitous", however, she suggests that "(i)f we hope to maintain a sense of diversity and interdisciplinarity, the organization must build self-conscious reflexivity into habitual patterns of organizational communication" (p. 11).

Markham's concerns are well-stated and appropriate, given that "discursive closure" (Markham, 2004a, p. 14) is a reality of any functioning organization, for without unifying principles of some sort, chaos and confusion would be inevitable. However, although Markham strongly implies that discursive closure will nullify the possibilities for creative, flexible frameworks in Internet research, she is not advocating anomie. Instead, Markham's position is one of firm and measured caution against enclosing Internet research within the paradigms of established research, and deliberate efforts to create and maintain a system of Internet research that can accept challenges and
resistances to established ideas. Noting that the “effect of discursive closure is to ‘suppress insight into the conflictual nature of experience and preclude careful discussion of and decision making regarding the values implicit in experience, identity and representation’” (p. 14), Markham’s (2004a) article lends support to my caution regarding the representation of students in my study of Art and Music Since 1945.

In Reconsidering self and other: The methods, politics, and ethics of representation in online ethnography, a draft of her forthcoming chapter in the 2005 edition of The Handbook of Qualitative Research, Markham (2004b) tackles tendentious issues of data gathering and representation in online qualitative research. In this chapter, Markham expands her convictions about avoiding discursive closure into a call for action by urging researchers to “generate questions which can be used to interrogate their own epistemological and axiological assumptions throughout the design and enactment of (their) inquiry” (p. 4). Stating that the “Internet and associated communication media permeate and alter interactions and the possible outcomes of these interactions at the dyadic, group and cultural level,” Markham (2004b, p. 2) offers that “(w)hether or not we do research of physical or online cultures, new communication technologies highlight the dialogic features of social reality, compelling scholars to reexamine traditional assumptions and previously taken for granted rubrics of social research” (p. 2).

Markham’s concern in this chapter is that current assumptions about the representation of self and others in research might need reconsideration when creating a study of online worlds. Specifically, Markham (2004b) identifies “tensions and complications” associated with decisions that must be made when “defining the boundaries of the field;
determining what constitutes data; interpreting the other as text; using embodied sensibilities to interpret textuality; and, representing the other ethically in research reports” (p. 4).

Of great interest to me is Markham’s views on “interpreting the other through their text” (2004b, p. 16), for Markham presents a provocative premise regarding the problematic assumptions that arise from equating authenticity and embodiment. Markham (2004b) insists that “if one is studying Internet contexts as cultural formations or social interaction in computer mediated communication contexts, the inclusion of embodied ways of knowing may be unwarranted and even counterproductive” (p. 19). In other words, online qualitative research that is concerned with the context of the situation must consider the implications of representing the participants in ways that are not consistent with the context of the study. Therefore, Markham makes a strong case for online qualitative research that is conducted solely online—that is, all interviews and other means of data gathering are consistent with the computer mediated environment being studied.

Confining research methods solely to the online environment thrusts into focus the very assumptions researchers often make about the ability to observe, understand, and know the other. In an observation that resonates with psychoanalytic implications, Markham posits that the Internet research context makes apparent a “deliberate and conscious” construction of identity—a significant aspect to be aware of when studying the communications of self and others. Markham (2004b) elaborates:

Offline, the body can simply walk around and be responded to by others, providing the looking glass with which one comes to know the self. Online, the
first step toward existence is the production of discourse, whether in the form of
words, graphic images, or sounds. But as many scholars have taught us (i.e.
Buber, 1958; Bakhtin, 1981; Blumer, 1969; Laing, 1961), we understand our Self
only in concert with Other, a continual process of negotiation and a great deal of
faith in shared meaning. (p. 3)

Markham's statement about "faith in shared meaning" is of particular interest to me
as I struggle to reconcile the expectations of the academic community that will
receive my research, with the faith that my students (and I) have in the shared
meanings constructed through our textual convergences in the online course Art and
Music Since 1945.

The issue of integrated methods

In Internet ethnography: Online and offline, Liav Sade-Beck posits that in
approaching the Internet as a "research field" rather than simply a "qualitative data
gathering instrument" (2004, p. 6), care must be taken to not exacerbate existing real
world versus virtual world dichotomies. To develop an ethnography that best represents
the merging of real and virtual worlds that occurs as people use the Internet, Sade-Beck
offers that methods which integrate on-and offline data gathering are preferable to
Internet-only data collection methods. Believing an integrated methodology which
examines both online and offline contexts of participants will result in richer,
"overflowing description" (2004, p. 8), Sade-Beck advocates the use of both online and
offline interviewing and data collection. Furthermore, three specific qualitative research
methods—online observations, interviews, and content analysis of supplementary
materials are advocated as a result of Sade-Beck’s personal experience of researching
Internet based Israeli support communities dealing with loss and bereavement.

Sade-Beck believes that studies which utilize internet only data collection
methods may be missing out on noticing important related themes. For example, in
studying the Internet bereavement support communities, Sade-Beck’s multiple methods
of observations, interviews, and content analysis yielded insights into the complex
relationship of Internet use and the wider sociocultural context it arises from. Sade-Beck
found that in collecting data both on and offline, a “complex ethnography” was
developed, leading to deeper issues such as how and why people select the Internet
that the offline interview provided unique insights not attainable through online
interviewing. Specifically, offline interviewing provided

information about a particular person and the wider social-cultural context in
which the interviewees live. In the interview setting, subjects acted both as
respondents who described their personal experiences, outlooks, and place
centering around the virtual support community, and as informants, when they
examined and described in general the processes and phenomena associated with
memorialization on the Internet. (p. 11)

Sade-Beck’s reasoning for the incorporation of online and offline data collection
seems sound, however, this study, when taken with Markham’s opinions on the
importance of being sensitive to the expectations that are entwined with a participant’s
context prompts questions about possible alternatives to a researcher’s either/or stance on
interviews. Therefore, when comparing the arguments of Sade-Beck and Markham, I am
compelled to ask if, in the spirit of “feminist communitarian research” (Hall, Frederick,
& Johns, 2004, p. 248), it might not be appropriate to involve the research participants in

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the decision of how they will be interviewed. Such involvement by the participants might even become a rich source of information about the assumptions and expectations both researchers and the researched bring to online social research. Deeper exploration and questioning of my research goals, methodologies, and methods is not only important, it is, according to Annette Markham (2004b), crucial to an ethical and responsible study.

Seeking compromise: The prospect of connective ethnography

The research of Leander & McKim (2003), offers an innovative idea for online social research. In wrestling with the issue of how to best represent the “everyday online literacy practices of adolescents,” they acknowledge the necessity of taking a bricoleur’s approach in weaving together methods most appropriate to the goals and circumstances of the study; however, they conceptualize their ethnography as a ‘traveling practice,’ assuming at the outset that [their] methodological assumptions will continually recede before [them]” (2003, p. 212). Their idea of ethnography as a traveling practice is significant, for in using the metaphor of traveling and implying that methodological assumptions might be a receding horizon viewed on one’s research journey, they foreground the challenging spatial issues inherent in researching an online situation. In other words, on the journey of online social research, without a methodological map, one travels toward their own methodological assumptions, pragmatically traveling within a horizon’s “light of alterity” (as described by Patti Lather, 2004, p. 4). In dealing with this challenge, Leander & McKim (2003) “turn to a consideration of how to follow and interpret space constituting practices” (p. 225).
Advocating for preserving the tensions that an analysis of space-time relationships in an online situation would necessarily entail, Leander & McKim (2003) devise the concept of a "connective ethnography" (p. 224) that looks to spaces of "flow" which are to be interpreted discursively. In other words, instead of viewing space as a container within which activities occur, the activities themselves and the discursive traces (or flows) that are left as evidence, become the means by which spaces and existences are conceptualized and interpreted. Specifically, a connective ethnography would abolish firm distinctions between online and offline realms, because "shifting to a relational perspective on space times as constructed within activity redirects...attention to the accomplishment of multiple spatio-temporal achievements" (p. 224).

The research of Leander & McKim confronts issues not yet considered in the art education research literature, and I find their connective ethnography concept to be promising for studying the way arts learning events are incorporated into both online and offline activity. Avoiding an essentializing distinction between online and offline existence will allow me to examine the possibilities that online arts education experiences might become a bridge for relating to one’s environment or to other people in personally meaningful ways.

Summary

In drawing together issues of context, arts education, technology, aesthetic experience, and general education pedagogy, as well as recent thought in online qualitative research methodology, the literature review represents both a broad survey of
issues relevant to this philosophical inquiry and as well as specific focus on several areas deemed key to the future study's grand tour question, *How did students interpret their experience and construct knowledge in the online course Art and Music Since 1945?* While studies on online arts learning experiences in art education are not plentiful, research by Lai, 2002; Lai & Ball, 2004 proved helpful in its focus on textual representation of students—a key concern in my research. Further, literature on visual culture was related to the issue of blurred boundaries and disciplinary flux in arts education, while literature representing relevant ideas about learning contexts, aesthetic experience, and technology rounded out the survey.

In this thesis, the complexities of an online arts learning and its implications for students' subjective responses to art are prioritized, for I believe that the online arts education course, *Art and Music Since 1945* is, to echo Laura Lackey's (2003) words, a unique orientation to practice in which art education takes on diverse meanings. Many questions remain however, questions about the nature of these diverse meanings, questions regarding what an online arts learning experience means to students, questions about how online arts learning is integrated into the contexts of everyday life, and questions concerning what advantages or disadvantages this method of learning holds for students and the discipline of art education itself. Only through posing and pursuing such questions might there develop an understanding of how this form of art education might meet the needs of today's art educators and their students, as well as how it fits into the pedagogical goals in arts education. A study of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* is expected to contribute to the discipline of art education by offering insight into

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how students interpreted their online arts learning experiences, specifically their perceptions of the distinctive qualities of an arts learning experience made accessible in the times and places of their choosing, and the ways in which arts knowledge is constructed in these variable contexts.
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CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE OF THE COURSE

We frequently find ourselves dealing as never before with our own prejudgments and preferences, with the forms and images we have treasured throughout our lives. What we have learned to treat as valuable, what we take for granted may be challenged in unexpected ways. —Maxine Greene, 1995

Introduction

In an online learning situation, the education experience of each student is a phenomenological transaction that resonates with the particularities of each student's lifeworld, and the curriculum of *Art and Music Since 1945* is animated by, and integrated into, the actions, attitudes, and environment of wherever the class happens to be accessed. I suspect that many factors come into play in one's choice of an online arts learning experience instead of a traditional classroom arts learning experience. Therefore, however contingent and indeterminate the boundaries of an online course may seem within the ephemera of a virtual world, to many students, this style of learning is a real-world solution to the vagaries and demands of real life existence. In *Theorizing a Network Called Art Education*, Laura Lackey (2003) provides an important caveat to the
assumption that the choice of an alternative venue of arts learning versus a traditional classroom arts learning environment is based upon "free choice" and agency.

Lackey argues that assumptions of "self-directedness and free choice" as determinants of participation in the education programs of "community, recreation, or continuing education settings" (p. 107) often misinterpret "the nature of access to these settings." Citing "liberal traditions of adult education and modernist traditions in leisure studies," Lackey (2003) offers that "economics, socialization and comfort (often related to class and ethnicity), time, and social responsibilities related to family and child care (often related to gender)" (p. 107) influence participation and choices in art education in alternative settings. Lackey’s observation about underlying factors that often circulate beneath the notion of freedom in one’s choice of an education setting points to the necessity of probing into factors such as class, gender, and ethnicity that may directly or indirectly shape preferences for an online arts learning experience. At this point, there is much to be learned about students’ motivations for taking the online course Art and Music Since 1945. In the following sections of this chapter I discuss some of the qualities of the course as well as some personal observations about my teaching experience.

**Description of Art and Music Since 1945**

The online version of Art and Music Since 1945 debuted in January 2001 with twenty-four students. In September 2001, the class was expanded to fifty students and in September, 2002 and additional section of fifty students was added. Another section of Art and Music Since 1945 will be added in Autumn of 2004, bringing the total number of
online students to one hundred-fifty. Today, the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* is offered to two hundred students (four sections of 50 students) each quarter.

The online class *Art and Music Since 1945* has an art and music survey curriculum covering the period of 1945 to the present. *Art and Music Since 1945* is delivered completely online, with all readings, images, and music contained within a single website. Although its curriculum is modeled after its traditional in-class counterpart, the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* is decidedly different, for missing is the familiar art history classroom format of slide viewing and image comparisons in a professor-led lecture. Instead, in its place is a "virtual classroom" complete with readings, images, music files, and links leading to further information about artists or musicians.

While this course does include study of popular music and contemporary art, topics which might be found in a visual or material culture studies curriculum, the focus of the course is similar to traditional survey-type classes in that the overview of major movements and important innovations in post 1945 art and music is separated into units of study and arranged chronologically. On the other hand, a significant deviation from the traditional survey is found in the freedom given to students to explore the units at their own pace and in any order they choose. Equally significant are the connections made through hyperlinks, enabling a student to move within and between the units to follow pathways linking ideas and related topics.

Communications in *Art and Music Since 1945* are asynchronous. The virtual classroom includes a separate email account for each student, and students are
encouraged to communicate with the instructor and with each other. The weekly
assignments in *Art and Music Since 1945* are critical thinking exercises designed to
develop description, interpretation, and analysis skills. These assignments are structured
to incorporate concepts from the curriculum with a student's personal observations and
interpretations and are posted on discussion boards. Responses to a student's assignment
submission can be posted by the instructor and classmates and remain accessible for the
duration of the quarter. In keeping with the totally online format, critical essays are
submitted electronically, and each student takes their exam from their own computer by
logging into the class web site.

While the curriculum and associated discussions, tests, and assignments are
experienced through the Internet with no student/student or teacher/student face-to-face
interactions required, the *Art and Music Since 1945* curriculum does require attendance at
two offline events—an art exhibit and a music performance. These events serve as the
topics of two required critical essays. In writing each essay, students are expected to
demonstrate proficiency in crafting personal responses to a real-life event using a
synthesis of concepts from online course readings and analytic skills practiced in the
online discussion forums. In promoting critical thinking about arts experiences within a
student's lifeworld, the essay assignments are pragmatic endeavors that form a bridge
between online arts experience and arts experiences occurring outside the realm of
cyberspace.

In summary, the online curriculum of *Art and Music Since 1945* is structured to
provide significant critical thinking and reflection opportunities through personal and
formal analytical activities that are experienced within the student’s learning environment of choice and within formal arts events. Students in the online arts education course *Art and Music Since 1945* participate in arts learning that intersects with formal and nonformal learning experiences in everyday life. This computer mediated arts learning experience is often a first point of significant arts education for my students, who from roster data are primarily majoring in non-art disciplines. In addition, the majority of the 50 students in my class each quarter are campus residents. That the online version of *Art and Music Since 1945* is frequently selected by campus residents over its traditional in-class counterpart, is, in my view, a noteworthy phenomenon that must be explored. Considering that *Art and Music Since 1945* is offered in both a traditional classroom setting and an online learning environment each academic quarter, what factors influence a student’s decision to learn about contemporary art and music in an online environment?

**Personal Context: The distinctive qualities of the course**

Although I had initial trepidation about becoming an online instructor of *Art and Music Since 1945*, I soon found the blending of art education into the day to day routine of my world to be practical, meaningful and, once accustomed to the procedures and structure of the website, a completely natural way of connecting with art and ideas and students. In the online classroom, the chronological arrangement of images and ideas that one would find in a traditional art history or art appreciation class exist, however, the student, not the teacher controls the image to image comparisons, moving forward and back at will, lingering or not, depending upon the student’s interest. Of course, it can be
argued that an art survey textbook offers the same possibilities for student-controlled viewing, however the online class differs in that its mode of presentation is inherently more flexible, for, in the online arts learning environment, hyperlinks can be explored, music files can be heard, images and texts can be printed or saved to personal files for later viewing, even digital manipulation. A flooding of images, sounds, electronic communications make intertextual and intercontextual experience possible, creating innovative art education encounters unlike those found in the classroom, museum, or through the art survey text.

Ironically, in navigating an online arts education classroom, I discovered that the absence of “real” classroom experiences, which was so disconcerting in the beginning, came to matter less and less to me. Instead, over time, my focus on what was “missing” shifted to a focus on the unique characteristics of the online education experience. As a result, aspects that I had taken for granted—such as the purpose of critical essays, dialogues about art, even the structure, frequency and content of communications—began to assume a new relevance to my understanding of my teaching situation. Patricia Briggs (1998) agrees, stating that in her experience of teaching a distance education art history class at The University of Wisconsin-Stout, she was able to “take notice of the ways in which art history’s normative paradigms had come to shape the content of [her] course” (para. 1). Briggs’ statement points to the possibility of important methodological and pedagogical issues inherent in an online class, and points to the necessity of examining the habits and rituals of an art education curriculum.
There were other significant experiences while teaching the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. For example, it is common practice in the study of art to examine visuals for potential clues to explain a maker’s motivations, intent, and compositional strategies. Sometimes, analyses of images include challenging, revelatory, and personal dialogues that emerge from a student connecting personal experience to what they are seeing. However, while I am accustomed to facilitating such discussions in a traditional art appreciation classroom, in an online course I found it very challenging to understand how, why, or when students are responding to the art history curriculum. I found that without the ability to stand before students in a classroom and gesture toward, or emphasize various elements in an image, I needed to devise other ways of answering questions about the qualities of the artwork or motivations of the artist. Consequently, I began to view the critical essay assignments as a significant source of teacher-student communication—an opportunity to dialogue with students as they described and analyzed their personal art experiences in their essays.

The critical essays are an important aspect of the curriculum, representing the opportunity for students to take their online learning out into the offline experience of an exhibit and concert. In reading the digital essays, I have discovered that students often make significant personal disclosures illustrating how they are interpreting the art they analyze. After noticing that this was a consistent occurrence over several quarters, I began to wonder if students in *Art and Music Since 1945* utilize the curriculum in different ways than those who experience it in the traditional classroom. Specifically, I have become increasingly curious about the students’ experiences of encountering the art
education curriculum in the locations, times, and circumstances of their own choosing. And, because subjectivity greatly influences learning, with physical location being an important factor in one’s subjective sense of identity, I wondered: might the assumptions of what counts as arts learning be expanded to acknowledge the effects of electronic learning contexts in arts experiences? Further, how might the electronic contexts of online arts learning influence the type of personal connections made with art, even the personal disclosures about one’s responses to art?

The issue of communication

The is much to be learned about the quality of relationships that students develop with their teacher and their peers in the online arts education classroom. Shifting the classroom from offline space to the Internet seems to shift the balance of authoritarian structure, spurring changes in the type, frequency and quality of communications. Many students respond positively to asynchronous learning environments, reporting better quality of conversations, enhanced engagement with the course material due to the ability to read others’ responses to discussions, and ease of access to the instructor (Dede, Whitehouse & Brown L’Bahy, 2002). In addition, an instructor’s role in the online class Art and Music Since 1945 often seems more like a mentor or facilitator than traditional classroom teacher. Interacting with contemporary art curriculum in an online learning environment, students can “speak” about art and music from behind the safety of the computer screen. This Internet-based communication seems to encourage a frankness of
reflection and response that I suspect might be qualitatively different from that of a traditional classroom discussion.

A term that refers to the quality/structure of relationships when people are geographically separated, *transactional distance* is an issue believed to greatly influence the perceived quality of online education (Wallace, 2003). When people feel that they are well-connected and have a high quality of communications, transactional distance is minimized. Conversely, if people feel disconnected from one another, or sense that they are not being heard or responded to in a meaningful way, the transactional distance is said to be increased. Some students are prolific email communicators, and will use this method of communication to carry a conversation that might extend over several days.

Because interactions with my students are limited to computer mediated communications, I find that I am very attentive to the frequency and content of these communications. In addition to emails, discussion assignments, and electronic essays, the website’s archive of each student’s hit or visit to the class further shapes how I come to “know” my students. I regularly visit the archive that tracks student website visits, and quickly become acquainted with student log-in habits and patterns. Some students tend to visit the website in the early morning hours; a few seem to log in only late at night. Others log in at random times, and of course there are those who visit the site infrequently, usually showing up only when papers are due or tests are imminent.

My formal evaluation feedback consistently indicates that many students are pleasantly surprised by the personal qualities of the course, with some even commenting that the attention they have received in the course far exceeds that which they have ever
received in a traditional classroom. I speculate the availability of email contact promotes communications that can feel more personal than simply asking a question in the presence of teacher and peers in a traditional classroom. For example, one student remarked that when writing their critical essay about an art exhibit experience—an essay that contained some very sensitive and personal reflections about several artworks—they felt as if they were writing a letter to me, instead of simply writing a paper.

Art appreciation, art history, or something else?

Throughout this thesis I refer to Art and Music Since 1945 as an “online arts education course” and “online arts learning experience.” I have avoided labeling Art and Music Since 1945 with a more specific title such as “art appreciation” or “art history” class for the reason that, although the online course Art and Music Since 1945 shares characteristics associated with both art history and art appreciation classes, its Internet locus creates a unique learning experience that deserves to be considered on its own terms. In the early stages of research, a struggle over which descriptive label to use—art appreciation or art history—led to a significant revelation: Researching an online arts education learning experience would entail seeing with new eyes the practices and processes of traditional classroom-based arts education.

In seeking to determine how to best categorize the online course Art and Music Since 1945 I began problematizing the taken for granted elements of traditional art history or art appreciation classes alongside a critical examination of the elements of online arts learning. In doing so, I began to notice the ways in which physical spaces and
mental enclosures often serve to legitimize and internalize certain ways of knowing. In addition, the absence of a physical classroom in the online arts education experience helped draw attention to other “enclosures.” That is, by not being inserted into the categories or boundaries formed by art education's traditional conceptualizations of art appreciation and art history, the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* could be studied with less prejudice and preconceived notions. I believe that subsuming *Art and Music Since 1945* under a traditionally defined category like art history or art appreciation might influence or even limit frameworks of critical evaluation. Thus, more general terms like “arts education” and “arts learning” are being used in my inquiry.

In a pragmatist’s view, conceptual frameworks are not rigid, impermeable structures, rather, they are contingent and responsive to historical context. Therefore, research into a contemporary phenomenon such as online classes is influenced as much by an historical knowledge base as it is by the contemporary milieu in which it is conceptualized. Acknowledging that an evolution in one’s surroundings can create conditions whereby habits of perception are altered, John Dewey in *Art as Experience* (1934) meets a growing industrial landscape with the optimistic possibility of an aesthetic experience that, instead of being confined by strict rules of ontology and epistemology, is shaped through subjectivity, contingency and context. With this in mind, I offer the idea that within the present socio-cultural milieu, an online arts learning experience like *Art and Music Since 1945* is perhaps a new kind of aesthetic learning experience—an experience that possibly cannot be adequately evaluated using only the established categories of art history or art appreciation in the discipline of art education. Although the
online class *Art and Music Since 1945* shares common ground with traditions of art history and art appreciation courses, I wonder that in its interpenetrating virtual spaces and embodied offline existence, the online class *Art and Music Since 1945* might represent a hybridized entity: an aesthatech learning experience that combines qualities of arts appreciation and art history traditions with unique aspects of the online learning environment.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I described the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* and shared personal observations of teaching the course, calling attention to the unique aspects, such as communications, critical essays, and personal connections to art that are in need of investigation in my future study. Further, I explained the rationale behind the phrase "arts learning experience" used in this thesis. In addition, I suggested that, as an arts learning experience which combines qualities of arts appreciation and art history traditions with unique aspects of the online learning environment, the online course *Arts and Music Since 1945* might be better served by a hybrid name such as aesthatech experience.
References


CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

We must be hermeneutical where we do not understand what is happening but are honest enough to admit it...

~Richard Rorty

Introduction

The grand tour question, How did students interpret their experience and construct knowledge in the online course Art and Music Since 1945? has influenced the direction of this philosophical inquiry, however, most importantly it will launch the upcoming dissertation research. Therefore, to accommodate the diverse issues attendant in the development of this philosophical inquiry and to address concerns inherent in the conceptualization of methodology for the future study, this chapter is divided into three sections:

- Part One: Issues in developing a philosophical inquiry;
- Part Two: Problems in researching an online course;

The purpose of this chapter is not to make definitive statements on methodology or choose ideal methods, instead, in pragmatic fashion, I believe that the questions raised,
the problems brought forth, and the ideas, statements and inferences that germinate in the
text will inform my continued engagement with research planning decisions for the future
study.

**Part One: Issues in developing a philosophical inquiry**

Conceptualizing a philosophical research inquiry can be a complicated and thorny
endeavor, made even more unwieldy through the process of coming to understand the
implications and consequences of one’s philosophical and theoretical perspectives.
Blunted or honed, the edges of our nascent understandings are tools that cut paths
through our worlds, revealing, for better or for worse, a visible world. Our
understandings, both creating and being created by our theoretical and philosophical
assumptions, are the apertures that reveal or obscure a world to our inquiries. In this
chapter, I will clarify some of the philosophical suppositions and paradigms that
influence the ways in which the world becomes visible to me. A central concern is the
issue of interpretation, not just in how I make sense of a world, but how these sense-
making activities both constitute the nature of my inquiry as well as become enfolded
within the questions I ask.

**Aesthetic philosophy in context**

In *Aesthetics and Education* (1993), Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker
describe the discipline of philosophy as an “analytical discipline for clarifying the way
we think” (p. 6). Further, they note, philosophy “analyzes not the world but the ideas with
which we think about the world” (p. 6). Aesthetics, a branch of philosophy, is concerned
with the issue of art—especially the ways we think about art. Parsons & Blocker (1993) elaborate, defining aesthetics as an “analysis of the ideas with which we think about the arts” (p.6). Moreover, in aesthetics, ideas that are specific to the arts, like “design, form,” and “rhythm,” as well as ideas that are not exclusive to the arts, such as “emotion, beauty, reality, communication, and judgement” are considered holistically in the effort to understand the “connections of art with life” (Parsons & Blocker, 1993, p. 7). In this way, the issue of aesthetics is woven into the concerns of my inquiry into the online course Art and Music Since 1945.

While the issue of aesthetics is inextricably entwined with my research questions, it must be emphasized that the purpose of the research is neither to examine solely the nature of aesthetic experience in the online course Art and Music Since 1945, nor to judge if an experience truly qualifies as “aesthetic.” I must acknowledge my trepidation in bringing such criteria to the research, given that the very issue of epistemology and ontology in an online course is being questioned. Instead, my interest will be directed toward understanding how the students interpreted their experiences and constructed arts knowledge in the course, and discovering what, if anything, in the online arts learning experience resonated with students in a significant way.

The hermeneutic perspective

Research into the use of online learning in art education is an inquiry that can be connected with philosophical, pedagogical, historical, theoretical, sociological, and cognitive dimensions of art education, therefore the possibilities for choosing
methodology which would ensure a depth and breadth of inquiry were vast. Having this awareness, and an overarching goal of initiating a dialogue about *Art and Music Since 1945* that would problematize relationships between discourses while creating a generative inquiry in which meanings and intent will further be problematized, a hermeneutic approach was chosen to both deepen and expand the reach of my questions.

Derived from the Greek word “hermeneia,” meaning an utterance or explication of thought, and the name “hermeneus,” associated with the messenger god Hermes, hermeneutics has deep ties to the concept of interpretation. And, perhaps because of the association with the playful, trickster god Hermes, hermeneutics is also “organized around the disruption of the clear narrative, always questioning those things that are taken for granted” (Moules, 2002, p. 6). Originally associated with the interpretation of biblical texts in the seventeenth century, hermeneutics is today associated with a philosophical construct that embraces the situatedness of an inquiry and the contingency and historicity associated with its interpretations (Noddings, 1995; Moules, 2002).

Not a specific methodology, but more a general spirit of interpretive inquiry, a hermeneutic approach seeks to see the “relations between various discourses as those of strands in a possible conversation, a conversation which presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers, but where the hope of agreement is never lost so long as the conversation lasts” (Richard Rorty, in Noddings, 1998, p. 71). Approaching research in the hermeneutic spirit means accepting that the situation and its specific instances will not yield final, definitive statements, but instead will “resist containment” as it becomes “larger and more generative with wider horizons and greater possibilities.”
(Moules, 2002, p. 7). Nel Noddings (1995) concurs, adding that “hermeneutical work enlarges the scope of our vision, suggests new meanings, and encourages further conversation” thus ensuring that inquiry becomes a “holistic practice of sorts, one in which we can rarely attach separate meaning to the atomistic parts” (p. 71).

In addition to the philosophical hermeneutics that informs this thesis, a spirit of “critical hermeneutics,” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 448) pervades the impetus to describe and interpret. Therefore, “the politics of interpretation” are placed at center stage (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 448). As a result, I proceed with the assumption that a final truth will not be revealed, ultimate meanings will never be fully disclosed, and actions and ideologies are mutually constitutive. The lack of closure and continual problematizing of interpretations means that research is not only a partial account of a situation that shifts and slips from clear focus, but that the process of research is dialectical.

It is my belief that entering a dialectical engagement with theoretical and philosophical paradigms while conceptualizing one’s research questions is essential, not only for engaging with philosophical or theoretical standpoints, but also for developing a keen attention to the subtle nuances of issues as they arise. In agreement, Adrianna Kezar, in *Wrestling with Philosophy: Improving scholarship in higher education* (2004), speaks of the necessity for engaging philosophical issues in research. She posits that by adopting an approach that intentionally engages philosophical issues and assumptions up front, investigating one’s role as a researcher, probing the nature of reality and how knowledge is constructed, a study will proceed with more clarity and focus. Like Kezar,
Kerry Freedman (2004b, p. 187) also emphasizes the need for careful consideration of the underlying assumptions of research strategies and advocates building a depth and breadth of understanding in how one’s research questions will relate to methodology.

**Philosophical method and the ‘Inquiry into Inquiry’**

While qualitative and quantitative research often will, at a study’s outset, identify problems, research questions, or hypotheses to be explored or tested through inductive or deductive methods (Morse & Richards, 2002), a foundational philosophical inquiry approaches its subject in a different way. When undertaken as the foundation for a research study, a philosophical inquiry can, through a stimulation of thought on connections and relationships, help build a rationale for the methodology and goals of the future study. Philosophical inquiry as research method can be understood as both a means and an end to metacognitive activity, merging the instrument of inquiry—language, with a philosophical inquiry’s outcome—a “multiplicity of meanings that go far beyond the matter of truth” (Greene, 1997, p. 209). Erasing distinctions between means and ends, or process and product, the process of philosophical inquiry is at the heart of Dewey’s “language of experience,” and exemplifies Dewey’s “inquiry into inquiry” as “both a philosophical and empirical enterprise” (Mesthene, 1964).

Before a primary research question was formulated, this inquiry proceeded on the basis of a working hypothesis. In developing a working hypothesis, current concerns and contexts within and surrounding art education were reflected upon and compared to my experiences with the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. As a result, connections
and relationships surfaced, yielding threads of inquiry that contributed clarity and focus to the research. In an ongoing process, emergent relationships are being continually explored and refined, and will be carried forward and evaluated within the future study of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. This process, which consists of locating one’s data within ordinary experience, and referring one’s findings back to the primacy of this experience for confirmation and validation is the cornerstone of John Dewey’s pragmatic method of research.

Also central to Dewey’s pragmatic research method is the concept of “systematic inference,” defined as the recognition of “definite relations of interdependence between considerations previously unorganized and disconnected, noticed through the “discovery and insertion of new facts and properties” (Dewey, 1910/1997, p. 81). Moreover, Dewey offers that, by carefully attending to the systematic process wherein relationships and connections are referred back to the facts of an experience and then back again, conditions are created for the development of a working hypothesis. Not a final conclusion but a guide, the working hypothesis is a means for bringing new facts to light (Dewey, 1910/1997).

The working hypothesis that anchors this thesis’ philosophical inquiry originates in the belief that the online art education class, *Art and Music Since 1945*, is a unique type of art education experience. Specifically, the working hypothesis maintains that the online arts education “classroom,” in defying traditional classroom limitations of time and space, fosters a personalized integration of aesthetic and arts learning experiences within a student’s lifeworld, thus being a pedagogical method which may hold promise
for further use in the discipline of arts education. This hypothesis was formed through a systematic review of the literature both within and outside of the art education discipline, and by identifying connections and relationships to various aspects of the online class *Art and Music Since 1945*, including my experiences in teaching this course.

**Pragmatism: Method, Means, and Action**

As a complement to the hermeneutic, interpretive approach to the research issues, the philosophy of pragmatism, "a discourse on the consequences of thinking" (Cherryholmes, 1999, p. 27), brings focus and clarification to the practical and social aspects of this inquiry. Pragmatism can be understood as a philosophy which looks to results. Without succumbing to the hopelessness or nihilism associated with subjective relativism, the researcher who chooses pragmatism as method recognizes that knowledge is fallible, however, as situations change, what is considered to be knowledge will change and adjust to accommodate new awareness, thereby initiating new questions (Cherryholmes, 1999). Moreover, pragmatists view inquiry, not as a question to be answered or a problem to be solved, but as a "serial or sequential process" (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 57).

Pragmatic inquiry, temporally and contextually situated, is "rooted in the conditions of life itself," and as a serial process, it "does not solve problems by returning to a previous, stable situation, but by means of a transformation of the current situation into a new situation" (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 57, italics in original). In attending to the process of meaning-making in particular sociocultural contexts, the pragmatic
approach to inquiry accepts that knowledge is contingent and that the "hermeneutic
circle" and its relationship to holism is unavoidable (Rorty, 1979, p. 318-319). In
addition, by acknowledging that consequences or results of actions taken will necessarily
cultivate new situations and possibilities for inquiry, this philosophical orientation is well
suited to research that must contend with the indeterminacies inherent in human behavior
as well as the innovation and cultural changes associated with Internet technologies.

As Dewey notes, the ways in which we believe and expect have a tremendous
elaborates, adding

the pre-conceptual frameworks (epistemes) through which our culture orders the
material and social worlds have changed through time and are themselves specific
to each time and culture. The concepts and modes of analysis through which we
interpret the past are not neutral abstract tools; they are cultural products. (p. 29)

In seeking to understand how the theory and praxis of art education both shapes
and is shaped by its predominant philosophies and beliefs, this thesis will be concerned
with matters of context and its associated habits, assumptions and actions in respect to
online art education. In this thesis, the consideration of context, both in the students’ and
researcher’s experience is a pragmatic undertaking that is expected to illuminate the
significant situations and questions found in the everyday experiences within the online
course Art and Music Since 1945.

Acknowledging the significance that can be discovered within taken-for-granted,
ordinary experiences, David Blacker (1993) offers that the "real lesson" of John Dewey
is to be found in the belief that the "revelatory capacities locked within even our most
ostensibly banal and quotidian tools and techniques are nearly inexhaustible" (para. 42).
Thus, philosophical inquiry can be employed as a tool to facilitate a discussion that, when referred back to the everyday, ordinary life experiences found within the lifeworlds of students in *Art and Music Since 1945*, might render these experiences and the understandings they engender, “more significant, more luminous” (Dewey, 1958/1997, p. 259).

**Pragmatists as realists**

By valuing discourse on the consequences of thinking, pragmatists can be viewed as realists, for working from a pragmatist’s viewpoint means accepting that all thinking is situated in socially constructed contexts. Calling pragmatists artists who “try to bring about beautiful results in the midst of power, oppression, and ignorance” (p. 5), Cherryholmes (1999) also observes that “(a)t the beginning and end of the day pragmatists are realists because they value what happens” (p. 5). Moreover, because their productions are “interpreted, reinterpreted, and criticized indefinitely,” pragmatists are “continually open to new experiences, problems and opportunities” (Cherryholmes, 1999, p. 6). Jonas F. Soltis (1999) elaborates, explaining that even in “(l)iving and doing without certainty, without a firm foundation, without Truth,” pragmatists possess an “aesthetic and social imagination” that leads them to expect “challenges and fulfillments rather than nihilism and despair” (p. ix). Indeed, the pragmatic social imagination explores the “consequences of conceptual frameworks” (Soltis, 1999, p. ix) with the goal of creating a “discourse that attempts to bridge where we are with where we might end up” (Cherryholmes, 1999, p. 3).
As a bridge to a future educational discourse, or a catalyst for educational change, the pragmatic method of inquiry is compatible with the notion of a “development research” framework that “regards theory as being collaboratively shaped by researchers and practitioners” (Reeves, 2002, p. 152). Pragmatic research that delves into the thicket of questions and concerns that seem to be increasing exponentially with the intense interest in, and use of, online education is sorely needed at this time. Developmental research on online learning is an exciting area for researchers in arts education, however, careful evaluation of online education must be guided by the values and interests deemed important by art educators. Vrasidas & Glass (2002) caution that

\[\text{technology should not be studied in isolation nor as a ‘mere vehicle,’ but within the context and structure of a program in order to examine how the synergy of technology, instructional methods, subject matter, and other contextual factors provide the conditions necessary to support knowledge construction and learning when teachers and learners are separated. (p. 48)}\]

In other words, the pedagogical goals and educational philosophies unique to each discipline should inform the questions asked when considering the use of online education. Regarding the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, art educators might ask: How does an online arts learning format permit and constrain certain kinds of interactions? How does an online arts learning experience shape affective responses to art? How has an online learning format made some art education content obsolete and other content more vital and relevant than ever? Of what value is immediacy and unlimited access to arts learning to students? To teachers? And, of what value are arts encounters, or even aesthetic experiences, in today’s increasingly technologically mediated environments?
Phenomenology

According to Thomas Schwandt (2003), phenomenological sociology, having roots in the work of Alfred Schutz and the research of ethnomethodologist Harvey Garfinkel is “principally concerned with understanding how the everyday, intersubjective world (the life world, or Lebenswelt) is constituted” (p. 297). Appropriate for research that prioritizes interpretative understandings, phenomenology, or phenomenological sociology can also be used to study the social constructions of communication and the ways in “social reality, everyday life, is constituted in conversation and interaction” (Schwandt, p. 297).

Phenomenological research also acknowledges the situational and the contextual, in both the researched subject and the historical context of the researcher. In addition, a phenomenologically oriented approach to research is created through an interplay among six research activities (van Maanen, 1990):

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and connects us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong pedagogic relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole. (p. 30-31)
van Manen's six research activities, written for traditional phenomenological studies in offline worlds, will present some challenges for adaptation to study of online experiences. As a result, choices of methods will need to be weighed carefully, with attention given to triangulation and crystallization (Richardson, 2003) to help preserve the complexity of the research context, as well as to help establish validity and credibility.

Part Two: Problems in researching an online course

*I mean, I mean and that is not what I mean, I mean that not any one is saying what they are meaning, I mean that I am feeling something, I mean that I mean something and I mean that not any one is thinking, is feeling, is saying, is certain of that thing, I mean that not any one can be saying, thinking, feeling, not any one can be certain of that thing... ~Gertrude Stein*

Introduction

Research of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* presents an intriguing problem: The challenge of creating a study that preserves the strange tension of disembodied words and embodied lives that give rise to a distinctive teaching and learning reality. Having concerns about meeting the challenge of representation itself, especially when the researcher and the researched will be present to each other only as text on a computer screen, I have enfolded the problematization of texts and representations into my methodological considerations for the future dissertation research.
Studying the textual presence

Qualitative research is steeped in processes of engagement with people—tangible engagements such as that found in participant observation, or ethnography. Even if the research is primarily concerned with documents, such as historical research or content analysis, there is usually not any question of where the researcher is located in respect to their data. However, in developing a study of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, I am faced with a textual research/subject relationship that undermines notions of stable, unified identity and stable, tangible objects of study. Complicating matters is that, like most social and cultural researchers, I am “embedded in embodied theory and practice,” and I have been “socialized to rely on and privilege the five senses” (Markham, 2004c, p. 368). Diane Ackerman’s (1991) eloquent statement, “we live on the leash of our senses” (p. 2-3) supports Markham’s (2004c) assertion that in the matter of online qualitative research, what is not experienced through traditional, embodied interactions may often seem suspect. How researchers choose to act upon these invitations to explore the meanings that seem to escape the boundaries of our senses is the stuff from which “interpretive bricoleurs” (Denzin, 2004, p. 3) are created.

The issue of a researcher’s representation of others in an online environment is somewhat confusing, for as of yet, there are no clear directives for this type of research. When framed within traditional qualitative research procedures, the work of studying the students of an online course might seem fairly straightforward. Methods used might include collecting data by observation, conducting participant interviews, performing discourse analysis or content analysis, etc. However, when looking deeper, past the placid
surface of what some see as "standard" qualitative research procedures, it becomes clear that the work of studying the members of an online environment can be anything but straightforward, and this is because of the complexities inherent in the social construction of communications in the Internet environment. Simply put, confusion arises from the fact that "traditional research training is designed for physically co-present environments" (Markham, 2004, p. 12), and Internet contexts are not physically co-present environments in the corporeal sense of this term.

The complexities of absence, presence, and co-presence when communicating in an Internet context are important epistemological and ontological issues, raising concern about responsible, ethical representation of participants. I struggle with planning how I might bring attention to the unique qualities of online arts learning, yet also present research that will be considered credible, informative, and valuable to both the participants of the course and the discipline of art education. As I conceptualize research plans for the online course Art and Music Since 1945, I have directed my focus to a particular aspect of the online course, the textual representation of self and others.

The issue of studying the textual presence in online courses is a relatively recent concern in qualitative research. Moving beyond the utilization of the Internet as a tool for conducting research, researchers are finding that since the Internet itself strongly influences the ways in which people communicate, it also has implications for the construction of identity. Furthermore, as Internet researcher Annette Markham (2004b) points out, communication is inextricably entwined with embodiment, and as communications within the online environment are studied, researchers must develop an
awareness of how their own biases about embodied communications influences the choices made in their research. Just as important is the acknowledgment of and critical reflection on how the social sciences “persist in seeking the authentic by privileging the concept of the body” (Markham, 2004b, p. 20). Clearly, the problem of creating a study of, and within, an online context necessitates a strong commitment to the interrogation of one’s methodology and methods. Annette Markham (2004b) stresses the necessity of reflexivity, reminding researchers that if one

  examines deeply the way new communication technologies influence the research project, one is likely to stumble into issues which question the fundamental reason for doing research in the first place. Allowing oneself to explore those issues can vitally contribute to the creation of reflexive and socially responsible research. (p. 9)

As a phenomenon of study, the electronic convergence of texts and representations in the online classroom problematizes ideas and assumptions already tangled and contested as the “seventh moment of qualitative research” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 611) unfolds. The field of qualitative research is already marked by challenges to assumptions regarding researcher and researched, subjects and subjectivities, and performances of self and others, and this restless milieu is now being complicated by new questions and emergent assumptions about the tenor and validity of relationships represented by, and created through, electronic texts. Our understandings, both creating and being created by our theoretical and philosophical assumptions, will reveal or obscure a world to our inquiries. With this in mind, the methodologies that will be employed in qualitative study of the online course Art and Music Since 1945, as well as the suppositions and interpretations they imply, must be subjected to careful, sustained
scrutiny for their propensity to illuminate or obscure how I and others will understand this course and its students.

Because my research objective is to discover how students are perceiving and interpreting their arts learning experience in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, all roads both to and from inquiry will pass through the texts that constitute our presence in the online classroom. Therefore the issue of reading and representation is not simply a matter of interpreting texts to discern what or who is represented, it is a matter of examining and problematizing fundamental assumptions about what counts as a legitimate and valid object of research, and how claims to knowledge are declared and defended. Annette Markham (2004c) finds that the issue of researching Internet contexts is seldom considered in qualitative research. She (2004c) remarks, that “(a)s qualitative researchers, we have neither fully explained nor adequately examined the function of text, practically and aesthetically, in the performance of self, perception of self and other, and sustenance of relationship” (p. 367). Moreover, on the issue of text itself, she asks, “(d)oes the form of the text matter? To what extent does an online persona’s text represent the embodied being? Is the text merely a tool for interaction” (2004c, p. 367)?

Keeping Markham’s questions in mind, I am compelled to articulate my own concerns about research of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. Thus I wonder, if researcher and researched do not physically interact within an online ethnography, can this venture be considered valid research? Will the data be considered credible? Why or why not? Also, I wonder, how will I present this research to an academic community that privileges knowledge constructed through embodied theories and practices? These are
questions not usually voiced by researchers in art education. Indeed, these concerns are not frequently voiced by qualitative researchers, even today. However, within this seventh moment of qualitative research, there are stirrings of uncertainty. Some scholars are beginning to sense the troubles portended by an excess of meaning, meaning that seeps from well-theorized boundaries of persons, communications, and systems of knowing in online environments. Specifically, I am struggling with the problems of what will count as data, and how I will gather my data. I wonder: will I conduct both online and face-to-face interviews? Only online interviews? What are the arguments for or against these choices? Specifically, what data gathering methods will best illuminate the distinctive qualities of student experience in *Art and Music Since 1945*?

The quote that begins this section, an excerpt from Gertrude Stein’s, *The Making of Americans* (1925), is intended to bring attention to the conundrum of text and representation, and the oft-unquestioned faith we have in the way other types of representation, such as speech, imagery, kinesthetic actions, carry particular qualities of validity and credibility. Densely packing into a single sentence statements that both affirm and deny the possibility of meaning, Gertrude Stein reminds that even certainties carry the seeds of their own refutation. Deconstruction, poststructural tenets, even psychoanalytic theory offer a similar wisdom. In coping with the vagaries of knowing and explaining existence, qualitative researchers, according to Norman K. Denzin (2003), have become interpretive *bricoleurs*. 

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Part Three: Intersections of Theory and Philosophy

Here then were my contradictory desires: to textualize identities at their most vulnerable moments, to speak about and for individuals by juxtaposing their words with my own, to dramatize the ordinary days that make time seem like no time at all... and to persuade readers of the credibility of my interpretive efforts. ~Deborah P. Britzman, 2000

Introduction

In this section, poststructuralism and psychoanalytic theories are introduced as additional strands in my methodological framework. Poststructural and psychoanalytic theories hold value for their complex perspectives on subjectivity as well as offering perspectives for understanding how desire for virtual experiences, desire for arts knowledge, even desire for a textual identity circulate in postmodern society. Kincheloe & McLaren (2003) believe poststructural psychoanalytic theory offers researchers "new tools to rethink the interplay among the various axes of power, identity, libido, rationality, and emotion" (p. 438). Further, as interpretive tools, poststructural and psychoanalytic theories emphasize the necessity of carefully heeding all possibilities for understanding conceptualizations of self and reality. Most importantly, these frameworks acknowledge not only the possibilities of human experience that we can see or speak about, but also those found in absences, gaps, silences, and invisibilities.

Poststructural and psychoanalytic theories differ in terms of their origins, yet both hold value for their complex perspectives on subjectivity. Psychoanalytic theory, which originates in Sigmund Freud's postulates on psychosocial human development, is further elaborated in the theories of Jacques Lacan. Poststructuralism is often characterized as
existing within and against structuralism, and is commonly associated with Jacques Derrida. These theories are of interest to me because they make room for considerations of the complexities, indeterminacies, and even the contradictory and paradoxical aspects of human experience. Moreover, these theories offer valuable theoretical frameworks for thinking about desire for virtual experiences, desire for arts knowledge, even desire for a textual identity. Here, I offer a brief overview of these theories and suggestions for how they might be of use in my research.

Identity through the text

Poststructuralism, an outgrowth of structuralism, is often subsumed under postmodernism. Believed, in part, to be a “philosophical response to the scientific pretensions of both structuralism and positivism,” poststructuralism helps researchers to gain a “better philosophical sense of what is at stake when one comes to do research, gaining a healthy skepticism for what counts as ‘knowledge,’ ‘education,’ ‘research,’ and science,’ and questioning the apparent naturalness of these categories” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 100). Also distinguished by concern with the textual and linguistic aspects of culture, poststructuralism conceptualizes subjects as decentered, and not sovereign, individuals (Smith, 2001). Specifically, the decentered subject is understood as being fragmented, contradictory, and incomplete, with subjectivity and agency being constructed by “arbitrary but powerful cultural and historical forces” (Smith, 2001, p. 119). Moreover, in the poststructuralist framework, knowledge production is viewed as social and contextual and “open, multiple, and endlessly proliferating, perhaps mutually
contradictory readings” (Smith, 2001, p. 120) can be derived from cultures and texts. The partial, fragmented knowledges that poststructural researchers believe constitute self and society can even be the impetus for creating new forms of research and writing, thus reinforcing and exemplifying poststructuralism’s refusal of closure and final meanings.

As stated in chapter one, poststructuralism offers qualitative writers two important advantages: It “directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing as particular positions at specific times; and it frees us from trying to write a single text in which we say everything at once to everyone” (Richardson, 2003, p. 509). Further, poststructuralism positions language as “centerpiece” of social reality, and in agreement with Laurel Richardson, I view language as a site where “different discourses divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another” (Richardson, 2003 p. 508). This understanding of language as a locus of colliding, interpenetrating, even contested discourses, is important to my thesis and future study, for it leads me to give careful consideration to context and the ways in which an art education discourse intersects with a Internet/technology discourse in the guise of the online course Art and Music Since 1945. By directing attention to the ways in which human identity is dialogically created through language, poststructuralism not only enables considerations of contexts, it also offers ways of conceptualizing and understanding the implications of textual representations in the online environment.
Deconstruction: A venture of oppositions and optimism

Poststructuralism also offers a way of studying, conceptualizing, and reflecting upon alterity in Internet research. This approach, deconstruction, ultimately reveals the contradictory logic inherent in concepts. Originating in Derrida's 1966 lecture Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences, the concept of deconstruction looks to certain clearly marked binary oppositions (as for instance between nature and culture, speech and writing, concept and metaphor, or philosophy and literature)...showing that their order of priority is by no means as stable or secure as the text seeks to maintain. (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 70)

Not simply a type of literary criticism or philosophy, deconstruction is instead a manner of closely examining texts to locate where logic breaks down in the face of binary oppositions wherein one term presupposes meanings of the other seemingly "original and self-sufficient term" (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 71). Like Foucault's idea of studying those defined as a society's "deviants" for what they might reveal about the normative categories of a society (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 71), deconstruction holds promise for my research in that the normative qualities of art education might be better understood through the efforts to understand the practices of the online course Art and Music Since 1945. Therefore, even the text-based relationships between students and teachers have the potential to lead to insights about classroom based instruction in art education.

John Caputo (1998) interprets deconstruction as an exercise in optimism, an expression of faith in what is yet to come. Viewed in this way, deconstruction, such as that which is inevitable when a course like Art and Music Since 1945 collides with
heretofore assumptions about what constitutes viable methods of teaching and learning in art education can then be understood as not being destructive of traditional ways of thinking about art education, but as affirmative of the possibilities that exceed our assumptions. Caputo (1998) explains that

( t)he very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices...—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy... (p. 31-32)

Thus, deconstruction offers ways of thinking about how the binary oppositions of absence and presence inherent in the textual presence of teacher and students in the online course Art and Music Since 1945 might reveal suppositions and assumptions about the normative and ideal education situations and settings in art education.

Deconstruction might also be usefully employed in the investigation of how text, as representation and locus of relationships, troubles the theories and methods of qualitative research.

Psychoanalytic perspectives

Like poststructuralism, psychoanalytic theory locates the formation of identity or subjectivity in language. However, psychoanalytic theory’s conceptualization of subjectivity and language is complicated by the role played by the unconscious.

Reworking Sigmund Freud’s theories on the construction of self through the powerful influences of unconscious biological and sexual drives, Jacques Lacan conceptualized the unconscious as being “structured like a language” (Smith, 2001, p. 207).Positing that the subject is fragmented and incoherent, due to a separation from the primitive, unified state
of the *Real* experienced as an infant, Lacan traced the origin of subjectivity to the *Mirror Stage* wherein a child-subject misrecognizes its mirror image as a whole, unified self (Lacan, 1973). This fantasy self assuages the pain of that original, and persisting, primal separation from the Real, and also permits the subject to conceptualize themselves as an "I," thus formally entering the world of language, or *Symbolic Order* (Lacan, 1973).

Lacan sees the subject constructed by language and culture because, within the psychoanalytic perspective, language is the precondition for, and essence of, being a self that can interact within a culture. In other words, an exchange must occur for a subject to enter culture—this exchange is the trading of a self that lacks (lacks a connection with the Real, lacks a coherent identity) for a self that is unified and can operate in the Symbolic Order (culture). Therefore, not only does language (and images, too) become a means of communication, it is also the very material of which selves are constructed. While language serves to cover a subject's lack, the longing for the Real is buried deep in the unconscious, becoming manifest in desires that a subject pursues in the conscious world.

Because the psychoanalytic perspective views desire as entwined with language and subjectivity, this theory has strong implications for understanding of power relations (Smith, 2001), providing another way of exploring and theorizing the movements and effects of desire throughout culture. It is my belief that examining how desire—desire for stability in subjectivities, desire to be recognized by others—circulates in the linguistic conventions and symbolic structures or rituals in society, may lead to deeper awareness and understanding of how online arts learning is valued by students and teachers.
Summary: Planning the future study

In this chapter, I have considered some of the implications of various philosophical and theoretical choices in the conceptualization of the future study. I acknowledge that a philosophical and critical hermeneutics both deepens and troubles the development of my research questions. In this chapter, pragmatism, a philosophy that looks to results of an inquiry, phenomenology, which deals with the nature of lived experience, and the language/reality concerns of poststructuralism and psychoanalytic theories are engaged as confluent and dynamic approaches to future research of the online course Art and Music Since 1945. Perhaps most inspiring about conceptualizing research through these diverse discourses is the opportunity to bring awareness to “the play of contradictions and the performances of power that both suture and unravel” a research text (Britzman, 2000, p. 39). Not only does this awareness complicate the task of a researcher, it also imposes demands upon a reader, requiring a willingness to “construct more complicated reading practices that move readers beyond the myth of literal representations and the deceptive promise that ‘the real’ is transparent, stable, and just like the representational. (Britzman, 2000, p. 39).

As clearly as research activities may be described in qualitative research literature, the actual practice of qualitative research can at times be opaque and filled with obstacles. Indeed, there is much ambiguity and uncharted territory in the area of online social research. I plan to remain open, watchful, and skeptical when proceeding with my research. Pragmatism, phenomenology, poststructuralism, and psychoanalytic theories may not rest easy in such close proximity, however, like Laurel Richardson (2003), I am
convinced that research problems are "crystals" which, in the manner of prisms will "reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns and arrays, casting off in different directions" (p. 517).

The crystal as research metaphor implies that what we are able to "see" in our research endeavors is ultimately determined by the angle in which we approach (Richardson, 2003). With this in mind, I believe that the activities undertaken in research should reflect an awareness of the implications of direction, viewpoint, and the complex dimensionality of the situation under study. Additionally, I believe that one's methodological approaches should be problematized both conceptually and pragmatically in the development of one's study. Therefore, in my future dissertation research of the online course Art and Music Since 1945, the notion of phenomenological experience might be troubled conceptually by considering assumptions about subjectivity and by questioning the validity of a researcher's perceptions and interpretations of the experiences of others. And, pragmatically, the consequences or tangible products of research (i.e. survey or interview results, texts and diaries, etc.) might trouble the task of containing and representing, in an academic research document, the existential, socially constructed experiences of participants and researcher. Complicating matters further is the need to cultivate a view that preserves the distinctive qualities of contingently formed, interpenetrating online and offline spaces.

Deeper exploration and questioning of my research goals, methodologies, and methods is not only important, it is, according to Annette Markham (2004b), crucial to an ethical and responsible study. Thusly, the following questions created by Annette
Markham (2004b) for a reflexive interrogation of the "roles, methods, ethical stances, and interpretations" of an online research project offer sound, sensible guidance for the work that lies ahead:

- What can we say we know about the Other when self, other, and the context may be constructed solely through the exchange of messages?
- In social situations derived from discursive interaction, is it possible to simply observe? Is it desirable?
- How does the researcher's participation in the medium affect the identity of the participant and the shape of the culture?
- How can one balance the traditional scientific impulse to uncover the "real" while interacting with people who may or may not have any correspondence to their physical counterparts?
- In what ways do one's research traditions delimit and limit the possibilities for sense making in environments which are not overtly physical, visual, and aural?

In keeping with the objectives of philosophical hermeneutics, this chapter does not make definitive statements on methodology and methods. Instead, it functions as a bricolage of issues and questions believed to impact the future research of the online course Art and Music Since 1945. This chapter represents my belief that conceptualizing research within a confluence of methodologies and a spirit of philosophical hermeneutics will provide opportunities to turn thought back upon itself—not only in the reflexive examination of positionality—but also in problematizing the notion of any research in an
online environment. To do so will be to both expose and experience the vulnerabilities and uncertainties of knowing and representing embodied or textual presences in online research.
References


CHAPTER 5

THE STUDENT: BODIES, SUBJECTIVITIES, AND
PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

The world is not what I think, but what I live through.
~M. Merleau-Ponty

Introduction

This chapter, in focusing on the concept of student, is concerned with the idea of subjectivity in context—that is, who a person is and how a person feels, acts, and understands differently depending upon location, activity, and associated emotional and cognitive states. Given the unique manner of experiencing arts education online—a spatial-temporal relationship to subject matter that is qualitatively different from traditional classroom experiences, this chapter takes up the issue of subjectivity as it relates to a student’s phenomenological experience. The premise upon which this chapter is built is that the corporeal presence of the embodied subject forms a distinctive relationship with art images and texts, and perhaps even aesthetic experiences, in the online course Art and Music Since 1945. The question guiding the chapter is, How does the student experience the online arts course? This question refers to both a student’s
embodied learning event as well as how this online arts learning experience is situated in a particular sociocultural context.

Subjectivity in context

A person’s subjectivity, when theorized as a socially constructed reality, both shapes and is shaped by the world the person exists within. According to Nick Mansfield, the ‘I’ is thus a meeting point between the most formal and highly abstract concepts and the most immediate and intense emotions. This focus on the self as the center both of lived experience and of discernable meaning has become one of the—if not the—defining issues of modern and postmodern cultures. (p. 1)

Subjectivity is both contextual and phenomenological. Jay Lemke (1994) suggests that by assuming that our students are the same people in all situations and settings educators may be missing out on making connections with learners. Embedded in this statement is the assumption that location, or context influences subjectivity. Because online and offline experiences interpenetrate one another in the production of subjectivity, it is possible to assume that students in the online course Art and Music Since 1945 have arts learning experiences of a subjectively different nature than those occurring solely within the space of a traditional classroom. Online education presents a challenge in studying the connections between learning contexts and subjectivity because the teacher (or researcher) is not in the same time or space as the learner.

The online learning experience differs from the classroom experience in many respects, and this difference is likely to affect individuals in varying ways depending upon their experience and frequency of use of computer and information technologies.
For example, the activity of working at a computer is generally performed alone. Even the keyboard, mouse, and spatial arrangement of the computer's physical structures are designed to accommodate the individual experience. How might being "unseen" by others affect the types of questions students ask, or reflections they make?

In an online classroom, previous assumptions about learning are challenged, for when removed from constraints of time and space, the online classroom is placed in the service and control of the learner—not the other way around, as has been tradition. In addition, as in-class dialogues are replaced with asynchronous discussion boards, synchronous chat room interactions, and email communications with people that likely will never meet in face-to-face encounters, the social roles and behaviors of students and teachers can be expected to undergo transformations. In short, as the physical boundaries of classroom change, so do the perceived boundaries of the person.

The phenomenology of computer use: The body and the machine

Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the phenomenology of perception (1962) locates a subject’s embodied reality as an active construction of body and world that is situated and contingent. Immersed in a world both sensuously and socially experienced, a subject’s phenomenological perception is multifariously complex and constantly in motion. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), the subject, in being enjoined with the "flesh of the world," is a network of senses that conspire with particularities of spatial and temporal situation to create a pre-reflective, embodied reality. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception leads me to the conclusion that the experience of learning
via computer, like all other actions in the world, is a transactional experience that is inextricable from subjectivity.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception also holds particular importance for an exploration of student experience in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, for it directs the researcher to the site of perception, that point of transaction where the body and computer create a particular kind of reality. It is at this point of transaction where researchers can begin to examine perceptions of self, other, and subject matter in an online arts learning experience to gain an understanding of how students are interpreting their learning experiences. In my research, I believe it will be important to avoid essentializing the body that sits in front of a computer—regarding it merely as a fleshy container left behind while the mind roams freely in cyberspaces. This reduces body and thought to a Cartesian relationship, a separation that Merleau-Ponty would find troubling. Such a dichotomization also limits the possibilities for understanding how the phenomenology of an online arts learning event affects one’s interpretation of the significance of the experience.

Aligned with Donna Haraway’s (1985/1994) theorization of the cyborg, Garoian & Gaudelius (2001) describe the body in cyberculture as a combination of the virtual and real, moving away from “a definition that establishes the limits of the body as those that are created by nature” (p. 335). McWilliam and Palmer (1996) support using the “cyborg as metaphor” for exploring the possibilities of “teachers and learners at the nature/technology interface” (p. 169), however, they caution against theorizing within an epistemological position that privileges the mental over the corporeal (p. 164). Instead,
McWilliam & Palmer introduce the idea of the "tech(no)body," that is, a body amenable to transmutation as the "distinctions between the corporeal body of students and teachers and the technology itself become blurred" (1996, p. 169). Haraway's, Garoian's & Gaudelius's, and McWilliams's & Palmer's ideas on the irreducibility of people to body-mind dualisms also raise questions about aesthetic experiences in a digital age. Therefore, we can ask: How might the transmutation of bodies into cyborg and tech(no)bodies be influencing personal and social constructions of reality—constructions which may necessitate new considerations of John Dewey's (1934) ideas about the "unity" (p. 37) of an aesthetic experience?

**Inscription, incorporation, and embodiment**

What is embodiment? What is a body? N. Katherine Hayles (1999) offers that "embodiment never coincides with 'the body'" but instead is "contextual, enmeshed with the specifics of time, place, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment" (p. 196). Merleau-Ponty's philosophy implies a similar approach to the body/embodiment issue, locating phenomenological perception in unmediated relationships between subjects and the world. Positing that the experience of consciousness and body is a contingent relationship that unfolds as "embodied beings are projected into the world," and as subjects discover the self "in a world, as part of a world" (Moran, 2000, p. 424), Merleau-Ponty advances an understanding of embodiment as exceeding the confines of human flesh to become a relational construct of body and world. To this end, Merleau-Ponty describes a subject/world relationship as being interwoven so completely as to be considered "flesh of the world" (Moran, 2000, p. 429).
Merleau-Ponty also insists that consciousness and perception are created within a pre-reflective, active engagement of subject and world—an engagement that endows embodiment with a fluid, contextual contingency. This contingency allows me to understand Merleau-Ponty’s embodied subject as contained by a corporeal body, yet unrestrained in the phenomenological richness of perception produced in the union of subject and world. Although Merleau-Ponty never did completely resolve the issue of time and human consciousness in his lifetime, his philosophy established his belief that perception is “rooted in the historical event” (Moran, 2000, p. 427). Calling time “self-constituting,” Merleau-Ponty believed time to be “produced by the relation between self and world” (Moran, 2000, p. 426).

If consciousness is inextricably woven into a self-constituted sense of spatiality and temporality, how has the conscious subject come to have accepted digitized data-forms of objects, texts, and experiences as satisfactory substitutes for their physical counterparts? An explanation might be found in Katherine Hayles’s (1999) theorization of changes in human subjectivity emerging from “the crossing of the materiality of informatics with the immateriality of information” (p. 193). Distinguishing the concept of “informatics” from the phrase “domination of informatics” used in Donna Haraway’s work, Hayles (1999, p. 313) defines informatics as “the material, technological, economic, and social structures that make the information age possible.” Specifically, Hayles (1999) notes that the concept of “informatics” includes

the late capitalist modes of flexible accumulation; the hardware and software that have merged telecommunications with computer technology; the patterns of living that emerge from and depend on access to large data banks and instantaneous transmission of messages; and the physical habits—of posture, eye
focus, hand motions, and neural connections—that are reconfiguring the human body in conjunction with information technologies. (p. 313)

Explaining how cultural contexts enable specific assumptions and expectations, the concept of a materiality of informatics promotes an examination of the distinctive discursive practices that both create—and are created by—subjects. Elaborating upon this idea, Hayles (1999, p. 198) posits that the contemporary subject is shaped though a process of inscription and incorporation. Inscription and incorporation explain how subjectivities are inextricable from the embodied and immaterial circumstances or discourses they both produce and are produced by. *Inscription* refers to the way in which abstract ideas constitutive of certain “realities” are crystallized and normalized into discrete beliefs that are able to operate independently of specific contexts. In the case of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, inscription explains specific assumptions about knowledge—such as where it can be collected/stored, its accessibility, its value to an educated populace, its relationship to individual and collective identities, and so on. Inscribing practices also help create the conditions and belief systems that view technological intervention in the processes of education or arts experiences as logical and desirable.

Complementing inscription processes, *incorporation* is contextual, rooted in the actions of the corporeal body (Hayles, 1999). Incorporating practices can be found in the tacit, automatic behaviors associated with computers. In other words, incorporating practices are actions “encoded into bodily memory by repeated performances until [becoming] habitual” (Hayles, 1999, p. 199). For example, the body’s seated position,
facial proximity to the screen, solitary nature of personal computer use, and a subject’s ability to hypertextualize information and multiple online activities, all factor into the embodied, contextual incorporating practices that have led to the normalization of online arts learning experiences. Even the automatic nature of initiating actions, or causing images, texts, and experiences to materialize by typing on a keyboard instead of moving one’s body through space in a classroom or museum is an example of an incorporating practice of retrieving information or experiencing the world.

Inscription and incorporation are woven into the constitution of ontological and epistemological sensibilities—enculturating, or socializing, assumptions and expectations about the body and embodied experiences. In short, a subject’s experience of embodiment is dependant upon an historical, normative concept of body and embodiment, which is shaped by the inscription and incorporation practices of the times. Hayles (1999) finds incorporating practices to significantly affect embodiment, offering that

when changes in incorporating practices take place, they are often linked with new technologies that affect how people use their bodies and experience space and time. Formed by technology at the same time it creates technology, embodiment mediates between technology and discourse by creating new experiential frameworks that serve as boundary markers for the creation of corresponding discursive systems. (p. 205)

Hayles’s connection of technology, embodiment, and corresponding discursive systems points to the necessity of gaining an understanding how online arts experiences influence student perceptions of art and arts learning experiences. As her discussion of inscription, incorporation and embodiment implies, ontological and epistemological assumptions and expectations are inextricably tied to cultural, contextual norms regarding human
subjectivity. According to Hayles, how the “body exists in space and time” and how it interacts with its environment “defines the parameters within which the cogitating mind can arrive at ‘certainties’” (p. 203). Thus, a body’s spatial temporal existence creates a certain subjective experience, legitimating what counts as knowledge.

Hayles links perceptions of knowledge with the transmission of culture, arguing that “when accounts of learning change, so do accounts of cultural transmission” (1999, p. 203). Following Hayles’s logic, it is possible to expect that a technological transformation of what counts as arts knowledge and art education will necessarily influence cultural beliefs about the arts, as well as the concept of aesthetic experience.

Summary

I speculate that the normative relationship established with computers can be equated with certain changes in human subjectivities, namely ontological and epistemological experiences of the world. Further, I speculate that the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* exemplifies a process of inscription and incorporation that allows an online arts learning experience to gain validity in the subject’s world-body schema. Keeping this in mind, a consideration of a subject as shaping and being shaped by interpenetrating online and offline worlds, is key to my research. In the context of online arts learning, how might assumptions and expectations of one’s world-body schema affect the notion of aesthetic experience, as it has been defined by Dewey?
References


CHAPTER 6

KNOWLEDGE

*The world is infinitely thicker than the concepts and practices with which we expectantly approach it, leading us to adapt our concepts and practices, potentially producing more surprises in turn.*

~ Robert P. Crease

Introduction

In this chapter, the concept of knowledge is explored with the intention of discussing some of the assumptions and suppositions that are influencing my thinking as I plan the future research. Because I view this thesis as an effort to “clarify the conditions under which understanding and interpretation take place” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 444), I consider how my research might be affected by its conceptualization and development in a postmodern milieu. I am interested in exploring how the concept of arts knowledge, might, through the practices of online arts learning become less boundaried, and perhaps more accessible than its classroom counterpart. Specifically, I will explore the issue of arts knowledge, as it has been conceptualized in art education, the relationship of arts knowledge with the concept of aesthetic experience, and the implications of virtualizing art objects.
Postmodern discourse

Although this thesis argues for an exploration of the epistemological and ontological qualities of experience in an online arts appreciation class, it must be emphasized that the postmodern milieu within which this inquiry develops its shape is a shifting landscape of contested meanings that create lifeworld contexts. Characterizing postmodernism as "more of a mood than a movement," Nel Noddings offers that instead of making claims to an "all-encompassing description of knowledge" (1995, p. 72), postmodernists tend to "emphasize the sociology of knowledge—how knowledge and power are connected, how domains of expertise evolve, who profits from and who is hurt by various claims to knowledge, and what sort of language develops in communities of knowers" (1995, p. 72). Therefore, even while identifying themes and issues that position online arts learning as a relevant concern for today's art educators, postmodern theories of knowledge would also acknowledge that the issues and themes are but partial glimpses and selective highlights of historically contingent discourses.

Postmodern discourses also help bring notice to, and problematize, modernist legacies that inform much of the pedagogy and practices of North American schools (Giroux, 1995). A postmodern approach within a critical examination of pedagogy is, according to Henry Giroux, "useful for educators to comprehend the changing conditions of identity formation within electronically mediated cultures" (1995, p xi). Giroux also points to a dilemma inherent in navigating the border areas of modernism and
postmodernism in the practices of everyday life. Giroux (1995) voices concern for how electronically mediated cultures are producing a

new generation of youth who exist between the borders of a modernist world of certainty and order, informed by the culture of the West and its technology of print, and a postmodern world of hybridized identities, electronic technologies, local cultural practices, and pluralized public spaces. (p. xi).

Giroux’s concern regarding the effects of an electronically mediated culture is valid, for today’s computer technologies blur boundaries of spatial-temporal existence, enabling life events to be experienced simultaneously, in layers and multiplicities. Daily life becomes a fast paced dance within a confluence of people and technologies, shifting and merging, as activities are released from their contexts to become something altogether new. Straddling the borders between school and home, between tradition and innovation, the online course Art and Music Since 1945 represents an electronically mediated space for experiencing art. What sort of resonance might the personalized nature of this borderline arts learning experience offer students who are caught within the shifting narratives of the postmodern?

Finally, the institution of education, through its theory, practice and research activities, validates groups of statements, or discourses, which not only structure the way a learning experience is conceptualized, but also structure the actions that occur on the basis of these conceptualizations (Foucault, 1972). In the arts, much emphasis is placed on original, creative work shaped by the mind, hand, and an embodied aesthetic sensitivity. Indeed, art making, as well as art history, are part of a discourse which celebrates the embodied, creative genius and linear, historical narrative of art, therefore
offering arts learning experiences through a computer challenges the discourses of art itself. Further, the discourse of art education is a powerful mechanism that, through choices made in curriculum, policy and programming, can validate what is considered art, legitimate arts learning practices, and perhaps ultimately define what counts as an aesthetic experience today.

Information technologies and the life world

The rapid growth in computer ownership and Internet access indicates that computer use and Internet connectivity is a priority in American households. In 2000, forty-four million households (42 percent) had at least one member who used the Internet at home, up from 26 percent in 1998 and 18 percent in 1997 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2001). The speed of information transmission, desire for virtual experiences, and the ability to exert control over specific aspects of human existence has fueled the growth of technology as a mediator of human experience. Woven into the sense and sensibility with which the fabric of reality is constructed, computer and information technologies create distinctive ways of understanding and acting upon the world. Moreover, the acquisition, manipulation and storage of digitized information becomes second nature, placing at human disposal a mastery of nature and circumstance which is shaping priorities, habits, and ultimately personal and cultural values.

Increasing the pervasiveness of technology’s growth is a desire for progress, and the social and economic forces that equate progress with the acquisition of the newest, most advanced products. Furthermore, improvements in the design and functioning of
computer and information technologies have resulted in products that are more efficient and affordable as well as more user-friendly and intuitive, thus creating technologies that are seamlessly and effortlessly integrated into a user’s world. With continuing advances in accessibility, performance, and the growing dependence upon the efficiency associated with these machines, the presence of computer and information technologies has become increasingly transparent, bringing mechanization and rationalization discourses into multiple facets of human existence, thus exerting a greater, and perhaps insidious effect upon individual and collective constructions of reality. To disregard the role that computer and information technologies play in the construction of our students’ or even our own realities is to disregard potential opportunities to understand how the process of teaching and learning is affected by technology’s shaping and reshaping of human experience in the world.

Education has long maintained a close bond with computers. Originating in a nineteenth century populism that merged the wisdom and knowledge of the common school teacher with the approaches of the social sciences, the bond between education and computers was strengthened through an assimilation of the discursive fields of work, human motivation, and cognition into a language of technology and social management (Popkewitz & Shutkin, 1993). Research in cognitive psychology also contributes to the computer/education association through the union of information technologies and cognitive psychology, advancing the belief that computers, as extensions of cognitive and sensory capabilities, could provide students with the means to solve problems or comprehend complex events (Popkewitz & Shutkin, 1993). This belief, combined with
cognitive psychology's central metaphor of the "mind as information processor," has, over the years, contributed to a strong union between cognitive psychology and information processes. Popkewitz & Shutkin (1993) explain that

in the context of education, research implicitly dissolves the metaphor and makes it real. Students are problem solvers and information processors. The mind exists to process information: a student's capabilities to solve problems are related directly to how well he or she communicates, which in turn is based on the limited amount of information he or she receives. In turn, the reception of information is conceived as constrained by limited sensory capabilities, initiative, the ability to process the information, and the quality of the information. (p. 28)

Given the longstanding associations of human mind as computer, a study of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* will be significant for its ability to raise questions about how shifting art education curriculum to an Internet class format might reinforce a self-making, or autopoietic process (Hayles, 1999, p. 136) in which the form, function, and cultural expectations of computer technologies will determine how art can be perceived—perceptions of art which in turn might eventually shape human capabilities of perception. An example of this process might be found in how increasing reliance upon computers for quickly and efficiently composing texts has, for some people, begun to diminish their abilities in composing texts without a computer.

Analogous to the concept of a social construction of reality, the concept of autopoiesis underscores the necessity of being attentive to the unintended results of an activity. Thus, as important as it may be to understand the impact of the instrumental applications of computer technology in education, it is perhaps just as essential to consider the ways in which the technology itself, and in particular the belief systems and discourses that this technology engenders, may be shaping the social and cultural
foundations of learning. Or, in the case of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, how computer technologies are shaping the social construction of art education, or even aesthetic experience.

Expanding upon the idea of “unintended results” of computer technology, Rick Voithofer (2002) points out that, as “communication, entertainment, and information seeking are becoming increasingly prevalent across all Internet users whether segmented by race, age, gender, ethnicity, or class,” the changes wrought in human behavior due to these “intertextual and interdiscursive knowledge and identity-formation practices” (p. 484) are likely to influence traditional education practices. For example, even the simple act of performing an Internet search or reading a hyperlinked online text subtly shapes expectations and assumptions about what constitutes knowledge as well as the possibilities for accessing what is considered to be knowledge. The shaping of expectations and assumptions is effected by constraints built into search engine logics (Lankshear, Peters, & Knobel, 2000), “apparently ‘neutral’ mechanisms [that] actually delimit the questions we ask and the answers we receive online” (Voithofer, 2002, p. 483).

Challenging the nature and construction of knowledge or experience in the information age holds important implications for art educators, for the assumptions about what constitutes an art object are not only being challenged by proliferation of popular culture, they are also being challenged by the processes by which information is obtained and legitimized. How might an online arts learning experience be legitimizing certain ways of seeing art or obtaining access to arts experiences?
Art appreciation and art history in art education

Art education’s longstanding reliance upon the presence of art image and dialogue within the same time and space in teaching art history or art appreciation, makes the idea of a totally online art appreciation class provocative, and some might suggest, problematic. Theories, philosophies, and traditions of art history can often seem locked into normative discourses that validate particular ways of knowing about art, and even what counts as art. On the other hand, the individual and societal constructions of reality that are compressed into the spaces between theories can disrupt and call attention to the assumptions and expectations that constitute a normative discourse. It is my belief that the online course Art and Music Since 1945 disrupts some of the traditions, methods, and functions of art history pedagogy. Challenging assumptions about the times and places of learning about art, online arts learning experiences move the fragmentation, deconstruction and dissolution of authority associated with theories of the postmodern to a new place—a blurry, undefined place of variable and unpredictable learning contexts in the online learning environment.

The long-held, powerfully influential assumptions about the practices and rituals associated with art, especially fine art, have firm ties to art education. Referring to the relationship of art competence and education as a “charismatic ideology” which confers upon a person the “disposition to recognize value in cultural goods and the competence which gives a meaning to this disposition by making it possible to appropriate such goods,” sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1993, p. 233-4) points to the deeply vested social process wherein success in appropriating the arts (through knowledge, experience, and
appreciation) is constituted and reinforced by competency or familiarity with the arts. While art educators can claim that appreciation of the arts can be cultivated through the process of art education, what claims can be made about an arts learning process that is far removed from the traditional rituals and practices of an art education classroom?

**Arts knowledge and the aesthetic experience**

What is an aesthetic experience? According to John Dewey (1934) an aesthetic experience or, as he has termed it, "an experience" (p. 35) has a certain unity that "pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts" (p. 37). Moreover, although an experience has a pattern and structure, it can not be separated into discrete parts—it exists as a holistic event, and it is only in reflection that it can be intellectualized into its distinct constitutive qualities (Dewey, 1934). Not only a result of arts experiences, Dewey believed "an experience" occurs "within the world at large," encompassing "the total transaction taking place between the organism and the environment" (Jackson, 1998, p.54). This transaction is significant in that it implies the "relational character of perception" which, in the "pairing of doing and undergoing" in a person’s experience brings "shape and significance to the experience" (Jackson, 1998, p.59). In addition, Dewey’s conceptualization of an experience implies that perception is dynamic, a process wherein being and experiencing takes on meaning in relationship to one’s context. Finally, Dewey makes clear that an experience is not a matter of being transported to some other consciousness, or an alternate reality, rather it "a deeper reality
of the world in which we live daily, the world of our ordinary experience” (Jackson, 1998, p. 61).

How can arts knowledge be related to the notion of having an aesthetic experience, or an experience? An answer to this question can be found in Philip Jackson’s (1998) analysis of Elizabeth Bishop’s 1940 poem, The Fish, wherein an experience as ordinary as reeling in a “battered and venerable and homely” fish becomes a transformative event—an experience. Jackson asserts that Bishop’s visual acuity and ability to sensitively and imaginatively describe her encounter with the fish reminds us that “such experiences may have as their starting place the most ordinary of events, which may occur when we least expect them” (p. 99).

From Dewey’s idea of an experience and Jackson’s interpretation of Bishop’s poem I surmise that arts knowledge, in its propensity for revealing additional layers and dimensions of subjective experience, helps deepen one’s experience of the world, perhaps increasing the likelihood that an experience, or as Maxine Greene (1995) would say, “shocks of awareness” might occur in the most ordinary of events, when least expected. In my future research of the online course Art and Music Since 1945, I will explore the possibility that arts learning experiences, by being inserted intercontextually (Leander & McKim, 2003) into the activities and routines of the everyday life world, might promote the sort of awareness that both Maxine Greene and John Dewey would believe transformative. Indeed, there is much to be explored about the perception of art and the construction of arts knowledge in an online arts learning experience.
A tactic of perpetual access: The virtualization of art objects

Theories and practices of art education have traditionally, through reliance on embodied arts experiences, afforded the art object a privileged position, a status being challenged by virtual art objects and online arts learning experiences. Virtual imaging, virtual museums, and virtual arts education disrupts traditional patterns of usage of art objects. Until technology permitted the transformation of the “real” art object into an electronic ephemera of pixels and bytes, where and how one might access an art object was taken for granted as being regulated within spaces that protected and maintained a particular viewer/viewed relationship. Whether observed within a museum, classroom, or by photograph or slide viewing, the inherent authority of who arranged the spaces or chose the imagery for display was taken for granted to have occurred outside of the control of the observer. For the purposes of art education, objects are essential didactic tools, and relationship of observer and art object has traditionally been a negotiation of distance and closeness wherein observer and object could “meet” via gaze in real time, in real space.

The arts educator brings the discourse of the museum into the classroom, securing a relationship between art object and audience (students) within the curriculum of art education. Inextricably linked with an arts curriculum are, according to Bourdieu, Darbel & Schnapper (1991), perceptual instruments which are historically constituted—that is, they are created by and dependant upon the society of which they are a part. The perceptual instruments effected through an arts curriculum might even be understood as codes (Bourdieu, Darbel & Schnapper, 1991) which offer advanced understandings of a
work of art. There is the intimation that without an adequate education in which the
codes, or instruments of perception, are learned, a person is "condemned to a perception
of a work of art which takes its categories from the experience of everyday life and which
results in the basic recognition of the object depicted" (Bourdieu, Darbel & Schnapper,
1991, p. 44). In Bourdieu's view, art objects require a special kind of education or code to
make their true meanings known. It would seem that an arts curriculum confers
protection from inadequate perceptions of art.

Exclusivity of access and use is part of the aura of an art object. Writing about the
mechanical reproduction of art, Walter Benjamin praises the emancipation of the work of
art from its "parasitic dependence on ritual" which frees the work for increasing
opportunities for exhibition (1955, p. 226). To Benjamin, the liberating inventions that
released the object into greater contact with the masses represented a positive
development; the loss of an "aura" was offset by the gains inherent in increased
accessibility. Is it possible that contemporary Western society may actually prefer the
benefits of speedy access and duplication (as found in an online arts experience) to the
presence of the "aura" of traditional art experiences? Is it possible that reliance upon
common digital technologies like personal computers and digital cameras have helped to
prepare society for an acceptance of experiences that are defined by convenience and not
by the lure of an experience's aura? Further, has the art object's availability through
electronic means reduced the quality of an aesthetic experience to simply a service of
information and interpretation (Hazen, 2001)?
A virtual, digitized art object compresses time and the potential for an aesthetic experience into a form that can be connected to unlimited other compressions of experience, creating an infinitely adjustable narrative potential. The loss of control over not only authenticity, originality, and the physical presence of art objects, as well as who or what defines an object as art may signal changes in the epistemological foundations of arts education. Colin Lankshear (2003) speculates that, although "conventional epistemology has privileged propositional knowledge," it may be necessary to rethink epistemology in an "evolving digital age" (p. 177). Lankshear also calls into question the rituals and symbolic activities that are associated with epistemological beliefs or truths (2003). The power of embodied truth, also associated with N. Katherine Hayles's (1999) theory of inscription and incorporation, is linked to knowledge, for the rituals and symbols of a culture are themselves a sort of knowledge. Lankshear further suggests, "the issue of how truth is made present in and through the rituals of [a] community of believers-practitioners has been an abiding concern of theologians for centuries" (2003, p. 182).

Lankshear's observations on the symbolic enactments and embodiments of knowledge, when combined with issues raised by Hayles, changes wrought by virtual arts experiences, and the beliefs surrounding the notion of aesthetic experience indicate the need for further exploration of the implications of knowledge in an online arts learning experience. The problematic of knowledge in the digital age is also implied in the thesis' embedded issue, subject matter. Therefore, in addition to investigating how the subject matter of Art and Music Since 1945 is being interpreted by students, it will be important
to explore the implications of the rituals and symbolic meanings associated with the acquisition of arts learning experiences via the Internet. In doing so, insights might be achieved regarding the issue of what constitutes a meaningful, productive learning experience in an online arts education course.

Summary

The concept of knowledge was explored through brief discussion of several issues related to knowledge in online arts learning experiences: Computer technologies in education and in everyday life, knowledge specific to arts education, the relationship of arts knowledge with the concept of aesthetic experience, and the implications of virtualizing art objects. It was speculated that online arts learning experiences represent a challenge to established modes of knowing in arts education, because, in disrupting dichotomies like online/offline, fine arts/everyday experiences, and real/virtual, online arts learning experiences undermine assumptions about stable foundations for knowledge. A dissolution of epistemological and ontological foundations will necessitate asking not only what constitutes a meaningful, productive learning experience in an online arts education course, but what role arts learning experiences have in contexts of the contemporary lifeworld.
References


CHAPTER 7

SPACE-TIME PERCEPTIONS: CONTEXT AND DISTANCE
IN AN ONLINE ARTS LEARNING EXPERIENCE

As our understanding of the past intersects with our vision
of the future, whether we like it or not our relationship to
the present is changed. ~K. Rose & J. Kincheloe

Introduction

This chapter, which takes up the issue of space-time perceptions in the
postmodern world, explores the situated nature of epistemology and ontology. Several
interrelated ideas will be discussed, beginning with the spatial, temporal and aesthetic
issues relating to concepts of postmodern contexts. Finally, because of its role in
redefining the place and time of learning, the issue of distance and several related
conceptual associations are considered.

Postmodern contexts

Context, as a timely inquiry area for educators and researchers, can be linked to
careers arising from the conditions of postmodernism. The era of postmodernism, with
its attendant fragmentation of rational, positivistic thinking and deconstruction of
universal truths and totalizing narratives is often contrasted against the social and spatial ordering and linear conceptions of time associated with the modern period. As a result, postmodern conceptions of space and time become, instead of immutable qualities of existence, contested systems of thought which tend to illuminate shifts in cultural, political and economic practices. In short, the idea of context in the postmodern milieu, in terms of conceptualizations of space and time, might be less focused upon the literal structures and temporal symbols of everyday life as it concerned with the social conditions that shape and are shaped by such structures and symbols.

David Harvey (1990), building upon the earlier conclusions of Dilthey and Durkheim, argues that the concepts of space and time cannot be extricated from the material practices that reproduce social life. Harvey (1990) proposes that beneath the veneer of common sense and seemingly ‘natural’ ideas about space and time, there lie hidden terrains of ambiguity, contradiction, and struggle. Conflicts arise not merely out of admittedly diverse subjective appreciations, but because different subjective material qualities of space and time are deemed relevant to social life in different situations. Important battles likewise occur in the realms of scientific, social, and aesthetic theory, as well as in practice. How we represent space and time in theory matters, because it affects how we and others interpret and then act with respect to the world. (p. 205)

By acknowledging the conflicts inherent in diverse understandings of seemingly immutable qualities such as space and time, Harvey offers a strong rationale for an examination of the art education practices that are tied to particular notions of space and time. Problematizing space and time in this way allows for the possibility of critically evaluating the relationship of art education’s material processes to social reproduction in space and time. This problematization also invites consideration of how material
processes such as art-making, art-viewing, and the writing of art history are tied to spatial and temporal rituals within certain art education contexts.

Context: A cross-disciplinary inquiry

The issue of context is clearly cross-disciplinary, offering a socio-cultural lens through which concepts like agency, power, and historicity can be viewed. Increasingly, the notion of context is surfacing as a topic of interest of contemporary researchers and theorists in education (Burnett, 2000; Callejo Pérez, Fain & Slater, 2004; Hasebe-Ludt & Hurrren, 2003) with one educator questioning "whether schools should continue to be the main places of focus for curriculum scholars" (Schubert, 2004, p. xi).

Yet another education researcher (Gruenewald, 2003) argues for the establishment of a new education tradition that synthesizes the discourses of "critical pedagogy" and "placed-based education" into a "critical pedagogy of place" (p. 3). From a critical pedagogy of place perspective, an art educator's considerations of the intended or unintended consequences of learning context might result in questions such as: How does space or time legitimize arts learning? Legitimize objects and their histories? Legitimatize subject positions? What is lost; what is gained in de/re-contextualizing the times and places of arts learning?

The idea of context also informs research in "ubiquitous computing" (Dourish, 2004; Hallnäs & Redström, 2002), an aspect of computer design first appearing in 1991 in the writings of Mark Weiser. Researcher Paul Dourish (2004) explains the dual origins of the notion of context in ubiquitous computing as an amalgam of issues in both
computer systems development and social science. This blending of different intellectual traditions offers a research framework for responding to current concerns in computer/human interaction design, in an era where computation has transitioned from the desktop to portable systems designed to assimilate unobtrusively into one’s lifestyle. Ubiquitous computing research then, brings focus to the use of technology in the social setting, drawing attention to the “mundane details of lived experience” that shape, and are shaped by, computer experiences (Dourish, 2004, p. 29).

Ubiquitous computing research serves as a reminder that rapid evolution in the scope and quality of human-computer interactions is a substantial and important factor to consider when conceptualizing a research agenda in any field, including the discipline of art education. If computer technologies are becoming more ubiquitous, and as some might suggest, “intimate” (Bell, Brooke, Churchill & Paulos, 2003), then what are the ramifications of locating arts learning, a subject which often resonates personally, affectively, and phenomenologically in the aesthetic experience, within online education? Does the online learning environment manifest unique conditions that contribute to or detract from an aesthetic experience?

Finally, the issues of power, agency, and context, when merged with issues in the field of ubiquitous computing create some interesting speculations about the transformation of the learner, from empty vessel to “sociological self” (Agger, 2004, p. 146). Sociologist Ben Agger offers that the “intrusion of the world into personal life via information and entertainment technologies” can spur a reactionary resistance that might eventually result in movements to take back one’s own life (2004, p. 156). Agger invites
contemplation of the consequences of the Internet’s ubiquity, asking if “the human benefits of information technology outweigh the ample costs of institutional de-
differentiation and the possible demise of the self” (2004, p. 145). He argues optimistically that we are

now at a stage of society and culture... in which the self can flourish only if it becomes a sociological self, using the efficiencies and social opportunities afforded by the Internet to theorize, to think conceptually about the world and then to write essays, stories, and even fiction that mobilize others to rethink their lives. (p 146)

Agger’s conceptualization of a more informed, creative citizen is echoed by writer William Butler O’Connor (1997) who theorizes that Internet is changing the dynamics of a culture wherein only certain people—cultural producers like artists, writers, musicians, or playwrights—create culture that an audience consumes. Referring to the computer as a “mechanical muse” (1997, para. 6), O’ Connor claims that access to software and technology that allows the production and transmission of one’s creative ideas, images, or texts with relative ease is opening up greater possibilities for people to become producers of creative culture, rather than simply those who experience the creations of others.

O’ Connor’s and Agger’s observations hold relevance for a study of the online course Art and Music Since 1945 because, in raising questions about the possible blurring of boundaries between creative producers and their audiences, and the possibilities of gaining greater critical perspectives on the world, they imply that internet and computer technologies are causing epistemological changes. And, it is these changes, also celebrated in neopragmatist philosopher Richard Shusterman’s theory of pragmatist aesthetics, that might herald a need for an arts education format that flexibly adapts to the

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new spaces and times where creativity and insights are occurring. Given the issues of context, ubiquity, and agency in Internet and computer technologies and the issue of online learning, might a paradigm of ubiquitous education, even ubiquitous arts learning emerge from cross-disciplinary research connections made between research in ubiquitous computing and research in online learning?

The issue of distance in the postmodern world

Online arts courses can be linked to a rich history of adult distance education. Beginning with the popular Chautauqua Institution correspondence school of the late 1800’s (Jarvis, 1993), distance education blossomed though the proliferation of home study courses which carried education to remote areas and populations that were not being served though traditional classroom-based education.

Later, as image reproduction and information transmission technologies grew in sophistication and availability, other modes of distance learning were provided by magazines, radio art instruction initiatives, and arts education television programming and films (White, 2004). Referring to home-study courses as the first stage of education based on space-time distanciation, Jarvis (1993) points out that distance education eventually evolved from the study of an entire academic subject, or discipline, to become discrete, modular units designed to be utilized for a specific time period. Today, a definition of distance education (and one that also applies to the online course Art and Music Since 1945) is “a form of education in which organized learning opportunities are usually provided through a technical medium to learners who normally study individually, and removed from the teacher in both time and space” (Jarvis, 1993).
Although *Art and Music Since 1945* is related to other forms of distance education, by being administered entirely over the Internet with no face-to-face meetings required, this course represents a very new education format for the discipline of art education.

The term distance is significant to this thesis in two ways. First, distance is associated with a metaphorical gap, or distance, that exists between a student and an arts experience. Second, the concept of distance, as an important component of an aesthetic experience (Bullough, 1912/1984), is associated with a particular psychological relationship with art. Considered together, the conceptual associations with the term distance point to unresolved issues regarding arts learning and aesthetic experiences in online arts education.

**Two conceptual associations with the term distance**

The first conceptual association of distance—that is the metaphorical gap that separates student from arts experiences, is of particular interest to me for it encapsulates what I suspect is a significant issue in an online arts education learning experience: the particular concerns of the arts novice who, prior to enrolling in the online arts education course has had little or no experience with art. In the first week of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, discussion postings abound with confessions of concern about a lack of arts experience, or worries about an unfamiliarity with museums. I consider this trepidation to be emblematic of a cultural mindset that art, or the aesthetic experiences associated with the places and conditions associated with viewing art, is something that is distant from the everyday world. Certainly, an online arts learning experience is defined
by distance, that is, its very premise is that art can be viewed, experienced, or even found meaningful, in places that are far from the spaces of museums, classrooms, or far from the artworks themselves.

Interestingly, this conceptualization of distance learning implies a paradox, for if the goal of arts learning is to help students increase their knowledge of art, increase their sensitivity to art’s role in society, and become capable of analyzing and relating to art on a personal level, then how can increasing the distance between students and their objects of study be effective? In the case of an online arts learning experience, perhaps students find the space-time distanciation to be a benefit. In other words, I speculate that distancing qualities of an online class might actually be viewed by students as an advantage, for an online arts learning course provides a zone of safety, even anonymity, within which students, free from scrutiny of others, may access the arts learning experience in privacy and at their own pace. Moreover, it is also possible that encountering the arts in a distance learning environment may decrease self-consciousness and increase receptiveness to new ideas.

The next conceptual association connected with the notion of distance in an online arts learning experience originates in the idea of “Psychical Distance,” first described by Edward Bullough in 1912. Bullough believed psychical distance was a necessary factor and aesthetic principle in an art experience. According to Bullough (1984/1912), an “antinomy of distancing,” or balance between proximity and distance, will determine the quality and meaning of an aesthetic experience. In Bullough’s view, the qualitative nature of an aesthetic encounter is inextricable from the way in which a person mentally relates

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to an art object or art experience, that is, how much they can (or cannot) identify with, or connect personal meaning with, the object or experience. Thus, the greater the psychical distance between person and art, the greater the empathic disconnect between a person and art. The absence of meaningful connections essentially undermines a full, robust aesthetic encounter. In short, Bullough would assert that the experience of aesthetic pleasure is highly individualized, contingent and subjective. Moreover, the concept of psychical distancing implies that aesthetic experiences are influenced by both the artwork itself and a viewer’s personal attributes or subjective state, which phenomenologically speaking, would extend to the context of viewing.

Going further with the idea of distancing is Fenner’s (2004), notion of “counter aesthetic elements” (p. 68). Fenner (2004) explains that a counter aesthetic element is an element of an aesthetic object which is: unintended in the creation of the object; generally selected out in attention to the object; and, generally, if selected in or attended to, such as to lower the aesthetic quality of the object, or at the very least not to increase the quality and to interfere with the aesthetically salient elements of the object. (p. 68)

Fenner (2004) broaches the subject of counter aesthetic elements to bring attention to the reality that most aesthetic experiences are not perfect, rather they, like all other life experiences are subject to contingencies which impact their reception and meaning.

In an example that can be related to the notion of psychical distance, Fenner explains how aesthetic overload can occur as a result of repeatedly listening to one’s favorite music on a CD. In this case, by having unlimited access to an object of aesthetic pleasure, a counter aesthetic effect of aesthetic overload would be caused by the music’s unrestricted availability. This example is important because it illustrates that common
technologies which decrease obstacles to an aesthetic object or event—like CD recordings of a favorite concert—may be viewed as a counter aesthetic element that will have an influence on aesthetic responses. Like Bullough’s antimony of distancing which advanced the idea that a proper balance of distance and proximity is necessary to effect the ideal aesthetic experience, Fenner’s explanation of the delicate balance between pleasure and aesthetic overload reminds of the important role that distance plays in human experience.

Most importantly, Fenner (2004) points out that even though unlimited access to pleasurable aesthetic experience might cause aesthetic overload, it is still preferable to have this imperfect experience, rather than not have any aesthetic experience at all. Further, Fenner concedes that rather than view acceptance of such imperfections as a “celebration of schlock,” (2004, p. 79) it is preferable to adopt the view that more occasions for exposure to aesthetic objects might yield more potential for aesthetic pleasure. The notion of a delicate balance between distance and proximity that influences the quality of one’s experience, needs further exploration when considering the space-time contingencies that characterize an Internet-based arts learning experience. At what point is distance acceptable, even advantageous for offering a diversity and plenitude of exposure to aesthetic experiences, and at what point does it become a counter aesthetic element that undermines an experience?

Fenner also asserts that “descriptions of aesthetic experience qua experience are as much psychological matters as philosophical” (2004, p. 77), pointing out that the mental and physical circumstances of a person’s experience will influence one’s attitude
toward, or reception of, an aesthetic experience. On this very issue, Bullough (1984/1912) asserts that “art has the more chance of appealing to us the better it finds us prepared for its particular kind of appeal” (p. 462). Continuing, Bullough explains that the “success and intensity of [art’s] appeal would seem, therefore, to stand in direct proportion to the completeness with which it corresponds with our intellectual and emotional peculiarities and the idiosyncrasies of our experience” (1984, p. 462).

Bullough’s and Fenner’s beliefs about the connection of preparedness for an art experience and the subsequent enjoyment of the experience resonates with me for I have often wondered how the online course Art and Music Since 1945 prepares students for an offline experience with art. Moreover, I acknowledge that this is a slippery question, for if epistemological and ontological sensibilities are changing with the digital age, by what criteria might we judge preparedness, or even enjoyment?

Bullough’s statements on the effects of psychical distance and the consequences of preparation for aesthetic experience, joined with Fenner’s ideas about counter aesthetic elements, aesthetic overload, and increasing opportunities for aesthetic experience, bear further consideration in regard to student experience in Art and Music Since 1945. For, although the idea of arts learning that is distanced from traditional times and places of art education is not new in the general history of distance education, the acquisition of arts learning via the Internet is relatively new. The manner in which personal and intimate rituals of computer use seem to open up new realms of experience—experience that includes accessing arts learning events in the spaces and times of one’s choice—leads me to believe that questions must be asked about the role of psychical distancing, aesthetic
overload, and psychological and physical effects in the online arts education learning format.

Summary

Although the notion of distance education is not new—and indeed it could be argued that any learning event in a classroom involves some sort of distance between teacher and student or student and subject matter—the space-time compression that characterizes Internet learning contexts implies a compression, and even fragmentation, of subjective experiences. In fact, Nick Mansfield (2000) argues that speed is a sort of “sublime violence that brings an unparalleled thrill, but also a sense of human renewal, a renewal that will shatter the physical and sentimental limits of our subjectivity in order to make a wholly new experience of our world possible” (p. 150). The social construction of space-time perceptions will be a vital issue to pursue in the dissertation research. Space-time awareness not only affects actions on an individual level, it is also the means by which social realities are generated and legitimized.
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CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION:

THE INTERSECTION OF DISCOURSES

*We live in the center of a physical poetry, a geography that would be intolerable except for the non-geometry that lives there.*

~Wallace Stevens, 1951

Introduction

Having explored methodology, thematic concepts, and the personal qualities of the online course Art and Music Since 1945, I now turn to a discussion of how these ideas might be related to one another, and what implications these relationships hold for my research. In the discussion, art education and Internet discourses are conceptualized as merging and meeting in dynamic, contingent intersections. Foucault’s theory of discourse and the idea of remediation as theorized by Bolter & Grusin (1996), are the conceptual anchors of the discussion.

Intersecting discourses in an online arts learning experience

As stated earlier, I view experience as being transactional and phenomenological, and that questions of knowledge and being in the world, “always refer us back to our
world, to our lives, to who we are and to what makes us write, read, and talk together" (van Manen, 1990, p. 46). Taking a poststructural view of this statement, I can postulate that the shared realities which allow us to us write, read, and talk together, can be understood as the result of power/knowledge positionings of both researcher and research subjects—positionings shaped by contingency, contextuality, and final closure of meanings (Peters & Burbules, 2004).

Additionally, the shared realities that constitute the interpenetrating contexts of online and offline learning can be understood as discourses. Theorist Michel Foucault (1972) conceptualizes discourse as a practice that produces the very objects and subjects of which a person can speak. Elaborating on this concept, Peters & Burbules (2004) summarize Foucault’s idea of discursive formation as a unity of the following criteria: “reference to common objects of analysis, types of statement, systems of concepts, and theoretical orientation” (p 61). Burbules & Peters (2004) take care to emphasize that the power/knowledge arrangements in a discourse are not simply “instruments of repression and control, wielded by some over others” (p. 63), but instead are relationships that, even if asymmetrical at times, are also productive. Most importantly, they stress that discourse is not “just a political concept, but an epistemic one, therefore, “we witness power in ruling institutions and authorities, and even in ways of thinking and speaking” (2004, p. 63).

Following Foucault’s logic, I speculate that the online course Art and Music Since 1945 exemplifies intersecting and interpenetrating discourses—an art education discourse and an Internet discourse. Conceptualizing the online course Art and Music Since 1945 as
an intersection of discourses helps to frame a space within which I might explore the transactional experiences that bring together arts learning novices and the artworld through Internet technologies. I believe that these intersecting discourses will not only be a rich source of ideas about the purpose and value of arts learning experiences in the contemporary world, they will also be a site for studying the conflicts, resistances and struggles inherent in a situation wherein epistemologies specific to each discourse meet and effect transformations in the practices of everyday life.

The intersection of art education and Internet discourses is a theoretical merging, and therefore is not a static, boundaried, or mapped site of convergence, but rather a type of non-geography—a dynamic process that produces social realities and influences subjectivities. As a distinctive power/knowledge arrangement that unites people through shared activities, goals, history, and language, the art education discourse exemplifies a particular reality. This reality revolves around the study of fine art and related issues, the display of art, historical studies, as well as all of the interconnecting realities, rituals, and beliefs that constitute what is known as an artworld today. Characterized by the priorities of speed, access, and immediacy, the Internet discourse is invested with the myriad ideologies, economics, cultural significances, and rituals that constitute the idea of progressive technology today.

I bring attention to the idea of intersecting discourses to emphasize the contextual, transactional, and relational nature of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, and to foreground the necessity of submitting taken-for-granted concepts to scrutiny. In dynamic, intersecting discourses, epistemologies can be expected to shift, merge, even
initiate new power arrangements, viewpoints, theories, and practices which can subtly or overtly change the conceptualization of a discourse’s objects, experiences, and shared meanings. The terms chosen for exploration in this thesis, *student*, *knowledge*, and *space-time perceptions*, are only one option out of myriad possibilities for scrutinizing contested and transformative shifts in epistemology and ontology in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*.

Created by, and enclosed within, the internal logic of the thesis text, the terms *student*, *knowledge*, and *space-time perceptions* may seem to project an aura of stability, however, the contingent, contextual relationships of these concepts create their own shifting auras of meaning. As a result, in my future dissertation research, it will be important to examine how the meanings of concepts associated with arts experiences might shift as arts learning experiences leave spatially and temporally boundaried art education classrooms to appear within the student’s choice of contexts.

**Remediation and the desire for immediacy**

Study of the relationships of concepts, and how such relationships take on certain meanings and resonances in particular contexts is undertaken by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1996) in their theoretical investigation of new media. Their method of exploring how “wholly new forms of mediation” function transparently to conceal their origins in earlier forms of mediation, becomes a “metadiscursive critique” (Sterne, 1999, p. 273) that illuminates various features of an historical desire for “immediacy” and “hypermediacy” (Bolter & Grusin, 1996). In addition, Bolter & Grusin’s identification of
the continuities and flows that connect what is believed to be new and innovative with the desires, actions, and objects that came before is indebted to Foucault’s method of “looking for historical affiliations and resonances and not for origins” (Bolter & Grusin, 1996, p. 315).

Their identification of connections between “old” or traditional media and new media led Bolter & Grusin to theorize that the concept of “mediation” long unquestioned in its association with new media and computer technologies is, in effect, a remediation. Remediation is defined as the co-opting of one form of mediation between subject and the world (for example, a photograph or text that ‘mediates’ a subject and a representation of something) and recasting it as a new concept (for example a website or CD recording)—without disclosing or referencing its repurposing (Bolter & Grusin, 1996). Jonathan Sterne (1999) explains:

Using examples from painting, photography, sculpture, and design, [Bolter & Grusin] argue that there is a vivid tradition among some new forms of expression simultaneously claiming their ability to supercede previous representational forms in terms of an aesthetic of immediacy (i.e., the new medium is supposed to be somehow ‘less’ mediated than the old medium) and, at the same time, a hybridization of content that reworks and refigures the old media with the new, resulting in a multilayered textuality (p. 273)

Bolter’s & Grusin’s concept of a “hybridization of content that reworks and refigures the old media with the new” (Sterne, 1999, p. 273) relates to my speculation about the online course Art and Music Since 1945 possibly being a sort of “aesthetech experience” that effects new arrangements of people and arts learning experiences through their associations within Internet contexts. Moreover, following Bolter’s & Grusin’s argument that remediation is essentially cloaking a long existing impetus for
mediated experiences with the veneer of the new, I am compelled to ask if the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* may, beneath its innovative aura, be hiding some of arts education's familiar issues of mediation—particularly in the case of access to artworks and arts knowledge. In other words, are online arts courses simply a continuation of an artworld discourse that effectively separates people from art through specific rituals and activities? Given that computer access is still distributed along class, gender, age, and regional boundaries, what is gained, and what might be lost, by recasting the socio-cultural mediation of art through museums and classrooms as a technologically innovative form of arts education that advances the assumption of an increased, less restrictive access to arts learning experiences?

Relating Bolter's & Grusin's theorization of mediation and remediation to the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* and the concepts of *aesthetech experience*, *student, knowledge* and *space-time perceptions* explored in this thesis is significant in that it brings attention to the repurposing of ideas, concepts, words, and even ontologies and epistemologies that can occur as discourses merge and shift. Bolter & Grusin demonstrate that what is believed to be innovative merits closer investigation to trace the continuities and flows between desires and their representations in the material processes of discourses. Therefore by exploring how students interpreted their experiences in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, I hope to gain an understanding of how mediation and remediation shape students' online arts learning experiences—an understanding that may lead to insights about art education's choice of teaching methods and formats in a digital age.
The theory of remediation can be connected with other theoretical frameworks. For example, in acknowledging that meanings will inevitably displace and substitute for other meanings in different contexts over time, the idea of remediation can be aligned with poststructural perspectives on difference. In poststructural theory, concepts become meaningful only in their relationships of *différance* (Derrida, 1974), that is, it is only through “differentiation that signification and interpretation become possible” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 69). Therefore, concepts like *student*, *knowledge*, and *space-time perceptions* used in this thesis have meanings that are perpetually in play, because they derive their definitions and significance through binary oppositions—or what each concept is *not*. Moreover, because meanings and significations are shaped in particular contexts, concepts like *student*, *knowledge*, and *space-time perceptions* can offer clues to understanding the meanings and functions of arts experiences today by how these concepts might differ from their past connotations in art education.

Remediation can also be linked to psychoanalytic theory. In fact, Bolter & Grusin (1996) posit that the “reciprocal nature of immediacy and hypermediacy has a psychological dimension” (p. 355) in that the desire for merging with the real of an experience, which is enacted in a proximity and simultaneity of mediated experiences gives a subject a point of view—or subjective position in relationship to a mediating technology. However, showing affiliation with Lacan’s theory, mediation is conceptualized as signifying lack, since one’s desire to be united with the real of an experience cannot be achieved through mediation. Further complicating this lack is remediation which implies that one mediation always substitutes for another, closing off
any possibility that the desired objects or experiences will ever be fully present. The psychological implications of remediation will be important to my study of student experience in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* for I am interested in the relationships of online arts learning and aesthetic experience, especially how the distance and proximity associated with Internet technologies relates to the personal meaning and resonance of online arts learning experiences.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I explained that the very experience of what each person or society deems to be “reality” is a complex and contingent interplay of meanings that shape and are shaped by the transactions we have with our environments and with each other. Moreover, I explained that these realities exemplify particular discourses. In the case of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*, I speculated that an artworld discourse and technology discourse intersect to problematize and give new meanings to concepts and ideas previously associated with each discourse. Additionally, the concept of remediation was introduced to explain how concepts associated with discourses might take on new meanings and resonances in different historical contexts. I believe it is necessary to explore if the online arts learning experience is a remediation of an art education discourse in its creation of particular relationships and proximities to art and arts knowledge.

The online arts learning experience has a spatial-temporal ephemerality that is decidedly different from the experiences within traditional classroom. In the future study
it will be important to explore the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* through a
discourse sensitive lens to develop an understanding of what is significant about an arts
learning experience which shifts an art education discourse from its traditional temporal
and spatial moorings into the immediacy and innovation associated with an Internet
discourse.
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CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Possibility cuts both ways, for it can be foreboding or enriching. Yet, we have no guarantee of which direction our possibilities shall take. In short, we move slowly hand over hand, reading the consequences of our actions and our thoughts as they emerge in the crucible of existential experience. ~John J. McDermott

In the spirit of hermeneutics, I’ve drawn upon the discourses of pragmatism, phenomenology, and the language/reality concerns of poststructuralism and psychoanalytic theory to support and shape this thesis and to conceptualize the future study of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. This confluence of methodologies promises to incite the myriad issues entangled in online social research. As a result, I regard both this thesis and future dissertation research as a dynamic interplay (van Manen, 1990) among multiple research activities that will honor and preserve the complexity and distinctiveness of the object of study. Like Deborah Britzman (2000, p. 30), I admit that I am haunted by “poststructuralist concerns” as I conceptualize my research goals and plans. Therefore, the dynamic interplay that I envision this thesis and future study to be is an endeavor necessarily fraught with the uncertainties, ambiguities,
and “inevitable tensions” when knowledge is conceptualized as “partial, as interested, and as performative of relations of power” (Britzman, 2000, p. 37).

In addition to wrestling with methodological issues in this thesis, I explored conceptual associations with the themes student, knowledge and space-time perceptions to help expose the assumptions and suppositions that are influencing the development of my inquiry into the online course Art and Music Since 1945. Moreover, recent literature was consulted and questions were raised in an attempt to determine an appropriate approach for pursuing the grand tour question, How did students interpret their experience and construct knowledge in the online course Art and Music Since 1945?, in the future dissertation research.

To explain the relationship of the chosen themes, as well as emphasize the tensions that arise from changes in meanings when concepts are recontextualized and remediated in different contexts and historical milieus, I introduced the idea of intersecting discourses. Moreover, it was explained that the process of examining the continuities and connections that arise from the transactional experiences in the online course Art and Music Since 1945 through a discourse sensitive lens will be prioritized in the future study.

As I conclude this thesis and chart my path for the dissertation research to come, I proceed in the manner of “researcher-as-interpretive bricoleur” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 634), who, through the experiences of interacting with others and the world, will add to, adjust, or rework understandings as needed in the course of research. Complicating the issue of research into the online course Art and Music Since 1945 is the complexity and

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indeterminacy that marks both the current climate of qualitative research and the current milieu of the field of art education. This shifting and unsettled landscape influences the questions I am raising, even the methodologies and methods that will shape my inquiry.

It is my conviction that concepts as broad and unwieldy as art, Internet technologies, experience, and education are best approached from a confluence of methodologies. Analogous to Laurel Richardson's conceptualization of research as "crystallization" (2003, p. 518), research into *Art and Music Since 1945* shimmers wildly with myriad, multifaceted possibilities for its conceptualization and study. As I develop my research plan, I am heartened by Patti Lather's confidence in a "responsible deconstruction" in which "responsibility in not knowing" means to ask "what would it be to learn otherwise here in order to set to work anew, wanting 'more and other' in terms of the relations of places of thought, welcoming the horizon of alterity that necessarily haunts all projects of responsible criticism" (2004, p. 4).

I also find support in Maxine Greene's remarks about a "deconstructionist critique" becoming a relevant approach for "educational researchers perturbed about what is 'normal' and 'real' and whether discourse does or does not refer to a 'world'" (1994, p. 446). Thusly, I envision research of the online course *Art and Music Since 1945* to be an opportunity for responsible deconstruction of assumptions of what it means to teach and learn in arts education, recognizing that questioning such assumptions necessitates that I work within the light of a horizon of alterity as I wrestle with the what ifs and uncertainties regarding the experiences of students in the online course *Art and Music Since 1945*. 

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CHAPTER 10

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