



Educational arts research as aesthetic politics

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In the ongoing argument that research in the arts attempts to do something beyond traditional dominant methodological models, recent and growing awareness of how media and digital technology have changed us and become unmediated extensions of our own bodies must be considered. We argue the necessity of a participatory methodology working across discipline boundaries to guide society's new potentials into creative means of self-augmentation, qualitative growth and continuing variation of the world.

Still immersed in the scientific methodology of perception, Eisner (1998) argued that arts research is an auxiliary process to empirical methods where what is imagined can be perceived and in which new possibilities are offered to perception. Though an important educational goal for decades this stops short of acknowledging perception as not simply a visual experience, a passive event or a one-direction event, nor does it notice consciousness as too small to take in the fullness of sensation (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008). Art viewed as something to orient perception too often catches within a loop of construction and interpretation only serving to reinforce routines of sense-making. It misses the very material, corporeal effects of participation, a more contemporary argument in light of media/digital technologies that this paper will address. Although truths of claims and theories in research become evident in the experience their claims make possible, the arts are less referential than language, leaving more room for what Massumi (2003) calls affect.

Massumi refers to affect as our "margin of manoeuvrability, the where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do in every present situation" (p.3), our ability to affect and be affected in relation to others. Both Massumi and Grossberg (1992) claim that while emotion has function and meaning, affect remains unformed and unstructured, a difficulty for traditional forms of research. Massumi explains that affect regulation has now taken the place of ideologies, making it important for understanding power. This paper will explore the ways in which educational arts research, embedded inextricably in new technologies (whether or not it uses them), tries achieving something quite different from traditional forms of research through its focus on affect. One of the notable ways in which this is happening in educational research today is in new approaches to community engaged public art as public pedagogy (see Bickel, et al., 2007)

Mass media and digital technology have created the need for a mobile participatory aesthetic politics to counter the current mobilization of power in capitalist society and to expand the range of affective potential. As boundaries for interaction become more defined by feedback loops than surfaces (Hayles, 1999), power has moved from power "over" an individual to bearing on our movement in the form of checkpoints. Our passage or access is continually controlled by technology, even as it is enabled. There are checkpoints at grocery stores, airports and banks. Disciplinary power is not fundamentally normative anymore but works by modulating affect through selecting particular stories for analysis and information and feeding them back in ways that change how we experience what potentials we have. We begin to change the way we live, instinctively limiting

movements and contacts with people. As a result of seemingly narrowed options, a new disciplinary movement-based power locks individuals tighter than ever to predefined cultural codings.

Using media to modulate affect plays on subjective experience of emotion thereby constraining more objective experiences of affect attached to movements of the body, to what we do and where we go. Massumi (2003) argues that alternative political action does not have to fight against affective power but needs to respond similarly with aesthetic approaches to politics where there are objective degrees of freedom that flip constraints over into conditions of freedom, rather than into affect's coded or conventional expression in emotion. In beginning arguments defending educational arts research, Eisner (1988) asserted one of art's benefits was, when it was well crafted, it captured both our attention and allegiance. Now, in a time of globalization and overwhelming multimedia, this argument does not anticipate the more significant and urgent issue of affect.

Williams (in Ngai, 2005) explains the difficulty that affect creates when constituted by social experience in that it does "not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before [it] exert[s] palpable pressures and set[s] effective limits on experience and action" (p. 26). In a capitalist society multimedia offers fulfillment in a world identical to the present one except for the possession of a particular object desired and still lacking. Arts research as aesthetic politics is therefore not a logic for a now-focused consumer society; it seeks as education must, to offer a continuous range of potential for change and instead, explores time as an active ingredient in people's lives. Aesthetic time, as Britzman (2006) describes, runs slowly - inviting the past to mingle with present feelings, prolonging thought paths, and thereby keeping the very possibility of imagining a future that could be radically and structurally other. This is research that returns to what it cannot understand in order to "keep faith with the open character of the future" (Ngai, 2005, p. 389) In these ways, research seeks not so much to know, analyze, or mediate, as to offer experiences of liberating affect from constraint.

In arguing that educational research in the arts is trying to achieve something quite different from traditional methodologies, the intent is not to do away with them. Rather traditional methodologies must be passed through on the way to somewhere else, offering a new empiricism to accompany new understandings of science. Human interpretations have traditionally been brought to the world's perceived order in which science presents organized objects identified by external observers. Now media has taught us instead, the practical and political problem of making visible and thinkable what Rajchman (2000) calls the "unattributable". This requires us to reconsider the ways in which we do research in general.