Nathaniel Stern › In Production (A Narrative Inquiry on Interactive Art)

ABSTRACT: "In Production (A Narrative Inquiry on Interactive Art)" is a free, digital companion chapter to *Interactive Art and Embodiment: The Implicit Body as Performance* (2013, an Arts Future Book with Gylphi Press). In the book, I argue that interactive art suspends and amplifies the ways in which we experience embodiment as per-formed, relational, and emergent. I provide many in-depth case studies of contemporary artworks that develop a practice of embodied philosophy, setting a stage to explore how we inter-act and relate with the world. I offer a critical framework for analyzing interactive artworks and what's at stake in our encounters with them, which can be applied to a wide range of complex and emerging art forms. Here bodies, matter, and their matters, are implicated as always unfolding and enfolded to make what *is*. At stake is the rehearsal of that making, the ways we perform our bodies, media, concepts, and materials.

An/other form of case study, this chapter explores the understanding of interactive art through embodiment, and vice versa, within the production of media art itself. Here, my own continuous process of making interactive and digital work becomes a somewhat fictionalized but rigorous story about performance and relationality – (mostly) from the original perspective of a producing artist doing a humanities-based PhD in an engineering department, rather than a professor writing a book on the topic several years out. I spend the first half of the chapter arguing for arts production as research, and an experimental form of narrative inquiry as the best way to examine the implicit (and explicit) connections that are made in the studio. The second half uses affirmative methods of creative and scholarly writing to implicate the processes that led to the book's core ideas, and continue to inform, perform, and transform their articulations as texts and works of art.

"In Production" is freely available as part *Networked: a (networked_book) about (networked_art)* (2009-), in a collaborative publication between Gylphi, Arts Future Book, and Turbulence.org. You can view it in any browser, or download it as a Creative Commons-Licensed and DRM-free PDF for your computer, printer, e-reader, or mobile device. The web site that houses this chapter also accepts new contributions. I invite practicing artists, curators, and scholars to make their own additions – whether as artist writings / narrative inquiries, curatorial or critical case studies, or broad theoretical texts – to continue to expand and explore, in reference to the book's title, *Interactive Art and Embodiment: The Implicit Body as Performance*.

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BIOGRAPHY: Nathaniel Stern is an artist and writer, Fulbright grantee and professor, interventionist and public citizen. He has produced and collaborated on projects ranging from ecological, participatory and online interventions, interactive, immersive and mixed reality environments, to prints, sculptures, videos, performances and hybrid forms. His book, *Interactive Art and Embodiment: The Implicit Body as Performance*, takes a close look at the stakes for interactive and digital art, and his ongoing work in industry has helped launch dozens of new businesses, products and ideas. Stern has been featured in the likes of the Wall Street Journal, Guardian UK, Huffington Post, Daily Mail, Washington Post, Daily News, BBC's Today show, Wired, Time, Forbes, Fast Company, Scientific American, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Leonardo Journal of Art, Science and Technology, Rhizome, Furtherfield, Turbulence, and more. According to Chicago's widely popular Bad at Sports art podcast, Stern has "the most varied and strange bio of maybe anyone ever on the show," and South Africa's Live Out Loud magazine calls him a "prolific scholar" as well as artist, whose work is "quite possibly some of the most relevant around." Dubbed one of Milwaukee's "avant-garde" (Journal Sentinel), Stern has been called "an interesting and prolific fixture" (Artthrob.co.za) behind many "multimedia experiments" (Time.com), "accessible and abstract simultaneously" (Art and Electronic Media web site), someone "with starry, starry eyes" (Wired.com) who "makes an obscene amount of work in an obscene amount of ways" (Bad at Sports). According to Caleb A. Scharf at Scientific American, Stern's art is "tremendous fun" but also "fascinating" in how it is "investigating the possibilities of human interaction and art."

Introduction to an Experiment

On the balls of my feet, I involuntarily hover in the doorway to my supervisor's office.

'Was there something else you needed?' Linda asks me, not even turning to face me from her computer. I want there to be. I rack my brain for a second, trying to think through how to voice my anxieties, before I finally summarize them with two simple words.

'I'm... scared?' My tone is surprised; the words come out along with a laugh. And it isn't a nervous laugh; I find my fear funny. And it isn't even real fear; it's academic fear. In both my personal and professional lives, I've done and endured far worse than simply exiting my comfort zone whilst researching and writing a paper. Still, 'I don't know if I can do this.'

Linda turns around to face me. It's hard to read her expression. I had only left the office 15 minutes ago, after convincing her that what I had been calling an autoethnographic experiment is the best way forward for the chapter on my own art, to bring in another aspect of my work and research that is itself material process. I want to find a way to show the moving–thinking–feeling of experience and practice, what I say interactive art *is*, via studio production. I want to narrativize the performed connections of making art that led to my PhD research in the first place. I arrived with a stack of books and articles and notes, and outlined an argument for her, tying together institutionally recognized artistic work, action research, self-reflective design, feminist epistemology, with dashes of performance studies and embodied praxis here and there for good measure. I then looped it all together into how I might make the most dialogical text around my arts and research methodology – through something which has its own creative writing methodology. 'I need,' I'd concluded, 'to be completely present if I'm going to show how this kind of critical thinking can be applied to critique, affection, reflection, and production. And I don't mean that I will simply be writing as a subjective I,' I had asserted – that wasn't enough. 'The art-making process needs to be detailed, on a personal and evocative level, so that readers can extrapolate and imagine their own potential implementation, and implications.' The finale to my monologue was my handing over a copy of *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (Ellis, 2004).

'Oh my god,' was Linda's initial utterance after skimming the first two pages. The book begins in a completely casual and autobiographical literary style, with Carolyn Ellis emphatically, and empathetically, telling a potential graduate student and cancer survivor that of course she must let her experiences not only 'get in the way' of her research on the disease, but inform and guide it at its core. It will anyway, Ellis says in so many words, so why not be honest and transparent about it? The text will be far stronger for it. This is diametrically opposed to what most students in Linda's department are told.

Professor Linda Doyle is a telecommunications engineer, who occasionally takes on artists for PhDs. She likes to shake things up a bit, and sees inherent value to bringing artistic and design practices – not to mention creativity – into usually rigid scientific fields. And she also likes artists that are fearless when it comes to taking on new technologies, and I (mostly) fit into this category. Sometimes her engineering background means she is wholly pragmatic about getting from point A to point B, and that's been extremely helpful in my learning how to write more like a traditional academic (when I decide to do so). An added and unexpected bonus, I learned only after enrolling at Trinity College, is that Linda has little to prove when it comes to the validity of what she does within the academy – as many in the arts, in all fields really, do – and so is herself fearless when it comes to going out on a limb and pushing, sometimes obliterating, boundaries.

From the first time I met Linda, we agreed that my role as an artist is, will, must be, present in my research; by the time I arrived at Trinity, I clearly saw artistic practice *as* research and my writing as inseparable from said research.[1] But I never imagined I would write about my own work in the final text. That idea, not without its own heartaches, was all Linda's; her engineering students are required to write about what they make, why wouldn't I be? Colleagues and supervisors in arts departments at our and other local institutions in Dublin called this idea a 'huge

mistake,' 'unacceptable,' and 'implicitly lacking rigor.' I imagine they'd cringe further at the format we finally agreed on.

I honestly never expected Linda to go along with it, never thought it would be agreed upon. Write about my work, sure, but write about it creatively, autobiographically, with unfolding tensions as opposed to academic assertions? Sounds great to me, I admit, but I didn't actually think my supervisor, the *engineer*, would think so, too. And now that Linda has agreed, rather than feeling elated, I feel uneasy, exposed, up the creek.

Am I even capable of this? What's the narrative arc? Why should people care? How far do I go back – to when I first started making art? Do I begin with my personal motivations or my academic curiosities? These are inseparable, really, but I hadn't always understood them as such. And, perhaps most importantly, aren't the criteria that are meant to help us judge if an autoethnographic text is 'working' pretty vague? Ironically, all the arguments *against* autoethnography, all the points refuted so eloquently – and practically, using the autoethnographic style itself – by Ellis and Bochner and Denzin and countless others I have been reading over the preceding weeks, come flooding into my mind. And Linda sees it in my eyes, in my precarious doorway hovering.

Her response is twofold. She points at a chair for me to sit down, and while I oblige, she starts with the academic and pragmatic side of things.

'You're really far along here, Nat.' Her voice is just above a whisper, as if she doesn't want the neighbors – office neighbors that is – to hear. And she also purposefully calls me 'Nat'; only my family and other people who have known me for ages – as a teenager – call me Nat, rather than Nathaniel. Linda doesn't fall into this small crowd, but has met my family, seen 'Nat' in action, and is probably trying to make me feel more at ease. 'You could always edit, re-write, or cut this if we agree you have to. You have more than enough traditionally rigorous academic text in the rest of your dissertation, and certainly enough time for changes. Yes, you are walking through a minefield of controversy in several different disciplines. No, it may not be worth it, given how small a percentage of the writing is about your own work. But it may very well wind up being one of the major contributions your research and text have to offer.'

This takes a few moments to sink in. When it does, I'm not sure I want it. This is way bigger than me and my practice. If I didn't believe that I had something to offer in a comprehensive text, if I thought that my 'biggest contributions' were available only through my art – even if that included practice as well as the fruits of my labor – I wouldn't be doing all this writing. Linda pauses briefly, then goes on as if reading my mind, with the more personal and second – but not secondary – response.

'This is so you, Nathaniel,' she starts. 'You are an artist and a writer. That is your practice and your research, and the two are one and the same. You're a storyteller and interrogator who works in and with many forms. Although the engineer in me wants to find a way, you simply can't have the results of your multimodal explorations only represented in and as argumentative writing.[2] All your hand-waving and excitement are themselves embodied through narrative voice and activity. This is exactly the place where your ideas come from. This is why your critical methodology includes looking at movement itself: "body-language,"' she laughs with the last four syllables – a chapter title – but then goes on after a half-second pause, and with a more serious tone.

'I'm not that comfortable with this style of writing either. I think you have amazing courage for trying. I don't know how it'll fit, how it'll work, if the University high-ups will be OK with –' Linda shakes her head and waves her hand as if swatting that idea away. My mind wanders to a paper I read recently, where the author notes the accepted practice of 'experimental discourse' and writing for 'respectable, established' academics, but never for 'graduate students writing dissertations' (Spigelman, 2001: 68).[3] I already know Linda and I both agree this is worth trying.

We both keep quiet for what seems a long minute, and then I get an unexpected rush of energy, picking up where I left off. 'It's really just a chapter on one of the many avenues of my research practice, and how it feeds back into itself. That's it. I have to make two concrete arguments.' I loosely hold my right thumb up in front of me,

'One, *why it's there*: to show the ongoing development and understanding of interactive art through embodiment, and vice versa, but in arts production and *that* experience, in addition to historical criticism and the museum space. My approach to, and practice of, viewing and criticizing art continues to be per-formed, as in birthed and changed, along with my experience and practice of *making* art. I am trying to engage with incipient materials and ideas, and their emergent relations, and then attempting to carry that framework of engagement over from my studio to the gallery, and back again.' I pause, reflecting on what I just said, and nodding to myself (I hope I don't look smug), before I go on. 'And,' I flip out my second, pointer finger along with the first,

'Two, *why a narrative inquiry* is most befitting: because everything here,' I wave my hand around as if my computer and notes and ideas are in the air, 'is about material process *along with* critical inquiry: moving and thinking and feeling provoked through affective evocation. It's about how they are all mutually emergent and, you know, *with*,' I criss-cross my two extended fingers to illustrate that last word. I stop again for a moment, this time keeping still and nodding only in my mind. 'Those two points are a good foundation, whether my readers – or whomever – like and agree with the style I've chosen or not'.

We both breathe in, purse our lips, then breathe out at the same time. We look at each other and laugh-snort awkwardly. I close my eyes for a moment to think: this is going to be really difficult. I open my eyes and continue, more slowly.

'I just have to get across that while my writing and making, and my moving–thinking–feeling between them, are entwined *practically*, the best way to re-present them and what they each accomplish in text is by very different – and thus also obviously separate – means. We can be blunt about it: narrative is affective.'

I'm silent for a few seconds, then add, 'I should also make clear that this chapter can be read as staging an implicit body as performance. It situates bodies and matter as always per-formed (emergent and relational, etc), and it implicates other conceptual and material forms and agencies in that ongoing formation.' I look at the ceiling as if it will tell me what comes next, then go on. 'It performs art and philosophy as potential practices of one another. It simply,' I shake my hands at the air a bit 'starts earlier, whilst the work is in production in the studio. It keeps going as it carries on through situations in the gallery, then back to the studio again – feeding into the next work, and so on. I'm... *amplifying* that experience, creating a kind of semblance of it. Potentializing it.'

I take a long breath and look at Linda again. 'I'll make a story about how each question leads to the following piece, in that quirky way you keep telling me I do, but stress that this is examining production, affection, and reflection with the same method, or at least the same theoretical and creative approach, as the rest of my text and work.'

Another pause. I sigh, and my supervisor half smiles / half grins.

'I think you can write this,' Linda answers firmly. 'I think you can make this interesting, and make all your points within the narrative.' She nods, almost to herself. 'But I also think you have to convince Nicole that it's the right way to proceed.' I raise my eyebrows. 'If you can convince her, you'll have convinced yourself,' she wisely finishes. 'And also me,' she attaches to the end a moment later.

I get up to leave. 'I don't think Nicole will go for it,' I say as I walk out, but I'm happy we've agreed on a threshold test for our unfolding plan. My wife will give me a run for my money on this. She'll save me from myself – and not for the first time, I laugh internally. Like I always say: Nicole is the smart one; I'm the loud one.

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NOTES

1. Here I'm reminded of Elaine Bass Jenks. When studying a group of visu- ally impaired children, including her own, Jenks continuously reminds herself and the reader that 'My mom role was always present.... My self image as a mom affected my study as well.... And as a researcher who is a mom, I believe I expend more energy researching a topic that affects my child than I would if I studied a more distant "other"' (Jenks, 2002: 180–1). Similarly – though certainly not as intensely – my own role as an artist relates to my roles as writer and researcher of the arts, and as husband and father and teacher and collaborator (and friend and, and, and...). I am always playing all of these roles at once, but I expend more energy on given texts and their analyses if they affect my other practices.

2. As Ellis asserts in a collaborative paper with her partner, 'I don't want to write in an argumentative style – you know, the "here's what's wrong with what you say, you don't understand my position, mine is better than yours" kind of writing ... Point-to-point refutation has never changed my mind; it certainly has never changed what I feel in my heart' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006: 434). Also see 'Being real: moving inward toward social change' (Ellis, 2002).

3. There are, despite this, a number of autoethnographic PhDs – or sections of PhDs – that have indeed been written. These are mostly by students of the aforementioned scholars – and other advocates of the form – but also include professional and managerial practices, as well as researchers in the field of art education. See, for example, 'Up Close and Personal: Reflections on our Experience of Supervising Research Candidates who are Using Personal Reflective Techniques' (Boucher and Smyth, 2004).

It's Not Really Autoethnographic, but OK

Nicole Ridgway, my sometimes collaborator and often-cited scholar, is also my life partner. It's mid-2008 and I've just walked into our tiny flat in Dublin; I'm doing that doorway-hovering thing again, so she knows I want to speak with her. Nicole puts her finger on her lips and nods towards our two-year-old daughter, Sidonie Ridgway Stern, napping in the bed, then gets up and follows me to the next room.

'I'm exhausted,' Nicole starts, as she sits down on the couch. There are boxes everywhere; she's been packing all day. I'm trying to get a draft of my dissertation done before we move from Dublin to Wisconsin: I have a new job teaching digital art in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She sighs. 'Let's not do this again any time soon,' she looks at me with a half- joking smile.

'What? Write a PhD? Have a baby? Move continents?' It's the second time we've done that last one in less than 2 years. I sit across from her.

'Take your pick,' she says drily, looking out the window and not quite smiling. She then turns back to face me, and asks, 'What's up?'

With degrees in drama, performance studies, and anthropology, Nicole knows a lot about the theories and practices I write about – including those in this chapter. 'I'm thinking about writing an autoethnography for the section on my art,' I try to say stoically.

We read each other's body language for a few seconds. I'm avoiding anxiety cues: I do a closed-mouth smile and tilt my head. And I can tell, through the way she looks up and bites the inside of her lip, that Nicole is going to give me a chance to explain, but her initial reaction is that this might not be the right way forward. I wonder if her connotations for autoethnography are the same as mine. It's probably been a long time since she's looked at the field.

'Alright,' she says, looking at me squarely, making a plan in her head. 'We'll get to the question of autoethnography in a minute....' My jaw tightens at the implied criticism, but I know that together we can work out what's best. 'There are a lot of other overarching issues you need to address before you can even begin talking about your own work, in whatever style you wind up using. You don't want to rehearse the same old debates around validity for arts practice, research methodologies, subjectivity, etc, but you still need to get them out of the way, bracket them off as recognized.'

I knew this was coming; this debate is, I think, the easy part. Nicole had pointed me to a third of the readings I'd started with when embarking on this journey, and we both agreed – after Linda's initial encouragement – how important it is to include my art as part of the text. In fact, she and Linda had both said that my role as an artist is one of the unique contributions I have to offer, what makes me stand out from amongst most of the theorists I use to support my arguments. But she's right; I still need to address why I'm going there.

'It's not about validity,' I start, sounding more defensive than I want to. Nicole raises an eyebrow, and I go on more calmly. 'We know it's valid; this goes beyond that. The entire text will be much stronger as an argument, as a study, as a model, if it includes writing about my own practice.' This, I say with confidence. 'My art led me to my writing just as much as my writing continues to guide my art. And this section would also serve to amplify the implicit body framework's value in self-reflective practice – *critique* in addition to criticism. Feedback loops for praxis. Implicit and explicit making and meaning-making. My practice – just as my art – is itself a framework for understanding embodiment through interactive art and interactive art through embodiment.'

Nicole smiles a naughty grin. 'Very poetic.' Although born and raised in South Africa, Nicole's dry humor is 100% English; it appears often and in full force. 'But you need to at least summarize the discourses out there, the longevity and clamor of some of the debates that, despite controversy, speak to the presence of artistic inquiry on the whole

within the academic landscape. Practice is recognized in journals, PhD programs, for promotion and tenure. None of this has yet settled, which is why you still have to point it out, but it's available enough that you can show its acceptance by referencing just a few key texts. Where are you pulling that from?'

I realize now that Nicole just wants to make sure I can write the justification into the section itself. On some level, she's giving it to me – although by the time my scribbles from this dialogue are edited and written into the text, it will be my own thinking and words (well, mostly). For now, she just wants to know I've done my homework; or rather, she wants my eventual readers to know I've done my homework, and more importantly, who my predecessors are. Fair enough – I just had this conversation with Linda, so it's still fresh in my mind. That fact doesn't stop me from pulling out both my laptop and a stack of printed and hand-written notes. I start by paraphrasing from Jennifer Mason's first-year textbook:

'I'd say the easiest place to start is with qualitative research more generally, and parallel it with arts production. Qualitative research is "specific in some way to [a] particular research project," and these projects tend to have problems that "cannot be anticipated in advance." Researchers "need to develop active skills which include identifying the key issues, working out how they might be resolved, and understanding the intellectual, practical, ethical and political implications of different ways of resolving them"' (Mason, 2002: 1).[4] I look up from my notes, 'Sounds like what artists do, no?'

'So you're saying art-making is qualitative research?'

'I'm saying it's a form of research – and that it could be argued that it's qualitative.'

'Well it's not *quantitative*,' she smiles a very small smile. It's a nice smile.

'This, I know,' I give a half-laugh. 'But some artists would prefer not to lump what they do with qualitative research; they want to think of it as a completely different approach.'

'What do you think about that?'

'I don't really care what you call it, as long as it's recognized as rigorous work. According to this book, qualitative researching promotes "critical yet productive ways of thinking and doing" and asks its practitioners to "think and act strategically in ways which combine intellectual, philosophical, technical, and practical concerns rather than compartmentalizing these into separate boxes". Sounds like art- making to me. We just wind up with different outcomes' (Mason, 2002: 2). I take a breath and smile with excitement. 'You should see this huge book I found by Sage publications, an edited collection in its third edition, um,' I fumble through my notes, 'the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*; they have sections on narrative inquiry, artistic inquiry – though that's mostly for activism and community-based art in their interpretation – and autoethnography, so it feels like I'd be in pretty good company as a qualitative researcher' (Denzin, 2005; Chase, 2005; Finely, 2005; Jones, 2005).

'I see your point and I think it's a good one,' Nicole starts, and I feel pleased with myself, 'but arts practice is a different kind of engagement, a material one with very different goals and, as you say, outcomes – sometimes with no goals or outcomes, depending on who you ask what kind of work they are making. I think you need to look at arts production specifically, argue how its methods are attendant on the same emergent categories dealt with in and beyond your text.' She pauses. 'In other words, it's not just your artworks that encourage movement, but your arts practices as well.'

'Yeeeees,' I say, taking notes with perhaps a bit too much enthusiasm. 'And the writing is trying to reflect that. What I'm doing –'

'Actually,' Nicole cuts me off, 'I think the writing can do more than reflection and illustration, and we'll get there, but I'm not done questioning you about research yet, dammit,' ending the last word with a grin. 'What've you found about arts practice as research specifically? Did you get that Graeme Sullivan book you found online?'

I didn't use the word *illustration*, but I let it slide for now. 'Oh, yes.' I pull out the Trinity library copy of *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* and hand it to Nicole, then find my notes on it. 'He's straightforward in saying that "the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by artists is a form of research." He follows Elliot Eisner, among others, in saying that arts practice is a "scholarly inquiry," that, in common with more traditional forms of research, gives "attention... to rigor"' (Sullivan, 2005: xi-xiii). 'Tangentially but related,' I go on, 'Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, who run The Sense Lab – what they call a "research creation" group in Montreal – consider "research to be creation in germ, and creation to produce its own concepts for thought"' (Manning and Massumi, 2009).

'Good. Very good. And what about thinking and talking and crit? I'd argue that reflection into practice, on practice, and about practice is a mode of theorization.'

'Sullivan goes there a bit, following people like Donald Schön, and touching very, very briefly on something called A/R/Tography, which combines Art-making with Research and Teaching (the A-R-T in ART-ography). But since his book is itself a reflection on practice, he's more interested in practice towards an artifactual end, towards art objects, and legitimizing that on the whole. I love this, of course, but I'd say that action research and its later incarnation of reflective practice are probably closer to what you mean here, because they are often "reported on," in text form.'

'Go on then,' Nicole invites. I turn to my laptop again and find a few pages that I've typed up on the subject.

'What I appreciate about the model Ernest Stringer puts forward for action research is that he likens practice to a spiral of look-think- act-look-think-act – ad infinitum' (Stringer, 2007). I twirl my finger around while I say this, and Nicole moves her eyes but not her head to look at it; she's trying not to laugh. I put my hand down, and go on. 'It's more related to sociology, maybe ethnography, too, but has a kind of activist approach. It "grew out of attempts to acquire knowledge that would help change social systems." Given that, there also tends to be more of an emphasis on local contexts, rather than generalizable truths' (Candy, 2006; Guba and Stringer, 2001: xii).

Nicole nods slowly. 'So,' she says thoughtfully, 'action research requires intervention; it impacts and changes the situation on a small scale, with large-scale implications. It could certainly be argued that your art does that, and perhaps some of your practice, when the two can't be separated,' she says, referring to some of my more recent interventionist and event-based art. 'But does your practice do that when you're alone, simply working on a new installation or print in the studio?' She raises her eyebrows.

'No, I'd say it doesn't. But Donald Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner*,' I find the page with my notes on the topic and start reading aloud, '"provides a link between action research and practice-based research. Schön is concerned with an individual's reflection on his or her own professional practice as distinct from the early forms of action research which were concerned with situations more broadly"' (Candy, 2006: 19). I go on more conversationally 'Schön himself calls self-reflective thinking an "inquiry into the epistemology of practice;" he's interested in artists' and designers' "capacity for reflection," in studying our "knowing-in-practice," the "actual performance" of what we do' (Shön, 1983: viii-ix).

'Mostly, Schön wants to place value on how professionals work – the same value granted to academic researchers who write. And he, at one point, goes so far as to say that an awareness of this kind of – what he calls "intuitive," but I'd call embodied, material, or implicit – thinking "usually grows out of practice in articulating it to others," in critical and "reflective conversation"' (Shön, 1983: 243, 296).

Nicole is nodding when she asks, 'So why not stop there? Why not just follow his lead on that?'

I don't miss a beat: 'Because, like Sullivan, while Schön wants to give credit to practice as research, in the cases he looks at, that practice leads to the production of a material project only, not an additional text. Ironically, it's those practitioners in between Sullivan and Schön, the action researchers, who tend to do write-ups, who want to add to discourse through both art-based and writer-ly – is that a word? – contributions.' Nicole does something between a nod and a shake that reads as 'just-go-on' in response to the tangential question, so I continue. 'Schön wants the

process to be seen as rigorous on its own, because of its continuous outcomes in art or design – and I agree with his assessment entirely. But what I'm doing is writing out, or rather artistically playing out in text, that creative reflection and critical process in a kind of doubled gesture. This is also what's different from action researchers: I'm moving-thinking-feeling in the making and then moving-thinking-feeling again in the re-writing; each is its own feedback loop, also feeding into the other. I'm continuously re-citing and re-situating, if you will.' I smile with my improvisational reference to Walter Benjamin. 'On the extremely rare occasions where we get such a document or text with regards to self-reflective arts practices, it tends not to be the artists themselves who are speaking; it's usually a very traditional, academic study by an outsider. The Schön book itself is a perfect example of what I mean.'

'Nathaniel,' Nicole's tone changes from inquisitive to disagreeable. She was with me until that very last point about artist texts, and I realize I've gone a little overboard. 'You know there are plenty of artists who write about their own work. You've read them: Joan Jonas, Robert Morris, Allan Kaprow, Marcel Duchamp, Mark Rothko, John Cage, Yvonne Rainier, and Richard Schechner. Brecht and Peter Brook. Critical Art Ensemble, Eduardo Kac, Adrian Piper, Anna Deavere Smith, Eugene Barba. Rebecca Schneider, although not an artist in the way you're talking about here, writes about her dream sequences and how they led to some of her ideas when exploring the explicit body – a text which later became a book you reference heavily with regards to your implicit body. Sure, some of these practitioners separate their making and their writing, some of them mostly write to support their own work – in artist statements and documentation – but several do explore practice itself, and even describe what they do in narrative form, how they reach certain conclusions or projects. Augusto Boal, for example, writes exquisite stories on where he finds art and meaning.' Nicole stops here, kind of awkwardly – given her momentum of intense and perhaps not entirely necessary name- dropping – and waits for a response.

'You're right,' I say firmly, with a nod. 'It's out there. What I'm doing is not completely unique; it's just rare – especially within the academy, even more so in a PhD, and that tiny list gets even smaller when you consider my combination of personal narrative with academic text in this particular way. But no, I'm not alone, and I should be using my predecessors to support what I'm doing, rather than ignoring them.'

'Exactly.'

'But why I was going there,' I stretch out the 'o' in going, and add a sing-song bent to my voice, so as to lighten the mood, 'was to differentiate between practice-based and practice-led research.'

'Why is that necessary?'

'Given how few arts practice-related PhDs there are out there,[5] I began doing a little research on how they are organized. One of the more interesting ones was in Australia –'

'I told you that,' Nicole interrupts with a brag, 'they are doing some really funky stuff out there.'

'Ahem,' I say sarcastically before I carry on. 'This is an important distinction to them. I bring it up because I want to show where I'd sit between practice-based and practice-led, and because both forms are recognized for a PhD, specifically.' Nicole looks at me intently.

'According to Linda Candy at Creativity and Cognition Studios, or CCS,' I restart with a slightly professorial tone and show her the printed out notes now in my hand, '"If the research includes a creative artifact as the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based ... If the research leads primarily to new understandings about the nature of practice, it is practice-led"' (Candy, 2008b).

'And you argue your research leads to both?'

'Yes. But it seems to be different from their work in other, perhaps more important, ways as well. Candy explains that in practice-based PhDs, "Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full

understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes"' (Candy, 2006). Nicole nods her head up and down, and I carry on, 'This is true enough for the artwork itself, but my writing is not there only to "describe the context and significance" of said work, it's for the context and significance of the work specifically in relation to critique and criticism, for understanding experience and practice as a performance model for different forms of philosophy and aesthetics. It's an/other form of work.'

'So then wouldn't it simply be practice-led? I see your point that your practice also leads to art, but the art is not included as part of your PhD, so this would just be considered practice-led by their standards.' After a beat, Nicole adds, 'Right?'

'I suppose. But I'd argue there's another difference, an important one that the CCS doesn't seem to address. You bring up that my practice also leads to art, to quote Candy, "the invention of ideas, images, performances and artifacts including design"' (Candy, 2008a). I continue, 'In this chapter, though, I'm writing about my own process of making. And rather than attempt to take an objective stance on that like in practice-led research, or simply write artist statements and show the objects like in practice-based research, I've decided to try and re-present the two creatively, as a narrativized and localized – perhaps contextualized and potentialized – invitation into practice.' I call up the CCS page in my browser. 'The practice-led PhDs tend to be critics or curators writing about artists in methodical, dense theoretical – or catalogue essay-like – texts similar to the rest of my work, unlike what I want to do in this chapter. I want to stage a kind of experiment into advancing knowledge through the experience of practice, and practical experience: an art philosophy for the studio. It's a creative text where I am both researcher and researched, and where I write in such a way that both aspects are present, with greater flux and openness in the telling and its interpretation.'

'And this is what led you to autoethnography.' It's a statement, not a question, and although this tells me that Nicole sees my trajectory of thinking at this point, I can tell she's still not convinced that it's the right conclusion. There's silence for about 20 seconds. We blink at each other.

'What?!' I finally ask in what is not quite a shout. She hears my frustration, but looks at me with her *you knew this was coming and so should not be upset, and besides we'll work this out and you know it* face. 'Sorry,' I say, and ask again, more softly. 'What?'

'Well, I'm just not sure it's ethnography,' she answers, sounding like she feels sorry for saying it – but I can tell she's been bottling this up for a while. 'I mean, from what you're saying, there is a field site, maybe, but there is no "other," no outside group you are speaking about or for or with.'

The penny drops, and my face falls a bit; but then I realize this is not really a big problem. 'Maybe you're right. I mean, I'd argue, first, that I am indeed writing about a group – artists – so we can learn something about them, and about ourselves, and their and our creative relations to other matter, people, concepts. And second, I'd say that although it's local to, well, me, I'm looking beyond my role as an artist. The purpose of this document is to again advance how artists and critics engage experience and practice more generally. That could be considered ethnographic.'

'Point taken,' Nicole adds gently. But I can tell, in her higher-than-usual voice, that there's more to her discomfort with autoethnography than this. Still, I'm admittedly thrilled that it seems to be just the classification that bothers her, not the style. It's a bit scary, as per my conversation with Linda, but also exciting. I think in convincing Nicole I really am convincing myself. Linda is smart, I say to myself with a smile.

I suddenly remember something else I read about 'narrative visibility of the researcher's self' within groups they were already a part of and writing about (Anderson, 2006: 7). I start talking again.

'He's avowedly more analytic than evocative, but Leon Anderson says something that I think might help here.' I'm looking for the hard copy, which I know I have in the pile. I remember that I had written in the margins of the text, rather than taking actual notes; he wasn't my favorite on the topic: precisely too analytic, and Bochner and Ellis agree with me on this point (Ellis and Bochner, 2006).

'Here we go: Anderson actually calls attention to Patricia and Peter Adler's distinction between "opportunistic" and "convert" CMRs, or "complete member researchers". The former are "thrown into [their] group by chance circumstance (e.g. illness), or have acquired intimate familiarity through occupational, recreational, or lifestyle participation." The latter join the group as they research them, become members over time. Although I dislike the exploitative connotation of the word "opportunistic" – and perhaps this relates to your distaste with ethnography more broadly,' she smiles a pursed-lip smile and raises her eyebrows with a nod, 'I'd obviously be in this category' (Anderson, 2006: 8; Adler and Adler, 1987: 67–84).

Nicole starts with a new tack. 'I guess my question would be this: given your and my discomfort with some of the issues ethnography raises more generally – and I don't want to have that discussion, just acknowledge that it exists – why even go there? I understand what you're trying to do and think it's a great idea, but wouldn't the rest of what you've offered, along with feminist epistemology, be enough to make your argument and frame? Autoethnography is coming out of that trajectory anyhow, out of the work of the likes of Nancy Hartsock and Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, Linda Martin-Alcoff, and Jane Flax. Several performance studies scholars followed them, and are a part of your other research – like Rebecca Schneider and Peggy Phelan. This is about the locus of knowledge production, about hermeneutics and representation. There are many ways to write this that are not necessarily autoethnographic, and any of those possibilities could be justified from various trajectories,' she says helpfully.

'You're right,' I begin. 'When Bochner and Ellis talk about going against the "disembodied authorial academic voice that argues and tries to persuade," for example, they pay direct homage to feminism, as well as the more specific "influx of women, people of color, and Third World sociologists" in their field' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006: 441–2). 'Stacy Jones goes there, too,' I add, grabbing and again glancing over my notes from her chapter (Jones, 2005).

I look up and out the window, and think for a minute, then look down again, as if searching for an answer in Jones' text. What is it that drew me to autoethnography?

'I guess there are two things I like best about autoethnography,' I say, thinking aloud. 'The first is that they treat the writing itself as a modality of practice. I understand that there are many fields that insert themselves into the work, but autoethnography is something that, according to Jones, "shows – *performs* – a writing practice that tries to respond to the crisis of praxis." You can see where that fits into my implicit manifesto a bit. The act of writing is akin to the making of an artwork, is an incorporating practice, even though the text itself will exist as an inscription' (Jones, 2005: 783). Implicit manifesto? That's funny.

I keep going. 'Jones says that a "perspectival, and limited vantage point can tell, teach, and put people in motion.... personal text can move writers and readers, subjects and objects, tellers and listeners into this space of dialogue, debate, and change"' (Jones, 2005: 763– 4). I grab my laptop and search for an old post on my weblog, one with a citation from when I was first reading Brian Massumi.

'Sorry,' I start, 'just wanted to find – here it is. That quote reminded me of a passage from Parables for the Virtual. Massumi explains that his "writing tries not only to accept the risk of sprouting deviant, but to invite it." This quote; it's really good.'

'Take joy in your digressions. Because that is where the unexpected arises. That is the experimental aspect. If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime. You have to be willing to surprise yourself writing things you didn't think you thought. Letting examples burgeon requires using inattention as a writing tool. You have to let yourself get so caught up in the flow of your writing that it ceases at moments to be recognizable to you as your own.' (Massumi, 2002: 18)

'He talks about affirmative methods of writing, "productivism" and "inventiveness". I like the idea that this becomes a kind of meta-text in its thinking and re-thinking and thinking again, about itself and its influences. Autoethnographers discover things, and ask their readers to discover things, in their personal writings' (Massumi, 2002: 12–13; Ellis and Bochner, 2006; Jones, 2005). 'This chapter would be like my arts production, like the

implicit body approach. It's about understanding the material and conceptual through how they help form one another.'

Nicole looks thoughtful. 'I'm not sure you need to be an autoethnographer to discover things through writing in this way. You're following the likes of Dilthey and Whitehead; Victor Turner linked writing and the performative to philosophy and sociology and anthropology, too. Performance studies followed his lead on that; there are the feminists we talked about. I mean, what you're saying here is what I alluded to earlier – that this can be more than just reflection or illustration, that it can be a performance itself; it doesn't need a classification that might have potentially negative connotations to do that.'

I nod, and the words come from my mouth slowly. I'm unable to tell if they come after I think them, or I speak them in order to think. 'I guess, with autoethnography, it's the avowed autobiographical aspects that make the most sense to me. I am researcher and researched, remember.' I squint my eyes, lick my lips, then, on my laptop, call up something about this. I again paraphrase aloud.

'Anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay says that autoethnography

synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question. The term has a double sense – referring either to the ethnography of one's own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest. Thus, either a self (auto) ethnography or an autobiographical (auto) ethnography can be signaled by 'auto- ethnography.' (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 2)

'I get it,' Nicole says quickly, 'but you don't have to call ethnography into question. Valid form or not, there's no need for you to have to take that on. It is tangential to what you are doing.' She pauses to let this sink in. 'What's the second thing you like about autoethnography?'

I shrug. 'Style.' I start rattling off quotes from my notes, mixing them with my own interpretations on and off the page: 'Jones and Denzin and Bochner and Ellis call it an intricate weaving of life and art; writing towards a moment to enact and / or change the world and our ways of seeing and being in, and as, and with it; they say it challenges, contests, or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing; they want their writings to linger in the world of experience, to feel it, taste it, sense it, live in it; their goals are evocation and empathy, they dwell in the flux of lived experience' (Jones, 2005: 765; Denzin, 2006: 422; Ellis and Bochner, 2006: 431–5).

'Actually,' I'm on a roll now, 'the way they differentiate between ethnography and autoethnography – and perhaps I just want my own little auto- for reflective practice here, which might be your point – is not dissimilar to the Zeno paradox. Remember: his arrow never goes anywhere if we understand it as merely a series of halfway points, rather than as in motion. When criticizing Anderson's appropriation of autoethnography for more analytic texts, Bochner and Ellis say that they "want to put culture or society into motion," while Anderson "wants to stop it, freeze the frame, change the context." An autoethnography understands that passage precedes position, that continuity and movement are more primary than stasis' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006: 433).

I can see that Nicole is starting to buy it. I imagine part of this is because it kind of sounds like something she would say, and smile to myself. 'Did Linda have any reservations?' she asks.

Now we're getting somewhere! I have to calm myself.

'Well, aside from being jarred by the style,' Nicole interrupts me with a snorting laugh that says 'I'll bet,' but I go on without stopping, 'she wondered how to judge such a thing.'

'And?'

'Well, Bochner and Ellis really just talk about an emphasis on evocation rather than theory development, that this makes it "good" – which the artist in me loves. But I also found this paper that talks about the dialogs between Aristotle and Plato, about enthymeme and example' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006: 442; Spigelman, 2001: 72). I scrounge around my notes again. 'Ah, here she is, uh, he is, uh,' I fumble a bit because the author is female but references another paper by a male academic, and the writing is so interwoven that I can't tell who is speaking sometimes. I tangentially think that I probably make that entanglement mistake myself sometimes, but force myself to get back to the topic at hand. 'This paper basically says that we can judge autoethnographic text based on 1. what assumptions we have to make to believe the story, and 2. what we can gain from the story and apply in the future. Basically, it's no different from any analytic text and how we might evaluate it. It's just argued in a contrasting format, in a narrative paradigm so as to encourage,' I'm paraphrasing a text as I read it live again, 'experiential contradiction, disruptive layering, and personal interpretation over asserting absolute truths' (Spigelman, 2001: 72–5; Raymond, 1984).

'And it has to be a good story,' Nicole adds.

I didn't expect to shift topics so quickly, but pick up on it as best I can, luckily finding my notes on this quite quickly. 'Yes – Bochner and Ellis are clear about that. "There has to be a plot, a moral, a point to the story. The difference between stories and traditional analysis is the mode of explanation and its effects on the reader. Traditional analysis is about transferring information, whereas narrative inquiry emphasizes communication. It's the difference between monologue and dialogue" – I'm thinking of throwing in a lot of conversation – "between closing down interpretation and staying open to other meanings, between having the last word and sharing the platform. Stories have always been used as a mode of explanation and inquiry..."' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006: 438)

'OK,' Nicole finally says, and I get a simultaneous feeling of excitement and dread. 'I'm convinced of the style – why and how and what it hopes to accomplish and also how readers might judge it. But I'm still not convinced it's ethnography. Isn't there anything similar in the art world?'

'There's that A/R/Tography thing I mentioned.' I pull out my notes on that. 'They talk about dealing with the limitations of more traditional modes of research, reference practice-based inquiry, want arts research not to be thought of as qualitative but as its own mode, "a loss, a shift, or a rupture where in absence, new courses of action un/fold"' (Springgay, Irwin and Kind, 2005: 897). My voice is a little wishy-washy here, and Nicole can hear it, but I keep going. 'They say their forms include "research as performative, research as provocative, and research as poetic"' (Springgay, Irwin and Kind, 2005: 898).

Nicole stops me by putting her hand up; it's a soft gesture, but accomplishes its goal. In her driest voice, with elongated vowels, she asks, 'And you don't want to be categorized with them because...?'

I laugh. 'They're obviously really smart, and I like a lot of the art the curator / academic, Stephanie Springgay, is showcasing; but their texts on A/R/Tography read like traditional academic essays, and the available writing samples I've found seem to be either standard artist statements or bulleted PowerPoint presentations. They're saying something very close to what I am, but the actual narratives in the texts I've found don't speak to me in the way autoethnography does. And isn't that the point? Empathy and evocation? Also,' I hate to admit this, 'I don't really like how they spell it.'

Nicole and I laugh, and then there's silence for a short while. Nicole is looking thoughtfully out the window again, and I give her a minute to collect her thoughts. Finally, she licks her lips and I know she's about to be brilliant. I get some butterflies in my stomach. I wonder, not for the first time today, if there is an empirical way to prove to the world that my wife is the best wife ever.

'Nathaniel,' she begins, and then pauses for effect, 'there's a long history of this kind of thinking, and it has quite profound epistemological antecedents. Anthropology itself, for example, with its particular concerns with power relations and writing and so-called inside / outside and self / other relationships, has had an acute critical concern about representation, knowledge, and power. And, I have to reiterate again that this sort of "autobiographical" route'

– she tallies her fingers as quotation marks while she says this – 'is just one approach in many possible philosophical ways of thinking through the conundrum of a subject who produces knowledge, and the object of that knowledge.'

Nicole looks at me warmly. 'Even if I'm enamored of the idea of a kind of fictionalizing element of your text, and in academia more generally, I'm not always buying that it solves the problems of cross-cultural communication, etc. in ethnographic encounters. You might want to look up some of the concerns Marilyn Strathern has in this regard.' Nicole pauses for me to write this down.[6]

'But,' she adds with a smile, 'in your instance, you are first the subject finding knowledge: jumping through academic hoops and meeting PhD requirements, marshalling all the rhetoric, evidence, argumentation, and substantiations, all of those things that will mark you off as a "doctoral" persona, an "expert," or whatever.' She lists these in a casual but loving counting-off of the requirements I've been slaving over for the last two years and more. 'And secondly, you are also the object of study: the mute artist who generally only gets to speak through the artist statement, web site, interview, or maybe blog, and whose words, however theoretical, conceptual, or intellectually rigorous, will be taken only to support the artifact or the scholarly interpretation of that artifact.'

I'm feverishly writing all this down, hoping to get it right in my own text. 'And here,' Nicole continues, 'you're trying to own both spaces, have both spaces speaking to each other and contaminating one another, disrupting one another through their varied voices and perspectives and practices. In fact it's not about subjects and objects at all, but the emergence of matter and what matters.' She again pauses. 'At its close, the academic discourse is left a little unsettled, and the art-making practice is left a little unsettled, both explicitly and implicitly.' She smiles and I nod, pen still scribbling. 'Perhaps you shouldn't think of this as an autoethnography,' she concludes theatrically, 'but an intervention.'

*

In the end, I decide that it isn't important what I call it, really. Nicole is right: this is not a debate about what is or is not autoethnography, or about the limits, benefits, and shortcomings in ethnography at large, for that matter. It's an experiment in narrative inquiry, whose aims are to further praxis in contemporary arts production and discourse. It's a kind of meta-forming-text, in the midst. It's an en- and un-folding of the embodied ideas my texts, and the artworks they study, attempt to put forth.

We're all in the kitchen now, a few days later; Sidonie is having her supper and Nicole is working on one for the adults. It smells good – one of Nicole's fancy variations on a veggie bake, with Irish potatoes, fresh sage and gruyere cheese – and I feel a bit guilty about the fact that I've not done much of the housework at all since deciding I wanted get a draft in before we head to South Africa, to pack up the things we left there and ship them over to the States. I walk over to the sink and start doing the dishes. We're talking about the various possibilities for a narrative arc in the new section; it's a much more casual discussion than the last one.

'I really don't think there's a need to go too far back into your personal history. It'll feel contrived, unnecessary for your larger point,' Nicole is saying, 'Perhaps a tension between your academic and art-making selves?'

I shake my head. 'But there isn't a tension really there. That's the whole point.'

'Well then make that point within the text itself,' Nicole says, shaking the spoon in her hand. The food's aroma is calling to me. 'A story about the mostly constructed tension between writing and making, one that is only there because people say it is. Talk about the fact that it's unfortunate they have to be separated, despite that they're inherently entwined.'

'That's good,' I'm nodding. 'I like that for the intro, for when I'm speaking with you or Linda or whomever the dialogue-slash-debate is with in order to explain why I've chosen to write it in this way. But,' I start thinking aloud, 'when there's no literal dialogue, when I'm diving into speaking out the making of the work in my own history, when it's not me and someone else exploring those tensions as a kind of back and forth parley between two whole

and real people,' I stop to make sure she understands what I mean, then realize I lost myself in the long sentence and start over. 'I really don't want to separate those aspects of my practice, the thinker and the producer, when I get into the art-making part of the narrative. Writing and making, the academic and the arty dude: these are not two distinct voices in my head.'

'Yeh,' Nicole says, offering Sidonie – actually, we've been calling her Nonie (pronounced NOH-nee), since she gave herself that nick-name a few weeks back – some broccoli. Our amazing two-year-old actually likes broccoli. I put the last of the dishes into the rack and dry my hands.

'What about,' I say in my elongated *I've got an idea but go ahead and kill it if I'm wrong* voice, 'what about if it's the "me" of now and the "me" of then? The writer and maker who was thinking and questioning and not recognizing what was unfolding as I tried to produce art, and the writer and maker who is discovering and connecting in the re-writing of the chapter; a dialogue between then and now. A story about the story and how it led to where I am at present, but one that reveals that this was never an inevitable end? I'm only now even finding out where I am, and where it might go next. Know what I mean?'

Nicole is nodding. I run to my computer in the next room, and call up a Denzin paper I was reading earlier. I quote, almost screaming across the flat.

'In bringing the past into the autobiographical present, I insert myself into the past and create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing it. History becomes a montage, moments quoted out of context, "juxtaposed fragments from widely dispersed places and times". I move across and between several writing styles, genres, and representational performative forms... I seek a dramatic, performative poetic, a form of performance writing that includes excerpts from personal histories... scholarly articles, and popular culture texts.' (Denzin, 2006: 423; Ulmer, 1989: 112)

Nicole comes from the next room, holding hands with Nonie. 'What?' she asks, shaking her head and laughing. 'I'm sorry; it's very hard to hear from the next room, you know, with Nonie and cooking and the telly on.' I hadn't even noticed that Sidonie left the television on, *Monsters, Inc* running across the screen.

'I've got it,' I say. 'It's a story about the stories that arts practice and experience enables. About how they form and re-form in their performative telling and re-telling. Making-moving-thinking-feeling.'

Nicole looks at me and nods. 'Uh-huh.' It's a look and tone that moreover says, 'Well, duh.'

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NOTES

4.   This quote, like many in the chapter, is a combination of my own words, paraphrasing, and direct citation, for stylistic flow. In instances such as these, I will always include the reference and page(s), so readers have access to the author's original quote and full context.
5. The number has grown exponentially since I originally wrote this chapter, and continues to grow at an accelerating rate.
6. See 'The Limits of Auto-Anthropology' (Strathern, 1987).

Approaching the Implicit

I recently redesigned [my web site](#).[7] Instead of breaking the works up individually by date or medium or concept alone – which is how many sites are organized,[8] but I feel can limit how people understand the work, and body of work – I set up a cross-referenced tagging system and database, like a blog. So rather than having to choose if a video installation that uses sculptural elements belongs in the 'video' or 'installation' or 'sculpture' section of my site (or having multiple copies of the page), it can sit across all three. I can also tag it conceptually as interrogating notions of embodiment, as interventionist in nature, or as part of an ongoing series of art or thinking. Any piece can have as many tags as I want, and the database behind the site understands where media and concepts and series are connected: you click on any tag and the site reloads after filtering out artworks without that tag. It additionally uses an algorithm to dynamically show several 'similar works,' which have several of the same tags, when viewing any singular piece.

The most fascinating part for me in all this is that I myself get to see the trajectories of my thinking and making, over time, through the eyes of a simple computer program. I am certainly not always aware of how I am continually jumping back and forth between my ideas and media, of how many different ways the seemingly disparate works relate to each other, or don't.[9]

Concordantly, I also began re-thinking what led me to my current practice and modes of inquiry, how my past and ongoing experimentation and research continue to influence each other in ways I often don't know about or see, until in hindsight. My practice has always been guided by questions: each new work and how my audience or participants engage with it opens up new and other possibilities in the studio, as well as in my writing. This recent re-design and re-thinking, I should add, happened alongside my early writing and research on the implicit body, which also coincided with a re-working of my overarching artist statement.[10]

Forced to think broadly and in text, I'd say my art seeks to interrogate the relationships we, as moving-thinking-feeling bodies, have to other emergent categories, including but not limited to language or society or space. I try to suspend and amplify that which is often presupposed in contemporary culture, in order to foster greater dialogue around these complex systems and their relationships to matter, affect, and meaning-making.

But that's not where I began in my practice, and nor where I thought I'd wind up. Given her intimate familiarity with my work, Nicole was asked to write a feature on me for *NY Arts* magazine in 2006. From her article:

Stern claims his interest in the body comes from his early study, and subsequent hatred, of fashion design. That, combined with his musical and slam poetry background, led Stern towards considering the body as text and as concept, but eventually (and he would say, inevitably) steered him to the inverse: the body as performed and emergent. One of the most fascinating aspects of this work is that it does not presuppose the categories of body and language that it works with. (Ridgway, 2006)

I can see now that my early ventures into art intended for a large public audience might actually explain my current fascination with autoethnography: it began with a fictionalized narrative inquiry, with a text (of sorts) in and around the body.

The body of work I affectionately call *the non-aggressive narrative* (2000–2005) first manifested in an Internet art site called *hektor.net* (2000, Figure 42).[11] The piece came out of my core interests back then: design, poetry, and, most of all, narrativity. In film theory, narrativity speaks to the processes whereby a story is presented and then 'read' by the audience. I used the term in my work in order to counter the brouhaha around hypertext at the time, believing 'interactive,' especially with regards to fiction, to be a mostly ill-defined term used to sell products. I instead opted to involve myself with more exploratory ideas around web surfing, oral traditions, and cross-modal perception for story construction. Taking cues from Mieke Bal's *Narratology* (1997), I loosely defined narrativity to be the conditions under which a story may or may not emerge.

On a more personal note, I can also admit more openly now – I was mostly unaware of it then – that I wanted to explore trauma through a sideways engagement with a car accident at the age of 17. I was the driver, and there were people hurt because of my recklessness. I wanted to play out said exploration in a way that invited empathy without voyeurism, in a way that put the viewer, rather than myself, into some kind of active role. I invented a character to play – someone more interesting and provocative than me – and after any given click, had him instigate viewers into thinking-feeling a narrative. I hoped to unfold the potential for a story, rather than speak the details of 'what happened' (to me).

Part of this was academic interest, some of it was because I thought a 'real' autobiography was too self-indulgent; but mostly, I think I must have liked performing new possibilities in 'what happened' in order to create new possibilities in what 'just might happen' beyond the present.

hektor.net is a navigable artsite of experimental pinhole photography, spoken word, and video poetry. Each vignette is in a performative writing style, and the series collectively explores narrative and storytelling, time and memory, multiplicity and identity, anger and trauma, and the labors of communication.... While viewers surf the site, hektor attempts to re-member: embody a past in the present. Floating memories, re-presented as art pieces, congeal in different patterns; from the 'ruins of memory,' viewers re-invent the past and its meaning, piecing together a story for themselves. However, similar to Julio Cortazar's *Hopscotch*, where readers can tackle any chapter, in any order, to assemble a whole story, this narrative is built by the listener, according to which pieces they have seen, in what context, and in which order. Viewers continually bring new insights to possibility by juxtaposing visited and revisited pieces and ideas several times over. (Stern, 2000)

The site portrays no specific histories, is a nonlinear series of ironic and sometimes funny, short but fairly lucid, monologues. hektor would say these are about personal relationships, but they're more transparently about his self-infatuation, his encounters with sex, class, and race issues, and his uncomfortable revelations about his participation in the power structures that make those identities very real. Viewers click through and construct a mostly unrevealed narrative which is driven by their responses to a made-up character that is not me, or even part of me, but whose initial creation was inspired by a past that I myself am always only beginning to grasp. hektor is an intelligent jerk with a fair amount of self-reflection and a whole lot of armor, and my intention – like in narrative inquiry – was for provocation and empathy.

Figure 42: screen grabs from *hektor.net*

In the production of *hektor.net*, I utilized drastic digital effects on several of the monologue-style video clips – many displayed from several angles at once – which were then seamlessly embedded inside of larger images in tables; each vignette opened in its own browser window and played with layers upon layers of foreground against background, using pop-ups, animations, and graphics that fed off one another across the screen. This aesthetic was an attempt to exploit movement and stasis in several open windows at once as a (flawed) substitute for embodied, live performances on the poetry slam stage – where hektor, as a character, was initially born.

To keep the integrity of the site I envisioned, I made a conscious choice to adopt broadband video streaming technologies that, unfortunately, the vast majority of homes did not have at the time. In line with this decision, I aimed for audiences in academic institutions and web and design firms (it was the dotcom boom, after all), who would have access to fast Internet connections and the necessary plug-ins like Flash and QuickTime, which were still fairly nascent (web-based video applications like Vimeo, YouTube, and Silverlight were barely even fantasies).[12]

This meant that most viewers had to surf the site in somewhat public spaces: cubicles, computer labs, or Internet cafes. hektor's videos contain racy spoken word about taboo topics and the images range from scary to somewhat explicit; the overall vibe is suggestive of deviance. Says Eduardo Navas in a short review, 'Some pieces take on social issues such as lower, middle, and upper class values while other pieces show hektor's obsession with sex' (Navas, 2003).

While my initial intent as an artist was to give hektor, the site, and his and its visitors a complexity that was greater than the sum of all parts, an unexpected consequence of relying on broadband was several dozen angry emails from embarrassed office workers (etc), who were caught viewing and listening to what could be misconstrued as pornographic, sexist, or racist material. My favorite of these was from someone who opened up a pretty explicit link; he jumped from his seat to turn down his speakers and cover his screen before quitting his browser, and wound up spilling coffee all over his keyboard.

Wow. My art *hurts*. Nice! (I apologized. Sort of.)

I had hoped that between story, speaker, and screen, vision, sound, and affect, hektor could somehow extend beyond the computer display-based proscenium of his performance – stomach squirms on a given click, pursed lips in response to an image, angry groans elicited from provocative phrasings, an overall experience and practice of sensation and perception, and how they relate to narrative. But because of the spaces viewers necessarily used to surf, and the people these audiences perceived to be watching them, hektor sometimes drew out activities far more pronounced and physical. His victims would literally spring from their seats to cover their screens from potential passersby; hands would shoot out in order to quickly shut off computer speakers; I imagine they might stumble and look around nervously whilst simultaneously rushing the mouse to the corner of their screen's browser windows – maybe over-shooting? – in order to click the 'x' and close them. This kind of response wasn't the norm, of course, but what little news reached me succeeded in opening some exciting possibilities that lay outside of textual narrative. hektor was indeed enjoying the complexities I had intended for him. But he wasn't just a character and story that online communities were stitching together. He garnered embodied, personal responses offline – for better or for worse, and in relation to the colleagues / community around each individual's computer station. This fascinated me, and led to my interest in creating sites and situations that amplify affective and active relationships.

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- 'Body-Language'
- 'Social-Anatomies'
- 'Flesh-Space'
- Four years later
- Bibliography

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- Introduction to an Experiment
- It's Not Really Autoethnographic, but OK

'In Production' main page

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NOTES

7. http://nathanielstern.com, though 'recently' is relative to when I first wrote this chapter in 2008, and I launched another new site with more advanced features in early 2013.

8. Or this was how most artist web sites were organized in 2008. Four years later, many work with dynamic and database-driven software.

9. These last two paragraphs were collected and edited / paraphrased from a blog comment I once left at http://edwardwinkleman.blogspot.com/2008/06/tuesdays-aside-shifting-gears-trust.html

10. See http://nathanielstern.com/artistic-inquiry-artist-statement/ – I tend to add to this and edit older works out all the time now.

11. Although it now uses flat QuickTime files rather than streaming technologies, *hektor.net* is still live and online, as well as available for free and full download under a Creative Commons License, at http://hektor.net.

12. Interestingly, a lot of *hektor.net* won't work in today's browsers either, without a few changes in settings – both because of somewhat outdated file formats, and security-based pop-up blockage. Don't even bother on an iOS device.

'Body-Language'

Near the launch-time of *hektor.net*, I was simultaneously learning how to develop physical computing projects and use computer vision software, so my next questions flowed relatively easily from the last. I wondered about provoking and framing activity. I began to ask, 'How might I actually instigate exploratory movements, and place emphasis on their potential, experience, and practice?' I was still trying to couple this inquiry with my interest in storytelling and poetry, and so became enchanted with JL Austin's definition of performative utterances, or 'speech acts.'

Proffered in his posthumously published lectures from 1955 at Harvard (Austin, 1962), the basic premise is that performative utterances are spoken or written words that actually *do* something, rather than simply describing an event. They perform some kind of action. The most classic example of such an event is a wedding: with the spoken words, 'I do,' the speaker is transformed from a single person into a spouse. Words literally (pun intended) make an ontological change.[13] Other easily understood performative possibilities include a declaration of war, to knight or fire someone, to command or forbid, or to ask something of someone as an act itself. In fact, all of language has some level of performative inflection and effect.

Performativity as a concept has been appropriated (and thus re-defined) by various disciplines over the last several decades, leading performance studies scholar Richard Schechner to declare it 'A Hard Term to Pin Down' (Schechner, 2002: 110), and to dedicate an entire chapter in his book, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, to its definition, history, and use. He says that as a noun, a performative – which is no longer necessarily spoken – 'does something'; as an adjective – such as what Peggy Phelan calls performative writing – the modifier inflects performance in some way that may change or modify the thing itself; and as a broad term, performativity covers

a whole panoply of possibilities opened up by a world in which differences between media and live events, originals and digital or biological clones, performing onstage and in ordinary life are collapsing. Increasingly, social, political, economic, personal, and artistic realities take on the qualities of performance. (Schechner, 2002: 110)

Karen Barad would later say that performativity and relation, together, make *matter* (Barad, 2003). You can see where this connection I unintentionally found between text, materiality, and performance eventually led to my understanding of embodiment as performed, and then my pursuit of creating interventions into that performance. Immediately following *hektor.net*, I wanted to involve text and activity in a recognizable way (they are, Austin argues, always reciprocally involved), and to suspend and thus make felt the potentials always present in their relation. Unbeknownst to me, this was the beginning of the as-yet-unnamed body-language implicit body thematic.
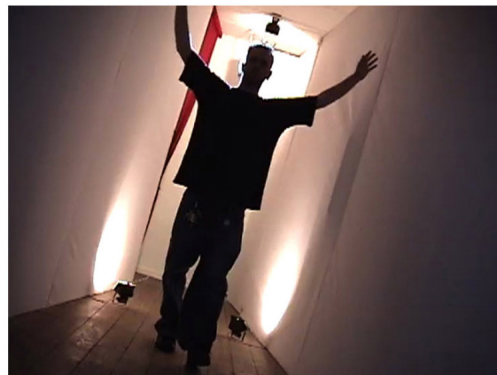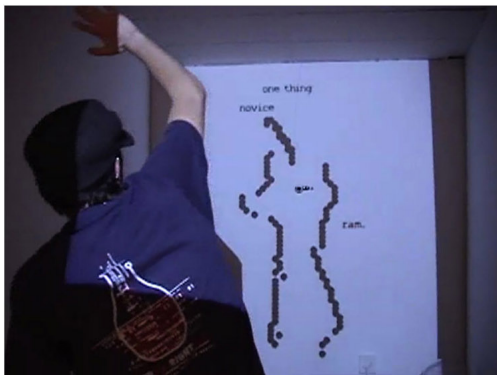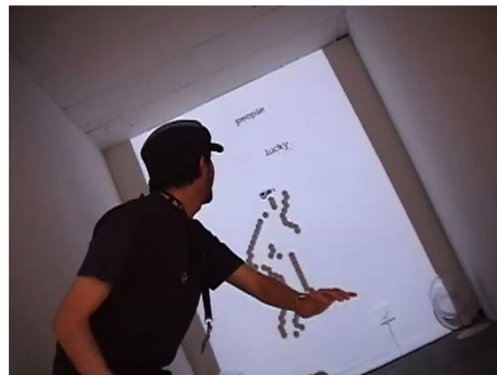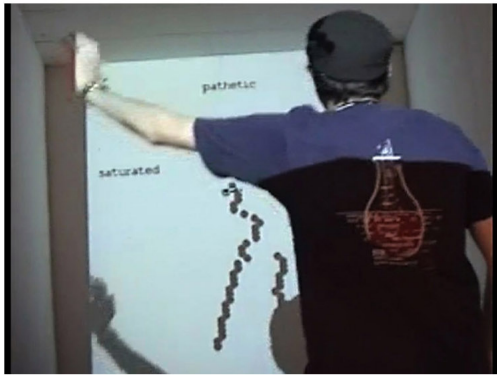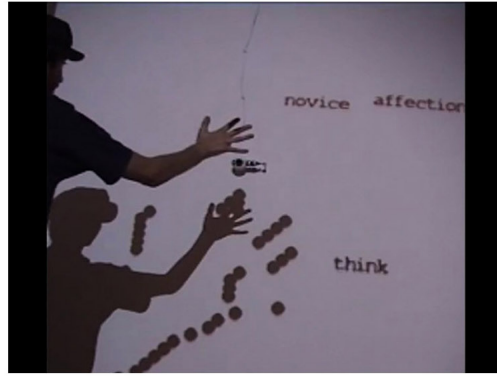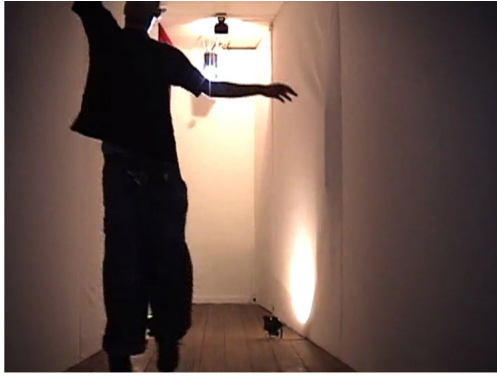
Figure 43, *enter*

My first foray into interactive installation, _enter_ (2000 - 2013, Figure 43),[14] asked visitors to literally chase after, bend towards, or stretch over hektor's words on a large projection screen. Dan O'Sullivan, my professor at New York University and very influential with regards to my early work, pushed me to try and encourage styles of investigation through the same 'jerky expressions and exaggerated gestures' that hektor exhibits in his online videos.

enter is an interactive work that combines conceptual and aesthetic principles from traditional installation, participatory art, and performance poetry, to explore relationships between text and embodied activity. Its participants enter through black and red velvet curtains – a literalized performance space – and into a white interaction area approximately 8 meters long; the width at the entrance begins the size of a doorway and expands to that of a large projection screen.

Upon entering, viewer-participants meet with an almost real-time abstraction of themselves – an outline drawn with large black dots. The closer they are to the screen / camera, the larger their image becomes. Short phrases float around them, in animated sequence. With this exterior re-presentation of their bodies, viewers-turned-performers can grab and trigger the text; each word that a viewer's outline touches will stop, turn red, and recite a line of poetry. _enter_ asks interactors to leave behind their everyday movements, and attempts to accent each step and extension as a rich and performative inauguration.

The _enter_ software does not work as one would expect, and pushes viewers to act in ways they normally wouldn't. Rather than traditional body-tracking software, the code is written in such a way that only the outermost points on the horizontal axis are shown – for example, put your arms up in a V, and your head disappears. The piece was originally exhibited on an old 8500 Macintosh (2000), which ran relatively slowly; in the updated versions (2005 and 2013), I've imitated the minor lag the original computer created. The lag, combined with the paradox of its awkward 'limited body' interaction, creates less of a mirror and more of a 'call and response, and response' space – much like that of a poet and his / her audience. Meaning is found in the relation between body and text, and the half-second lag amplifies that relation.

As viewer-participants learn how to perform this space, they move in alien ways. Whether they are trying to 'speak,' or doing their best to avoid it, the situation invites them to poll styles of being and becoming – exaggerated gestures or jerky expressions, for example. I've watched some folks crawl into a ball and lash out at words with their arms, others dance and play on the fringes in an attempt to speak quickly and all at once, while still others get up close to the screen and squirm around words, so as not to speak. _enter_ is a recognition of the negotiations and contradictions inherent to the performance of communication, and of body. We are invited to use our flesh as a writing and speaking tool, to experience and practice a poetic, embodied, and relational language. (Stern, 2005)

As evidenced by my artist statement, I became enthralled by how people interact with and relate to words, screens, communication, space, and themselves in and as and with bodies and matter – all at once. Although at the time my focus was probably more on identity than differentiation, on self and subjectivity rather than body and corporeality, here is when I began my attempts to collapse saying and doing, affection and reflection. Perhaps I started to see that none could exist without the other; I was at least headed in that direction.

enter (2000)

enter:hektor - interactive installation

[embed width="490" height="330"]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaZp0NUIBew[/embed]
Download this video (mp4, 51mb)
Download this video with artist voiceover (mp4, 51mb)

enter (2013 update)

[embed width="490"
height="260"]http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ORxzHbVAxAQ[/embed]
[Download as mp4 (1:33, 85MBs)](#)

But I was also still playing out my interest in narrativity. For example, I began working on another video series similar to the monologues found on *hektor.net*. In *the odys series* (2001–2004), which later fed *odys for your iPod* (2005),[15] a new character explores the same memories hektor does, but engages his trauma through other means. While hektor is lucid and antagonistic, purposefully maneuvering around explicitly speaking the past, odys is contemplative and confused: he keeps trying to approach the past, and fails. He lacks hektor's articulation, so painfully stutters over words and explanations, and viewers are again left to fill the spaces between.

My next interactive piece paralleled *enter*, but with odys' approach rather than hektor's. I was continuing the experimental and performative format of my 'narrative,' and odys enabled me to delve deeper into the physical spaces between words, worlds, and characters. I wanted viewers to explore (his) stuttering, with their bodies, and so attempted to animate stuttering text, which exploded from their movements. The effect and affect of my software, however, were not what I initially intended.

Figure 44, elicit

elicit (2001 - 2013) explores and amplifies the continuity between text and the body. It is a large-scale, interactive installation where every movement of the viewer, small or sweeping, births fluidly animated text onscreen. Viewers' motions elicit projected passages, character by character, which in turn elicit variable performances from them. Its software responds to small movements, writing letters onscreen slowly for us to read, or to rapid passersby, whose full bodies birth hundreds of flying characters, impossible to decode.

Here the spaces between language and meaning, movement and stasis, stuttering and silence, are framed as ongoing and embodied. *elicit* situates us as part of an emergent and enfleshed language, where possibly infinite meanings, or none at all, are materialized. (Stern, 2001)

elicit (Figure 44) also existed as a collaborative dance piece with South African choreographer Jeannette Ginslov (*en/traced*, 2001), where both generative and improvised variation in her and the animations' movements made for a spellbinding performance at the installation's premiere. I believe in the work and my statement: playful and beautiful, the piece makes a continuous and embodied feedback loop between significations and signifying practices, inscription and incorporation.

elicit (2001)
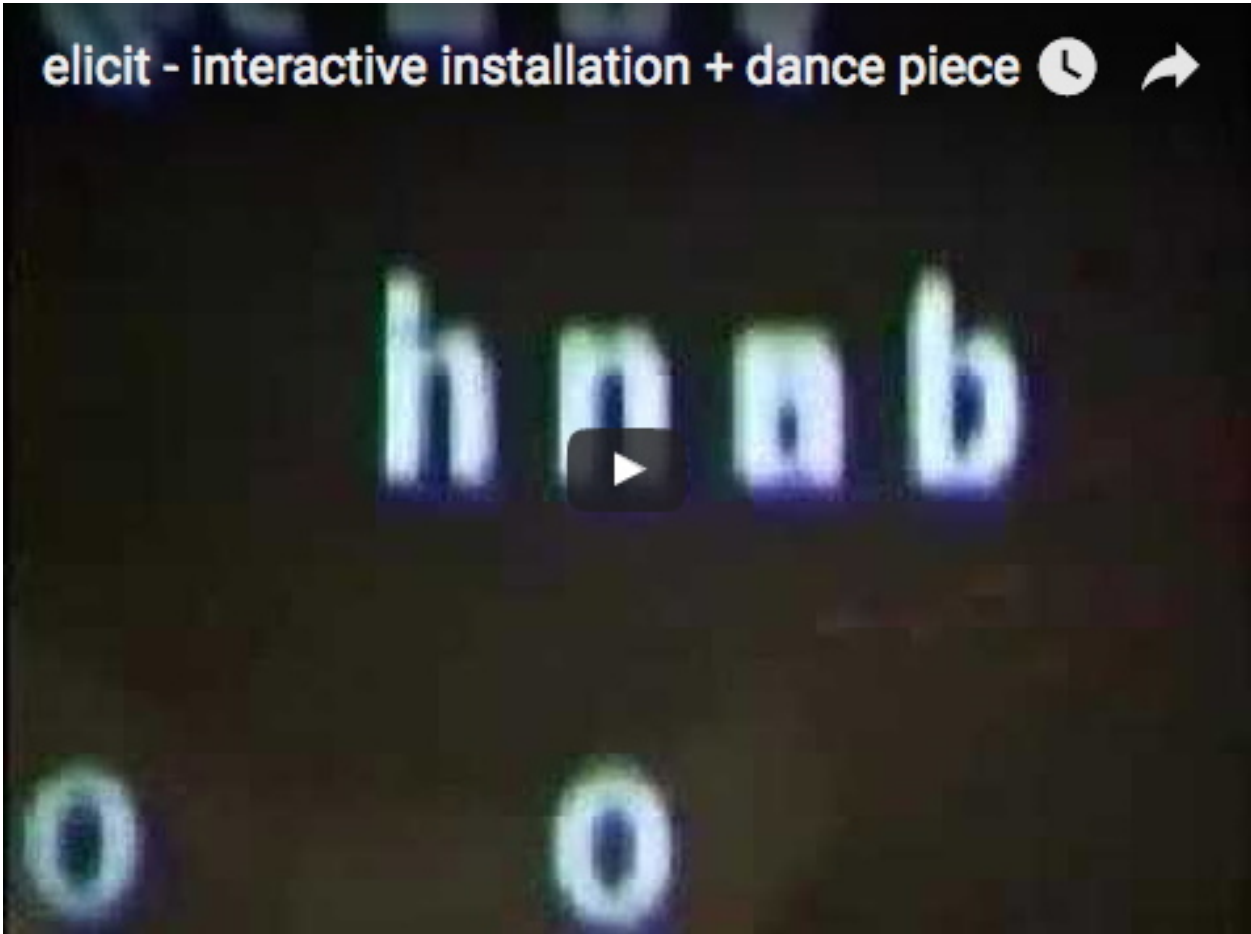
[embed width="490" height="330"]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lAQ95fzLqrk[/embed]
Download this video (mp4, 2.5mb)

elicit (2013 update)

[embed width="490" height="260"]http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=nYHGZszH-qI[/embed]

[Download as mp4 (1:40, 90MBs)](#)

But I admittedly only saw that in retrospect.

I say this because what I really wanted – per odys – were stutters, not fluidity. As I watched participants interact with *elicit*, which was inspired by the work of Camille Utterback,[16] it dawned on me that no matter how much I willed it to be so (as artists are wont to do), neither the text nor – perhaps more importantly – the viewers were stuttering. There was indeed an amplification of the relationships between embodiment and meaning-making, body and language, but I created an encounter with their continuity and feedback, rather than the garbled interruptions, and immediacy, of the utterance. If I wanted to make stutters virtually felt, I would have to overlay affective resonances of movement, in body and words, as syncopated rhythm (see Manning, 2009).

This is where the beginnings of my critical framework were forming. I never voiced the precise critique above, but I often found myself in the exhibition space, examining and rethinking how participants move and relate, how they embody meaning. This led me to research on metaphor and embodied communication, which in turn led to a re-thinking and re-working of how I might frame and amplify potentials in the situation of interactive art, both generally, and in my next piece: *stuttering* (2003 - 2013, Figure 45).

According George Lakoff, author of *Philosophy In The Flesh* (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999), human communication is always already mediated. Our emotions, our past and the memories it carries, cannot be separated from it. He says, 'The mind is inherently embodied.' Because of our flesh, our multi-sensory perception, and our personal experiences, our communications engage with much more than transparent information.

stuttering, an interactive installation, proposes a space which accents how we effect, and are affected by, conversation and comprehension. It suggests that stillness and stumbling play a role in the un/realized potentials of memory and storytelling.

Computer printouts are scattered about the floor, containing quotes and passages about stutterers, situations in which stuttering, in its broadest sense, is common, and suggestions of when and where we should 'make stutters,' in order to break 'seamless' communication. Each viewer in the space triggers a large-scale interactive art object projected

on the wall in front them. This projection is broken into a Mondrian-like mirror, where each sub-section, initialized by body-tracking software, animates one of the floor-found quotes; every animation is accompanied by an audio recitation of its text.

stuttering thus creates an intense environment through its inescapable barrage of stuttering sound and visual stuttering: noise. Only by lessening their participation will the information explosion slow into an understandable text for the viewer. The piece asks them not to interact, but merely to listen. Their minimal movements, and the phrases they trigger, literally create new meaning.

The spaces between speaking and listening, between language and the body, add to the complex experience of communication. *stuttering* is not displaying data, but rather, pushing us to explore these practices of speaking and listening. It suggests that communication comes to and from us, in ways that even we do not fully comprehend. (Stern, 2003)

Unlike *enter*, where movement and text are frenetically paired, stuttering is contrary in its interaction. In enter, you must physically pursue hektor's words to communicate, encountering text and activity as intrinsically active, together. In *stuttering*, you practice the labor and intimacy of embodied communication. Sweeping gestures in front of the screen execute a storm of visual and aural stutters. Move carefully, even cautiously – *stutter with your bodies* – and speaking, listening, meaning, and bodies are all felt. We slowly move our fingers, legs, or heads on and off, back and forth, across each individual button, intensifying a rehearsal of techniques for the affection and reflection of language.
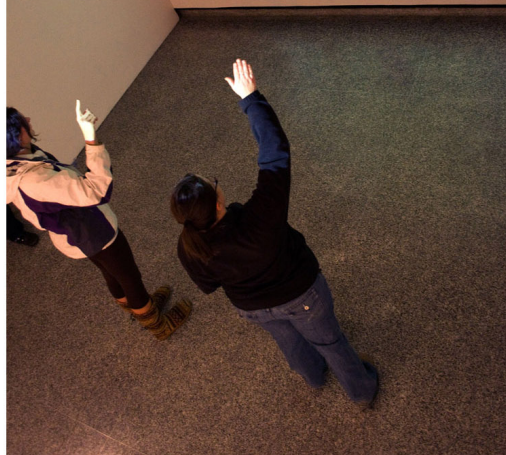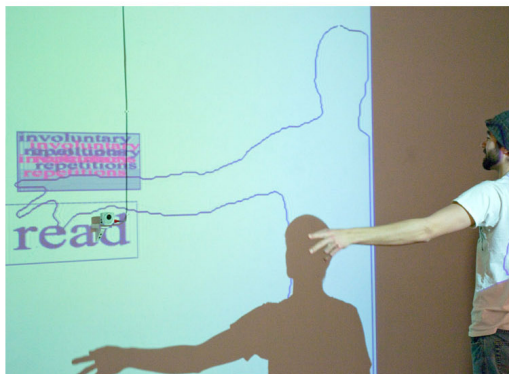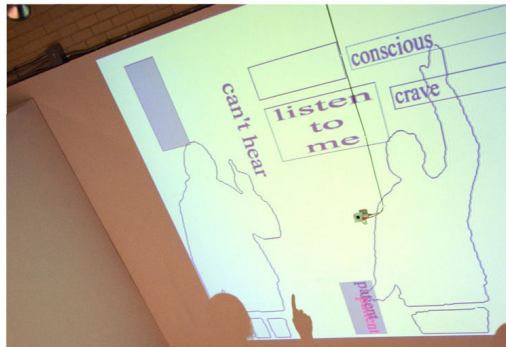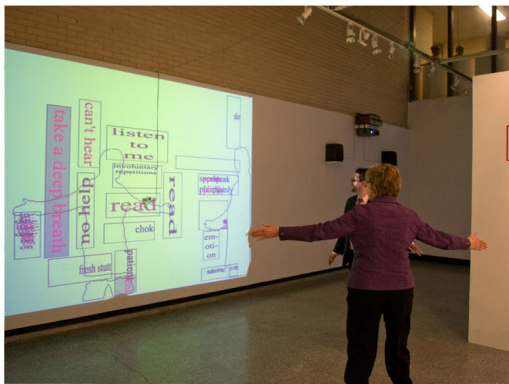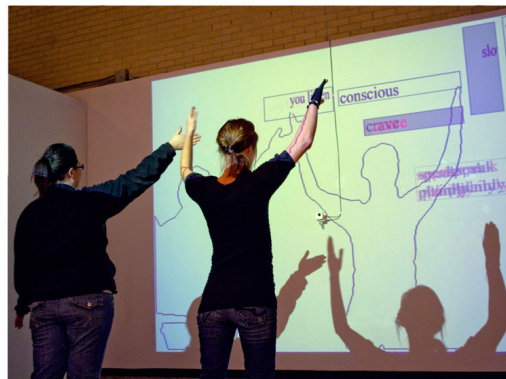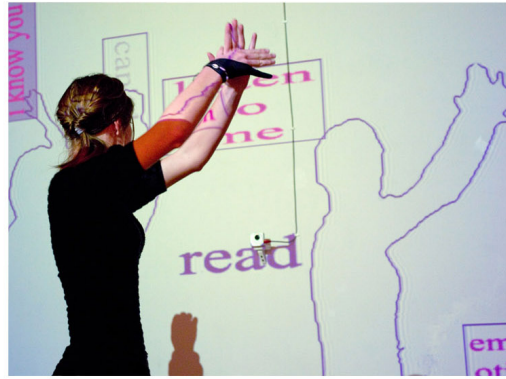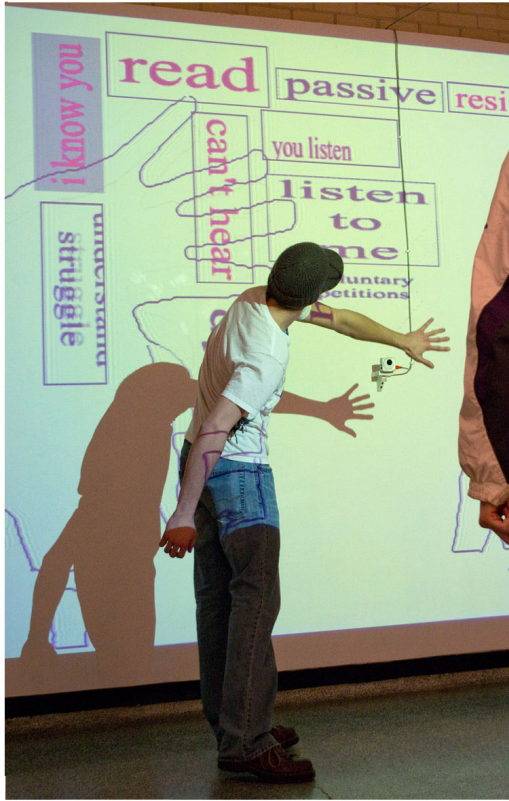
Figure 45, stuttering

Nicole, in the aforementioned NY Arts biography, later said:

Stern's interactive pieces work to implicate participants in his narratives, weaving them into events shot through with thoughtful intention and distracted passivity.... The tangle of text, voice and motion, makes our first encounter with *stuttering* feel almost perilous. We are dragged into the frenzied tension between body and text that the stutterer endures, but are then invited to slow down and stop doing. Seducing us into delicate gestures, and almost Butoh-like awareness, the piece allows us to perform quietude, but not acquiescence. (Ridgway, 2006)

stuttering (2003 - 2013)
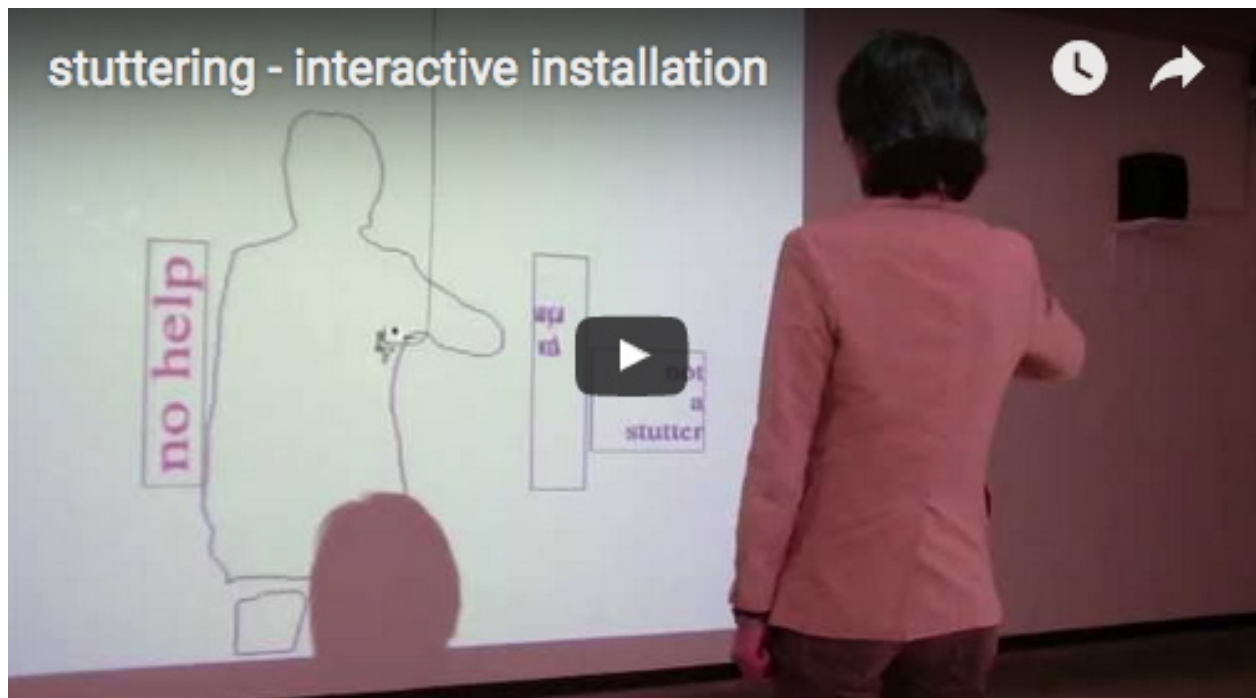
[embed width="490" height="260"]http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=VCzMRRyDt4Q[/embed]
Download as mp4 (2:01, 110MBs)

And more broadly:

Staged via various media, Nathaniel Stern's work enacts the interstices of body, language and technology. It seeks to force us to look again at the relationships between the three, and invites us to experiment with their relation. His body of work can, perhaps, be described as an exploration of the interstitial itself – revisiting between technology and text the dangerous spaces of enfleshment, incipience, and process. (Ridgway, 2006)

stuttering invokes and evokes a complex and careful exploration of how sign and body relate. It is a space for the experience and practice of embodied listening. Over the past few years, I have spent days at a time at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, and *stuttering's* various other installations, watching everyday gallery-goers, dancers, children, and academics all play out stutters and quivers between signs, exploring their relationships to, and as, flesh and text and image.

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NOTES

13. In his lectures, Austin breaks these down further, into several categorical types, depending on their implementation and on what they accomplish.
14. The multi-year designation here represents updates made to the software or installation, necessitated by changes in computer technologies. For example, a 2005 update saw a move from OS9 to OSX on the Mac – and while I was at it I also changed the installation area to reference performance more directly. The 2013 update, which I am working on as I do the final edits to this chapter, moves to the cross-platform and open-source coding platform, openFrameworks. I will again rethink the situated space in this latest version, since I intend to install it along with three other interactive pieces.
15. See http://odys.org/. Both hektor and odys are ironically named after characters from Homer's epics.
16. Two years before, Camille Utterback had been working on *Text Rain*, discussed in the full-length book, while we were together at NYU. I played with several prototypes.

'Social-Anatomies'

'It's not that it feels dishonest, really,' I'm saying to Nicole. 'It's just that....' I struggle to find the words, 'the way I'm telling it....' I sigh.

'It feels so... so... so inevitable.'

Nicole looks up at up me from what she's doing, with her eyes but not her head. She's blowing on a spoonful of homemade mashed potatoes with garlic and goats milk Brie, to cool it down for Nonie. I'm again tangentially very proud of what a classy eater our two-year-old is. Nicole pops the food in Nonie's mouth – who is lazily drawing circles with a pencil on the kitchen table – and waits for me to continue. I briefly think that a nice, hard, erasing session on the table, later, will do me some good – relieve some tension, if you will.

'I mean, it's all *true*,' I go on, figuring out what I'm going to say only as I say it. 'But there are so many other factors I don't mention, so many other people and relationships and bodies of work and jobs and parties and – whatever – that affected where I am now. And even this very idea – "where I am now."' I hold up two fingers on each hand and flex and extend them quickly in order to show quotation marks. 'What on Earth does that *mean*? I don't really *know* where I am. *Ever*.'

'Three years from now, I may see all of this as a blip, a fumble, after I decide to go back to narrativity or slam poetry or other concepts or media that interest me but that I'm not concentrating on at present for whatever reason. Maybe I'll go back to playing music! My entire project at Trinity could very easily be written off as a completely different stage in my progress at some point in the future. If it suited me, in my re-telling I could skip out on my interactive work and highlight art like my *Sentimental Constructions* or *Doin' my part* in Croatia and South Africa.[17] Although they also deal with the body on some level, I might say that, I don't know, they mostly served to lead me towards relational aesthetics or choreographic thinking. The "Nathaniel Narrative" would then read,' I take on my ironic professorial tone now, 'In my research on relationality, I was of course steered towards texts by Nicolas Bourriaud and Claire Bishop. Seeing the work of the likes of Liam Gillick, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Santiago Sierra, I began to recognize the potential in more subtle and subversively political art. I eventually abandoned physical interactivity to instead concentrate on social participation – an inevitable end, in retrospect... Or... It could be... I was drawn to the writings of William Forsythe and Erin Manning on objects that move us, but without technology's limitations, blah, blah, blah...'[18] I realize I'm starting to sound slightly belligerent at this point, but care little.

Nicole laughs at me lovingly, which makes my fear and aggression dissipate immediately, but she doesn't interrupt my monologue because she knows I'm not done. She's aware that I'm just airing out my frustrations – not an uncommon thing among PhD students, believe it or not. We both know that this is how writing and making happen, but that fact doesn't mean I can't complain about it. I sigh again, knowing I'm being kind of ridiculous, but then I carry on as if I hadn't even stopped.

'And what about all the other things I'm not mentioning from the last eight years or so? The slam poetry nationals helped me find odys. My residency at Cornell, in Ithaca, affected his story, and my engagement with it. Our marriage and the move to Africa, teaching HIV-positive township teens, my collaborations with dancers: these things challenged my understandings of self, of body, of relationships, and of reification. And more,' I say emphatically. 'My collaborations with lo-tech media artists like Marcus Neustetter, the downtown Johannesburg studio with Christian Nerf and Kathryn Smith, and the experimental residency at the Joburg Museum[19] – all of this, and so much I'm sure isn't coming to my mind right now, feeds into how I engage with my work and process, with theory and with life. I never know what will be most influential until years after it has happened, and I may never fully understand all the consequences, good and bad, of these activities and experiences.'

I stop speaking for a moment, and Nonie looks up from her drawing.

'Daaaaaaddy! Da-da-da-daddy!' I can't help but smile big. Aware that she has her ranting father's full attention now, she aims straight for her golden ticket. 'Watches... monstahs? Monstah time? Baths time, yeh? Monster time. Yeah. Oooooh-Kay.' My heart melts as she gets up and starts walking to the next room, then stops, turns around, and coyly says, 'Daddy? Come.'

Nicole and I both smile. 'I'm coming sweetie,' I say to Sidonie, realizing that in all my blustering, I left out the most important person and relationship in my entire life. I think about how Nicole always jokes that it's no accident I started producing 'pretty pictures' right around the time she got pregnant.[20]

I pop in Nonie's *Monsters, Inc* DVD; move her little plastic tub in front of the telly (we don't have an actual bath in this apartment); fill it with water and bubbles; soap her up; and plop her in. We sit and play and splash for a while in front of the television, talk about her favorite characters – Boo and Sully, obviously, though her dad is more like Mike Wazowski – and worry over the 'bad monsters' versus those who are 'just pretending.' She loves the bath, so instead of taking her out, I keep adding more warm water on top, and Nonie is starting to look a bit like a prune.

Nicole is sitting on the couch, reading a novel. When Nonie is completely engaged by the 'Boo in the Bathroom' scene – I have no idea if that is what it is actually called – I sit down across from Nicole for a break, and she puts down her book and picks up where we had left off 45 minutes before.

'It's really part of the point you know,' she starts. I look up.

'The process you're talking about is an example of continuity, etc, at its best. Of narrativity, too. Of writing, of making, of performance and emergence.' She waits for me to nod – I almost say, 'Very poetic' in dry response, but think better of it. 'But after that, once the writing is put to paper? It's nothing more than an exercise in good editing, in trying to ameliorate that sense of teleology.'

I shift in my seat, and Nicole takes in a short breath in preparation to speak again. 'Whether you are making art, or writing fiction, non-fiction, or a narrative inquiry, you can never include everything from the back story. Or everything that happens as part of its continuous present, for that matter.'

I nod another defeated nod, as if to say gloomily, 'Yeeeeh, I know.' Of course Nicole is right; and I knew it even before she said it. She doesn't stop, though.

'The art-making can be a discovery for you – it *was* a discovery for you; the writing can re-situate it for you – as it seems to be doing; but the final text you are working towards must end up as just the right mix to invite similar discoveries and re-situations for your readers. What you choose to include, and not include – how you edit – only that will foster such a thing. It's the difference between a long text, and a good one.'

I take Nonie out of the bath and begin to dry her off.

<p align="center">*</p>

I'm not entirely sure why things progressed the way they did after *stuttering*. Or more specifically, why my work and I progressed the way we did.

Perhaps it was because I felt I needed to branch out a bit while producing my first large-scale exhibition of works from hektor et al's narrative.[21] Maybe I thought I had exhausted the concept for myself, or I had finished my personal explorations of trauma and communication. Maybe I'll go back to it later. In all likelihood, I left the narrative behind simply because hektor and odys, as tools and as constraints, had served their purpose in furthering my work, but I now felt more than capable and ready to move on from them. I could explore and inquire without such an intricate back-story for support.

Following *enter*, *elicit*, and *stuttering*, I began concentrating less on story and more on interaction and performance / embodiment. One result of this move – or perhaps *this* was the action *behind* the move – was a step or three away from text and from language. At the time, the most specific catalyst that helped propel me towards performance and away from text came out of my watching styles of engagement with *stuttering*. As with *elicit*, I can see in retrospect how this watching helped to develop my interest in suspending and amplifying meaningful and material relationships through inter-activities, and thus also helped me move towards what would later become the implicit body approach.

As described in the last section, when viewers were alone with stuttering, they would investigate with their bodies, physically stutter and play out awkward encounters between signs, rehearsing possibilities in their relationships to, and as, flesh and text and image. It was actually quite magical not only to experience, but to see happen. Here we move-think-feel embodiment and meaning as emerging together; they are accented as they occur; bodies and discourse are virtually felt as continuous events.

But... this kind of sensuous and conceptual complexity only materialized when one or two, or maybe three, people were in the gallery. None of the magic came when would-be performers were at a crowded installation. On opening night and several congested weekends, for example, I witnessed swarms of bodies in front of the interactive screen, where everyone was just trying to show off, to 'one up' or otherwise entertain one another and their audiences. Players would run and dive, make shadow puppet-like outlines for linear narratives, and try to use the *stuttering* software and setup as a backdrop to a party. There were no intimate investigations of bodies and meaning; it was more like a game of who can do better.

This admittedly upset me. I wanted all my viewers to explore *stuttering's* potential. Yes, it was fun and funny to watch people move in very close to the camera and overtake the whole screen, triggering a mass of audiovisual verbiage. It was amusing to see teams work together to make Lozano-Hemmer-like body movies and stories. But I couldn't help feeling as if these partying viewers were missing out on the potentialized context they were being offered.

Eventually, as with my reflections on *hektor.net*, I came to view such interactions as an opportunity. I began to recognize the sometimes-frolicking scenario as a constructive critique, which not only showed *stuttering's* limitations, but intimated a new situation for my next work of art. With just the slightest reframing – what was offered to *stuttering* by a crowd – its performance emerged as something entirely different. The same software that had been intended for affective intimacy instead produced a communal space with its own emergent sensibility. This space manifested shared rules and structures, despite the fact that they were never spoken or agreed upon verbally.

In hindsight, in the language of the research and writing I've done since (in treating my own work as a case study), I know I was watching a socially constituting context – a microcosm of intercorporeality – for the practice of body techniques. Here people's collective movements create rules for said people's movements, which in turn creates more movement. I began thinking more about how we perform both with and for others, both consciously and unconsciously – the latter a 'second nature.' My next investigation of inter-activity would begin to explore and encourage performativity and affect as and in and with embodied social engagement, through playful competition. It would intervene in how we conceptually sense, and make, social-anatomies.

Given my re-focusing, I again turned to the idea of a literalized performance space, like the one I used in *enter*. But in this work, I would play out the tensions between performer, performed, and audience, and the relationships between all three as a kind of mutual immanence of bodies and an embodied society.

step inside is a multi-sensory environment that calls attention to our actions and affects as communal and embodied beings. It provokes us to re-think our bodies as 'collage[s] in motion,' always making and responding to matters around us. *step inside* implies multiplicity, reciprocity, and movement as intrinsic to the performance of bodies in society. As Elizabeth Ermarth would say, 'I swing, therefore I am' (Ermarth, 1992).

When 'stepping inside' the 3 x 3 x 3 meter interaction space, viewer-participants are immediately confronted with an amplified and echoed trail of noise. This is the sound of each footstep they take, of all the footwork in the room.

A video camera, opposite them and connected to the *step inside* software, 'reads their bodies,' and separates them out from the background. Instead of a video mirror directly in front of them, their two-dimensional forms are projected as profile, to their left, and filled with video static. The amplitude of the echoed footsteps controls the video's opacity. We, and our representations, become a variable wave of embodied noise.

A written statement, as a provocation to movement, is on the far wall of the space. It invites participants to perform, direct, react to, and interact with, the images and sounds they create. It asks them to try walking, crawling, gesturing, with their bodies; play between silence and tapping, scratching, audio-theatrics on the floor. Through experimentation, viewers' performances will change, as they try and direct their image to suit their fancy – a purposeful performative act. They are both inside, and looking from the outside-in.

External, non-interacting viewers will also see the performer's projected image, but not their bodies or actions inside the space. They can only guess the intent of *step inside's* participant, who can likewise only attempt to promote a well-read re-presentation of his or her body in the communal gallery space and time. There's a literal wall between what we project with our performance, and how this might be perceived by others.

step inside literally frames, and accents, the minute details of willing and unwilling communication, through movement in and with others. Rather than mirroring us back to our 'selves,' it provokes 'body' and 'bodies' as question, and shifts our perspectives on where and how these do not begin or end. (Stern, 2004)

By cutting off the 'performance room' from the rest of the gallery space with *step inside* (Figure 46), I was trying to emphasize both how we are always already performing for / with others, and how our separation from them, the separations between self and other, and body and performance, are all a myth. Differentiation never fully occurs, and only happens through contact. Nicole calls the artwork a 'place of play and intimacy' (Ridgway, 2006): the former because of how we are asked to perform in public, the latter because of our anonymity from within the enclosed stage. Viewers' actions and gestures are not witnessed directly, but are still guided by societal rules, conscious and unconscious.
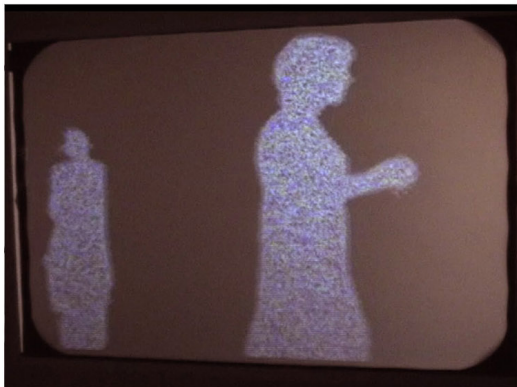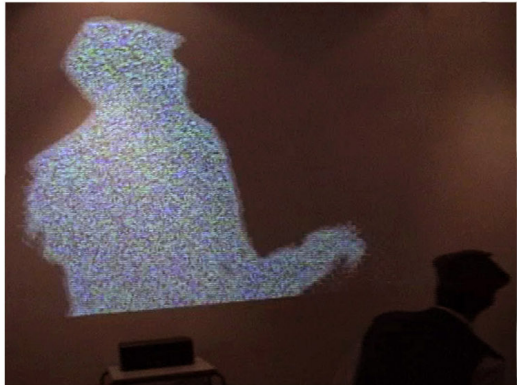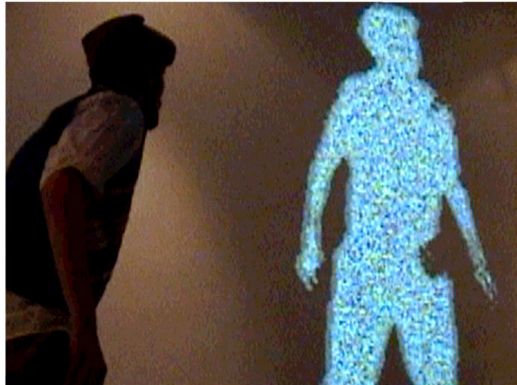
Figure 46, step inside

Here, I enhanced what stuttering was sometimes inadvertently accomplishing with a crowd. Performers watched each other's images – the movements and affects and vulnerabilities of those around them, how they were 'looked at' when they finally stepped *outside* the box when they were done – and this affected their styles of behavior, again. Simultaneously, the awkward interface – the need for stomping or scratching to be seen, the profiled camera that asks for re-adjusted (non-mirrored) body-techniques to create our animated images – meant *step inside* doubly intervened in how we move, and see and feel ourselves moving, in social space, as part of an intercorporealized community. An implicit body is staged and implicated as per-formed, with its public. We make, distort, constitute, interrupt, anticipate, intercept, and ultimately move-think-feel our bodies along with others, and thus (a) 'social-anatomy.'

[embed width="490" height="330"]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fad4n-IueY[/embed]
[Download this video (mp4, 39mb)](#)
[Download video w/ artist voiceover (mp4, 46mb)](#)

On a personal level, *step inside* also freed me to enjoy the ludic pleasure of body-play. Unlike stuttering, it was always intended to be fun and funny, to embarrass or frustrate or empower its performers, with a sense of humor. It called for a kind of *serious play*. Participants' efforts ranged from tap dancing and somersaults and cheerleading to dropping change on or sweeping the floor, all whilst trying to make shapes with their bodies that performed textual characters or sexual acts or flipped bodily identities. Inside my little cube, the performance of the body lacks at least some of the everyday signifying cues we are used to, and it thus creates a situation for rehearsing other experiences, practices, *per-formances* in and of and as (an embodied) society.

Affect, says Massumi, is irreducibly bodily and autonomic; he says that it is not pre-social, pre-reflexive, or unconscious, but rather 'asocial... it includes social elements but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels

of functioning and combines them according to a different logic' because 'the trace of past actions, including a trace of their contexts, are conserved in the brain and the flesh, but out of mind and body' (Massumi, 2002: 30). Affect is autonomous, but *knows* things. *step inside* invites us to explore both action and affect in this way: between movement and society, between body techniques and intercorporeality. It is virtually felt *before* and as we move-think-feel, and plays a role in how we continue to unfold, enfold, and contextualize our movements.

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NOTES

17. See http://nathanielstern.com/?post_type=portfolio for a reverse chronological listing of my art projects since 2000, including both of these from 2007 and 2008. Several works and series have come out of the *Sentimental Constructions* trajectory, and I consider them potentialized art.
18. Still true in 2013: in addition to interactive art and *Sentimental Constructions* (etc), I do a lot of print and / or video objects, mixed reality art, Internet art, kinetic sculpture, and what Erin Manning calls choreographic objects. In fact, Manning has recently become a collaborator.
19. Locals often call the Johannesburg Art Gallery, or JAG, the Joburg Museum.

20. I began an ongoing performative printmaking series in 2005. This is also talked about in the full book, and documentation is available online at http://nathanielstern.com/art/tag/compressionism/
21. *The Storytellers: works from the non-aggressive narrative* was a solo exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, from December 2004 to February 2005. See http://nathanielstern.com/artwork/the-storytellers/

'Flesh-Space'

'Nicks?' I whisper tentatively. I just got back from a day of administrative crap I had to finish at Trinity. I barely take off my coat and hang it up, and already I'm doing my doorway hovering, eyebrows knitted. My brain has been buzzing with the last few sections I need to write before we skip continents, and I'm sure Nicole can hear the anxiety in my voice. My ever-patient wife sighs gently, looks up from reading her book on the bed, and nods at the door to the next room. I give a thin-lipped smile-nod thing and watch as she cautiously extricates her arm from a napping Nonie. I smile bigger, and with more feeling, as my daughter wraps her floppy arm around a pillow where her mom used to be.

We move into the lounge, and I close the door. As we both sit on the couch, Nicole quietly groans, 'It's not been a very fun day.' She had explained earlier, on the phone, about paying way too much money for shipping far too few things to our new place in Milwaukee – sight unseen. Nonie senses a big change is coming, as two-year-olds do, and so was being pretty difficult at the post office in terms of needing to be entertained and wanting to be outside. Yeh, me too, kid.

'I'm sorry,' I say, and mean it. The move is going to be hard – and also exciting – for all sorts of reasons. New city, new art scene, new friends and colleagues, new classes. Closer to my family (though still a plane ride), much further from Nicole's. I've got my first important New York show coming up, and we just heard that Nonie got into a fabulous day care center a distant relative had recommended.[22] The big question mark, however, is over Nicole. The ever-elusive academic 'spousal hire' was just not in the cards at this point. In fact, Nicole doesn't have a green card yet. We'll be OK for a little while, and Nonie will be happy to have her mom at home, helping her adjust. But I'm familiar with how hard it is to move to a city where you know no one and feel reliant on someone else. I did it when I moved to South Africa to be with Nicole and, although it was *well* worth it, I struggled to be who I wanted to be in the world, and could get very emotional about it. Nicole is less emo than I am (that's not saying much), and able to adjust better (also not saying much), but that may not make it any easier for her.

Nicole responds with a simple smile that says, 'It'll be fine,' and I know it will. A few seconds later she adds, with actual words after another almost imperceptible sigh, 'I'm not looking forward to the cold, though.' And we both laugh.

'Could be worse,' I answer.

'That's comforting,' she replies with a sardonic tone. And we sit for a few moments to let that exchange teeter off.

I eventually pipe up with what I really want to talk about. 'I'm a little at a loss for the flesh-space section in the "me" chapter,' I start, without looking up. 'I don't know what to write about.'

I wait a few seconds, then peer up. For once, Nicole looks at me like I'm mad. '*undertoe*,' she says simply.

Huh. I hadn't thought of that. It's an interesting and potentially beautiful installation. But there's a reason I didn't consider it viable. 'I haven't made it yet. I might *never* make it.'

'What does that matter?' she asks.

Again, I'm not sure.

Another pause, and then I know why. 'Well, my whole point is to study actual interaction, the experience and practice of relational styles, etc, etc. The most compelling parts of the "not autoethnography" thinger are when I thought I was making one thing that turned out to sometimes be, or do, something else. *undertoe* is just a concept

right now, and so all I can really talk about is the technology and the idea.' I let that sink in. 'Isn't the whole point to get away from all that, and talk about situation and performance?'

Nicole raises her eyebrows. 'You're an artist. Use your imagination.'

She's right. And she's not. It's not the same. Nicole can see my struggling with my thoughts, and she softens.

'Nathaniel, I agree to some extent,' she bites just the inside corner of her lip before going on. 'The narrative inquiry is about making and thinking, experience and practice, as they feed back in to making and thinking, experience and practice. But still, all the bits and pieces within the narrative have to unfold somewhat linearly, and you have to end the story somewhere. I think it's actually kind of nice to end with a proposal.'

I bob thoughtfully. She goes on, 'Your readers will be understanding, given the project's size. Not everyone has the kind of support that Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Norah Zuniga Shaw have. The two flesh-space artworks you write about in the core text are huge funded projects by artists much more famous than you.' She tries not to grin, and the corners of her mouth go up and down tightly in containing the laugh.

'Thanks,' I answer sarcastically.

'Maybe one day,' she replies light-heartedly, accompanied with a half-shrug.

'Most people probably won't even notice that one of the pieces you write about is on hiatus, while the others are complete. Not in the scheme of things. You've got images and a great description and tell good stories about why you do what you do.'

That was nice of her. 'Unless I tell them it's not complete.'

She laughs out loud this time, at her slightly neurotic husband. 'As I'm sure you will.'

And we both laugh, just as a bleary-eyed Nonie manages to get the door open and totter in. She starts laughing with us, really loudly, despite having absolutely no idea why. We all laugh a little harder.

*

Late 2004 was around the time I started thinking about going for a PhD. I was enjoying my own feedback loops between making and thinking and watching and doing, and could already see these as parallel to many aspects of who I am and how I operate in the world. Following *step inside*, my work and research began to converge around many implicating ideas, and also to diverge across even more sensible concepts.

In terms of another interactive piece, I wanted to next create an installation where participants feel what José Gil calls 'the space of the body,' dispersed and interfered across other bodies and *their* spaces, where interior and exterior are accented as always folding. I wanted to intervene in flesh-space. This was to some extent a response to the inside / outside, intensive / extensive that was virtually felt with *step inside*, but with a desire to amplify physical space rather than social constitution. The proposal for *undertoe* (in progress, Figure 47) was first written in collaboration with New York-based artist Greg Shakar in 2001, but has since gone through a few phases of editing and research and development on my own.

undertoe fills a large, interactive room with the experience of walking on water, and watching yourself from the beneath the surface. It traces the almost imperceptible sounds of our footfalls into a pool of water directly above our heads. Hop lightly on your feet, and create a gentle series of ripples that disperses outward. Heavier jumps result in sustained rolling across the room's expanse. Loud stomping produces large swells of undulating liquid. Each footstep, or sound we make on the floor below us, results in a 'hum' of varying amplitude and duration above, and each 'hum' vibrates the water, making literal 'sound waves' that disrupt the reservoir and unsettle the environment

around us. Soft lamps shine focused beams through the mildly colored fluid, illuminating bands of light and dark blue on the space's walls and floor.
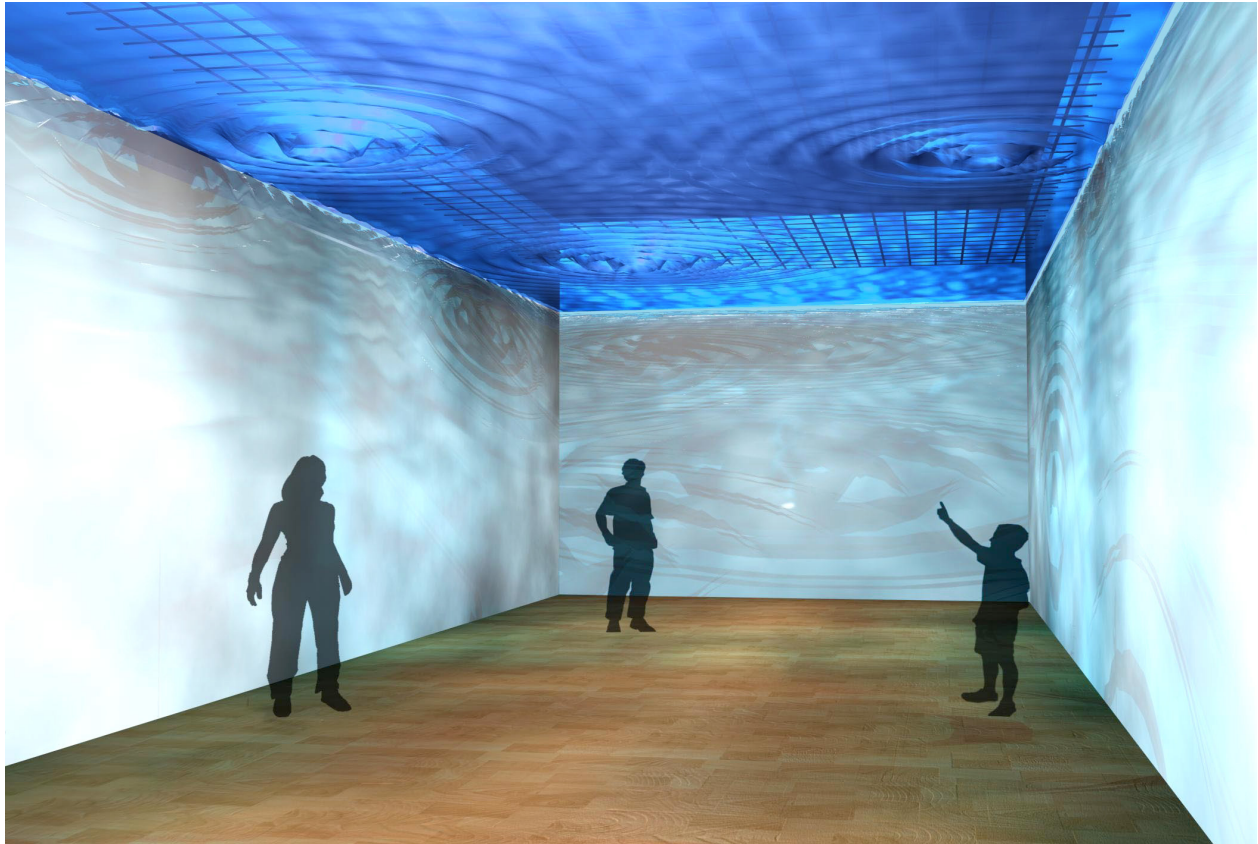

Figure 47, undertoe; artist rendering by Tana Green

As more participants cross the threshold into *undertoe*, their movements erupt outward and in counterpoint to one another, making a cacophony of co-operative formations. Sweeping effects creep across the water's surface, performing a multitude of possibilities in our unfolding, enfolded, and intensified relationships. *undertoe* asks us to attune ourselves to the world we inhabit, together, and to rehearse the potential in our reciprocal interactions within it. Our bodies' literal 'minor impacts' (footsteps) are shared with exterior space, things, and other bodies, and we respond in kind, again. The piece explicitly provides a habitat where we can collaboratively practice better modes of active relation with water, the environment, and each other. It invites us to perform otherwise, personally and politically, with matter, spaces, bodies, and their matters. (Stern, 2007)

Although I can only, as in the last paragraph, imagine how participants will play out the flesh-space of *undertoe*, the performance it proposes to stage is clear. It very literally asks us to experience and practice how bodies and their spaces per-form – are dispersed, enacted, entwined, interfered, differentiated, shared, and continuously embodied. It is, it makes, and it re-presents our moving-thinking-feeling bodies as, and in, an ever-shifting expanse.

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- [Four years later](#)

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NOTES

22. My mother's cousin's son's life partner's sister's son went to the same day care. Seriously. The NY exhibition was cancelled when the economy tanked. I'm over it, I really am.

Four years later

It's more than four years later as I write this section. I passed my viva with no revisions – and this chapter was a highlight for my reviewers, both external and internal. I'm tenured in [Peck School of the Arts](#) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Nicole teaches part-time in the graduate program, and is working on her own writing. Nonie is six, totally made of awesome, and still likes broccoli. We ride bikes and roller coasters together.

Although all of the thinking and ideas for my PhD have been expanded and refined since I first wrote them (the book is a very different beastie, after all), they have become part of who I am and what I do. Experience and practice, understandings of reciprocity and movement, are not only what I try to highlight in my moving-thinking-feeling with art and writing, but also what I aim for in my teaching and the ways I engage with friends and participants and collaborators. In my current research, more than 60% of the work I make is now in equal partnership with other artists and thinkers.

My approach can best be summarized via the spiel I usually start my 'artist talks' with:

I believe that artists no longer simply make images, objects, or even processes; they make discourse – both sensual and conceptual. They help to produce what Jean-Luc Nancy would call a 'corpus.'

Artists ask us not only to 'look,' but to 'look again,' or, with all our senses, to re-examine. The *best* of art invites us to re-think and re-make what *is*.

Art is always dialogical – I mean, simply, that it is in dialogue: with history, with other art and artists, with current events, politics, pop culture, materials, and more. And it is in dialogue with people, with real people.

This is not the same as the en masse, people-powered, Internet – the supposedly democratic, vote yes or no, argue over at Wikipedia, Facebook 'like' this, re-Tweet, intelligence of crowds we keep hearing about. Because while I appreciate LOLcats as much as the next guy, I'm interested in more depth. I'm interested in speaking to one another on a powerful and personal level, working together to create and change ideas, matter, and matters, working together to make things, and to make things different.

I believe in the artist as public figure, as both engaging and engaged; because the only things I appreciate as much as beautiful and provocative works of art, are the discussions and transformations that can grow out of them.

Given that, I also believe that generosity is key to contemporary practices of art. If art is a conversation, you've gotta make people want to talk to you; you've gotta be nice, you've gotta ask questions, you have to not only be interest*ing*, but interest*ed* – in other work and what others say and do.

We are all always already implicated across each other: in experience and practice, in production and research, in our very being (-with).

I believe in chit chat, in agency, in studio critique, in humanity; I believe in art karma, in goin' around and comin' around, in sending folks to see things and meet people, and in sharing my tricks and my code and myself. Teaching is a part of my practice, and a part of my work. Writing is a part of my practice and a part of my work. Collaborating is always implicit in what I do, and often explicit towards the materialization of a given piece...

... And I go on from there to talk about trajectories of making and thinking not dissimilar to how I do for much of this chapter. You can probably hear Nicole's influence, the subtleties of fatherhood, the desire and hope for art and what is at stake in how we experience and practice in its situation – and then again, with the rest of the world.

As I finish what I hope is the last draft of my book in early 2013, I'm producing eco-art, sound art, and multimedia installations with The SenseLab, kinetic and choreographic sculptures with my friend Yevgeniya Kaganovich, social media projects with Scott Kildall, and some new print and video works with Jessica Meuninck-Ganger (among other little projects, of course). And, probably because of the manuscript I've just completed, I'm revisiting interactive art in my studio for the first time since 2004. I'm updating *enter*, *elicit*, and *stuttering*, re-writing their code, and packaging them with a fourth installation I've recently conceptualized, as a suite of interactive installations called – of course – *Body Language*.

Tentatively titled *scripted*, the last, in-progress installation suspends, amplifies, and intervenes in the embodied activity of writing. Here a ceiling-mounted camera (a Kinect) uses head-tracking to follow participants' movements below, and the software draws slowly fading, charcoal-like lines of their actions on screen. If and when any of the shapes they create resemble a character from the English alphabet (using Palm Pilot 'graffiti' gestures), that letter will be temporarily overlaid in the projection in a standard font (such as Times New Roman), accompanied by a John Cage-like oral recitation ('Aaaaah,' 'Beh,' 'Kah,' and so on). Not all 26 letters from the English alphabet will be possible – since many contain echoes of others in how we must move – and so the work is less about accomplishing specific gestures, and more about encountering and rehearsing textual movements at large.

scripted asks participants to investigate Jean Luc Nancy's concept of exscription, how the activities of writing and embodiment require one another. Nancy says that while we may not be able to produce any successful language or discourse that is 'embodied' as bodies are, we also fail to produce any writing without the body already in it. Inscrip- tion and exscription, language and bodies, are implicit in every-thing, every constitution, every action, every communication, every meaning and every text (Nancy, 1990). Here writing becomes more than an abstraction, created by a hand and an eye. Writing is one site of the incipient and active body, and the body always takes part in writing its own discourse.

scripted (2013)

[embed width="490"
height="260"]http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=9An_SI1C89s[/embed]
Download as mp4 (1:59, 109MBs)

Taken together, the suite creates situations for the practice of four specific relations between body and language: *elicit* invites viewers to perform the continuity between text and the body; *enter* effectively asks its participants to investigate how words and activity are inherently entwined; *stuttering* provokes its performers into exploring the labor and intimacy of embodied listening; and *scripted* asks us to remember how the activities of writing, the shape and sound of language, are forever a part of both the corporeal and incorporeal.

With *Body Language*, participants can investigate the complex and emergent relationships between embodiment and meaning-making. These pieces involve bodies and language in various ways, enabling in-depth and stylistic explorations of how the two are always implicated across one another. Here we experience and practice the reaches and limits of bodies and language, together, in order to better understand how they are formed, together. I pose a challenge to how bodies are mediated and re-mediated in contemporary culture, by putting embodiment and signification on the same plane of existence. And I implicitly ask what is at stake in how we perform our bodies and our media.

Body Language (2000 - 2013)

[embed width="490"
height="260"]http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=xgCPZaq6DJ0[/embed]
[Download this video as mp4 (2:03, 112MBs)](#)

*

I suppose the narrative arc of this chapter does get a bit jumbled at points, going between proof of academic rigor, my questions as an artist, the production of work, and family experience. So let me summarize: inquiry is *always* academic and personal, generous and dialogical, rehearsed and made. To make it (a) narrative is just another way to 'make sense.'

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