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### **BodyHeat Encounter: Performing Technology in Pedagogical Spaces of Surveillance/Intimacy**

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#### **Abstract**

What occurs when videographer and performer encounter each other through the lens of a camera? This collaborative performative inquiry focuses on embodiment and emergent narrative as realized through an encounter between technology and the visceral body—a relational body that smells, touches, sees, hears and feels the emergent world through impulse and movement. Who performs whom as we encounter each other through technology? Does our engagement with technology limit our field of vision, or expand the pedagogical imagination? What we are beginning to recognize is a paradoxical complexity; that within surveillance is an unsuspected possibility of intimacy. With the rise in techno-mediated arts, arts

educators are offered curricular and pedagogical opportunities to reinvestigate the performative encounters of those who create through and with technology.

### Introduction

*I take my position in front of the screen after tying my blindfold securely around my head. I tie my blindfold on swiftly and yet transparently, hoping if people see me do it they will soon forget. I surprise myself by taking a stance of mixed messages. My feet are far apart, knees locked, and pelvis slightly forward and yet my hands are clasped behind my back. Had I not been blindfolded this last kinesthetic detail might not have been so unusual, it could have looked like I was unafraid to be exposed, comfortable in my self and moving forward to my audience. However, I have my back to those in the room and I am blindfolded which evokes within me an image of moments before an execution.<sup>1</sup>*

This paper moves fluidly between journal entries of a performative inquiry and our ongoing research on the relationship between performance, pedagogy, technology, and ethical responsibility. What follows is the unfolding of a performative event as we track our experience, as we witness each other through the inquiry lens of a video camera, in the presence of others, from our initial positioning through to an unexpected moment when the videographer crosses the unmarked border from distant observer to active witness.<sup>2</sup> Our inquiry investigates the interplay between the performing body, pedagogical and curricular encounters, and the lived experience of performing technology. As we engage in our inquiry, the following questions, among others included throughout the text, are evoked for future wondering: How might we problematize and re-imagine the relationship between the performer and videographer within performative encounters? What curricular moments are called into being, as we seek to bring an immediate and embodied presence in our explorations of impulse, intimacy, and reciprocity in pedagogical moments of inquiry? How might we attend to our students and our own practices as technology increasingly mediates the performance and response of the artist? In this inquiry, borders collapse between the watcher and the watched, as the videographer falls into a performative space of reciprocal responsibility.

As we are both in the field of educational arts, our attention is drawn to the possibilities of

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<sup>1</sup> Italicized text indicates the action thoughts of the performer during the research and the emergent questions of performer and videographer during their shared research encounter as mediated through a video camera lens. These emergent questions call us to new theorizing and inquiry.

<sup>2</sup> This performative inquiry was conducted during a conference presentation, one of the many action sites where we engage in research together.

performative inquiry (Fels, 2012, 2011, 2010, 1999 & 1998) and embodied poetic narratives (Ricketts, 2011, 2005 & 2002) that emerge through pedagogical engagements between text, performers, objects, and those who witness. Our theorizing is embodied within the unfolding storying of our lived experience, in conversation, and in reflection with those whose words resonate with what we have come to recognize through our performative investigations.

The nature of embodiment through action sites of inquiry and learning as practiced in our research together is a recurrent theme in a variety of discourses that intersect performative and educational theorizing with pedagogical ambitions and is absolutely intrinsic to our values of relationality and presence in our work. Snowber (2007) supports the concept of the body as a sensual force awakening self to the world, simultaneously locating and experiencing embodied presence, inquiry, learning, and theorizing. “In whatever stage of life one is at, there is always the body as a fertile place for discovery and growth” (p. 145). Similarly, Shapiro (2008) writes of the body as a conduit and barometer of tacit cultural inscriptions, calling our attention to the complicity of our engagements through a culturally prejudiced embodiment. “The body here is understood as the concrete material inscribed by cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs and as the vehicles for transcending our limited social identities” (Shapiro, 2008, p. 261). Recognizing the role of body as a template and thermometer of our cultural histories and present circumstances, our performative inquiry embodies a rich palette of as yet unknown possibilities. As our inquiry unfolds, we become viscerally cognizant of the hidden, the invisible, the as yet unsaid, and the possible lived experiences of others, evoked through our performative inquiry as shared together.

Thus, a simple gesture or action or form holds the history and unfolding narrative of culturally inscribed beings. Abram (1996) links the sentient body with the world of objects “thus my divergent senses meet up with each other in the surrounding world, converging and comingling in the things I perceive. We may think of the sensing body as a kind of open circuit that completes only in things, and in the world” (Abram, 1996, p. 125). Consequently, when we consider embodiment, we recognize that we embody understanding and meaning making in action through our interactions with others, our narratives, our histories, our cultural and ethical contexts in relationship with place and time, relationships and experiences remembered, and newly realized in an ongoing unfolding of new unbounded possibilities.

Similarly, Fels (2011) attends to an etymological reading of per/form/ance, as it informs our lived experience, noting how form (or structure, or thing) is the artifact of embodied action. Thus in addressing form, we are simultaneously attending to action—past, present, and future—as evoked (or provoked) by form and through playing with form. As Fels (2011) writes,

If we further understand that form embodies action, then our etymological reading

of performance calls us to attention. Knowing that form is fluid, flexible, suspect, and accountable, and that we may through its disruption, interruption, corruption, and/or destruction come to new understanding, invites us to identify performance as a generative action space of inquiry and learning. (p. 340)

Our collaborative performative inquiry focuses on embodiment through an encounter between technology and the visceral body, a relational body that smells, touches, sees, hears, and feels the emergent world through impulse and movement. Embodiment becomes a place to engage with self, other, and world that is rooted in a physicality, which forges the connection between body and knowing, a metaphorical evocation of recognition, breathed into presence and named.

***Unsuspected Intimacies: Under the Lens of a Video Camera Who Performs Who?***

In our work, a three-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Canada funded inquiry, we are exploring pedagogical and performative implications of technology in relationship to performer as enacted and witnessed. Our initial research questions embody the following: What impact does the presence of a video camera have on a performer when he or she is aware of being under surveillance? Does she perform for, with, or against the technology? What occurs when videographer and performer encounter each other through the lens of a camera? Who performs who? Investigating the role of the video camera, the action of videoing others, and the ways in which technology performs us, we engaged in an inquiry whereby a videographer films a performer as she moves in a series of improvisational movements dictated by impulse. These distinct roles of spectator and performer unfold in an extraordinary way, as the videographer morphs into co-performer within a shared performative space.

*From moment to moment  
what impulse, thought, action will unfold  
into new interstanding?<sup>3</sup>*

We have through the years engaged in a variety of techno-mediums in our explorations, from video camera to computerized platforms with sensors attached to the skin of the performer. Initially, we worked in a studio beyond the scrutiny of our colleagues and inquisitive students. Our interest was not in creating a final production but in our journey of inquiry. Our first venture involved deceptively simple technology: the researcher held a rolled piece of paper to

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<sup>3</sup> Saarinen and Taylor (1994) suggest that understanding is no longer possible, that all “interstanding” or meaning-making arises through interconnections and inter-relationships in dynamic encounter.

her right eye, with the other eye closed, she circled the performer, focusing on different parts of the performer's body. This exercise, which limits the field of vision, proved pivotal in our inquiries; our low-tech inquiry called our attention to the importance of attending to what is seen and not seen, the choice of focus, and emergent moments of narrative and metaphorical clarity from what is seen (or not seen) that create new understandings. Our choices of where to look, i.e. data collection, and the meaning-making that emerges, is highly subjectified, provoked by our positionality and contextual relationality. Although our explorations became more technologically complex, these initial findings of what mattered continue to inform our understanding of the interplay between surveillance, intimacy, and the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived.

During our video sessions together, the performer would execute ten-minute physical 'meltdowns.' From a standing position, she would descend slowly towards the floor, allowing the pull of gravity and the weight of her body to shape each moment in anticipation of the next. An essential rule of this exercise is to remain true to the physical path as bones, organs, muscles, and breath collectively navigate gravity, surface, space, and time. Moments are almost imperceptible as time alters perspectives in this event, magnifying each micro impulse—like a strawberry seed caught between teeth, the performer understands and feels minuscule shifts that cause magnanimous effects. A meltdown offers another means of engagement and attention.

These exercises called our attention to posture, which in turn evokes an unfolding narrative of movement through attention to impulse. Posture performs us. Interconnectedness between the physicality of the body, the body's posture or form, and the consequent unfolding narrative(s) is central to our inquiry. Will Johnson (1996) in his handbook on meditation, *The Posture of Meditation*, writes of the implication of posture, which informs how our bodies interact with gravity. The first stance to which he speaks provokes militant traits with authoritative implications; the second brings an astuteness balanced with ease.

The standing military position seeks to create good soldiers. By bringing a great deal of tension into his body, the soldier is effectively able to lessen the awareness of his sensations and feelings. Through limiting his awareness and impulses, he becomes much more amenable to following orders and doing the bidding of his superior officers. (Johnson, 1996, p.40)

By relaxing through surrendering the weight of the body to the pull of gravity, we allow unnecessary tension in the body literally to fall away. As the musculature of the body continues to relax, we become much more aware of our sensations and feelings. Formerly the tension in the musculature created a kind of armoring that

prevented us from fully feeling the tactile sensations in our bodies. As we relax this tension, we are often flooded by the awareness of this sensation and we become able to experience the body as it is. (Johnson, 1996, p.41)

The paradoxical stance taken by the performer at the beginning of our inquiry—that of standing at ease, yet hands bound behind her back, as if *moments before an execution*—evokes imagery that is militaristic, a metaphor that carries into her second stand, as she slowly collapses as if dying in slow motion. Videographer and performer engage in an improvised encounter, as each movement unfolds into the next. The videographer zooms in on different parts of the performer's body: a slow pan across a creased sleeve, a watchful eye as the performer's head tips forward, cascading hair concealing her face, a concerned arrest as a shoe turns skyward, as the performer's body comes to stillness, prone on the floor.

The videographer is tense during our initial research sessions, burdened by her unfamiliarity with the video camera, as cables trip her up, anxious for fear of batteries dying, fingers fumble with the zoom; her attention is fragmented, slipping in and out of focus like the images she sees through the viewfinder. As the performer descends within the familiarity of her art, the videographer struggles with the inflexible weight of the camera and that of her own body. In close proximity, she seeks clarity through the blurred images, the camera unable to sustain close focus as the performer descends.

Due to the proximity of the videographer to the performer, and consequent low depth of field, the images seen through the viewfinder, (and, later, when projected simultaneously on the screen) quiver in and out of focus, accenting moments of clarity, while distorting others. Occasionally, however, these moments of shifting focus come to moments of image clarity that call the videographer to attention, evoking response, recognition, and articulation of what matters. Moments of image clarity became metaphorical, fragments of an unspoken narrative unfolding into meaning; it is within these spaces and moments of action that we recognize the generative spaces of learning.

While our work in the studio was informative, we decided that our next conference presentation would become an action site of inquiry; rather than share our findings from our studio research, we would invite participants to witness our work in action. In recognition of the presence of an audience, we arranged for the images filmed by the videographer to be projected directly onto a screen located behind the performer. In this way our audience could see what the videographer was seeing through her camera lens. In addition, they would also see what the videographer could not see due to the limitations of the viewfinder. We were curious about audience response; what, we wondered, would be the experience of watching our performative encounter through multiple lenses, embodied by us and through the lenses of

technology? Focused on soliciting audience response, we failed to anticipate the possibility that we ourselves would feel the bodyheat of technology in this performative encounter.

### ***Heated moments of recognition***

*The videographer and performer are in position, a large screen reveals images captured by the videographer as she zooms in on the turned-up collar of the white shirt, and descends the length of torso. The images are shaky, blurred, only occasionally does clarity appear on the screen and through the viewfinder. The videographer becomes frustrated by the limitations of the technology that distort the images. With the presence of an audience, she desires perfection, control. Coldness exists in this techno-examination, a distance between performer and videographer and audience as they enter into inquiry.*

The performer steps into position, blindfold over her eyes and stands with her back to the audience, while the videographer (never secure in the workings of the assorted technology, trustworthiness of camera, battery, input and output to computer onto screen) turns on the camera, and stands outside the performance area; positioned five feet from the performer, she begins to film. In this positioning of the videographer and performer, we anticipate the distancing of relationship (emotional, spatial, and relational) as the performer falls in slow motion under the lens of the videographer. This distancing, like surveillance, suggests a detached engagement, an ethics of reciprocal care or compassion is absent; one is the watcher, the other the watched. However, unknown to each other, performer and videographer are on the threshold of an embodied encounter of surveillance, capture, witnessing, intimacy, and surrender.

*I can feel the thick silence of the room. My hair is a curtain over my face drawing my focus inward. My breath is slow and steady. I can distinguish almost inaudible groans that seem to help sustain the muscularity and precision of my dance. I begin to release the muscular tension in my torso in its slow sustained journey of descent and yet my hands seem to rise opposed to seeking the weighted gravity laden path to the floor. They accumulate tension and so does my face until half way through the meltdown I can feel myself crouched like a wild animal with a silent roar in horrific protest. I am also aware of moving in a downward spiral and perhaps facing more towards the audience. This causes a disorientation and provokes a heightened sense of vulnerability*

As videographer approaches the performer, physically in body and visually through the viewfinder, there is, in this instant that precedes the action, a construction of *availability*, “a decided body”—movement that is activated without chronology or logic but rather with an astute presence to a moment. This presencing entails an attentiveness to all senses, as

experienced by both performer and videographer. The nuances of gesture, smell, touch, sound, and sight inform the lives of teaching, theorizing, and performance—they are sensuous knowledge (Ricketts, 2005, 2002). As Abram (1996) says, “meaning is birthed in the soil of the sensory world, in the heat of meeting, encounter, participation” (pp. 74-75). The nature of embodiment is not only about the body, but it is the intersection of body, mind, soul, and imagination. It is the imagination with flesh on it, the soul with wings, the mind with feet. Embodiment breaks down the binaries of either/or and creates a space for a visceral inquiry into what it means to re/search through our bodies.

*Through the limited view of the camera’s viewfinder, I trace a creased sleeve to the blurred image of flesh of wrist and, then, a moment of clarity, as the lens automatically focuses on the performer’s hands held behind her back as if bound. A startled intake of breath, I had not anticipated this image-moment, this posture had not been pre-planned. My hand holding the camera recoils, the image disappears from the viewfinder, and then, responding by impulse and intent, I think, “I must get this on film. This moment matters. I must document what is happening.”*

The switch of intent from a simple act of documentation to one of witnessing occurs as the videographer stumbles into the participatory space of performance with urgency,

*I must get this on film. This moment matters.*

The videographer has stepped across the threshold into a performance space that is one of reciprocity, embodiment, and repercussion. A story has emerged provoked by the momentary image clarity of the hands crossed behind the performer’s back; what is being formulated as a narrative is the witnessing of a prisoner, in bonds, and by consequence, the videographer embodies what began as a seemingly neutral exercise and plunges into a mutually informed performative encounter.

*I crouch down out of sight as if there are enemy soldiers in the vicinity (I am also now out of sight from the majority of the audience members so that just as I imagine myself unseen, the videographer is now unseen, only fragments of her presence, and what she is recording, are displayed on the screen). I inch forward on my belly, across the threshold of a perceived barrier negotiated by technology between performer and videographer into the space of embodied encounter—how did I get in this position? I must not be seen, something evil is happening, a prisoner of war? This must be recorded...*

Performative inquiry speaks to performance as an embodied action site of inquiry and learning. We recognize that action is embodied through form and shapes our inquiry. Thus,



we pay attention to how we engage, our interactions and relationships with other, our environment, the contexts within which we perform and are performed. We attend to the scripts that perform us, and that we perform, and seek new possibilities of action. Guiding questions in performative inquiry as we engage in our research, in our lives, are “What happens if? What matters? Who cares? How do we now respond?” Performative inquiry calls our attention to moments of recognition, interruption, and disruption that are generated through performative encounters such as ours. Performative inquiry is a research vehicle that,

... recognizes performance in action and interaction as a place of learning and exploration. Our tools of inquiry are our bodies, our minds, our imaginations, our experiences, our feelings, our memories, our biases, our judgments and prejudgments, our hopes and our desires simply, our very *being, becoming*. (Fels, 1998, p. 29)

Through an embodied approach, performative inquiry seeks to unsilence the body, to bring it out of its socially, politically, communally imposed constraints—if only momentarily—to let it breathe, play and have a voice, so one can ultimately listen to its rhythms in the practice of life, work, and art. This unsilencing is an emancipatory act, which serves as a foundational platform for engaged meaning-making and shared learning. It is our intention to shift the perception that we *have* bodies to the reality that we *are* bodies. In understanding that we are bodies, we seek to attend to our feelings, strain of muscles, pulse beating beneath skin, to discover again the wonder of movement, of presence, which lies at the heart of our own bodies. And that it is through and with our bodies, we come to our inquiries, to our questioning of what matters.

The catalyst for inquiry may be a question, an event, a theme, a feeling, a piece of poetry: a phenomenon which we explore through questions: *What if? What matters? What happens? So what?* These questions are not separate from the action but embodied within the action-interaction of performance. (Fels, 1998, p. 29)

At the heart of embodiment lie paradox (Friedman & Moon, 1997) and an invitation to a physical way of apprehending the world that bleeds with the knowledge and experiences of both pain and wonder. Embodiment reaches far beyond the borders of the body, but resonates simultaneously in the depths, as realized so beautifully by poet Anne Michaels (1997) in her poem, *The Weight of Oranges*, offering glimpses of the power of a physical remembrance in an intimate encounter with the other,

Fingers have a memory, to read the familiar braille of another’s skin.

The body has a memory: the children we make, places we've hurt ourselves, sieves of our skeletons in the fat soil.

No words mean as much as a life. Only the body pronounces perfectly the name of another.

(p. 46)

*How does the performer respond to the presence of a videographer; what is her embodied experience of being under surveillance, watched and recorded?*

*I am aware of the lens as an additional partner in this embodied encounter as the videographer responds to my movements with an intuitive kinaesthetic sense of a dancer sustaining and quickening her moves, listening to breath, weight fulcrum, and dynamic nuance. The lens is another story. Without grace or discernment it tracks, probes, and traces with an invasive intimacy and a haunting repressiveness. I am a prisoner of the narrowing lens of the camera. The unforgiving weight of surveillance is ever-present; wearing the blindfold, I am unaware that the videographer is on the ground, documenting what she perceives is a prisoner in danger. What I am beginning to suspect is a paradoxical complexity; that within surveillance is an unsuspected possibility of intimacy.*

In the moment that the videographer falls to the ground, she becomes imprisoned by her urgency to document what she is witnessing through the camera lens; simultaneously, the performer feels imprisoned by the relentlessness of the camera's tracking not knowing that the intent that moves the videographer to track her descent is simultaneously one of fear and a felt sense of responsibility as witness. This bodily knowing has room for paradox and echoes the words of educator Ted Aoki (1993) by "dwelling in the midst of doubling of live(d) experiences," in conjunction with narrating our lived experience, a place for recovery of the past as well as the production of the present. This place, he suggests, is dwelling in the midst of ambivalence and ambiguity, replacing the binaries of "either-or." Improvisational performance becomes a place of dynamic possibility where the invisible and visible become partners in the complex dance on the edge of chaos (Waldrop, 1992). As Fels (1998) writes,

In performative inquiry, researcher-participant(s) realize-recognize journey/landscapes through performance and then map-in-action the landmarks of learning recognized through discussion, reflection, remembering, writing, re-imagining. There is no detached observer in performative inquiry: Researcher and participants together realize through creative action and interaction an ever-spiraling circle of interstanding. (p. 29)

As we engage technology in our performative inquiries (whether through the use of a video

camera and/or sensor lines attached to the performer as a technologist commandeers the computer console), our concerns lie with whether or not we are creating pedagogical spaces of learning, and if so, how to make visible and interrogate within these spaces the learning that emerges. Who are we as we encounter each other through technology: does our engagement with technology limit our field of vision, or expand the pedagogical and creative?

*It was at this point that I experience a kind of ‘stop’ moment. I realize I have had my eyes closed for the entire time, and I suddenly open them and realize that the effect is the same. I have no choice in the darkness. This recognition brings an authenticity to my sense of entrapment as I continue to move down, I feel my hands holding my head. I am moving directly forward and down, first on my hands and knees then finally down on my belly, still holding my head. This movement gives rise to more images of riots and police boots on my back.*

These moments of recognition, space moments of possible learning realized in the narrative relationality and positionality experienced by both performer and videographer call us to attention, to note what matters, who we are in response and in action to the presence of others. Appelbaum’s (1995) concept of the *stop* speaks to occasions or events within which we are stopped in our trajectory and come to the awareness of other as yet-unrealized possibilities: this stop moment is an embodied perceptual shift—a *moment of risk, a moment of opportunity*. Appelbaum (1995) writes,

Between closing and beginning lives a gap, a caesura, a discontinuity.  
The betweenness is a hinge that belongs to neither one nor the other.  
It is neither poised nor unpoised, yet moves both ways...  
It is the stop. (pp. 15-16, centered original)

It is in the tension within these performative spaces of encounter fertile with possible *stop* moments that we are invited to call forth embodied imaginings beyond our anticipation and ‘readings’ from the edges of what have been pre-understood. Nudges beyond habituated knowing ask us to reconsider the anticipated, the expected.

*Who is this war correspondent inching belly forward, filming this unnamed prisoner? Who imprisons who in the tensions that hold the prisoner captive within the lens as perceived by the videographer; the performer as embodied within a prisoner’s stance? What responsibility does one have to the other? How did such an image arise in our exploration of technology, proximity, and intimacy?*

Our inquiry becomes infused with narrative and metaphor; tensions and complexities are

surfaced through these unexpected images that surprise us as they are experienced through the camera lens, as the body falls. These emergent images and tensions call us to attention, like a child's tug on the sleeve, drawing us into a place of surrender to new meaning-making and possibilities. Our falling into the heat of technology as embodied narrators implies that our inquiry, infused with image, may temporarily collapse preconceived locations and expectations. Simultaneously, illuminated in this moment of encounter, mediation through technology moves us to action, reveals prejudices, biases, previous learning, thus opening us up to new ways of pedagogical and curricular engagement, art making, and storytelling.

Our inquiry suggests that the performer and videographer are in relational interplay, performing their lived experience of an event as it unfolds. The videographer responds viscerally and kinaesthetically to the cropped images that come into focus and then blur instantly, so that the residue of their presence is captured on film and in memory. These remembered and filmed artifacts become evidence of the moment of dissolution between the videographer as she stood outside the event, and the moment upon her entry into a shared performative encounter, a trespassing that calls forth an obligation of witnessing. "To become witness is to be exposed, vulnerable, to have something at stake" (Salverson, 2006, p. 146).

In improvisational movements, the performer listens with a kind of astuteness in the body that responds to every micro second of stimulation which enables each impulse. This liminal space is charged with tension, producing what Barba (1995) describes as *sats*.

*Sats* can be translated with the word 'impulse' or "preparation," "to be ready to..." In the language of our work it indicates, among other things, the moment in which one is ready to act, the instant which precedes the action, when all the energy is already there, ready to intervene, but as suspended, still held in the fist, a tiger-butterfly about to take flight. (p. 40)

In this instant, which precedes action, there is a construction of *availability*, a "decided body"—movement that is activated without chronology or logic but rather with an astute presence to a moment. And yet, there arrives, in the laying down of "one of many new possible worlds" (Varela, 1987, p. 62), an emergent historicity, a language of engagement and encounter that informs and performs each successive moment of impulse.

Curricular engagement requires us to be aware, wide-awake, where choice of action "enlarges the space of the possible" (Sumara & Davis, 1997). Such moments of recognition both signal and embody "natality" as imagined by Arendt (1958) as they emerge within curricular locations of pedagogy and action.

*How shall we receive each other in this moment of recognition?*

*The camera continues its slow crawl along the body, time evaporates, as I struggle with focus, struggle to hold the camera steady, muscles straining, seeking understanding in the blurred fabric of pant trousers, unfocused ribbing of cotton sock, and then, with startling clarity, a boot, upturned, skyward. Execution! And I am moved to presence, to take action; I rise up, to a standing position, zooming out to take in the entire scene, heedless of discovery, one thought on my mind, I must witness this, I alone can bring this story back, a dead man's testimony. This intimacy of encounter embodies responsibility, I cannot but be present to this moment, to a recounting of what has happened, who was present, a story that requires telling, across time, this moment, a child of duration.<sup>4</sup>*

Simultaneously, these two moments of encounter, mediated through a video lens, moves us to action, reveals prejudices, biases, previous learning, thus opening us up to new ways of pedagogical and curricular engagement, art making, and storying.

*When I arrive fully on the floor, I begin to turn to my back and simultaneously my hands finger the blindfold. As the energy slowly leaves my body, the blindfold is peeled away but my eyes are motionless. I experience two intersecting trajectories; one towards freedom and one towards loss of self.*

The performing body is not solely the mechanism of delivery to the metaphor revealed below the surface. It is rather technique and impulse that locates the interstitial space, the in-between temporality, or as Viktor Shklovsky would say “the act of making strange.” (as cited by Heathcote, 1984). This is the dynamic space of stillness, the brimming of emptiness where conflicting spaces meet to form new meanings, to enact new possible relationships,

The true void—out of balance, caught between one temporality and another becomes such a gathering place that stands in an oblique relation to itself and others. As a ‘diagonal’ event it is, at once, a meeting place of modes and meanings, and a site of the contentious struggles of perspective and interpretation. (Bhabha, 1998, p. 30)

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<sup>4</sup> Jana Milloy's (2007) concept of “each moment, a child of duration” speaks to the temporal aliveness of a moment experience. In our performance work, such moments haunt us, call us to attention; moments are time-spaces of possibility, of enduring loss, of opportunity missed, of time-arching relevance.

This moment of disequilibrium becomes a catalyst for many potential strands; reflection, memory, action, moving diagonally through our lived experiences cutting through our patterns, traditions, expectations, and habits of engagement.

***Entering into Performance: The Journalist and the Prisoner as Witnessed***

Throughout the duration of our inquiry, conference participants gather to ‘observe’ an improvisational encounter between performer and videographer; a blindfolded body in slow descent, and a hand-held video camera, its fragmented images projected on a projector, folding in and out of focus, appearing, disappearing on a screen. How are we to understand this encounter and its pedagogical implications? In the encounter, performer and videographer—one devoid of all visual sense, the other restricted to fragmented vision—experience the collapsing borders between observer and the observed, the researched and the researcher, the performer and the videographer, the educator and the educated.

This encounter, in the sterile confines of a conference room, was the first time during our research together that the videographer unexpectedly moved from documenting an unfolding event into co-creating within a shared performative space.<sup>5</sup> A racing heart, suppressed breath, the war correspondent (as the videographer has come to imagine herself) realizes, in a moment of clarity (the boot) *this man is dead, the world must know*, and rises to her feet, still filming. Her intention is to reveal the entirety of the act, the camera enabling the witnessing and documentation; the video becomes an artifact of someone’s death, someone’s guilt, someone’s responsibility.

*I deliberately expand the field of vision, allowing the audience present with me and those in the future to see the full extent of the crime, the zoom pulls back so that the body is exposed, sprawled in death on the ground. I must reveal all. The video camera allows full exposure, there will be no concealment of this act (although the perpetrators remain off-camera, unseen, which alerts us to yet another layer of complicity and inquiry). Performance is stripped bare of its accessories and adornment and stands naked in front of us.*

This is an unscripted moment.

*How am I, as witness, as videographer, as the war correspondent unexpectedly embodied in this moment here now, to respond?*

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<sup>5</sup> In a subsequent inquiry, the videographer steps onto the stage, simultaneously in the role of researcher and performer. See Ricketts, Fels & Pritchard, 2014.

This moment of entering into the performance surprises us, brings us beyond ourselves and our understanding of the role of the camera as simply a means of filming action where the videographer stands *outside the action*. We had always imagined the videographer as operating in a relationship *with* but not embodied *within* performance. What has also not been anticipated is the blurring of the line between audience, performer, and videographer in an emergent embodied performative encounter that called us to witnessing. The chasms that existed within this paradigm and beyond this research are suddenly brought to the fore, collapsing the divides between.

The tenets of our work, *authenticity* and *immediacy*, require a willingness to witness, to engage. Instead of distancing audience and videographer from the action, we are compelled to encounter each other in wakeful presence, caught as we are in the bodyheat of technology, in a singular moment of witnessing.

Immediacy and authenticity is present as the videographer feels the breath and presence of those behind her as she rises to capture the event, to call attention to the moment, and in doing so, she creates a pedagogical stop of recognition and communal responsibility. Such a moment arises through unexpected encounters of clarity brought into temporal focus through proximity and thus, an emergent embodied intimacy.

During the opening minutes of the meltdown, the catalyst for embodied engagement was the performer's crossed hands behind her back, revealed through the viewfinder, as if bound, a position pregnant with emergent meaning, with narrative, that sent the videographer scurrying for cover, belly in the dirt, *I must not be seen*. And it was the motionless boot seen through the viewfinder, within the clarity of that image and in that moment of performed death, that a moment of recognition awakened the videographer from a position of remaining concealed to the risk of exposure as she rose up to standing position to capture the event in its fullness. In this moment of micro then macro perspective, this immediate intimacy and then opening the field of seeing to engage others, we traverse time/space logic. Berger (1982) writes of this coming into meaning that moves beyond the immediate photographic recording. "An instant photographed can only acquire meaning in so far as the viewer can read into it a duration extending beyond itself. When we find a photograph meaningful, we are lending it a past and a future" (p. 89).

How was it, in the breathless stillness of recognition—*someone has been executed here*, that the videographer, in emancipatory action, rises to her feet, compelled to enlarge the field of vision, as if "enlarging the space of the possible" (Sumara & Davis, 1997), so that the audience as yet not known, present and absent, might also witness this death? This performative encounter speaks to responsibility, to intimacy, to the raw necessity of recording

an event within an individual's life so that *this* act is not forgotten; so that *she/he who is executed* is not forgotten. This moment speaks to impulse, memory, historicity, recognition, and as yet unrevealed longing that dwells in the videographer's heart and asks, how do we witness when we are alone? What action is possible in the absence of others?

*But I am not alone. I rise up into view of all others, camera zooming out to reveal the body prone on the floor, the blindfold released, and in doing so, I become aware of the presence of those behind me, a single breath, a single pulse, witnessing with me. I am not alone. They too will tell this story. I slowly return to the room, to our conference presentation, the dead body rises from the floor, and we are all silent, for a moment, words escape us. This encounter has become one of embodied intimacy, presence and witnessing; the videographer embodying that of all who have been, are, and will be war correspondents; the performer embodying that of all those who have been, are being, and will be executed; in this moment between breath, we are all witnesses to an unfolding narrative metaphorical moment that has played and replayed throughout memory, through time, through place, even in this conference room—the death of one by another while yet another watches. How now to respond?*

### ***Recognition of a Pedagogical Imperative: The Ethics of Encounter***

The performer through a singular elongated motion suspends time and space, provokes a collision of tension, responsibility, action, suspension of the probable, simultaneously revealing the impossible, the unknowable, the as yet unseen. The videographer documents and projects the event as captured in the viewfinder onto the screen, each image in consequence to the one before, revealing an inquiry of context, frame, image, and impulse. The videographer encounters a performer in suspended freefall, and through the paradoxical complexity of intimacy and surveillance of the video camera, she experiences the turmoil of witnessing an act, and in doing so, is called to embodied presence and action. The technology held in her hands allows this witnessing. No longer an encumbrance, the camera becomes the mediator enabling recognition, documentation, witnessing, thus performing relational and ethical connection of the self in encounter with the other.

Curriculum within this event becomes a pedagogical space of movement, impulse, reciprocity, encounter, responsibility, and intimacy within the as-yet-unknown: a living performative narrative of embodied engagement and inquiry, evoking new questioning, new challenges (Garoian, 1999). How are we to understand the meaning of this encounter, this elusive embodied reconnoiter, the videographer as war correspondent, the performer as executed, through the lens of a camera? What are we to learn of the impulse to witness, to record, to expose that which is concealed? What now is our relationship and responsibility to the medium that permits such intimacy?



Through embodied interplay, we create a relational language and emergent historicity, which informs us of our choices within which to work. Each movement starts from impulse to impulse creating a history and becoming the ancestry of our performance (Ricketts, 2011). What we shared in common as we engaged in our tasks—the performer in her meltdown, the videographer in her recording—was a common catalyst transmitted through the object: the black blindfold. A blindfold is not innocent, it holds within it memory, narrative, symbol, metaphor, embodied action, relationship, possibility. A thing “is inseparable from its context, namely its world and from our commerce with the thing and its world, namely, engagement” (Borgmann as cited by Barney, 2005, p. 42). A thing such as a blindfold carries with it a poetic impulse that can incite restoration, re-creation, reciprocity, releasing the body from a habituated response to one of emancipatory action. Similarly, the appearance of hands clasped as if bound behind the performer’s back, as seen through the viewfinder, moves the videographer into inhabiting the space of performance, the fragmented image evoking a call to presence<sup>6</sup>, a response of action, a recognition that *I too am present and responsible*.

Within this constructed vocabulary and improvisational movement, the performer and videographer engage in a dialogue of unfolding moments, within the immediacy, intimacy, and reciprocity of a shared collision meets in the in-between of embodied performance. Mediated through the lens of a video camera, engaging impulse to impulse, the performer listens to her body, follows its slow descent; the videographer similarly engages in response to the temporal and momentary view as seen through her camera lens, they execute a bristling presence. Collapsing borders of language, technology, temporality, and embodied spaces of engagement, the performer and videographer create a fragmented non-linear narrative, a kind of counter-narrative that we as educators, performers, and researchers, as those engaged in techno-mediated encounters, cannot afford to dismiss. It is within this pedagogical space, that we seek to resist the entrapments of technology and documentation as a means of detached surveillance, and instead invite a curricular unfolding in embodied authentic response<sup>7</sup> to those with whom we engage.

On the screen, through the viewfinder and in unexpected moments that surprise, that evoke questions of complicity, complexity, compliance, resonating within performer, videographer, and audience, are traces of lived experiences that we accumulate and simultaneously erase as we move through our lives. This act of layering and accumulating, discarding and

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<sup>6</sup> We would like to thank Anne Saar for sharing with Fels in conversation, her understanding of witnessing as “a call to presence.”

<sup>7</sup> In using this term, authentic, we do not wish to imply that our actions are in themselves without complicity; rather what emerges is a curricular and pedagogical action space of new possibilities to question, to explore.

disappearing through light, image, and movement invites performative recognitions and engagements that evokes a metaphorical counter-narrative that requires close attention. It is through an intention of awareness and reflection that we achieve moments of clarity evoked by individual and shared memories, narratives, cultural and intercultural relationships. An invitation to witnessing, this calling to presence and to what we have termed as authentic response is itself a new curricular inquiry. Habituated looking is replaced by seeing and responding to what is “in-between.”

Our interplay of camera, performer, videographer, and capture (i.e. projection on screen) similarly invited the audience to experience the choice making and meaning making that occurs simultaneously. Performer, videographer, and viewer (who must choose between watching the performer, the performer being filmed by the videographer, the videographer filming the performer, and/or the screen behind the performer, and/or all four simultaneously) engage within a performative space of storying and meaning-making mediated by technology and our individual and communal ‘readings’ of what is seen. Just as the artist interacts with her material, her subject matter, and the environment within which the interplay occurs; so too the audience may move from that of surveillance to a stance of impulse and response in embodied conversation with and through and outside the lens that allows openings, new horizons of witnessing, meaning making and storying. As artist Devora Neumark (2000), writes, on having a photographer document her performative act of peeling beets on the stoop of her house, “the availability and use of documentary processes have shifted the realm of the private into the personalized social sphere” (2000, p. 77).

As we experienced during our debriefing with the audience, this temporal engagement provoked conversations around visual and performative literacy, responsibilities of encounter and witnessing, acts of meaning-making, issues of intimacy and surveillance, and attention to that which surfaces in the interface between movement, body, and technology. A *stop* moment cannot be expected, manufactured, nor pre-ordained; what we offered to the audience, and what we experienced, is an experience of Appelbaum’s concept of *betweenness...a hinge that belongs to neither one nor the other*. Within the limitations of a 20-minute presentation, we were hot with the heat of our encounter; the austerity that is often experienced with technology or techno-mediated experiences dissolved.

As arts educators, this attention to encounters within the pedagogical ‘in-between’ spaces of our curricular engagements with our students, within our own work, and through techno-mediated engagements requires that we embody an emancipatory position that liberates us: rather than seeking to create within a structured environment of action and response, we invite students and educators to enter into performative spaces of reciprocal curiosity and deep listening (Snowber, 2005). We echo the call of educator and activist, Paulo Freire for an

emancipatory education of reciprocal responsibility. Freire writes, “Teaching is transitivity, democracy, dialogue. An Argentinean teacher from Cordova relates: I taught a peasant how to write the word [plough] and he taught me how to use it” (Freire as quoted in Boal, 1998, p. 9). Similarly, we hope our shared encounter, offered here to readers, invites us all as educators and students to interrogate how we might use emergent technologies that inform, perform, interrupt, disrupt, and enable our art making and pedagogical practices, recognizing, as we experienced, that the body of the hand that holds the camera, if permitted, must cross the threshold into a space of embodied performance and inquiry, if art, and learning, is to come into presence.

Through our investigation, we recognize our embodied encounter, this unexpected movement from detached videographer to an embodied dance of relational ethics as an action site of inquiry, that calls us to explore what is seen, and not seen, revealed, and yet to be surfaced. While further theorizing and critique is required, what matters is that through this inquiry, we have realized that techno-mediated art making requires recognition of the embodiment of the user of that technology, an embodied falling into the performance that is art making. The artist wields his or her techno-media tools not an observer, nor a watcher undertaking detached surveillance, but as the embodiment and performance of that technology, and thus susceptible and suspect to its seduction. What matters is that we come to recognize the intimacy that is embodied surveillance, and our complicity and reciprocal responsibility in how we engage as art makers, educators, and researchers.

### ***Connections to Curricular and Pedagogical Practices***

Through performative inquiry, our curricular encounter invited a disquieting, a disruption of our known ways of engagement and perception, evoking, we suspect, a desiring of intimacy and reciprocity as realized within each moment of our improvisational embodied inquiry. The contribution of this event is to provoke a new questioning to conventional uses of technology within performative and curricular spaces; a problematizing of how we encounter each other through mediated technological fragmentation and surveillance, and how we might gauge the impact of these mediums of encounter.

*Who are you that I see in the lens beyond touch?*

Can our words, our longing, our desires, resonate beyond the camera, engage in meaningful encounters that recognize the intimacy and immediacy of the interplay between the viewer and the watched?

Why, you may be asking, does this performative exploration between a videographer and performer matter? What we hope to offer, through our exploration and thinking, is recognition

of the fertile performative action space of unbounded new possibility, when those engaged collapse the divides between art making and art production, techno-mediation and creativity, thus understanding performance through inquiry as relational reciprocity and responsibility. Our own explorations, and unexpected tumbling into a shared performative learning space of reciprocity, through movement, impulse, and historicity, and through wide-awake presence to each moment unfolding, teaches us how to engage in our art and inquiry, recognitions to be shared with our students.

Our research in particular invites others to explore in their pedagogical and artistic practices the following: what happens when pedagogical encounters are experienced within the interstices of aesthetic, improvisational, and techno-mediated contexts of exposure, surveillance? How do we as artists, educators, and researchers co-create a language of vulnerability, intimacy, hospitality, recognition, and emancipation within a techno-mediated world dominated by surveillance and reprimand? What we are witnessing in our explorations is not a synthesis, but relational interactions, which have given rise to further questions, which in turn become the action sites of inquiry and learning (Fels, 2012).

These kinds of exploratory performative collaborations of inquiry evokes *interstanding* through intersecting commonalities, thus provoking sensations and embodied enactments of previously un-lived yet imagined (through multiple sources of media) experiences. Through particular kinds of emergent embodied encounters such as the ‘prisoner’ and the ‘journalist’ in our inquiry, we temporarily touch upon, are engaged with, and recognize the lived moments of others as we are engaged within that moment of embodiment, thereby creating a possibility for cultivating acceptance, empathy, responsibility, and compassion for each other.

### ***Reflections and Openings: Pedagogical Presence and Ethical Reciprocity***

What strategies might be developed to discover ways to perform within reciprocal spaces of creation as we invite our students through their art to move beyond representation to understanding their artistic engagements as exploratory, performative, and reciprocal? And that arts making and meaning making within performative learning spaces draw upon an emergent, improvised, reciprocal engagement of interaction with one’s body, a medium of expression within unfolding moments calling forth creative action and response?

The challenge, we believe, for arts educators is to nurture within their students an ability to attend to those moments within their practices that call them to attention—to be attuned to their aesthetic, techno-mediated, and relational environments, and the performative ecologies of interactions between the mediums of their vehicles of expression and their own bodies. To allow for the intake of breath and to be surprised—to embrace vulnerability, uncertainty, ambiguity.

Understanding the complex paradox that pedagogical surveillance necessitates and indeed embraces intimacy—leads us to understand that witnessing and action requires a willingness to fall into an emergent performative space of reciprocal engagement and inquiry. With the rise in techno-mediated arts, arts educators are offered curricular opportunities to reinvestigate the performative encounters of those who create through and within technology. As we ask of our students, we too as arts educators need to learn how to recognize and collapse borders between watcher and watched, researcher and participant, teacher and student, artist and art, as mediated through technology, in order to engage in creating and challenging generative learning spaces of encounter and creativity. If we are willing to be off-balance, and vulnerable, just as the videographer who struggled with the unfamiliarity and responsibilities of her video camera, we might enlarge the possibility of our practices so as to engage anew in what we thought we already knew. As theatre director Barba (1995) writes, “The aim is permanently unstable balance” (p. 19).

What emerges through our work together, as we pause now to reflect, is a call to pedagogical presence, a deep awareness of the reciprocity of ethical engagement and relationship as we witness each other in interplay, attending to emergent moments that inform and perform our arts making practices. Surveillance is no longer possible, in the intimacy of my witnessing you, you being in my presence, our work, as artists, as art educators, brings us to the heart of education. In all our choices, curricular, relational, pedagogical, performative, we must attend to an accounting of those who have been silenced, and those who are at this moment now being silenced, those who we encounter, and those we encounter in absence. We are seeking in our work a surfacing of the perceptual shifting(s) made possible through such encounters, as we evoke the heat of embodied technology within improvisational spaces of encounter, surveillance, intimacy, and resistance.

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