

The Graduate School of Education  
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# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

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**SPECIAL ISSUE**

## A/r/tography and the Literary and Performing Arts

**Volume 3 | Issue 2 | 2013**

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Guest Editors *Rita L. Irwin*  
*Anita Sinner*

Editor  
Associate Editor  
Designer

*Lindy Joubert*  
*Naomi Berman*  
*Rosie Ren*

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## EDITORIAL TEAM

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## ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

*The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.*

*Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.*

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# Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

## Guest Editors

*Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner*

### THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

# Becoming A/r/tographers Whilst Contesting Rationalist Discourses of Work

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## ABSTRACT

### BECOMING A/R/TOGRAPHERS WHILST CONTESTING RATIONALIST DISCOURSES OF WORK

Extending critical perspectives which have problematized “work,” in this essay we contest rationalist values of “work” through a/r/tography, noting that a/r/tography is particularly suited to troubling the artificial divisions and correlative productivities between art and research, teacher and student, teacher and researcher, and so forth. We explore the notions of transmediation and pedagogical recognition to suggest that if our educative systems, processes, and imaginations could more generatively attend to students as creative beings, and if students could be invited to a fuller activity in the world across multiple domains, then an increasing social tendency to accept economic values as trumping all others might be redressed. We argue that how adults value young people in the progress and process of their making art, making knowledge, and making a life, comes to affect the ontology and epistemology of work in all its social manifestations.

## KEYWORDS

*A/r/tography, transmediation, pedagogical recognition, school work, employment, neoliberalism<sup>i</sup>*

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO A/R/TOGRAPHY AS MORE THAN METHOD

Our journeys as English teachers becoming a/r/tographers with our co-a/r/tographer students has been a vital shift in understanding the changing/conflicting contexts and values of what is traditionally called “work.” While specifically teachers of art and English, we will be contextualizing essay below in the breadth of teachers’ experiences, underscoring Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, and Bickel’s (2006) endeavour to elaborate a/r/tography beyond the scope of art education. In schools, *schoolwork* is typically what students produce, and in the economies and regulative protocols of school, the student product is incrementally valued according to an assessment scale. Because of the contemporary preference for tightly coupling *instructional strategy* to *assessment*, what is schooled into students is the notion that they are valuable correlative to the teacher’s opinion of their work; thus, they quickly learn that they are valuable only in relation to what they produce: students’ predominantly capitalistic responses to the question, “What makes you valuable?” underscore this neoliberal orientation to education (Wiebe, 2012). A/r/tography disrupts this neoliberal orientation.

Drawing on Nicolas Bourriaud’s theorizing of relational aesthetics, Irwin and O’Donoghue (2012) theorize that a/r/tography can “reveal the hidden labour of pedagogy” (p. 224) because it is a practice that “invents, produces or reconfigures social relations between individuals, groups and communities” (p. 231). Learning to notice, value, and appreciate (in the economic sense as well) the relational connections that students make between themselves, their work, the community, and the economy is an a/r/tographic practice—a practice that draws attention to neo-liberal constructions of knowledge as capital. Quoting Downey, Irwin and O’ Donoghue explain how a/r/tography has become an important means to critically question capitalization, how—for example—people, their processes, and their products can be valued differently: A/r/tography as social practice creates “new ways of being with each other that exist beside or beneath a real economic system” (p. 231). We are using conceptualizations of a/r/tography to trouble schoolwork and its relationship to work practices. Our imagining a different education, where student and teacher work contributes alongside, sometimes against, and at other times underneath current economies of value, has direct application to pedagogy, particularly assessment. In a/r/tography, students themselves become legitimate artists, researchers, and teachers,

and this is a vital shift in pedagogical address and recognition. In our ongoing journey of understanding English language arts classrooms a/r/tographically we hope that together with our students we will learn alternative ways to value ourselves, others, and our processes and products.

Learning an alternative value system is not easy. Irwin and O'Donoghue (2012) note just how difficult this is for pre-service teachers: They are "reluctant to commit to practices that may be perceived to be out of line, or not in line with the system of schooling that they perceive to be in existence" (p. 233). And later, Irwin and O'Donoghue ask, "Why are they reluctant to think up reality differently? Do we expect too much from our art teachers? Do we expect them to translate the oftentimes untranslatable for pedagogical practices?" (p. 233). As if to illustrate that these questions are not simply rhetorical, these long-time a/r/tographers share how they, too, struggled to alternatively value pedagogy and think differently about the economies of school. Reflecting on the pedagogical challenges of a/r/tography, especially within "the endless institutional demands on a teacher education programme and how difficult it is to pursue alternative means and ends" (p. 230), Irwin and O'Donoghue note how "as teacher educators, [we] missed an opportunity. While we discussed the final product, we didn't engage with it as art as social practice" (p. 230). So while emphatic about the "unequivocal connections between aesthetics and politics" (p. 232), in this a/r/tographic project with pre-service teachers, Irwin and O'Donoghue reveal their own difficulty with alternatively valuing means, ends, processes, and products. As English teachers who are also artists (who have spent an inordinate amount of class time creating assessment tools to evaluate student work), we empathise with Irwin and O'Donoghue's struggle to "reverse pedagogy" (p. 233) and rethink "how we might set up conditions for learning" (p. 234). We, too, are still learning how students can be teachers and researchers, and how the work of their research can teach, and how all of this is always artful.

Reflecting on the challenge to alternatively value school processes has led us to more than a methods shift or change in technique. Being a/r/tographers with our co-a/r/tographer students has emphasized the *artistic authority* for students to create. Related to agency, artistic authority depends on "believing that one's self is capable of action" (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 163). But more than that, artistic authority includes certainty, a legitimization that one's creation has value. Willinsky (2009) captures this nicely in his essay, "The Intellectual Properties of Literacy" where he outlines how teaching students literacy is about "rights," "status," and "how words are made public and make their mark on the world" (p. 17, 19). Willinsky argues that we need to rethink pedagogy so that "the act of learning leads to the production of the intellectual property" (p. 19-20). For us, an emphasis on artistic authority has shifted everything, and by everything we mean every single thing we do in and out of the classroom that could be considered work. Sharing with our students an emphasis on who we are being and becoming together has changed *what it means* to grow up, to become mature, to take on responsibility, to seek independence, and to pursue employment. As much ontological as epistemological, a teacher's shifting of authorial privilege to the students helps them become conscious of their own creative power.

## BEING A/R/TOGRAPHERS WITH TRANSMEDIATION AND PEDAGOGICAL RECOGNITION

In conversations with our English teacher colleagues, we often turn to the more familiar concept of transmediation to explain how a/r/tography changes who we are in our pedagogy. In a literacies or skills-focussed sense, transmediation is an analytical and interpretive process (McCormick, 2011) where students think critically, utilizing higher order literacy skills to translate meaning across sign systems. As noted above, with the contemporary preference to focus instruction on assessable competency outcomes, oftentimes transmediation becomes simply text translation, where teachers give authorial privilege to the text and students then decode meaning to demonstrate competency. Instead, what we see in *transmediating* processes is the possibility for students to create as they move between sign systems. Being a/r/tographers—we are invited to transfer artistic authority to our students. As much ontological as epistemological, vital is a teacher's shift in pedagogy from interpreting others works to renaming students as creators who understand others' works as a leveraging experience to create intellectual property of their own. Seeing the possibility for agency in transmediation helps students become conscious of their own creative power.

Leggo (2005) writes: "We are the words we speak, write, think, hear, read, sing, play, dance and breathe. We speak, write, think, hear, read, sing, play, dance and breathe ourselves into being and becoming" (p. 444). Leggo insightfully co-implicates *the who* of our being with *the do* of our being. In the language of transmediation, this means that students working creatively are not only creating, but become conscious of themselves as creative beings who have agency in the world. Placing priority on students as legitimate creators reimagines schooling as a critical ethical and social undertaking beyond the acquiring of subject literacies. However, there is a correlative caution: should a teacher undervalue a student's *do*—whether speaking, writing, thinking, hearing, writing, and so forth—then what is also undervalued is a student's *who*. While not speaking about the ontology of transmediation, we find van Manen (2002) helpful for explaining how pedagogy is less technique than tone. Exploring the connection between teacher/student as the *tone of teaching*, what van Manen (2002) points to is the importance of an embodied and aesthetic address that deeply recognizes the *who* of students in all communicative practices. What the tone of teaching underscores is the longstanding phenomenological premise that the way you address a thing changes its nature (Hyde, 1983, p. xiii).

Perhaps an example from another a/r/tography research team can illustrate our cautionary note of how easy it is to undervalue students as creators. As drama and English language arts researchers and teacher educators, Winters, Belliveau, and Sherrit-Fleming (2009) seek—much like ourselves—to demonstrate how negotiating a/r/tistic identity "might inspire educators to re-imagine" student engagement "where students generate and revise their own stories, conduct research, and feel like they are inside literature on a visceral level" (p. 2). While being "inside" of literature is an important pathway to literacy, we feel Winters, Belliveau, and Sherrit-Fleming's over-emphasis on literacy technique misses an opportunity to empower and position students as *insiders* to literature who can investigate authoring and knowledge archiving practices in order to demystify them. Consider Winters and Sherrit-Fleming's personal account of how often students, after watching a performance of

Tickle Trunk players [Winters and Sherit-Flemming's drama company] will often ask, "Where do you get your ideas?" (p. 3).

Appreciating the complexity in the children's question, Winters and Sherrit-Fleming, respond, "Perhaps... [it was this] or maybe [this]... or it would also be true to say [it was this]" (p. 3). While giving three possible answers is illustrative of the possibilities and lines of thinking a performer or researcher could follow, it is hard not to think of Winters and Sherrit-Fleming's reply as unsatisfying or mysterious to children who would still be left to wonder, "How did they do that?" Rewording the question slightly so that we might hear a different tone, it is quite likely that children are asking, "Can I really be a performer like you?" Winters and Sherrit-Fleming write that the question, "Where do you get your ideas?" is by far the most commonly asked (p. 3). And while their performance does invite students to think of themselves as creators, what the constant asking of the question underscores for us is that teaching children a process for creating is not enough to have them construct an identity as a creator. So even when the wizard in Winters and Sherrit-Fleming's performance breaks creativity down into a procedure, "First you find something you know. Then you think where the story might go. Next you see what it all can be. Before you know it, you're a wizard like me" (p. 3), there are undercurrents that legitimate creation is still restricted to adults.<sup>ii</sup>

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*Perhaps the medium of the performance nurtured the students' disbelief in the message? Because of the mystique of the wizard character and the fact that it takes a lifetime of luggage (the play's title) to gather source material, what comes to mind is how the students are still told to pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.*

What is it about being a learner in school that constrains taking on an identity of creator? What is it about the slipperiness between epistemology and ontology that a/r/tographers with the research question to explore the connection between identity and creativity still miss an opportunity to deeply inquire into how students struggle with taking on a creative identity? How might a/r/tography specifically and strategically reposition learning identities to enhance students' creative processes, including their confidences, rights, and responsibilities to question, shape, trouble, and transform the world? Or in different words, how might a/r/tographic pedagogies make explicit the pathways for agency, opening up for students opportunities to legitimately claim creator identities such as writer, researcher, dramatist, artist, poet, and so forth. While we don't have a definitive answers, we do know that when everyday pedagogical activity recognizes students for their "personal worth" and genuinely values "their capabilities in action" (Carabajo, 2010, p. 5), then, we argue, transmediation is more than translation. What Carabajo emphasises is the spontaneous and continuous nature of recognition (p. 6), as it is a daily relationship where the strong connection between personal worth and the creative process cannot be undervalued. Van Manen (1997) explains that pedagogical recognition is an interpretive ability (p. 2), which is to say transmediation of text is proximate to tending to students as creative beings.

Our claim is that meaningful pedagogy depends on the ways a teacher values students, and that a/r/tography helps prompt such a shift because it reorients how a teacher might understand schoolwork—the multiplicity of outcomes in student work, the nature of students' reception of values while being at work, and the relatedness of students' ethics being worked out while working together. Irwin and O'Donoghue (2012) propose that in a/r/tography, like relational art, "people come into contact with each other and relate to each other in new and different ways and this becomes the focus and form of the work" (p. 231). What if as a/r/tographers we could understand learning as a relational experience that positions students as authentic knowledge creators themselves?



A socially attentive practice of thinking together, being together, and creating together in school is a helpful orientation for moving toward more holistic understandings of work. While such understandings are still difficult conceptually—as they are often situated in what seem like permanently fixed boundaries separating what is school and what is work—what is in progress and what is finished; who is the student and who is the teacher; what (and who) is valuable and what (and who) does not meet the standard—our contention is that the neoliberal values implied in these modernist dichotomies are not simply a neutral way of understanding school. We are taking a more radical position in this paper, and while we recognize that a shift will always, necessarily only be a movement toward, we feel it is imperative that teachers do move toward a more postmodernist conception of school/work so that school (and the social world that school is co-implicated in creating) is less dehumanizing.

Reflecting a/r/tographically on the “cultural, ethnic, geographic, institutional, public, private and disciplinary boundaries... of postmodern reality” (p. 87), Bickel, Springgay, Beer, Irwin, Grauer, and Xiong (2010) position Gablik’s notion of radical relatedness at the heart of “coexistence with others, the environment, the community, and the world” (p. 87). What we find most challenging (and promising) in their attention to how radical relatedness is part of the contiguity of artist/researcher/teacher lived experience is how relatedness becomes *the priority value* (p. 87). The pedagogical significance of this is profound, and it prompts in us additional questions regarding the specifics of how students are valued in the day-to-day of classroom life. If a teacher’s shifting of creative authority to the students is understood as a first priority value, then the corresponding radical pedagogical relation will, importantly, further influence how students value others, particular those others who, socially, are living beyond the traditional scope of a community’s or a nation’s boundaries of concern. Radical ethical relations can therefore be learned in the relational construction of pedagogy. In such a mode, learning is not exclusively an individual achievement, but a social one. What we are arguing here is that teachers who seek to understand what it means to become an a/r/tographer and to practice doing a/r/tography with students can potentially shift teachers’ and students’ orientations toward school and work, and in so doing, come to more humane values of being and knowing. It is difficult to understate the imperative of this ethical position, and we agree with Bickel et al (2010) that while relatedness might be “radical” from the modernist position, our co-existence needs to be radically practiced for what is at stake is the environment, the community, and the world.

This ontological turn toward coexistence with others moves beyond modernist paradigms. The predominant discourses in Western culture which restrict schoolwork to an economic measure have left students (and by extension society) vulnerable to unbalanced neo-liberal capitalization of being *human*. Attention to how we can enact the daily workings of school a/r/tographically can restore a more *humane* balance to “making a life” in school and “making a living” outside of it. We argue that pedagogical recognition depends on valuing students in their creative processes, and to do so is an interpretive shift for teachers as they move from the rationalist medium of product and productivity to a medium of identity making and role exploration. This social shift is a process where education might question the traditional privileges and economies of production and create opportunities for empowerment.

## SIGNIFICATION AND THE SLIPPERY BUSINESS OF REASON

Clarity and accuracy are two parallel values in modernist conceptions of text and image. Corresponding postmodern critique shows the inevitable gaps and shortages of meaning in all communicative efforts. Hurst (2010) provides a helpful summary of why the modernist/postmodern impasse is at the heart of the realities we live in:

*Since concepts create realities (i.e. justify and motivate practices)... it is important to consider how [to] respond to conceptual difficulties caused by the modern era's still influential 'binary' paradigm... Our epistemological task accordingly is to establish strategies for interpreting multiple dimensions of phenomenal reality, given the irreducibly complex relation of co-implication between mutually negating opposites. (p. 233)*

Important to note in Hurst's explanation is how opposites are co-implicated and have complex relations. And while the epistemological task is interpretation, what is at stake in that task is the nature of reality, for how reality is understood is what justifies and motivates practices. Frost brings a day-to-day attention to co-implicated complexities in communication: In her poem "Happiness," she (2011) playfully demonstrates how "all talk is slippery" (line 1). "Want[ing] to convey one thing" (line 2), says Frost, "all that gets conveyed is some other thing" (line 3). Slippery talk has a correlative in slippery images: consider how Plato's canonical illustration of the cave explains slipperiness as an *imaging* problem: the shadows of our tainted perspectives cannot adequately reproduce the truer forms which exist outside our frames of reference. Following Plato, the common approach to *slipperiness* (whether in talk or images) has been to pathologize it. The possibility that we might be meaning something else, something different than what we intend to convey, has been the impetus for a rationalist zeal to map out the systems and structures of language, imaging, and thought, all in an effort for more clarity and exactness. The downside of such an approach, writes Aoki (2000), is "the claim for universal translatability beyond any possible substantiation" (p. 349). As English teachers becoming a/r/tographers our approach has been to see *slipperiness* (that gap between signifier and signified) as a fertile space for exploring the everyday lived experience of phenomena. Assuming the connection between the self and text, the worker and work, a difficult or slippery interpretation can be a "dominant signification" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 45) for us as a/r/tographers to address playfully/carefully/*slipperily*—slipping into (and out of) that strange/familiar dynamic of work discourses.

## CAN I WEAR MY SLIP EVEN IF IT'S NOT FREUDIAN?

In making the strange familiar and the familiar strange, artists often work with slippery words/images/spaces, yet their articulations from *within the slip* are undervalued when compared to a social preference for reason. Tracing the modern preference for reason and control back through the ages of Western civilization, Wong (2009) explains that “Reason and consciousness are often cited as the critical qualities that distinguish man from beast. Appetite, will, reflex, and instinct, unless severely restrained, are widely believed to lead inevitably to a life of ignorance and immorality” (p. 193). As Wiebe (2011) explains elsewhere (removed for review), ignorance and understanding or *nonsense and making sense* are not mutually exclusive concepts but complementary via sensuality. A/r/tography is particularly suited to sense-making, that is, to art(making)sense and a/r/ticulating that sense (and sensuality) from that artful space between signifier and signified. In foregrounding a/r/tographic identities “making sense” with the creative—slippery—processes of *artmaking*, we hope to trouble and restore balance to “[c]ontemporary perspectives in psychology and education that characterize ideal students as rational and in control of their thinking and actions (Wong, 2009, p. 192).

Typically separate concepts in a modernist tradition, ontology and epistemology are indeed co-implicated. Returning briefly to Hurst (2011), *the who* of students’ becoming is in relation to the conceptual realities which justify practices. With a conceptual orientation of students as simultaneously artists, researchers, and teachers, the pedagogical reality which follows is one where students believe they are valued and valuable, thus restoring a more *humane* balance to “making a life” in school and “making a living” outside of it.

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*Greek mythology (which includes the myths of Crete) regularly connects cosmic ordering with procreation and doubled identities, particularly the interrelated narratives of King Minos as the son of Zeus and Europa, the Minotaur born from Pasiphae and the sacred bull of Poseidon, and Theseus as the first “non-eaten” child to defeat the Minotaur in the labyrinth.*

## TENDING TO TENSIONS IN CREATIVITY, WORK, EMPLOYMENT, AND VALUE

Keeping with the metaphor of creation, teachers as a/r/tographers pedagogically recognize and genuinely value students’ cre/ate<sup>iii</sup>, the contiguous relation of creed and credo to self-perpetuation and self-making. Leggo (2012) explains that etymologically one’s credo is what one gives her/his heart to. Understanding the deep connection between their creating and themselves as creators, a/r/tographers transmediate such understanding broadly, inviting students to imagine their fullness of activity in the world as valuable in multiple domains. This approach to pedagogy is a life orientation that contrasts with the tenets of rationalist thought which dominate conceptions of school work.

During our collaborative exploration of the relatedness of work to the wholeness of our lives, we were also teaching and creating art. As a/r/tographers, we have come to notice our simultaneous multiple roles, but more than that, we are also continuing to notice how practicing a/r/tography has meant a significant turn toward a way of being. Being a/r/tographers has helped us understand more deeply the nature of the difficulty introduced when conceptual relationships are not mutually exclusive but lived out as co-implicated. The multiplicity of difference introduced into our overly pragmatic and bounded lives is sometimes overwhelming. As Bickel et al

acknowledge (2010), familiar (and entrenched) modernist ideologies make practicing a/r/tography pragmatically difficult (p. 98). In their Richgate project, they faced difficulty in the interstice between academic and art discourses (p. 98), and while long-time collaborators, they still struggled with modernist notions of authorship (p. 97). Similarly unbounded we began to learn that being a/r/tful included the everyday of our lives regardless of context. Thinking of writing this academic paper as art has challenged us. Similarly, thinking of walking the dog as research still sounds somewhat scandalous, even though Leggo, Sinner, Irwin, Pantaleo, Gouzouasis, and Grauer (2011) assure us of the necessity of lingering in liminal spaces (p. 239) and claim that changing our expectations toward research can be the means to “transformative meaning making” (p. 240). Unlearning our modernist proclivities has been a practice of being a/r/tful in as many ways as we can imagine it.

Looking back on a painting Morrison-Robinson created for a show entitled *Woman's Work in 2009* (see figure 1 below), we realize with Apple et al (2010) just how much capitalistic reasoning has invaded education and devalued anything that cannot be justified economically.

Figure 1  
*Work can Wait it is time  
to make Fairy Tea*



This commodified education, according to Lyotard (1984) emphasizes knowledge production and consumption with the goal of increasing rates of exchange (p. 4). What concerns Lyotard is how such a treatment of knowledge shifts its fundamental nature, arguing that mass production of knowledge makes education a business enterprise. Schooling is thus reduced to competencies training for employment. Connecting Apple's and Lyotard's theorizing to radical relatedness and priority values, how does the value of paid work depend on the other being understood as play? How does the imagined urgency of adult work depend on artmaking being considered childish?

As a/r/tographers, we consider these work-complexities because work is co-implicated in all that we do. Leggo et al note (2011) that a/r/tography is “a form of living inquiry wherein participants and a/r/tographers continually ask questions, search out new understandings, and enact new interruptions, all in an attempt to create new knowledge” (p. 241). In figure 1, thinking of work as always there has helped us remember that art is also always possible. In the artmaking that has been part of this research process, we have also realized how being a/r/tographers has been latent in us: so, for example, at first what a/r/tography provided was a methodology which oriented pedagogy and research, but later, it also resonated with the wholeness of our experience, so much so that we began to notice traces of *always having been* a/r/tographers. Like the notion of palimpsest, it is possible to see within ourselves the a/r/tography that was waiting for our academic encounter with the concept that would give us the means to articulate the evolution of ourselves as a/r/tists.

## WHAT IS AT STAKE IN THE EMPLOYMENT MOTIF OF SCHOOLING

With the recent crisis of capitalism, our a/r/tistic hope has been that students would receive new freedoms to create and explore and experiment. But as Konidari (2011) shows in great detail, this crisis has not reduced the employment motif of schooling at all. Instead, ironically, it has increased competition and performance management more than ever. She explains how “unemployment, massive job losses, cuts in salaries and pensions, cutbacks of national budgets and social services...rising living costs and new, harder forms of poverty” create a parallel crisis in education that privileges “choice, competition, [and] performance management” (p. 75-76). We believe this *better than the other* competitive approach is actually harmful to education. Societal inattention to that which does not have an obvious measurable utility has meant that complex creative processes and/or dynamic relational processes have been *inferiorized*. Concepts like productivity or economic viability are so predominantly imagined in the rationalist discourse that it has been almost impossible to offer a viable and valuable societal alternative for understanding creativity and work. Alternative articulation is vital and urgent, not just to better account for the necessity of art(making)sense in school/life, but so that, in the face of globalization, society might have a means to value work ethically.

Bickel et al (2011) write that “A radical relationality requires a shift from the individualistic modernist paradigm to an interrelational post-postmodern paradigm” (p. 100), but what is lacking in their paper is a believable explanation of what is at stake should such a shift not be made. We agree with their assertion that a/r/tography calls for empathetic listening, ongoing dialogue, and questioning assumptions (p. 98) across the contexts of research, teaching, and art making. But beyond this, we are asking what is at stake socially, culturally, and economically in these times of capitalism in crisis.

Following the rationalist discourse of work to its global implications is not difficult. In a UK study of 98 young people aged 13 to 16, Kennedy (2011) finds that schools regularly educate “bystanding.” That is, *not participating* in justice is a learned ignorance (den Heyer & Conrad, 2011). A picture emerges when these UK findings are combined with Australian findings: because moral teaching is largely transmissive

students neither take responsibility for their learning nor demonstrate agency (Johansson, Brownlee, Cobb-Moore, Boulton-Lewis, Walker, & Ailwood, 2011, p. 120). Coupled, these findings suggest that rationalist discourses value a measurable product to such an extent that regular passivity to injustice is not a social concern. In the specific economies of school, an “A” student who is a bully is celebrated for “good” work, both by his peer bystanders and by his teachers who value an “A quality paper” on justice more than the doing of justice. When investigating a slippery word like work, what does this mean? Further, given the potential consequences of a global social acceptance of economic values trumping all others, there is a need to consider how value comes to operate in the socializing processes of school.

Consider, by way of example, Larry Kuehn’s (2011) recent description of teachers’ working conditions in Colombia: “The violence is very real to students. Some have seen their teacher gunned down in their classroom” (p. 198). Kuehn is a director in the British Columbia Teacher’s Federation, and he considers what is happening in Colombia an important focus for Canadian educators in their local understandings of what it means *to work* as a teacher (p. 199). From a modernist, bounded perspective it would be difficult to understand why what happens in Colombia is relevant to the day-to-day work of a British Columbian school teacher. But from a perspective of radical relatedness, what happens elsewhere—even if it is beyond the imagined boundaries of a political nation or a cultural geography—is still very much related to what is happening here (wherever that particular here or there may be). Kuehn says that “[i]nternational attention saves lives and puts pressure on the [Canadian] government to take action” (p. 199), a government which ought to be held accountable for its ratification of a free-trade agreement where Colombia “self reports” any human rights issues (p. 200). Campaigning did delay ratification (as Liberals initially did not support the bill), and continuous campaigning is what Kuehn is calling for (p. 200).

Speaking generally, one can presume the Canadian government ignores human rights violations because the economic benefit supposedly trumps the lesser value of human rights elsewhere. Here is where transmediation, pedagogical recognition, and a/r/tography intersect. While the “campaign” is often only envisioned directly in relation to election and/or policy, if one were to go back *to who* those “campaigners” are *becoming* by examining what they are *doing* in their formative years, there is a particularly relevant role for a/r/tographers in contesting the ways school-based rationalist discourses value work—and those who come to perform work—in all its social manifestations.

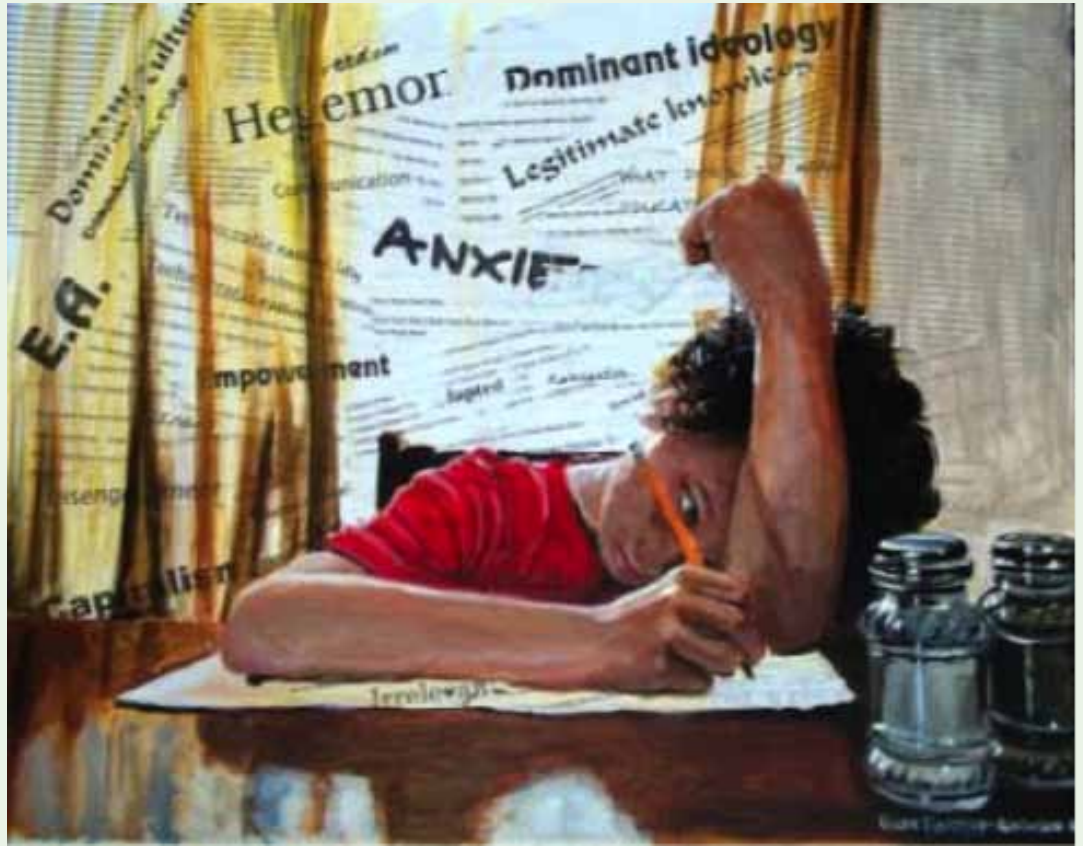
## THE INTERSECTION OF A/R/TOGROPHY AND CRITICAL THEORY

As somewhat of an aside, Bickel et al (2010) note how a/r/tography is connected to critical theory, and they suggest that the challenge moving forward is to develop a relational curriculum which motivates social action (p. 96). In this section we will make a/r/tography’s connection to critical theory more explicit, and detail some of the pedagogical challenges in motivating social action.

In figures 2 and 3 below, we explore aspects of critical theory that relate to issues of race, literacy, motivation, and homework. The subject of figure 2 agreed to sit for

this painting if he could play computer games longer than his usual time. He was paid fifteen minutes of “game time.” His only concern was to make sure people did not think he was not doing his homework, or that he did not want to do it. The only request for this pose was to sit as though he were doing homework.

Figure 2  
Untitled

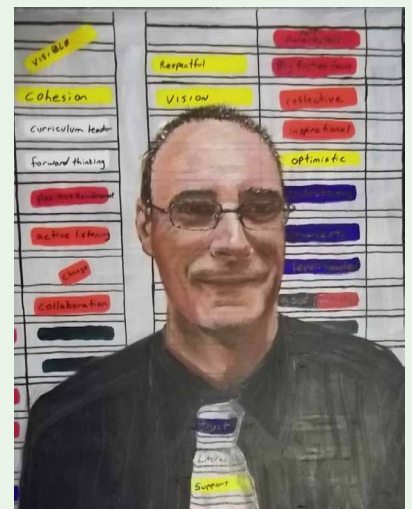


The subject of figure 3 is a school principal. Facing his desk is the school schedule, and it takes up the entire wall. It is what he sees whenever he is working in his office.

Figure 3  
Work in Progress



Work  
in  
progress



The images are of paintings in progress. In the exclusive identity of an artist, showing work publically before it is complete rarely happens. But as researchers, we are putting the work out for view, in progress, for feedback and perhaps to give more access to our thinking as we work. It is an uncomfortable feeling.

Thinking back to artistic authority, a/r/tography pushes us to understand how these images (and this text) are also self portraits (consider the proximity of a/r/tography and autobiography). Given the authorial power implied through textualizing processes of self (Lenzo, 1995; Prain, 1997), ongoing contesting of authorship is important, especially as locating the “real” subject has been a slippery slope of slippery conceptualizing since antiquity. Such slipperiness is the portent and possibility of a/r/tography, where the subjective context shifts in relation to being with one’s identity, where place and time cannot be ignored. Thinking of the infinite, rhizomatic complexity of self/other/place/time, the *in progress* nature of these portraiture, in time, and over time, open up important methodological possibilities for a/r/tography to be employed in self-study inquiry. For example, in the three portraits above there are five dichotomous relationships: daughter/woman, woman/man, work/play, teacher/parent, and principal/teacher. Treated as singular concepts, once mathematically factored, there are twenty-five intertwining relationships. If the contiguous identities are viewed as doubled, then there would be one hundred intertwining relationships, and that is only if time and place are treated as fixed. Arbitrarily (and narrowly) attributing time a factor of five (five phases of the life span), and place a factor of three (geographical, territorial, aesthetic), there would be two thousand and five hundred interrelated relationships. We mention this to draw attention to the (impossibility) urgency of research which addresses the whole of work/education, and to be heartened in the theoretical construction of a/r/tography, a graphy attending to the complex relationships of the parts. As Wiebe (2012) explains:

*The distinction between already being a “human being” and still being in the process of becoming a “human becoming” importantly highlights that we as human beings are othered to ourselves in relation to time, place, [and] people... Understanding is less about knowing ourselves as a singular and stable self and more about the journey of not yet being a being. I am a human becoming. (p. 36)*

Layered within these reverberations of *in progress work* is the *in progress human being* becoming human. Herein lies a/r/tography’s relationship to critical theory via radical relatedness in the contiguities of self/other and self/text, for “understanding both students and teachers as human becomings... highlights how typical every-day pedagogical practices perpetuate the power structures of a classroom’s social systems” (Wiebe, 2012, p. 35). Similarly, but expressed as a possibility for a/r/tography and critical theory, Irwin and O’Donoghue (2012) write how in concert with realizing “they were part of a larger art world that promotes social practice,” teacher candidates also came to realize “they were the medium for learning” (p. 228). This important ontological finding prompted Irwin and O’Donoghue to ask, “If art as social practice is steeped in pedagogical engagements, [h]ow might the process of learning become as important, or even more important, than the product?” (p. 228).



## THE TROPE, TRICK, TRIPE, AND TRAP OF UNBOUNDED WORK

Work is a slippery word, and how we progress its concept through transgressive art is itself a work in *progress*, which is to mean that the work is always incomplete and in need of our ongoing activity. Like the highway signposting that work in progress is real work—tax dollars are at work even while the workers are still (may not be) working—we hope, as do the governments which campaign so carefully in the margins of highway work, that socio-economic imaginations will begin to value work which happens behind the scenes. Contrary to socio-economic preferences for a finished product (i.e. distaste for the physical phenomenon of a bumpy road), we believe that political systems which value work processes will also work (and already do), so that mental and physical discomfort with “bumps and potholes” will get worked out in due time.

Reimagining the socio-economic value system of what counts as work ought to receive greater pedagogical attention than it does. What it means to grow up, to become mature, to take on responsibility, to become more independent, and to pursue employment cannot be understood apart from the interrelated discourses of school and work. Returning for a moment to the concept of pedagogical recognition and how it might invigorate conceptions of educative “bumps and potholes,” it becomes apparent that how adults value young people in the progress and process of their making art, making knowledge, and making a life, comes to affect the ontology and epistemology of work.

Teachers work at home, the work-at-home movement enabled by homework. The power of the employer to employ the home to sustain productivity, but to simultaneously devalue women through socio-economic gender norming, whether to increase profit or reduce the deficit, is unbounded. The subjects of figures 1,2, and 3, like the authors, want to find joy, purpose and meaning in work, but the disconnect between joy/work/meaning is wide enough that they have little option but *to appear* to enjoy working while—in their minds—not doing real work. The important pose “to sit as though” is an insightful manifestation of the struggle against the increasing demand of profit (including profiting from free time (lifelong learning)) and the impossibility to contain it.

What do these work portraitures tell us about the positioning power of work discourse? How does the work discourse position “in progress” work, especially since any elementary understanding of time and development shows human lives as always in progress? Does this mean that as human beings the discourse of work is continually devaluing who we are because it is possible to imagine ourselves as a completed work, some kind of arrival where efficiency and productivity in our lives reaches the fullness of our capacity? Is our capacity ever understood as finite?

Further, if work has no boundaries, such that it has expanded to include the home (but also devalue it), how are we to understand work’s demand of increased capacity where time and space have no physical means to limit what might be required? Also complicating this notion is that work discourses place the responsibility of finding workload/worklife balance on the individual, as that individual is rarely understood as part of a larger discourse. In figures 1 and 2, the children know all too well the trope of doing more homework to do better in school; in figure 1, the teacher knows

all too well the trick of teaching is to mark those papers and return them tomorrow morning; in figure 3, the principal knows all too well the tripe of getting all the paper work done while apparently never sitting down in the office (good instructional leaders are out in hallways and classrooms making a difference). Presumably he makes such a large schedule so he can keep it always in front of him, which is to say, so that he can do the work of scheduling in his head while simultaneously doing other work which is taking his more immediate attention.

## CONCLUDING THIS WORK?

From Block's (2004) *Talmud, Curriculum, and the Practical*, we've learned that the Western philosophical approach to work has depended on the physicality and/or measurability of the product. In the politics of better education, multiple measures are designed to position school/work as a cause/effect relationship, and these instrumentally influence a person's value in society, that is, relatively valuing a person based on his/her economic contributions. In Talmud, argues Block, since creation is presupposed, the productive drive of knowledge cannot be separated from prayer (pp. 2-5). What we understand Block to be suggesting is that homework, housework, school work, all work—if related to prayer—becomes valuable not in the result but in the posture, in the activity, in the ethical approach of one to another. This is similar to Hegel's (1777/1807) notion of dialogue or Pinar's (2004) notion of complicated conversation in that work is rendered valuable in the relationships of those working together. They need not produce to bestow a social benefit. The trouble with the potential wisdom in Block (2004), Hegel (1777/1807), and Pinar (2004) is the difficulty of shifting one's relationship to work, for us perhaps illustrated in the ongoing pursuit of measuring learning. De-privileging our pedagogical position with students and becoming more familiar with our reluctance to let learning happen without assessing it, emphasizes a profound debt that we think we still owe in what we imagine is *our obligation* to be doing good work.

Our claim is that the ways teachers value students influence how those students value others, particular those others who, socially, are living beyond the traditional scope of a community's or a nation's boundaries of concern. We argue that pedagogical recognition depends on valuing students in their creative processes, and to do so is an "interpretive" shift for teachers as they move from the rationalist medium of product and productivity to a medium of identity making and role exploration. This "transmediation" of self, like the transmediation of texts, is a process where teachers deconstruct traditional privileges of production and create opportunities for empowerment. It is not new to connect literacy to empowerment, nor is it new to see critical literacy as enabling creative processes. Consider, for example, Freire's (1973) use of images in literacy programs for *consientizacao* and political efficacy: both how his understanding of aesthetics supports critical literacy and how critical literacy is foundational to democratic ideals. Freire's (1973) program was not a preparation for work, nor was it the acquiring of skills for the real world, but, according to Freire, was a daily doing of democratic life via creation "capable of releasing other creative acts," a kind of creation "in which students would develop the impatience and vivacity which characterizes search and invention" (p. 43). Freire's primary goal was activating students' recognition of their active role in transforming culture.

What we share with Freire is the belief that together students and teachers can come to critical understandings to change their world. We extend his work in thinking of empowerment as context dependent in relation to role and identity, particularly as these relate to students and teachers who are simultaneously artists, researchers, and teachers.

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