

Statement of Art and Teaching Philosophy

Art, at its social core, is the trace of an engaged pathway. A pathway that conducts the circulation and exchange of creative human energies as they are attenuated by a vast range of mediative (materialized) carriers. The artist is that person who opens and offers the Self in a directed seeking: to engage in a dialogue of human energies with an Other. Finding a proper pathway for those energies: transmitting: simultaneously receiving the expressions of the Other, this is the moving act of creativity. Creativity is the charged flow of energies between and through the Self and the Other over relative spaces and times.

These two proto-definitions are the basis of my art and teaching praxis.

Creative activities at the confluence of art and communication (science and technology) have an increasingly important role in cultural and social dynamics. The territory mapped by these activities, especially their impact on evolving social structures and networked systems, is an area of rich possibility and chaotic flows. As an artist, it is my interest to occupy the dynamic field of that intersection and, while exploring its fundamental characteristics, develop a deeper awareness of the process of human connection, exchange, and be-ing. Presence, as it may be variously manifest through mediation, is my primary "material," and "genuine dialogue," as Martin Buber expressed it, is my primary method. My research often explores the spontaneous unscripted abilities of the self to concentrate and focus energies and establish dialectic connection across more than just material gaps. In a space of indeterminate momentary outcomes, creativity finds a fundamental source.

The formation of material artifacts is for me an inspired activity and a specifically directed flow of energy in support of creative activities. However, I subscribe to a post-materialist worldview which transcends the mechanistic and Cartesian linkages between object and subject and instead looks at the energy content and configuration of a 'work' as a situation. One current area of exploration of this energy is the creation and constellation of ordered systems -- archives or dataspace -- which I subsequently employ as sources in performative situations. These situations sometime incorporate artifacts, sometime rely solely on the momentary ambient environmental conditions, sometime cull the ordered space of archive; they all seek to establish a flow of the spontaneous and improbable. While I regard the material art-making process an important aspect of being -- an aspect that allows for significant concentrations of personal energy and expression -- I do like to approach it as an open-ended element of a wider *praxis* where there is no defined ending point and change is the guiding principle.

TEACHING

As an artist, I am committed to the dynamics of the learning environment as a critical and important facet of my work. Teaching is a special case of the more general open situations referred to previously. I seek to create vital learning spaces -- conceptual and physical zones where the exercise of free expression and spontaneous dialogue takes place -- an environment that is both practical and experimental, realistic and fantastic, personally relevant and socially sensitized. I frequently build on my own explorations as an artist -- using my personal creative experience as a referent and bringing my current creative energies and directions directly into the learning process. Personal rapport, dialogue, and humane contact are important factors in my conduct as an arts educator.

With the goal of defining fundamental conditions for personal and social evolution, my workshops are based in critical and dynamic dialogue over a wide variety of issues and concepts. I am against drawing arbitrary divisions between various concepts, cultures, disciplines, creative sources, and mediums of expression, but rather focus on weaving different ideological, conceptual, and especially personal energies into creative juxtaposition. The synergy of disparate trans-disciplinary energies and ideas through active communication and creative collaboration is a necessary element of inspired and relevant learning. Two specific roles that I take on is that of facilitator -- to encourage open-ness -- and that of information-source -- to pass on to participants significant threads that I receive from my own substantial international network of collaborative connections working across the spectrum of art and technology.

I teach my students to accept and trust their own sensory experience in the world. In this process, they gain an inexhaustible energy source and free up their creative possibilities. I accomplish this by facilitating a trusting environment and stimulating connected collaboration. At any point in the dialogue between myself and the student, I would seek to engage at a level that is beyond institutionalized formality. My significant experience in second-language and cross-cultural situations provides my teaching activities with a certain independence from ideology-based systems and protocols. This makes the learning more transparent, participative, flexible, and spontaneous.

Any emphasis on language-based (and thus abstracted) theory needs to be balanced by intimate, practical, and principled exploration of the (materialized) actions of creativity to establish a lived practice. A student needs to be able to construct a finite methodology for approaching a new medium or idea -- how to test the limits of a medium, how to stimulate experimentation without stifling spontaneous creation, how to build up discipline, concentration, and attention when working, and how to see critically and creatively while in vital interaction with the noumenal world and, finally, how to package their own human energies within carriers most appropriate to their expressive needs. Ways of working may and should be informed by theoretical understandings, historical precedent, critical viewpoints, but, most importantly, the establishment of this centered life-practice. It is extremely important that the student experience and identify specific life-long sources of energy where they might root their creative impulses. The creative oscillation between word and action must always be linked; and both, considered and used in concert, become an inexhaustible energy source and basis of a powerful practice.

As the writings of Paolo Friere discuss in detail, the teacher-student relationship should be characterized by a dynamic and balanced dialectic. Teaching is a truly human activity. Teacher and student are both the educators and the educated -- learning is sharing. The measure of a successful learning experience may be drawn from how the shared wisdom comes into being in the life-practice of both the student and the teacher.

Outside formal classrooms, I am always interested in working with other artists and educators in creating new learning situations both on- and off-line, especially those that explore the rich textures of inter-disciplinary awareness. Being supportive of and supported by the academic community is crucial to the survival and growth of diversity. I am interested in a sustained dialogue around the principle issues of higher education and am especially interested in the creation of projects and programs with international participation.

The past two decades of teaching and working as an artist in 20 countries has given me a great deal of insight into cross-cultural education and the flexibility it demands. This experience leads me to understand cross-(cultural, social, disciplinary, media, ideological, and linguistic) boundaries not as hindrances but as stimulations to a deepening of vision and understanding. There are great personal and social rewards in cross-border dialogues that foster open and sustained contact. In closing, I can say that my teaching and my art practice is not simply an avocation, but a broad and inclusive expression of my own personal creative energies.

-- John Hopkins, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, June 2011
