A recent a/r/tographic community-based research project called Richgate involves a public pedagogy that addresses the lived experience of eight families in the City of Richmond, British Columbia, Canada. “Richgate” is a Chinese translation for the name of the city of Richmond. The eight participating families have migrated to Canada at various times in history, from China, Estonia, Japan, South Africa, Western Europe, and India. The four-year SSHRC-funded project consisted of a/r/tographers working with inter-generational families through interviews, collaboratively designed works of art, and public exhibitions focusing on issues of identity and belonging. The a/r/tographic process generated new combinations and patterns as well as different alternatives and connections for ways in which publics co-exist.

The participating families originally came together when the local art gallery held a symposium on art, immigration, and the environment. At this event, several of the authors gave academic presentations on their work. At the end of the event, an invitation was extended to local in-migrating families wishing to participate in an intergenerational project focused on collecting visual and textual narratives of immigrant experiences. Through this public invitation, families that chose to participate knew they were being given an opportunity to contribute to a small community of immigrants willing to explore how their notions of home and away changed as a result of immigration. In effect, the research project was a form of public pedagogy that designed conditions for creating relationships within a particular place and time allowing individuals and their families a way to make their stories both perceptible and possible. We maintain that composing public pedagogy that attends to the relational aspect of transition must involve a reevaluation of the dynamic nature of what we feel are public pedagogy’s central components: public, space, and time. Highlighting the material, aesthetic nature of pedagogical experience shifts us away from static fixations on people, methodologies, or objects. Rather than more common practices of positioning a public intellectual or pedagogue as central to a learning event or addressing an already-determined public grouping or presupposing a common outcome, this research designed for what Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) describes as a transitional space in which the very aliveness of the embodied self is “creatively and imaginatively elaborated into new ways of being in the world and making sense of it” (p. 32).

To highlight a/r/tography’s potential for decentering public pedagogy, this chapter explains
the Richgate project's key considerations of public, space, and time; and how considering their actual materiality moves us towards research experience as composition. Richgate's first consideration concerned its public, whose evolving futures emerge from the extraordinariness of everyday routine. Second, in considering how this example of public pedagogy opened opportunities for the creation of stories, networks, and installations, space was addressed as multiple modes of configuration whose openness can be changed. This is not just to emphasize the contextual nature of research experience but rather to appreciate and contribute to an event's dynamic nature, recognizing that the creation of public pedagogy very literally has the potential for creating flexible and responsive public space. The third important consideration of the project is conceiving of time as inseparable from space, in which the present includes both past and future (Deleuze, 2004; Massumi, 2002; Mead, 1938). The project's insistent emphasis on participation offers a fusional time effect, what Brian Massumi (2002) might call “a continuity of transitions” (p. 197). In broad terms, we gave energy to the aesthetics of occasioning a composition of public pedagogy that invents itself in its process of self-variation. The a/r/tographic methodology helps catalyze and modulate a politics that is always on the verge of coming into being. We have also included throughout the paper several images of public installations generated from this project in order to relay a sense of how public, space, and time played out in the visual compositions that were offered as exhibitions to local and nonlocal audiences.

Public

With a focus on identity and belonging in processes of the transitions that mark change, the Richgate project linked learning with democratic public life. A commitment to addressing both global and local citizens pedagogically necessitated a consideration of how we understand “public.” In an historic revaluation of public space, Nancy Fraser (1992) argued that it was impossible to claim that any group could be inclusive. Instead, she claimed that marginalized groups form their own publics, which she calls counterpublics. Fraser was not advocating simply for a postmodern celebration of multiplicity but, instead, for expanded democratic possibilities. The Richgate project was, likewise, not linked to a multicultural celebration but sought to articulate differences other than those associated with traditional ethnic groupings. More specifically, however, the project sought to give experienceable form to the imaginations and sensibilities of the continual movements of change in which there is room for participation and experimentation.

Gilles Deleuze (in Rajchman, 2000) explains an alternative stream of thought to Fraser's theory of multiple publics. Deleuze's distinction is a keener, more discriminating conception of “public” that arose in the post-war, Western art world through the expressive material of film. The realities of war resulted in a radical rethinking of cinema's images and this ultimately had an influence on Deleuze's reconception of “publics.” In an effort to separate from the value systems and cultures that permitted such enormity of destruction, a postwar interest emerged in images that go beyond usual successions of time and space to consider time and space as questions of composition instead of organization, and as experiences of movement and rest instead of developmental progression. Deleuze was interrogating the problem of representation and arguing that cinema's shift away from the aesthetic object to the act of creation offered a way to think outside representation. This was in contrast to theories of cognition in which learning was deemed to involve assembling internal models of external reality.

Deleuze (1989) explains that film began to explore the body not so much as what moves, nor as the subject or instrumental center of action but, instead, the body as the inventor of time, making time public through its weariness, its waiting, and its anticipation. Moving images beyond phenomenological explanation to aesthetic processes of ideas and ideals is what Deleuze terms
“becoming-art.” Becoming-art in cinema no longer presented a nation, the common good, or a border between private and political. Instead “the people” no longer exist or do not yet exist. “The people,” instead, is a becoming. This notion of “becoming” is central to Richgate’s focus because it forefronts the significance of histories and futures in the immediacy of present interrelatedness. Becoming indicates both a flow out of layers of experience and time, and a continual surprising emergence in actual contact zones of interrelatedness.

In his philosophical work, Deleuze connected cinema’s new concept of “becomings” with the official histories of majority and minority groups in the context of postcolonial culture. He considered minorities as always becoming the collective sense of what is lacking or missing in the predefined public. In exploring Deleuze’s contribution to film theory, Patricia Pisters (2003) describes how space is given for becoming people to take place in “the stories and myths told by the filmmaker, who in turn becomes part of the people as well” (p. 92). Through storytelling, the characters in modern cinema extend becoming beyond the scope of history which only grasps an event as it was actualized in particular circumstances. Instead, becoming art takes up and invents new spaces and times, continually crossing the boundaries separating private business from politics through renderings that blur traditional distinctions and through experiments with subject matter, form, temporal sequences, and fusions of the everyday with the remarkable and the folkloric.

According to Deleuze (1989) minorities are political, collective, revolutionary, and even spatial as they deteritorialize one terrain at the same time they map another. This is not to impose an aesthetic form on relations with one another but rather to extend an experience of the process of the present. Becoming’s feelings of time, movement, and continual processes of life offer an understanding of publics that gather for reasons other than traditional ethnicity and sociopolitical determinants, and for educational experiences that are both pleasurable and incomplete.

In the concern with becomings, minorities are more of a rhizomatic configuration, like the cinematic experience that involves material capture, processuality, and movement, and incorporates the transitions and changes of a micropolitics. The becoming-art of cinema involving the expectancy of time rather than time’s chronological sequence offers engagement in transitions that contribute to the invention of what Deleuze describes as “the story-telling of a people to come” (p. 223), instead of the myth of a past people.

The art form of film has played a role in awakening public education to a responsibility of addressing the experiential nature of pedagogy rather than just its use of representation and interpretation. Connections in these educational experiences are not social interactions between already constituted subjects such as an already defined People; they offer experiences that indicate something smaller than ethnicities and collectivities and more in terms of a micropolitics of elements and particles, almost a becoming-people. Focusing on the biological, corporeal matter in the material realm rescues us from a transcendent, reactionary individualism and refers instead to the biological, aesthetic experience that involves what Barbara Kennedy (2000) describes as a “total engagement with the molecular forces of being in the world” (p. 31). In creating the arrangements of the Richgate project we planned for times and spaces where everyone involved in the project could explore individuations of difference rather than the macropolitics of identity groupings. By not addressing traditional groupings of people, pedagogues, or viewpoints as static and fixed, and attending instead to the processual nature of artistic, pedagogic, and inquiry sensibilities, potential was offered for exploring a deeper dimension of being which is becoming.

We argue that public pedagogy is plagued by the same problem that John Rajchman (2000) sees as art’s problem. Public pedagogy’s problem and ongoing experiment is “to create arrangements in space and time in which we relate to ourselves and one another in a manner not already
subordinated to identity or identification, imaginary or symbolic” (p. 82). We extend Rajchman’s explanation that art is how we invent ways to say and see things that do not preexist into Richgate’s project of public pedagogy. Moreover, publics are never given and must always be invented anew. Public pedagogy has a responsibility in offering aesthetic experiences not as matters of communication but rather as experimental and experiential endeavors of sensing our commonalities through making something new of our particularities. Artists, researchers, and educators can only invoke a people, never create one. The dynamics of a/r/tography catalyze emergence from its artist/researcher/teacher relations in an active philosophy that creates novel qualitative combinations of sensations and feelings. As with the popular image of the rhizome, a/r/tography works best if we let its meandering growth determine its own directions in the becoming of publics.

The potency of the conception of public pedagogy that offers aesthetic engagement as experimental might be extended with Brent Davis, Dennis Sumara, and Rebecca Luce-Kapler’s (2008) unraveling of the traditional pedagogic assumption that the center of an educational experience has to be a person or object. They argue that a shift from a centralized structure to a decentralized one is not merely a matter of shifting attentions from one thing to another. Rather, it is about decentering or displacing such attentions. As a result, the center is not an academic, teacher, student, public, counterpublic, or a work of art; but is instead, emerging possibility that, with Massumi (2002), we might define more specifically as potential. Rather than possibility, which is a variation that is implicit in what something can be said to be when it is idealized, potential is the immanence in a process that is “the still indeterminate variation, under way” (p. 9). This open center is something that we do not or cannot yet see is happening to us and is concerned instead with the emergence of something new.

Opening up the center of a pedagogical experience to movement of something yet undefined shifts pedagogy from its interest in influencing what Walter Lippman (1925) described as a confused and helpless public. Instead, opening the center rescues public pedagogy from simple formulas of critical thinking in which we educate against propaganda. Public pedagogy in a decentered conception moves away from representation or interpretation, following instead the participatory movements of increased transnational migration and its subsequent interest in relationality and diversity as well as the microscopic differentiating changes that occur constantly at a biological level. Nothing is given here but the continuous affective force of ethics that does not diminish with time. By presupposing a prior capacity for response (Agamben, 1993), public pedagogy might offer common events of sensorially rich experience (Davis et al., 2008) that are open enough to offer hospitality to everyone.

The a/r/tographic methodology engaged in the Richgate project is changing conceptions of research, implicating it deeply with a community-engaged public pedagogy. Although arts-based methodologies in general have been transforming the representational form of research communication for several decades, using creative processes to fully engage in the contexts of surrounding human experience (Sullivan, 2005) a/r/tography stresses the human composition in activities of work that are so etched into our life work as living beings. A/r/tography involves making art as experimentation, inquiring with wonder, teaching as replenishing, playfully adding the double entendre of the term “graphy” as a field of study, rather than a written text alone. Further, the Richgate a/r/tographic project did not only assist a public in asking different kinds of questions but rather offered a participatory event in which to interact in time and space differently. In doing so, the participating families guided us on memory walks in neighborhoods and spent hours with us in their homes, sharing memories as we looked through photo albums together and eventually revisiting images again in planning and preparing for public works of art. Several evenings were spent around large tables in restaurants, visiting and telling stories
about ongoing learning and passage. These interconnections are not meant to be, and cannot be captured by our research but are intended, instead, to open public space for more interconnections to continue.

Important assumptions guiding this project have much to do with the translogic of an a/r/tographic methodology, in which neither objects nor people nor place stand back from the process but instead, enter the relations to experience a temporal composition. As an art form itself, a/r/tography is part of a dynamic process always moving outside of formal definitions. Necessitating a co-mingling of the materiality of learning and practice with the aesthetics of artmaking and research, a/r/tography reconnects visceral, vital experience with both image and text in a way that offers a wide framework for understanding. A/r/tographic methodology does not attempt to do away with other methodologies but recognizes, again with Massumi (2002), that no single logic or theoretical framework is flexible enough to encompass the concrete abstractness of experience. It also acknowledges that the edges of what we already know (represented by the forward slashes in a/r/tography) are where pure potential exists, uncategorized. As Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse (2005b) observe in their Feasibility Project, the edges are where “extraordinary acts of creativity and responsiveness have now become necessary and possible” (¶2).

Public Space

A/r/tographic research as public pedagogy addresses not only Deleuze’s (1989) conceptual ideas of a people to come but simultaneously, literal, physical places of public space in its installations. Physical space is immeasurable and indeterminate—not quite what it appears to be. Physicists Cliff Burgess and Fernando Quevedo (2007) recently predicted that space has nine dimensions rather than the usual three of length, depth, and breadth, and, once time is included, ten. These dimensions are not visible to us, perhaps because they are too small for us to fit into them and too untraveled for us to imagine, but they do remind us that the physical world involves more than we can directly visualize, slipping always, rhizomatically away, into a crack or a fissure. Deleuze (in Rajchman, 2000) writes that society is always leaking and it may best be measured in terms of the ways in which it deals with its leaks. In other words, the People as already determined are missing, slipping away into the “becoming” of minorities. Deleuze (1990) explains that the difference between minorities and majorities is not their size; instead, the minority has no model and its becoming is spatial beyond our current perception. In fact, he claims that what we consider the majority is really nobody, because everyone is in some way in a process that could lead them on unforeseen paths.

Not only indeterminate, space is also dynamic, and in 2003 Burgess and Quevedo (2007) found that, in fact, it bends in response to matter. The time and space of the universe literally sculpts itself around our participation. One theory regarding the way in which the universe is continually expanding involves a process in which the three usual dimensions expand more rapidly as a result of the potential energy that drives the extra dimensions of space to settle into the usual configurations. Burgess and Quevedo (2007) explain that this process “relates the size of the dimensions we see to the size and shape of those we cannot” (p. 59). The twistings and turnings in this process of movement are defined relationally with its ever-changing landmarks, making cities, in particular, places of constantly expanding potential in how we relate to each other. Landmarks of public art pedagogically trigger headings, mark relations, and offer directions for movement. Landmarks change the topology of a space not metaphorically, but actually just as sound defines the time and space around it. Richgate’s project of creating banners (see Figure 33.1) to hang on poles in the heart of Richmond, poster images on bus shelters (see Figure
33.2), and its public exhibitions of art, redefine public space, creating particular public spaces that physically impact how we relate to ourselves, and to each other within them. As space reworks itself around new material, perhaps the energy it needs to settle into our usual reality literally expands the potential of our current movements. Although consciously imperceptible, it is possible that our ways of moving and relating in the world, both socially and physically, are significantly altered.

Figure 33.1 is an installation photograph of two of the Richgate banners, which were historical images of meaningful events for each of the participating families. Figure 33.2 is an installation photograph of the city of Richmond’s Night Market. It has an inset of a particularized view of the same event. The words “You Are Here” are written in both English and Mandarin indicating the multiplicity of experience in Richmond as well as the unique experience and the broader experience always within one another.

The movement between fixing a location and the simultaneously uncontainable present is the experience of the open dynamics of space. Somewhere between our already-determined position and new movement, our senses fold into and out of each other. This means that we always orient ourselves with two systems of reference used together: one is self-referential and the other is exoreferential (Massumi, 2002). It is to this fissure or fold in any experience that we must go to find ourselves; here is perhaps where the missing People are, the becoming people. Where the aesthetics of someone else’s storied image evokes a déjà vu that is not entirely impersonal yet not completely ownable, experience becomes personal socially and generates collective expressions. The expressions overfill experience eliciting openings into dimensions of the present where past and future transition. Furthermore, as space reworks itself around the design of new public openings, our own
physicality as humans is affected. The paths and rhythms of changing landmarks serve to create more complex nervous systems (Davis et al., 2008; Rajchman, 2000), and as a result, there is potential for being less subservient to what Ellsworth (2005) describes as the debilitating effects of clichés and already assumed knowledges. In relation to public space, Richgate’s pedagogy is therefore not only metaphorical but also immediately pragmatically philosophical in considering real effects to be essential aspects of meaning.

In addition to the set of banners and the bus shelter posters, the Richgate project created several other series of images with the participating families. Another series included eight Gates that are lived diagrams or maps of each of the family’s various processes of transition. These are designed to have a top banner with hanging sides in the shape of gates or entrances through which visitors could walk. The Gates were installed in several exhibitions in both China and Canada. In the city of Richmond, they were exhibited for several months in Richmond City Hall. The Gates share moments of the process of arriving into the present through continuous change, and also mark the determinate forms selected out of that flow. Transformations are defined not by the invariant formal properties but by a continuity of transformation including stasis, which is also a movement effect. As a result, when a process of change has been stopped in its passage and designed as an image, what is left untold also belongs. By walking through the Gates and through the private experiences of others, the Richgate project hoped to welcome becoming-stories.

The Gates created public space for the particular stories told by the a/r/tographic experience. As William Pinar (chapter 6, this volume) observes, in writing about the form of essays, when private realities are created they do not disappear into their articulation but are instead reconstructed as public reality. He argues that it is not collective cohesive thinking that is needed for engaging reality, but instead, “it requires a decentered, even democratic, subjectivity embracing ‘disunity.’” In similarity to the way in which the art form of the essay is reconstructed as public reality, Richgate’s Gates generated and shared moments of becoming based on already lived experience. In the public installations of varied memories of transition, the possible coexistence of degrees or nuances of private experiences offer a sense of the inexhaustibility of the expressions. Although individual choices are made in the art pieces, the concept of decentering brings the potential of another and another and always yet another choice in each continual and novel point of contact in the streaming of becoming.

Encountering one of Richgate’s public installations is a pedagogy that might not be experienced as immediately educational. Over 70 years ago, Walter Benjamin (1935) noted that as mechanical reproduction and cinema moved the place of art away from ritual and religion to one of politics, people experienced art collectively in a state of distraction rather than as they did earlier, with contemplation. He observed that “the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, by contemplation alone. Instead, they are attended to gradually by habit” (XV, Para. 3). Habits are formed by both use and touch (Benjamin, 1935). By touch, we interpret Benjamin to mean that it does not require attention to form habits. Ellsworth (2005) notes that the power of pedagogical events address learning selves obliquely through “orchestrations of space, time, duration, movement, sensation, sounds, text, image, interaction, juxtaposition and invitation to surprise” (p. 10). We agree with her argument that places speak to pedagogy indirectly through design, creating a space for pedagogy’s still-to-come potential. American experimental filmmaker, Stan Brakhage (1963), believes that perception can be assumed apart from cognition. In agreement, film artists Sarah Markgraf and Gregg Biermann (2000) argue that experiencing direct perception that is not caught already in the net of concepts could result in more meaningful experiences of the world. This preverbal capacity is supported by Massumi (2002) as perception that precedes
cognition, and it is possible in events that address publics as social in a manner that is prior to the separating out of identifiable groups and positions.

Richgate’s public works of art offer potential for resituating variation, which, as Massumi (2002) observes, is much different than just contextualizing learning. Physical encounters with changed public spaces create the particularity of place with something more elemental than new questions or recognitions. Instead, as physical space reworks itself around new objects, its generation of energy reverberates, fading out infinitely in all directions to dynamic thresholds that facilitate transition across the same boundaries they embrace. Unfolding space within an unfolding place within an unfolding time, this is where we sense the intensity of our reality as well as its folding back on itself in order to take our place in it as in a becoming. Our becoming is that in which, as Deleuze (1990) explains, “we grow both young and old in it at once, going through all its components and singularities” (p. 2).

Richgate’s Gates are designed to meet the challenge of what Ellsworth (2004) asks of public places of learning: that they are completely impersonal, able to be recombined with an experience of movement past, under, through, and yet—utterly human, entirely contingent on the passing through of a particular place and a particular time. Public pedagogies that are designed with Ellsworth’s criteria in mind make possible the necessity of having to deal with our relation to others. The Gates hang as patterns of exits and entries across thresholds. As gates, what is important is the hospitality of passage. In response to current global surveillance of movement, they invite openings into different arrangements for public space, inviting the known to mingle with the unknown, the process of change to linger at the coming edge of the future. Massumi (2002) describes every experience as a “portentous déjà vu at a hinge” (p. 189). The curves of space and time are always life-givingly ajar. In her novel Fugitive Pieces, Ann Michaels (1999) also writes lyrically of our fragmentary cartographic awareness of places in which “the closest we come to knowing the location of what’s unknown is when it melts through the map like a watermark, a stain transparent as a drop of rain. On the map of history perhaps the water stain is memory” (p. 137).

Public Time

What happens to memories of places that are no more? The participating families in the Richgate project have had experiences in places—in buildings, gateways, gardens, and homes. Although many of these sites important to these families’ heritage no longer exist, they remain perhaps more vivid than ever in memory. Benjamin’s (in Marx, Shwarz, Shwarz, & Wizisla, 2007) intimate archives remind us that living leaves traces. Places and landscapes hold these timeless traces. In the Richgate project, the tracings were always redrawn with stories, with overlapping memories of moving in relation to time’s change, transitory attempts at locating sites that remain situated in personal memory. Despite attempts at linearizing time, it twists our three dimensional constructions, its added dimension changing everything. The frequently used term “space-time” indicates the imbricated relationship of when and where something is. Space and time are relative to each other, based on the activity within them. Deleuze (in Rao, 2005) argues in his 1956 study of Bergson’s philosophy of difference, “The past has not ceased to be. Useless and inactive, impassive, it IS, in the full sense of the word: It is identical with being itself” (Rao, p. 39, emphasis in original). Deleuze (2004) explains that in every moment there are always two halves of being—two of nature, and they are the same movement. One solidifies or congeals in a product, the very movement of difference that interrupts products. The other movement turns back and retraces the steps, drawing from the product, the movement of difference from which it resulted. Richgate’s collaborative public pedagogy functioned in these movements of turning
backwards to retrace anew and turning forwards to anticipate, enlarging the space of potential through the very motion of turning.

The way in which time carries difference is not as stopping a process but rather as a unity that might be described as any all-encompassing semblance of difference: “thriving on conjunction and disjunction, in mixture or separation being but one with the unforeseen course…in every direction, a river carrying partial objects and varying their distances” (Deleuze, 2004, p. 158). Time is a method and an activity that renews relations with the social and physical world. At the peripheries of what we think we already know, there is a grayness from which the colors of difference emerge and catalyze; we are always flowing into each others’ experiences, in and out of our pasts and futures. The distinctions decenter, their edges rimmed with the fluid materiality of life. Time shows our memories as more abstract and more concrete than can be expressed in a single story about a single experience. Massumi (2002) explains the relation of the personal to the difference that time makes, “The personal is not intentionally prefigured. It is rhythmically re-fused in a way that always brings something new and unexpected into the loop. The loop is always strangely open” (p. 191). What is at stake is memory that keeps the past active in the present. Memory can only do its rhizomatic work by not maintaining parts of its network; memory, as Paul Cilliers (2006) argues, is only possible if there is also forgetting. What he stresses as most important in this process of remembering and forgetting is slowness, and therefore, “there should be a temporal space in which the past is allowed to play itself out in interaction with present … the balance between stability and change is a contingent thing which plays itself out in time” (p. 5).

Although in reference to schooling, curriculum theorist William Doll’s (1993) lament that education had still to realize the potential inherent in time as a framework for transformations is also applicable to education as public pedagogy. Since the time of Doll’s writing, ever driven by larger structures of global market economy (Ferneding, 2003), education and society’s conception of time as linear and cumulative has only intensified. Moments that make us slow down to take in the substance of experience in all its complexity are needed now more than ever. Britzman (2006) notes that the way in which the testing industry in contemporary mainstream education demands proof of education before its time “contributes to an instrumental, repressive orientation to knowledge. The procedures of content, comprehension, and skills dominate pedagogical interactions, and there is hardly time for curiosity into the mysteries of being” (pp. 66–67). Without the qualities of becoming, we often find that tomorrow is already gone because we’ve come too soon. What follows is that we learn to believe that we can stand outside of our own histories and outside of the morphogenetic geology of time.

In response to society’s demanding conception of time and its inattention to the becomings of lived experience, Richgate’s Side by Sides are historical images of participating families situated alongside more recent images. Putting time into motion in the Side by Side images offers topologies, surface qualities that are larger than our visual range—like the rim of the horizon. They are not visual representations; they are seeing time in space. They retain a surface character but are, using Massumi’s (2002) words, “event perceptions that combine senses and tenses and dimensions on a single surface” (p. 187), what might suit George Mead’s (1938) description of “the future edge of experience” (p. 344). To offer time as a unity of differences requires that self or other is not at the center of a pedagogical event but rather a space of potential generated from time’s overlapping and multidirectional movement. Biologist Jean Piaget (cited in Doll, 1993) contends that knowing is a perpetual construction or reconstruction between our environment and us. Rather than intending this contextual relationship to translate only into a participatory or experiential pedagogy, Piaget was explaining the restructuring and transforming of reality that is defined by constant movement. In responding to Piaget’s notions of learning, Richgate’s
pedagogy does not expect to smooth any disconnect between past and present, here and there, or home and away, but instead, offers patterns of lives lived in relation to time. Locating the force of change in a movement that time carries teaches that difference does not occur only at the surface of our skin; instead, it is a force that is always in the process of becoming.

Although we seldom notice it, this temporal space of becoming already exists. Massumi (2002) reminds us that the delay between sensation and cognition is not a pure, still space in which we wait for consciousness to kick in. Instead, there are intervening stimuli that affect the outcome of each prior stimulus, again and again. And again. The recursions meld together, creating what he describes as a “relational time-smudge” (p. 196). The smudge suspends continually—sensation, awareness, past and present, self and other, here and there—all doubled over, recursive, elaborative, fractalized. Whatever we pull out of this suspended, wandering stain is not in a linear hurry to race on but instead, folds back on everything else, wrinkling more time and space dimensions into the ever-increasing complexity of newness.

Ellsworth and Kruse (2005a) ask us to consider what it would be to pause at the crest before the wave of our unknown crashes over into change, immersed in the relation of who we were and who we are becoming, its profound experience of sensing what it is to be undone. Suspending the smudge of time is of utmost pedagogical importance; as artists, researchers and teachers, it is perhaps the very best we can do for assisting the continuity of stasis and change in society. Grosz’s (2001), Massumi’s (2002), and Ellsworth’s (2005) descriptions of pedagogy and philosophy as forms of architectural experience are of benefit because they push any apparent wholeness of anything to its edges, creating space that reforms and modulates self and other relations, leaving the relations within as the most “real” part of an experience. The publicly pedagogical work of making things continuous recognizes time’s twisted nature by helping presuppose a prior capacity for response; it addresses the world as active, already. Ideas that are infinitely more ancient than we are catch us up in their flow generating renewed potential for ideas that have never yet been.

Richgate considered slowness in a doubled way: one was the extended four year time commitment spent with families through occasions of visiting, looking through old photographs, listening to stories of places and times, walking together through their neighborhoods, as well as sharing meals with all participants present. Much time was also spent discussing and negotiating which pictures would best be shared as images for public exhibition. The second layer of slowness of time involved the art products being exhibited in public places: bus shelters, city hall, main city plazas, the local museum, university entryways, and reviews carried by newspapers and television. Other publics had time to repeatedly experience the project through the media and in the encounters of their everyday movements. Elementary school students were also given time to contribute Postcards from Home, stories and images of an experience of living in Richmond that became part of an installation in the Richmond Museum. In the Richgate project, we wanted time to be the continuous difference at each instant with which we negotiate our own stories of change and we wanted to make use of the time of the past to be in the present (Cilliers, 2006). The generous gift of a four-year SSHRC grant also provided that essential time that provided us such a rich research creation opportunity.

Public Composition

Formal Western philosophy used to think time and space were the building blocks of experience providing only the pure schema of possible experience, and so time and space were considered purely aesthetic, unconnected to literal materiality (Davis, 2004). With the Richgate project, we were convinced that the a/r/tographic methodology could offer a more profound and encom-
passing physical experience. A description that is helpful for understanding the potential of pedagogical experiences resides in what Massumi (2002) calls a “confound,” using its etymological meaning of “found together” (p. 172), in which an event is a block of experience. He explains it more fully using examples of artists such as Paul Klee, who does not separate color from form but instead experiences it as fundamentally as form: “color, illumination, form, three-dimensional space, and linear time all emerge, and emerge together, reciprocally, differently each time, from a many-more dimensioned, self-varying confound” (p. 173). Likewise, people or objects that inhabit blocks of experience inextricably bind up weather, wind, seasons, place and time. Massumi describes a “confound” as a “composition of integrally experienced emergence” (p. 174) that invites self-variation and simultaneous contrasts. In an a/r/tographic experience of public pedagogy, this experience of confound is where the distinctions between teacher and student, author and public, lose their basic character. Time and place become public virtual property instead, and what is important and actual are the terms of relations. As a/r/tographers engaged in public pedagogy we worked to design public space and time for the becoming-people and becoming-art in the Richgate experience.

Both Klee (in Massumi, 2002) and musician Jacques Attali (2006) describe the confound of art’s process as a composition. The parts of a composition do not preexist it but are rather invented and reinvented in the process. In this way, art never supposes a transcendental public but only ever an experimental one. Rajchman (2000) writes, “art is less the incarnation of a life-world than a strange construct we inhabit only through transmutation or self-experimentation, or from which we emerge refreshed as if endowed with a new optic or nervous system” (p. 135). A/r/tographic events of public pedagogy link publics to the substance in art in which neither are languages to be refined nor interpreted; both can be understood directly as compositions of preverbal indications and images.

To compose an a/r/tographic event of public pedagogy is to take pleasure in the process, in time, in relations. It evolves as art does, from within its own practice, and the connections are not something that we are intentionally or consciously in search of. In an example of art evolving from within, experimental filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky extends the power of film to the level of distraction, to focus on something that is so pervasive that we forget that we are looking directly and hardly notice the moment of intense seeing. In subtle fluctuations of prolonged, suspended moments, we sense ourselves, outside of consciousness, in dissolution and then reemerging within configurations of light and shadow. His moving images seem to evoke a tactile, visceral, mesmerizing response leaving memories of continuation, repetition, movement—memories that this matters physically—in our matter.

Dorsky’s work is consistent with what a composition is: invented in the process. Markgraf and Biermann (2000) observe that what is noticeably missing in Dorsky’s film, Variations, is an ego. Instead, the film’s center is a becoming-art. By not controlling the shots into a particular form, Markgraf and Biermann argue that, “he seems to be comming with the shots and finding out what they themselves are suggesting” (p. 2). Dorsky (2005) himself writes how shots and cuts need each other: “If a film is cut in a manner that forces the progression of the shots, not allowing the shots to come into fullness, then no connection with presence can take place” (p. 46). Leaving movement with the images themselves, when no other shot would work after a particular one, he realized that it would be the last, the end of the film. Dorsky’s intertangled connection in his creation hints at how absolutely we are affected by what we try to affect. Figure 33.3 also hints at the one of the ways in which Richgate’s a/r/tographic composition evolved from within. This image involves a/r/tographers and interested visitors to the installation in Beijing creating public space through discussion about the exhibit. The conversations engaged in China
subsequently offered the a/r/tographers new perspectives as they returned to Richmond to work with the Richgate participants.

**Conclusion**

A/r/tography is an experience of our academic lives as confound. Through engaging in the a/r/tographic methodology, Richgate became a composition experimentally created and evolved with a reciprocating exchange between fellow researchers and eight families in a Canadian city. The Richgate project does not deal immediately with large-scale issues of difference such as racism or immigration but offers instead, a profound coming-together of 29 people, learning to know each other's names.

Within public pedagogy as a composition is, perhaps, where the metaphorical rhizome falls apart. Massumi (2002) critiques the rhizome paradigm as spatializing what is a multidimensional experiential process. The rhizome sensibility fills instead of decenters, creating “unchanged change” (p. 175). We are not selves who have experiences, “we are experiences” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 26), and what happens in relation is already the edge of our radically changing futures. A most accurate description of this process, unencumbered by traditional space and time framings, is found in Ellsworth and Kruse’s (2005b) term “becoming else.” In a/r/tography, the activity of the artist, the researcher, the teacher, the participating families all join the composition, become one of the variations of the composition. The simultaneous artmaking, the theorizing, the philosophical and pedagogical work confound each other, change each other. Each person can still act but in Massumi’s words, their actions “help catalyze a particular co-emergence of color, illumination, form, and space-time...it [the creative process] brings a singular variation out into an integral, unfolding expression...the literal creation of a world” (p. 173).

The Richgate “public” could not and cannot be predefined. The families came together through public invitation presented as an opportunity for artmaking and exploration of the times and places of their lives. Through the suspended encounter, although it smudged everything and everybody involved, the collective making of art created a demand that, as Benjamin (1935) argues, can really only be fully satisfied later. It might be, as Massumi theorizes, that only during long periods of history, “the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s
entire mode of existence” (p. 222). In the continual catching up between sensation and consciousness, there is an open space for experiencing the relationality of change and consequently, for presupposing a prior capacity for response—an ethics. Art then becomes an ethical domain. It is situated in what Agamben (1999) describes as a zone of “irresponsibility” (p. 21), meaning that it is situated before consciousness, before the usual expectations for predetermined, precategorized kinds of responsibility and instead, demands more than we can ever assume.

There is no time or place in which we can fully know how it is that we must respond to one another and no time or place in which we are finished with addressing our opportunity for response. As a result, art’s public pedagogical work must always remain indirect, allowing unimagined and multitudinous responses and movements into other connections and occasions, leaving a hope and anticipation for the future. Richgate can scarcely be said to be an example of public pedagogy unless we adopt Agamben’s (1993) description of an example as hinging on the singularity of its details and each of the details as yet another example embedded within, in endless multiplicities. Instead, we offer it as an event, an unrepeatable experience, creating what Ellsworth and Kruse (2008) describe as “intense fl ickers of here and gone, now and then, self and stranger, passing through one another.” This, we feel, is what we can best hope for in public places of learning.

Notes

1. We want to extend our appreciation to the participating families: (a) Mei Lin, Tam Wang, and Crane Wang; (b) Bob Duan, Linda Gu, and Ying Duan; (c) Yuzhang Wang, Hong Wang, and Steven Wang; (d) Gu Xiong, Ge Ni, and Gu Ye; (e) Gabriele and Brian Ailey; (f) Kit Grauer and Carl Grauer; (g) Margaret, Pauline, Mike, Cameo, and Madison Sameshima; (h) Charon, Vicki, Hardeep, and Betty Gill.

2. We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

3. Artists/researchers/teachers: A/r/tography is a research methodology that explores the imbricated practices of artist, researcher, and teacher through acts of ongoing living inquiry. We emphasize the visual arts in this project but a/r/tography may involve all art forms. See Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis (2008).

4. See http://www.smudgestudio.org/smudge/feasibility.html

References


