

# “The Chinatown Foray” as Sensational Pedagogy

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## ABSTRACT

Thinking through affective theories by Alfred North Whitehead, Giles Deleuze, and Brian Massumi, this paper proposes an understanding of pedagogy that is sensational. To consider affective theories and their implications for educational research, I engage with a relational artwork, “The Chinatown Foray,” by Toronto-based artist Diane Borsato. In “The Chinatown Foray,” the artist and the audience, which consisted of amateur mycologists, foodies, and a few art students, foraged through Chinatown in Manhattan, New York, to collect various mushroom species in the shops and markets, followed by a group lunch of dim sum at a local restaurant. In the paper I describe relational art and situate Borsato’s practice within this paradigm. From there I contextualize the use of walking as a form of research-creation and attend to the politics of smell in the construction of alterity. The paper concludes by way of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1986) theories of the “minor,” which recognizes that bodily encounters—the act of one body interacting with another body—are affective. I argue that close, critical, and deeply contextual analyses of relational art practices as sensational pedagogy advances, develops, and enhances understandings, theories, and practices of body knowledge. Moving beyond a simple binary of mind and body, a sensational pedagogy endeavors to free the base senses, like smell, from their limiting associations.

## INTRODUCTION

Thinking through affective theories by Alfred North Whitehead, Giles Deleuze, and Brian Massumi, this paper proposes an understanding of pedagogy that is sensational. For Whitehead, affect precedes cognition. According to Whitehead, “we respond to things in the first place by feeling them; it is only afterward that we identify and cognize, what it is that we are feeling” (Shaviro, 2009, p. 58). Often referred to as a “theory of feeling,” Whitehead’s arguments place aesthetics, rather than ontology, at the centre of philosophic inquiry. Moreover, thinking affectively about pedagogy places the body at the centre of knowledge production. This is not the autonomous Cartesian body, but a de-centred assemblage of bodies.

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Curriculum Inquiry 41:5 (2011)

Published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc., 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA, and 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

doi: 10.1111/j.1467-873X.2011.00565.x

Sensation is the information we gather with our senses and the body and the process of it being transmitted to our brains. Perception or consciousness is the interpretation of that information, the recognition of things, and the organization of them. Brian Massumi (2002) describes perception as capable of precision, while “sensation is unfolding and constitutively vague” (p. 259), a “sheerness of experience, as yet unextended into analytically ordered, predictably reproducible possible action” (p. 259). If sensation does not have a constituted form, then it opens the body to different possibilities of being affected. For example, if we smell something, it registers in our body as intensity—affect—and then as sensation. When this sensation crosses over into perception, we then organize the smell according to memories, past experiences with a similar smell, or associations we have with the scent. Affect grounds the connection between the body and thought and increases or diminishes the capacity to act. Massumi (2002) describes affect as synaesthetic, implying that it involves “the living being’s ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another” (Massumi, 2002, p. 35). In other words, it is a matter of transforming and extending the non-conscious affective resonance into another activity, process, or potential event. Educational scholarship has often privileged conscious thought. However, it would seem, according to affective theories, that learning takes place in the feeling, sentient, and moving body.

To consider affective theories and their implications for educational research, I engage with a relational artwork, “The Chinatown Foray,” by Toronto-based artist Diane Borsato.<sup>1</sup> My engagement is akin to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) logic of “experimental empiricism” which is concerned with the not yet known and the new. Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic theories enable scholars to examine everyday life in new and different ways, attending to the affective dimensions of thought. Their philosophy does not construct a theory about the world and its inhabitants that can be applied to a practice to critique it. Rather, their theories take part in producing everyday life. It is a philosophy that “is constructed through encountering thought with examples, it is what takes place in everyday life practices that makes it function” (Olsson, 2009, p. 27). Thus, this is not an empirical study of an artist project in any traditional sense that describes and interprets the work, but rather it is the “encounter between examples from practice and the philosophical concepts that is capable of bringing forward something new, interesting and remarkable” (Olsson, 2009, p. 28). From this point of view, research as well as pedagogy is seen as a process of experimentation rather than a construct.

“The Chinatown Foray” is an event where community participants, amateur mycologists, and the artist foraged through Chinatown in Markham, Ontario, and Manhattan, New York (on two different occasions), to research about and collect various mushroom species in the shops and markets, followed by a group lunch of dim sum at a local restaurant. In 2007, Borsato became a member of the Mycological Society

of Toronto to learn about mushroom species, and participate in the naturalist culture of foraging, collecting, and identifying species in the woods. In the tradition of relational aesthetics where everyday events are manipulated and exaggerated by an artist in order to create the conditions for conversation, relating, and knowledge exchange, Borsato invited mycologists to participate in an urban foray, with field guides in hand and magnifying glasses around their necks. Urban forays are not uncommon in that many urban mycologists, particularly those who live in colder climates like Toronto and Manhattan, study species of fungi in Chinese medicinal shops and Asian grocery stores in Chinese neighbourhoods when snow, frost, and other weather conditions prohibit mushrooms to spawn in rural areas. Thus, while most forays take place in the woods, searching for mushrooms in Chinatown is part of some mycologists' common experience.

I am interested in contemporary art practices like "The Chinatown Foray" for what they might offer in terms of thinking about the relationships between affect, sensation, and pedagogy. Ellsworth (2005) refers to such art practices as "anomalous places of learning" and contends that one's aesthetic response to a work of art takes place in the transitional space between sensation and perception. Moreover, she insists one's response is a particular way of knowing but that this "requires a different conception of knowledge itself" (p. 152). Drawing on the work of de Bolla, Ellsworth (2005) argues that such a difference is "knowing" rather than knowledge, and that this knowing *always exists as a potential in the space between sensation and cognition*. Thus, the body is implicated in the act of constructing new knowings and ways of knowing. Responding to "The Chinatown Foray" as an anomalous place of learning, I explore the in-between spaces of sensation and movement—the intercorporeality of the event. My interest in engaging with "The Chinatown Foray" is twofold. First, I want to unhinge the senses from innate and natural convictions. In doing so I demonstrate the ways that smells produce understandings of alterity—the crossing over of sensation into perception. Second, I want to make room for thinking about pedagogy in a materialist, affective manner.

To begin the paper, I offer a very brief account of theories and practices of relational art, situating Borsato's art within this paradigm. From there, I trace the history of walking as an aesthetic practice and emphasize the ways that artists and ethnographers have turned to walking as a research methodology, particularly one that attends to sensation and theories of emplacement. I introduce the concept of walking both in the context of relational art and as a research methodology. Following the discussion on walking, I focus on the sense of smell in relation to "The Chinatown Foray." I focus on smell for a number of strategic reasons. In art and educational research we continue to privilege the distance senses—vision and hearing—as vehicles of knowledge, dismissing and neglecting the proximal epistemologies of touch, smell, and taste. Because of their association with the body, the close senses are often repressed and sanitized or marketed "not as means of

knowledge but of pleasure” (Marks, 2008, p. 130). Laura Marks (2008) argues that consumer capitalism has conquered the bodily senses for hedonic not epistemological reasons. Think of aromatherapeutic promises of hand soap, and the connoisseurship of wine, coffee, and other luxury goods that are sold to enhance sensuous pleasure and secure class status. Many of Borsato’s art interventions directly challenge ocularcentrism and instead emphasize sensational ways of knowing—tasting, touching, and smelling. And while all of the senses cross over and collide with each other when experiencing one of her relational art projects, I focus on smell in this paper.



Diane Borsato, “The Chinatown Foray,” 2008–2010. Image courtesy of the artist.

This is important because in education emphasis has traditionally been placed on linguistic, aural, and visual learning while affective and sensational responses become bodily responses that must be tamed or controlled to achieve cognitive performance (Boler, 1999). When attention is given to the senses it is often wrapped up in theories of somatic or tacit knowing, which isolates an awareness of the inner being of a person. However, while significant for the ways that such theories integrate mind and body in learning, they often fail to account for the social, political, and economic implications of embodiment (Fisher, 2007; Springgay, 2008).

Secondly, I emphasize smell because there is a tendency to regard smells as purely phenomenological and natural, yet the ways people engage with smells are influenced by social, cultural, and political factors. Thus, sensation is not an unmediated event, but rather imbricated in our intercorporeal encounters with other bodies. In other words, “The Chinatown Foray,” as a pedagogical event, is a space where “sensation and perception are

given time and space to meet and co-shape one another” (Ellsworth & Kruse, 2010, p. 279).

In the concluding section of the paper, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1986) concept of the “minor” to address the affective dimensions of pedagogy. I argue that while theories of relational aesthetics attend to the sociality and collectivity of creative acts, sensational pedagogies recognize that bodily encounters—the act of one body interacting with another body—are affective. Affective configurations of experience are important for educators to consider. Our daily encounters are imbued with sensations and movement and it is crucial for critical educators to understand that the senses are not pre-given, neutral, or fixed. According to Whitehead, it is in the receptive act of feeling that I locate things in space and time. In other words, “feeling is the process by which all things get spatialized and temporalized. . . . [Thus], space and time are basic forms of affectivity; they cannot be preassumed, but need to be constructed in and through the process of experience” (Shaviro, 2009, pp. 58–59). Sensational pedagogies offer the potential to re-think the ideologies of domination that are materialized and preserved through smells. Sensational pedagogies are important to understand the viscosity of domination; highlighting and interrogating the felt, aesthetics dimensions of bodily encounters. “The Chinatown Foray,” I will argue, leaves open the possibility for individuals to interrogate their habitual responses to the world, to offer bodies the potentiality for recomposing their corporeal relations to each other, to their environment, and to the ways that we experience and create knowledge.

## RELATIONAL ART

In the 1970s the artist Joseph Beuys created a series of performances that took the form and shape of educational lectures, and were documented through photographs and blackboard drawings. Beuys intended these series of lectures to prompt further discussions, on a myriad of topics, to be carried out by the audience. Beuys called this genre of art Social Sculpture—art that involved human activity and the viewer’s ability to co-create meaning alongside the artist. Beuys’s practice laid the groundwork for subsequent movements including relational aesthetics (Patrick, 2010).

First conceptualized by Nicholas Bourriaud in 1998, relational aesthetics describes a number of practices that came to prominence in the 1990s. In a broad sense, relational art is a branch of artistic practice that is largely concerned with producing and reflecting up the interrelations between people and the extent to which such relations need to be considered as an aesthetic form (Downey, 2007). Relational art invents possible encounters and the conditions for an exchange between individuals.



Diane Borsato, “The Chinatown Foray,” 2008–2010. Image courtesy of the artist.

Rirkrit Tiravanija’s “Untitled (Tomorrow Is Another Day)” (1992) represents one early example of relational aesthetics. Tiravanija set up a replica of his New York apartment in various art galleries and offered the public access for 24 hours, 7 days a week. The public was invited to hang out with Tiravanija, chat, make and eat food, and use the toilet. Grant Kester (2004) contends that relational artworks are concerned with a “collaborative, rather than specular relationship with the viewer” (p. 11), creating what Bourriaud calls “microtopias”—small communities within which are the potential for something else to happen. Relational art, according to Bourriaud (1998), can generate a particular domain of exchange and “[t]hat community is formed in relation to and inside the work” (p. 162). For Bourriaud (1998), when artists offer services, the artist fills in the cracks in the social fabric and creates “new models of sociability” (p. 28). Relational projects such as “Untitled” foreground conversations and experiences among viewers, recognizing their participation in the co-creation of meaning. Kester (2004) conceives of such artist practices as dialogical aesthetics arguing that a work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation, “a locus of differing meanings, interpretations, and points of view” (p. 10). Both relational and dialogic theories reject a representational, interpretive, or narrative function of art in favor of a social, durational, and performative experience.

Critics like Claire Bishop (2006) argue that many relational art projects are more akin to service work than political. For Bishop, artists like

Tiravanija simply offer a refuge from the real world. In this way, this work does not encourage us to strive for a larger goal—for example, securing permanent and free communal space—but rather to sit back and enjoy what is offered by the artist. Artist and curator Kristina Podesva (2007) contends that while “emphasizing the social dimensions of contemporary life, practices of relational aesthetics appear to neglect how the social is imbricated in the political and the economic” (n.p.). Bishop dismisses artists like Tiravanija for their insistence on communal pleasure and instead favors work like Santiago Sierra’s “Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes.” Also situated in a gallery context, Sierra hired Chechnyan asylum seekers to spend the day at a gallery hidden in small cardboard boxes. “The work does not offer an experience of transcendent human empathy that smooths over the awkward situation before us,” writes Bishop, “but a pointed racial and economic nonidentification: “This is not me.” The persistence of this friction, its awkwardness and discomfort, alerts us to the relational antagonism of Sierra’s work” (Bishop, 2004, p. 79).

Darren O’Donnell (2006) challenges Bishop’s arguments, noting that regardless of the antagonism, Sierra’s work represents conversations that might be already happening outside of the gallery spaces among activists, politicians, and journalists but have now moved into the privileged spaces of the gallery “as art.” Thus, he contends, relational aesthetics are too often devoid of an analysis of existing power. He argues that Tiravanija’s and Sierra’s artworks are not all that dissimilar in that they afford gallery audiences refuge from the world—a moment to step outside of everyday life and to experience a microtopia that may or may not provoke conflict of any sort.

What interests me about art practices like Borsato’s is the way they examine already-existing activities like mycology. Unlike Tiravanija and Sierra who created “replicas” of life events or activities, which they then placed in gallery settings as catalysts for potential conversations, Borsato’s work takes events or activities that she and others participate in on a regular basis and uses them as a means to explore how the sociality of being together becomes a process of knowledge exchange. In Manhattan the audience/participants included amateur mycologists, foodies, and a few art students. Some of these individuals joined the urban walk because they were interested in meeting other foodies and mycologists and learning about mushrooms. They did not know they were participating in an art event. Only the two art students had come to the event to participate in a relational artwork. For some audience/participants, Borsato’s involvement was inconsequential. Two leading Manhattan mycologists were on hand to lead some of the walking groups and to host the post-walk discussions where people shared mushrooms collected from the foray and learned more facts and information about the practices of identification and different characteristics of types of mushrooms. Borsato does not withhold the

information that she is an artist, but when she creates situations for already-existing groups of people to come together to exchange knowledge and to explore a phenomenon together, the aegis of art is bracketed out temporarily. This is art that focuses not so much on the social relations of the artist and the audience, like in the case of Tiravanija, but on relationships within society and how those relationships contribute to an exchange of knowledge. While the event itself might be organized by an art gallery or a cultural organization, like in the case of Borsato's piece in Manhattan, which was organized by the Unami Food Festival, the execution of such work is generally intended to frame a sincere transaction. The priority of such work is to pay attention to an actual social activity that already exists, but to get to know it differently, rather than by what is predictable and reproducible.



Diane Borsato, "The Chinatown Foray," 2008–2010. Image courtesy of the artist.

### WALKING AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Walking, as a fundamental human activity and way of interacting with the environment, has attracted the attentions of poets, essayists, artists, philosophers, educators, and social theorists. As a particularly important urban tradition it extends from the practices of the 19th-century flâneur, through the Dadaist "event," the dérives of the Lettrists and the Situationists, the wanderings of the land artists of the 1960s, psychogeographical expeditions



of contemporary artists, to the relational art practices of artists like Diane Borsato. These various perspectives have involved different practices of walking, different aesthetic, critical and political strategies, and different forms of epistemology and ethnography (Jenks & Neves, 2000; Solnit, 2000).

The *flâneur* arose as a distinctive figure in early 19th-century Paris. He was portrayed as a disinterested, leisurely observer (invariably male) of the urban scene, taking pleasure in losing himself in the crowd and becoming a spectator (Tester, 1987). The aesthetic and critical impulse behind the *flâneur* emerged in the ideas and practices of the Dada movement in Paris in the 1920s. The Dadaists staged a series of provocative “events” in theatres and halls, and in the streets exploring on foot the banal places of the city (Sanouillet, 1965). Although they intended to host an ongoing series of “events,” only one occurred. However, the Situationists gave these practices a distinctive twist, changing the passive spectator into an active participant they sought to abolish the separation of art and life (Dubord, 1957/1987). One of the practices the group developed was known as the *dérive*, an aimless drifting on foot through urban spaces that would in turn produce alternative patterns of exploration and protest against the alienation of life under modern capitalism. Similarly motivated to create art as a protest against the plastic aesthetics and ruthless commercialization of the 1960s, land artists such as Richard Long and Hamish Fulton employed wandering and walking techniques that traced the body’s path through nature. Likewise, Canadian artist Janet Cardiff’s “Her Long Black Hair” (2005) is a journey that transforms an everyday stroll in Central Park into an absorbing psychological and physical experience of sound, interweaving stream-of-consciousness observations with fact and fiction, local history, opera and gospel music, and other atmospheric and cultural elements.

Long and Fulton’s work, while influential, reinforces the idea of the artist as a romantic and solitary figure (often male) who walks alone. Cardiff alters this solitary perception (participants are given an audio kit that contains a CD player with headphones as well as a packet of photographs) by connecting the speaker and the listener within their shared physical surroundings; however, her soundscape does little to call attention to the social interactions of people, places, and events that occur in and around the walk.

Recent psychogeographical practices have emerged that demand a new form of cartography capable of representing states of emotion and interactions between people. Such examples include a recent exhibition at the New Museum in New York in which 21 international artists were invited to create a personal view of the city and draw a map of Manhattan, uncovering a territory that is both real and imaginary.<sup>2</sup> The practice of ethnographic wanderings and the theorizing of psychogeography have also brought important issues of gender and identity to the surface, emphasizing walking as a way of becoming a “citizen,” and walking as negotiation and with regard for the Other.



Diane Borsato, “The Chinatown Foray,” 2008–2010. Image courtesy of the artist.

The relationship between walking and subjectivity has been taken up by a number of contemporary artists like William Pope who crawled 22 miles wearing a superman costume. Performed over 5 years in stages, Pope crawled from the Statue of Liberty to the Bronx. As an African American, his “social struggle” literally through dirt, garbage, and other street debris calls attention to issues of race and class. Francis Alys, another contemporary walker, pushed a block of ice through the streets of Mexico City until it melted in “Paradox of Praxis” (1997). While many of his walks are solitary, albeit in crowded urban spaces, his work “When Faith Moves Mountains” (2002) was based on the collaborative and relational efforts of 500 people in Ventanilla, outside Lima, Peru, forming a single line at the foot of a giant sand dune and moving it four inches using shovels.

Such interventions may be characterized by what Miwon Kwon (2002) has identified as “site-oriented” practices. Kwon describes site-oriented practices as those artistic practices that pursue a “more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life—a critique of culture that is inclusive of non-art spaces, non-art institutions, and non-art issues” (p. 43). Walking as a site-oriented practice differs from site-specific works in that the “relationship between an artwork and its ‘site’ is not based on a physical permanence of that relationship . . . but rather on the recognition of its unfixed impermanence, to be experienced as an unrepeatable and fleeing situation” (p. 43). Borsato’s art practice, which relies on walking for the

Chinatown project, is embedded in the history of art and walking as an aesthetic practice.

Alongside but happening in a separate (but perhaps related) disciplinary field, anthropologists and social geographers insist that walking as a research methodology is “a reflexive and experiential process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced” (Pink, 2009, p. 8). In seeking ways that a place might be constituted and communicated through participant engagement, ethnographers like Sarah Pink (2009), and Tim Ingold and Jo-Lee Vergunst (2008) are turning to contemporary artists for methodological examples, particularly by way of walking. Pink (2009) contends that ethnographers now recognize the significance of walking as a research method and argue that walking offers a potentially rich medium for sensory ethnographic research in that it permits ethnographers to “attain richer and fuller translations of bodily experience and materiality that are located, multi-textured, reflexive, sensory and polysemous” (p. 149). According to Pink (2009) “walking as sensory ethnography . . . offers walkers an opportunity to experience place in ways that are informed by the experiences of ethnographers and participants in their research” (p. 151). Conventional scholarly practices are limited in their capacity to communicate about the directness of sensory and affective of emplaced experience. Scholars like Pink (2009) have developed their research methodologies and processes of dissemination alongside artistic work. She argues that researchers and artists are interpreters “producing knowledge through interdisciplinary phenomenological research and artistic re-presentations of lived experience can help to counter identity thinking, make critical interventions, and help us to get in touch with our social worlds” (p. 133).

In addition, there have been recent articulations of what Brian Massumi and Erin Manning refer to as “research creation,” which engages “in the creation, exploration, and use of [artistic] techniques for the generation of newness, not the radically new as a break but newness as emerging from modes of participation, contact, transduction and relation” (Thain, 2008, n.p.).<sup>3</sup> Research creation, they argue, refers to new modes of collaboration where art-making and concept-formation come together as part of the same open process of experimentation from which new relations or articulations are born. Massumi and Manning’s theories of research creation are similar to the concept of “experimental empiricism” introduced briefly in the first section of the paper. Research creation creates itself through encounters and relations and thus, affect and movement feature prominently in its theoretical construction.

Diane Borsato and I currently hold a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada, Research and Creation grant, which enables us to collaborate on projects that re-imagine bodily ways of knowing and re-conceptualize pedagogy in relation to corporeality. In the case of “The Chinatown Foray,” just one of the research creation events produced in our

study, walking as an aesthetic practice is both the form of the artwork *and* the research methodology by which we both shape an inquiry about knowing. Borsato's research interests contribute to her ongoing artistic practice, while I write about these research events for academic publications, most commonly educational texts. However, it would be remiss to qualify her work as that of artist and mine of educator, as if these were two separate domains, as both of us are committed to our artistic practices and questions of an educational nature. Research creation, as Manning (2007) states, is a practice based on collective assemblages and experimentation.

I participated in "The Chinatown Foray" in Manhattan and I documented the event through digital video and still imagery and kept a journal of observational notes. I have also had many informal conversations and e-mail correspondences about the work with Borsato. The methodologies we draw on borrow from critical arts-based research (O'Donoghue, 2009; Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2007; Springgay, 2008), "research creation," and what Ellsworth (2005) suggests could be called a "Deleuzian methodology" which "disrupts pre-established methods and systems and in so doing put new conditions into play" (p. 3).

Walking as a research creation methodology involves the integration of mind and body with place, or what critical ethnographers call emplacement. Theories of emplacement understand place not as a pre-existing physical location but a performance and process of dwelling that is accomplished through wandering. In the foray, the audience and the artist "make place" or are emplaced, through the processes of encountering and sensing different objects and bodies as they walk. In "The Chinatown Foray" "places exist as entangling intersections of multiple trajectories of movement, not as locations" (Myers, 2008, p. 174).

### THE POLITICS OF SMELL

Artists, who work with smell provide "the audience with direct and unasailable experiences" (Drobnick & Fisher, n.d., p. 1). These immediate experiences reveal the ways that smells are mediated by culture, social values, and personal memory (Drobnick, 2006). Because smell is difficult to document in artwork, one needs to participate and experience the work firsthand. "Unlike traditional art objects that maintain their autonomy from the viewers, olfactory artworks are performative and interactive—they and we are transformed in the very act of apprehension" (Drobnick & Fisher, n.d., p. 4). The use of scents in the visual arts has the potential to make the viewer conscious of his/her own body and thus brings together complex and contradictory attitudes towards the body and identity. Differing from artists who offer aromatic and edible practices in the white cube of the gallery, Borsato's intervention invites us to re-consider place-making sensorially by what we feel and sense as we walk through a particular place.

On the urban foray a number of mycologists react to different smells by describing past foray experiences. After smelling a cultured mushroom in one shop, a woman elaborately describes to me a previous foray experience in which she stumbles upon a field full of brightly coloured mushrooms. The cultured mushroom, grown for sale in many Asian grocery stores are bleached white from the lights used for growing and their smells are altered. However, because of the olfactory power to trigger memory, this woman was able to recall a past event, unconnected to the current mushroom smell.

Mushrooms are smelly and many are identified and distinguished in the field by smells. The familiar ones we eat like portobello or shiitake have been described as smelling earthy, bodily, or savoury. Oyster mushrooms are called oysters because they remind people of a faintly fishy smell. Truffles have similar smell properties to the sex hormones of fertile pigs, which explains why pigs are so adept at finding them. In the woods, there are mushrooms whose smell are recorded as smelling like maple syrup, curry, freshly milled flour, library paste, burnt almonds, aniseed, carrots, warm milk, and decaying flesh. Mycologists have invented the most complex and surprising descriptions for the smells of mushrooms, nearly impossible in their obscure specificity and subtlety. And on occasion, there are descriptions like the notorious one for the smell of *Hebeloma sacchariolens* as “reminiscent of harlots” (D. Borsato, personal communication, 2010).

But how we respond to smells is deeply personal and intimate. According to Marks (2008) the uncoded dimension of smell, which is registered as intensity has deeply personal associations that are often difficult to communicate. For example, a prior emotional experience might be associated with a particular odor, even after the event itself is forgotten.

Borsato notes that distinguishing smells can be challenging for mycologists with little to no personal reference. For example, smell descriptions noted in guidebooks like “slightly phenolic” or “of freshly milled flour”—descriptions which one might have little personal reference for—render smell both personally meaningful and unavailable. For mycologists, identification is dependent on the senses—touch, taste, and smell—as even the photographs in guidebooks are deceptive. The colours and the scale of individual fungi are surprising in the field. Positive identification—something that your life can depend on if you are collecting for the pot—comes almost exclusively through a sensorial epistemology of fungi (D. Borsato, personal communication, 2010).

Traditionally, smell is thought of as primitive, innate, and natural. We frequently and easily categorize smells as “good” or “bad,” “pleasing” or “offensive,” yet rarely consider their integral connections to the constructions of identity and bodily knowledge. For instance, smells are not naturally agreeable or repulsive. What one person may find distasteful might smell satisfying to another. When we smell something our bodies merge and intermingle with the sensation and thus we become aware of our body in relation to space, place, and memory. Smells are perceived and coded as

good or bad dependent on prior experiences we have had with smells, the ways we have been taught to understand smells, and the environment or context in which we sense a smell. For example, our memories and our prior educational experiences might suggest that the smell of freshly baked cookies is pleasing. At the other end of the spectrum, many people categorize smells that are unfamiliar and strange as offensive not because they naturally smell bad, but because we associate the alterity of the smell with disgust. Sarah Ahmed (2004) suggests that disgust, although felt in and on the surface of the body, is not just a gut feeling or reaction. Rather, it is “mediated by ideas that are already implicated in the very impressions we make of others and the ways those impressions surface as bodies” (p. 83). In the case of “The Chinatown Foray” sensory knowing extends beyond just smelling mushrooms as part of the identification process, to include the ways that otherness is constructed in the process. According to Richard Shusterman (2008) embodied habits offer “a way of understanding how complex hierarchies of power can be widely exercised and reproduced without any need to make them explicit in laws or to enforce them officially; they are implicitly observed and enforced simply through our bodily habits, including habits of feeling that have bodily roots” (pp. 21–22).

When we smell something we open ourselves to the odor, but so too to memories and associations of other scents we have encountered and to the socialness of the smell experience. Smells can be challenging to isolate, as the place and time in which we encounter a smell affects the ways that we register the sensation. Likewise, when we are familiar with the object of the smell, the smell is stronger, demonstrating that “cultivated odors operate across a membrane from the material to the symbolic, the asocial to the communal” (Marks, 2008, p. 126). The smells of daily life—sewage, rot, corruption, body odor—in short the smells associated with the body—have been censored over time and replaced with sweet, clean, and sanitized smells. The history of attitudes towards odorless bodies can be traced back to the rise of bathing in the 19th century in America (Hyde, 2006). Through a combination of medical thought related to perspiration and the need to remove it from the body, religious doctrination on cleanliness, and a general “civilizing process,” the norms of cleanliness and an absence of body odor were mobilized “in a larger policing project of ethnic and economic elites against poor and minority populations” (Hyde, 2006, p. 55).

For example, Sally Banes (2006) argues that the exotic Other is represented as possessing a smelly identity, and “in doing so, creates an ideological representation of the West as odorless and therefore neutral and the norm” (p. 35). Similarly, Martin Manalansan (2006) states that “the immigrant body is culturally constructed to be the natural carrier and source of undesirable sensory experiences and is popularly perceived to be the site of polluting and negative olfactory signs” (p. 41). While smells can produce moments of affiliation and group identification more often they emphasize difference by framing otherness as contaminants and pollutants, indicators

of segregation and colonialism. According to Sarah Ahmed (2004) the association of what is bad is “bound up with questions of familiarity and strangeness” (p. 83). The proximal senses are far more threatening because of their apparent closeness to the body and the ways that they are comprehended by being “taken into” the body. When food or smells are taken into the body for survival or pleasure, we open up our body to that which is not us: to the other. Smells are not inherently unpleasant, but when it is brought into contact with our body through the nose or the mouth, then this proximity is felt as offensive.



Diane Borsato, “The Chinatown Foray,” 2008–2010. Image courtesy of the artist.

Walking through Chinatown, smelling mushrooms, Borsato’s intervention navigates between two worlds—the artist as cosmopolitan nomad and immigrant alterity—and thus the sensory experience of her work potentially maintains rather than disrupts the economic racial stratification of place. On one hand the walking experimentation dislodged occularcentrism as the artist and participants relied on sensory knowing as a way of familiarizing themselves with different mushroom species. However, the fact that the foray took place in Chinatown cannot be ignored. The affective dimensions of smelling crossed over with perception and conscious thought in ways that suggested that one’s own social group (e.g., the mycologists) is odorless while others (inhabitants of Chinatown) smell. In

this way, as sensation crosses into perception, walking and smelling constructed and abjected the Other. Yet, the recognition that this abjection existed, that how we understand and organize smells is not natural but part of conscious thought, was absent from any of the casual foray discussions. So while on the one hand I want to engage with relational art, like the Chinatown foray, for what it might offer us pedagogically, I also need to wrestle with the contradictions that the piece reveals, that relationally we might also construct the Other and the abjected. Developing an understanding of knowing as affective (that which is registered directly by our bodies) and as perception (the coding and ordering of affective sensation based on conscious thought), and how the relationship between those two domains might construct and maintain processes of Othering is important pedagogical work. It is important to recognize “feeling” in knowledge but equally important then, is to not immobilize or close feeling down by naturalizing and normalizing it. Attending affectively and sensorially to pedagogy means thinking about sensing as an ongoing activity, the very moment of becoming.

### **SENSATIONAL PEDAGOGIES AND BECOMING MINOR**

In this section I want to begin by attending to my use of the term *pedagogy*. While the word is habitually associated with the methods of teaching, feminist, postcolonial, and poststructuralist theories have been concerned with pedagogy as the *capacity to learn*. Moreover, as Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) states, “specific to pedagogy is the experience of the corporeality of the body’s time and space when it is in the midst of learning” (p. 4). Accordingly, a learning self is a body whose movements and sensations are paramount to understanding. Sensational pedagogies challenge educators to recognize the importance of corporeality, emplacement, and sensation in learning—of the body’s encounter with other bodies (human and non-human), of its location in space and time as enmeshed and intertwined, and that sensation is not simply a matter of an awakening to non-ocular ways of knowing, but recognizes the politics of knowing sensorially.

In the introduction to the paper, I define art practices that are relational. To date there seem to be a wealth of terms associated with practices that account for the artist-audience co-construction of meaning—relational, participatory, dialogic, socially engaged. Deploying Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the minor enables me to attend to the social and collective nature of contemporary art, the political engagements of such art practices, *and* the sensational and affective means by which one learns in the midst of these art works (as opposed to about the artist or art work). Relational aesthetics commonly privileges the social dimensions of aesthetics over the sensational and affective, and thus returning to Deleuze and Guattari’s work on affect and the minor is paramount for thinking



about sensational pedagogies, and about learning practices that address the corporeality of knowledge production.

The minor is a concept that deterritorializes the major; the major being dominant systems of signification and representation. The minor has no model; it is a becoming, a process. According to Simon O'Sullivan (2006) there are three characteristics to describing the minor. First the minor involves a kind of stuttering, or what he refers to as a "becoming stranger" (p. 70). The minor is not habitual; it is unfamiliar and inventive. For instance, feeling, according to Whitehead, is relational. "An act of feeling is an encounter—a contingent event, an opening to the outside—rather than an intrinsic, predetermined relationship (Shaviri, 2009, p. 62). The problem with thinking only in terms of perception and interpretation is that the unknown is reduced to the already known and the already determined. Rather, affectivity invites bodies to experience a knowing that happens in the interval, "in the continuous space of crossing from one way of knowing to another" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 162).

Second in the minor everything is political, meaning that the individuals who are imbricated by the minor are always linked to larger social spaces. O'Sullivan (2006) argues that minor art, while political, "does not involve itself necessarily with political—or what we might call molar organizations, rather it works to connect up the different aspects of life, be they individual or social (or indeed non-human) so as to produce new lines of causality and new pathways of experimentation" (p. 74). This form of political engagement is creative rather than reactive, and it is specifically an aesthetic, or affective project.

Affects are passages of intensity, a reaction in or on the body at the level of matter. Affects are visceral and express our state at a given moment in time and thus, are always experienced in time and as duration. For Deleuze affect is "the becomings of my own body, especially when it encounters another body" (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 41). Brian Massumi (2002) describes affect as pertaining "to the dimension of passage, or the continuity of immediate experience" (p. 258). According to Elizabeth Grosz (2008) it "is the zone of indeterminacy between subject and object, the bloc that erupts from the encounter of the one with the other. Sensation impacts the body, not through the brain, not through representations, signs, images, or fantasies, but directly on the body's own internal forces, on cells, organs, the nervous system" (p. 73). Affects increase our capacity to act in the world, to learn, and to be "otherwise directed" (Massumi, 2002, p. 192). For Deleuze the science of affect is called "ethics" (O'Sullivan, 2006). We are generally constituted by the random affects we have and the encounters that produce them. A second kind of knowledge arises from the effort we make to understand and organize these affects. John Dewey (1934) referred to such an organization as bodily habits, which "filter and shape all that is apprehended by the senses" (Granger, 2010, p. 72). It is with this second kind of knowledge that we seek to understand what determines us,

why it is that we act the way we do, and how we understand ourselves in relation to others. For Deleuze, this purposeful selection and discrimination is called ethics and it involves an awareness and understanding of bodily encounters and the capacity to affect and to be affected. Put simply, ethics becomes a way to think life. So much of education is predicated on prediction, control, and measurement creating systems of closure and certainty. Rather, in line with the work of Ellsworth (2005) I want to argue that we need to enable sensational pedagogies that create “potential fields of emergence for learners and teachers” that are responsive to affect, to the body, and that are relational.

Third, the minor is always collective. There is less emphasis on the autonomy of the artist, for instance, and more importance placed on the collective production of work and meaning. Minor art deterritorializes representation challenging modernist notions that meaning is embedded in an art object. What I mean by this is that art theories beholden to representation contend that meaning is inherent in the visual languages of the artwork. Under this paradigm one would be able to uncover the hidden meanings of a work of art and disseminate that knowledge to others. This often reinforces elite notions that the artist and art scholar are the only individuals with access to such knowledge, which they then distribute to others. However, because minor art is always in process, always becoming, it generates new forms and understandings with each affective experience (thus in time and in duration). Walking through Chinatown is about the in-between spaces of collectivity and communicability—the bodily encounters that happen along the way, the shared experience of affective relations, and it is these moments that create the art. As Ellsworth (2005) states, “pedagogy takes place at the turbulent point of matter crossing into mind, experience into knowledge, stability into potential, knowledge as promise and provocation into bodies in action, doing and making” (p. 165).

Following a Deleuzian framework, minor art, the affective, connects us to the world, responding and resonating with matter around us. Guattari (1995) refers to such creative productive encounters as an “ethicoaesthetics”; the concepts we form about the world when we experience bodies coming together. In other words, there is a viscosity to the creation, regulation, and interpretation of alterity, and a reflective bodily consciousness is required to dislodge bodily habits and norms, and the construction of Otherness. Therefore, a politics of representation, I argue, is complicated by the senses. Sensational pedagogies open up the *potential* to interrogate personal and social consequences of human embodiment. Erin Manning (2007) writes that in much political thought bodies are often brought together through a coherence of time and space. Instead, she argues,

politics must begin to think itself as an extension to the body’s sensing apparatus. Politics is not beyond the body, it is of the body. Bodies sense, and their sensing movements reach toward relations of emergence, expressions always already incorporated into political texts. (p. 121)

To that extent contemporary relational art projects like the ones enacted by Diane Borsato are important for the ways that they sketch out new models for thinking about the practices of subjectification, not as detailed formulas, but as a means of sensual experimentation. Through the development of new, affective responses, over time and in place, walking in Chinatown could potentially engender a proliferation of new forms of singularization—a process of emergence and the creation of new concepts. Of course such a process of emergence does not always mean resistance or emancipation, but could in fact regulate and reproduce systems of domination and representation.

Sensational pedagogies keep us moving, inciting us to sense beyond this moment towards another moment. To think sensorially about pedagogy is to begin to reconsider the role of the senses and making sense in learning. Art, according to Deleuze is a creative act that actualizes affects, “giving art an ethical imperative, for it involves a ‘moving beyond’ the already familiar (our actual selves), a kind of ‘self-overcoming’” (O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 51). To be open to sensation we reach beyond the already familiar, our actual selves, to new cartographies that evolve and are innovative to pedagogies continuous emergence.

In closing, it is my conviction that close, critical, and deeply contextual analyses of relational art practices advances, develops, and enhances understandings, theories, and practices of body knowledge. Moving beyond a simple binary of mind and body, sensational pedagogies endeavor to free the base senses, like smell, from their limiting associations. Furthermore, analyzing the affective—the minor—through a process of sensation/movement reminds educators that there is still much research to be done with, in, and through the body.

## NOTES

1. This work is funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Research and Creation Grant (2009–2012).
2. <http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/12>.
3. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop in detail Massumi and Manning’s theories of research-creation. More information can be found in their journal *Inflexions: A Journal for Research-Creation* at <http://inflexions.org/>.

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