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**Sensorial A-r-tography:
Walking with Public Art**

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Sensorial A-r-tography: Walking with Public Art

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INDEX

3

Preface - Noticing the Needle, Differently
Rita L. Irwin

6

Editorial note
Elly Yazdanpanah, Anita Sinner

8

Critical Softness: Using Water as a Metaphor for Response-Able Actions in Anti-Racist and Decolonial Education
Ashleigh Janis

12

Memory in the Making: A Visual Epistolary on Cross-Cultural Journeys
Koichi Kasahara, Sunah Kim

16

Thinking-(queerly)-with the crocus: A poetic inquiry
Nafisa A. Iqbal

19

Tracing the Politics of Space: Interrupting Public Art Discourses
Xi (Sisilia) Chen

23

Walking A/R/Tographically with Bird-Public Art in the Quest for Self-Meaning
Mengkai Zhang

27

Walking Through Art: Exploring the Hidden Curriculum of an Abandoned Painting
Manisha Tripathy

31

Walking Through Valiasr Intersection: The Gateway to Tehran’s Public Sphere
Saman Farkhak

Cover image: Xi (Sisilia) Chen

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Preface

Noticing the Needle, Differently

It is such an honour and privilege to provide this visual essay preface to this IMAG special issue dedicated to a/r/tography. I want to commend the guest editors, Elly Yazdanpanah and Anita Sinner, for nurturing this community of inquiry. It is a celebration of the visual alongside important investigations into scholarly ideas. After reading the issue I found myself attending differently to a walk I often take. It became an a/r/tographic exploration of a particular work of public art I came to know in more sensorial ways. Allow me to share my experience with you.

I take regular walks around my neighborhood and one that I often take is to Garry Point Park which is a 75-acre waterfront park near Steveston village, a historic fishing village in the City of Richmond, British Columbia, Canada. The park is situated on the south arm of the Fraser River as it reaches the Strait of Georgia in the Pacific Ocean. The views of the mountainous Gulf Islands are incredible. Garry Point Park has expansive areas for walking, cycling, flying kites, wandering through beached logs, and picnicking on the sandy beaches. There are three prominent features for me. As you enter the park, you will see Kuno Garden, a Japanese style memorial garden commemorating the centenary of the first Japanese immigrant who arrived in Richmond in 1888, and who was just one of thousands who contributed to Steveston's fishing industry since then (Richmond, B.C., n.d.). This park and other Japanese memorials in the Steveston townsite recognize the enduring legacy of Japanese immigrants to this region. On the far side of the park, one will see Scotch Pond, which was the home to the Scottish Canadian Cannery and just one of over a dozen canneries that could be found on Steveston's shoreline a century ago. Built in the late 1880s, one can still see pilings that remain from where the original walkway once was. These remains may not be a formal memorial, and yet they act as such for a period when this area was bustling with activity from the fishing industry.

Yet there is another memorial in the park that I want to focus on here. It is the Steveston Fishermen's Memorial, shaped like a fishing net needle that stands erect along the shoreline commanding one's attention.

Held up by a circular foundation cast in First Nations imagery, we are reminded of the First Peoples who have stewarded this land for millennia and who knew the waterways well. This foundation sits on a compass fishers relied on for finding their directions. Just a meter beyond this foundation, there is a circular wall, about half a meter high, that frames the whole piece. The concrete wall contains the names of local fishers, men and women, who lost their lives while at sea.



Figure 1: Rita L. Irwin, Untitled, 2024, Garry Point Park [Steveston] in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, photo courtesy of the the author

Whenever I visit this memorial, I remember those whose lives were lost yet I also contemplate the lives of those who lived on these lands' decades and centuries ago. Today, I paid attention to the fishing net needle and attended to it as an object in which to become attuned. While I have never mended a fishing net, it reminds me of the times when I worked on weaving projects, weaving through the warp on the loom by using shuttles to carry the weft thread through multiple layers of warp threads. The fishing net needle is much like a weaving shuttle as both interact with a thread going in a different direction. I find it quite extraordinary that a material practice is celebrated in this public art sculpture, here where the Fraser River delta meets the Georgia



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Strait. It brings home the necessity of this material practice to fishers, men and women, yet it also recognizes the importance of community to this practice. The circular framing of the whole sculpture reminds us that fishing was central to this community, and that this community was central to fishing, that is, the warp and the weft: both are needed to make a piece of fabric, and in this instance, to make a community. It also reminds of us the ongoing cycles of seasons and nature itself, with no beginning and no ending. Our communities are part of these natural cycles and fishing is something that has nurtured us and will continue to nurture us. Perhaps this is something we can ask of public art: that it continues to remind us of what is important and what will nurture us as we go into the future. This memorial is a form of public art that has done this and will continue to do this for years to come.

So many memorial sculptures depict human figures, attempting to capture the essence of a person for eternity. In this Fisherman's Memorial, it is the needle, the shuttle, that mends the net, that is held up as a memorial. This is utterly profound to me. In my mind's eye, I can see the hands of fishermen and women, mending their nets, with their tanned and wrinkled weathered skin from years of facing the elements. I can see their postures attentively attuned to every detail of their net. I can feel the ocean air enveloping them and smell the lingering notes of fish recently caught. With possible interludes of a few shared stories, the mood is focused on the repair of the nets, preparing for a new day, tomorrow. This public art doesn't highlight any one person. It highlights the materiality of a calling to fish.



Figure 3: Rita L. Irwin, Untitled, 2024, Garry Point Park [Steveston] in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, photo courtesy of the the author

Figure 2: Rita L. Irwin, Untitled, 2024, Garry Point Park [Steveston] in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, photo courtesy of the the author

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In preparing to write this preface, I read all of the visual essays in this special issue and was struck by the array of topics pointing to social justice from many places around the world. Yet most of all, I was drawn to the a/r/tographic inquiries themselves. Walking to, with, and alongside public art, meant each person was attending to noticing in new ways, as they noticed what wasn't noticed before, and how they began to notice the exchange between and among themselves, the objects and the site of their walks (see Sinner, 2021 also). Sharing my a/r/tographic walking inquiry to Garry Point Park and especially the Steveston Fishermen's Memorial speaks to my ongoing relationship with the park but more importantly, after reading these essays, to what I attended to and noticed in new ways. What else could I have paid attention to? What exchange might be new to me, or different to me?

Ironically, for me during this recent walk, what was different was the needle itself. I have walked this park hundreds of times. Usually, I am drawn to its expanse of space, the feeling of the weather, the glorious vistas. When I walk to the needle, I often pay attention to the names on the memorial and imagine when the fishers might have lived and how they might have lived. At other times, I feel the call to remember and acknowledge the land as Musqueam First Nations unceded, traditional and ancestral territory. And this time, while I recalled all of these things as well, I focused on the needle. In the past I knew the significance of the needle to fishers and yet I realized I had taken it for granted. This time, I marveled at the choice of a material practice as the memorial symbol itself. When I understood it this way, all kinds of imagery flooded my senses: mostly of hands working, but also of the rope used in the nets themselves. To remember this material practice and to give thanks to it alongside the memory of those lost, is quite extraordinary. I share three images with you here as part of the visual essay preface. The first with the sun behind, exemplifies the magnitude of this object and all it can and will do (Image 1). In this sense, it is both a memorial and a compass for the future. The other two images situate the work alongside the shoreline, facing the Fraser River and drawing attention

to the needle (Image 2 & 3). At certain times of the day, the sun's reflection draws attention to the needle. At other times, it is but one stop on the perimeter path. My own walking path will be experienced differently in the future because of this inquiry.

All the authors in this special issue have their own a/r/tographic living inquiries just as I have shared my own small inquiry with you here. I encourage you to read and view them as a collection of visual essays that will surely inspire your own living inquiry, as they did for me. I personally hope each visual essay inspires more visual essays, with walking, public art, and a/r/tography! Congratulations to everyone in this issue for inspiring us to walk differently with public art.

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Editorial note

This special issue brings together seven provocative visual essays that explore the convergence of art, pedagogy, and public art in relation to space through the lens of a-r-tographic practices. Each essay delves into the sensorial and embodied experiences of 'walking-with,' offering critical, experimental, and speculative inquiries that push the boundaries of conventional understandings of public art across diverse contexts. Central to this collection is the notion of geographies-in-relation, where artists, researchers, and teachers engage in living inquiries, and embrace a process of conversational and creative exploration. The "/" (slash) in a/r/tography emphasizes the fluid and corresponding nature of these roles, suggesting their dynamic overlapping, while the "-" (hyphen) in a-r-tography similarly echoes their integration but highlights a cohesive and harmonious configuration. Both forms underscore the convergence of identities within a/r/tography, with the choice of punctuation deliberating different compositional decisions rather than a change in meaning. This approach not only recognizes the complex, more-than-human world we inhabit, but also challenges us to rethink our roles as art educators. Through a lens of equity, diversity, inclusivity, and decolonization (EDID), these essays open up new possibilities for understanding public art as a vital source of pedagogic potential.



The essays in this issue prompt a critical reflection on our 'response-ability' as art educators—challenging us to reconsider our engagement with public art, our modes of intra-acting with it, and the potential to reconceptualize it as both a vernacular practice and a privilege. This reconceptualization invites us to acknowledge the contextual factors that highlight walking as a privilege, often assuming a level of physical ability, safety, and infrastructure that may not be universally accessible, reflecting societal inequalities and disparities. These inquiries extend beyond theoretical discourse; they operate as imperatives for praxis, advocating for a shift from the confines of the studio classroom to the public sphere, where art is not merely observed but experienced as a dynamic and integral component of societal life.

Ashleigh Janis explores "Critical Softness: Using Water as a Metaphor for Response-Able Actions in Anti-Racist and Decolonial Education" to unpack the challenges of addressing liability towards Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour in educational contexts while supporting learners' emotional responses, such as guilt, shame, and resistance. Through the concept of critical softness—defined as the intersection of criticality and gentleness—the author engages water as a metaphor to navigate the complexities of anti-racist and decolonial work. The essay entangles critical theories, posthumanism, and care ethics to emphasize the importance of balancing critique with empathy, advocating for a responsive approach to education. Janis highlights the need for both criticality and softness to foster a collective response-ability that acknowledges the intertwined relationships between Indigenous Peoples, settlers, and the more-than-human world. Through practices like walking and slow scholarship, this essay encourages educators to pause, meditate, and stay with the tensions of these complex issues to provide meaningful, response-able care.

The visual essay "Memory in the Making: A Visual Epistolary on Cross-Cultural Journeys" by Koichi Kasahara, and Sunah Kim examines the complex historical and cultural relationships between Japan and Korea through the lens of a/r/tographic exploration. As collaborators and as Japanese and Korean researchers, Kasahara and Kim engage in a deliberative dialogue that navigates the tensions between collective historical narratives and contemporary individual experiences. Engaging in walking practices across significant sites such as Seoul's Inwangsan and Japan's Sado Island, this essay explores themes of memory, loss, and cultural reference. Through visual and material metaphors, including water and Jizo statues, they evoke the intertwined yet distinct histories of the two nations, illustrating the potential of a/r/tography to foster cross-cultural understanding and re-membling. This inquiry highlights the creation of shared memories that transcend national borders, contributing to a nuanced understanding of belonging and collective identity.

Nafisa Iqbal's poetic inquiry, "Thinking-(Queerly)-with the Crocus," is a creative meditation of the symbolic resonance of the crocus flower as a metaphor for queer identity, memory, and resistance. Through a contemplative journey at the Vancouver AIDS Memorial, Iqbal engages with the crocus as a living symbol of queer resilience and interconnectedness. The essay intertwines historical and contemporary queer experiences, evoking the legacies of figures such as Oscar Wilde and the impact of the AIDS crisis. By juxtaposing personal deliberations with visual elements, including digital photography and text inspired by

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Elly YAZDANPANAH is a postdoctoral fellow (NFRF) at The University of British Columbia with a Ph.D. in art education from Concordia University, Montreal. Originally from Iran, she holds a Bachelor of Arts in Design and a Master of Fine Art Painting. Elly's research explores walking practices in art museums and galleries, focusing on embodied experiences. She has contributed to renowned galleries in Iran and Canada, curating exhibitions and bridging artistic expression with cultural exploration.

Anita SINNER is Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy. Her areas of interest include international art education, geographies of self-in-relation, historical perspectives, life writing, collaborative online learning and community education. She continues to work extensively with stories as pedagogic pivots, with particular emphasis on artful inquiry in relation to curriculum studies and social and cultural issues in education.

the “HIV In My Day” project, Iqbal creates a rich, multi-layered narrative that honours queer elders and challenges the erasure of queer history. The crocus becomes a metonym for queer visibility, fluidity, and the inevitability of change, inviting readers to embrace a relational and non-hierarchical understanding of identity within the broader context of queer community and activism.

The essay by Xi Chen, “Tracing the Politics of Space: Interrupting Public Art Discourses,” redefines public art as a dynamic process of encountering rather than a static essence. Through the lens of a/r/tography, Chen explores how embodied encounters and cultural dislocation challenge conventional notions of public art. By meshing walking practices with artistic expression, Chen highlights the fluid and evolving nature of public art, where meaning is continuously (re) negotiated. The unpredictability of public reception, as exemplified by an AI algorithm’s misinterpretation of an artwork, underlines the complex relationality between art, technology, and public perception. Ultimately, the essay argues that public art is a process of becoming, shaped by the ongoing exchanges between the artist, the environment, and the viewer.

Mengkai Zhang, in “Walking A/R/Tographically with Bird-Public Art in the Quest for Self-Meaning,” delves into the complex process of self-discovery through the lens of a/r/tography, where walking becomes a deep form of embodied and sensorial inquiry. By navigating the liminal spaces between self and environment, Zhang engages in a transformative dialogue with bird-public art, which emerges as a potent metaphor for the fluid and ever-evolving nature of self-meaning. The intertwining of personal narrative and academic exploration through art-making allows Zhang to uncover deeper existential insights that not only shape their own personal growth but also inform their pedagogical practices. This essay emphasizes the iterative, fluid dynamics of a/r/tographic research, illuminating its capacity to cultivate resilience and a deeper understanding of self, both within the artist and in the educational sphere.

In “Walking Through Art: Exploring the Hidden Curriculum of an Abandoned Painting,” Manisha Tripathy echoes an encounter with an abandoned landscape painting amidst a wintry street, guided by Mehdi Hassan’s evocative Ghazal poem. This juxtaposition against a snow-covered backdrop evokes a profound exploration of how walking can perform as inquiry, intertwining artistic expression, personal history, and geographical context. The essay employs glitch photography to reveal the subtle beauty within distorted urban landscapes, resonating with concepts of ‘glitch pedagogy,’ which valorize imperfections and

disruptions as sources of insight and creativity. This process challenges orthodox conceptions of artistic and pedagogical precision, advocating for a more nuanced appreciation of complexity and ambiguity. This essay highlights how immersive engagement with the environment can uncover hidden curricula, revealing new dimensions of understanding and resilience in art education.

Saman Farkhak, in ‘Walking Through Valiasr Intersection: The Gateway to Tehran’s Public Sphere,’ examines the transformation of Tehran’s pivotal Valiasr Intersection from a vibrant hub of public engagement to a controlled space, reflecting broader tensions between public freedom and urban regulation imposed by the government. This intersection, historically significant and culturally rich, has seen shifts from an open area fostering spontaneous relations to a regulated zone constrained by security measures. Through a/r/tographic walking, Farkhak demonstrates how the intersection’s evolving character—marked by urban controls and resistant practices—mirrors larger societal dynamics. This inquiry emphasizes how public space, while increasingly regulated, remains a site of resistance and cultural significance, challenging conventional notions of publicness and offering insights into the interplay between order and disorder in urban settings through everyday life activities.

As we engage with the visual pages of this special issue, we are reminded of the profound capacity of public art to provoke intellectual orientations, inspire meaningful movement, and cultivate a sense of collective relationalities. The essays offered herein constitute a diverse assemblage of viewpoints and often hybrid geolocations, that is, authors belong to multiple geographies that inform their contribution. In this way, each visual essay enriches the ongoing dialogue surrounding the position of public art within the educational, social, cultural and geographical spheres. By embracing a-r-tographic methodologies and centering the voices of marginalized communities, together authors demonstrate the ways in which public art can be a powerful tool for examining history, challenging dominant narratives, and in the process, seek to foster a more just and equitable society. We invite you to critically engage with the visual essays within this collection, to immerse yourself in the sensorial and embodied experiences they articulate, and to meditate on how we might reconceptualize public art as a vital and dynamic element of our pedagogical practices.

Critical Softness:
Using Water as a Metaphor for Response-Able
Actions in Anti-Racist and Decolonial Education

Keywords: A-r-tography, critical softness,
posthumanism, care ethics

Introduction

In the field of anti-racist and decolonized education, it is challenging to appropriately teach about and address the harm towards Indigenous, Black, and/or People of Colour, while also supporting learners, as they navigate their emotionality, guilt, shame, and resistance in this process. Moreover, many learners do not engage when they hear that “they are always doing something wrong” (R. Irwin, personal communication, December 4, 2023). The notion of critical softness begins to address these challenges through residing in the tension between how we critique our social world and how we actually live in it, with our human and more-than-human relations. Lee (2023) defined critical softness as the intersection between “the burst strength of criticality—that punches, scathes, and burns—and the tensile strength of softness—that stretches, pulls, and widens” (p. 117). The following essay will identify the process of lingering within the in-between space of critical softness using water as a metaphor. Both water and critical softness are fluid, responsive, and “infused with possibilities, intentionalities ... and constant movement (Mosavarzadeh et al., 2022, p. 101). In this context, each of the photos in this essay was taken near or inspired by water. By intertwining concepts from critical theories, posthumanism, and care ethics, I will demonstrate how critical softness can be used to engage with others in anti-racist and decolonial work and strengthen our collective response-ability.

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Process

During my walking practice, I was drawn to how water could blur boundaries, being both life-giving–life-taking, calm–ferocious, slow–fast, and light–dark. Disrupting dichotomized notions of self (mind/body), our relations (us/them, subject/object, civilized/savage) and moral thinking (good/bad, right/wrong) can be difficult due to colonial discourses founded in Western rationalism and Cartesian binaries (Ben Ahmed, 2022). Jones and Okun (2001) described this as *either/or thinking*, which serves to simplify and optimize our complex worlds. Ted Aoki’s use of the term *and* is helpful for troubling *either/or thinking*, as he offered instead to reside in the “place of lived tension between this and that” (Pinar & Irwin, 2004, p. 300). It is important to refrain from considering

the in-between space as a combination of both criticality and softness; each is distinct in its own right, and it is in their difference where we can understand both more fully.

In Canada, a dichotomized relationship is felt between settlers and Indigenous Peoples. This relationship is represented by Figure 1, which was taken on qələχən and qiqləχən, a lookout and defense encampment for Musqueam Peoples. The balanced rocks can be just that, balanced rocks; yet, they can also represent an appropriation of Inukshuks. Criticality urges us to consider the latter and the exploitative presence of settlers on Indigenous lands. Softness asks us to reflect on one’s place on these traditional lands and how we can learn from Indigenous Peoples to be better stewards. Broadly, criticality acknowledges the colonial violence that continues to harm Indigenous Peoples, while softness recognizes the entanglement between settlers, Indigenous Peoples, land, and the care provided. In other words, “care does not occur separate from the world, but in and of the world” (Hamington, 2021, p. 39).



Figure 1
Ashleigh Janis, 2024.
Photo courtesy of
the author.

In my pursuit to find public art adjacent to water, “The Drop” seemed like a natural fit for my journey (Figure 2). I sat on the bus and watched the landscape change from decorated storefronts to graffiti and boarded-up windows. The bus stopped at a red light, and there was a mural of a tree (Figure 3) with red dresses and handprints hung on the branches that represented Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2 Spirit Peoples; MMIWG2S). This brief pause allowed The Drop to become an opening for experiencing this mural and expanded my understanding of what public art could be. Here I was going to a highly trafficked tourist location to see a commissioned piece of public art, while this evocative mural was hidden in an underserved neighbourhood. Criticality may judge the significance of The Drop, where it is located, and who created it, while softness shifts our attention towards the invisible, unseen, and neglected, and reminds us that this is where our care is first required (Carstens, 2021).



Figure 2
Ashleigh Janis, *The drop*, 2024.
Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 3
Ashleigh Janis, 2024. Photo
courtesy of the author.

I finally arrived at The Drop and looked across the plaza to witness Ocean Hyland’s “The winds and the waters will always call us home” (CPAWS British Columbia, 2023), a powerful reminder of the importance of water and its interconnectedness with all life (Figure 4). Lee (2023) discussed how critical softness is guided with a-r-tographic communities of practice in mind, where interconnectedness, collaboration, collectivity, relationality, togetherness, and philosophies of belonging are upheld. These spaces are characterized by gestures of care and concern, and acts that uphold the “Other as a human being” (p. 115). Figure 5 represents my return to the earlier underserved neighbourhood. As I took this picture, I was approached by a man who started talking to me. I immediately felt uncomfortable and started to shake my head “no,” (inappropriately) assuming he was asking for money; yet, he was actually saying “we all need to love ourselves more.” I agreed with him, wished him a good day, and he walked away smiling. Vela Alarcón and Springgay’s (2021) critical questions about care are relevant here, including: what does it mean to be in relation? And, what power does my care uphold or take away? They challenged the assumption that care always includes positive feelings, as the individualized, humanist notion of self-care often implies. Considering my interaction with this man, criticality would reveal the power imbalance which led to my reluctance to provide care; yet, keeping softness at the fore allowed me to uphold our shared relationality and receive a beautiful lesson.



Figure 4
Ashleigh Janis, 2024. Photo
courtesy of the author.



Figure 5
Ashleigh Janis, 2024. Photo
courtesy of the author.

Reflection

Both criticality and softness are required in anti-racist and anti-colonial work to provide response-able care to our human and more-than-human relations; first and foremost, for those who experience racial and colonial harm, but also for those who learn about it. Residing within this in-between space requires time, creativity, and often discomfort; yet, can be fostered through practices such as walking and slow scholarship that promote pausing, lingering, and slowing down in a “space of lived tensionality of difference” (Pinar & Irwin, 2004, p. 300).

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Memory in the making:
A visual epistolary on cross-cultural journeys

Keywords: A/r/tography, cross-cultural understanding,
Korea–Japan relations, memory, remembering



Figure 1
Koichi Kasahara, *Wings that cross us again and again*, 2024.
Photo courtesy of the author.

Crossing

As neighbours, Japan and Korea share a complex historical background, including several past conflicts and Japan’s rule of the Korean peninsula from the early 20th century until World War II. According to Kimura (2022), the historical tensions between Japan and Korea stem from differing views on colonial rule. Fixed perceptions and actions by political and judicial bodies have deepened the problem. A/r/tography has led to research exploring the complex ‘in-between’ of individual and collective spaces through ‘walking,’ providing unique insights (Lasczik et al., 2022). We, one Japanese and one Korean researcher, have engaged in explorations that create negotiations between collective historical narratives and individual narratives, thus transforming our own perspectives (Kim & Kasahara, 2023). This visual essay is part of the travel and correspondence that have been undertaken for the research of crossing boundaries and intersecting conflicting space metaphorically.

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Walking in/with the others

Koichi Kasahara -

I visited Seoul in winter 2024. Despite the lingering snow, the bustling streets were lively. I reached the foot of Inwangsan (Mt. Inwang), named after Inwang, the guardian deity of the former Korea, Joseon (1392~1910). Despite trying to protect it, the 500-year-old Joseon Dynasty fell to Japanese imperialism in the early 20th century. From the top of this historic and symbolic mountain, there is a spectacular view of the metropolis of Seoul. Nearby is Yun Dong-ju Literature House. Yun Dong-ju (1917–1945) was a Korean poet who studied in Japan and died in prison during World War II at 27 years old. His poems, which reflect political and social themes, as well as everyday emotions, resonate with many readers. The university building where I worked stands on the site of his former lodging house, where a poetry monument was erected in 2006. I recalled his ‘A new road.’



Figure 2
Koichi Kasahara, *The roads and views you loved*, 2023.
Photo courtesy of the author.

A new road
by Yoon Dong-ju (2022)

Across the brook, then to the wood—
Across the hill, then to the village—

My road runs on, a road ever new,
I took yesterday and will take today,

Where dandelions bloom, and magpies fly,
Where girls tread on, and the wind blows.

My road runs on, a road ever new,
As it does today, and will tomorrow.

Across the brook, then to the wood—
Across the hill, then to the village—

Sunah Kim - Re-membering

Koichi Kasahara -

Sado is an island still subject to dispute regarding forced labour during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Sainokawara, located on Sado island, Japan, is a cultural niche constructed to commemorate the deaths of children. As thousands of people have added their own Jizo to those of others over the years, the site has become a public space where individuals participate in an aesthetic form of sharing painful experiences.

When I started to walk around the Jizo statues, I could hear countless voices telling their own stories of death, though they were all silent. In that moment, I was connected with the unbearable pain of parents who had lost their children. What made this site a 'new genre of public art' was how visual mediums were used to engage in dialogue and communication about issues directly related to the lives of a broad and diverse audience (Lacy, 1994). This site has been created to remember collectively and artistically, as these visual symbols contain the experiences that words cannot fully express.

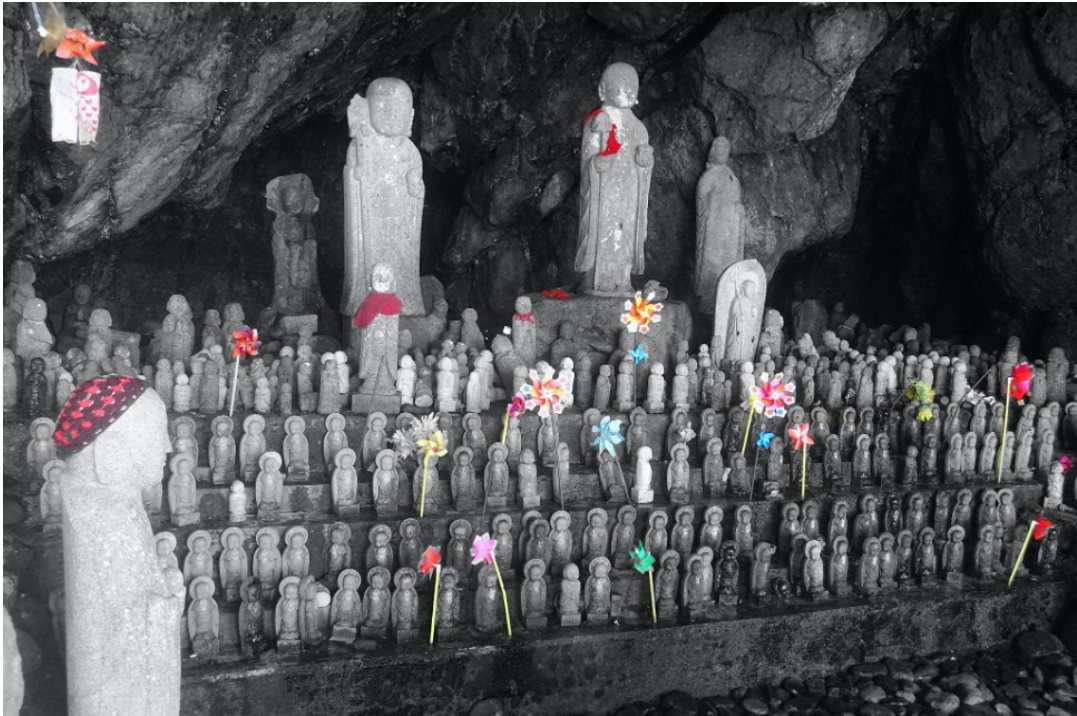


Figure 3
Sunah Kim, *A rock cave with Jizo statues*, 2023. Photo courtesy of the author.

What does it mean for a memory to become public? Inspired by my visit to the Yun Dong-ju Literature House, after returning to Japan, I created a small ceramic monument and photographed an azalea flower that I had seen blooming at a Koma (Koryo) Shrine, which we came across during our fieldwork in Japan. A Japanese proverb 'even a chance acquaintance is a divine ordinance' inscribed on the monument highlights the inevitability of chance encounters.



Figure 4
Koichi Kasahara, *Small monument and an azalea*. Photograph of a ceramic and a flower. Photo courtesy of the author.

Reflections

Sunah Kim - This arts-based approach makes the memory of a place ‘public’ for us. New understandings and relationships have emerged from the moments of being connected, through which we re-membered me/you and us/them. It was a new sense of belonging that transcends borders. In this sense, the creation of something to be remembered, as tokens of memories, is a conscious act of forging connections and cross-cultural understandings. The a/r/tographic exploration with reciprocal visits and walking illustrates a possible approach vis-à-vis such cross-cultural research for art education.

Although I often felt overwhelmed on this journey by the multilayered meanings and differences embedded in the cultures of Korea and Japan, the small artefacts or specific sites that we encountered in each other’s lands enabled me to connect with others. One day, I returned to the shore with a white stone and a skein of thread that symbolized different beings. When the boundaries of these objects were transgressed and blurred by strong waves, various textures of feelings were captured and inscribed in my memory of a cross-cultural journey.

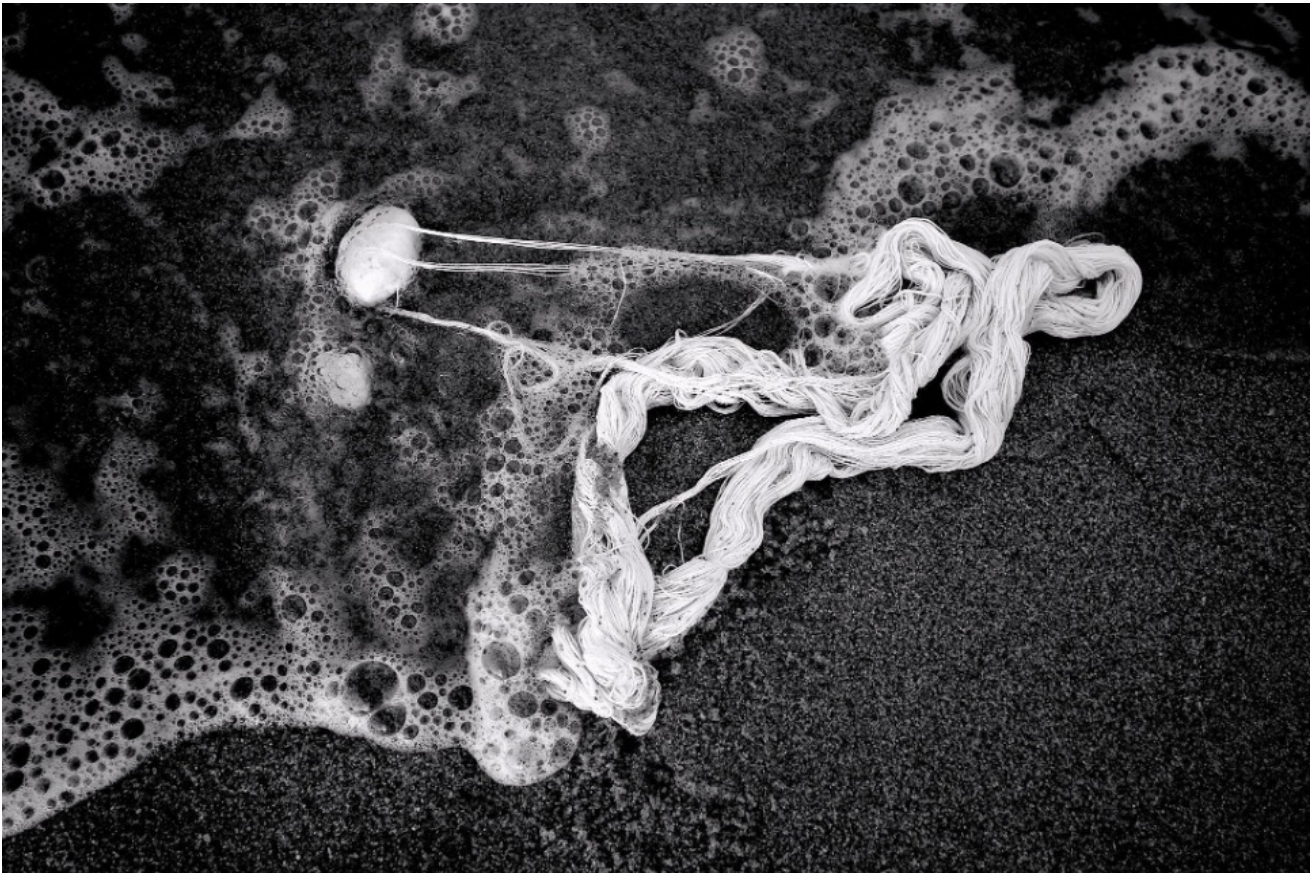


Figure 5
Sunah Kim, *Memento*, 2024.
Photo courtesy of the author.

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¹ The Josun Dynasty was founded in 1397 and replaced by the Korean Empire in 1897. However, the Josun period is often considered to have ended in 1910, as the Korean Empire was continuously succeeded by the Josun dynasty until it became a Japanese colony.

² Jizo Bodhisattva is the Buddhist Guardian Deity of Travelers and Children, venerated in Japanese temples and by the roadside.

³ In 668, after the fall of Goguryeo to the Tang and Silla forces, immigrants from Goguryeo, who had fled to Japan, were resettled in this area. This Koma Shrine (the Korean pronunciation is 'Koryo') honours 'Koma no Jakko', the governor of Koma District.

Thinking-(queerly)-with the crocus:
A poetic inquiry

Keywords: Poetry, photography, queerness,
arts-based research

Seawall walking with Pacific wind in my hair
a flash of purple beckons to me:
crocus buds in crisp morning air.
I receive them with the silver glint
of my analogue camera and eyes
full of childlike wonder, blink.

Kneeling at sparrow level I greet them,
sweet harbingers of glorious spring,
and they point me to a clump, another!
And another, and another, as I tail
crowds of crocuses like a breadcrumb trail
leading me on a memorable meander.

I tread with all the caution of a giantess,
praying not to step on little wayward buds,
till I, with urban eyes accustomed
to the official grey of a concrete jungle,
am ushered into a field of passionate purple.

Purple! My queer soul burns with that hue!
A mingling of girlish pinks and boyish blues.
Think now of Oscar Wilde’s “purple hours,”
Or from 20s Berlin, that Lavender Song of ours,
singing “The crime is when love must hide,
From now on we’ll love with pride!”

And much before that wrote Sappho of Lesbos,
of slender young necks in garlands of purple
or of “violet tiaras” that lovingly encircle
soft hair and proud, haughty brows.

And so enamoured am I by this precious purple
that it is only at the halting pace of a turtle
that I look up to find it lovingly cradled
by the rusted steel ribbon of a metal structure.

Laying on a grassy knoll just off Sunset Beach:
the AIDS Memorial. Nearly a thousand names
engraved of those lost to the battle, to the injustice
of a system that judged queer lives to blame.

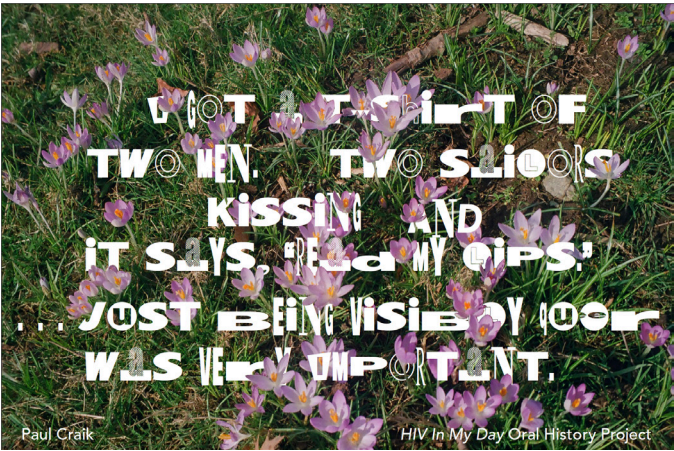


Figure 1
Nafisa A Iqbal, Quote from Paul Craik as part
of the HIV In My Day Oral History Project.
Interviewer: Ben Klassen. Typeface: Robert Ford
designed by Nat Pyper, 2024. Photo courtesy of
the author.



Figure 2
Nafisa A Iqbal, Quote from Kim Kinakin as
part of the HIV In My Day Oral History Project.
Interviewer: Ben Klassen. Typeface: Moonstorm
designed by Nat Pyper, 2024. Photo courtesy of
the author.

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than-human.
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Stood on high lectern, a government man
proclaimed AIDS “a self-inflicted wound,”
While Little Sister’s Books were bombed¹
And the wasting syndrome consumed.

But you nourished each other still
spoonful by Loving Spoonful²,
while those in charge tried to pass a bill³
to forcibly quarantine the ill,
their cruel faces, in doing so, not even woeful.

And they say that walking down Davie,
the wind might pick up the thumping ghost
of the mighty sounds of long-gone protests
demanding “Free AZT!”

Yet, even a thousand sunlit names
on sixty feet of grainy metal panes
could still not hope to encompass the pain
of a generation left without queer elders
who could guide us, hold us, be our loving teachers.



Figure 3
Nafisa A Iqbal, Quote from Sharyle Lyndon as
part of the HIV In My Day Oral History Project.
Interviewer: Jackie Haywood. Typeface: G. B.
Jones designed by Nat Pyper, 2024. Photo
courtesy of the author.

It is then that a line catches my eye,
begging to be read and daring me to deny:

But the energy that is me will not be lost.

And suddenly, my queer gut feeling is tossed
up through heart, into mind and: reverberation!
The crocus field, in purple cloak, is none other than
our elders saying hello, giving acknowledgement.
Why else would the crocus gather in such numbers
by the memorial, if not to help us, queerlings, remember?

Dear crocus, holder of queer knowledge, spirit,
let me assure you: your metonymy, like a metronome we hear it.

To stand out boldly, against winter’s grey.
Flamboyant with hope, in snow, or come what may.
A marvelous metaphor of queer visibility,
recognition for queer folks, our community.

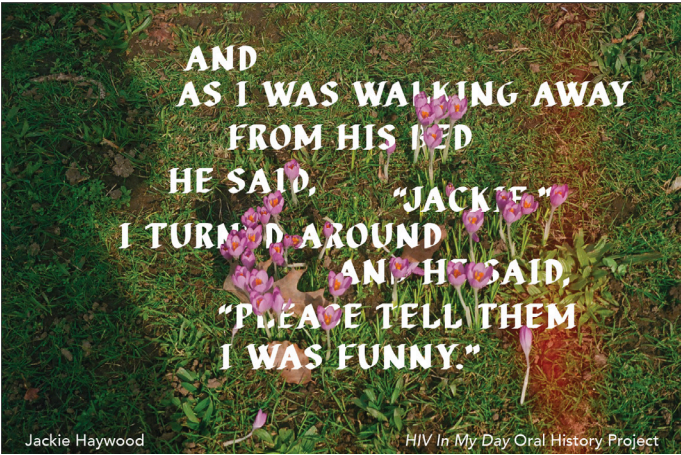


Figure 4
Nafisa A Iqbal, Quote from Jackie Haywood as
part of the HIV In My Day Oral History Project.
Interviewer: Ben Klassen. Typeface: Women’s
Car Repair Collective designed by Nat Pyper,
2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

With your intertwining of female and male in one
you are becoming-fluidity bar none.
Marking the turn from winter to spring,
you remind us of the inevitability of change—
identity is shifting, embrace its range.

It is true, you like to grow in clusters,
multiplying in offsets from corms, astir
revealing to us your rhizomatic nature—
interconnected, fluid, non-hierarchical.



Figure 5
Nafisa A Iqbal, Quote from Art Zoccole as part of the HIV In My Day Oral History Project. Interviewer: Sandy Lambert. Typeface: Ernestine Eckstein designed by Nat Pyper, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

And don't think it evades me
that you live in symbiotic community
with networks of mycorrhizal fungi,
teaching us an ethos of relationality.

So I bow my head to the crocus flower,
for holding this exuberant knowledge of ours,
before letting it return to what it will always be,
a quickening of nature's spring heartbeat.

The images created as part of this project use quotes pulled from *HIV In My Day*, a seminal project that comprises more than 100 oral history interviews conducted between 2017 and 2022 by community-based researchers in British Columbia, featuring long-term HIV survivors and their caregivers, used with the explicit permission of principal researcher, Dr. Nathan Lachowsky. The text is overlaid on my own 35mm photography of my spontaneous encounter with the crocus flowers at the Vancouver AIDS Memorial. The typefaces were designed by the queer alphabet artist, Nat Pyper, as part of their 2018 project, *A Queer Year of Love Letters*, a series of free-to-use fonts that commemorates the legacies of countercultural queers from recent decades. Existing relationally in this work, these contiguous elements come together to create openings for complex meaning-making by merging my living inquiry as a queer person with that of other queer creators based in my metonymic understanding of the crocus as a queer elder.

¹ Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium in Vancouver's Davie Village has been a hub for queer literature since its founding in 1983. The bookstore was bombed twice (1987 and 1992) as homophobia surged with the government's reaction to the AIDS epidemic.

² A Loving Spoonful, founded in 1989 as a response to the epidemic, is a non-profit that provides meals and nutritional support to individuals and families affected by HIV—a testament to queer community care.

³ Bill 34 was a piece of provincial legislation introduced by B.C.'s Vander Zalm administration, which would have forcibly quarantined those with AIDS. The bill did not pass as a result of activist pushback.

Tracing the Politics of Space:
Interrupting Public Art Discourses

Keywords: A/r/tography, becoming, public art,
contiguity, reception theory

Public art is a multifaceted concept that has been the subject of considerable debate. This essay explores the notion of public art through personal encounters, artistic expression, and the methodology of a/r/tography, which intertwines the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher (Irwin et al., 2023). By walking and displaying art in both physical and virtual spaces, this visual essay employs storytelling and experiential narratives to challenge traditional perspectives on what public art can be. Through these explorations, public art emerges not as a static entity but as a dynamic, living process of becoming—where meaning is continuously negotiated, reinterpreted, and redefined.



Figure 1
Untitled: Xi (Sisilia) Chen, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

Xi (Sisilia) CHEN is an M.A. student at the University of British Columbia, specializing in Early Childhood Education. Her expertise lies in teacher education and integrating arts-based projects to enhance emotional well-being and foster cultural dialogue. She has led creative initiatives such as the “Wadang Ex-libris” workshop at the Qin Museum and the “まめほん” travelling exhibitions across libraries and bookstores, focusing on using art to support professional learning communities and promote holistic development in educational settings.
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Art is Becoming

I had become accustomed to walking in my neighborhood and hiking the trails of Pacific Spirit Regional Park. Following a heavy snowfall, I eagerly ventured out to the park and encountered a striking scene: a Buddhist Master standing amidst the snow in the distance. I began to question whether I would still view this scene as a compelling example of public art if it were situated in its original cultural context in China, devoid of any cultural dislocation. This realization led me to understand that such scenes offer new perspectives, redistributing (Rockhill & Watts, 2009) our sensory experiences and expanding what can be perceived, felt, and contemplated.

Public art is broadly defined as artworks created for public spaces, often with the intention of engaging the community and enhancing the urban environment. Its purpose extends beyond mere decoration, aiming to foster community interaction, provoke thought, and reflect cultural identities (Tan et al., 2024). However, existing research primarily focuses on the broader impacts of public art on urban culture, economy, and ecology (Thanh, 2024, pp. 1307-1313), while giving limited attention to the specific interactions between public art and individuals on a more personal, micro level. A non-traditional definition of public art exists in the space between *what is* and *what is not*. This redefinition calls for counter-thoughts that provoke senses and feelings, with the belief that the more counter-thoughts there are, the higher the artistic quality of public art. This challenges the boundaries of public art, suggesting that it is not merely a *being* but a *becoming*.

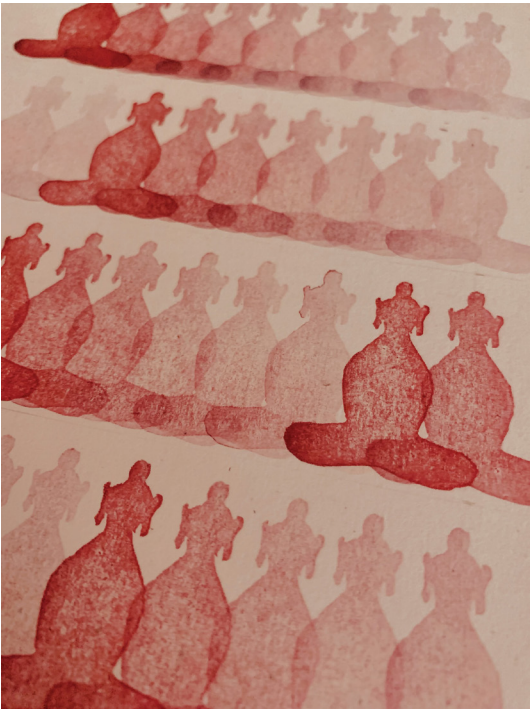


Figure 2
Xi (Sisilia) Chen,
念念不忘, 必有回响, Woodblock
printing Oilbased inks, 2024.
Photo courtesy of the author.

Inspired by this redefinition, I created a set of Japanese prints titled “念念不忘，必有回响” (The world is an echo valley. If there is a call, there will be an echo), a proverb by Master Hongyi 弘一 (1880-1942). This suggests that the contiguity of thought from an individual will eventually resonate with the world.

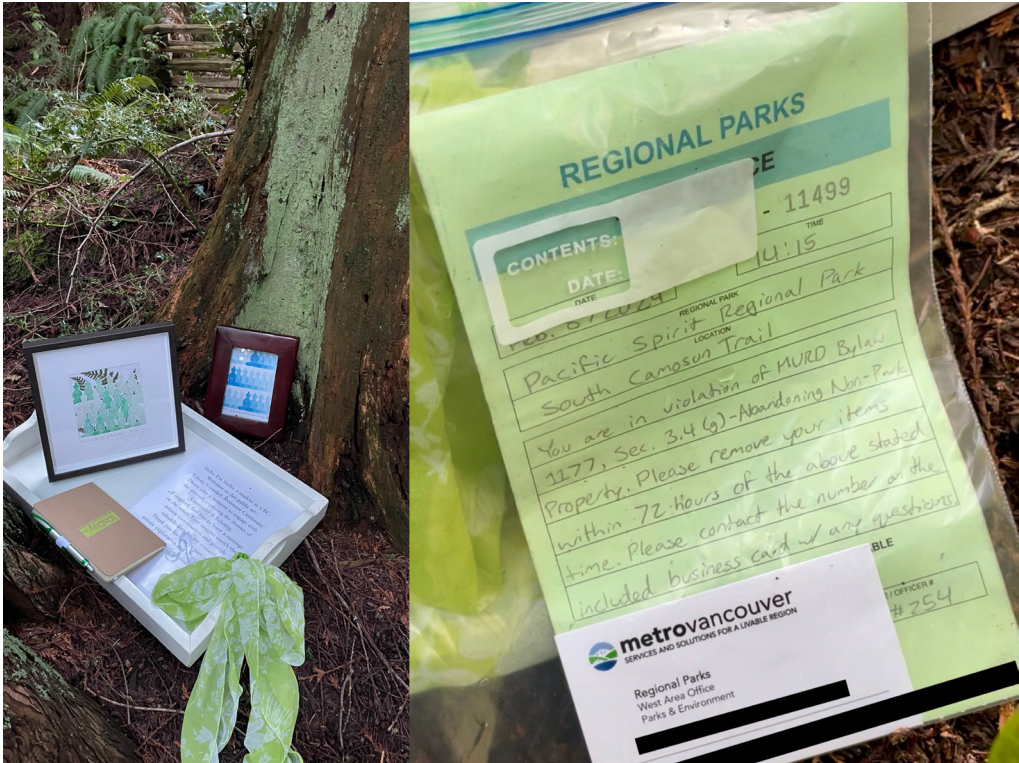


Figure 3
Xi (Sisilia) Chen,
念念不忘，必有回响, Woodblock
printing Oilbased inks, 2024.
Photo courtesy of the author.

Public art is inherently political, as it often involves negotiations over space, identity, and community. This became evident during my “Seasonal Walks in Identity Routes,” where I displayed arts in a public park. Upon my return, I found a notice indicating that I was in violation of MVRD Bylaw 1177, section. 3.4 (g) - abandoning non-park property and needed to remove the items within 72 hours. Apart from the immediate concern about potential repercussions, this incident prompted me to question: Who is allowed to display artwork in public lands? Who is not?

Legalism, as defined by Shklar (1964), emphasizes strict adherence to rules and promotes a narrow, exclusionary view of the law, dismissing dissenting opinions as invalid (cited in Lopez Lerma & Etxabe, 2018), and has also been discussed by Rockhill & Watts (2009). However, Rancière argues that in democratic politics, the moment of active equality is also the moment of self-creation (May, 2008), where hope is integral to political expression. This politics of hope contrasts with a politics that merely offers resources for creating hope. Walking as an art practice seems to offer a certain awareness of this creative tension in which bodies have to continually renegotiate their relations and make selections from felt potential (Irwin, 2013). During this motion, not only my body but also my mind evolves, breaks, and becomes anew.

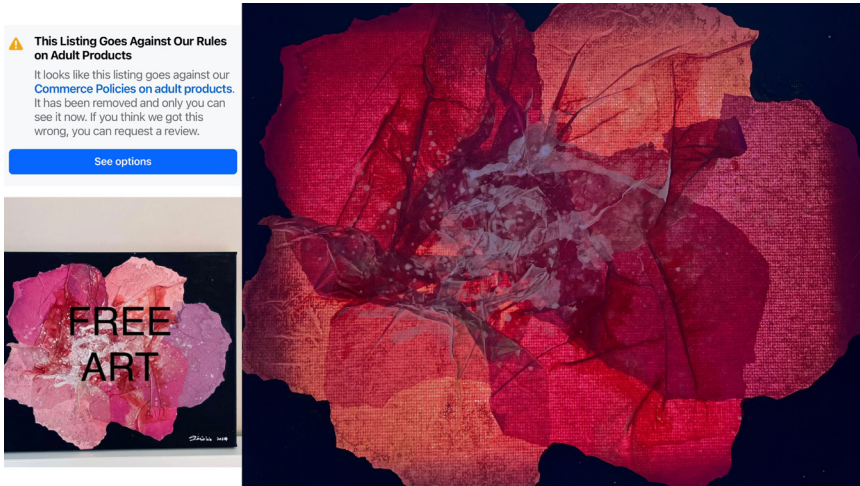


Figure 4
Xi (Sisilia) Chen, Artificial
identification, 2024.
Photo courtesy of the author.

Art is Interpreting

The reception of public art is equally important, as it determines the work’s impact and significance. Reception theory (Lane, 2006), developed by Hans Robert Jauss (1982), shifts the focus from the text (or artwork) to the reader’s (or viewer’s) reception and interpretation. According to Jauss, public art should challenge and deconstruct the public’s assumptions by breaking down expectations and prompting new interpretations. For example, one of my artworks was flagged by an AI algorithm as violating commerce policies on adult products when I attempted to display it in an online market. Most pattern recognition algorithms “recognize” based on statistical inference, and output layers list the probabilities of the recognition of specific features (Chen & Chen, 2022, p. 146). However, algorithms may lack the ability to understand the full context of an image or text, especially with abstract or less clear items like art.

Curious about the algorithm’s response, I showed the artwork to a friend who remarked that it resembled a bomb explosion rather than a flower. I was grateful that my artwork had unintentionally become a symbol of anti-war sentiment, demonstrating that the politics of space lie in promoting peace. While the artist may create with a specific meaning in mind, they cannot predict how it will be received as public art.

My further exploration of public art took place at Jericho Beach and the UBC campus. These spaces served as the backdrop for a series of artistic interventions and reflections, similar to Sinner’s (2021) art walks, which use the environment as a studio and transform art walks into art-making processes. Treating the environment as a canvas, the art gradually evolved into a unique piece, capturing my affection for Vancouver’s natural beauty and recording my distinctive art walks.

Art is Self

Walking art has generated in me a capacity for aesthetically integrating my knowledge, methods, and practices into a world already underway (Triggs et al., 2014). As an artist, researcher, and teacher, I seek to endorse the positive pleasure that public art provides (Jauss, 1982). This pleasure involves both an initial surrender of the recipient to the work of art and a process of aesthetic distancing. Such an a/r/tographic process embodies the interpretation of contiguity, where public art is not a fixed entity but a continuous process of becoming.



Figure 5
Xi (Sisilia) Chen, Free Art No.2 & No.3, 2024.
Photo courtesy of the author.

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Walking A/R/Tographically with Bird-Public Art in the Quest for Self-Meaning

Keywords: A/r/tography, living inquiry, bird-public art, neo-phenomenology, self-meaning

When I was born, my wings were cut by “Zookeepers.” I always thought I would spend my life this way until I met another bird. She changed my mind, her wings were powerful, letting me consider whether I have the right to fly. At the same time, during the pandemic quarantine, I had to stay with myself, but I had the chance to contemplate this question that I never thought before. These experiences strengthened my resolve to regain my wings. I faced fear, despair, and numbness, but also moments of fearlessness. Although the process was long and torturous, I eventually succeeded. I am grateful for those challenges, for they transformed me. I became the immortal sculpture! If you are wondering what I am talking about, then please continue to follow me...

Introduction

In recent years, I have been on a quest for self-meaning, realizing its importance in forming an independent personality. As an educator, it is particularly important for me to possess a complete sense of self, as it enables my teaching to be more resilient (Palmer, 2012). However, I had not found a satisfactory answer until I saw the unique moments of interaction between birds and public art. I define this kind of artistic form as “bird-public art.” As an artist, researcher, and teacher, I will use these three identities as a framework, employing the methodology of a/r/tography (Irwin, 2013), to explore the “in-between” generated by the process of walking a/r/tographically with bird-public art. This inquiry not only allows me to understand the nature of self-meaning but also helps me create a more humanistic teaching/learning environment with my students in the future.

A Thousand-mile Journey Started Beneath My Feet

Influenced by my original family, I have always been someone reluctant to leave my comfort zone. However, life’s upheavals prompted me to reflect on self-meaning. Seeking answers, after overcoming family objections and continuous self-mental preparation, I finally came to Vancouver, Canada, marking my first journey abroad. As I work in the field of art, I often noticed

the silent public art while walking through the city. One day, I saw a thinking bird standing on a thinking sculpture. This awakened my artistic perception. I quickly took a photo of this rare moment of bird-public art. I decided to explore this moment through a/r/tography. From the perspective of six renderings of a/r/tography (living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonym, contiguity, excess, and reverberations) (Springgay et al., 2005), I felt an unseen force guiding me towards certain answers.



Figure 1
Mengkai Zhang, A thinking bird on a thinking sculpture at Marine Drive, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

Mengkai ZHANG is an a/r/tographer and current graduate student at the University of British Columbia (UBC) studying Art Education. His interests include a/r/tography, art-based research, more-than-human, storytelling as research, Taoism, and immigration studies. He received the Jeanette Andrews Scholarship Award in 2024. ZMKzmk19940617@163.com

Continuous Walking, Continuous A/r/tographic Inquiry

I began to consciously walk outdoors for the next few months, creating more encounters with bird-public art in my daily life. This process is an embodiment of walking activity and fluid exploration, helping me generate and clarify my a/r/tographic research, which strongly responds to living inquiry. Additionally, following contiguity, I integrated neo-phenomenology (Daniels, 1995) into my inquiry. Through walking with bird-public art, the emotions generated by the encounter between birds, sculptures, space, and me are seen as responses to a specific situation. These responses, in turn, influence my understanding and reaction to the situation. This dynamic experience emphasizes the diversity in our perception of beauty and context (VerCetty, 2022; Yoon-Ramirez, 2021).



Figure 2
Mengkai Zhang, *The bird-public art at UBC*, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 3
Mengkai Zhang, *The bird-public art at Canada Palace*, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

As I explored deeper, gradually dispelling the fog, the process of pursuing the complexity created by bird-public art allowed me to see myself. Starting from the “metaphor/metonym” in a/r/tography, the birds, as a metaphor for my essence, showcases the freedom and transformation of the self, while the public art symbolizes not just a motionless life but, on a deeper level, represents the environments I was/am/will be in. I realize that exploring the interaction between birds and public art is a profound inquiry into my connection with environments. Leaving an old one for a new one has brought me to the understanding that the essence of life lies in seeking change of oneself, and creating an iterative narrative with the environments.

After that, as an artist, I expressed what I gained in the ongoing inquiry through art-making. Based on my personal story at the beginning, I created this triptych. Blending literature with visual art blurs disciplinary boundaries, making thinking more intertwined (Sinner & Owen, 2011), and allow me to dig deeper into the essence behind the phenomenon.



Figure 4
Mengkai Zhang, *My triptych*, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

Figure 5
Mengkai Zhang, *The all things-thinking sculpture* at Marine Drive, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

::

“Art-making is a thinking process” (Jónsdóttir et al., 2018, p. 33), and a net for capturing reflection and diffraction in the living inquiry. During creation, my understanding of meaning deepened beyond its initial inquiry. Meaning is not solely determined by emotional responses/influences, but rather by the process that emerges within this change. When different people, events, and objects become/leave part of this process, new meanings are born, which are dynamic and ever-evolving.

Returning to the Origin: Research is an A/R/Tographic Fluid Loop

When I walk with this thinking sculpture once again, I realize that different processes endow it with different meanings, thus forming an iterative collection. I as a teacher recognized a confusion in my life and approached it through art-based inquiry as a researcher. Based on my initial findings, I created artworks as an artist, using the works for deeper thinking. Ultimately, this process offered profound answers about my life, which I will reflect in my teaching. Within this cycle, bird-public art has been my mentor, from which I have gained an a/r/tographic thinking pattern. Through this pattern, I finally found self-meaning, helping me to form my independent personality. Moving forward, under this framework’s guidance, the new me will help my students find their self-meaning through walking a/r/tographically with public art, making my teaching resilient. I believe this is the power of a/r/tography - A fluid of loop research.



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Walking Through Art:
Exploring the Hidden Curriculum
of an Abandoned Painting

Keywords: A/r/tography, glitch pedagogy, glitch
photography, hidden curriculum



Figure 1
*An encounter with fading colours: Stumbling upon an
abandoned painting wrapped in snow's cold whisper,
where brightness of colours lose their intensity and
echoes turn still.*

Manisha Tripathy, digital photograph, 2024. Photo
courtesy of the author.

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Figure 2
*Self in relation with snow: A still moment to absorb the
emotions stirred by the essence of snow and tunes of
Mehdi Hassan's Ghazal, where the threads of personal
and collective memories weave*

Manisha Tripathy, digital photograph, 2024. Photo
courtesy of the author.

“मुझे तुम नज़र से गरि तो रहे हो
मुझे तुम कभी भी भुला ना सकोगे
ना जाने मुझे क्यों यकी हो चला है
मेरे प्यार को तुम मटि ना सकोगे”
“You are making me lose sight of you.
You will never be able to forget me
I don't know why I believe it,
You won't be able to erase my love.”

(Anwar & Rana, as cited in PakMag, n.d)

As I leisurely strolled through the wintry streets of Metrotown, Greater Vancouver, Pakistani Ghazal singer, Mehdi Hassan's soulful ghazal “मुझे तुम नज़र से गरि तो रहे हो” (You are making me lose sight of you) (Hassan, 2023) guided me into deep introspection. I encountered an abandoned landscape painting, starkly contrasted against the snow-covered sidewalk. This unexpected sight sparked reflections on the fading vibrancy of our world, now slipping into a monochrome existence. The painting, juxtaposed with the white and grey snow, seemed to comment on the societal forces—like digital overload and daily monotony—dulling our environment and creativity. This essay explores how walking serves as a method of inquiry, blending artistic expression, personal history, and geographical study (Goertz, 2017). It reflects on how such experiences prompt introspection, evoke memories, and connect us to our surroundings, revealing the hidden curriculum of our modern existence (Patterson, 2020).

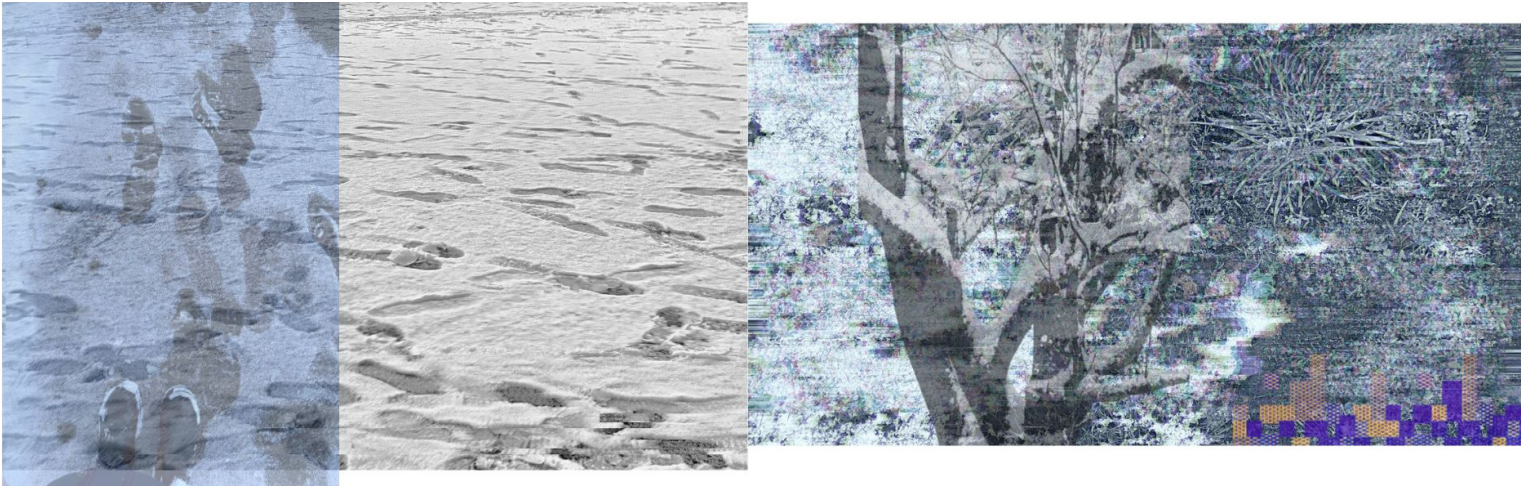


Figure 3
Curriculum beneath the surface: Glitch photography uncovers the silent lessons embedded within visual distortions, blurring the boundaries between artist/ teacher/ researcher

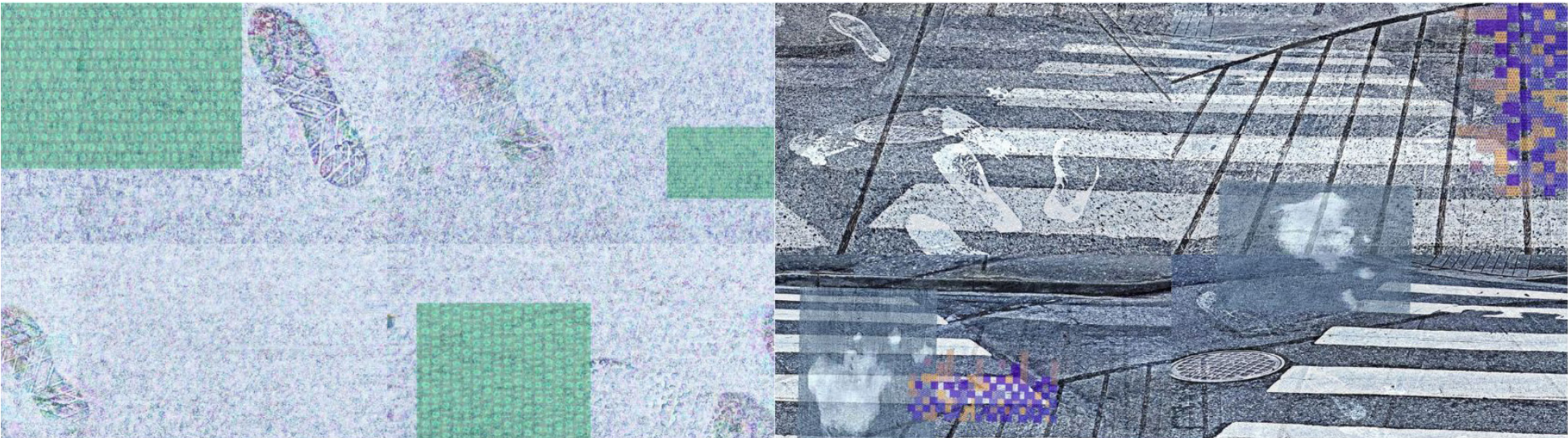
Manisha Tripathy, digital photograph, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

Process

In contemplating these themes, I found resonance with the ideas put forth by Cartiere and Willis (2008), who speak of the “temporary transformation of art in interaction with its environment” (p. 15). The abandoned painting, though temporary in its existence, became a catalyst for a larger spectacle as it merged with the snow-covered landscape, blurring the boundaries between traditional physical spaces and artistic expression. Equipped with nothing but the environment saturated in winter tones, a digital camera, and a playlist of Ghazal songs, I embarked on a journey of artistic exploration. My creative process unfolded organically, alternating between deliberate experimentation and intuitive discovery. Initially, I captured the urban land painted in snow, focusing on the subtle grayscale changes that mirrored the complexities of the fading colourful world around me with a “glitched” camera. The resulting photographs, with their distorted and fragmented imagery, revealed a previously unnoticed beauty of the unexpected. As I wove the melancholic tunes of Mehdi Hassan into my creative exploration, a narrative began to emerge, becoming a passage to somewhere else (Springgay et al., 2005). Drawing inspiration from my own memories, experiences, and emotions, I dived deeper into the creative process. I experimented with techniques such as multiple exposures, inadvertently stepping into the realm of “glitch photography” (Kane, 2019). Each layer added to the composition served as a metaphor for the multifaceted nature of existence, reflecting the intricate play of inter & intra web of considerations.

Figure 4
Whispers of the Unexpected: Embracing the allure of glitches and sprinted realities, unravel hidden depths, uncovering the invisible drape of serendipitous discoveries.

Manisha Tripathy, digital photograph, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.



Reflection

The surprising change and distortion of the cityscape through glitch photography offered an “opening as invitation” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 906) that resonated with the principles of “glitch pedagogy” (Peña & James, 2016). Glitch photography allowed me to understand glitch pedagogy better by highlighting the potential for unexpected beauty and insight in errors and disruptions. It accentuated the significance of embracing imperfections and unconventional aspects, demonstrating how these factors can lead to new and meaningful ways of comprehension and learning. The process of creating glitch photography became a symbol for appreciating complexity and ambiguity in learning, challenging conventional ideas of flawlessness, thereby opening up new avenues for exploration and creativity. Through glitch pedagogy, I discovered a way to examine the contradictions inherent in our societal structures while empowering learners to challenge prevailing narratives through chance experimentation. This approach, in my opinion, not only questions established norms but also enables learners to contest them creatively. Glitch pedagogy fostered resilience as well as adaptability beyond traditional bounds of creativity when faced with uncertainty (Preece & Whittaker, 2023).

In the quiet simplicity of the snow-covered landscape with an abandoned painting, I discovered an intense complexity, a hidden curriculum waiting to be uncovered. As an artist/researcher / teacher, I have come to recognize the transformative power of fully immersing oneself in the environment, embodying “the creative possibilities of renderings” (Blake, 2005, p. 105), and “lingering with the emergence: that which is unknown yet, comes to be known” (Lee et al., 2005, p. 354). Through physical and mental walks, I embarked on a journey of yearning, critical reflection, unlocking layers of meaning and inspiration from intuitive learning. A simple walk, became a passage into a new understanding of pedagogy, as if the act of walking had taught me to see with new eyes.

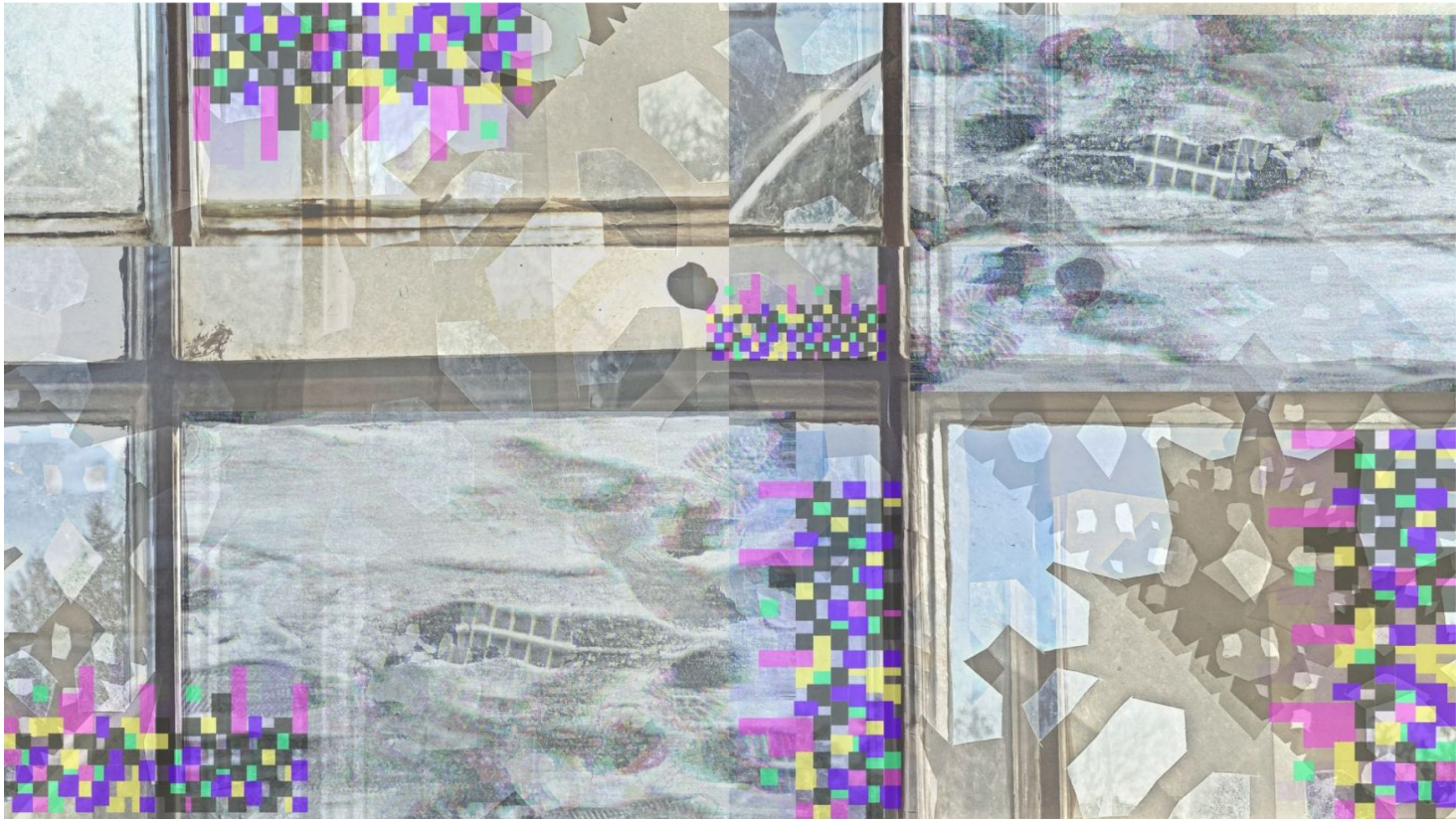


Figure 5
Navigating the glitch: As images distort and transform, the hidden curriculum emerge, revealing the authentic learning flourishing in the cracks between the known and the chaotic
Manisha Tripathy, digital photograph, 2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

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Walking Through Valiasr Intersection:
The Gateway to Tehran’s Public Sphere

Keywords: Walking, a/r/tography, public sphere, everyday
life, resistance

From Agora to Arena: Tehran’s Shifting Public Space

Walking through the intersection of Pahlavi (Valiasr) and Shahreza (Enghelab) streets, where the south, north, east, and west of Tehran converge, offers a vivid frame of the city’s dynamic pulse¹. This intersection not only reflects the city’s energy but also encapsulates the political, social, cultural, and artistic scene of Tehran, becoming a complex manifestation of the public sphere as a form of human togetherness (Biesta, 2012). Historically significant, this area hosts Iran’s most important theatre building and festivals and has witnessed key moments of protest and resilience in various timelines. However, since 2009, urban security measures have transformed this intersection from a place of free gathering into a controlled territory, reflecting a broader tension between public freedom and regulatory control. Numerous urban specialists have argued that (Tehrani, 2015; Houseynion, 2014) the right to free use of urban spaces is a fundamental human right that is essential for fostering cultural diversity, democratic participation, and social cohesion. Amid this struggle, the everyday resilience of street vendors and pedestrians (Kazemi, 2016) underscores the intersection’s role as a symbol of resistance and liberty. This shift from public space to sphere, as Hewitt and Jordan describe, raises the question: “What actually constitutes a public space.” This “is in contrast to the way in which the word ‘public’ is traditionally used in the expressions ‘public art’ and ‘art in public places,’ which usually refer pragmatically to the siting of an art work in an ‘outside’ space” (Hewitt & Jordan, 2016, p. 27).

The Art of Resistance through Everyday Life

Through walking a/r/tographically (Snepvangers et al., 2018; Irwin et al., 2018) in this intersection and immersing myself in a sensorial and embodied encounter, I attempt to capture the multilayered essence of this vibrant urban space. By engaging deeply with my surroundings, I become attuned (Springgay & Truman, 2019, p. 89) to the nuanced correspondences and underlying tensions that define the impulse of this locale as an artist, teacher and researcher through “artistic arrangements of materials” (Sinner, 2021, p. 2). The pedestrian streets surrounding the central intersection are teeming

with peddlers offering a diverse array of clothing and everyday items (Figure 1). The atmosphere is characterized by the smoke emanating from barbecues, the illumination from irregularly placed lights, and the artificial hues of industrial juices, which are often misleadingly labeled as “one hundred percent natural” (Figure 2). Additionally, sparrows are frequently trapped in cages, with the opportunity for passers-by to purchase their freedom, ironically granted by the hunter according to the buyer’s intention. Furthermore, the presence of anti-riot bikers and law enforcement officers adds to the scene’s complexity.



Figure 1
Saman Farkhak, Valiasr intersection, sale of clothing and
everyday items by peddlers behind the fences, Tehran,
2024. Photo courtesy of the author.

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Figure 2
Saman Farkhak, Valiasr
intersection, advertisement of
natural fruit juice, Tehran, 2024.
Photo courtesy of the author.

On the southeast side of this intersection, there is a historically significant building that hosts the most prestigious theatre festivals and performances in Iran, the City Theater. The building and its surroundings form a vibrant public space, fostering open engagement where individuals naturally interact and navigate the city. Street performances bring theater to the public, creating a more inclusive and accessible cultural experience. The theater building transforms the intersection into a dynamic space where people can see, feel, and engage with not only artistic performances but also everyday life events. In direct opposition to the organic, spontaneous interactions fostered by the intersection's previous character, the mayor sought to impose a rigid, controlled environment. This was achieved through a series of engineering interventions, including physical barriers (Figure 3), spatial disconnections, and infrastructure alterations, all designed to regulate vehicular movement and redirect pedestrians underground. The sphere of 'meeting', 'pausing', and 'choice' has been changed to a state of 'passing' and 'forced', so that you can only pass through quickly, without stopping or hesitation. These measures prioritized security force access and crowd control over public engagement in response to the notable political and protest history of this place, which served as a central point during the 1957 revolution, and later in 2009 and 2021 (Figure 4).



Figure 3
Saman Farkhak, Valiasr intersection,
The City Theater building, Tehran,
1979/2024. Photo courtesy of the
author.

The right image shows the City
Theater building behind fences in
2024, while the left image depicts the
same building in 1997. A part of this
image has been derived from
<http://archcritique.com/>

Government restrictions have transformed the intersection into a space where lingering, photography, and videography are prohibited. From the government's perspective, there should be nothing to 'see', 'pause' or 'watch' by disrupting the cultural and social landscape of the intersection, attempting to marginalize social, public, and free urban life and the 'spectating' action. However, individuals are reclaiming the street in a different manner than in the past, benefiting from a kind of irregular presence within the street expansions. The coexistence of these controlling actions next to a noticeable presence of law- and control-avoidance behaviors, where the everyday life of the city persists in a non-political manner has turned this space into a symbolic form of resistance. The space that was once a gentle combination of elements has now turned into continuous and chaotic turmoil, presenting a different experience of pausing and moving that confronts passersby with uncertainty in choosing whether to stop or continue. This space now encourages people to pause and linger, creating a new kind of public sphere (Figure 5).

Figure 4
Saman Farkhak, Valiasr intersection,
Tehran, 1979/2024. Photo courtesy of
the author.

The above image depicts the
intersection as it was in the past,
while the image below shows the
underground pedestrian route. A
part of this image has been derived
from [https://akharinkhabar.ir/
photo/3274507](https://akharinkhabar.ir/photo/3274507)



Order and Disorder: Public Spaces as a Battleground

The emphasis on the presence of regulatory forces aimed at controlling the public, commotion, pollution, and disorder highlights the inherent duality where order coexists with the possibility of disorder. This ironic situation suggests that the more one side is enforced, the more the other form of public presence emerges. As a form of togetherness, where “the boundaries between art and social/political practices are increasingly blurred, to the degree that art in public places is often inextricable (and sometimes indistinguishable) from social engagement, activism, or political action” (Gerin, 2009, p. 6). Evading control through this form of social engagement creates a space in which individuals can resist imposed order and create new paths to assert their freedom of action (Asef, 1997). At Valiasr Intersection, these unassuming peddlers in my walkways embody a form of libertarianism in the movements, displaying their wares beside Iran’s most important cultural and artistic center, where we engage with their freedom through small purchases. This perpetual entanglement of people, cars, buildings, and streets captures “disorder” in a fixed image, metaphorizing multiple and free directions of movement and presence (Asef, 1997).



Figure 5
Saman Farkhak, *Valiasr intersection*,
Electronics items from a peddler at
the intersection, Tehran, 2024. Photo
courtesy of the author.

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