

Reassessing the Ethics of Nomadic Thought in Art and Art Education

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Abstract

This paper explores the ethics of nomadic thought, which locates the emergence of subjectivity as an inherently aesthetic process, and thus posits an inextricable entwinement of philosophy and creative transformation. This is positioned through a case study of Taiwanese-American artist Tehching Hsieh’s year-long durational performance “Cage Piece” (1978-79), in which the artist spent 365 days of self-imposed physical and social isolation inside a cage built in his New York studio.

The theoretical framework for this paper is grounded in philosopher Rosi Braidotti’s (2011) concept of figuration as a cartographic tool for creating a nomadic subjectivity. Braidotti’s nomadic thought follows a radical posthumanist critique of the Eurocentric subject, but importantly it must also account for often unexplored common threads with vital critiques from (neo)humanisms of postcolonial and race theory.

Hsieh’s work explores an ethics of subjectivity that is positioned not in the fixity of identity (in Hsieh’s case, that of an undocumented immigrant in the

United States), but rather in the generative experimentation that pushes subjectivity to its limits. This future-oriented subjectivity creates an asymmetrical relocation through a radical interplay between center and margins in thought and action.

Working from this extreme example of Hsieh's ethics of artmaking through nomadic thought, this paper seeks to account for these (neo/post)humanist critiques of hegemonic Eurocentric humanism that inform ethical principles for artist practices, and by extension opens new paths of experimentation with subjectivity as material engagements in lived experience for both art educators and art students.

Keywords

Nomadic Thought, Posthumanism, Neo-Humanism, Subjectivity, Ethics.

References

Braidotti, R. (2011). *Nomadic theory: the portable rosi braidotti*. Columbia University Press.