

## At a Loss for Words: Aphasic Affects in Imogen Stidworthy's *I Hate...* (2007)

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the intersection between speech therapy, multimedia installation art and phenomenological approaches to empathy. Taking as a case study contemporary artists that are engaging with individuals who suffer from aphasia (a communication disorder caused by brain damage or stroke that reduces one's ability to speak or use words coherently), this paper will probe in detail how the current collaborative work being published by phenomenologists and cognitive scientists (Fuchs and DeJagher) can nuance current theorizations of empathetic spectatorship in contemporary media art while also being of benefit to research on aphasic speech therapy. Analyzing the aesthetic practices of artists Imogen Stidworthy and Ann Hamilton in particular, I will argue that the fields of speech therapy, media art, and phenomenology speak to each other in mutually beneficial ways by bringing to the fore the primary role the body plays in fostering intersubjective communication and social understanding.*

**Keywords:** media art, communication disorders, phenomenology, spectatorship, voice studies

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"There is no meaning then if meaning is not shared, and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because meaning is itself the sharing of being" - Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*.<sup>1</sup>

How can we understand identity when the tools of language have been removed; when the ability to speak and use words has been diminished, and when our voices struggle to be heard and comprehended by others? These are the questions that artist Imogen Stidworthy brings to the fore in her piece entitled *I Hate...* (2007). First exhibited at Documenta 12 in 2007, *I Hate...* bears witness to the debilitating effects of aphasia: a condition cause by stroke or brain damage that impairs one's ability to speak. How can the self be situated outside of the logic of language, and can it do so in a fulfilling and meaningful way? Stidworthy asks us to consider these questions as we inhabit her complex multi-media installation. In *I Hate...* spectators occupy a space where the self is suspended between a state of coherence and instability,

pressed up against the limits of knowledge as it is normatively conceived through language. As language fails to situate and secure viewers, they are left to flow with the unnameable, beyond and in-between the alienating terrain of the symbolic order. By sticking with this disorderly flow of part-iterations and partial subjectivity, this paper will explore *I Hate...* as a possible site for the precarious apprehension of self and others. In this installation, the vulnerability of the linguistic terrain and the loss of a stable self is marked in and through the spectators' bodies as they witness, in an embodied manner, the struggles of aphasia and the ways in which it complicates the expression of identity. Here, the self and other are opened up – put into the hands of one another – enacting an ethics of care that de-bases self-plenitude and re-thinks identity-formation as always fundamentally constituted through being-with others.

To begin, I would like to briefly recognize that the binary language of "self" and "other" that I employ is, for me, a way of working through and breaking down the rigid distinctions they mythically propagate. The oppositional language of self/other will be occupied throughout this paper in an attempt to challenge the neat boundaries that they produce. By working through this norm and occupying its structure I hope to throw into relief the failure of

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, Trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Bryne, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5.

language to fully structure and contain the complexity of identity –particularly, in this case, aphasic identity –and the inter-subjective, embodied construction of meaning it highlights. As Butler states in “The End of Sexual Difference,” “The words of the master sound different when they are spoken by one who is, in the speaking, in the recitation, undermining the obliterating effects of his claim.”<sup>2</sup> This is the type of reiteration that I am attempting to put forth in order to question the reductionist logic of the self/other binary.

That being said, let us consider the condition of aphasia. Aphasia came to the forefront of medical studies in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century when Paul Broca presented his findings on language disorders and their correlation with damage in the left frontal lobe of the brain.<sup>3</sup> This area of the brain, now named after the man himself (the “Broca” region), is said to be where language is articulated. It is worth noting that the localizability of language is highly contestable and debated widely. However, the discovery of lesions in this area after stroke or brain damage has formed the diagnosis of aphasia within the medical community. As a condition, aphasia is understood as the inability for a person to articulate words and formulate speech. They may know what they want to say, but the ability to do so is greatly diminished. Technically speaking, aphasia is defined as “an acquired loss of language due to cerebral damage, characterised by errors in speech, impaired comprehension, and word-finding difficulties.”<sup>4</sup> The definition of aphasia is agreed upon across disciplines; however, how and where meaning is articulated differs across medical, sociological and cognitive-linguistic fields of inquiry. Most notably, the role of the body in the production of meaning, along with the role of cultural contexts and social interactions in this process, has been disagreed upon, and it is not until recently that studies in aphasiology have taken on a social approach by emphasising what has been termed the “life participation approach” along with a “context-drive approach” in order to facilitate a broader

understanding of the effects aphasia on identity.<sup>5</sup>

Numerous articles written in the past six or seven years have taken on the question of identity as central to the therapeutic processes necessary for aphasic recovery. Of interest to us here is an article written by Barbara A. Shadden entitled “Aphasia as Identity Theft: Theory and Practice.” Written and published in 2005, Shadden reviews sociological approaches to the condition of aphasia and discusses how we can weigh these considerations in when attempting to understand the effects of aphasia and its implications for the construction of subjectivity.

Central to Shadden’s discussion is an understanding of identity as a deeply inter-personal process that is constituted through dialogic relations with others. The fragility of communication surfaces explicitly when sufferers of aphasia struggle to articulate themselves and establish dialogue socially. Shadden states that:

Ideally, persons with aphasia and their families develop modified identities to communicate who they are and what they are doing within the context of aphasia. These relatively fragile new identities must first be recognised, then accepted or authenticated. Identity becomes a map with moveable boundaries that we negotiate with others.<sup>6</sup>

The consequent re-negotiation of identity, or the destabilisation of the self that aphasia enacts through the removal of language, perhaps makes explicit the ways in which identity is fragile: never fixed in the first place and always constituted through negotiation with others. But, importantly, it reveals how the act of recognition within social spaces is a key aspect of identity construction; and as such, is essential for recovery for those who suffer from aphasia. Later on in my discussion this will become an important aspect when considering how Stidworthy’s installation functions for the aphasic subject she is representing.

Shadden continues to argue that, “Identity is the background for all of our actions and interactions. It is always defined in dialogue with others, and the contribution of those others

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, “The End of Sexual Difference?” *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 201.

<sup>3</sup> D Frank Benson and Alfredo Ardila, *Aphasia: A Clinical Perspective*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Benson and Ardila, *Aphasia*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara A. Shadden, “Aphasia as Identity Theft: Theory and Practice,” *Aphasiology* 19, (2005): 212.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

continues indefinitely in our lives.”<sup>7</sup> Without the tools of language and the ability to articulate the self, the condition of aphasia fundamentally disrupts social interactions with others and thus consequently shatters a coherent sense of identity; she asserts, “Identity and language are intricately intertwined and cannot be artificially separated for the purposes of defining or treating aphasia.”<sup>8</sup> The terrain of self-other interaction that aphasia makes difficult – but necessary to re-negotiate in order to recover – is one which is highly reliant upon alternative symbolic modes of communication outside of the system of language. Aphasic individuals and their families will necessarily develop a system of communication that is often quite fragile and contingent – dependent on inferring meaning from reading facial expressions and body language, thus often at risk of misinterpretation and never fully solidified through linguistic or symbolic inscription.

Of course this brings to mind whether language was ever transparent and if intended meanings were ever fully communicated through the symbolic system of language in the first place; and indeed, one could argue that experiences, especially traumatic and debilitating ones such as aphasia, create an excess of signification that defies incorporation and comprehension within language. None the less, an important aspect to consider is how language is debased as a primary system for identity formation when struggling with aphasia. Different forms of communication, such as bodily gestures, are privileged as possible sites for self-articulation. Again, Shadden asserts this when she notes, “Language and communication are tools towards identity formation and re-negotiation, but they are not the only tools.”<sup>9</sup> Aphasia thus challenges the authority of the Symbolic order as the primary site for self-constitution – complicating the rigid self/other dichotomy it produces – and allowing one to instead consider embodied forms of communication as powerful modes for identity expression and dialogical engagement.

This general line of inquiry into the authority of language and the ways in which it structures the creation of meaning, identity, and one’s sense of location, is perhaps where we can best situate Imogen Stidworthy’s broader body

of work. In not just *I Hate...* but also in a similar piece entitled *The Whisper Heard*, Stidworthy juxtaposes a video of a man with aphasia attempting to read a story with an audio track of her and three and a half year old son reading the same story together. Language is always an underlying element in her work, and the ways in which language territorialises space, opens up or closes down subject-positions, articulates difference and conveys meaning, is played with. Often language is deconstructed and taken out of habitual frames of understanding. For example, her most recent piece, *(.)* (2011), is a video installation that features a blind man, Sacha, as he attempts to navigate the streets of London. Juxtaposed with this is a sound installation that plays the text-to-speech voice that Sacha’s computer generates for him. Through the act of listening alone we are asked to reconsider how text locates us spatially and corporeally. Frequently, Stidworthy’s installations will confuse one’s sense of space by complicating the acoustic airwaves, juxtaposing partial-articulations and disembodied voices with images of deeply embodied modes of knowledge and corporeal depictions of subjectivity. This inter-play of embodied and or disembodied knowledge in conjunction with the separation of sensual elements to both simplify and complicate the processes that consolidate meaning are fundamental to her work, perhaps revealing Stidworthy’s underlying commitment to, and interest in, re-thinking the authority of language as a privileged site for the production of meaning.

In *I Hate...* Stidworthy creates a space that both complicates and simplifies the act of communication. Initially, the viewer occupies a sound installation that is composed of a large semi-circular speaker system (fig.1). The speakers literally circulate around the viewer while the sound over-takes the acoustic airwaves and immerses the body in the voice of another. Indeed, the sound recording is from a speech therapy session between Edward Woodman, a middle-aged man who suffers from aphasia, and his speech therapist, Judith Langley. Edward is attempting to say the sentence “I hate fast food,” but is stuck on the pronunciation of “hate.” Depending if the viewer has read the text panel explaining this information before entering the room, the sound will either take on partial meaning or will exceed the viewers grasp altogether. Either way, the

<sup>7</sup> Shadden, “Aphasia as Identity Theft,” 213.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

soundscape created by Stidworthy is paradoxically immersive yet distancing at the same time. Visitors are over-taken by the sound and can feel the words vibrate throughout their bodies, but they cannot yet see or visually identify a body to allocate where the sound is coming from.

This suspension of the visual in favour of an auditory experience creates a form of engagement that visual identification cannot offer. Don Ihde offers an explanation of this in his book *Listening and Voice: the phenomenologies of sound*. In his comprehensive discussion of the phenomenology of sound, Ihde argues that sound, unlike vision, immerses and penetrates the body. The ear does not have a cover in the same way that an eye-lid can protect the eye, and can thus be seen as a perpetually open vessel that is constantly vulnerable to the external environment. Speaking about sound more generally, he states, "But as a field, we must say that it surrounds us. I am immersed in the auditory field that displays no definite boundaries such as those of vision. The sound field, unlike the visual field which remains in front of me, displays an indefinite space in all directions from me."<sup>10</sup> Hearing is not an act which one can easily contain or control; sound imposes itself upon me, it immerses me and commands my engagement: "Sound physically penetrates my body and I literally 'hear' with my body from bones to ears."<sup>11</sup> Through the immersive soundscapes of *I Hate...* the voice of Edward is not only heard, but it also punctures and vibrates through visitors' bodies. They are touched by the iterations in an affective, embodied way. They become increasingly aware of their vulnerability to the sound along with their inability to completely understand it. In that sense, the coherent, rigid Imaginary self is made fragile within *I Hate...* The surface of the body is ruptured and opened up through external sounds that exceed its control, while habitual modes of understanding that are normatively secured through the visual terrain are depleted.

It is also important to consider how the repetitious iteration of the word "hate" plays into a heightened form of engagement. Repetition is often used in speech therapy sessions to help the aphasic individual work

through the language and focus in on the movement of his or her body in articulating the sound. Repetition suspends meaning and pulls one in to the materiality of the word; thus, for the viewer/listener a different form of engagement with language is enacted, wherein abstract or conceptual meaning is not primary but the bodily feeling of the words are.

Furthermore, as an emotive term, "hate" carries within it an affective quality, riddled with passion and anger, which also lends itself to an understanding of the person who iterates it; that is, "I hate" is an opinionated claim that inscribes Edward's subjectivity and brings it into being through the act of speaking it. In her article "Making Stories: Evaluative language and the aphasic experience," Elizabeth Armstrong discusses the important role value-ridden words play in the recovery process by allowing the aphasic subject to stake a claim within language and regain symbolic agency. After listing narrative devices such as repetition, direct speech, metaphoric language and words/phrases as important elements in the re-constitution of linguistic agency, she states, "It is through the use of the above devices that the individual shares personal information and engages the listener/reader, and in so doing, creates and maintains a mutual bond. It is the sharing of perspective, rather than facts alone, that is important in the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships."<sup>12</sup> In *I Hate...* the repetition of a phrase, "I hate" in this case, is employed within the speech therapy session as a re-building tool. Also, though, one could argue that through the constant re-iteration of this phrase, a mutual engagement between the listener/viewer and Edward is set up, wherein we are highly engaged and share a common emotion: we all know what it feels like to hate, though we may all experience it differently. As such, an empathetic relation, wherein the specificity and difference of the other's experience remains in place while the self feels and relates to it, is created within the space of *I Hate...*

I think it is necessary here to lay out a framework for understanding empathy and the ways in which I intend to engage with it throughout this text. Empathy, a highly contested and much theorised concept, is taken up within this paper from a phenomenological

<sup>10</sup> Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 207.

<sup>11</sup> Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 81.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Armstrong, "Making Stores: Evaluative language and the aphasia experience," *Aphasiology* 21 (2007): 767.

perspective. Embodiment is central in this theorisation, and the difference in embodied experiences is understood as constitutive of empathy itself. Dan Zahavi provides a clear discussion of empathy in his article "Simulation, projection and empathy," where he states that, and it is worth quoting at length here:

Empathy is a basic, irreducible, form of intentionality that is directed towards the experience of others. It is a question of understanding other experiencing subjects. But this doesn't entail that the other's experience is literally transmitted to us. Rather, it amounts to experiencing, say, the other person's emotion without being in the corresponding emotional state yourself. You experience the emotion in a way that differs from the way you would experience the emotion if it were your own.<sup>13</sup>

What this definition offers is a way of understanding empathy as a process that maintains the specificity of the other's experience while still remaining in-tune to it. When experiencing empathy, we are not feeling exactly what the other feels and we cannot fully simulate or mirror his/her emotions as if they are the same as ours. Dominick LaCapra articulates this perfectly in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, wherein he defines empathy as such: "Empathy in this sense is a form of virtual, not vicarious, experience related to what Kaja Silverman has termed heteropathic identification, in which emotional response comes with respect for others and the realization that the experience of the other is not one's own."<sup>14</sup> Thus, the difference between my embodied experience and another's embodied experience is constitutive; that is, without this difference, we would be left with a projectionist model that infers that the way I feel must be the way the other feels: a sort of self-same narcissism that over-identifies with the other and abolishes the specificity of his or her experience is enacted.

Again, Zahavi discusses this in terms of some of the more recent simulation theories and theory of the mind models popular in cognitive science and neuroscience. Simulation theory puts forth the notion that we can directly

simulate the feelings of others through observation, while theory of mind models say that we cannot directly simulate or infer but must rely on our conceptual knowledge and understandings of the actions in order to allocate meaning and put ourselves in another's shoes. This is perhaps an over-simplification of the theories at hand, but it remains important to see how both of these models remain self-centered; that is, the self must rely on their own experiences alone to understand the other. As Zahavi points out:

If one accepts this outlook, it is difficult to avoid the verdict that simulationism remains stuck in an egocentric predicament. Its focus remains intrapersonal and it is ultimately unable to account for interpersonal understanding ... the simulation-plus-projection procedure imprisons me within my own mind ... and prevents me from ever understanding others.<sup>15</sup>

In this way, phenomenologist have looked to modes of embodiment for understanding empathy. Through this model, emotion and affect are understood as experienced in and through the body and revealed to others there. This is not a form of behaviourism in that phenomenologist do not infer that they completely understand the state of others through their behaviour and bodily gestures. Rather, they see expressive bodily movements as constitutive of emotional states and vice versa, as Zahavi states, "The point is to recognize that expressive phenomena are already from the start soaked with mindedness."<sup>16</sup> It is from this inter-play between body and mind, and the collapsing of the distinction between the two, that phenomenologist's theorise the creation of meaning. Furthermore, it is through this model of empathy as an embodied form of knowledge that simultaneously allows one to feel-with others while respecting their differences that I will take up in analysing the inter-subjective relations enacted in Stidworthy's installation.

The second part of the installation is a video projected on a felt screen that is framed by aluminum. The choice of felt is no doubt important, as it adds a material, haptic element

<sup>13</sup> Dan Zahavi, "Simulation, Projection and Empathy," *Consciousness and Cognition* 17 (2008): 5.

<sup>14</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 40.

<sup>15</sup> Dan Zahavi, "Simulation, Projection and Empathy," 9.

<sup>16</sup> Dan Zahavi, "Empathy and Direct Social Perception: A phenomenological proposal," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 2 (2011): 531.

to the act of looking that further engages viewers: the use of felt denies their ability to gain an aesthetic distance, normally enacted through a smooth act of perception projected onto a flat screen. Instead, viewers are encouraged to look harder to not just see with their eyes but to feel the image through their bodies. The video shows the interaction between Edward and Judith during speech therapy (fig.2). Here, the voice is no longer disembodied but given a highly embodied referent to attach to it. The video has the same audio track as the surround-sound speaker installation, and the sounds from the speakers in the semi-closed off other room interrupt a linear and synchronised reading of the video. That is, the video audio-track, while for the most part matches up with the images, is also conflated and interrupted by the speaker installation which is playing the same track but at a different time in the room over. As viewers watch and witness the therapeutic process, they are denied a coherent reading of the image and cannot fully project themselves onto it: the audio track is convoluted by the other space, and they are denied easy access to the procedure depicted. In this way, Stidworthy creates a space that denies full identification with the condition of aphasia. Viewers are de-centred in relation to the video as their ears are bombarded by two sources of sound. The space puts into process a relation to Edward that re-iterates the impossibility of fully knowing or comprehending the experience of his aphasia. This can also function to create a sense of empathy – as we watch the fragile body of Edward we ourselves feel briefly frustrated, unconfirmed in the image before us, and victim to incoherent sounds coming at us from all angles.

The de-centering of the self that is imparted upon the viewer is constructed not only formally but is explored within the content of the video as well. As we watch Edward interact with Judith, a blank, black screen abruptly interrupts our reading and creates a blind-spot in the linear progression of events. This happens after every statement, utterance or depicted interaction. This fragmentation thwarts full identification with either Edward or Judith; but also, it approaches the experience of aphasia itself, perhaps conveying the gaps in memory and knowledge that sever Edwards ability to articulate himself in a coherent manner. Similar for trauma survivors, the fragmentation of a narrative “self” induced by external

circumstances out of one’s control can often fracture memory: the body and mind is overwhelmed by external circumstance and fails to fully comprehend the temporality of the event. Victims will begin to dissociate; that is, they begin to view the self as an object that they cannot control, thus moving in and out of consciousness, and thereby creating voids in memory content.<sup>17</sup> Also, though, the fragmented identity that is the aftermath of a traumatic experience can make explicit that perhaps there was so singular or fixed “self” to begin with, as Susan Brison notes in *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*: “Recovery no longer seems to consist of picking up the pieces of a shattered self (or fractured narrative). It’s facing the fact that there never was a coherent self (or story) there to begin with.”<sup>18</sup> The process of recovery, for both trauma survivors and aphasic individuals, becomes one that not only tries to embrace this fragmentation, but it is also one which accepts a position of “lack” that had been previously repressed. Stidworthy’s abrupt disconnections and insertions of voids within the video convey this experience in a formal manner – thwarting full narrative understanding of the aphasia and allowing a feeling of destabilisation to surface.

Through witnessing the interaction between Judith and Edward, language is revealed as a highly embodied form of knowledge; it is a knowledge that marks and emanates within and through the body. At times, Judith will speak into Edward’s hand, pronouncing a syllable so he can feel the air from her mouth against his skin (fig. 3). After she does this, Edward tries to reproduce the sound by pronouncing the same syllable in his hand and feeling how the word sounds (fig.4). This is, in effect, puts into process a fundamental rethinking of the mind/body dualism of Cartesianism, as well as a questioning of Lacan’s disembodied, alienating Symbolic: language is explored and revealed as a dialogical system that is created through *embodied* intersubjective interaction.

In their article “Enactive intersubjectivity: Participatory sense-making and mutual incorporation,” Thomas Fuchs and Hanne De Jaegher argue that social cognition is a dynamical process that emerges from embodied

<sup>17</sup> See Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 39-52.

<sup>18</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, 116.

interaction. They state, "Social agents are able to coordinate their sense-making in social encounters – that is: they can participate in each other's sense making. Hence, social understanding emerges from a dynamical process of interaction and co-ordination of two embodied subjects coupled to each other."<sup>19</sup> In the speech therapy session between Edward and Judith, this dynamical and embodied interaction between subjects to establish meaning is made explicit. The ability to move, contort and express the sounds of words, for Edward, is reliant on his embodied interaction with Judith, who speaks into his hands to communicate the form of the word "hate" (fig.5). Through this interaction, Edward is then able to focus on his own body and how his mouth must be controlled to produce certain syllables. Language is located in the body; it is felt and expressed through the hands and mouth. As we hear him attempt to speak, for instance the "ate" of "hate," we can literally hear the air flow through this body and move up against his tongue to work in conjunction with his lips.

Steven Connor explores this haptic element of the voice in his article "Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing" where he states:

Although we are accustomed to thinking of touch as focused on the hand ... a primary association of hearing and touch is formed, not on the exterior skin, but in the interior skin of the mouth. For it is in the mouth that we form our first sounds and may at first apprehend sound as a sort of plastic tangibility: the burring of the lips, the sibilant puffs of air between teeth and tongue, the uvular gulps and gurgles. Sound and touch meet, mingle and part in the mouth.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, sound is haptic – it is apprehend in and through the feeling created in the mouth. Edward's aphasia has left him unable to remember the feeling of words, that is, how is teeth and tongue work in conjunction to produce a specific sound, or how his uvular gulps and gurgles when iterating a singular letter. Viewers see him use his hand to touch his throat to feel

how it is moving to produce the sound of "ate" (fig.6). In these moments they witness how he must attend to the contortions of the body that one normatively takes for granted. Through this process, our own sense embodiment surfaces, and the ways in which language is deeply imbedded in and made meaningful through the movement and expressions of the body as it interacts with others is made explicit. Thus, a form of embodied witnessing is enacted on the behalf of the viewer. They become conscious of how the self is constituted through the being-with others: Edward's self is made meaningful and constituted in the hands of Judith (Fig.7). Witnessing this type of embodied interaction opens us up to a form of empathy that acknowledges our common fragility and vulnerability; it puts into process an apprehension of the self and of others that is deeply corporeal and highly inter-subjective.

Stidworthy's installation also facilitates a process of healing and recovery for Edward. If we return to my earlier discussion of aphasia's effect on identity, and how social interaction is key for the recovery process, then we can see how Stidworthy effectively structures a space of mutual recognition and acknowledgement for the aphasic individual. The installation brings aphasia as a condition into the public sphere, allowing social dialogue to develop around it. Visitors do not passively walk through the space but are bodily engaged and drawn into the struggle that is being articulated. Returning to Shadden's article, she underlines the important role recognition plays in the establishment of identity, particularly for the aphasic subject who is re-negotiating their identity throughout the recovery process. The need for recognition is context-specific and identity-specific to the individual: "Which social spaces matter, and how do we create or enable social spaces? Simply placing a person in a social milieu does not guarantee identity re-negotiation."<sup>21</sup> Some biographical details on Edward will do us some good here. The text panel accompanying the exhibition informs us that Edward is a photographer. But he was not just any kind of photographer: Edward specifically photographed art installations for artist's portfolios and art publications. From this fact alone we can perhaps consider that the context of the gallery space is indeed very meaningful for Edward, and

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Fuchs and Hanne De Jaegher, "Enactive Intersubjectivity: Participatory sense-making and mutual incorporation," *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* 8 (2009): 470.

<sup>20</sup> Steven Connor, "Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing," in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, ed. Viet Erlmann, 164 (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Shadden, "Aphasia as Identity Theft," 219.

the recognition of his aphasic identity within this type of space will provide him with positive affirmation of his newly re-negotiated self.

Shadden, again, highlights the importance of “real life” contexts for progress in recovery, she states, “How can we study and enhance identity in settings where forming identities are at stake, typically ‘real life’ contexts or groups? These type of interactions can provide the recognition and affirmation needed for renegotiation of identity.”<sup>22</sup> And indeed, this is what Stidworthy’s spaces allow: a recognition of Edward’s re-negotiated aphasic identity, but also, a re-negotiation or rethinking of normative identity on the part of the viewer as he or she becomes increasingly more conscious of his or her corporeality, fragility and inter-dependency on others when immersed in a lack of symbolic efficiency.

The specificity of Edward’s needs and desires are upheld by allowing for a form of recognition to take place within a gallery context; that is, the type of affirmation that Edward desires is perhaps from like-minded people who also enjoy art exhibitions and installations. But one could also argue that multiple identity formations are always at stake within gallery walls, and perhaps *I Hate...* allows this process to become more explicit. The viewer is located between the processes of meaning-making, in the midst of self-articulation. They wander through the space, attempting to fix the sound to a body, and then the body to a single sound, and are thus constantly deferred and always suspended and left at a loss. This allows the viewer to be positioned as the “middle voice” as Dominick LaCapra termed it: it is the “in-between” voice of un-decidability and ambiguity that is marked by a loss of clear-cut positioning.<sup>23</sup> The fragmented language that emanates through the viewers bodies, surrounding and bombarding them in the installation space, suspends and challenges the viewers’ stable subject positions, opening them up and allowing them to empathetically recognize Edward’s experience as something that they too are capable of being exposed and vulnerable to.

In this sense, Stidworthy effectively creates a space for self-other recognition. No one is posited above the other, but each constitutes

and fulfills each other. A mutuality is created within *I Hate...* and the space allows for a fragile “we” to be constituted. In no way is this an assertive, consolidated or coalitional “we” – but is a mutually inter-dependent “we” founded on the contingency and precariousness of identity. It is a “we” that recognises that meaning is created in the space that exists between us, and as such, should be empathetically and ethically attended to.<sup>24</sup> In *I Hate...* we are put into the hands of each other, and through this process, are made aware of the precariousness of our identities. Indeed, this is a form of precariousness that marks our embodied mutuality and necessitates an ethical and empathetic apprehension of one another. Judith Butler perhaps put it best in her book *Frames of War* when she states, “Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure to both those we know and those we don’t know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or not at all.”<sup>25</sup> In *I Hate...* the linguistic-symbolic order that is said to alienate the self from the other in order to come into “being” is broken-down. Our embodiment surfaces as the fragility of language and identity is brought to the fore. Although this ethics of vulnerability can fail and the self is always at risk of being put into the hands of an exploitative, violent other, (or vice versa, the self becoming violent in the face of the other), it remains important to hope that this will not always be the case, and to embrace the spaces, such as Stidworthy’s, that allow us to see and feel our identities as fragile processes of mutual recognition and embodied interaction. It perhaps through this apprehension of the co-constitutive nature of identity, enacted in the embodied space that exists between us, that an ethics of care and an ethics of precariousness can effectively be put forth.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 220.

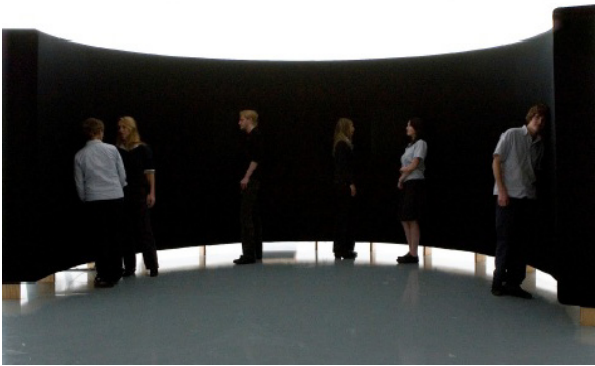
<sup>23</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 20.

<sup>24</sup> Irit Rogoff makes this argument in her article “We – Collectivity, Mutuality and Participation.” Re-considering the communal aspects of the gallery, Rogoff reminds us that the creation of meaning never exists in a vacuum but is constituted through being-with others in the gallery space, “Despite the prevailing mythologies that continue to link the experience of art to individual reflection, we do look at art, inhabit the spaces of art in various forms of collectivity and in the process we produce new forms of mutuality, of relations between viewers and spaces rather than relations between viewers and objects”

<sup>25</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2009), 14.



## Figures



**Figure 1.** Imogen Stidworthy, Installation view of *I Hate...* (2007). Curved wall: 240 x 975 x 32cm, 3 loudspeakers, 2 focusing loudspeakers, 5.1 surround sound composition.



**Figure 2.** Imogen Stidworthy, Installation view of *I Hate...* (2007). Video projection, 480 x 270cm, stage, 520 x 735cm, screen, felt on aluminum frame, 520 x 293 cm.



**Figure 3.** video still from *I Hate...* (2007). Video (DVD): HDV format, sound, colour, 6:20min, loop.



**Figure 4.** video still from *I Hate...*



**Figure 5.** video still from *I Hate...*



**Figure 6.** video still from *I Hate...*



**Figure 7.** video still from *I Hate...*

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## Biographical note

Megan Toye is a PhD candidate in Art History and Visual Culture at York University. She completed her M.A in Art History at McGill University in 2013 and worked as an Assistant Curator at the Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art in Kelowna, BC. Her research explores the intersection between feminist conceptual art, critical disability studies and ethical forms of spectatorship. She is a recipient of the SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship and has been published in *Drain Magazine* and the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*.