

SKIN or SKINLESS:

Skin as an Adolescent Communication Medium

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The symbiotic union of art creation and art-based research found a practical application in research devoted to skin modification as a new frontier of communication among contemporary adolescents. Viewed through the lens of pedagogy, art, and adulthood, the study examined youths' motivations and desires in embracing various forms of skin alteration. In a quest to find genuine answers to such an intriguing and relevant subject, I have implemented another contemporary method of communication: a website blog as a means of communication and data collection from participants. Additionally, I created an interactive art installation that was simultaneously a culmination of my research and, while exhibited, another source of data. The analysis and the collected data brought me to the conclusion that the adolescents' desire to embrace body modification has many consumerist overtones (either pro or contra) that reflect contemporary Western societies. The influence of consumerism, with the sophisticated use of modern technology and the heavy reliance on technology-friendly media, shapes adolescents' desires. My research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms behind such desires and opens new gates to enhanced communication between adults and youth. The results of my research also explain adolescents' reasons and desires concerning skin alteration: to fit in and to be unique, to rebel and to be fashionable, as a means of artistic expression and as a rite of passage. My research can be used as a platform to implement exciting projects easily incorporated into school curricula, including the subject of art, but also to indirectly introduce new projects based on the skin modification theme to various curricula subjects in secondary schools. This will contribute to enhancing students' interests in learning material; thus, they are more likely to finish school and obtain a high school diploma.

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## COMING TO THE QUESTION

*The skin has been a boundary for the soul, for the self, and simultaneously a beginning to the world. – Stelarc<sup>1</sup>*

The human body as a subject has been a source of constant fascination throughout the centuries. It has inspired generations of artists to create masterpieces that became an integral part of our global heritage. As a visual artist myself, I did not escape the seductive spell of the human body. Ever since I was a little girl, I feverishly drew figures of people, both from observation and from imagination. Ultimately, the art of portraiture attracted my attention the most.

My interest in the human body did not fade over the years. I pursued this path by completing a Master's degree in figure painting, with portraiture as a central focus. Since then, aside from being a prolific portrait artist, I have been teaching art courses that specialize in depicting the human form in various art mediums. Additionally, I operate a successful Saturday art school, *Artiza*, for children and teenagers. Watching young students blossom to their fullest potential in my classroom made me realize that I wanted to become a teacher. Consequently, I registered in, and successfully completed, the Bachelor of Education Program (Secondary Route) at the University of Alberta. In the years that I have been teaching in the Alberta secondary education system, I have pondered how digital-savvy young individuals, more specifically junior and senior high school students, establish novel ways of expressing themselves by using their own bodies (skin to be more precise) as a medium of communication. From the perspective of an art educator, I am on a quest to better understand students' patterns of affective responses as to why body modification, such as piercing, tattooing, or scarification, is a valued artistic enterprise. Subsequently, the idea that the younger generation is using skin as a medium of communication has become an interesting and plausible topic, and worthy of research.

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<sup>1</sup> Atzori, P., & Woolford, K. (1997). *Extended-Body: Interview with Stelarc*. In A., Kroker & M., Kroker (Eds.), *Digital Delirium* (pp. 194-199). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

I have to admit that I am in love with human skin. Perhaps its complexity, which encompasses a multitude of corporeal experiences, has drawn me to this state of infatuation. I also love skin for its uniqueness; like a true lover, it embraces its owner and shares the existential wisdom of each passing moment that transforms skin into an eternally evolving landscape of sorrows and happiness, manifested in visible signs. Thus, the stretch mark on my thigh becomes a metaphor of life, reminding me of the first glance into the ocean-blue eyes of my daughter. The skin's natural scent, unique to each individual, can repulse or attract another person; the skin's smell has the power to become a most potent aphrodisiac. Skin is also equipped with a sense of touch that allows us to appreciate a host of sensory experiences, such as a long relaxing soak in a hot bath or snowflakes falling on our faces. Skin (like a person who never lies) shares our age and social upbringing, revealing ourselves to the outer world as we truly are. It also becomes a medium of communication. By modifying it, we share with the world our identity, our desires, our preferences, and our dislikes. Skin does not lie, although we try to. In the end, our skin outsmarts the highly technologically advanced human, and mercilessly reveals sides of us that we never show or try to hide, such as vulnerabilities, insecurities, narcissisms, weaknesses, or diseases.

## **The Purpose of the Study**

What does skin do? The very nature and purpose of skin is paradoxical, oscillating between two polarized concepts: the skin wraps the body, defines it, and sets it apart from the world, while at the same time the skin is the body's contact point or its connection with the world: "The skin is where the self enters the world and the world enters the self" (MacCormack, 2006, pp. 59-60). A boundary between inner and outer worlds, the skin can also carry visual messages through ink, scars, or piercings. As Stelarc, the well-known Australian body-modification artist eloquently pointed out, "metaphysically, in the past, we've considered the skin as surface, as interface. The skin has been a boundary for the soul, for the self, and simultaneously, a beginning to the world" (Atzori & Woolford, 1997, p. 196). In this vein, skin may not be regarded as "a receptacle but an elastic organ progressing through time" (Zdebik, 2012, pp. 178-179).

Skin becomes a metaphorical facade whose surface, aside from mechanical modifications, has been marked with signs of race, gender, sexuality, class and age. Some of these corporeal expressions are of a permanent nature, while others are in a state of constant flux beyond one's ability to control them. Among the latest trends are body markings created by historical and social consensus. Tattooing, scarification, and piercing are individual or small peer-group choices, while race and gender place the body within a hierarchical system before the subject can reflect on her or his capacity to represent the relationship of race and gender to self. Therefore, the body modification act is an addition to the surface rather than a plane of signification into which a person is born (MacCormack, 2006, p. 59). Within this context, the modified skin takes on the paradoxical role of both armor and advertisement about its bearer. Moreover, it becomes a novel medium through which youth can communicate instantly with the outside world without having to rely on what they might perceive as common, boring, and old-fashioned communication methods such as face-to-face discussions or writing elaborate letters.

The question of why body modification attracts youths' attention is of special significance, given in most cases, its permanent nature in contrast to today's transitory postmodern society. One might say that in a world stripped of durability and stability, the permanence of a tattoo, scar, piercing, or brand empowers young individuals by allowing them to take control of how they view themselves and how others view them. Youth have found a new communication medium by relying on altering (permanently or semi-permanently) the surface of their bodies.

Since adults could gain a greater understanding of what motivates present-day adolescents to undergo often painful (and pricey) procedures to modify their *minoritarian* (see Appendix A, Deleuzian Terms) bodies as a means of communication with the *majoritarian* (see Appendix A) world around them, an inquiry into this subject is justified. Hence, the topic of skin modification will be the research focus of my dissertation for which the following questions constitute a framework:

1. What are some of the justifications behind the appeal of skin modification to youth?

2. How does skin modification reflect a *becoming* of adolescents? (By *becoming*, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I mean a process of change, line of flight, or movement within an assemblage that is beyond the youth's self-control.)
3. What, if anything, are the pedagogical potentialities of youths' skin modifications?

Under the umbrella of a broad range of skin modification forms (i.e. tattoos, piercings, sub-dermal implants, scarification), the overall purpose of the study is to establish a link between the skin and various motivational desires that would explain youth's willingness to embrace body modification for communication purposes. Within this context, I investigate the possible link between the permanence of a tattooed or marked image as a visual reminder of "something meaningful," an act of filling a void in a search for spiritual enrichment and the perceived impermanence of life, among some young individuals lost in hedonism and the glitter of meaningless consumerism.

Next, I explore to what degree the aspect of *permanence* fits into this youth/skin communication paradigm, since there is a startling contradiction between the notions of permanence and the globalized society of the Western World<sup>2</sup> living under the spell of consumerism and disposability. Is it possible for a person with a consumer attitude (always striving for more, newer, and better) to be content with a tattoo or scarification that was inked or marked ten years earlier? Can skin alteration be regarded as an act of consumerism itself? Or do, perhaps, such forms of body modification epitomize the hidden desire for permanence and stability in a society that is otherwise in a constant state of flux? Are there elements of thrill-seeking or danger in the experience of the raw pain of being marked and in the possibility of contracting a blood-borne disease in an otherwise protective society, immunized to anything connected to discomfort?

As an artist, educator, and a parent of three teenagers, I was intrigued by these questions and the pedagogical potentialities of the body-art phenomenon that has pervaded contemporary youth culture. In the age of the Internet, using the human body as the keeper

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<sup>2</sup> Countries of the world that have many industries and relatively few poor people: the rich nations of the world. ("First world." 2016. In *Miriam Webster.com*. Retrieved February 08, 2016, from [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/first%20world](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/first%20world)).

of a permanent image is of special interest to me, and this consequently stimulates further inquiry.

The results of my research may allow teachers to better comprehend the younger generation in terms of how they express themselves, and the meanings of these various expressions. Every educator aiming to succeed in his or her profession cannot and should not rely solely on mastering a specific curriculum subject; he or she must become familiar with a hidden (covert) curriculum<sup>3</sup> his or her students are immersed in. In these times when the majority of skin modification forms, such as tattooing or piercing, have become mainstream, it is necessary for a teacher to gain a greater understanding of youths' conscious and unconscious motivations in embracing such body modification forms, with the ultimate goal of better understanding the student as a whole.

Among other outcomes, my research will establish to what degree the youths' skin modification act signifies a young person's liberation, independence or compliance, depending on the individual's social standing, and/or belonging to a specific (sub)culture. "What philosophical questions can a tattooed body raise to deterritorialize the very notion of 'reading' a subject through the signifiers of the skin?" (MacCormack, 2006, p. 59). My intentions are to share the results with a broad range of professionals in the fields of education and social work as well as parents of youth. Two aspects of the artistic process concerning the installation were considered.

Pedagogy. There is a need to conduct timely, relevant studies on youths' acceptance of various forms of body modification and how this manifests in the realm of adolescent non-verbal disclosure of their selves. To date, an extensive number of studies have been conducted worldwide on the subject of skin modification; however, the research results were presented from the youth's point of view. In contrast, my research predominantly studied this subject from the adult point of view. My contribution to pedagogy is not only novel, but also up to date.

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<sup>3</sup> The *hidden (covert) curriculum* refers to, "the kinds of learnings children derive from the very nature and organizational design of the public school, as well as from the behaviors and attitudes of teachers and administrators" (Longstreet & Shane, 1993, p. 46).



I already noticed in my preparatory research that the studies conducted ten years prior cannot be reused as a valid source of data, since they do not relate to the youth of today. The reality is that present-day teenagers live different lives from those a decade ago due to the rapid growth of technological innovations and the aggressive consumerism permeating their daily lives. To truly grasp the idea of what it means to be a young individual today requires constant study and updates on youth culture, which also calls for new research approaches. For example, one could use Deleuzian philosophical concepts and perspectives to pose relevant questions as in the case of two British scholars, Ivinson and Renold, who used Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *Body without Organs (BwO)* to study what it means to be a female teenager in the contemporary Western world.<sup>4</sup>

My research deals with a subject often avoided in a secondary-school classroom. Many teachers, fearing the backlash from parents and administrators, shy away from introducing skin alteration as a pedagogically valid subject, while those who have tattoos themselves feel pressured to cover them, since “[e]ducators are considered role models to students, and they could influence their decision to go under the needle” (“The Tattoo Taboo,” 2014, para. 3).

Therefore, my research contributes to raising awareness and empowering educators with the knowledge of skin modification and what makes it so appealing to some of their students, which in turn can lead to constructive discussions in classroom forums. One of the key pedagogical elements that may help overcome the stigmatization of skin modification, and which was a unique contribution to my research, was the ongoing, emergent art installation in a public space to which students and educators were invited to contribute their feedback and thoughts (a detailed explanation to be provided in section III, *The E-skin Installation*).

**Research.** Following the philosophical concepts of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I began with establishing my position within the research to be conducted. In the spirit of their terminology, I regard myself as a hybrid consisting of three equally important assemblages (although there may be many more that my “I” is not aware of): the mother, the

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<sup>4</sup> Ivinson, G., & Renold, E. (2013). Subjectivity, affect and place: Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari's *Body without Organs* to explore a young girl's becomings in a post-industrial locale. *Subjectivity*, 6, 369-390.

artist, and the educator, that, as such, is no longer an object of correspondence to my subjective “I.” Instead, the hybrid has the power of entering a new relationship (thus always open to a virtual becoming) through the setting of multiplicities that repeat themselves into infinity. Since the assemblage of mother, artist, and educator has the collective power to overcome the hegemony of “I” as a subjective entity, I found myself becoming a vehicle through whose lens the research was conducted, validated and justified. Thus, I relied on the self-reflexivity research method, a term coined by Jan Jagodzinski and Jason Wallin, to “distinguish it from self-reflection and self-reflexivity” (2013, p. 112).

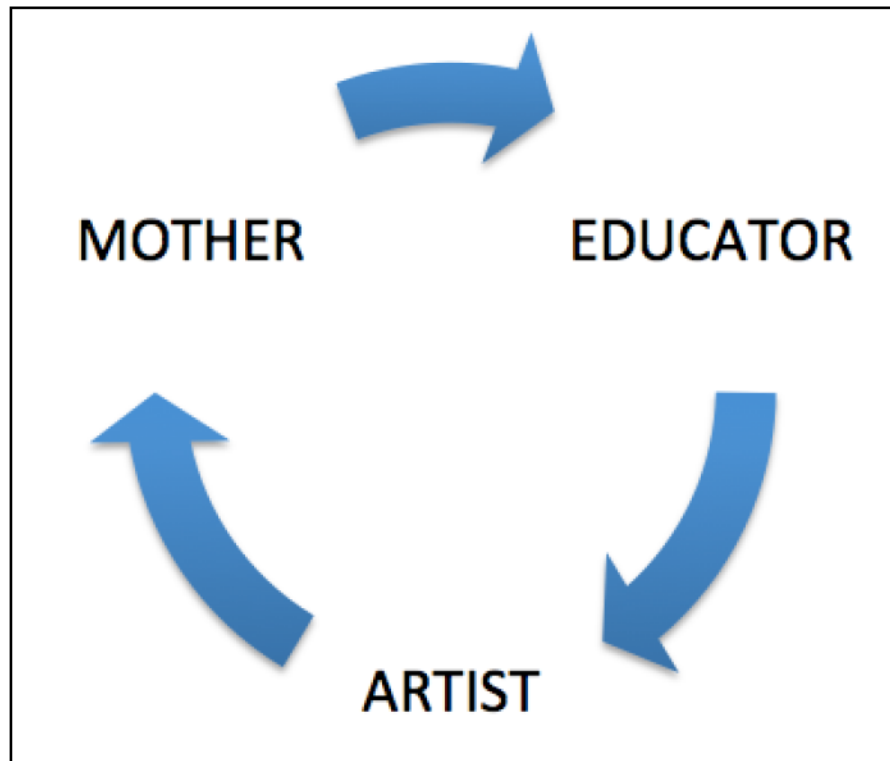


Figure 1: The “I” Hybrid

Furthermore, since these multiplicities undergo constant movement and change (all continuously influencing and informing each other), I wanted to contribute by relying on an arts-based research/research-creation<sup>5</sup> method that uses the visual elicitation method to study

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<sup>5</sup> Term coined by Brian Massumi and Erin Manning, who have grounded a research institute at Concordia University, Montreal Quebec, Canada.

phenomena alongside the narrative of a visual inquiry approach, including the *Voice without Organs (VwO)*.<sup>6</sup> Since I was an integral part of the study, through which all the inquiry parts intersected, this qualitative approach was the most suitable choice.

Following are the elements that informed my Research Creation methodology, which include the creation of a public art installation *E-skin* \ ē- skin\, complemented by the written exegesis:<sup>7</sup>

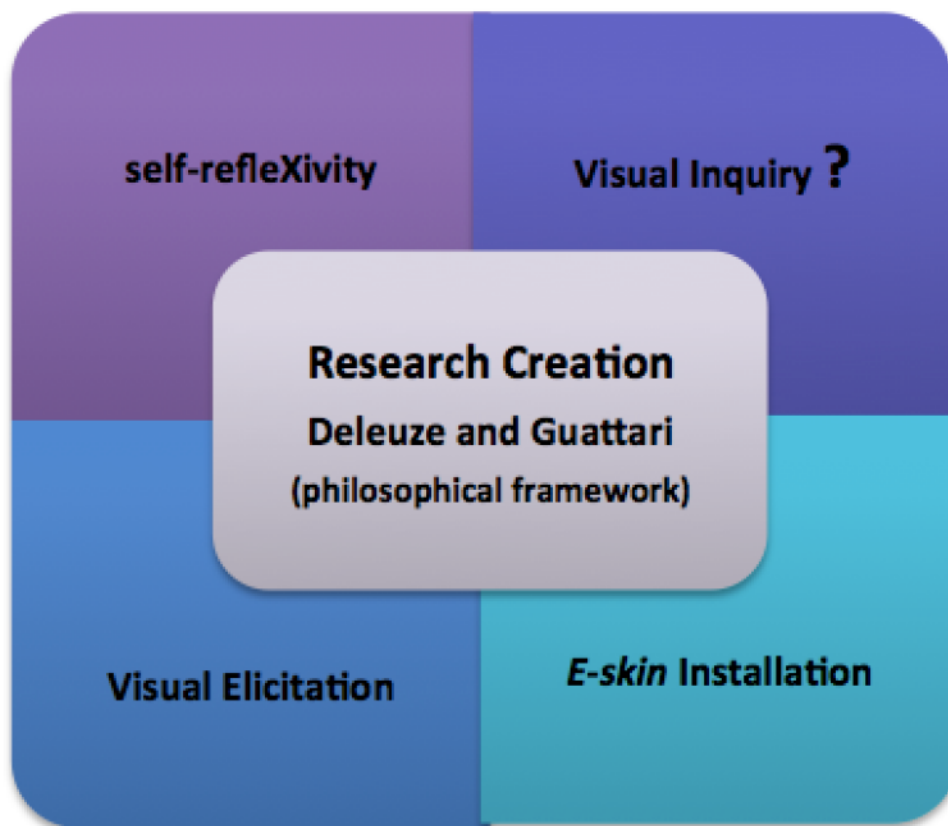


Figure 2: Research Diagram

As these constantly moving and changing multiplicities have continuously influenced and informed each other, the power of the mother-artist-educator assemblage had the means to overcome the supremacy of “I” as a subjective entity. Therefore, I found

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<sup>6</sup> Term coined by Lisa A. Mazzei, the associate professor in the Department of Education Studies, College of Education, University of Oregon, USA.

<sup>7</sup> A written component of a doctoral thesis that is grounded in arts-based research methodology; it provides explanation, exposition or interpretation of the art work(s) included in the exhibition as a second component of the PhD degree (the first component is the exhibition itself. (Dally, K. et al., 2004, n.p.).

myself becoming a vehicle through whose lens the research was conducted, validated, and justified. Similar to many scholars who use multiple methodologies in the course of their arts-based research, I applied self-reflexivity and visual inquiry as two methods of my research approach within the Research Creation methodology. Coined by Jan Jagodzinski and Jason Wallin (2013), self-reflexivity distances its self from naïve modernist notions of mirrored self-reflection and its consequent post-structuralist redefinition as self-reflexion (Jagodzinski, 2011, p. 213) through the capital X and incorporates “the *incorporeal event*: that which happens to us from the Outside (the virtual Real), the encounter with an object as the place of becoming or learning” (Jagodzinski and Wallin, 2013, p. 47).

In this sense, I had to rely on the Self-reflexivity approach, since “reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up worries about [...] the search for the authentic and really real” (Barad, 2007, p. 71). Instead, as Jagodzinski (2012) notes, in Self-reflexivity:

the notion of self-reflexion has been forwarded as a reminder that the X refers to the inhumanness of the Outside, which art can reveal through the assemblages of affects and percepts. The X is the singularity of an event, the forces of the virtual Real that are then counter-actualized through artistic production in the direction of the post-human. This is to say, art becomes ‘monumental’ in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms. Such artworks stand on their own in the way they offer us glimpses of the Outside. (p. 92)

Within this scope, I concluded that only through the prism of self-reflexivity could my “I” hybrid contribute to the conducted research.

### **My Contributions: E-Skin Installation and Art-Based Research**

As a postmodern researcher, I made a conscious choice to ground my research in new and innovative approaches in the field of art education, grounded in a multi-modal methodology. Therefore, while researching, I relied on a methodological hybrid that, under the umbrella of the research creation, consisted of traditional and non-traditional

epistemological methods. My study used a post-qualitative approach and relied on art making as a primary mode of enquiry since, as previously discussed, I was an integral part of the study, through which all the inquiry parts were intersected.

### **Research Creation and Arts-Based Research Methodology**

Arts-based research is an emerging paradigm in qualitative research that employs the creative process for study purposes. In the globalized world of academia, in which the reliance on scientific research methods has been prevalent, it is refreshing to notice that “in recent years arts-based research has gained recognition as a legitimate and useful methodological approach” (Greenwood, 2012, p. 2). The use of an arts-based research approach emerged from the need of scholars to “elicit, process and share understandings and experiences that are not readily or fully accessed through more traditional fieldwork approaches” (Greenwood, 2012, p. 2). It is applied in the fields of education, sociology, nursing, and fine arts, in which human interaction and experience are highly valued. Arts-based research has already been applied by a number of scholars at universities in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Holland, Germany, the United States, and Canada.

Arts-based research offers various methods for generating, interpreting, and representing research of which the most prominent are autoethnography, a/r/t/ography, PhotoVoice, narrative writing, autobiography, dance and movement, readers’ theatre, multimedia, hypertext, visual arts, photography, music, poetry, and creative non-fiction. Arts-based research “incorporates the processes, forms (or structures), and approaches of creative practices in academic scholarship” [by drawing] “from the creative arts to inform and shape social science research in interdisciplinary ways; it enriches methodological choice applied in the field of education” (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006, p. 1226).

jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) point out that “[t]here are various arts based researchers emerging, though they need first to detach themselves from the subjective, the (post)structuralist collective ‘we’ of processes (or the egoistic ‘I’ [so]... as to be relevant to the times we live in, the times of the digital age and posthuman{sic} conditions” (p. 2). Therefore, I decided to rely on the *Voice without Organs (VwO)* method in my research

since, “[r]ather than analyzing data in a search for meaning or attaching data in the form of interview transcripts to a specific subject who can speak the essence of experience, this methodological approach positions data and voice as agents in their own right” (Mazzei, 2013, p. 739).

As an art educator who is also a practicing artist, I found that arts-based research or more specifically, following Manning and Massumi, research-creation is the most suitable and relevant methodology for my study subject, especially since the results culminated in the creation of an art work, complemented with a written document (exegesis) that simultaneously became a catalyst and generator of my research. Such a practice-led method allowed me to effectively study the skin as a medium of communication among adolescents from the perspective I had chosen. There are a number of studies on this subject conducted from the perspectives of academics in the fields of anthropology, education, medicine, and art, such as Deschesnes M. et al.,<sup>8</sup> or Luca Cegolon et al.<sup>9</sup> However, I did not encounter similar studies on this subject from the perspective of a secondary-school educator directly involved in work with adolescents.

In any study involving socio-cultural issues regarding youth, personal contact between researcher and participant(s) can bring the most interesting results. In my case, the arts-based research method provided me with opportunities for close human interaction: the development of the *E-skin* art installation relied on constant interaction and input from the blog’s participants, Canadian teachers,<sup>10</sup> who were invited to contribute to the ongoing growth of the art project by sharing (online) their personal experiences on the youths’ skin modification subject. They were also asked to comment and express their thoughts (in written and visual format) about the weekly-posted photographs depicting the evolving *E-Skin*, Phase I installation. These comments became a source of data, which later became a part of the progressing installation (Phase II). Within this context, each blog entry was

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<sup>8</sup> All data comes from a 2002 in-school survey conducted among a representative sample of 2,180 students (81% response rate) enrolled in the 23 high schools of the Outaouais region of Quebec.

<sup>9</sup> 4,277 secondary-school students were surveyed from the Veneto Region of northeast Italy (Cegolon, L., Mastrangelo, G., Mazzoleni, F., Majori, S., Baldovin, T., Xodo, C., et al. (2010 b). Body Art in 4,277 Italian Secondary School Adolescents: Prevalence and Associations With Personal and Family Characteristics. *Family Medicine*, 42(4), 273-9.)

<sup>10</sup> As a guest-speaker invited to present at six Teachers’ Conventions in Alberta in February and March 2015, I invited participating teachers to join the *E-skin* blog forum.

contributing to the art installation's *unfolding*, since the acquired data were included in it. Thus, the installation itself became a research ground that, by including the new data, became a new generator of research.

## **Installation**

An integral part of my research consisted of the aforementioned art installation entitled *E-skin*, which, in Deleuzian language, was an *event*. This artwork, a creation of beings of sensation, affects and percepts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 169), explored epistemologies that challenge societal perceptions on adolescent communication. The installation consisted of two components: a) *E-skin* \ ē- skin \ Blog, and b) *E-skin* Installation Phase I & II. Each produced a new set of assemblages (with a new set of connections) that did not follow the linear path of progression but rather the rhizomatic coming and going with the sense that we will never fully know in advance what will happen.

The title *E-skin* for the art-related components of my research is grounded in present-day reality: the installation *E-skin* symbolizes the current approach of young peoples' methods of communication. The first letter *E* suggests the digital age approach to communication. As teenagers are very savvy with modern technologies, they have a similar approach to other areas of life. Their communication happens instantly, with a click of a button, though the message becomes permanent in cyberspace. In the same manner, to modify a body by getting a tattoo is a quick decision, but carries with it permanent consequences.

**The *E-skin* Blog.** My study was conducted among a group of 29 teachers across the province of Alberta. The participants' age varied from 24 to 63 years old. Among them were 25 females and 4 males. These teachers were working with junior and senior high-school students; I solicited the future participants while participating in Teachers' Conventions held in various cities across Alberta, during February and March 2015.

To conduct my research, I opened a blog called *E-skin*<sup>11</sup> as a communication platform and data collection source. The *E-skin* blog homepage included a disclaimer (see Appendix B *E-skin* Blog Disclaimer) assuring participants of their anonymous status and also that the data collected will be used only by me, as part of the research for my dissertation and for future publications pertaining to the subject. The *E-skin* blog consisted of a home page and additional eight entry pages. Each page represented a new entry date (March 30, April 13, April 27, May 11, May 25, June 08, June 22 and July 06). Each page contained a set of questions or statements, a number of images pertaining to the posted questions and statements, and a participants' response compilation pertaining to a previous post.<sup>12</sup> Each new entry page had the text stating: "In the format of your choice (video, poetry, photograph, song lyrics, art creation, ...etc.) respond to all of the questions and/or statements posted below" (See Appendix C).

While the teachers were replying, I began to contribute to the research as an active participant myself. The first part of the *E-skin* evolution included my presence in the installation room on a daily basis to reflect, research, elicit and, if in a position to do so, create or add new artefacts to the "in process" installation. As such, I needed to be in close proximity to *E-skin*. Therefore, I turned one of the areas in my own art studio<sup>13</sup> into a research space, in which *E-skin* Installation, Phase I, began to evolve following Deleuze and Guattari's train of thought for *becoming*.

Similar to neurons and their intricate web-like connections, a set of strings were tied together and hung at various heights (some loose, and some tight), following different directions, intersecting the space while attached to the walls. With each passing day, more artefacts were attached or hung from these strings, such as photographs, hand notes, magazine pages, drawings, small 3D objects, and more; their common theme was the human skin and its permanent alteration as it relates to contemporary youth. Some of these artefacts were altered or removed during the course of my visual investigation. Likewise, new objects were added to represent a new concept or vision that the brain was following. Any outside

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<sup>11</sup> I used the WordPress.com weblog site.

<sup>12</sup> The page with the entry date March 30th did not include a participant's response compilation since it was the first page.

<sup>13</sup> My choice for the art studio was motivated with the convenience (large space, art supply available on hand, proximity to my living quarters).



sources connected directly or indirectly to the investigated subject of the installation, such as research articles, discussions, movies, and the *E-skin* blog conversations, had the potential to contribute to the continually evolving *E-skin*.

The participants' responses were added to the *E-skin* installation. As a skin event, the installation became an assemblage of individual experiences: the narrative of a hybridized self, as well as the stories of the blog participants and the visiting public. I became a facilitator of this event with no control of its *becomings*, as an agent who "set[s] things in motion without knowing what might result, without any direct sense or intention of how my own becoming was and would be and might be produced" (Mazzei, 2013, p. 737). In this sense, the *E-skin* as an event that "hovers in the virtual realm of creativity, productivity and transformativity" (jagodzinski, 2013, p. 3), became itself a self-refleXion with an unpredictable outcome.

**The *E-skin* Interactive Installation (Phase I & II).** Aside from the artistic value, the *E-skin* Interactive Installation became a conglomerate of various stages within my inquiry; I included in my exhibition a replica of the *E-skin* installation initial phase (*E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I). Its development, over a period of four months, relied on constant interaction and input from *E-skin* blog participants, and after the final *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase II was created as a summation of all the conducted research. It took two months to complete Phase II before the two parts of the installation were moved to the gallery space<sup>14</sup> for public viewing in September 2015.

During the display period from September 14, 2015 to September 28, 2015, viewers were encouraged to engage in public debate on the research subject; their input became another source of data collection. The installation itself became a research ground that, by including new data, became a new generator of research exploring epistemologies that challenge societal perceptions on adolescent communication.

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<sup>14</sup> The Extension Gallery, Enterprise Square, 10230 Jasper Avenue.

## **BACKGROUND, CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Descriptive Overview**

I will initiate this overview with a definition of body modification,<sup>15</sup> followed by a historical overview offering a glimpse of what that entails, with special emphasis on skin modification in the form of tattooing, piercing, and scarification.

In the simplest terms, body modification can be defined as intentional permanent or semi-permanent alterations of the living human body for various purposes (“Body Modification,” 2014). In other words, it is an act in which an individual becomes an agent affecting his or her own corporeality by embracing procedures such as, among others, tattooing, piercing, scarification, or body suspension. Here, the natural alteration of the body, through its submission to the unavoidable aging process, has been enhanced with the superficial corporeal modification.

The most common body parts to undergo alteration(s) are: head (ears, tongue, nose, lips), limbs, skin (tattooing, piercing, scarification), torso (neck, trunk, breasts), and genitalia (circumcision, castration, piercing). Modification of the skin has been accomplished in a number of ways. Tattooing permanently colours the skin through the use of needles or similar sharp instruments, while body piercing, according to Armstrong, Ekmark, & Brooks (1995), is a “penetration of jewellery into openings made in such body areas as eyebrows, lips, tongues, nares, navels, nipples, or genitals” (p. 20). In the case of scarification, raised scars are achieved by either incision or burning the skin based on designs that, in most cases, consist of a decorative pattern (“Scarification,” n.d.).

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<sup>15</sup> Body modification and skin modification will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.



Figure 3: Tattoo

Recently, *corneal tattooing* has been gaining popularity (Holley, 2015) among those who dare to differ. Initiated by Luna Cobra, the American tattoo artist, this form of body alteration requires injecting pigment directly into the eye cornea. Aside from temporary pain and discomfort while submitting to the procedure, the implementation is risky and permanent.



Figure 4: Corneal Tattoo Procedure



Figure 5: Corneal Tattoo

*Corset piercing* is another form of extreme body modification that is steadily gaining popularity among skin alteration's aficionados. The procedure consists of a number of symmetrical surface piercings arranged into two vertical columns. There are an equal number of piercings on each side. The arrangement is usually, though not exclusively, located in the back of the body to simulate the appearance of wearing a corset emphasized by the ribbon running through the piercing rings. Since there are health risks associated with healing the pierced surface, most corset piercings are of a temporary nature.



Figure 6: Piercings

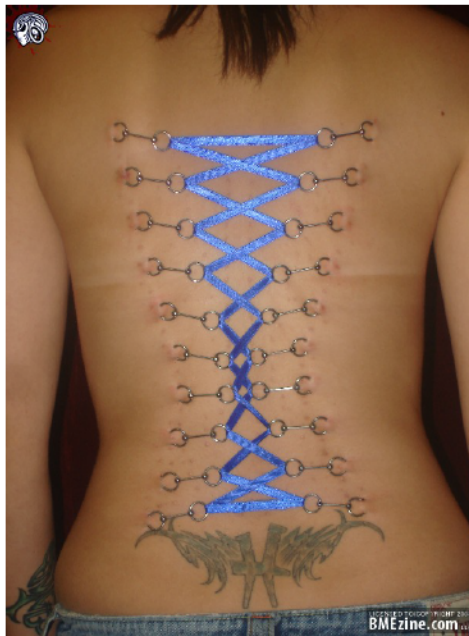


Figure 7: Corset Piercings

Another body modification phenomenon that catapulted to a worldwide craze is *earlobe stretching* (McClatchey, 2011). This procedure involves a piercing in the ear that over time gradually gets replaced by a larger piercing thereby making a hole in the ear stretch called a flesh tunnel. The inspiration for the earlobe stretching finds its roots in

similar procedures practiced among tribal societies around the world, notable among the Mursi in Ethiopia (Condra, 2013, p. 209) as a part of their cultural heritage.



Figure 8: Earlobe Stretching

The most extreme body modification involves body piercing and is called *body suspension*. It requires penetrating the body with a number of temporary piercings with hooks, on which the person's body is suspended. The hooks are inserted into the body in strategic locations, preceding the suspension act. The body is then raised from the ground and suspended for a period of time. This form of body alteration is performative in nature, and due to its associated risks, is practiced by a fairly small number of individuals, though it is steadily gaining more popularity.<sup>16</sup> The motivations behind embracing body suspension are different depending on the individual. For some, it is a form of a modern rite of passage, while for the others it is a spiritual encounter. Body suspension may be also categorized as performance art.

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<sup>16</sup> As stated on the International Suspension Alliance website (<http://www.suspension.org/us/groups.htm>), the Canadian chapter of the organization has already seven suspension groups officially registered across Canada.



Figure 9: Piercing, Body Suspension

Similar to tattoos, *scarification* is another form of body modification with a long history spanning thousands of years and seen “as a practice among Australian Aborigines dating back to 60 000 B.C.” (Camphausen, 1998, p. 5). This was practiced among various traditional societies around the world for different purposes, including the Ga’anda of Nigeria (Rubin, 1998, p. 59). In the present day, scarification is performed mostly for aesthetic and spiritual reasons. The procedure requires skin incisions ranging from 1/4” to 3/4” in depth. In some cases sections of the upper skin tissue layers are removed to create a specific design. Depending on the tools used, “scars can be raised, indented or linear.



Figure 10: Scarification (Cutting Procedure)



Figure 11: Scarification (Cutting)



*Branding* is one of the most painful body alteration procedures and consists of burning the skin creating a wound that will become a permanent scar when healed. In most cases, a hot iron tool is applied onto the skin and kept long enough to create a third-degree burn.<sup>17</sup> Due to experiencing extreme pain while undergoing the branding procedure, some of its enthusiasts claim that this form of body alteration is more personal and even spiritual.



Figure 12: Scarification (Burning/Branding)

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<sup>17</sup> According to online magazine *itTHING*, a third-degree burn destroys nerves permanently, thus the mark is permanent (Limoge, 2010).



Figure 13: Scarification (Burning/Branding Procedure)

The newest form of skin modification are *subdermal* implants that introduce objects under the skin's surface and *transdermal* implants, in which an object is simultaneously on and under the skin surface, such as the example in Steve Haworth's iconic *Metal Mohawk* below.



Figure 14: Subdermal Modification



Figure 15: Transdermal Modification



Figure 16: Transdermal Modification

These have steadily gained more interest, and have a special allure for individuals who have a fascination with and an inclination towards merging the newest technological inventions with human bodies, as in science-fiction movies; the trans-human with microchips implanted in his or her body is the ideal these technology enthusiasts are attracted to and ready to follow. As Dr. Mark Gasson of the University of Reading in Great Britain states, “it will be such a disadvantage not to have the implant that it will essentially not be optional” (Gillespie, 2014, para. 10).



Figure 17: Transdermal/iDermal – The Magnetic Implant iPod Holder

Skin modification is not a new phenomenon. For thousands of years, body alteration has been an integral part of human cultural and spiritual existence, symbolizing important rites of passage, group affiliations, or deviance, to mention a few. For example, based on archaeological excavation findings, it is known that tattooing was already practiced during the Stone Age, as the “carved figures from European sites dated 6,000 years B.C. [...] show facial and body markings thought to represent tattoos” (Sanders & Vail, 2008, p. 9). To create such tattoos, sharp tools were dipped into pigment and then used to pierce the skin. In this vein, an anthropological study conducted by Brame, G., Brame, W., & Jacobs (1993) states, “historically, travellers’ tales and the works of anthropologists have shown that body modification is virtually universal” (p. 29).

YEARS (circa)	EVENT
60 000 BCE	Scarification practices among Australian Aborigines <sup>18</sup>
8000 BCE	Scarification practices in Sahara region, in Africa <sup>19</sup>
3300 BCE	The oldest documented tattoo: <i>Otzi the Iceman</i> whose body remains carries over 40 tattoos <sup>20</sup>
2000 BCE	The oldest earrings found in the graves of Ur, in present Iraq
1400 BC	Piercing practices in ancient Egypt <sup>21</sup>
1200 BCE	Body modification practices among inhabitants of Polynesian Islands <sup>22</sup>
600 BCE	First recorded use of decorative tattoos in Japan
400 BCE	Tattooing practices among Sythian nomads of Siberia, in present Russia: <i>Pazyryk Warrior</i> <sup>23</sup>
1891	Tattoo machine patented <sup>24</sup>
1961	The first silicone breast implants <sup>25</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Camphausen, 1998, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Tassili images depicting markings that appear to represent scarification (Camphausen, 1998, p. 6).

<sup>20</sup> “Ötzi: Iceman’s Tattoos Were Born In Fire” <http://anthropology.net/2009/07/21/otzi-icemans-tattoos-were-born-in-fire/>

<sup>21</sup> Depiction of a naval piercing on a pharaoh Akhenaton statue (Jean-Chris Miller. *The Body Art Book*. Berkley Books).

<sup>22</sup> Each island had a distinct tattooing method and design (Poli, et al. 2012, p. 13).

<sup>23</sup> In 1948, archeologists excavating the burial site at Pazyrykin found a number of well-preserved human remains that were encased by ice. Most of them had tattoos on their legs, arms and torsos (Sanders & Vail, 2008, p. 9).

<sup>24</sup> In December 8, 1891, Samuel F. OReilly patented his tattoo machine that, with some modification, has been in use today still (“S. F. OREILLY. TATTOOING MACHINE, -No.464, 801. Patented Dec. 8, 1891”. <http://tinyurl.com/lr39xtb>).

<sup>25</sup> Developed by plastic surgeons, Frank Gerow and Thomas Cronin. PBS. Chronology of Silicone Breast Implants. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/implants/cron.html>.

1989	Introduction of BOTOX® by Allergan <sup>26</sup>
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Table 1: Timeline of Major Events Regarding Body Modification History

Further, piercing can be traced back to the times of the Roman Empire whose centurions<sup>27</sup> were “wearing nipple rings in their breast plates to hold their capes in place and as a sign of loyalty to their Emperor” (Armstrong, 1996, p. 236). Also among Mayans, “tongue piercing were spiritual rituals” (Armstrong, Ekmark, Brooks, 1995, p. 21). Similarly, the exposure of European and American sailors to Polynesian and Japanese tattoos gave birth to modern tattooing practiced in Western cultures (Sperry, 1991). For example, the tattoo called the *body suit* or *full body suit* steadily gaining popular momentum traces its roots to the Japanese *irezumi* – “the clothing tattoo” (Brain, 1979, p. 64) practice. The body of a tattooed individual became a decorative interpretation of traditional Japanese stories and legends, as well as “living and breathing” copies of the famous Japanese artists’ works (Brain, 1979, p. 64).

An important characteristic of body modification as a global phenomenon is that it has crossed all boundaries of class, race, and other human demographics. In contrast, however, for many traditional tribal societies around the globe, tattoos and various forms of scarification have belonged to elaborate social hierarchies by signifying: a) status [The Maoris of New Zealand], b) awards for bravery in battle [The North American Iroquois], and c) a method of attracting the opposite sex [The Suri Women of Ethiopia] (Carney, 2014). In the same vein, the Samoa<sup>28</sup> tattoos were related to “ritualized warfare and religion, with the images themselves extending from the waist to below the knee” (Gillbert, 2004, p. 26). Additionally, the Samoan Islands have tattoos that are gender specific: males (pe’a) and female (malu) (“Samoan Tattooing,” n.d.). Body modification practices were also used “to identify and marginalise social deviants” (Johncock, 2012, p. 16). For example, in the

<sup>26</sup> The botulinum toxin approved by the FDA to treat blepharospasm and strabismus. BOTOX®. <http://www.botoxmedical.com/about-botox/botox-history/>.

<sup>27</sup> Ancient Rome’s army officers.

<sup>28</sup> Samoa is a part of the Samoan Islands within the Polynesian Islands.

cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, tattoos were affiliated with barbarism. The Greeks, acquiring the skin marking technique from the Persians, “used it to mark slaves and criminals so they could be identified if they tried to escape” (Gilbert, 2000, p. 15). These individuals were involuntarily marked on the most visible parts of their bodies, such as the forehead or arm (Fisher, 2002). Under the reign of the first Christian Roman emperor Constantine, tattooing began to be associated with the pagan religion (The History of Body Modification Around the World, para. 2). In a similar vein, in Medieval Japan, the faces or arms of social outcasts were permanently marked as a “form of public identification and punishment” (Richie & Buruma, 1980, pp. 12-13) while the Nazi Germans tattooed identification numbers on the prisoners’ forearms at the Auschwitz concentration camp (Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

Against this historical backdrop, the beginning of the Western World’s modern era of fascination with tattoos was marked by two distinctive directions: the wealthy class regarded tattoos as another form of capricious extravagance or fashionable statement, while for the lower classes it epitomized self-expression and identity. Though in different forms, such a dichotomy has prevailed in North American culture until the present. As Fisher states, “[c]utting across diverse social and class groups, there are more people today who get tattoos, and yet there is still a relative marginalization of the practice within the larger culture” (p. 97). The acceptance of tattoos has been closely related to the generational societal strata: the younger the individual, the greater his or her inclination towards acceptance of tattoo practice.

Within this context, even the permanent marking of the visible skin, such as the face and neck, or tattooing the entire torso or even entire body, is starting to gain general acceptance and approval. Furthermore, piercing of the ears, tongue, nose, lips, and other parts of the head has become a social marker within some Western cultural groups among whom the practice often signifies youthfulness or a willingness to engage in social experimentation (“Body Modifications and Mutilations,” 2014). Hence, thanks to the younger generation, the de-stigmatization of tattooing (and other forms of body alteration) as a socio-cultural practice, associated mainly with groups on the fringe of society, has dramatically advanced until “a tattoo is a true poetic creation, and is always more than meets



the eye. As a tattoo is grounded on living skin, so its essence emotes a poignancy unique to the mortal human condition” (Vale, 1989).

The degree to which skin modification is regarded as a mainstream activity and an individual aesthetic expression of its owner within global societies is epitomized by the example of the *Tokidoki Barbie*<sup>29</sup> from 2011. This special edition Mattel doll differs from Mattel’s<sup>30</sup> standard version, a prototype of 1950s. As stated in the product description section, “She’s on the cutting edge of fashion with her pink bob and trendy tattoos” (Tokidoki Doll, Amazon.com).



Figure 18: *Tokidoki Barbie* (close-up)

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<sup>29</sup> Tokidoki Barbie Doll. (n.d.). Barbie Collector - Tokidoki Barbie Doll - Gold Label. *Amazon.ca*. Retrieved from <http://www.amazon.ca/Barbie-Collector-Tokidoki-Doll-Label/dp/B004WLXR94>.

<sup>30</sup> Mattel, Inc. is an American multinational toy manufacturing company with such iconic toys as Barbie and Hot Wheels (<http://careers.mattel.com>).



Figure 19: *Tokidoki Barbie*<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, this is not the first collectible Barbie doll endorsing a visible form of skin alteration; the Harley Davidson Barbie<sup>32</sup> and Hard Rock Cafe Barbie<sup>33</sup> dolls sport tattoos as well.

### **Youth and Body Modification**

Is it possible to consider skin modification a cultural marker of current adolescents and young adults in North America? According to a research group on adolescent health at the University Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, in Lausanne, Switzerland, the estimates (since the late 1990s) for body modification among US adolescents range from 10% to 25% (Suris, Jeannin, Chossis, & Michaud, 2007), while the tattoo business is the “sixth fastest growing in the USA” (Lord, 1997, p. 67). There is no doubt that various forms of body alteration appeal to a diverse demographic group worldwide, though the young

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.amazon.ca/Barbie-Collector-Tokidoki-Doll-Label/dp/B004WLXR94>.

<sup>32</sup> Featuring a tattoo of a pair of giant wings.

<sup>33</sup> Featuring a sleeve (arm) tattoo.

generation seems to be the most receptive (Deschesnes, Demers, & Fines, 2006, p. 325). Based on a number of studies involving students aged 12 to 18 in Canada, the United States and Italy, there is a great interest in tattoos and body piercing among adolescents. For example, despite constraints to obtaining a tattoo or a piercing by minors, the results of the studies reported that the prevalence of body piercing ranged from 27% to 42% (excluding traditional earlobe piercing in males and females), and that the prevalence of tattoos ranged from 4.5% to 10% among participating students (Cegolon, Xodo, Mastrangelo, & VAHP Working Group, 2010, p. 273). Further, a Canadian study from 2002<sup>34</sup> states that body modification practices begin at an early age: “32.1% of tattooed students and 52.7% of pierced students have gotten their first tattoo or piercing, respectively, before age 15 [with] 16.9% of the male participants obtaining their first tattoo before age 12” (Deschesnes et al., p. 326).

Interestingly, according to an Italian study from 2007,<sup>35</sup> there is a parallel between a young person’s chance of having or getting a tattoo and the age of his or her father: youth with fathers aged 47 or younger are more inclined to obtain a tattoo or piercing than their counterparts with fathers aged 48 or older. Additionally, the father’s educational level is a factor; having a less educated parent is associated with an adolescent having or desiring a tattoo or piercing. In general, boys are more receptive to body modification than girls. At the same time, while female adolescents prefer piercings to tattoos, their male counterparts will instead opt for tattoos more often. Piercings are more prevalent among students than adults. Adolescents who already have tattoos tend to obtain piercing(s) as well (Cegolon et al., 2010). Not surprisingly, the number of adolescents with tattoos and/or body piercings increases with age (Deschesnes et al, 2006).

Although various reasons are behind youths’ desire to obtain a tattoo or piercing, the most common reasons appear to be self-expression and a desire for uniqueness to distinguish themselves from others through the use of body art (Cegolon et al., 2010). Aesthetics is

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<sup>34</sup> All data comes from a 2002 in-school survey conducted among a representative sample of 2,180 students (81% response rate) enrolled in the 23 high schools of the Outaouais region in Quebec.

<sup>35</sup> It surveyed 4,277 secondary school students from the Veneto Region of northeast Italy [Cegolon, L., Mastrangelo, G., Mazzoleni, F., Majori, S., Baldovin, T., Xodo, C., et al, (2010 b). Body Art in 4,277 Italian Secondary School Adolescents: Prevalence and Associations With Personal and Family Characteristics. *Family Medicine*, 42(4), 273-9.

another important motivational factor as youth are attracted to the idea of “decorating” their bodies (Deschesnes et al, 2006, p. 327).

It seems there is a collective fascination and desire among the young generation to be inked or marked permanently. Sporting more than one tattoo, body piercing, or even scarification appears to be the trend of the day. Within this context, adolescent skin transforms into “an important surface for this rupturing and stammering of human habit of thought and acting” (jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 123).

In conclusion, this art-based research examines and evaluates the possible reasons behind adolescents’ desire to modify their own skin from the adult perspective. Furthermore, it provides a more insightful and comprehensive picture of the prevalence of body modification within the social and cultural context than previous work in this area. It also becomes a starting point to a better comprehension of youth among adults, with a special emphasis on junior-high and high-school teachers. Additionally, this research provides educators with some cross-curricular art assignments that are inspired by body modification, and that can be easily implemented in classroom(s) to regain and retain students’ interest in curricula subjects. Interestingly enough, tattoos, piercings, and scarifications can be used as an educational tool.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Arts-Based Research Methodology

According to McNiff (2008), “art-based research can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies” (p. 29). Rooted in the qualitative paradigm, arts-based research is the response to a need: “to claim art and aesthetic ways of knowing as research is an act of rebellion against the monolithic ‘truth’ that science is supposed to entail” (Finley, 2008, p. 73). Sinner et al. (2006) state that “arts-based educational inquiry utilizes the elements, processes, and strategies of artistic and creative practices in scholarly investigation” (2006, p. 1234); and Leavy states: “arts-based practices have been developed for all research phases: data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation” (2009, p. 12). Moustakes (1990) contributes, stating that in arts-based research, “the final presentation or re-presentation of the data can also be referred to as “creative synthesis” which often includes artwork (pp. 31-32). Furthermore, the diverse methods of investigation applied in arts-based research methods allow for blurring of lines between the scientific approach and artistic approach. Greenwood (2012) adds that:

there are a number of scholarly publications available to the broad public as to justify the use of art practices in graduate/ doctoral research. The contemporary development of the academic domain of arts-based inquiry draws on conceptualizations by Eisner (1998), who argues that there are multiple ways of knowing, that knowledge is made and not simply discovered, and that inquiry will be more complete as researchers increase the range of ways in which they can investigate, describe and interpret the world. (p. 4)

Therefore, as Milech and Schilo (2013) argue, “arts-based research needs to be part of the academy, [... not just where art practice or art appreciation is taught, but as a form of academic research” (p. 241).

Additionally, Greenwood (2012) argues that qualitative research “opens to some wider questions about the relationship between aesthetics and knowledge, and to the limitations and opportunities that might be associated with ‘an aesthetic way of knowing’” (p. 2), especially since in an arts-based domain, the arts are used “as a means of analyzing and presenting the data” (Austin & Forinash, 2005, p. 462). Sullivan (2010), the Australian art theorist and educator, adds that continually relying on inquiry methods that are not arts-based “denies the intellectual maturity of art practice as a plausible basis for raising significant life questions and as a viable site for exploring important cultural and educational ideas” (p. 95). In a similar vein, Jones (2009), in his essay “Research Degrees in Art and Design” quotes Donald Schon: “the mental buzz that is constant throughout creative activity [...] is itself crucial to the generation of new knowledge obtained through practice. This is what makes practice creative practice” (p. 33).

Since arts-based researchers utilize diverse and sometimes very personal combinations of art and research methods, Sullivan (2005) states that arts-based research has a potential in the field of education since the “experience of the artist [as] the core element in the creation of new knowledge and the potential for new understandings is further enhanced through research projects that may take varied forms such as exhibitions, performances, and publications” (p. 191). In this vein, Sinner et al. (2006) point out that:

the creation of a painting may serve as the primary source of data for an inquiry, and the same painting may then be exhibited as a means of sharing research understandings. Traditional sources like interviewing may generate an in-depth analysis from which an arts-based rendering such as a play is written. Although these approaches are very different and rely on divergent sources, both constitute arts based research. (p. 1242)

Within this context, Sullivan (2010) adds that an arts-based inquiry is “a creative and critical process that accepts that knowledge and understanding continually change, methods are flexible, and outcomes are often unanticipated, yet possibilities are opened up for revealing what we don’t know as a means to challenge what we do know” (p. 99).

Therefore, for Greenwood (2012), the results of research grounded in the arts-based research methodologies “provide a platform for public debate, strategic analysis and provocation for change” (p. 4). Similarly, in Chenail’s (2008) opinion, arts-based research can “perform, reform, and transform what we think we know about the world around us as well as ourselves as researchers and readers” (p. 10). Sinner et al. (2006) add: “recognizing the necessity of a methodology being practice, process, and product is a key principle of arts-based educational research” (pp. 1225-6). At the same time, Finley (2008) stresses that the arts-based scholars need to “revisit the importance of the power of form, not only to inform, but also to promote dialogic activist responses among audience participants” (p. 79).

Within this realm, the research methodology proposed by two Alberta scholars, Jan Jagodzinski and Jason Wallin, appeals to me due to novel ideas and fresh perspective. As such, arts-based researchers need to deviate from representational thought since:

the power of art to commence new times and less oppressive styles of living becomes radically delimited. The overcoming of paranoiac-production is a condition of thinking the new.... [A]rts-based research might be defined by the myriad approaches it has mobilized against the paranoiac-desires of Western culture. This orientation cannot be understated insofar as it begins to plot a new trajectory for the field in general. (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 163)

For them, “arts-based research is left with the problem of how meaning might be produced once it has dispensed with a particular form of common sense intimate to its hermeneutic and phenomenological fidelities” (p. 164).

Furthermore, Jagodzinski & Wallin (2013) argue that to become a political force, arts-based inquiry has to depart from the mere reliance on analyzing/critiquing an image and “begin to focus on the fabulation and deployment of untimely images capable of opening new spaces and times of living” (p. 166). In its current form, arts-based research often “remains hinged to praxis, or rather, to the notion of a creative and intentional consciousness operating ‘behind’ the object of its production” (p. 168). Therefore, “the field continues to exert a paranoiac desire to ground artistic production in a historically stable and commonly accepted point of reference” (p. 168). This is the point “where art is reterritorialized upon

the personal narrative of the artist, the intentionality of a conscious creator, or the metaphysics of genius; it fails to apprehend art's monumental power" (p. 168), for "[a]rt does not express the world as it is nor does it reflect the artist's intent to communicate or create meaning. Rather, art mobilizes affects or potential encounters that are then forged into meaning" (Colebrook, 2006; qtd. in jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 169).

For jagodzinski & Wallin (2013), contemporary arts-based research has fallen into the predictable modernist pattern of discourse surrounding method, interpretation and meaning, adding that:

[w]hile such fidelity to representation is undoubtedly sufficient for founding common sense, it is no longer adequate to a myriad of emerging art forms and practices that have begun to take seriously art's potential to create new subjective and social nervous systems capable of breaking from clichéd circuits of reaction and meaning-making. (p. 170)

Further, they add, "today, there is an emerging body of art and arts practices that no longer aspire to meaning-making in the sense of attempting to reflect the world" (p. 190). Simon O'Sullivan is in agreement with jagodzinski & Wallin, stating in his 2005 book *Art Encounters* that "[art] is more than an object to be read" (qtd. in jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 190). For Sullivan (2005), the postmodern discourse instigates forces obliterating the dominant modernist construct "to see is to know" for the refreshing "to know is to see" as the response to the contemporary visual world in which "there is little distinction between the real and the virtual" (p. 167).

Another problem with arts-based research, jagodzinski & Wallin (2013) argue, is the contemporary organizational culture of the institutions from which it is practiced:

[t]oday, we have become keenly aware of a schizophrenic impulse in arts-based theorizing aimed at disrupting the sedimented genealogies of art history, the coded distribution of life into the forms of race, gender, class, and the deterritorialization of disciplinary limits projected upon art by the image of professionalism in which many schools continue to be organized." (p. 174)



Therefore, in their opinion, “the conceptual tools of rhizomatics, hybridity, metissage, and nomadism have begun to assume special currency as devices for challenging the paranoiac image of thinking that continues to fulminate against experimentation in the arts” (p. 174), concluding that:

[i]f one accepts that the highest ethical act of arts-based research entails stealing back the greatest degree of freedom from the straightjacket of representation or those habits of thought that topple over into fascism, it follows that the field must prepare a new artistic machine no longer committed to either the goodwill of common sense or those conditions of representation necessary for agreement between minds. (p. 187)

In summation, Jagodzinski & Wallin (2013) suggest that to be relevant in their studies, arts-based scholars “need first to detach themselves from the subjective, the (post)structuralist collective ‘we’ of processes or the egoistic ‘I’ [so] as to be relevant to the times we live in, the times of the digital age and posthuman conditions” (p. 2). Otherwise, “[i]f arts research begins in the image of self-reflexion, semiotic production, or along the contours of such ‘magic’ words as interdisciplinarity and holism, the limits of what it can *do* are already marked” (p. 106). Instead, Jagodzinski & Wallin note, “for arts research to remain politically charged, it must begin to orient its task to the creation of a probe-head capable of detecting the *poetic event* without reterritorializing it within an a priori image of thought” (p. 106). In other words, for Jagodzinski & Wallin (2013), “arts-based research must begin to ask what art can *do* once representation becomes insufficient to the project of freeing subjectivity from constraints of cliché, sentimentalism, and the habitual spasms of modernity” (p. 109).

Interestingly, Chenail (2008) contributes to this scholarly discussion by pointing out that the unique differences of the arts-based methods allow “us to see the connections quantitative, qualitative, and arts-based all have in common” (p. 9). Additionally, Sinner et al. (2006) conclude that “arts-based researchers continue to devise original ways to render academic research so that researchers may muse on the aesthetics, consider the ambiguity, and reside in the divergence such dissertations generate as they are dis/located in their understanding of what is research” (p. 1254). Within this context, Sullivan (2010) envisions that “a new era of visual arts research is possible for those who see studio art as a site for

conducting transformative research<sup>36</sup> that has individual and cultural relevance” (p. 120). From the perspective of Milech et al. (2013), arts-based research must be recognized by academia worldwide as an integral “form of academic research” (p. 241). As for jagodzinski & Wallin (2013), “[m]any questions still exist on the methodological implications of arts-based research. Such questions deserve a broader examination with more inquiry to properly assess the differing trajectories in Canadian art education” (p. 25).

### **Body Modification: Through the Artistic Lens**

Skin is a membrane whose “surface maps [the] passage of time, an elastic organ progressing through time” (Zdebik, 2012, pp. 178-179). Many contemporary artists have embraced skin as an artistic medium to communicate their ideas with the outside world. Throughout the creative process, the skin has often been transformed from object to subject. Thus, the theorizing of contemporary art has brought to light the connotations of skin that have been manifested in the artistic oeuvres of Ron Athey, JON JOHN, and Sruli Recht, to name a few. These contemporary artists have chosen to explore the limitations of their bodies within the psychological and the physical realms. In this vein, their skin is transformed into a “default envelope of intensity” (jagodzinski, p. 120); thus the skin alteration becomes a fertile ground for the creation of a “skin event.” Furthermore, their artistic oeuvres were founded on a dualistic principle that allowed the artists to be labeled as both the creators of artworks and the artworks themselves.

### **Body Art versus Pain and Ritual**

One of the recurring themes of *body art* is the concept of pain, often closely related to a ritual, grounded in various facets of human contemporary life. Therefore, it should be no surprise that *body art* is an artistic phenomenon with a strong socio-political-cultural

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<sup>36</sup> According to Sullivan (2010), “in transformative research knowledge creation in visual arts is recursive and constantly undergoes change as new experiences ‘talk back’ through process and progress of making art in research settings. This transformative feature also applies to the artist-researcher, who is very much an embodied part of the research process as visual arts knowledge is framed, encountered, critiqued, and created, as insight is revealed and communicated” (p. 110).

underpinning in which the body artist produces an “event on the surface of [his or her] body” (Schutz, 1970, p. 27). But what is the pain? According to the definition published in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “pain” is a bodily sensation that is typically attributed to bodily location and appears to have features such as volume, intensity, and duration. Furthermore, according to Jagodzinski & Wallin, the sensation of pain is closely related to the skin as the “liminal membrane” (2013, p. 120) that provokes a sensory and corporeal reaction. In this respect, bodily pain may be regarded as a universal aspect of human life, an unpleasant sensory and/or emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage. Pain, the unwanted and the consensual, can be of a personal or a social nature. Although pain is universal, it is idiosyncratic; it cannot be shared literally, yet its effect can be projected onto others so that *they* become the site of suffering (Jones, 1998, p. 230).

Further, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the power of the artist’s body is greater than that of others since they are able to encounter “something in life that is too much for anyone” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, pp. 172-3). Since youth and body artists share similar perceptions of the skin and its purpose, I have therefore decided to introduce Ron Athey, JON JOHN, and Sruli Recht and to analyze the artistic oeuvre of these three contemporary artists who embrace skin modification in a way that helps me to further study contemporary youth and their use of their skin as a communication medium. The aspect of pain, as well as its ritual infliction, and its significance as expressed by these artists, will be of special relevance to my studies. There is a striking similarity between the infliction of pain by the artists, during the body art performance acts, and the voluntary acceptance of painful procedures during skin alteration by the youth, during which “the pain [...] does not lead to degradation, but to elevation of the ‘victim’” (Bilmes and Howard, 1980). Is the exploration of the limitations of their bodies an unconscious pedagogy for youth?

Interestingly, according to French analyst Didier Anzieu and his theory *Skin Ego*, human skin contributes to the construction of the ego of an individual, and thus, is essential in the development of identity (Anzieu, 1989, pp. 3-4). In this sense, narcissistic inclination produces a desire to enhance the skin through various body modification procedures so as to reinforce the ego. The scope ranges from seemingly innocent and harmless Botox injections

and ear piercings, to extreme skin/body alterations such as in the case of the American performance artist Eric Sprague, aka “Lizardman,”<sup>37</sup> who became a human personification of his favourite reptile. According to Anzieu, the concept of masochism shifts the purpose of the skin to the “organ of imprisonment.” In such a case, any body alteration procedure that is related to the experience of pain might be considered an act of ego liberation from the skin, which is equated with entrapment (Anzieu, 1989, p. 35). The branding procedure that involves pressing a heated metal rod onto the skin resulting in a raised permanent scar becomes a cathartic act. In this spirit, the Vietnamese performance artist Lai Thi Dieu Ha has used a hot iron to brand her skin while “ironing” repeatedly both her arms during the *Skin Iron* performance.<sup>38</sup>



Figure 20: Lizardman

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<sup>37</sup> Eric Sprague, aka Lizardman, has transformed his body into that of a lizard: his favorite animal. To do so, he had his teeth filed into fangs, split his tongue, and decorated his body with numerous tattoos and piercings. Additionally, he had five ridges implanted over each eye. “Lizardman.” (n.d.). 13 Most Extreme Body Modifications. *CBSNews*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/13-most-extreme-body-modifications/3/>.

<sup>38</sup> The performance act took place February 22, 2011 at Nha San Studio in Hanoi, Vietnam. Lai Thi Dieu Ha intention was to convey the idea of destruction in her performance act. <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/art-entertainment/4939/terrifying-performance-by-vietnamese-artist.html>.



Figure 21: Branding



Figure 22: Lai Thi Dieu Ha's *Skin Iron* performance

**Artists.** The artistic creations of Ron Athey, JON JOHN, and Sruli Recht are grounded within the context of pain and ritual. Their performances (Athey and JON JOHN) and creations of art works (Recht) become, in Deleuze's nomenclature, pure events or "a disruption, violence, dislocation of thinking" (Colebrook, 2005, p.4). Their performances and art works raise ontological questions regarding subjects such as *jouissance*,<sup>39</sup> isolation, masochism, spirituality, void, love, and belonging. Furthermore, these artists break away – or *detrterritorialize* – from the common assumption of what pain and social acceptance mean, while simultaneously examining the psychological and physical limitations of the human body.

Especially within the context of pain, the physical body, thanks to the 0.3 second delay needed by the brain to process an infliction of pain upon the skin, already "knows" before there is an active response" (Jagodzinski & Wallin 2013, p. 128). Furthermore, "[t]he brain and the skin resonate with one another at an unconscious level, which is not under our control" (2013, p. 128), while the artist's body within that time of 0.3 seconds "is continuously being filled with *jouissance* (pure sensation), pure potentiality, or multiplicity" (p. 131). Therefore, these artists' experience of painful sensory sensations opens the gates to the virtual Real.

### **Ron Athey**

The performances of American artist Ron Athey carry a masochistic underpinning. Tested HIV positive in 1986, Athey calls himself "the embodiment of a living corpse" (Battersby, 2012, page n/a). Through his performances, Athey, already an iconic figure in the development of contemporary performance art, challenges old binary opposites. He removes the divide between pain and pleasure, construction and deconstruction, while pushing the human body's biological limits. The sensation of pain is real since his performing body is never under sedation or any painkiller. As Athey puts it, "[s]omeone has to be in pain for all of us" (in Carr, 1998). Athey deliberately blurs the lines between pain and pleasure "in complex spectacles that speak to

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<sup>39</sup> *Jouissance*: a Lacanian concept meaning "pure sensation," a mixture of pleasure and pain.

larger social experiences of belonging and alienation, care and abandonment, hope and despair” (Doyle, 2008), the themes that resonate with contemporary youth.<sup>40</sup> Put differently, since “[t]he artist is a symptomologist” (Deleuze, 2004 p. 140), Athey’s performances become a powerful visual commentary on contemporary society. Athey’s *The Resonate/Obliterate* performance act revolves around subjects such as “the desire to make your body, your self, into something else; to the links between desire and pain, in which one seems to bring the other, about being ill-at-ease in your own skin, about being a beautiful monster” (Doyle, 2008), another set of themes that appeal to adolescents. In this sense, Athey is a Deleuzian artist par excellence who “invents new possibilities of life” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 103).



Figure 23: Ron Athey in the performance, *Self-Obliteration*, Portland, 2008

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<sup>40</sup> These theme are prominent in popular teen novels such as *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins or *Divergent* by Veronica Roth.

## **JON JOHN**

Another artist who has chosen his own flesh as a medium of artistic expression is JON JOHN, a French contemporary artist. His creations explore the experience of pain and mutilation, as well as ritualistic staged imitations of blood sacrifices in the name of love. JON JOHN's performances might be read as rituals of male submission, analogous to primitive rites involving corporeal scarification. He objectifies the skin by perceiving it as a barrier destined for evolutionary progression. His body performances deconstruct the schism between pain and pleasure, or private and public.

Aside from the sensation of pain, JON JOHN is obsessed with the notion of rituals that involve his own flesh, skin, and blood as a vehicle for expression. His ritualistic acts merge various cultures, religions and aesthetics while implementing ancient rites. By immersing his own permanently altered body in such performative acts, JON JOHN creates body=skin events in Deleuzian conceptual language. For example, in his "THE 2 of US" performance, through the experience of the physical pain of wounded skin and the controlled, artistic loss of blood, the metaphorical source of life, JON JOHN moves into the realm of physical and emotional pain immersed in the fluidity and ecstasy of love. Therefore, the physical intensity and emotional depth of JON JOHN's acts permeate a plateau of sensation that affects his public profoundly.





Figure 24: Jon John, *The 2 of Us*, Chelsea Theatre, London, 2013

### **Sruli Recht**

At the other end of the artistic spectrum is Sruli Recht, an Australian conceptual artist and designer, who challenges public perceptions of what constitutes the hybrid of art and design. Recht's artistic oeuvre thrives on the element of surprise that, and with understated elegance, throws his enchanted spectators into a field of never-ending sensations. He is not afraid to enhance his fashion creations with "hard-core" elements, taken directly from the realm of body modification.

Sruli's *Forget Me Knot* creation is a 24-carat gold ring that includes a 110mm by 10mm strip of skin surgically removed from his abdomen. The surgical procedure was documented on a DVD that, along with a DNA certificate, complements the ring. The asking price for the set is €350,000, which the artist describes as a small price for owning a part of him. The videotaped surgical spectacle has some reminiscence of Orlan's "carnal art." Like his

female counterpart, Sruli was conscious throughout the surgical procedure, a martyr who freely subjugated his body to pain: jouissance in its apogee!



Figure 25: Sruli Recht, *Forget Me Knot*, 2013



Figure 26: Sruli Recht, *Forget Me Knot*, 2013

Skin that can be metaphorically regarded as an entombment of human desires simultaneously becomes an object of desire with his *Forget Me Knot* ring. Thus, Sruli created a new line of flight, a “skin event” that broke the status quo of what is acceptable, and thus opened the gates to the “yet to come.”

### **Marina Abramović**

Endurance, discomfort and pain, physical and emotional, are some of the features associated with performative pieces by the Serbian artist Marina Abramović. The uniqueness of her acts is based on her exploration of the possibilities of the mind while “confronting pain, blood, and [the] physical limits of the body” (Demaria, 2004, p. 295). “The grandmother of performance art”<sup>41</sup> uses her own body as a mean of communication with the public. Moreover, she uses it as both a subject and an artistic medium: a body that projects desires and creates affects.

Abramović engages her audiences emotionally by “offering up her pain” (Marla Carlson, 2005, para 5). While performing, her body becomes a Deleuzian assemblage par excellence that is constantly evolving and reinventing itself through subjugation to continuous actions, where each encounter provokes a new unanticipated experience as another “and”, .....yet to come. For Abramović, the conscious abuse of her body during a performance, such as cutting herself with a sharp object, losing consciousness due to the repetitive deprivation of oxygen, or hitting with full force against the body of a fellow performer,<sup>42</sup> is not a desperate cry for attention or sensationalism. On the contrary, Abramović’s performances are saturated with such a seductive mélange of purity and commitment, so that at the end “the viewer is lifted temporarily out of themselves” (Emma Brockes, 2014, para. 4).

During her iconic performance *The Artist Is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art, Abramović was only staring at visitors sitting across a table. Her

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<sup>41</sup> Abramović uses this term to describe herself and her contribution to the development of performance art (Brockes, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> In *Relation in Space* (1976), Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen) and Marina Abramović ran into each other repeatedly for the duration of one hour according to mix male and female energy into the third component called *that self*.

engaging gaze and concentration on each following participant was repeated for the duration of 736 hours. While the majority of the visitors experienced this silent encounter as very moving, Abramović stayed the same: sitting silently and fully concentrating on yet another encounter. Each of these repetitive encounters created another event with a new set of forces and desires culminating in what the artist described as, “I never saw so much pain in my life” (Emma Brockes, 2014, para. 11). With *The Artist Is Present*, Abramović created a ritualistic performance piece that was simultaneously cathartic and liberating.



Figure 27: Marina Abramović, *The Artist is Present*, MoMa, 2010

In another iconic performance act, *Lips of Thomas*,<sup>43</sup> Abramović performed a series of actions in a repetitive sequence,<sup>44</sup> clearly demonstrating

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<sup>43</sup> The first performance of *The Lips of Thomas* took place in 1975 at the Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck, Austria, and was repeated in 1993 and in 2005 at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA.

<sup>44</sup> Though without time constraints, the first performance was finished only after 30 minutes by members of the audience, who were not able to continue watching the “painful” act, and removed Abramović from the crucifix and carried her off set (<http://www.li-nl/site/catalogue/art/marina-abramovic/thomas-lips-1975/7215#>);

her disregard for the limitations to the manipulation of her own body. Among other acts, she carved with a razor blade a five-point star onto her stomach, whipped herself mercilessly, and lay down on a cross made out of ice-blocks. The deliberate infliction of pain and self-harm within the ritualistic realm, based on various Christian themes and acts of repentance, juxtaposed with the Communist star carved into her abdomen, transformed Abramović's performance into a skin event of mega proportions.

In summation, even though her acts are re-performed, Abramović never treats her performances as routine, knowing that different locations, with a different audience and within a different time frame, create a new event. The repetition stimulates the production of new sensations, affects, and desires unique to the new event. In such a context, Abramović's flesh becomes a rebellious locus of change, in which her extreme exploration of physical limits apogees in the transgression of bodily boundaries. As Cull (2009) eloquently states, Abramović incites "the limit of the body and [...] demonstrate[s] both the contingency of its construction and its significance in culture" (Cull, 2009, p. 43). Marina Abramović's artistic oeuvre seems to reflect the philosophical stance of Gilles Deleuze, for whom "there is no fundamental separation between art and life, or aesthetics and ontology. Lived experience is not more real than aesthetic experience; [...] rather, it *is* that differential force that presents itself to affect alone" (Zepke, 2005, pp. 3-4). To echo Spinoza, we never know what a body can do.

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Thomas Lips (1975). LIMA, retrieved from, <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/marina-abramovic/thomas-lips-1975/7215#>.



Figure 28: Marina Abramović, *Lips of Thomas*



Figure 29: Marina Abramović, *Lips of Thomas*

## **Body Modification: Through the Philosophical Lens**

The complex nature of my research subject requires the research to be interpreted through philosophical concepts that on their own are also novel and unorthodox. Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that the many facets of the alteration of skin by the young may be better understood through a Deleuzian philosophical line of enquiry. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who is often misconstrued as a post-structuralist, did not subjugate his philosophy to standard, ready-made research approaches. On the contrary, for him philosophy “ought to be creative and responsive, forming its questions through what it encounters. [...] If Deleuze has a method it is that we should never have *a* method, but should allow ourselves to become in relation to what we are seeking to understand” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 46). O’Sullivan goes further by stating that even if one would attempt to squeeze Deleuze into a methodological conformity, “this would be to render Deleuze’s thought inoperative, to freeze it in, and as a particular image of thought, to capture its movement, precisely to *represent* it” (O’Sullivan 2006, p. 3).

In particular, the Deleuzian concepts of *event* (here applied as youth/skin event) and *assemblage*, supplemented by the *rhizome*, *affect*, *lines of flight*, *minoritarian/majoritarian*, *becoming*, and *body without organs* (BwO), will enhance the research of my subject. For Deleuze, the *event* is a disruption, or disturbance of the way we are accustomed to think or act. Furthermore, when change occurs on account of the *event*, everything that happens afterwards is different than it was before. For example, an adolescent getting a tattoo creates a *skin event*, which means that from that moment on, something is happening that was never there before. In a similar vein, MacCormack (2006) discusses tattoos stating that it is “an event rather than simply ‘thing’.” Furthermore, she continues, “[t]he questions tattoos evoke from the non-tattooed evince their unpredictability as simultaneously corporeal, political, philosophical and artistic events” (p. 76). In this regard, the altered (tattooed or scarified) skin of adolescents becomes a skin event that, for its part, creates affects impossible to be envisioned a priori to the event.

For example, a skin infection, caused by skin-altering procedures, cannot be predicted prior to the (skin alteration) event. The effects of a skin event cannot be measured, regulated, or predicted. Similarly, a grade-8 student who comes to school with a pierced

eyebrow cannot possibly predict the reaction (affect) of his or her schoolmates, teachers, and school administrators. Will other students follow his or her example? Or perhaps the young individual will be ostracized by his or her schoolmates? The affect(s) of this particular skin event cannot be known yet. Though, according to Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, a "marked" adolescent becomes a *minoritarian* body among majoritarian bodies within the stratified school system: with his or her skin alteration event, the student forms a *line of flight* outside the *majoritarian* social establishment. In this vein, tattooing, scarification, or any other form of permanent and semi-permanent skin alteration may be a way for the youth to differ (minoritarian) from the conforming students' body majority or the entire educational establishment in general (*majoritarian*). Therefore, "[t]he permanence of the mark for which it is maligned and celebrated is an event of thought which is made permanent depending on our relation with it" (MacCormack, 2011, p. 200).

The affects as a product of the skin event are in fact, according to Deleuze and Guattari, *becomings* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 256). So is it with the youth who decide to alter their skin. Their altered skin often provokes negative responses, even prejudice. As MacCormack (2011) points out, "it does make one put one's flesh on the line in minoritarian becomings, evinced when the tattooed and pierced body is continually asked in a troubled way by the non-modified 'did it hurt?' – or more strangely long after the act, 'does it hurt?' or 'is it permanent?'" (p. 193). Thus the "marked" adolescents become minoritarians by their own choice. Perhaps the skin alteration manifests youth's unconscious desire to find another means of communication with the majoritarians (their peers as well as adults)?

Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari state that, "Paintings, tattoos or marks on the skin embrace the multi-dimensionality of bodies" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 176). Since the modified body of an adolescent may be viewed as a philosophical problem that cannot be "contextualized as a cultural object" (Buchanan, 1997, p. 75), but rather regarded as a sum of its capacities, I find it useful to draw upon the concept *body without organs* in my research since "[i]t is through affects that the term 'body without organs' (BwO) must be understood. It is the 'beyond' of the body's physical *limits* that are desired, which BwO addresses" (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 118). Therefore, the skin alteration as a skin



event that creates affects transforms an adolescent body into a BwO: a minoritarian trying to find the unconventional methods of communication with a majoritarian establishment.

Deleuze's explanation of the *desire* concept as a creative production process of *affects*<sup>45</sup> and *percepts*<sup>46</sup> that combined into blocs of sensation, "form the basis of our experienced reality" (Thornton, 2013, para. 10), provides a foundation for a more radical thought in the field of aesthetics versus the pain experience. For example, is undergoing a painful procedure of tattooing or branding regarded by an adolescent as an experience solely motivated by an aesthetic desire to decorate his or her body, of which pain is an unavoidable part? Or, perhaps there is a desire for both: the beautification and the bodily *jouissance*.<sup>47</sup> If an unconscious desire for pain is present, then is this a desire for "painful pleasure or pleasurable pain" (jagodzinski, 2014, p. 85)? Since, according to jagodzinski (2014), "one can invert into the other depending on the intensity of the force of the drive" (p. 85), how can the infliction of pain, as a part of the body modification procedure be interpreted? Following the philosophical thought of Deleuze, the painful sensation of the tattooing process becomes a deterritorializing force freeing body=skin from its habitual impasse, letting it change into a "pure presence" (*Anwesenheit*) of the flux of *becoming*. Thus, by experiencing the opening of their skin to an outside force, the adolescents undergo the process of counter-actualization that is "the releasing of a potentiality that brings with it a repetition with a difference" (jagodzinski, 2013, p. 5). It is the very moment in which the majoritarian (clear skin) and minoritarian bodies (tattoo ink) collide, helping "unleash the power of AND" (Bell, 2008, p. 60).

*Assemblage* is another of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts useful in my research, especially since it "involves a continual process of emergence and becoming and is composed of a multiplicity of unstable organic and non-organic elements each invested with the capacity to transform the whole" (McFarlane, 2009, p. 562), and "that come together to express productive desire within what they [Deleuze and Guattari] term as rhizomatic arrangements" (jagodzinski, 2014, p. 83). In this vein, *assemblage* can be "best

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<sup>45</sup> Refer to "Affect" in *Philosophical Terms*, Appendix

<sup>46</sup> Refer to "Percept" in *Philosophical Terms*, Appendix

<sup>47</sup> *Jouissance* is associated with symptoms of unconscious desire.

conceptualized as open-ended and productive” (Kennedy et al, p. 47), something that can unlock the mystery surrounding the motivations behind desiring and/or embracing skin alteration procedures by the contemporary generation of adolescents.

In conclusion, using the Deleuzian philosophical terminology, skin modification is a mode of youths’ self-becoming that I have investigated by relying on his and Guattari’s concepts. The versatile nature of arts-based research creates possibilities between theory and practice. Furthermore, “the practice of art shows that art and method can connect in a novel and constructive way” (Slager, 2009, p. 49). For example, inclusion of an art process in research opens new cognitive venues to perceive the world. The individuals involved in such research have a unique opportunity to view reality through the paradigm of art. As Slager continues, “[i]mages do not replace reality, but reveal novel visibilities, and art proposes polymorphic kinds of observation” (p. 54). Therefore, “artistic research is also connected to the search for critical understanding of our existential conditions” (p. 54). In this vein, the very nature of creative research cannot be constrained with inflexible formulas of investigation and individual and cultural relevance” (p. 120). Instead, it thrives on the unexpected such as the rhizomatic model as it “move(s) in different directions simultaneously yet continues to explore a line of inquiry” (Sinner et al., 2006, p.1237). In this light, research creation as arts-based research appears to be the best methodology to investigate skin as adolescents’ communication medium. From the perspective of Milech et al. (2013), arts-based research must be recognized by academia worldwide.

### **Body Modification: Reflections on Becoming(s) among Youth**

Contemporary adolescents widely use different modes of communication than the previous generation of teenagers. In addition to ever-pervasive electronic gadgets, skin simply becomes yet another medium of communication for today’s youth, the latest *in*. The skin becomes a canvas of youths’ expression of self-becoming: an existential metaphor for contemporary communication. In this vein, through altering their own skin, adolescents create a new line of flight that deterritorializes the status quo of aesthetics and communication modes by challenging it. Though the most important question remains: what

are the reasons behind the use of skin as a communication medium among youth, and how does the communication manifest itself?

When it comes to the alteration of the body by adolescents, the polarizing forces in play are external forces, personified through consumerism, and internal forces, expressed through one's desires. Immersed in the glittering though empty and meaningless consumerist world, the body of an adolescent may be regarded in Deleuzian terms as a body without organs since it is a "[b]ody as a cultural object, which generally means treating it as a dumb item that can, like any mannequin, be adorned with desires, but no desiring of its own" (Buchanan, 1997, p. 75). Following this thought, many adolescents who feel lost in Western culture are searching for new avenues of self-exploration. Subsequently, they "find new ways of being, which effectively means a new way of becoming" (Buchanan, 1997, p. 79). In summation, they attempt to develop a "new" *body without organs* (BWO). According to the Australian scholar MacCormack (2011), this often means that they belong to the "community of those who have nothing in common. These bodies are verified through being made minoritarian collectives. Collections of tattoos and piercings, branding and implants coalesce independent of bodies and form their own activism. Modification creates its own philosophy as its own art" (p. 199).

There is no doubt that there is an allure surrounding the subject of body modification that plays on the fascination and desires among a broad strata of Western society, including youth. As American jurist and scholar Alicia Ouellette (2012) states, "Body modification, whether through cosmetic surgery, Botox injections, body piercing, or tattooing, is very much a part of youth culture in the United States today" (p. 129). Within this context, MacCormack, (2011) is convinced that tattoos "engage, because they are real things on real bodies which remind us of the body as materially constituted by signification but also desire, and activism, revolution and liberty, a negotiation of both as same, yet too often the flesh is forgotten or purely abstracted" (p. 201).

## **Consumerism: External Forces behind Youth's Fascination with Skin Modification**

Contemporary North American society has been permeated by consumerism. As eloquently stated by Jagodzinski & Wallin, “the organ of the eye/I has been territorialized by the advertising industry” (2013, p.19), whose marketing strategies cater to the needs of youth who desire to be different. Following the opinion of the American scholar Mary Kosut, the immense popularity of tattoos as a cultural phenomenon is directly related to the commodification of the body in a consumerist-oriented postmodern society (Kosut, 2006, p. 1040). Therefore, I decided to investigate the role of a consumerist culture in popularizing various forms of skin alteration among youth. Furthermore, I wanted to find answers to a question such as: Is it possible that powerful forces hide behind the tattoo phenomenon, manipulating the subconscious desires of the youthful masses? Especially now, in the age of technological revolution and global surveillance, the young generation must be especially vigilant to avoid indoctrination. I was also wondering: Is a teenager, acquiring a tattoo similar to that of Rihanna,<sup>48</sup> the super-star singer, in a desire to be or look like her, free of media manipulations? I definitely wanted to investigate such a possibility.

Western culture, under the schismatic spell of diverse richness and yet spiritual emptiness, has created an ontological void among the younger generation. In effect, there has been a visible trend manifested as a “regression back to a primitive embodiment of experience and a rebellion against that which was once the status quo” (Kellett, 2009, para. 1). Furthermore, various forms of body alteration become a permanent feature on the popular culture's firmament. Following Kellett, “[w]hat was once on the fringe and unworthy of cultural attention is now commonplace.” For example, tattooing, as a respected art form, has recently been “disenfranchised by the cultural institutions and ideologies that define what is popular, what is art” (2009, para. 1).

If deterritorialization, as understood by Deleuze and Guattari, suggests escaping the determination of society and capital by reclaiming the body as a site of experimentation, then in some ways the incorporation of body modification into the hegemonic body politic

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<sup>48</sup> The singer even published on her official fansite, *Rihanna Daily*: “I like hanging out in tattoo shops. I am so intrigued by tattoos. It's an entire culture, and I study it. Sometimes I go with friends, or just by myself. I get bum-rushed, but I don't care. I don't take security” <http://rihannadaily.com/rihanna/tattoos/>.

would suggest that body modification has lost its minoritarian status. However, the advent of more extreme body modification practices – such as branding and scarring, involving not only considerable pain to the subject but permanent and highly-visible de-markation – would suggest that the minoritarian impulse towards de-territorialization and control over one’s body has been pushed or relocated to more extreme body modification practices. One could say that as social codes become territorialized and appropriated into the hegemonic system of representation under capital, as tattoos and piercings now being common practice of adolescent self-actualization, youth, in turn, are finding more extreme modes of (de)territorializing their bodies, ways deemed too grotesque and too painful by current standards of cool.

### **Desires: Internal Forces and their Lasting Effects on Youth**

According to MacCormack (2011), from a sociological perspective, the modified body of a North American has been labeled as “modern, primitive, fashionable, extreme (an unstable matter of degree more than essence), representative of self-expression, a mark of subcultural belonging” (p. 190). For some researchers, the present capitalist economy has not only commoditized individuals’ lives, but also their bodies (Fisher, 2002, p. 103). Since the concept of permanence is not embedded in capitalism, and “[i]f the American body is a commodity, tattooing and other forms of permanent body modification can be construed as a way in which the individual reclaims some power over his/her own body” (Fisher, 2002, p. 103). The drive to skin alteration by youth may be also heavily influenced by their desire to create a sense of ownership, and thus control, of his or her own body that can manifest itself in a multitude of different ways.

Overstimulation from mass culture, new technologies, and consumerism can have a negative impact on adolescents’ self-identity. To find a way out of such excess and in an effort to gain control over their lives (manifested through their bodies), young individuals may turn to their own skin as a form of self-expression and self re-discovery. In these terms, skin modification is equated with one’s body identity. To that extent, body piercing is now accepted by a growing, mainstream group of teenagers as an important avenue for self-expression “to herald their uniqueness” (Armstrong et al., p. 404), while simultaneously

their modified skin becomes a contemporary signifier of belonging to a certain community or group. Thus, modification becomes a *plane of consistency* over a collective group (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 191). Body modification unites youth, who may have nothing else in common, through the sharing of a singular intensity.

Thus, the altered youth's body becomes, in a Deleuzian sense, the *skin event* thriving on an adolescent's desires such as individuality, narcissism, spiritualism, belonging, and art/aesthetics. As MacCormac puts it, "[t]his shopping list of motives and affects could continue infinitely" (2006, p. 72). Interestingly, while some researchers regard youth's skin alteration as a "sign of rebellion, youth, trendiness, or some amalgam of coolness" (Koshut, 2006, p.1039), other researchers view skin alteration as "the externalization of self as an enacting entity in the world" (MacCormack, 2006, p. 59). Within this context, the altered skin of an individual can only bring his or her uniqueness into play through social relations with other individuals. For Sullivan (2001), "[t]his perpetual fleshed encounter determines that both self and the other are continuously (re)constituted, are (re)read and (re)written, mark and are marked" (p. 35). In today's world, skin alteration has been popularized among adolescents through their role models by various media outlets, the Internet, and social media. Popular artists such as Adam Levine (lead singer of the band Maroon 5), or famous athletes such as soccer star David Beckham, who sport multiple tattoos and/or piercings, influence teens to follow them or to *become the other*. Often, skin alteration appears "as a carefree rite of passage" (Gunter et al., 2004, p. 67).

When considering skin modification as a mode of self-becoming, pain plays an integral role by becoming a plateau of intensities and sensations, leading to the creation of affects. Pain thus becomes an affect that produces other affects. In some cases, skin alteration may be connected with a young individual's negative perception of his or her own body image. In that instance, the pain affect will be similar to that of one associated with corporal pathologies such as "self harming" or anorexia. Female adolescents, especially, may find in skin alteration an antidote to dissatisfaction with their bodies that allows them to "attain a certain image as a result of social pressures to appear attractive" (MacCormack, 2006, p. 67).

From a youth perspective, skin modification may be regarded as a symptom of resistance against the control by adults, or in general, the neo-liberal establishment. It seems that present governments strive to regulate every aspect of young people's lives, from their position within the family (children's rights), school (mandatory schooling until the age of 16, zero-tolerance policies, anti-bullying laws), to societal standing (such as the rating of movies, the minimum age to enter bars, alcohol consumption, or cigarette smoking). This also includes control over the experience of pain by young individuals. The youth of today have been protected from harm, hence pain, through a growing number of legislations, such as mandatory bicycle helmets or safe playgrounds. These are propagated on websites and blogs such as *Parachute Canada* whose mission is focused on "preventing injuries and saving lives" of Canadian children and youth.<sup>49</sup> Statements such as "four out of five brain injuries could be prevented if every cyclist wore a helmet," or "traumatic brain injury, which appears to be increasing, has been reported to account for [...] 67 per cent of all skier deaths in children" (*Parachute Canada*) contribute to fear-mongering among the population.

Therefore, youths' longing for pain in the form of skin alteration may be regarded as their subconscious response to the sterilization of their environment; the adolescent whose childhood is robbed of any possible "harm-causing" objects and situations naturally long for danger, harm, and pain. The conscious and unconscious desire for the forbidden, the *jouissance*, connected to the abuse of skin by harming it, the urge to experience the sensation of pain as a way of another becoming is what contemporary youth may be screaming for. Thus, the skin with its markings becomes a political statement of youth; further, markings on a youth's skin are a signal to their peers about his or her revolt. It is a sign of solidarity, a sign of mobilizing the forces against the *Other*, the capitalist establishment.

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<sup>49</sup> Parachute is a national charitable organization, formed in July 2012, which unites the former organizations of Safe Communities Canada, Safe Kids Canada, SMARTRISK and ThinkFirst Canada into one strong leader in injury prevention.

## **Philosophical Framework: Concepts of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari**

In my research, I relied on Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical framework to conceptualize youth culture and its affiliation with skin alteration as a communication medium. Specifically, I drew upon the concept of *event* as translated into the *event* of skin modification. This closely relates to the bodily sensation of pain as an active and affirmative expression of life and joy (*jouissance*). For Deleuze, the descriptive nature of art lies with art's ability not merely to re-describe, but rather "art has a material capacity to evoke and to question through non-mimetic means, by producing different affects" (Colman, 2010, p. 15).

Within this realm, I applied the visual elicitation method to study phenomena alongside the narrative of a visual inquiry approach by using Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the *Body without Organs*. I enriched it with its extra version *Voice without Organs* (*VwO*), especially since my research included conversation (written and verbal) with participants. I found that the multiplicity of "voices" = participants' shared experiences formed my convictions and results. As stated by Mazzei (2013, p. 734), "in Deleuzo-Guattarian ontology, there is no present, conscious, coherent individual who 'knows who she is, says what she means and means what she says'" (cited in MacLure, 2009, p. 104). She continues, "Thus, we decouple voice – words spoken and words written in transcripts – from an intentional, agentic humanist subject and move to VwO, voice thought as an assemblage, a complex network of human and nonhuman agents that exceeds the traditional notion of the individual" (2013, p. 734).

If traditional notions of the individual rests on the modernist conception of subjectivity as the Cartesian process of thinking as a solitary activity inside a human's mind, and agency as the action as a result of that solitary thought process, then the multiplicity of voices used in my research process, the forms and means of communicating, both visual and oral, experimental and empirical challenged that modernist bias by producing an amalgam of forces, desires, and intensities. The participants, their voices (shared comments), the exhibitions, blog with posted questions, and data analysis – are all the forces present during the research that created the assemblage VwO/BwO. During my research, the assemblage BwO was not static; instead everything was in a continuous, unbreakable process of making



and unmaking as a pure process of *becoming*. As such, the *E-skin* assemblage was to be regarded as the *E-skin* BwO. To fully comprehend the scope of problematic, my reliance on *assemblage theory* was essential, since its application “encourages new and divergent thoughts, to yield new lines of inquiry” (Kennedy, Zapasnik, McCann, Bruce, 2013, p. 63).

Therefore, I began with the concept of assemblage (*agencement*) invented and popularized by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The assemblage was of special interest to me, since it is a continuing process of spontaneous arrangement of diverse bodies into “new associations among its elements, thus bringing them into a new kind of relationship” (Buchanan, 2015, p. 384). Therefore, an assemblage may be regarded as a “breathing” complex organism of a non-static nature. Furthermore, as Buchanan (2015) eloquently describes it, “the assemblage is purposeful, it is not simply a happenstance collocation of people, materials and actions, but the deliberate realisation of a distinctive plan (abstract machine); lastly, the assemblage is a multiplicity, which means its components are both known and integral to its existence, not unknown and undecided” (p. 385).

As such, Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory was ideal for my research, since it presented, “a new conceptualization that opens up these arenas for new modes of engagement” (Kennedy et al, 2013, p. 50). Among others, this theory allowed investigation to be more flexible and “adventurous” in terms of choosing the right approach. Following Steven Shaviro’s (2009) argument, assemblage theory “is not a totalisation, a definitive tracing of limits, or a final theory of everything. It is rather an expansion of possibilities, an invention of new methods and new perspectives, an active ‘entertainment’ of things, feelings, ideas, and propositions that were previously unavailable to us” (pp. 148–149) (in Kennedy et al, 2013, p. 62). Therefore, through the prism of an ever-reinventing assemblage, I could feel unrestrained to conduct research on an unconventional and multifaceted subject of skin alteration and its communication power among adolescents.

## **The *E-skin* Interactive Installation**

An integral part of my research consisted of the aforementioned art installation entitled *E-skin* that, in Deleuzian language, was *an event*. This artwork – a creation of beings of sensation, affects and precepts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 169) – explored epistemologies that challenge societal perceptions on adolescent communication. The first component of my installation was the Blog *E-skin* \ē- skin\, which produced its own unique set of assemblages and connections, and was followed by the second, the *E-skin* Installation Phase I & II, with its own set of connections – neither following the linear path of progression but rather a rhizomatic coming and going, with the sense that we will never fully know in advance what will happen.

The installation *E-skin*, with the *E* in the title grounding it in the reality of the present day by referring to the digital approach to communication, reflects the contemporary method of communication. As teenagers adopt modern technologies, they adopt a similar approach to other areas of life. This communication happens instantly, with a click of a button and often in passing, but the message becomes permanent in cyber space. In the same manner, to modify a body, like getting a tattoo, might be a quick decision but carries with it permanent consequences.

### **The *E-skin* Blog**

As part of my research, I conducted a blog called *E-skin* as a means of communication and data collection. I recruited 29 teachers across the province of Alberta, ages 24 to 63 years old, 25 females and 4 males. The teachers were initially verbally invited to participate via the Internet, and all were working with junior and senior high school students. E-mail addresses were solicited from interested participants as further means of communication. In February and March of 2015, I solicited future participants while participating at Teachers' Conventions held in various cities across Alberta. The *E-skin* blog lasted from March 30, 2015 to July 20, 2015, four months in total.

Access to the *E-skin* blog was secured; only participants with a valid code could enter. There was an initial e-mail letter sent to each potential participant asking for his or her confirmation regarding involvement, as well as a set of rules to follow while being a part of the research. After I received each participant's confirmation letter stating that they wanted to be involved and move forward, they were granted the access code to the blog.

The *E-skin* blog homepage included a disclaimer assuring participants of their anonymous status and also that the data collected will be used only by me – the researcher – for my dissertation and for future publications pertaining to the researched subject. The participants were made aware that they could withdraw at any time without providing justification for their decision. They were told the access password to the *E-skin* blog was not to be shared with other parties, and that any entry posted would be printed and then included in the *E-skin* installation without revealing the owner's identity. Regarding questions or comments, I included my university e-mail address as the contact information.

The *E-skin* blog consisted of a home page and eight additional entry pages. Each page represented a new entry date (March 30, April 13, April 27, May 11, May 25, June 8, June 22 and July 6). The participants were instructed in the disclaimer and e-mail with the *E-skin* blog's code about procedure and order, in which the pages should be accessed. Only after becoming familiar with the disclaimer, participants were able to access the specific page. Each page contained a set of questions or statements, a number of images pertaining to the posted questions and statements, and a participants' response compilation pertaining to a previous post. Each new entry page had the text stating, "In the format of your choice (video, poetry, photograph, song lyrics, art creation, ...etc.), respond to all of the questions and/or statements posted below."

To make it easier for participants, the set of questions and statements were placed on the top and the bottom of each entry page. The participants were then asked to share their points of view, convictions, and even personal stories and experience on the posted subject(s). After their first posting, each participant's e-mail address was removed and instead a number was assigned (for example, Participant 1, Participant 4, or Participant 32). The participants had a two-week period to respond. Participants' statement entries were secured, so that a participant who posted it could only edit each entry.

After two weeks, the participants' could access the next entry page to become familiar with a new posting and respond to it accordingly. Prior to next entry date, there was a new e-mail sent to participants prompting them to continue in the next phase.

The first entry page dated March 30, 2015, and included two questions along a set of two photographs pertaining to the nature of the posted questions:

1. What is your position on youth skin modification?
2. Did you have prior experience with body modification in your personal or professional life?

All 29 participants provided answers to both questions, while some made a specific reference to photographic images included on the entry page. The length of each individual response varied from a couple of sentences (participant #3) to a 505-word statement (participant #26). The majority of the participants posted their response within the first week.

While the teachers were replying, I began to contribute to the research as an active participant myself. The first part of the *E-skin* evolution included my presence in the installation room on a daily basis to reflect, research, elicit, and, if in a position to do so, create or add new artefacts to the “in process” installation. As such, I needed to be in close proximity to the *E-skin*. Therefore, I turned one of the areas in my own art studio into a research space, in which *E-skin* Installation, Phase I, began to evolve following Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *becoming*.

The *E-skin* research space hosting the *becoming* installation was approximately 12' x 9' x 8' dimensions. This art-research area visually and conceptually became a metaphor for the human brain, which continuously processes – and re-processes – information by engaging sensory stimuli, since “[i]t is the brain that thinks and not man- the latter being only a cerebral crystallisation of the former” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 210).

Similar to neurons and their intricate web-like connections, a set of strings were tied together and hung at various heights (some loose, and some tight), following different directions, intersecting the space while attached to the walls. With each passing day, more

artefacts were attached or hung from these strings, such as photographs, hand notes, magazine pages, drawings, small 3D objects, and more; their common theme was the human skin and its permanent alteration as it relates to contemporary youth. Some of these artefacts were altered or removed during the course of my visual investigation. Likewise, new objects were added to represent a new concept or vision that the brain was following. Any outside sources connected directly or indirectly to the investigated subject of the installation, such as research articles, discussions, movies, and the *E-skin* blog conversations, had the potential to contribute to the continually evolving *E-skin*.

The participants' responses were added to the *E-skin* installation. As a skin event, the installation became an assemblage of individual experiences: the narrative of a hybridized self, as well as the stories of the blog participants and the visiting public. I became a facilitator of this event with no control of its *becomings* as an agent who "set[s] things in motion without knowing what might result, without any direct sense or intention of how my own becoming was and would be and might be produced" (Mazzei, 2013, p. 737). In this sense, the *E-skin* as an event that "hovers in the virtual realm of creativity, productivity and transformativity" (jagodzinski, 2013, p. 3) became itself a self-refleXion with an unpredictable outcome.



Figure 30: *E-skin* installation, phase I (March 30-April 12, 2015)

The second entry page, dated April 13, 2015, included two questions accompanied by a set of ten photographs pertaining to the nature of the posted questions. Additionally, the post included a compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry and a link to the “Body as Surface” article pertaining to the subject discussed. The participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. In your opinion, what is the allure for adolescents to desire or/and engage in skin alteration?
2. Is consumerist culture affecting adolescents’ decisions to modify their bodies?

Twenty-one participants provided answers to both questions, with some making specific references to photographic images. The length of individual responds varied from a

couple of sentences (participant #10) to a 314-word statement (participant #23). Most participants' responses were one paragraph per question. The responses were spread out: the participants provided answers throughout a two-week period.



Figure 31: *E-skin* installation, phase I (March 30-April 12, 2015)

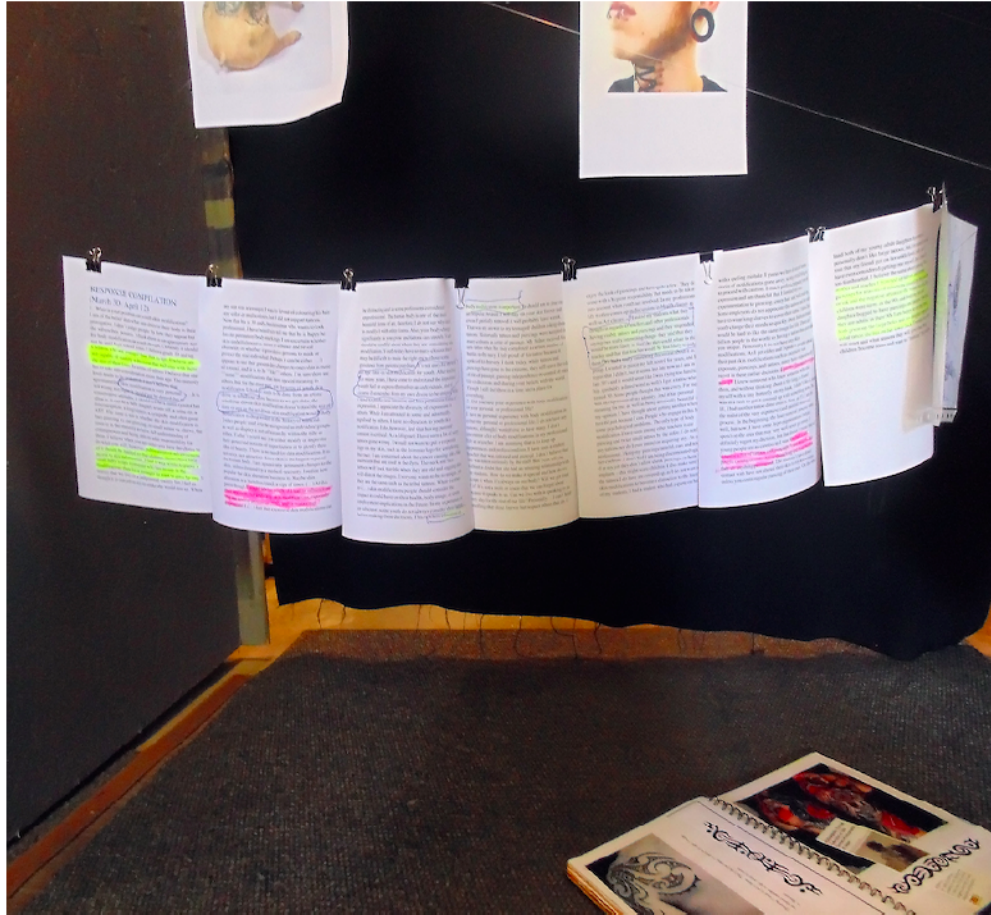


Figure 32: *E-skin* installation, phase I (April 13-26, 2015)

The third entry page, dated April 27, 2015, included two questions along with a set of eight photographs accompanying them and the compilation of responses from the previous entry. The participants were asked to answer following questions:

1. In your opinion, why does the adolescent choose permanent body modification versus semi-permanent?
2. Can (altered) skin be regarded as another medium of communication among youth?

Twenty-two participants provided answers to both questions. The length of individual responds varied from a couple of sentences (participants # 15 and 28) to a 323-word statement (Participant #5). One of the participants (participant # 21) included a link to



the video and “The Teens and Tattoos: Would You Let Your Teen Get Inked?” article as a part of her commentary.

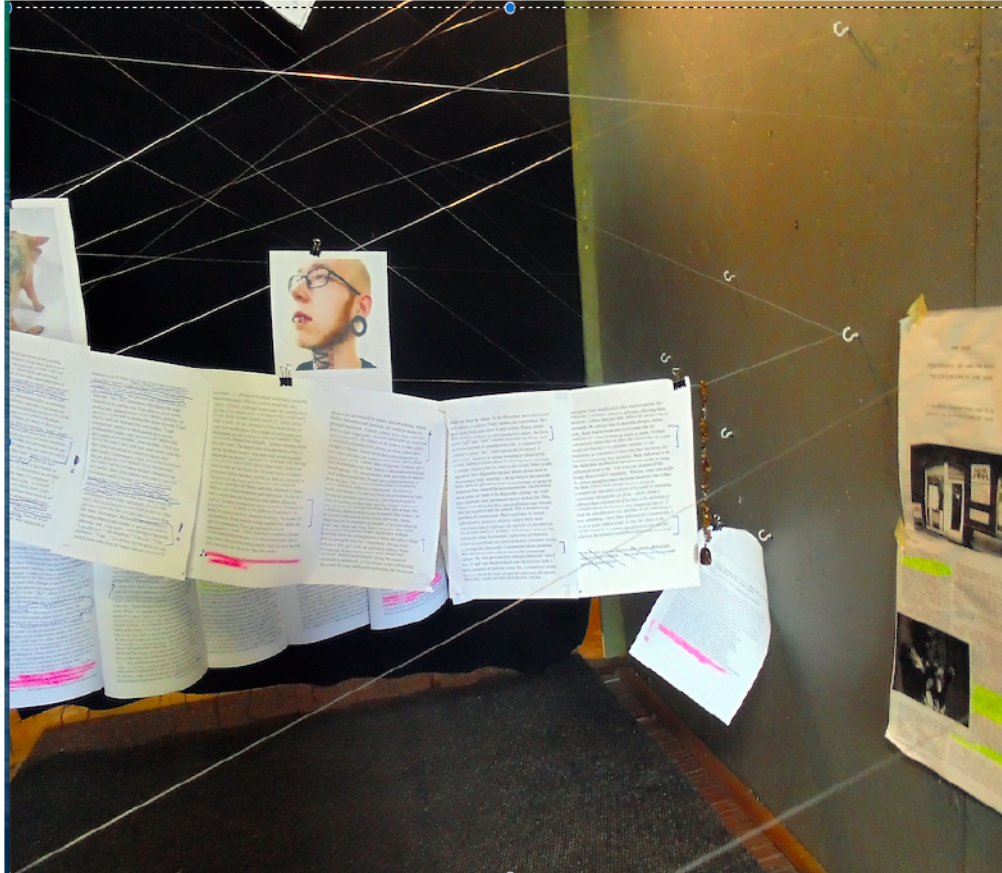


Figure 33: *E-skin* installation, phase I (April 27-May 10, 2015)



Figure 34: *E-skin* installation, phase I (April 27-May 10, 2015)



Figure 35: *E-skin* installation, phase I (April 27-May 10, 2015)

The fourth entry page, dated May 11, 2015, included two questions together with a set of nine photographs pertaining to the nature of the posted questions. Additionally, the post included a compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry. The participants were asked to respond to following questions:

1. Are there any similarities between the skin marking of youth in tribal societies and today's Western youth?
2. Are the underprivileged youth more inclined to embrace various forms of skin alteration?

Twenty participants provided answers to both questions, with some making specific references to photographic images included on the page as well. The length of individual responses varied from a couple of sentences (participant #15) to a 304-word statement (participant #26). Additionally, participant #21 included a link to an article about the scarification rituals among some of the tribes in Papua Guinea.



Figure 36: *E-skin* installation, phase I (May 11-May 24, 2015)



Figure 37: *E-skin* installation, phase I (May 11-May 24, 2015)



Figure 38: *E-skin* installation, phase I (May 11-May 24, 2015)

The fifth entry page, dated May 25, 2015, included three statements accompanied by a set of 13 photographs pertaining to the nature of the posted statements and the compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry. The participants were asked to respond to following statements:

1. Body modification can offer a concrete and readily available solution for many of the identity crises and conflicts normative to adolescent development.
2. Feeling prey to a rapidly evolving body over which they have no say, self-made and openly visible decorations may restore adolescents' sense of normalcy and control, a way of turning a passive experience into an active identity.
3. Adolescents and their parents are often at odds over the acquisition of bodily decorations.

Twelve participants provided answers to all statements. The length of individual responses varied from a couple of paragraphs (participant # 5) to a 366-word statement (participants #18). Most of the participants answered in length.



Figure 39: *E-skin* installation, phase I (May 25-June 7, 2015)



Figure 40: *E-skin* installation, phase I (May 25-June 7, 2015)

The sixth entry page, dated June 08, 2015, included two questions along with a set of 20 photographs pertaining to the nature of the posted questions and the compilation of responses from the previous entry. The participants were asked to answer following questions:

1. What, if anything, are the pedagogical potentialities of youth's skin modifications?
2. Are there any specific curriculum topics or subjects that might benefit from introducing conversations related to body alteration (science, mathematics, social studies, language arts, health, art, music, religious instructions, etc.)?

Thirteen participants provided answers to both questions. The length of individual responses varied from a paragraph (participants #6 & 17) to a 259-word statement (participant #30).

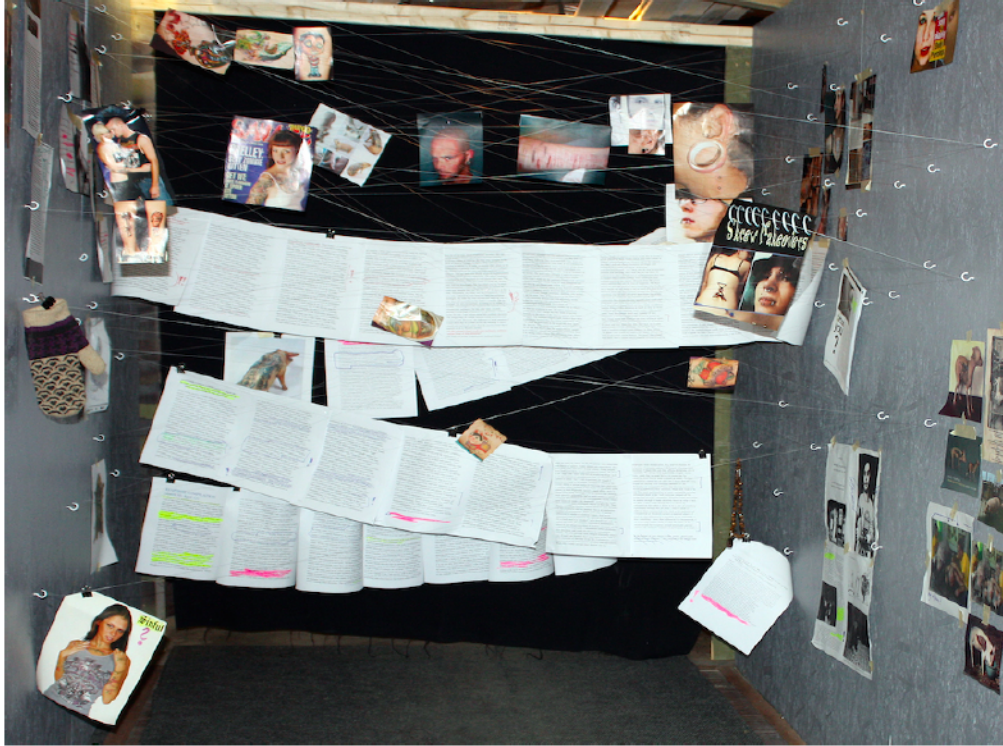


Figure 41: *E-skin* installation, phase I (June 8-21, 2015)



Figure 42: *E-skin* installation, phase I (June 8-21, 2015)





Figure 43: *E-skin* installation, phase I (June 8-21, 2015)

The seventh entry, page dated June 22, 2015, included one question along with a set of 15 photographs pertaining to the nature of the posted query and the compilation of responses from the previous entry. The participants were asked to answer following question:

Do you think that you need additional experience such as professional development prior to initiate discussions on body modification subject with your students?

Fourteen participants provided answers to the question, while some made a specific reference to photographic images included on the entry page as well. The length of individual responses varied from a paragraph (participant #17) to a 184-word statement (participant #8).



Figure 44: *E-skin* installation, phase I (June 22-July 5, 2015)



Figure 45: *E-skin* installation, phase I (June 22-July 5, 2015)



Figure 46: *E-skin* installation, phase I (June 22-July 5, 2015)

The eighth entry page, dated July 06, 2015, included three questions along with a set of 11 photographs pertaining to the nature of the posted subject and the compilation of responses from the previous entry. The participants were asked to answer following questions:

1. Does longing for the pain experience play a role in youths' decision to modify their bodies?
2. Is there any possibility that contemporary youth will embrace technology (implants, cybernetic/ bionic parts) as another form of body modification?
3. Does youth skin/body become the next frontier of technology application?

Additionally, the participants were asked to consider contributing an artifact such as object, photograph, musical item, or anything else that conveys your experience of participation in this research.

Ten participants responded to the posted questions. The length of individual responses varied from a paragraph (participant #17 & #21) to a 314-word statement (participant #4).



Figure 47: *E-skin* installation, phase I (July 6-20, 2015)



Figure 48: *E-skin* installation, phase I (July 6-20, 2015)



Figure 49: *E-skin* installation, phase I (July 6-20, 2015)

Two weeks after the last blog entry, the *E-skin* blog was officially closed and the password eliminated. The installation site was also closed and all data was collected and stored at my art studio until the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase II, was created and moved to a public gallery space during September 2015. From March 30, 2015 to July 20, 2015, 54 photographic images were taken to document the progress (*becoming*) of the *E-skin* Installation, phase I. The number of teachers who actively participated in the conducted research changed from 32 participants (March 30, 2015- April 12, 2015) to ten participants (July 06, 2015- July 19, 2015). When the *E-skin* blog was closed, the *E-skin* Installation, Phase I, consisted of a visually presented collection of artefacts within the confines of a closed space. The installation was informed by the written statements shared by the research participants that in turn was informed by the “T” hybrid.

## **The *E-skin* Interactive Installation (Phase I & II)**

Aside from the artistic value, the *E-skin* Interactive Installation became a conglomerate of various stages within my inquiry; I included in my exhibition a replica of the *E-skin* installation initial phase (*E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I). Over a period of four months, its development relied on constant interaction and input from the *E-skin* blog participants. After the final *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase II as a summation of all the conducted research was created. The two parts of the installation were moved to the gallery space for public viewing in September 2015, so it took two months to complete Phase II.

During the display period of September 14, 2015 to September 28, 2015, viewers were encouraged to engage in public debate on the research subject; their input became another source of data collection. The installation itself became a research ground that, by including new data, became a new generator of research exploring epistemologies that challenge societal perceptions on adolescent communication.

Just like the brain continuously processes and re-processes information by engaging sensory stimuli, so the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I became a metaphor for the human brain. Since part of the *E-skin* evolution included my presence in the research space, on a daily basis, to reflect and examine, I decided to include an empty chair. The chair symbolized my presence as a researcher, thus became a signifier for the investigation. The *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I, simultaneously became an assemblage of individual experiences: the narrative of a hybridized self, as well as the stories of the blog's participants.

Due to limitation of gallery space, the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I was displayed in a slightly different arrangement, occupying an approximately 20' x 15' area. Aside from the visual aspect, this restraint did not have any negative impact on the coherence of the entire presentation.



Figure 50: *E-skin* interactive installation, phase I, Extension Gallery, University of Alberta



Figure 51: *E-skin* interactive installation, phase I, Extension Gallery, University of Alberta

The *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase II, occupied another space within the *Extension* gallery. The floor area was 20'x15'. There were seven organic forms suspended



from the ceiling at different heights with one form placed on the gallery floor. The forms were rounded and approximately 65” diameter and 150” high. They were made of wire and rope and were suspended at different heights. Some of them were joined with a rope loosely connecting one to another. Their interior was filled partially with scraps of papers (coloured, black and white) that were visible to the visitors through the web of strings, as the external form’s body. With its suspended organic forms symbolizing the youth’s brain, Phase II of the installation investigated the adolescent’s interaction, communication and comprehension as it relates to their cognitive maturity. The forms’ intricate and fragile surface evoked the fragility of youth (*thin skin*), as well as their susceptibility to the power of peer and media persuasion.



Figure 52: *E-skin* interactive installation, phase II (close-up), Extension Gallery, University of Alberta



Figure 53: *E-skin* interactive installation, phase II (detail), Extension Gallery, University of Alberta

The floor beneath the suspended forms had paper scraps piled up at different heights in the shape of a pyramid. The paper symbolized the process of selection by youth: some information is retained and other is discarded.



Figure 54: *E-skin* interactive installation, phase II, Extension Gallery, University of Alberta

After viewing both parts of the *E-skin* installation, the visitors were invited (by a note posted on the wall) to contribute to the growth of the *E-skin* installation by writing comments about their own experiences and thoughts regarding youths' skin modification subject. Once written, the comments were inserted into one of the "youth's brain" form. This data provided additional information for my research.



Figure 55: *E-skin* interactive installation, paper slips, Extension Gallery, University of Alberta

The installation also included a wall that was covered with eight white sheets of Bristol paper (20"x30") with six pens suspended by strings. Through the statement posted on the wall, spectators were invited to write their comments about their own experiences and thoughts on the youths' skin modification subject, as well as share their thoughts on the exhibition. There was no censorship: all the written comments were left on display visible to be viewed by anyone passing by. The gathered data then provided additional information for my research.



Figure 56: *E-skin* interactive installation, public commentary section, Extension Gallery, University of Alberta



Figure 57: *E-skin* interactive installation, public commentary section, Extension Gallery, University of Alberta

## **Data Collection Method: Visual Elicitation through the Art Installation**

During my research, I relied on the visual elicitation method to study phenomena alongside the narrative of a visual inquiry approach by using Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the *Body without Organs, assemblage and becoming*. This method of collecting data appeared to be the most suitable technique for my research, since collecting data "generated by application of visual methods such as photographing or drawing may provide a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural and contextual factors of human behaviour" (Keller et al., 2008, p. 429). Following the train of thought of Irit Rogoff (1998), "much of the practice of intellectual work within the framework of cultural problematics has to do with being able to ask new and alternative questions, rather than reproducing old knowledge by asking the old questions" (p. 15).

The data informing my research were collected from sources listed below: a) the blog participants, b) ongoing *E-skin* Installation, Phase I, c) "I" hybrid, d) scholarly publications, e) informal interviews and discussions with adolescent students and colleague teachers, and f) visitors to the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase & II.

In this line of inquiry, the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I & II, as a complex *assemblage*, became both: a data itself and a source/form of data gathering, since it was a collection of data, recording my ongoing evaluation of the gathered information on the researched subject. Each artefact included in the installation became a means to elicit information from me as a research subject and by me as a researcher. The process of eliciting/ collecting data from me as "I," as the researcher, took place daily for the initial period of four months (March 30, 2015 to July 19, 2015, *E-skin* Installation, Phase I) and then continued for the duration of two months (July 20, 2015 to September 16, 2015, *E-skin* Installation, Phase I & II) to be completed after an additional one month (September 14, 2015 to September 28, 2015, *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I & II).

There was also data collected from the visitors of the public gallery space in which the installation was exhibited (after viewing the installation, the visitors were invited to provide written feedback related to the subject). This feedback (paper notes) was collected after the exhibition was concluded.

After commencing the *E-skin* Phase I & II at the public space gallery, my initial intention was to permanently dissemble the E-skin installation. However, in the course of the presentation and based on the comments/public voices, the decision was made by me to allow the installation to be seen, create an encounter with the diverse public across different parts of Canada. After these new *events*, the data collected will be permanently stored at the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta for a period of two years, after which it will be officially discarded.

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

Several limitations to this study must be noted. Firstly, this research has a small group base. Responses were collected only from those junior-high and high-school teachers who lived and worked in the province of Alberta. Secondly, this study used self-reported data; therefore, it is unknown how reliable it may be. Finally, this study made use of responses reflecting the views and beliefs of a small group of adolescents (6) belonging to the same social demographic (inner-city students).

Despite these limitations, the representative sample of 29 teachers and six adolescents used in this study adds significantly to previously published studies in this area and provides a more generalizable picture of the prevalence of body modification as a form of communication among youths.

## **FINDINGS/ RESULTS**

The conducted research contributes some new insight into the subject of skin modification as a new method of adolescents' communication. This could only happen because of the novel way of approaching the subject/problematic from the involved



teachers' perspective and not, as is more common, looking through the students' perspectives. Additionally, the research was conducted through the research-creation methodology that allowed for broadening the scope of the research on a multifaceted level, while relying on the application of technology that is another and ever-expanding means of contemporary youth communication.

## **Data Analysis**

Based on the questions constituting my research's framework, the key collected data revealed that:

- 1) There are diverse reasons behind youth's fascination with skin alteration.
- 2) Any form body modification (factual or a desired one) by youth reflects a step in his or her *becoming*.
- 3) Skin modification by youth has a pedagogical potential for secondary school curriculum as a classroom tool to gain and sustain students' attention and has pedagogical potential for the second curriculum subject (cross-curricular approach).

There were two main data sources: the *E-skin* blog and the *E-skin* interactive art installation (Phase I & II). Each of them contributed to the production of new data that did not follow a linear path of progression, but rather, produced a rhizomatic set of connections that could not be foreseen or planned for in advance, but rather appeared and vanished again without any preconceived notion on my (the researcher) or participants' part.

### **The *E-skin* Blog**

The *E-skin* blog recruited 29 participants aged 24 to 63<sup>50</sup> and lasted for four months, or from March 30, 2015 to July 20, 2015. The number of participants varied with each new entry post.

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<sup>50</sup> Age Group: 1) 24-29: 12 participants, 2) 30 – 39: 8 participants, 3) 40 – 49: 7 participants, 4) 50- 63: 2 participants.

**March 30, 2015 – April 12, 2015.** In the first post, participants were asked to respond to two questions. There were 29 teachers participating whose replies provided a comprehensive overview of their personal stand on the subject of skin modification as a platform for posing further questions pertaining to youth.

QUESTION #1	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL
What is your position on youth skin modification?	9 participants <sup>2</sup>	13 participants <sup>3</sup>	7 participants <sup>4</sup>

Table 2: The *E-skin* Blog, March 30-April 12, 2015

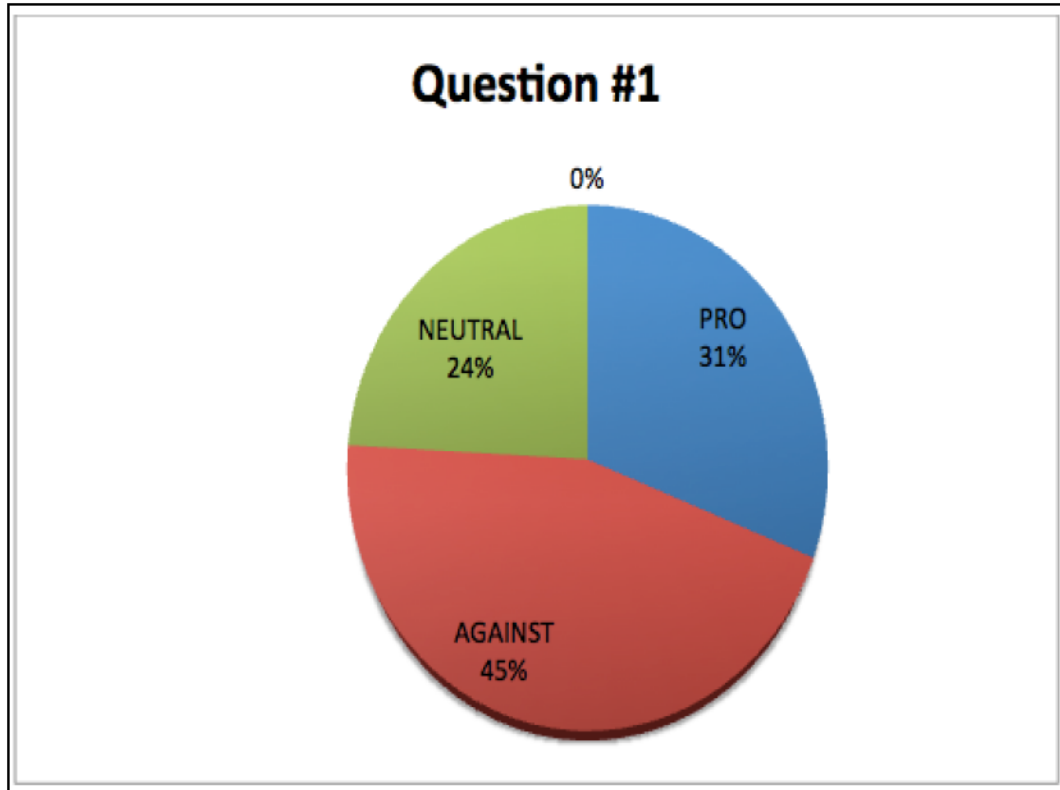


Table 3: The *E-skin* Blog, March 30-April 12, 2015

The majority of the participants had a negative attitude towards skin modification by youth. They provided various reasons for it, though the common thread was that youth were lacking the cognitive maturity level to make life-lasting decisions regarding their bodies, such as choosing tattoos. Therefore, they emphasized that educating students on body modification was important, stating that although individual rights are cherished and should be protected, when it comes to youth, society has a duty to protect adolescents from poor decisions that could negatively impact them in the future (participant #22). Some of the participants did not object to youth body modification, but they emphasized the importance of discussing the matter with adolescents to make sure that this is something they have thought through and are not doing impulsively. Only then would the consent be provided. Moreover, they were in favour of age limits for permanent procedures such as tattoos. As participant # 2 stated, youth should not be allowed to modify their skin until age 16.

QUESTION #2	YES	NO	NO COMMENT
Did you have prior experience with body modification in your personal or professional life?	23 participants <sup>2</sup>	4 participants <sup>3</sup>	2 participants <sup>4</sup>

Table 4: The *E-skin* Blog, March 30-April 12, 2015

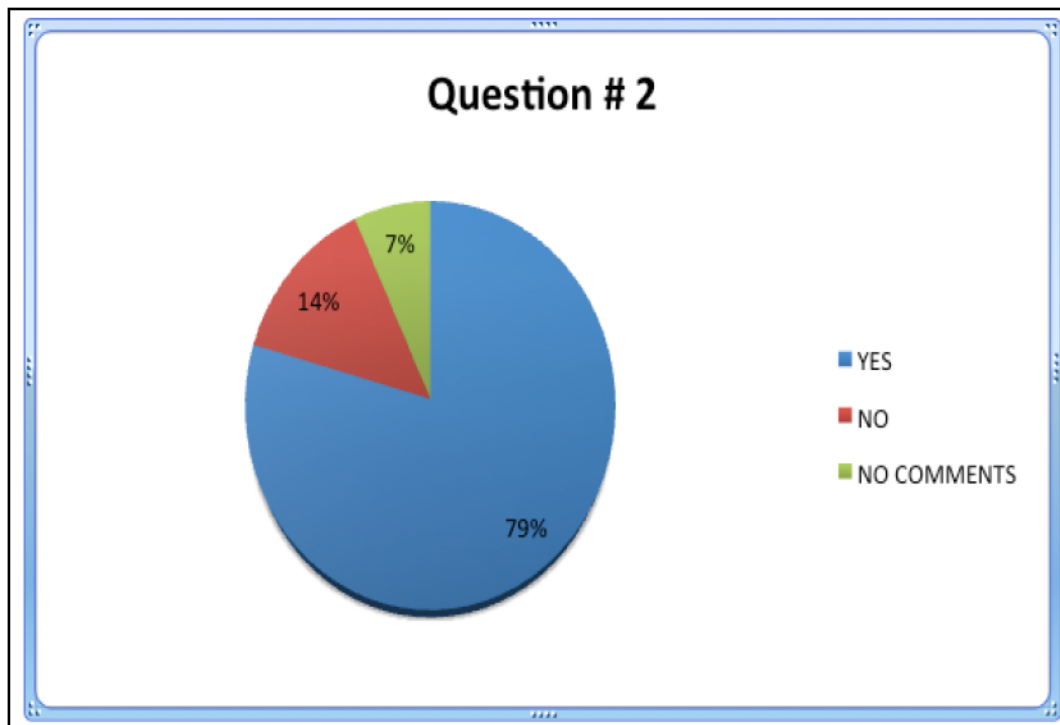


Table 5: The *E-skin* Blog, March 30-April 12, 2015

Regarding question #2, the majority of participants either modified their bodies or knew of someone in their life (private and professional) who embraced permanent body art. The most common form of skin alteration was piercing (ears), followed by tattoos. The age of participants getting their first tattoo varied from ages 15 (participant #15) to 50 (participant #14). Children of some participants obtained tattoos once they reached age of 18. Some participants indicated that their co-workers had tattoos that were visible to students. Although a majority of participants did not have permanent skin alterations, they did not object to their colleagues having them as such; some even indicated that teachers with modified skin were more trusted by their students. The perception is that students viewing teachers with altered skin “would be more likely to feel like they could relate to that teacher and that that teacher would be less likely to judge them” (participant #8).

**April 13, 2015 – April 26, 2015.** In the second post, participants were asked to respond to two questions. Question #1 allowed participants to include numerous answers while question #2 relied on a clear stand (either *yes*, *no* or *not sure* answers). Additionally, the post included a set of photographic images pertaining to the research subject, a compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry and a link to the “Body as Surface” article pertaining to the subject discussed. Twenty-one teachers participated.

<b>QUESTION #1</b>	
<b>In your opinion, what is the allure for adolescents to desire or/and engage in skin alteration?</b>	
<b>FAD</b>	12 participants <sup>2</sup>
<b>BEING UNIQUE</b>	12 participants <sup>3</sup>
<b>ARTISTIC EXPRESSION</b>	5 participants <sup>4</sup>
<b>FIT IN</b>	8 participants <sup>5</sup>
<b>AGAINST AUTHORITY/ MAINSTREAM CULTURE</b>	6 participants <sup>6</sup>
<b>RITE OF PASSAGE</b>	4 participants <sup>7</sup>

Table 6: The *E-skin* Blog, April 13-26, 2015

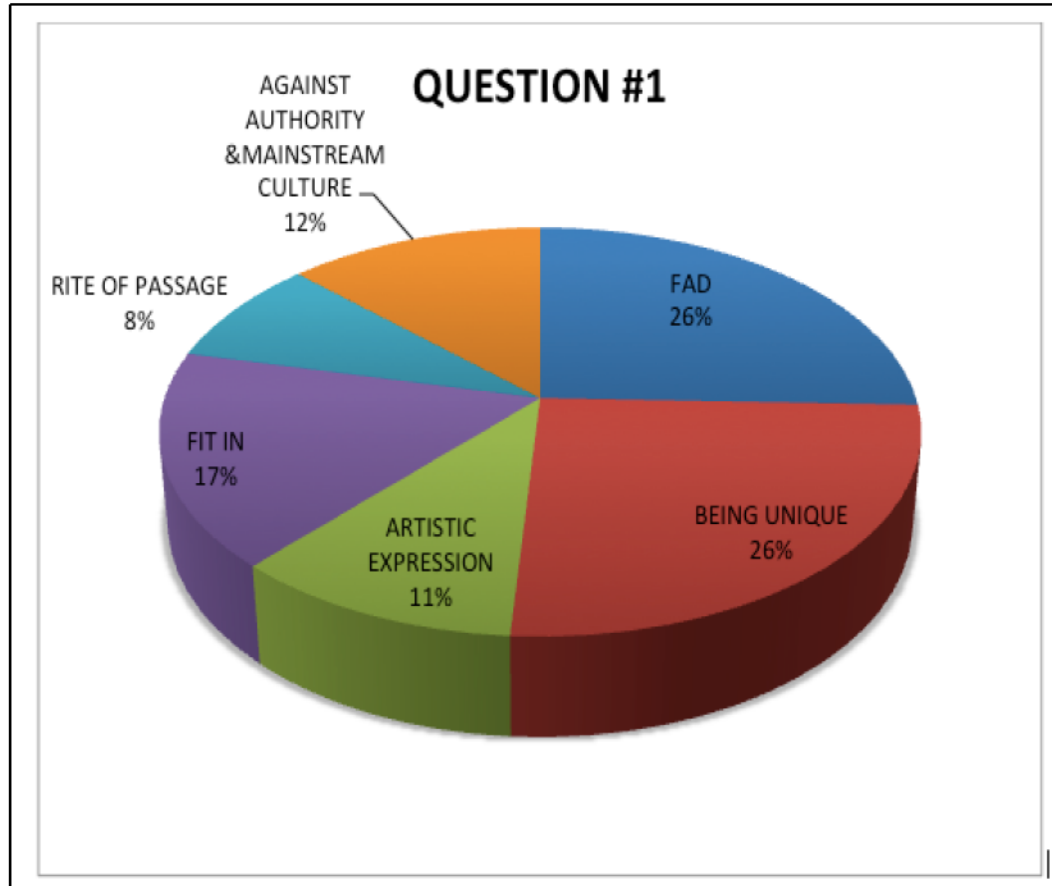


Table 7: The *E-skin* Blog, April 13-26, 2015

There were six common responses regarding the posted question. Some of the participants included one justification or reason for their response, while others chose a number of them. Youth striving to *be unique* was one of the most common answers. According to the majority of participants, the main reasons for adolescents' desire to modify their bodies is the desire to be unique, a search for a way of expressing their own personality or a journey of self-realization and discovery. Some participants pointed to the self-esteem movement that has created a sense of entitlement, so that each teen is told how unique and special they are. Here, the skin modification fits into this mould by placing an emphasis on appearance that is different and unique from others (participant # 10).

Similarly, participants saw a strong connection between adolescent desire for body modification and a fashionable, prevailing trend in mainstream culture.

Tattoo and scarification have become a fashion statement with permanent consequences. As the participants pointed out, celebrities, whom many youths try to follow, influence and introduce new fads and fashions. Since it is almost impossible to find a celebrity who does not endorse body modification, why would adolescents not desire to adorn their own bodies with tattoos, scars, etc. (participant #1).

Some participants related the allure of body modification by youth to the desire for rebellion against authority and/or mainstream culture. To do something that may outrage the adults or to visibly distance themselves from what is perceived as the societal standard can trigger a desire for body modification.

Another reason for the allure of skin alteration is, according to the participants, the innate desire to fit and blend in with their peers. As such, they feel the need to get tattoos or body piercings to fit into a prescribed societal mould. They feel camaraderie with others who mark themselves in a similar way. On the other hand, for some adolescents, body modification symbolizes a rite of passage. They are becoming adults and are now having full control over the decisions that they make (participant #28). Particularly among youth coming from families where parents have already modified their own bodies with “permanent art,” there is a belief that skin modification is normal, even desirable (participant #9).



QUESTION #2	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Is consumerist culture affecting adolescents' decisions to modify their bodies?	12 participants <sup>2</sup>	6 participants <sup>3</sup>	2 participants <sup>4</sup>

Table 8: The *E-skin* Blog, April 13-26, 2015

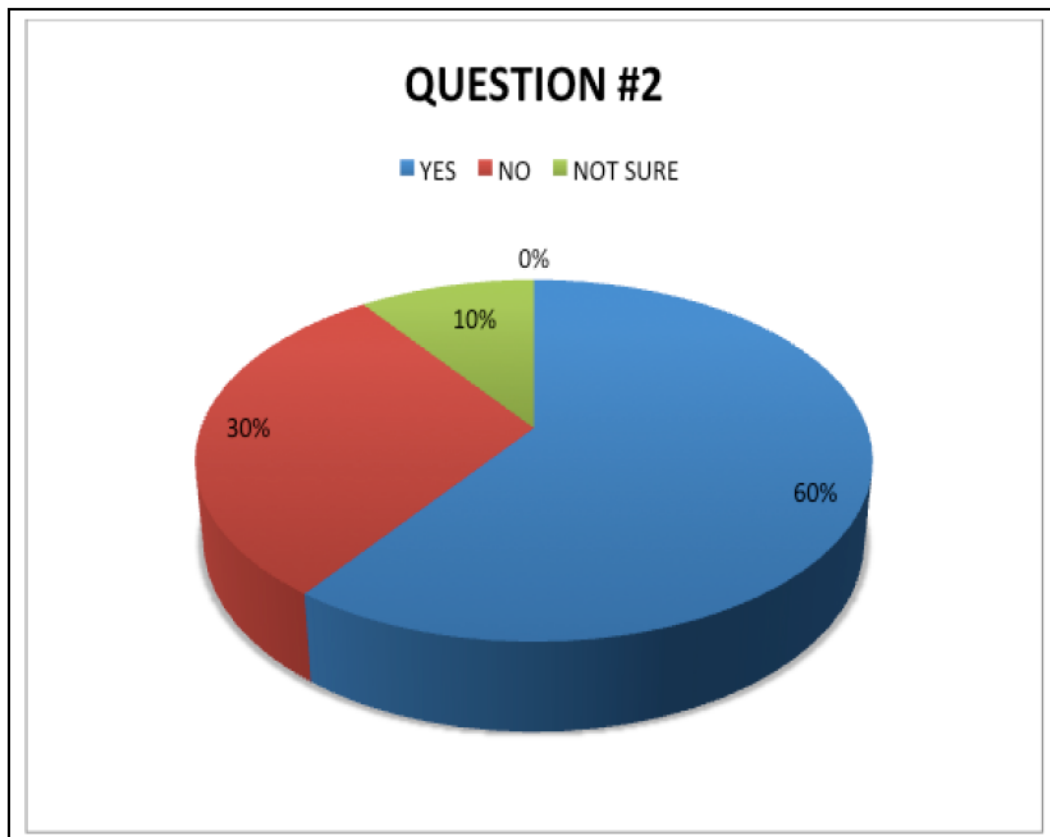


Table 9: The *E-skin* Blog, April 13-26, 2015

The majority of participants (60%) found parallels between consumerist culture and adolescents' decisions to modify their bodies. Some pointed to the consumerist culture of the self: I am responsible for myself, I deserve it, I want to be unique, trendy and ahead of the crowd (participant #26). This is emotionally empowering to youth, sending the persuasive message that they should be taking charge of their own bodies. Another participant stated, as an interesting paradox of consumerism, that in our consumerist society where most items are made to be disposable, youth might move towards something that seems more permanent in their life. They choose something that they cannot afford to erase because it is too expensive and too painful (participant #9).

For other participants, there was either no link between consumerism and adolescents' skin alteration (30%) or they were not sure (10%). Some of the participants in the first group felt that body alteration was an adolescent call for attention to their bodies as a site of transformation and expression that became a wall or a door between the young people and others (participant #29).

**April 27, 2015 – May10, 2015.** In the third post, participants were asked to respond to two questions. Question #1 allowed participants to take various positions, while question #2 asked them to take a clear stand in the form of either *yes*, *no* or *not sure* answer. Additionally the post included a set of photographic images pertaining to the posted questions and a compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry. One of the participants (# 21) included a link to the video and article “Teens and Tattoos: Would You Let Your Teen Get Inked?” as a part of her commentary. There were 22 teachers participating.

QUESTION #1	
In your opinion, why does the adolescent choose permanent body modification versus semi permanent?	
<b>COMMITMENT</b>	10 participants <sup>2</sup>
<b>STATEMENT</b>	6 participants <sup>3</sup>
<b>CONTROL</b>	7 participants <sup>4</sup>
<b>IMMATURITY</b>	7 participants <sup>5</sup>
<b>REBELIOUSNESS</b>	4 participants <sup>6</sup>

Table 10: The *E-skin* Blog, April 27-May 10, 2015

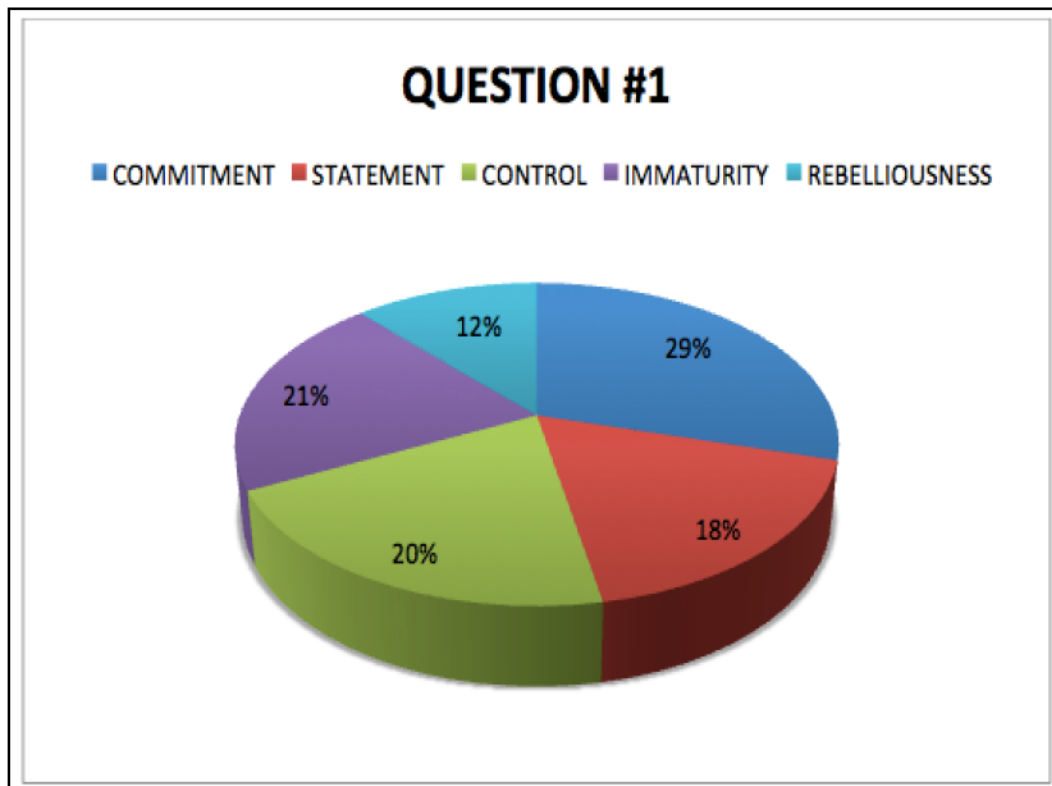


Table 11: The *E-skin* Blog, April 27-May 10, 2015

The majority of participants (29%) thought the *commitment* behind adolescents' decision to mark their skin permanently was intended to highlight an important event in their lives (participant #29). *Immaturity* ranked as the second highest reason (21%). According to participants, adolescents lack the maturity to fully comprehend the concept of permanence (participant #9). *Control* became the third reason for permanent body alteration (20%). The participants stressed that youth may feel that the one of the few things they do have control over are personal expressions they can put onto their bodies (participant #4). As such, a permanent element shows a strong determination and a desire to be taken seriously. Eighteen percent of participants thought that *statement* was another reason for adolescents body alterations, to show that they were mature enough to make this decision and live with the consequences for the rest of their lives (participant #5). Lastly, *rebelliousness* (12%) was viewed as another reason behind adolescents' preference for permanent body modification over the semi-permanent, since it was regarded by youths as a rebellious protest against the untattooed establishment and the more conservative status quo (participant #23). Overall there was recognition of the strong need of adolescents to find themselves. They are in constant transition, moving from being a child to a fully functioning adult.

QUESTION #2	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Can (altered) skin be regarded as another medium of communication among youth?	18 participants <sup>2</sup>	0 participants <sup>3</sup>	2 participants <sup>4</sup>

Table 12: The *E-skin* Blog, April 27-May 10, 2015

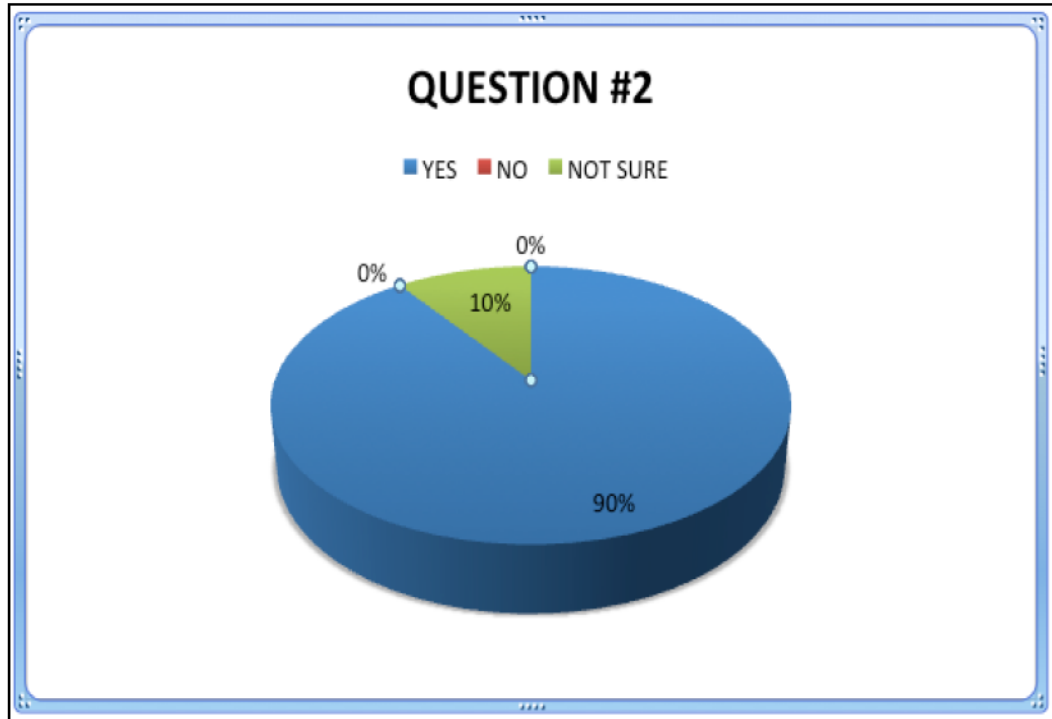


Table 13: The *E-skin* Blog, April 27-May 10, 2015

Responses to question #2 were either *yes* or *not sure*. There was not a single *no* answer given. The majority of the participants (90%) chose the first option, stating that skin markings such as tattoos, piercings and cutting communicate non-verbal messages (participant #9). Thus, it is a communication of values and beliefs without words, a common ground for a relationship (participant #10). Only 10% of participants were not sure if modified skin might be regarded as another medium of communication among youth. Some participants questioned whether their peers and society received the intended message as it was envisioned (participant #23).

**May 11, 2015 – May 24, 2015.** In the fourth post, participants were asked to respond to two questions with either *yes*, *no* or *not sure*. The post included two questions, a set of photographic images pertaining to the posted questions and a compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry. Additionally, participant #21 included a link to an article about the scarification rituals among some of the tribes in Papua Guinea. There were 20 teachers participating.

QUESTION #1	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Are there any similarities between the skin marking of youth in tribal societies and today's western youth?	11 participants <sup>2</sup>	4 participants <sup>3</sup>	4 participants <sup>4</sup>

Table 14: The *E-skin* Blog, May 11-24, 2015

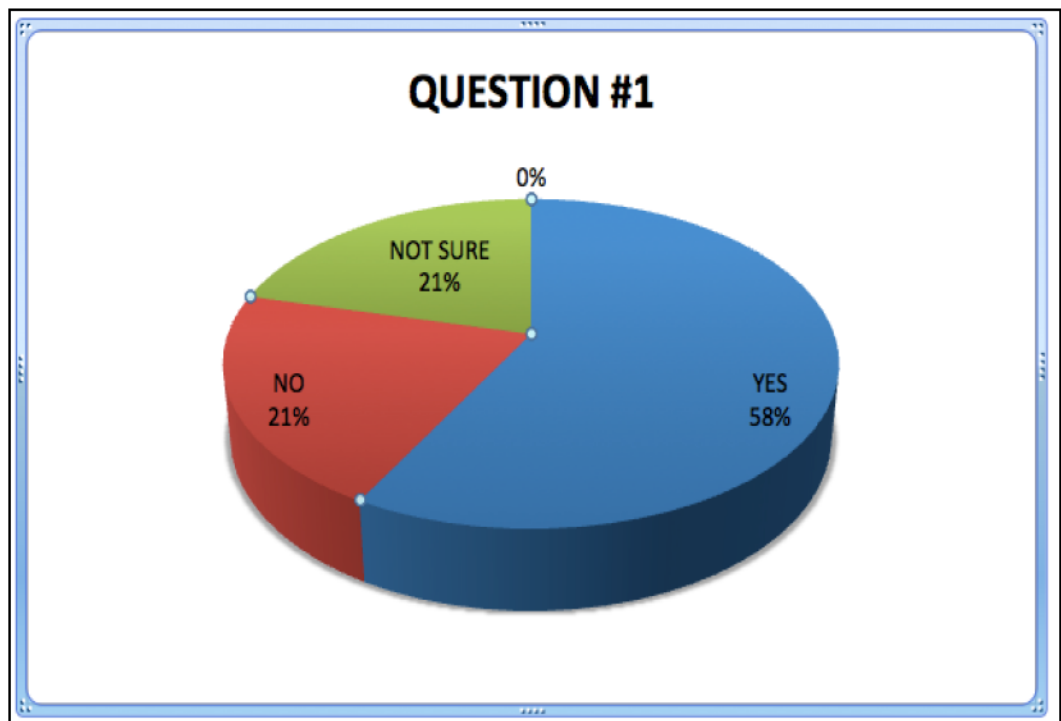


Table 15: The *E-skin* Blog, May 11-24, 2015

The majority of participants (58%) found a correlation between the skin alteration of adolescents in tribal societies and the contemporary Western world. Some of the responses pointed to similar thought processes between both groups

regarding independence in the form of communication via skin markings (participant #13).

Twenty-one percent of the participants rejected the idea of drawing any similarities between the skin marking of youth in tribal societies and today's western culture. For them, the tribal youth's skin markings were culturally based, while the western youth's markings were mostly a personal statement (participant #17). Furthermore, in tribal societies, body modification seems to be a deeper expression of a collective identity with major social, cultural and spiritual significance. With today's youth, skin marking is more of a fleeting expression of individual identity (participant #23).

Another argument was that youth in tribal societies have no choice but to subjugate their bodies to skin modification procedures as a part of a traditional rite of passage, while Western adolescents make their decisions of their own free will (participant # 21).

Another 21% of participants were not sure of their answer. Some of them pointed out that many tattoos embraced by contemporary Western adolescents were an adaptation from the skin marking of other cultures (participant #6). Others stated that there are some similarities between the skin markings of tribal youth and modern western youth, reflecting a rite of passage and the communication of significances that are important to youth. However, this is where the similarity ends (participant #5).

QUESTION #2	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Are the underprivileged youth more inclined to embrace various forms of skin alteration?	9 participants <sup>2</sup>	8 participants <sup>3</sup>	2 participants <sup>4</sup>

Table 16: The *E-skin* Blog, May 11-24, 2015

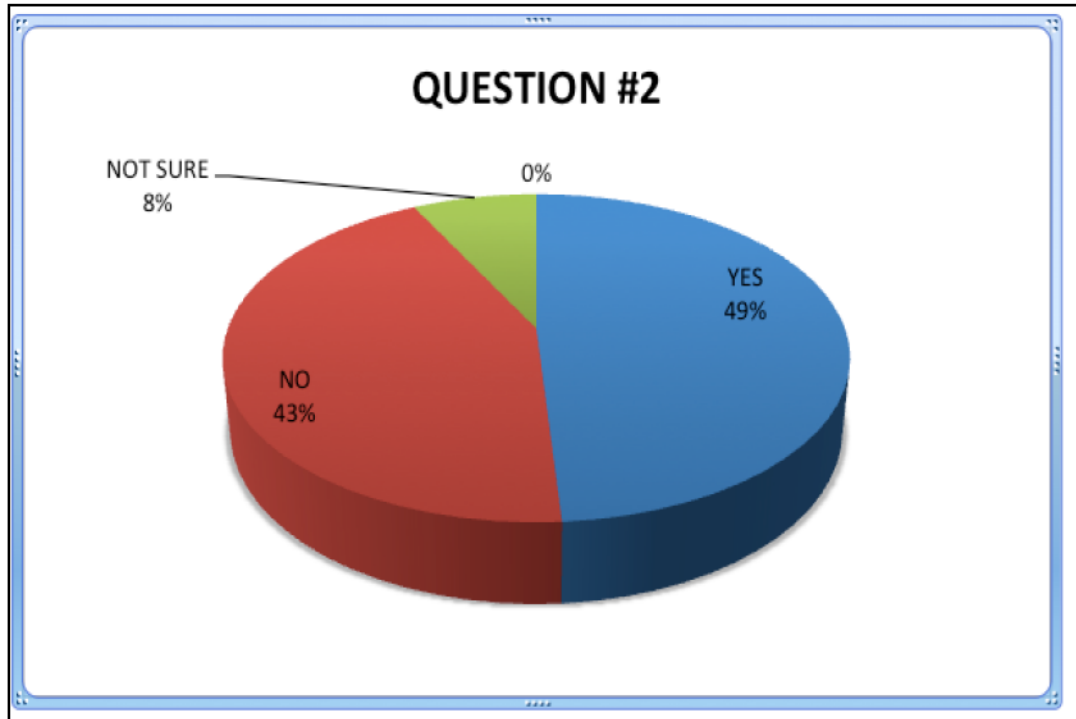


Table 17: The *E-skin* Blog, May 11-24, 2015

There was a great divide among participants in regards to the posted question. Forty-nine percent of participants saw underprivileged adolescents tending to gravitate towards skin markings more than the privileged students. Often underprivileged youth already feel alienated and suffer from prejudice and poor



treatment by mainstream society; they embrace looking different. Hence, they are more prone to choose skin alteration procedures (participant #6). Some of the responses pointed to the correlation between skin alteration and cultural upbringing. As participant #5 stated, underprivileged youth often have lower expectations for future careers, and the careers they envision themselves in tend to be those with fewer dress code restrictions.

Forty-three percent of the participants voiced an objection to making any parallels between underprivileged youths and a greater gravitation towards embracing various forms of skin alteration. Instead, the participants stated that adolescents, whether they belong to a privileged or underprivileged background, will equally embrace skin alteration, as most of their problems, thought processes, idealisms, role models, and so on are the same (participant #13).

Eight percent of participants stated that they did not know the answer; participant #17 thought that unprivileged adolescents often have their skin markings more visible than privileged youth. Moreover, economically poor youth tend to start trends from the street, including various types of skin modification (participant #4).

**May 25, 2015 – June 07, 2015.** In the fifth post, participants were asked to respond to three statements. All three statements relied on a clear stand (*yes, no* or *not sure* answers). The post included a set of photographic images pertaining to the posted questions and a compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry. There were 12 teachers participating.

STATEMENT #1	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Body modification can offer a concrete and readily available solution for many of the identity crises and conflicts normative to adolescent development.	3 participants <sup>2</sup>	7 participants <sup>3</sup>	2 participants <sup>4</sup>

Table 18: The *E-skin* Blog, May 25-June 7, 2015

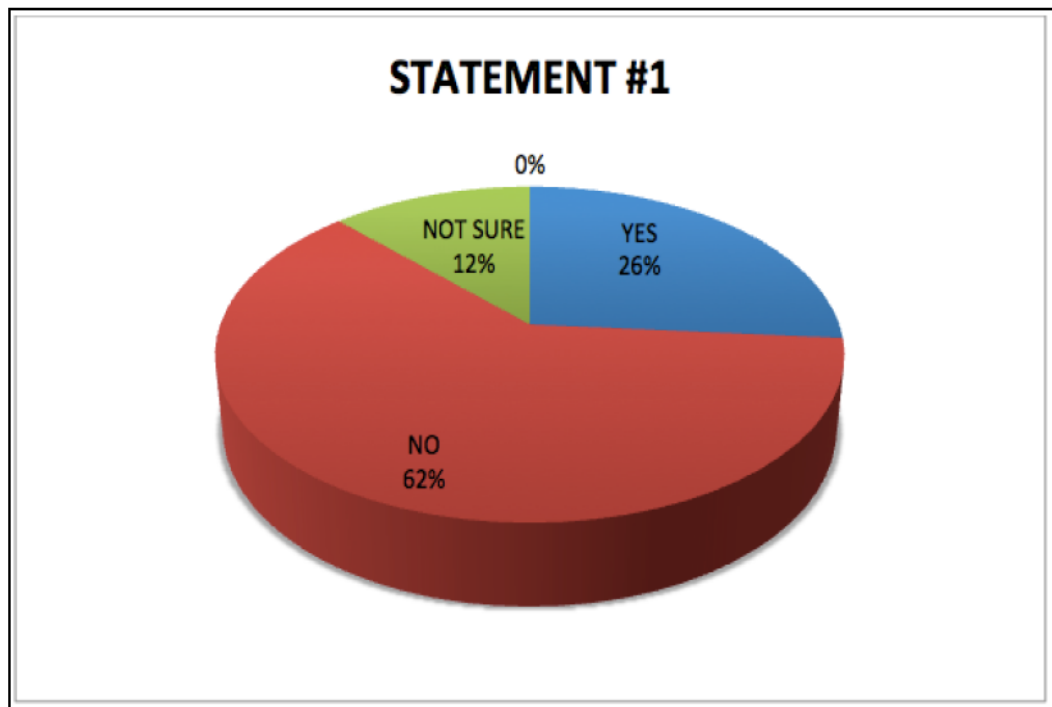


Table 19: The *E-skin* Blog, May 25-June 7, 2015

The majority of participants (62%) did not believe that body alteration offers concrete and available solutions to adolescents' identity crises and conflicts since the origin of these problems lies deeper and is much more complex

(participant #17). Instead, some of the respondents pointed to time and life experience as the only keys to giving youth the confidence and serenity to “be themselves” (participant #18). For others, giving youth control over decision-making in regards to body modification was a dangerous precedent with unforeseeable consequences (participant #26).

Twenty-six percent of participants found that identity-seeking might be associated with a form of skin alteration, manifesting in a tangible way a conviction of a person’s identity (participant #16). Other respondents added that body modification could be in part a process that allows adolescents to find themselves (participant #23).

*Not sure* answer was chosen by 12% of participants. Participant #8 added that the majority of her adolescent students whose skin was marked gave much thought to what they had put on their bodies as markers, statements, and symbols of this particular moment in time. In conclusion, most respondents did not embrace the idea of body modification as a solution to youth identity crises, although it could seem like it at the time to some adolescents.

STATEMENT #2	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Feeling prey to a rapidly evolving body over which they have no say, self-made and openly visible decorations may restore adolescents’ sense of normalcy and control, a way of turning a passive experience into an active identity.	6 participants <sup>2</sup>	4 participants <sup>3</sup>	2 participants <sup>4</sup>

Table 20: The *E-skin* Blog, May 25-June 7, 2015

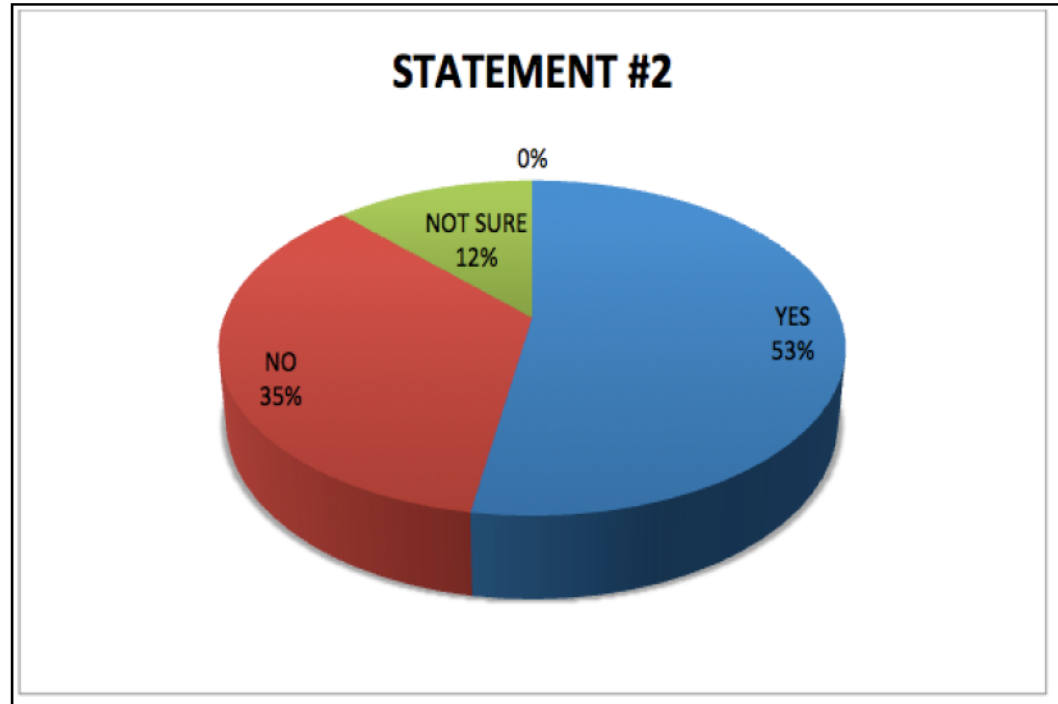


Table 21: The *E-skin* Blog, May 25-June 7, 2015

The majority of participants (53%) agreed with the statement, pointing out that body modification can provide youth with a sense of “being in charge” through making some permanent decisions (participant #23). As participant #16 stated, since many adolescents dye their hair and use makeup to conceal acne, so in a sense skin marking could give them some sense of control over their own bodies. According to participant #8, contemporary youth have more control and life experience than the adults tend to give them credit for; therefore, not all of the decisions they make are poor. In this vein, a body artwork mark has the potential to become an ego booster, a conversation starter, or a way of bonding with other adolescents. This may create a sense of belonging and they may be more accepted in various circles due to their body decorations (participant #4).

The opposite stand was taken by 35% of participants. In their view, self-made and visible skin decorations may offer temporary relief from feelings of loss of control over one’s body; however, as adolescents continue to evolve they will feel somewhat isolated and victims of their changing bodies and emotions

(participant #17). Twelve percent were not sure if the self-made and openly visible decorations might help youth restore their sense of normalcy and control. Some of them shared that this statement may pertain to some individuals, although not to all (participant #18).

STATEMENT #3	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Adolescents and their parents are often at odds over the acquisition of bodily decorations.	12 participants <sup>2</sup>	0 participants <sup>3</sup>	0 participants <sup>4</sup>

Table 22: The *E-skin* Blog, May 25-June 7, 2015

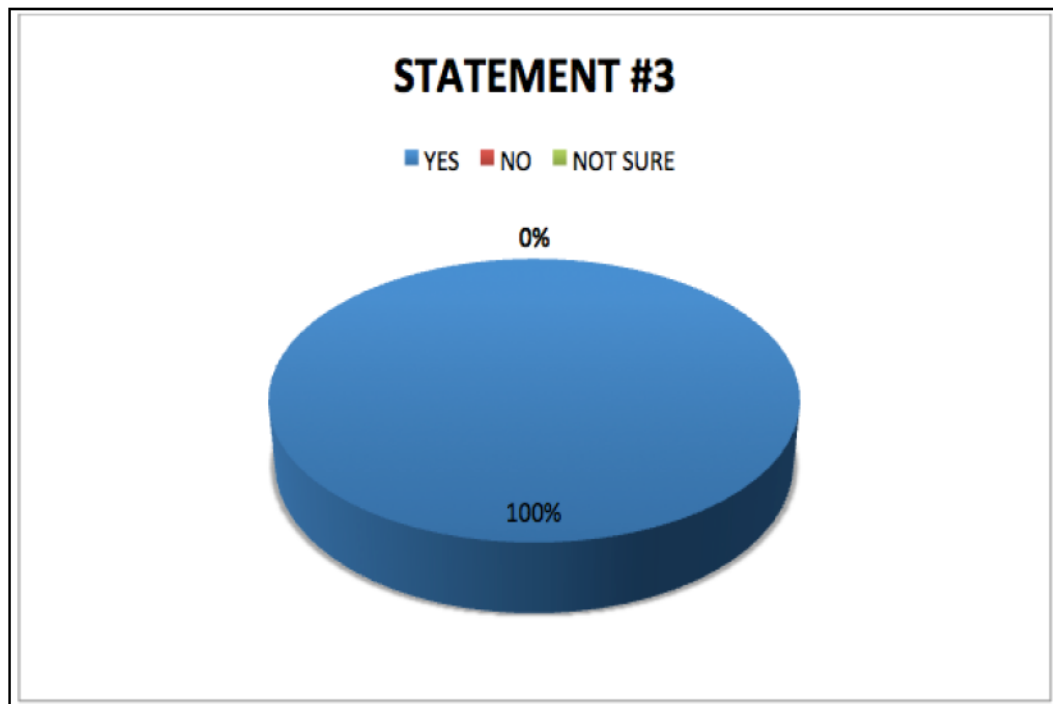


Table 23: The *E-skin* Blog, May 25-June 7, 2015

The participants responded to the statement in a unified way: 100% of them agreed that adolescents and their parents are often at odds over the acquisition of body decorations. Some of the participants pointed out that although parents today are more tolerant of certain forms of body modification, they tend to think long-term and many discourage extreme skin markings because they do not want to see their child exposed to prejudice in the future (participant #18). For other participants, adolescents and their parents will always be at odds over styles and trends; the acquisition of body decorations is just another battle of the child/parent-fermenting feud (participant #4). Another participant stated that the size, visibility and permanency of the decoration become the issue more than anything (participant #17).

**June 08, 2015 – June 21, 2015.** In the sixth post, participants were asked to respond to two questions with either *yes*, *no* or *not sure*. Question #1 allowed participants to include numerous answers while question #2 relied on a clear stand (either *yes*, *no* or *not sure* answers). Additionally, the post included a set of photographic images pertaining to the posted questions and a compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry. There were 13 teachers participating.

QUESTION #1	
What, if anything, are the pedagogical potentialities of youth's skin modifications?	
KNOWLEDGE	13 participants <sup>5</sup>
TRUST	2 participants <sup>6</sup>

Table 24: The *E-skin* Blog, June 8-21, 2015

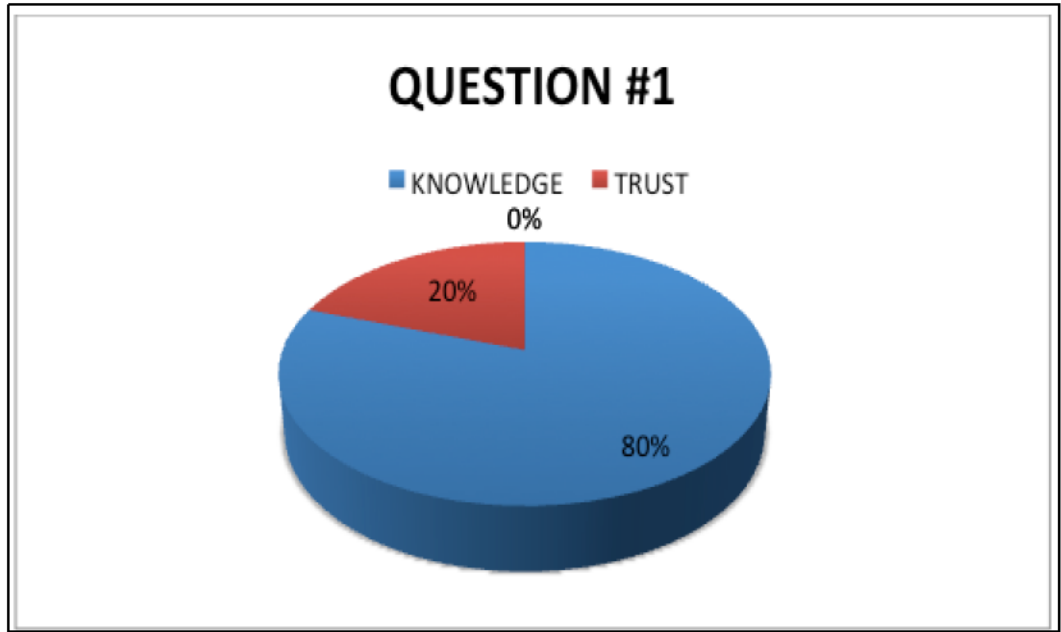


Table 25: The *E-skin* Blog, June 8-21, 2015

The participants' responses were dominated by two concepts in regards to pedagogical potentialities of youth's skin modifications: *knowledge* and *trust*. *Knowledge* was embraced by all participants, while 20% of them added *trust* as well. In terms of *knowledge*, the majority of participants saw the potential benefits of incorporating body modification into the junior-high and high-school curricula as a great topic for raising the student's motivation to study and for discussion. For participants, the more informed students are on the subject of body alteration, the better armed they will be to make informed decisions (participant #26). Furthermore, since teachers in general become role models for their students, they gain student trust, and subsequently, can influence their pupils' way of thinking with regards to skin modifications (participant #13). Therefore, discussing what is "body art" openly and listening to what youth have to say in regards to this is extremely vital. This opens the gateway to pedagogical potentials (participant #18).

QUESTION #2	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Are there any specific curriculum topics or subjects that might benefit from introducing conversations related to body alteration (science, mathematics, social studies, language arts, health, art, music, religious instructions, etc.)?	13 participants <sup>7</sup>	0 participants <sup>8</sup>	0 participants <sup>9</sup>

Table 26: The *E-skin* Blog, June 8-21, 2015

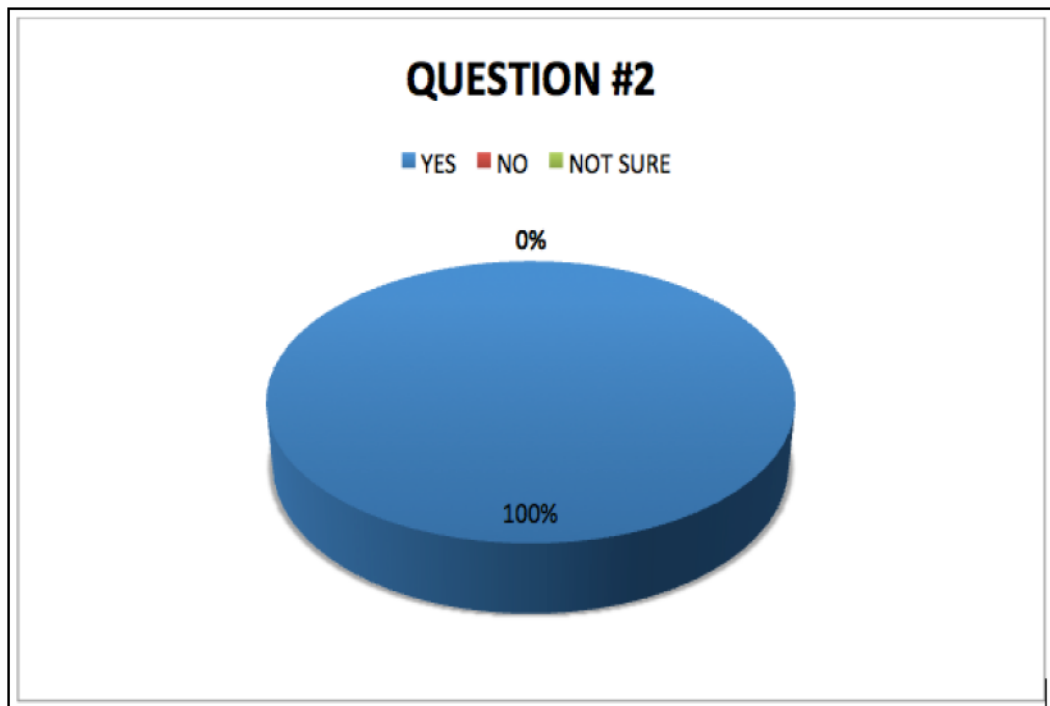


Table 27: The *E-skin* Blog, June 8-21, 2015



All participants agreed that there are curriculum subjects that have the potential of benefiting from introducing the topic of body modification. The benefit would be twofold: it may increase students' interest in an otherwise dry subject and may enhance their acquired knowledge. The list of subjects that might benefit from the introduction of body alteration includes a broad and diverse list of core and optional curriculum subjects. Among them, social studies was listed by 11 participants.<sup>51</sup> It was followed by art, mentioned by nine participants.<sup>52</sup> Seven participants each pointed out science<sup>53</sup> and health.<sup>54</sup> Psychology was stated by four participants,<sup>55</sup> closely followed by English with three participants.<sup>56</sup> Two participants presented the benefits of incorporating body alteration in math<sup>57</sup> and drama,<sup>58</sup> while cosmetology<sup>59</sup> and religion<sup>60</sup> were each mentioned by one participant. Overall, participants were of the opinion that students would enjoy examining the body modification topic further in almost any class, as it has become so important and ingrained in contemporary Western culture.

**June 22, 2015 – July 05, 2015.** In the seventh post, participants were asked to respond to one question by providing either *yes*, *no* or *not sure*. Moreover, the post included a set of photographic images pertaining to the posted questions and a compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry. There were 14 teachers participating.

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<sup>51</sup> Following participants (#): 21, 6, 8,17, 4, 15, 16, 9, 30, 18, 26

<sup>52</sup> Following participants (#): 21, 6, 3, 8,17, 4, 15, 16, 18

<sup>53</sup> Following participants (#): 21, 6, 3, 8,17, 15, 9

<sup>54</sup> Following participants (#): 13, 3, 16, 9, 30, 18, 26

<sup>55</sup> Following participants (#): 6, 8, 17, 18

<sup>56</sup> Following participants (#): 4, 9, 18

<sup>57</sup> Following participants (#): 21, 9

<sup>58</sup> Following participants (#): 16, 18

<sup>59</sup> Following participants (#): 3

<sup>60</sup> Following participants (#): 18

QUESTION	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Do you think that you need additional experience such as professional development prior to initiate discussions on skin modification?	14 participants <sup>32</sup>	0 participants <sup>33</sup>	0 participants <sup>34</sup>

Table 28: The *E-skin* Blog, June 22-July 5, 2015

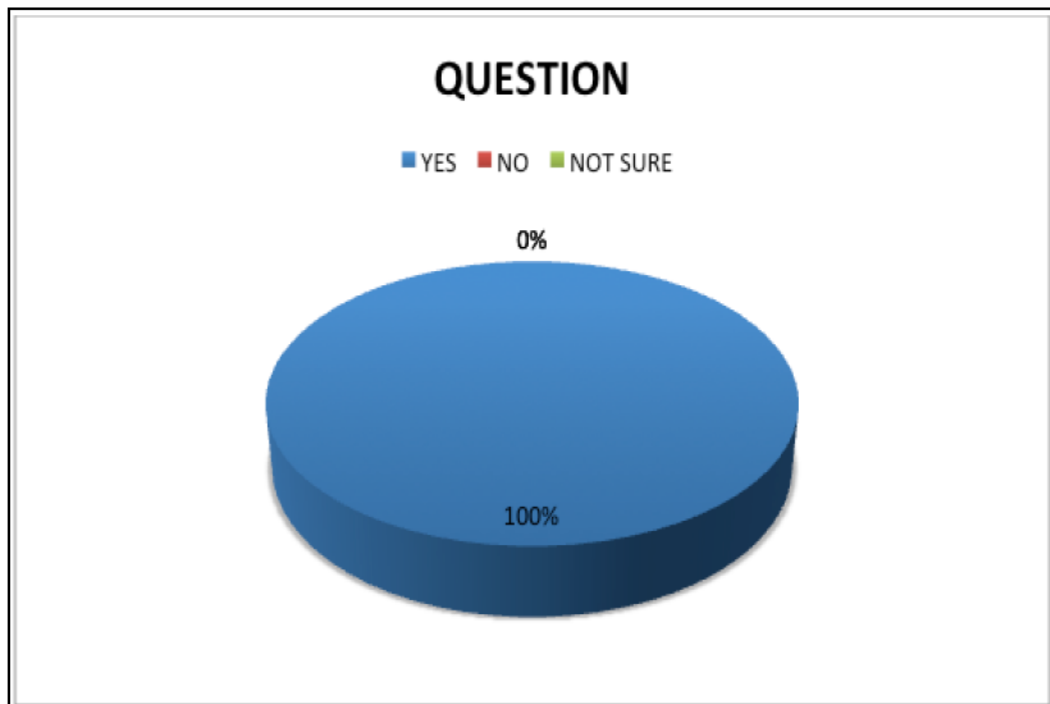


Table 29: The *E-skin* Blog, June 22-July 5, 2015

All participants responded with *yes* to the posted question. Participants prior to initiating any discussion on the subject of body modification with students would welcome professional development and access to some educational materials. Some participants stated that knowledge of psychology, behaviour, and health would arm

teachers with additional information so that the discussions could be meaningful to the students (participant #13). Others specifically pointed to workshops with psychologists to learn more about cutting and self-harm among youth (participant #21). There was also interest in learning how to analyze methods and strategies for working with high-risk adolescents (participant #6).

In general, participants showed a great interest in the possibility of receiving expert advice from professionals such as a public health nurse, or doctors, with experience with pros and cons of the procedures (#26). All participants agreed that it is necessary to be well prepared to embark upon the conversation regarding such a controversial topic; since adolescents' brains are in the process of development, a poor approach to the subject can cause unpredictable and negative consequences (participant #15).

**July 06, 2015 – July 19, 2015.** In the eighth post, participants were asked to respond to three questions with either *yes*, *no* or *not sure* answers. The post included a set of photographic images pertaining to the posted questions, and a compilation of statements made by the participants during the previous entry. The participants were also asked to consider contributing an artifact such as an object, photograph, musical item, or anything else that conveys experience to the research. There were 10 teachers participating.

QUESTION #1	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Does longing for the pain experience play a role in youths' decision to modify their bodies?	4 participants <sup>35</sup>	3 participants <sup>36</sup>	3 participants <sup>37</sup>

Table 30: The *E-skin* Blog, July 6-19, 2015

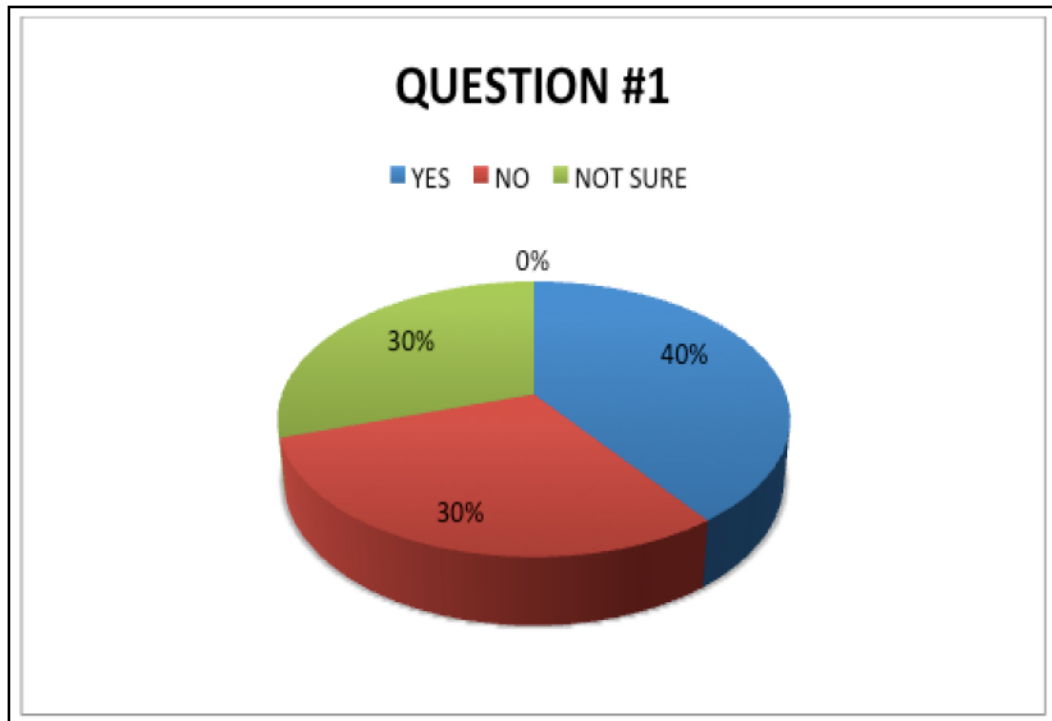


Table 31: The *E-skin* Blog, July 6-19, 2015

The connection between longing for pain and body modification by adolescents was evident to 40% of the participants. Some respondents stated that since longing for pain is a very real urge, similar to an urge for an adrenaline rush or other “high” sensations craved by many people, youth might desire it (participant

#10). Some youth cut themselves as self-medication, while others view pain as an important part of the ritual: “I survived the pain of this tattoo” (participant #20).

On the other hand, for 30 % of participants, *longing for pain* did not play a factor in adolescents’ skin modification. Instead, some respondents stated that such a desire represents mental pain (participant #3). Others pointed out that for the desired end product, the pain was only a by-product (participant #17).

The remaining 30% of participants were not sure of the answer. Some stated that youth could sometimes act impulsively. In the case of skin alteration, some may even not realize how painful these body modification procedures are until they are experiencing them, whereas others are just ready to prove that they are up for a challenge (participant #13).

QUESTION #2	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Is there any possibility that contemporary youth will embrace technology (implants, cybernetic/ bionic parts) as another form of body modification?	10 participants <sup>38</sup>	0 participants <sup>39</sup>	0 participants <sup>40</sup>

Table 32: The *E-skin* Blog, July 6-19, 2015

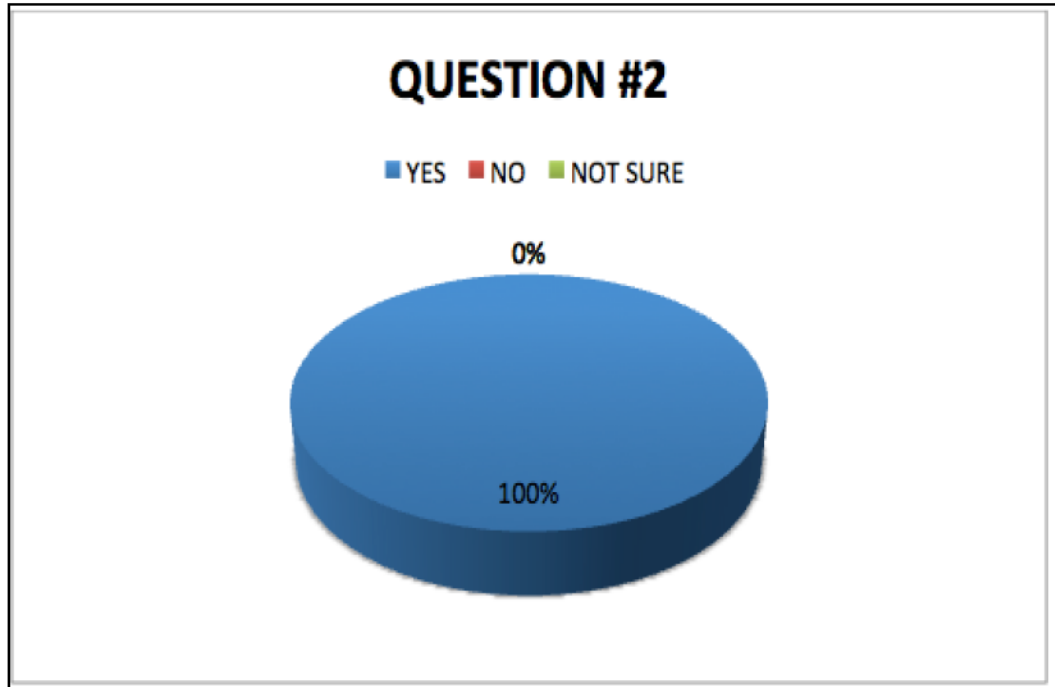


Table 33: The *E-skin* Blog, July 6-19, 2015

All participants agreed that contemporary youth will embrace technology as another form of body modification, since they are immersed in the world of technology and digital communication. Some respondents stated that this is exactly the direction the body alteration trend is going and the younger generations are primed to embrace implants that would make their lives more convenient, such as cellular implants, Google chips, and energy sources just to mention a few (participant #10). Additionally, as participant #26 pointed out, some adolescents who modify themselves will embrace any extreme form of body modification as long as it is considered atypical.

QUESTION #3	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Does the youth skin/body become the next frontier of technology application?	4 participants <sup>41</sup>	0 participants <sup>42</sup>	6 participants <sup>43</sup>

Table 34: The *E-skin* Blog, July 6-19, 2015

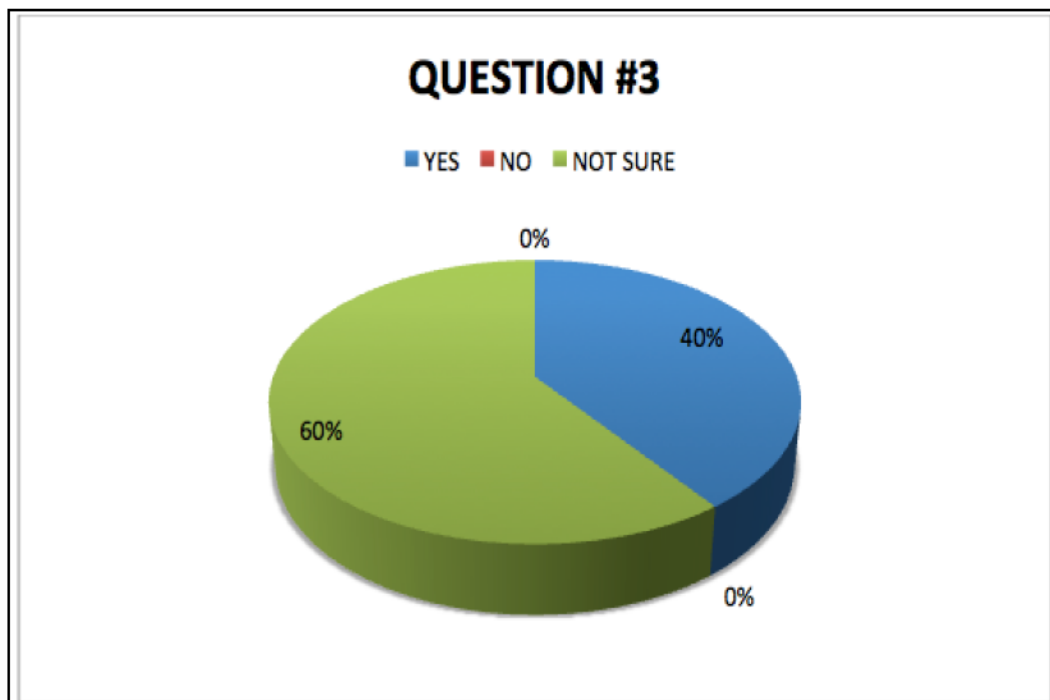


Table 35: The *E-skin* Blog, July 6-19, 2015

The response of the participants was twofold: 40% of them were convinced that adolescent bodies will indeed become the next frontier of technological application, while the other 60% did not have a clear answer to the question. For some, youth have always been willing to try new things and possibly push the limits; therefore, the involvement of technology is the inevitable path in future body

modifications involving youth (participant #17). In a similar vein, participant #4 pointed out that today's youth have been pioneers in incorporating technology into their skin marking that the rest of us are uncomfortable with: magnetic chips. For participant #10, western culture and youth have already unconsciously moved in that direction, and they are ready for the next step in the symbiotic relation of technology and human body.

The blog allowed for certain patterns to emerge. Visible is the unresolved tension of participants seeing body-modification both as a trend among youth, and simultaneously as a necessary practice of self/group identification and actualization. The tension seems to be further exacerbated as teachers oscillated between perceiving body-modification as a result of peer pressure and fashion, and thus as potentially problematic, while simultaneously seemingly acknowledging it as a potentially genuine and *necessary* method of adolescent self-expression.

Not only does the blog reveal insight into the thought processes of the participants, it assists the participants themselves to develop and evolve their own understanding and assumptions of the subject and themselves as the content of the subject through a new lens. In this whole process they move beyond a singular focus on the self to look at the entire subject of the whole blog by reading comments of other participants, thus becoming a collective subjectivity, and going through the process as a group in a collective process of *becoming*.

The above graphs and tables anchor the subject at the specific moment and provide a starting point for further discussion as a dynamic entity in flux. They provide the basic information that invites the reader to ask more questions why, to read the actual statements of the participants, and to urge further discussion and research. It is not just a typical conversation of the researcher and the reader, but an evolving conversation inviting a deeper and deeper understanding of the subject with the next step being to read and consider the specific statements of the participants.



As mentioned in my project research questions, the focus of my research is for educators, and the research intended for adults to better understand youth body modification as a possible pedagogical tool to be used as resource for school curricula. The quantification of data into graphs, although undoubtedly collapses some of the nuances of participant responses and the varied themes arising regarding the practice of body modification among adolescents, it also provides an easily disseminated and immediately discernable sense of the needs, gaps and issues teachers perceive around the practice of youth body modification. As the idea is for this research to be used as part of school curricula, the quantification of the data into graphs seemed the most appropriate presentation of information, suited for the organizational capacities of secondary schools and their curricula.

**The E-skin Blog Installation Site.** During the E-skin blog, the installation site devoted to the research gradually began to be filled with artifacts, closely related to the blog's activities. The participants' responses were collected, printed, and then included among artifacts within the installation space. I was present in the research space on a daily basis to contemplate and elicit information from this conflux of collected objects. In this vein, I became a facilitator of the event with no control over its becomings. As a skin event, the installation became an assemblage of individual experiences: the narrative of a hybridized self, as well as the narratives and accounts of the blog participants and visitors to the site. The expansion and growth (becoming) of the installation was documented on the photographic images that were taken on a bi-weekly basis. Altogether 60 photographs were taken.

Once the *E-skin* blog was officially closed, the password was changed and the blog entry data printed and stored at my art studio for future reference. Similarly, the installation site was also closed and all data collected and stored at my art studio. The photographic data images, documenting the progress (*becoming*) of the installation site, were later used to reconstruct the installation that became the E-skin Installation, Phase I of the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I & II. Once phase II of the *E-skin* Interactive Installation was created, the entire installation was moved to a public gallery during September 2015, where it became a source for collecting new data from spectators.

## **The *E-skin* Interactive Installation (Phases I & II)**

The *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I & II represented various stages within my inquiry with a re-installation of the *E-skin* Installation initial phase (E-skin Interactive Installation, Phase I). After the E-skin blog was closed and Phase I of the installation, as a data site, disassembled, the creation of the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase II, began as a summation of all the conducted research. This lasted two months and in September 2015, the installation was moved to a public gallery for public viewing. While the E-skin Interactive Installation, Phase I & II was available for public viewing,<sup>61</sup> spectators were invited to engage in a public debate on the research subject, turning the installation into a research ground since the public's contribution became another source of data collection. The installation became another generator of research exploring reasons and meaning behind adolescents' use of skin as a medium of communication.

i) The *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I. Based on photographic images, *E-skin* Installation, Phase I was re-constructed in the public gallery. Special adjustment had to be made in regards to the space dimensions, although this did not have a significant impact on the installation's purpose as a source of data collection from the exhibition participants.

ii) The *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase II. The second part of the *E-skin* Interactive Installation was comprised of a collection of large, pear-shaped forms that were suspended at different heights in the gallery specifically assigned for them. The see-through forms symbolized adolescents and how their brains are perceived and how they process information. The vulnerability of youth in contemporary Western society and its impact on their decision making pertaining to body modification were the main leading themes of the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase II. The installation was continuously in the progress of, using Deleuzian language, *becoming*, since viewers were encouraged to contribute physically to the artwork by inserting written statements into the suspended forms. These slips of paper were later collected and became another source of data.

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<sup>61</sup> The exhibition lasted from September 14, 2015 to September 28, 2015.

iii) Additional Source of Data Collection. After viewing the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase I, the public had an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the subject of youth and skin modification by posting comments visible to any other spectator. A wall covered with 12 white sheets of Bristol board (24"x36") was included in the gallery space, so respondents could leave their thoughts and ideas by using any of the six pens suspended by string from the wall. Thus, the wall was transformed into a public forum space, 144" x 72", open to any viewer who had comments to share. Without exception, all written comments were not censored. Once the exhibition was closed, the Bristol boards with the commentaries were collected, transferred to a Word Document, evaluated, and stored on my computer as new data. This data then provided additional information for my research.



Figure 58: The *E-skin* Interactive Installation, paper slips, The *Extension* Gallery, University of Alberta

Seventy-eight comments were collected. The majority were anonymous; only four visitors signed either with their full name or initials. The age and sex of commenting spectators were unknown. There were 42 positive remarks, 27 negative remarks, and nine neutral. Three comments questioned the validity of another person's remark. Some of the comments were very straightforward ("beautiful work," "pure evil," "lovely," and so on), while the rest shared more comments regarding their knowledge of the subject. Six commentaries emphasized the importance of public discussion on the subject of contemporary youth in relation to various forms of body alteration (See Appendix D, Participant Comments). The general comments either applauded the artist for the subject exploration<sup>62</sup> or for the art show's impact.<sup>63</sup> Some comments also brought forward the desire of adolescents to alter their skin as a means of expressing oneself in a unique, personal way (four),<sup>64</sup> as an inner struggle (three),<sup>65</sup> as a way to share with one's surroundings something that cannot be shared in any other way (one),<sup>66</sup> as a multidimensional issue (three),<sup>67</sup> as a body and soul healing (two),<sup>68</sup> as a means of being acknowledged and accepted (three),<sup>69</sup> or for aesthetics (two).<sup>70</sup> One of the commentaries stated their own desire for a specific skin marking,<sup>71</sup> while another warned about the life-long, lasting consequences of having a body marking that was not thoroughly thought through.<sup>72</sup> One of the commentaries focused on the

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<sup>62</sup> Commentary: "Thank you for your exploration" (anonymous).

<sup>63</sup> Commentary: "The show is amazing, bold and important" (anonymous).

<sup>64</sup> Commentary: "Body piercing and body tattoos are a way of showing who someone is. They may not always look good or professional" (anonymous).

<sup>65</sup> Commentary: "Interesting thought provoking controversial body mod & ink is a state of ones soul & demons" (anonymous).

<sup>66</sup> Commentary: "I'm not a fan of the body modification subculture, but I understand these people have something to say and see no other way to say it" (anonymous).

<sup>67</sup> Commentary: "Ultimately there are multiple reasons why one may decide to modify their body: it is a multidimensional issue" (anonymous).

<sup>68</sup> Commentary: "Sometimes I wonder if they have a broken soul that body mod help heal" (anonymous).

<sup>69</sup> Commentary: "People on the street give me a good feeling about my artistic tat. This is what your show symbolizes to me" (anonymous).

<sup>70</sup> Commentary: "The expressions from the individuals are impressive. This exhibit offers many of us to ponder and watch with feeling self conscious about 'staring'; Although many of us watch and ponder; we are not always judging but rather curious; this is a fascinating "Real" view of many expressive ways people can share; whether it's a cry or need for attention or their way of being transformed into an artistic piece. Thank you" (singed: Heather T.).

<sup>71</sup> Commentary: "I've always wanted a barcode on my foot" (anonymous).

<sup>72</sup> Commentary: "They can be "out there" but people who get them dare have to be smart or live with the consequences" (anonymous).

influence of pop culture on youths' decision or desire to alter their bodies and suggested further inquiry in that direction.<sup>73</sup>

Among the negative comments, some spectators found the images included in the show "scary," "too extreme," "freakish," "sad," "sick," and "ugly." One of the anonymous comments describes the show as projecting "a dark, sad energy channelled by self mutilation and need for exterior change." The other viewer, who signed his comment using an unreadable signature, advised that "Anxiety & Pain only clutter; they are not the road to meaning nor fulfillment." Another nameless comment stated, "sick and ugly, when they age and skin droops, they will all look like walking bruises. Gross!" Finally, one unnamed commentary approached me directly saying, "Ms. I. O-K, I see freakish body embellishment. The artistic value is zero. I wonder where is the artistic value in disfiguring one's own body?" Some of the comments were not directly related to body modification. Instead, under the umbrella of anonymity, one of the viewers wrote "you managed to showcase normalcy in abnormality. After a while, all our idiosyncrasies become prosaic."

In general, the number of comments and their tone showed that the subject of adolescents' desire to embrace body modification is a very controversial topic, having the power to ignite passionate debate. Based on the collected data, it is evident that there is an urgent need for open discussion as a platform to educate all interested parties on the subject.

Aside from writing comments on the wall, viewers were also invited<sup>74</sup> to contribute to the growth or *becoming* of the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phase II by writing additional comments about their own experiences and thoughts regarding youths' skin modification on slips of paper provided at the table located between the two exhibit sections. Once written, the comments were then inserted into one of the "youth's brain" forms by the spectators. At the closing of the exhibition, the new data was collected and formed part of my research. These written comments were collected after the exhibition was concluded.

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<sup>73</sup> Commentary: "I do agree there is a process of cultural misappropriation that underpins a lot of pop culture influenced body modification, perhaps this could be further explored in this work" (anonymous).

<sup>74</sup> [A note posted on the wall](#)



Figure 59: The *E-skin* interactive installation, paper slips, Extension Gallery, University of Alberta

There were 20 notes collected from the suspended forms. The text of each note was then typed into a Word document, evaluated, and stored as a data source on my computer. The age and sex of participating spectators were not requested. Based on the collected data, the commentators viewed skin modification as an attempt by youth to be different (three),<sup>75</sup> creative (two),<sup>76</sup> attention-seeking (one),<sup>77</sup> and rebellious (two).<sup>78</sup> Some participants objected to the very permanence of skin marking since “nothing is permanent... even life.

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<sup>75</sup> Commentary: “Trying desperately to be different” (anonymous).

<sup>76</sup> Commentary: “Expressing creativity – maybe?” (anonymous).

<sup>77</sup> Commentary: “I think the tattoos and piercings are a cry for attention or an attempt to identify with a certain group where a different hair do or hair colour did the same in the past” (anonymous).

<sup>78</sup> Commentary: “Is it rebellion against society against norms?” (anonymous).

So I do NOT like anything permanent” (signed: Aska C-S).

One of the viewers even pointed out that skin marking is symptomatic of inner struggle, and therefore it is essential to “figure out what is important on the inside first” (anonymous). A number of participants described body alteration as a self-mutilating act,<sup>79</sup> while others admitted that they could not comprehend the idea and reasons behind skin marking. For some “tattoos & piercings are very ugly – plain, healthy skin is beautiful” (anonymous), while for others skin markings “are for many reasons a value response to all or any negative effects related to an individual” (signed LM.).

Interestingly, another anonymous commentator stressed the importance of adolescents being taught how to express themselves and their feelings, since “As a youth you have all these emotions, feelings and that you haven’t quite learned how to express. As this is where people are at this time. The only thing you ‘know’ is yourself, which is why that’s the medium.” Finally, a last public voice pointed out that, “skin does not tell us much about a person, it is but the encasement of hopes, dreams, plans and the value of living life in the present” (anonymous).

In summation, the data forming my research collected from different sources provided me with broad overview of the research subject. The results of my research brought me to conclude that there is not one but a multiplicity of reasons behind adolescents’ desire for and motivation to undergo a body modification procedure. Furthermore, any form of body modification (factual or desired) by youth reflects a step in his or her *becoming*. Lastly, skin modification by youth has a pedagogical potential for the secondary-school curriculum as a force to gain and sustain students’ attention while expanding their knowledge on a given subject.

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<sup>79</sup> Commentary: “Is self mutilating to give a message? To society?” (anonymous).

## **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Following the questions constituting my research's framework, the collected data revealed that skin is indeed a new medium of communication used by contemporary youth. There are diverse reasons behind youths' fascination with skin marking, as signifiers of both internal need and external influence. This brings Deleuze's concept of *becoming* onto the limelight as a way of demonstrating adolescents' process of evolvment that, as with any process of creation, does not cease its existence but rather is in constant "making-remaking." Because of its seductive power to youth, the topic of skin alteration carries a great pedagogical potential to enhance the studying process. By incorporating some of its aspects into the subjects, the majority of students may find the learning process more interesting and challenging, thereby potentially making the body modification topic a stimulus capable of helping retain students' attention and excitement. Body alteration may well become a so-called icebreaker in the teacher/student relationship, since an informative, truthful conversation on this controversial subject may allow for better communication based on increased mutual trust between the educator and his or her pupils.

### **Why? The Reasons Behind The Desire & Fascination**

Given the permanent nature of body modification, in contrast to the transitory nature of contemporary society, the question of why body modification attracts youth's attention is one worth asking. In a quest to establish a link between the skin and various motivational desires behind youth's willingness to embrace body modification for the purposes of communication, I based my inquiry in arts-based research, which culminated in the creation of the *E-skin* Interactive Installation. Following a Deleuzian line of thought, I created an assemblage of visual research that offered arguments, perceptions and insights, opening the gate for further investigation "to produce new knowledge that can be encountered and acted on" (Sullivan, 2005, p. 180).

Based on the data collected, there are a number of reasons behind the adolescent fascination with and desire for skin modification; however, the predominant reasons are the



culture and its norms affecting the choices teenagers make. Youth are immersed in a world driven by consumerism and the dominance of the technology and social media. Youth's brains, still in the process of development,<sup>80</sup> are constantly bombarded with never-ending news, advertising, and a stunningly complex amount of information.

### **Consumerism and Popular Culture**

In today's post-modern Western society, it appears that the toxic mélange of consumerism and popular culture has permeated the daily life of adolescents, heavily influencing their choices. This symbiotic union, thriving in the age of digital communication, has an enormous influence on youth. Media such as TV, magazines, and social media are peppered with paid advertisements, affecting the young people's preferences and choices. To make the products appeal to young consumers, celebrities whose lifestyle and choices adolescents try to imitate are often hired to officially endorse and represent certain products. Celebrities have always influenced and introduced new fads and fashions. It is next to impossible to find a celebrity<sup>81</sup> whom adolescents look up to, who does not have his or her skin inked or pierced. Therefore, it is not surprising that many youths want to follow in the footsteps of their idols by either embracing or desiring skin marking for themselves. As one of the teachers<sup>82</sup> participating in the *E-skin* blog research pointed out, youth, left to their own wishes, and without any influence from others, would choose fewer permanent alterations, if any.

Another interesting aspect of consumerist culture is the focus on the "self" and "now." As Christopher Lasch keenly pointed out in his bestselling book *The Culture of Narcissism*, "The media give substance to and thus intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the 'herd,'

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<sup>80</sup> According to the article "The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction," published in the online magazine of the National Institute of Mental Health, "The parts of the brain responsible for more 'top-down' control, controlling impulses, and planning ahead – the hallmarks of adult behaviour – are among the last to mature" (2011, p. 3). Retrieved December 30, 2015. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-still-under-construction/index.shtml> National Institute of Mental Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, NH Publication No. 11-4929, 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Miley Cyrus, the American singer and actress, has around 40 tattoos inked on her body. Cara Delevingne, a British model, got a lion tattoo on her right finger when she was 20 years old. Retrieved on December 10 from <http://www.wewomen.ca/news-celebrities/celebrities-with-tattoos-female-stars-with-ink-s1559157.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Participant # 5, The E-skin Blog, Entry #2 (April 13 - April 26).

and make it more and more difficult for him to accept the banality of everyday existence” (p. 21, 1991). In this vein, as another research participant<sup>83</sup> stated, adolescents have been conditioned to think following the motto: “I am responsible for myself. I deserve it. I want to be unique, trending or ahead of the crowd.” The instant gratification of getting a tattoo on the wrist, similar to that of Justin Bieber, without thinking about the consequences, appears to be normal for an average youth desiring a tattoo. Therefore, today’s youth appear to be following current, passing trends,<sup>84</sup> rather than a carefully thought out, meaningful vision of what they will mark on their skin. As participant #5 stated, “I like it,” or “It’s cool” are typical responses to questions regarding the choice of the skin marking image; this seems to be more important than the meaning behind the chosen image.<sup>85</sup>

### **Rebellion/Minoritarian versus Authority/Majoritarian & Identity versus Nomadism**

As stated above, motivations behind skin modification by youth are complex in nature. In some sense, skin becomes a battlefield of diverse ideologies in a quest for supremacy: creative expression, self-reflection, trend, mutilation, and catharsis, just to mention of a few. Among them is certainly the need to distance oneself from authority while in the process of establishing his or her own identity in a visible way. Such an action might be also regarded as a form of protest against mainstream culture in much the same way youth have done in previous times.

The question, then, is whether one can locate youth’s desire to alter, augment, and adorn their skin as a minoritarian impulse of deterritorializing one’s body against the homogenizing forces of capitalism and the appropriation of similarity/difference? Can body modification be a minoritarian impulse at the same time as it is a fad? This question is certainly a difficult one, since, as noted throughout my research, the complex history of body modification has seemingly found its crux in the commercialization of body modification as an activity of self-actualization under capitalism.

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<sup>83</sup> Participant #26, The E-skin Blog, Entry post #2 (April 13 - April 26).

<sup>84</sup> Participant #5 in his/her post in Entry #4 (May 10 - 23) observed, “How many students did I see for a year or two with dragonflies, or a few years later with a quote, or more recently with a compass?!”

<sup>85</sup> The *E-skin* Blog, Entry #4 (May 10- 23).

In this way, one could say *some* forms of body modification have been re-territorialized as a majoritarian practice. Tattoos and piercings are, in some cases, fashionable rights of passage for adolescents. However, as my research has shown, despite the popularity of certain practices, body modification, on the whole, remains a polarizing issue. Many participants still find the practice dark, abject, and unnecessary. Furthermore, many still question the very motivations behind such practices. In addition, as certain forms of body modification become commercialized, youth react by adapting new and more extreme forms of body modification practices. More radical, visible, and abject tattoos such as the full suit, face scarring, branding, and implants – all involving considerable risk and pain – are just some of the new body modification forms practiced amongst youth.

### **Professional Tools**

It would be useful to empower secondary-school educators with essential pedagogical tools to facilitate informative discussions regarding body modification and youth. Many teachers do not feel qualified to engage and lead discussions related to this subject. As participant # 20 suggested, “professional development, access to reliable quantitative and qualitative data, or even firsthand accounts from individuals would help educators demystify the topic for their students.”<sup>86</sup> The more knowledgeable the teachers are, the more they will be inclined to moderate honest and open conversations on this sensitive subject with their pupils. This would give youth access to informed choices. In this respect, professional development sessions would benefit teachers who deal with students resorting to cutting or self-harming.

Body modification has already crossed the tipping point in its popularity and has become widely accepted within the mainstream of Western societies. It is not uncommon these days to meet individuals representing the most conservative professions including teachers, lawyers and physicians exhibiting a tattoo or piercing proudly displayed on his or her body. In such a welcoming environment, more adolescents treat the subject of body alteration as a commonality and understandably have some questions that need to be

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<sup>86</sup> The E-skin Blog, Entry #7 (June 22- July 08).

answered in a professional and knowledgeable manner. Therefore, instead of making it a taboo subject in schools, educators should be empowered with knowledge on this subject to assist their students with advise or clarification if needed. A number of high quality courses on various topics related directly and indirectly to body modification, in relationship to youth, should be offered to secondary school teachers as a starting point to informed discussion. Future development days in my opinion should include such courses within its mandated program.

Within this context, the subject of body modification has a great potential to become a permanent feature within the junior and high school curriculum. Similar to sex education courses, skin alteration could be offered as a mandatory course consisting of three to five classes offered yearly to all junior and high school students. Alternatively, it might be offered as a unit within the health course. Parental consent would be required before the students attend these classes. Pros and cons should be discussed in debt. Therefore, the presence of invited professionals, such as tattoo artists, nurses, dermatologists, tattoo removal specialists, addiction counselors, social workers and skin modification aficionados would be desirable. Students could have a chance to ask questions, which would lead them to make more informed choices. The presence of these guests would be essential for those teachers who have no personal relationship to body modification, by this I mean teachers who may be averse to body modifications, or have no first-hand experience with body modification. Students should have ample opportunity to lead discussions among their peers. Such student involvement is crucial to a productive learning experience for it enhances and helps them retain what is and has been taught.

In conclusion, it appears that body modification is here to stay and therefore we, as educators, should embrace this subject with our students. Let us eliminate the stigma that tattoos, piercings and scarifications have elicited when the subject is raised within the school system. The well being of our students should always be our highest priority.

## Becoming

In one of her posts, participant #21 included a link to an article discussing the stand taken by some parents regarding their adolescent children's desire to get a tattoo.<sup>87</sup> According to its author, Mary Pflum, a 2010 Pew Research study demonstrated that "parents increasingly support their kids' decisions to get tattoos" (2010, para 5). As a result, according to the owner of a Tattooville tattoo parlour in Neptune, New Jersey, "In the past 10 years, we've seen more and more teenagers getting tattoos and getting larger tattoos" (Pflum, 2010, para. 4). Some parents have even presented their offspring with a sixteenth-birthday tattoo gift.

This brings up the question of why youth express a desire to modify their bodies? Perhaps adolescents subconsciously reject the notion of regarding their own bodies as a cultural object that, according to Buchanan (1997), would mean, "treating it as a dumb item that can, like any mannequin, be adorned with desires, but no desiring of its own" (p. 75). Looking at this issue from such a point of view, one might say that by modifying their skin, the adolescent undergoes a process of counter-actualization. There is a new person emerging from such an experience, a person whose body and mind is setting new parameters for his or her existence within the familiar environment. In other words, with marking their skin permanently, the process of deterritorialization is activated that, together with the practice of territorialisation, "constitutes a process of becoming" of a teenager (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 181).

The adolescents' desire to alter their own skin is a reflection of their *becoming* as, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a process of change, line of flight, or movement within an assemblage. Here, one element of *becoming* is that it is beyond the youths' self-control. They cannot anticipate how teachers, their friends or people of different cultural backgrounds will perceive their modified skin. For example, *E-skin* Blog participant #15 would certainly have some problems with accepting, in her classroom, a student with

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<sup>87</sup> The E-skin Blog, Entry #2 (April 13 -26).

visible tattoos on his or her body.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, despite the fact that adolescents may have parental support to permanently mark their skin, there still might be elements of assemblage beyond their control and that of their parents. It is the very moment, in which the majoritarian bodies collide with the minoritarian bodies, that the body art may not be positively perceived, thus releasing “the power of AND” (Bell, 2008, p. 60).

In other words, this multiplication provides a sense of never-ending events leading to adolescent’s continued *becoming*. Here, it is important to mention that for Deleuze and Guattari, the concept of desire represents an “ontological level of relations resulting in an affirmative mode of acting, relating, and existing” (Goodchild, 1996, p. 33). Furthermore, their desire or decision to let their bodies be modified manifests itself in the “releasing of a potentiality that brings with it a repetition with a difference” (Jagodzinski, 2013, p. 5).

Within this context, an adolescent with a modified body might be regarded as an assemblage of various life experiences and stages of his or her life. Following the Deleuzian thought, the nature of assemblage shows that “assemblage reproduces and changes its patterns and the flux of ‘natural drift’ through space and time,” therefore, it is possible to anticipate that assemblage might produce “chaotic or unpredictable behaviours” (Jae Eon Yu, 2015, p. 5), as gathered through the two phases of the *E-skin* Interactive Installation. Similar to the tattooed body of an adolescent, by moving to the public gallery space, my artwork became another minoritarian body that was beyond my control anymore. The public became the power of “AND.”

By altering their skin, youths “find new ways of being, which effectively means a new way of becoming” (Buchanan, 1997, p. 79). Since skin modification may also be regarded as an attempt to produce Body without Organs (BwO), in this spirit, BwO “is a new way of becoming” (p. 79). The only thing left is to continue posing Spinoza’s question “What can a body do?” In a similar way, in the future, I hope to continue presenting the *E-skin* Interactive Installation to other audiences in order to encounter a new power of “AND.”

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<sup>88</sup> In her third post, participant #15 declared, “I personally do not like tattoos and i don’t understand them.”

Whether one reduces the motivations behind body art to a fad, or questions the very psychological motives behind body modification, especially as a practice involving pain and permanence, one thing is for certain: a youth's body remains a territory of contestation as my research has demonstrated. It has also demonstrated that there is not just one clear reason why youth have desire to modify their skin. There is a multiplicity of reasons, starting from being inspired by people that they admire such as pop stars and athletes; influence by family and peers; social pressure; demand to belong to a group; rebellion; and acts of self destruction. It could be immaturity, or maturity and a conscious choice of pure art. Youth are not clones. They may be in the process of evolving, but none is the same, so we cannot look through one view or one lens. There is a multitude of lenses. Living in times of social media, youth are in constant contact, moving beyond local and small group problematics to global influences with global reach. This research has also demonstrated that the reasons behind the appeal of skin modification for youth are constantly in flux, thus itself reflecting a *becoming* of adolescents that is often beyond their self control.

Through my teaching practice, I have seen significant interest in the subject of skin modification from students and teacher colleagues. Skin modification will continue to be with us. Rather than fighting it as a taboo subject, we can use it as pedagogical tool to enhance the sharing of knowledge with students in a wide variety of curriculum subjects, thus inviting the interest and participation of students. In chemistry, for example, we can use it to discuss chemical components of ink. In biology, we can invite discussion of skin, morphology, safety, and how skin modification affects the skin and the entire body. In math and physics we can discuss calculations of mass and tension. In art, we can discuss skin modification's multiple artistic aspects and processes. In social studies, we can discuss tribal body modification practices as rites of passage. In Language Arts, we can research the innate need of certain social groups to mark their own skin as a form of communication.

All of this suggests that the adolescent body remains an ideological terrain, one that is "up for grabs" as to who has control over it. In this sense, despite the commercialization of certain body modification practices such as tattoos and piercings, body modification on the whole remains a minoritarian practice. Given the permanent consequences and the pain involved in the process, for adolescents, body modification remains a tool to de-territorialize

majoritarian claims of what one can and cannot do with their body at that age. Through this process, youth re-assert the question “who is to determine what a body can become?”

In the spirit of keeping the future open, below are the images representing the evolution as a continuous “and, and, and...” of the *E-skin* Interactive Installation.



Figure 60: The *E-skin* installation, phase I, prototype #1



Figure 61: The *E-skin* installation, phase I, final version (for now)



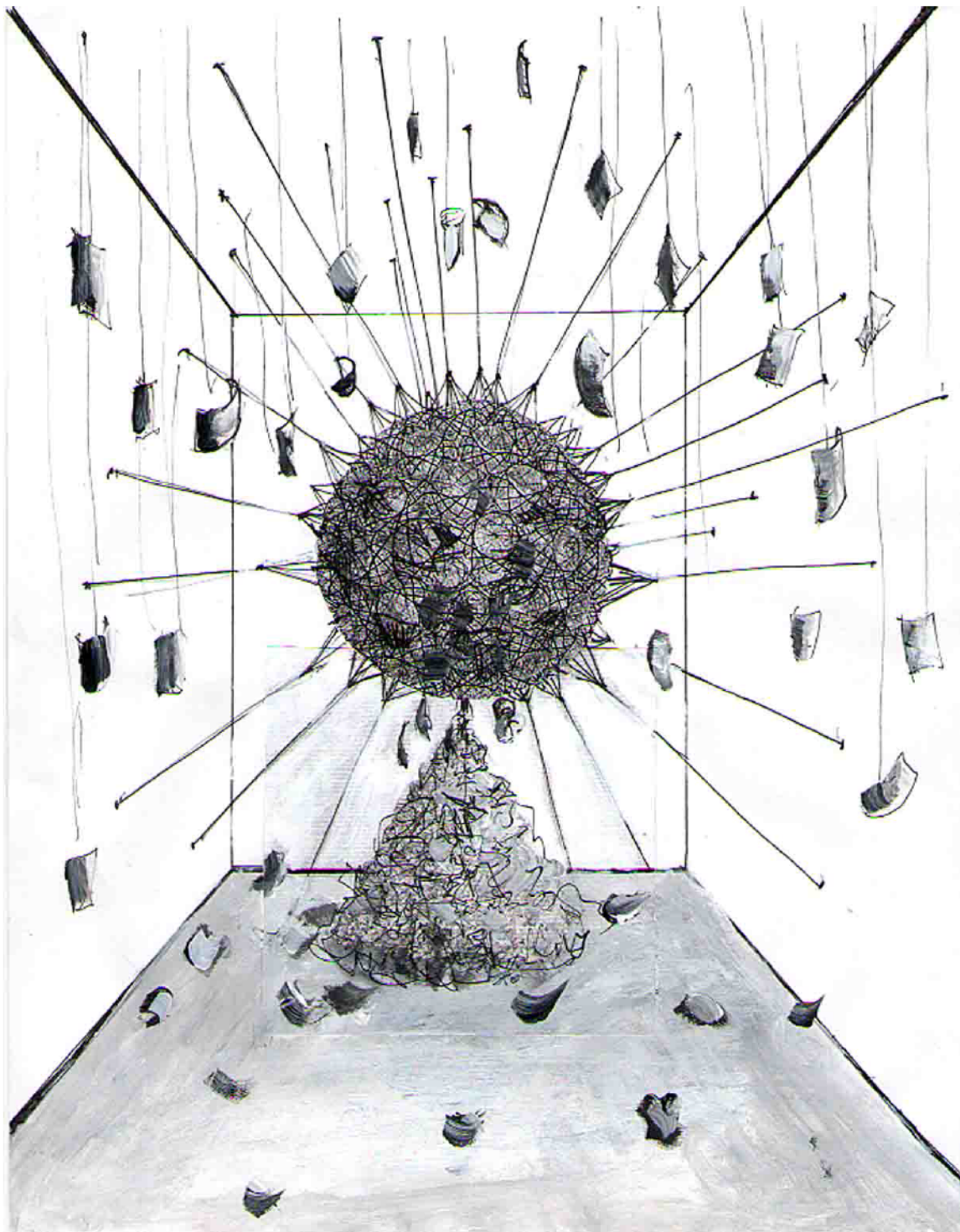


Figure 62: The *E-skin* installation, phase II, prototype #1



Figure 62: The *E-skin* installation, phase II, prototype #2



Figure 63: The *E-skin* installation, phase II, final version (for now)

## **Pedagogical Potentialities**

Understanding skin modification as a modern phenomenon within the context of youth can contribute to establishing a solid cross-generational communication platform. Within this framework, understanding the rationale behind youth's fascination with tattoos, piercing, and scarification may well enhance the communication and dialogue between the polarized forces of students and teachers. This, in turn, could possibly lead teachers to use the epistemological potential of skin as a communication tool within the school environment. For example, a Grade 8 social studies unit on Japan may include a lesson on tattoo art practiced by the Ainu, the Japanese Indigenous People, or the Grade 9 language arts students may write a persuasive essay on the Chinese foot binding practice.

Furthermore, students' interest in tattoos may result in offering a larger number of art projects that revolve around skin modification; thus, students will be more inclined to genuinely embrace such a project. The subject of skin modification has the potential of becoming a platform for a collaborative fusion between art and various subjects since many art projects can also be relevant to, or incorporated into, specific topics covered in Social Studies, Math, or Science. As such, this approach demonstrates a successful means of actively engaging students into studying a broad scope of curriculum subjects. Such potential enrichment of the curriculum, sparking students' interest and attention, offers enormous pedagogical prospects that may translate into having a positive impact on school attendance. Throughout my professional career as an art teacher of grades 7 to 12, I have already introduced a number of projects directly related to skin modification.

Art projects for Grades 10 and 11 can be structured around body modification art, since students ages 15 to 17 are expected to possess the technical skills and the cognitive maturity to generate well-executed art works with a strong conceptual underpinning. This could also be expanded towards the introduction of a cross-curricular approach, in which art lives in symbiotic relationship with core curricular subjects. For example, a drawing unit may be structured around the body alteration art, specifically scarification and tattooing. In this vein, a *Skin Marking* charcoal drawing exercise will allow students to practice their tonal drawing skills while becoming familiar with the anatomy of the human body. This

activity might be introduced by an in-depth investigation on subjects such as: 1) tribal tattoos of Polynesia, 2) Japanese Yakuza tattoo patterns, or 3) Mehndi (Henna) tattoos. Such investigations can analyze the symbolic meanings behind the use of certain patterns and their placement on specific body parts. The young researchers may ask if the bodies of both genders are subjugated to skin modification. If this is the case, then what is the difference of permanent marking between males and females?



Figure 65: My Cultural Experience, design assignment (grade 7)



Figure 64: Skin Marking, charcoal drawing exercise

This activity can culminate in writing an analytical essay on the subject before proceeding with the actual assignment called *Tribal Marking*, in which students will create a self-portrait that will be enhanced with skin markings representing who they are inside.



Figure 65: Tribal Marking Drawing, Assignment #1



Figure 66: Tribal Marking Drawing, Assignment #2

Another interesting art project related to skin modification might consist of creating a design for a back, upper torso, or arm tattoo that is intended to cover a specific skin condition such as rosacea, vitiligo, or hyperpigmentation. The preparatory work of creating a suitable and original design may only commence after students submit expository essays on the symbolic meaning of tattoos as a rite of passage in Maori, Haida, and Polynesian societies. The final version of the design can be completed by using the stippling technique that closely resembles the actual tattooing procedure; instead of a needle penetrating the skin in short intervals to mark it permanently, the students will use thin markers to create a multitude of small, inerasable dots on the paper's surface.



Figure 67: Back Tattoo Design, Prototype Drawing





Figure 68: Sleeve Tattoo Design, Prototype Drawing

An additional art project based on the skin alteration concept is the so-called *Inside-Out Calligraphic Portrait*. Here, as in the case of ritualistic tribal markings, the signs

(letters) are superimposed onto the depicted person's flesh. In the spirit of the old traditions, the marking is not accidental but has a profound connotation to its bearer. It may even reveal a "hidden subconscious" of the portrayed person, as in the case of the portrait of the American rapper, Eminem (Fig. 70). Some of his song lyrics have been permanently inscribed onto his body. His songs, which are often controversial, reflect his socio-political inclinations shared with millions of his fans. Consequently, the inscription of lyrics on his portrait may be regarded as a symbolic act, equal in importance to those bodily marking practiced among some tribal societies.



Figure 69: *Inside-Out Calligraphic Portrait, Assignment #1*

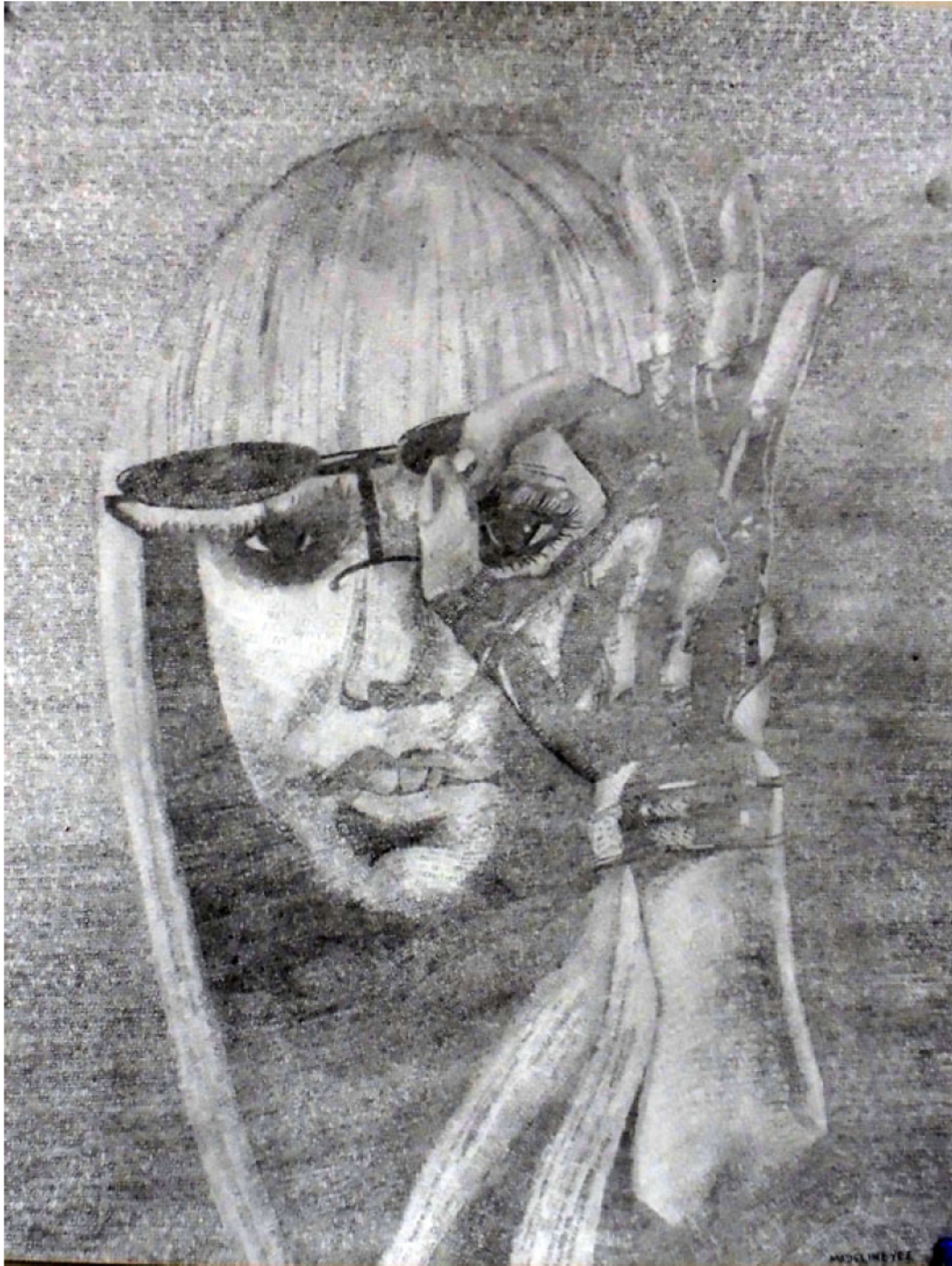


Figure 70: *Inside-Out* Calligraphic Portrait, Assignment #2



Figure 71: *Inside-Out Calligraphic Portrait, Assignment #3*

In conclusion, the incorporation of the topic of body modification in secondary-school art classroom has the potential to be an effective method of teaching art in the

classroom, making art an exciting and educational life-long experience for contemporary students. The cross-curricular hybridization would allow the introduction of a new aesthetic paradigm into the art classroom, while embracing knowledge from other disciplines. Perhaps creating a prototype for a Yakuza style full-body tattoo might spark a love for science in some students. Or perhaps, the application of the laws of physics and mathematics to create a body suspension sculpture may lead students to engineering studies in the future. The 21st century classrooms cannot be anything else but a space that nourishes students' innate curiosity and thirst for knowledge by turning it into an epistemologically exciting adventure. As open-minded educators, we can certainly do it!

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since adolescents constantly rely and thrive on immediate digital technology, it is easy for them to get lost in the glitter of the omnipresent consumerism promoting hedonism, disposability, and a culture of narcissism. Perhaps that is why so many youth are resorting to body modification as a possibly subconscious drive to find permanence in an otherwise ever changing reality. With my research, I have tried to contribute to the quest of finding some plausible responses to this young generation's existential paradox. My contribution, however significant or useful, may become a catalyst instigating further research among scholars. During this time when paper books and letters are becoming obsolete and are being replaced with digital versions, it is only understandable that today's adolescents have resorted to new methods of communication, methods permanent in their nature. As images in cyber space remain forever, so do images marked on human skin. There is no doubt that skin has become an adolescents' new medium of communication. Although there is presently some research available regarding this subject, there is room for much more still. Especially now, in these times of the rapid expansion of social media, the topic of virtual skin and virtual skin modification seems to be a worthy research subject.

## CONCLUSION

Skin as an adolescent communication medium is a fascinating, complex research subject of great contemporary cultural relevance. Skin is used by youth to express the whole range of youthful experimentation and becoming. Indeed, it is so prevalent in contemporary youthful experience that it has become a social signifier for their development and maturity. It can be a physical manifestation of their own perception of their evolving sense of themselves.

The concepts developed by poststructuralist French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his collaborator, French psychotherapist Félix Guattari, were of immense assistance in my research endeavour, as these concepts help us to illuminate the layers of meaning in this complex subject. Along these theoretical lines of flight, I began perceiving my research as a Deleuzian assemblage *par excellence*, a desiring machine that, throughout the course of my inquiry, has produced a multitude of *becomings* and a multiplicity of unstoppable “AND” forces. The echoes will continue to resonate with the *E-skin* Interactive Installation, Phases I & II, a future exhibition tours, and another exhibition yet to come. Possibilities include bringing this exhibition to schools as a catalyst for the further discussions with youth about youth and their means of using skin as evolving medium of contemporary communication. Another possibility will be to involve youth directly in contributing to the exhibition as an evolving research experiment in *becoming*.

Through the perspective of an “T” hybrid (artist-mother-educator), I was able to start, oversee, navigate, and provide some insight into the reasons motivating youth desires to modify their (minoritarian) bodies. This view is unique; it involved my “T” hybrid in a process of reflexivity, based on the remarks, statements, and reflections (VwO/Voices without Organs) made by a group of anonymous Canadian educators representing the societal majoritarian forces. The conclusion is thus multi-faceted: my research has not only provided many multi-valent answers to the questions posed, but has moreover opened the gate to further inquiry. In this sense, the investigation departed from a linear model and became a springboard for many possible rhizomatic *becomings*.

As an artist, educator, and a parent of three teenagers, I endeavored to find concrete answers pertaining to the appeal of skin modification among youth, and how it reflects and enhances their process of *becoming*. I also aspired to uncover the pedagogical potentialities of skin modification for students. I often was surprised with the results, which reflects the open nature of the Deleuzo-Guattarian theoretical model employed. For example, there were many diverse opinions regarding the social acceptability of skin alteration, and its underlying desires among the subjects. At the same time, the authoritative (majoritarian) forces that justified such youthful longings were often associated with research participants who had their own skin altered. Overall, the steadily rising popularity of body modification among contemporary adults seems to reflect a more relaxed, accepting and widespread stance towards the desire of youth to modify their own bodies. In general, there were a variety of reasons provided behind the appeal of skin modification to youth: from curiosity, rite of passage, experimentation and rebellion, to conformity and belonging.

Similarly, skin alteration as a reflection of adolescent *becoming* generated many personal reflections that provided additional productive perspectives on the discourse. The views offered by participants, who modified (or desired to modify) their own bodies, were of special interest since they provided deeper insight based on personal experiences. These subjective interpretations helped to provide a way into understanding and engaging with contemporary youth *becomings*. At the same time, we must acknowledge that intentions and desires are never transparent, subject to greater movements. Indeed, the act of skin marking is often motivated by forces that are beyond the control of many young people, such as the power of consumerism with its never-ending barrage of celebrities, the “airbrushing” culture related to the body-image anxiety, or the desire to create and control self-identity.

Finally, my research concluded with the statement that youth interest in body modification has the potential to be used as an educational tool in secondary schools. Indeed, by engaging students at the level of the body, there is great potential for having them take responsibility for their desires, and moreover, allowing themselves to open up to many different ways of *becoming*. Introducing certain aspects of body modification into the classroom discussion may create an interesting shift of power between minoritarian (youth)



and majoritarian (adults) forces. In addition, the use of body alteration as a cross-curricular theme is very promising in enticing at-risk students to attend classes that they would normally avoid.

In general, the results of my research will allow teachers to better comprehend the current younger generation in terms of how they express themselves, as well as the broader meanings they give to these various expressions. It will encourage teachers to consider skin modification as a subject to invite interest and participation of students in a variety of curriculum subjects.

Moving forward, my research invites further inquiry. For example, additional questions may be asked and statements sought on the perspective of teachers who modified their bodies in their youth. This direction would allow for further analysis of the problematic coming from adults who, drawn from their personal experiences, may better relate to, and interpret, youth's reasons for skin marking. Further research could include a larger group of participants, which would allow for greater social and cultural diversity and a broader geographical location. As well, it may be worthwhile to compare, in times of social media and instant global communication, the same research in three diverse countries from differing continents but sharing similar standards of living, for example, Germany, Japan and Canada, all through the lens of diverse social and cultural upbringings. Therefore, I regard my research as a series of rhizomatic starting points, generating interest among scholars to enhance and instigate their own inquiries.

My research has illuminated the power of popular culture and digital technology, both saturated with consumerism, in terms of adolescents' decisions to modify their skin – decisions that often come with lifelong consequences. It was my intention as a researcher to help initiate deeper public awareness and discussion regarding body modification as a new frontier in adolescent communication. I choose not to judge, only to inform. Body modification is a phenomenon on a global scale that transcends cultural and societal barriers, and is here to stay. We might as well enter into and open up the many possibilities of this conversation, in order to support our youth in their *becoming*.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A Deleuzian Terms

#### 1) Affect

Affect is the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact. As a body, affect is the transitional product of an encounter, specific in its ethical and lived dimensions and yet it is also as indefinite as the experience of a sunset, transformation, or ghost (Coleman, 2010, p.11). The Deleuzian sense of affect is to be distinguished as a philosophical concept that indicates the result of the interaction of bodies; an affective product. For Deleuze, affect can produce a sensory or abstract result and is physically and temporally produced (p. 12).

#### 2) Assemblage

Assemblage refers to complex flows, connections, and becomings that emerge and disperse relationally between bodies. Distinguished by an insistence on the capacity and vitality of bodies, this understanding of assemblage values the dynamic arrangements and organisations of bodies, situating *agencement* as an adaptive, fluid, and ongoing process. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, assemblages involve a continual process of emergence and becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 4) and are composed of a multiplicity of unstable organic and non-organic elements each invested with the capacity to transform the whole (McFarlane, 2009, p. 562). What comes together can be any variety of objects, practices, feelings and affects, which move “between technology (content, material) and language (expression, non-corporeal effects)” (Wise, 2005, p. 80).

#### 3) Becoming

For Deleuze becoming (*devenir*) is the pure movement evident in changes between particular events, the continual production of difference innate to

events, whether physical or else: “Rather than a product, final or interim, becoming is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end- state” (Stagoll, 2010a, p. 26).

#### 4) Body without Organs (BwO)

Body without Organs (BwO) does not equate literally to an organ-less body but rather refers to a plane of consistency as a non-formed or organized body. The BwO exists within stratified fields of organization at the same time as it offers an alternative mode of being or experience (becoming). “The BwO is always contemporary with and yet independent of its host organism [...] the BwO does not exist before or prior to the organism, but is adjacent to it and continuously in the process of constructing itself” (Message, 2010, p. 39).

#### 5) Event

First introduced in *The Logic of Sense*, it describes the “instantaneous productions intrinsic to interactions between various kinds of forces” (Stagoll, 2010b, p. 89). Furthermore, “being without fixed structure, position, temporality or property, and without beginning or end” (Stagoll, p. 90), the event does not have any material content. Therefore, it is “neither a beginning nor an end point, but rather always ‘in the middle’” (Stagoll p. 91).

#### 6) Line of Flight

It is “a path of mutation precipitated through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or ‘virtual’) that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond” (Tamsin, 2010a, p. 147).

#### 7) Majoritarian versus Minoritarian

Majoritarian: Deleuze and Guattari describe a majority as a “standard like ‘white-man’ or ‘adult-male’ in comparison to which other quantities can be said

to be minoritarian (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987)” (Tamsin, 2010b, pp. 152-3). The operative statements of various regions of the social field (statements concerning, for example, school and the student, the prison and the convict, or the political system and the citizen) constitute the majoritarian elements of a denumerable set. “The majoritarian standard constituted through these statements specifies recognizable positions on points of the arborescent, mnemonic, molar, structural systems of territorialisation and reterritorialisation through which subjects are sorted and significations make sense (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)” (Tamsin, 2010b, p. 153).

Minoritarian: the term is frequently associated with the concept of minor literature. “A minority is a deviation from the model or a becoming of everybody (tout le monde). The majoritarian mode is a constant while its minoritarian counterpart is a subsystem. Minoritarian is seen as potential (puissance), creative and in becoming” (Conley, 2010, p. 167). Deleuze states clearly that a majority is never a becoming. Minorities are defined not by number but by becoming and by their lines of fluctuation. “Minorities are objectively definable states. One can also think of them as seeds of becoming whose value is to trigger uncontrollable fluctuations and deterritorialisations” (Conley, 2010, p. 168).

#### 8) Percept

For Deleuze and Guattari, it is an element of a block of sensation that often is related to an artwork. Percepts should be not directly associated with perception since they are independent of a state of those individuals who experience them. Thus, “the percept is that in a work of art that might be perceived, but it goes beyond perception and is beyond assimilation by a perceived individual” (Clay, 2010, p. 53).

#### 9) Rhizome

It is a concept that “‘maps’ a process.” (Coleman, 2010, p. 232) It draws from its etymological meaning, in which “‘rhizo’ means combining form and the

biological term 'rhizome' describes a form of plant that can extend itself through its underground horizontal tuber- like root system and develop new plants” (Coleman, 2010, p. 233).



## APPENDIX B The *E-skin* Blog Teachers' Invitation E-mail Letter

Dear Colleagues,

The time has come to officially open my E-skin blog. I am contacting you today because each of you kindly agreed to participate.

As you already know, I have been a PhD candidate of the Faculty of Education at UofA. To successfully complete my degree, I need volunteers to assist. The subject of my research is "Skin as a Communication medium of Youth" viewed from the teacher's perspective. My intention is to elicit information from the participants by using E-skin blog as a means of gathering ideas. During February and March, I presented at seven Teachers' Conventions across Alberta. This opportunity allowed me to connect with of you who have previously stated that you are willing to participate in my study. Would you still like to become a part of my educational adventure?

The research will last four months. We will communicate 8 times via E-skin blog. Your response will be voluntary and you may participate 1 to 8 times, as you choose. Please be assured that all information collected will remain confidential.

If you are still interested, please reply by e-mail before 29 March 2105. I will then share with you the link and password to the E-skin blog.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and possible participation.

Kind Regards,

Izabella

## APPENDIX C The *E-skin* Blog Disclaimer

Protected: May 11, 2015

In the format of your choice (video, poetry, photograph, song lyrics, art creation, ...etc.) respond to the images and question posted below

1. **Are there any similarities between the skin marking of youth in tribal societies and today's western youth?**
2. **Are the underprivileged youth more inclined to embrace various forms of skin alteration?**

Please leave comments below.

## APPENDIX D List of Participant Comments

### Disclaimer

- The participants remain anonymous.
- The access password to the E-skin blog is not to be shared with other parties.
- Any entry posted by the participants will be printed and then included in the E-skin installation without revealing the owner's identity.]
- The collected data will be used by the researcher for her dissertation and for future publications pertaining to the researched subject.
- Any views or opinions represented in this blog are personal and belong solely to the blog participants. They do not represent those of people, institutions or organizations that the facilitator may be associated with in professional or personal capacity, unless explicitly stated.
- Any of the posted views or opinions is not intended to malign any religion, ethnic group, club, organization, company, or individual.
- The researcher has the sole right to exclude anyone from participation due to offensive or inappropriate posting.

### Downloadable Files

Any downloadable file, including but not limited to pdfs, docs, jpegs, pngs, is provided at the user's own risk. The owner will not be liable for any losses, injuries, or damages resulting from a corrupted or damaged file.

Contact Information: [Orzelski@ualberta.ca](mailto:Orzelski@ualberta.ca)

## APPENDIX E List of Participant Comments

1. Very though provoking & interesting. Brings the topic of body modification & youth to light. High time we talked about it. Great job!  
(anonymous)
2. Finally an artist with guts to talk about the untalkable.  
(anonymous)
3. It is scary and difficult subject for me to understand. I respect other people's wishes & decisions and love your courage and invention in bringing this subject to life...giving it attention.  
CONGRATULATIONS Izabella!  
(Aska C-S)
4. Very though provoking & interesting. Brings the topic of body modification & youth to light. High time we talked about it. Great job!  
(anonymous)
5. I don't like it, but I respect the courage it took to bring forward a difficult subject. I wish more artists would have the "guts" to do something similar.  
(anonymous)
6. This installation is definitely thought provoking. It makes us aware how emotionally fragile our children are. Awareness is the first step for us to "keep in touch" with our children. Thank you to the artist for bringing this subject to our attention. Keep up the GOOD WORK!!!  
(anonymous)

## APPENDIX F The *E-skin* Interactive Installation Invitation

***E-skin***  
**Izabella Orzelski-Konikowski**  
**14 September-28 September 2015**

**EXTENSION GALLERY**  
Enterprise Square, 10230-Jasper Avenue, Edmonton (main floor)

Opening night: Thursday, 17 September 2015, 6-8 pm



***E-skin* Interactive Installation**  
by Izabella Orzelski-Konikowski

The questions surrounding body modification and its attraction to youth, given its permanent nature in contrast to today's transitory post-modern society, is of special significance. Artist, educator and a parent of three teenagers, Izabella Orzelski-Konikowski became intrigued with the body-art phenomenon pervading contemporary youth culture and its pedagogical potentialities, and has focused in her arts-based academic research on the subject of '*skin as youth's communication medium*'. The study has culminated, amongst the other issues, in the creation of *E-skin*, an interactive installation, exploring epistemologies, that challenge societal perceptions in adolescent communications.

Izabella Orzelski-Konikowski, is presently a candidate in the PhD program in Education, at the University of Alberta, and this installation constitutes a part of this program.

## APPENDIX G The *E-skin* Exhibition: Artist's Statement

### E-skin Interactive Installation

#adolescents, #bodymodification, #communication, #deleuze, #skin, #teachers, #e-skinblog ...

The question of why body modification attracts a youth's attention is of special significance given, in most cases, its permanent nature in contrast to today's transitory post-modern society. As an artist, educator, and a parent of three teenagers, I am intrigued with this body art phenomenon that has pervaded contemporary youth culture and its pedagogical potentialities. To further my inquiry, I chose skin as youth's communication medium a subject of my arts-based research. The study has culminated in the creation of E-skin interactive installation.

To show various stages of my inquiry, I included in my exhibition a replica of the E-skin installation initial phase. Its development over the period of four months relied on constant interaction and input from the E-skin blog participants-Canadian teachers who were invited to contribute to the ongoing growth of the art project by sharing their personal experiences on the youth's skin modification subject. They were also asked to comment and express their thoughts (in written and visual format) about the bi-weekly posted photographs depicting the E-skin. These comments became a part of the evolving installation as well. The installation itself became a research ground that, by including the new data, became a new generator of research exploring epistemologies that challenge societal perceptions on adolescent communication.

The phase I E-skin interactive installation consists of a visually presented collection of artifacts within confinements of a closed space that visually and conceptually become a metaphor of the human brain continuously processing -- and re-processing -- information by engaging sensory stimuli. Similar to neurons and their intricate web-like connections, a set of strings tied together and hanging at various heights (some loose, and some tight), following different directions, intersects the space while attached to the walls with various artifacts hang from these strings. Their common theme is the human skin and its permanent alteration as it relates to contemporary youth. Some of these artifacts were altered and/or removed during the course of my visual investigation. Likewise, new objects were added to represent a new strain of thought or vision that the brain will follow. Any outside sources connected directly or indirectly to the investigated subject of the installation, such as research articles, discussions, movies, and E-skin blog statements/ conversations had the potential to contribute to the continually evolving E-skin. Part of the E-skin evolution included my presence in the installation room/ space on a daily basis to reflect, research, elicit and, if in a position, create or add new artifacts to the "in process" installation. Thus, the E-skin installation became an assemblage of individual experiences: the narrative of a hybridized self, as well as the stories of the blog's participants.

The E-skin interactive installation, phase II, with its suspended organic forms (youth's brain/ body), investigates the adolescent's interaction, communication and comprehension as it relates to their cognitive maturity. The forms' intricate and fragile surface evokes the fragility of youth (thin skin) as well as their proneness to the power of peer and media persuasion.

The title of the installation E-skin symbolizes the way youth currently approach communication. The first letter E suggests the digital approach to communication. As teenagers are very savvy with modern technologies, they have a similar approach to other areas of life. Their communication happens instantly, with the click of a button, though the message becomes a permanent artifact in cyber space. In the same manner, a body modification such as a tattoo is a quick decision but carries permanent consequences.

The E-skin installation is a quest to establish a link between the skin and various motivational desires, which will explain youth's willingness to embrace body modification for communication purposes.

Viewers are welcome to engage in public debate on the research subject by writing their thoughts and comments (provided paper) and insert/ slip them into the "adolescents' brains" through their porous surface; thus, they will become another source of data collection.

Izabella Orzelski- Konikowski

**APPENDIX H The *E-skin* Installation, Spectators' Invitation to Participate Note**

Dear Spectators:

I invite you to contribute to the growth of the ***E-skin*** installation. If interested, write your comments about your own experiences and thoughts on the youths' skin modification subject. Then insert your note into one of the "youth's brain" form. Your data will provide additional information for my research.

Thank you in advance for your contribution.

Sincerely,

Izabella Orzelski- Konikowski