

Who Is This Self I'm Supposed To Be Expressing?
Narrative Inquiry into the Art and Learning of Twelve Women
Visual Arts Students

Georgina Miriam Cooley

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in the
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for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art Education

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Abstract

Who is this Self I'm Supposed to be Expressing? Narrative Inquiry into the Art and Learning of Twelve Women Visual Arts Students.

Georgina Miriam Cooley

The life narratives of twelve women visual arts students at Concordia University, Montreal form the core of this study. Consistent with the concept of feminist narrative inquiry, discussion of the author's academic, artistic and teaching experiences establishes the background for the study. Interviews focused on students' life stories and their self-selected art works. Diverse personal histories and evolving perspectives on art making, self concept and learning were revealed. Regardless of age and life experience, these women regard their art learning as catalytic in their growth toward subjectivity, and personal, social and cultural agency. Links are drawn between expectations, life experiences, family relationships (particularly with fathers), art production, and their commentary on creative engagement.

Students expected to acquire artistic skills, aesthetic knowledge, and to become competent art makers. The study presents examples of how those expectations were met or frustrated. The women tell how they acquired skills and knowledge and came to see themselves as artists with ideas to express. The interrelationship of personal experience, self reflection, the influence of teachers, and exposure to new ideas, is shown to be significant in developing artistic content.

The students' stories, viewed in relation to established proposals of learning dynamics, create new narratives of visual arts learning. Work by Belenky, Clinchy,

Goldberger & Tarule in Women's Ways of Knowing, provides insights into standpoints that these students assumed in certain situations. Examples are given of how these personal points of view were manifested in the students' art work, attitudes, and interactions with instructors.

Prof. Stan Homer's proposal of aesthetic response and creative processes offers a concept of learning grounded in Winnicottian theory, wherein illusionistic fusion with the work in progress is encouraged. The teacher's role is then to establish critical distance and assist the student through the inevitable disillusionment.

The study focuses on positive learning experiences and defines the concepts of the "good enough teacher" who models the skills and knowledge of art making, who makes knowledge available to students, and who fosters the student's illusion of artistic achievement until she can appreciate the disillusionment of critical discussion.

Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to the women who participated in this study for so generously telling their stories of their life experiences, art and learning. Their ongoing interest and enthusiasm for my work has been most gratifying.

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For my parents, Laura and Fred Cooley
and for Georgina and Mark.

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Stories to Learn From

Stories are important. Stories tell us about people and ideas and the ways that things work in the world. Stories give us models and patterns to inspire our own lives and guide our actions. Stories give us information upon which to base our judgements and make our plans. Stories give us ways to understand what goes on under the surface of daily life. Stories shape our dreams.

Like other families, my family has stories about the lives and exploits of past generations. For me, the most important stories from my family anthology are the stories about intelligent, resourceful, hard working Prairie women who raised their families, cultivated their gardens, worked in the farmyard, and fought for women's rights. My maternal grandmother learned to drive a car when she was fifteen so that she could drive her mother and aunts to Women's Institute meetings. On one occasion the men took the car to go hunting on an afternoon when the women had planned to attend a meeting. The men returned to find that the women had bobbed their hair and hemmed up their skirts. The gauntlet was down! Those women insisted upon being respected and having space for themselves even in hard times. The stories of their lives shape my expectations of the role I can play in the world, influence my aspirations, influence the way I think about my responsibilities to myself and others, and form the foundation for my politics.

Similarly, the narratives which constitute the heart of this study are the stories of intelligent, creative, hard working women. They come from different

generations and from various backgrounds but they all expect to have their place in the world. More than that, they expect to have the satisfaction of using their minds and the pleasure of creating their art. I value their stories for the spirit that they evince and the insights into creative learning that they give to me.

As I reflect on the ways that I have come to understand my own learning and my role in the society in which I live, I am acutely aware that the stories such as the one I mentioned, along with the stories that I share with friends and family about day-to-day life, and the stories that I read, all play a role in shaping my understanding of the world. My own experiences as an artist, teacher, student, daughter, wife, mother of a daughter, and single woman, all stimulate my understanding of the significance of gender in how I and other women negotiate our way in the world. This understanding grounds my role as a researcher, for as the authors of Interpreting Women's Lives assert,

That recognition of the impact of gender and the insistence on the importance of female experience have provided the vital common ground for feminist research and thought. Feminist theory emerges from and responds to the lives of women. The recovery and interpretation of women's lives have been central concerns of feminist scholarship from the earliest pioneering days to the present. Listening to women's voices, studying women's writings, and learning from women's experiences have been crucial to feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world.

(Personal Narrative Group 1989, 4)

My project here is to include the experiences of women visual art students in this "feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world." Accordingly, the narratives of twelve women students, along with discussions about self-selected examples of their art work, are the central concern of this narrative,

qualitative study. This study is motivated by my curiosity about the process of creativity, learning and knowledge construction as it is experienced and understood by women undergraduate visual arts students. I wish to acquire a better understanding of the meanings these women develop or assign to events and interactions throughout their education. Their responses to the instruction they receive, their views on their creative efforts, and their discussions about the learning situations and practices that they consider to have been most helpful to them are of particular interest. Significant relationships with family and friends outside of the university setting and interactions with instructors and fellow students are also important. Seeing the art works about which the students were speaking enabled me to observe the development of their artistic production in relation to the ways that they spoke about it.¹ My expectation is that from a deeper understanding of women students' motivations, expectations, responses and behaviours, I may propose curriculum and teaching practices that provide women with challenging, exciting engagements in art making.

I am committed to the view that we can draw on women's daily experiences as a vital resource for analysing the structures and forces in society, and particular institutions within society. There are several points arising from this position that I would like to make clear from the outset. First, while my personal memoir is not my preoccupation here, the dissertation is in fact a

¹ At my request, each woman selected several art works which were discussed during the interview. The interviews were video taped, particularly to record the women as they spoke of the art works. I audio taped the interviews to facilitate transcription.

certain construction of my own narrative. As I will detail in the chapters preceding the student's narratives, my experiences as a teacher, an artist and a researcher are implicated in the origination and progress of this project. Equally, my own background and perspective are reflected in the issues upon which I chose to focus as I interpreted the stories and drew conclusions from the data.

Second, while the narratives, discussions and descriptions of the students' lives and learning experiences are central to my study, this does not mean that there is an unquestioning acceptance of an essential *Truth* embodied in their words and images. These narratives are descriptions given by particular students of the material realities of their lives as they have seen and experienced them. They are the recounting of memories and opinions as seen at the particular moment of each woman's life at which I spoke with her. I concur with other researchers who point out that to render this knowledge useful to practice, "women's daily life experiences can only be adequately understood by 'mapping' them onto broader social processes" (Frankenberg 1993. 7)². In this case, the social processes of current artistic production and Canadian post-secondary education establish the context. An extensive body of existing feminist theory has provided me with a grounding from which I have developed this study, and the insights gained from the mapping process can be examined in relation to theoretical

² "Mapping" is the process of discerning and examining the relationships between / among the patterns that I observed in relation to the contexts from which they are seen to evolve. In the analysis of the stories, similarities in how women viewed situations, reacted to them, or came to decisions were suggested in the art works and in the ways that the women talked about themselves, their ideas and their art works.

proposals drawn from feminist, pedagogical and art discourses. A discussion of the potential of women's life narratives in art education research and issues of interpretation follows under the heading "Valuing Women's Narratives."

With these concerns in mind, I proposed an overarching set of questions from which to initiate my research. My intention was to "cast a wide net" in order to glean as broad a range of information as I felt I had resources to analyse. My intent was to engage the participants in conversations that elicited their stories of life experience and views on their processes of learning and art making. My strategy was to begin from the explicit events and concerns of these women's lives, attend to their interpretation of events and concerns, consider the issues that I observed in the conversations and art work, and then to consider our (mine and the students') observations in relationship with theoretical discourse.

My initial research questions can be stated as follows.

- A. What are the life narratives of the women students who participated in this study? How do they describe their family and social relationships, and the events that led them to become students in the Faculty of Fine Arts?
- B. What are the viewpoints about themselves, about learning, about art and art making held by the students? What kinds of experiences, in school or elsewhere, are seen by the students as encouraging certain points of view and developments in their art making? What forms or concepts of knowledge do they value, and what knowledge do they think they are acquiring?

- C. What observations can be made about the relationship of experiences within a particular life narrative? Further to that, what observations can be made about the relationship of one woman's experience to those described by other participants? Are there any similarities in the verbal or artistic manifestations of their ideas? How do any patterns that I perceive relate to one another and the broader social, cultural, and theoretical contexts?
- D. What implications might my findings have for visual art education curriculum and teaching practice?

Profile of the Study and Dissertation:

The narratives of twelve women constitute the foundation for this study. They are former students in the ARTE 430 Multi Media³ course that I taught for four years at Concordia University, Montreal. Eight of these women were BFA Major or Specialization students in Art Education. ⁴There were also four students who selected ARTE 430 as an option course although they were Majors in Studio or Drawing and Painting. Some of the women had been admitted as Mature Students, but most had attended the required (in Quebec) two years in a college

³ This is a studio / seminar course in which students engage in artistic production in black and white photography, sound montage, video, performance, 8mm film, and slide montage. They develop installation works integrating combinations of these media. Discussion and critique centred around the technical, aesthetic, social / cultural issues that arise from the works produced.

⁴ Art Education students take a ninety credit baccalaureate degree with forty-two credits in studio courses and at least six credits in Art History. Thus the studio and academic studies of these students were spread throughout most programmes in the Visual Arts Section of the Faculty.

fine arts programme prior to admission to the university. Some had taken prerequisite studio courses at other universities and others had attended art courses in less formal centres.

The women who participated in this study were volunteers from among the students who arrive in my classroom. I have not tried to insure that any particular cultural, racial, ethnic or religious group is included or excluded from the study. One participant is a Métisse⁵ and all the other women who I interviewed are from Euro-Canadian backgrounds, so my study does not deal with issues of racial difference.⁶ However, this study group does involve students from a diversity of class, age, ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as a lesbian woman. I have discussed these aspects of their lives to the extent that they were raised by the women themselves.

In the introductory chapters of the dissertation I will present the theoretical, experiential and methodological background from which this study was developed. The core of the dissertation is composed of the twelve women's narratives. The original telling of the stories was inevitably partial and constructed in response to a particular set of circumstances, i.e. an interview where certain initial questions were posed. Nonetheless, these narratives reveal aspects of the complex, often painful, but ultimately rich and rewarding lives that these women have lived, and the invaluable role that art and art making has

⁵ A woman of aboriginal and European parentage.

⁶ Asian students were the only visible minority group represented in my classes, (one student per group). None of these students were available for an interview.

played for them. The final section of the dissertation begins with my summation of the issues which the women 's life narratives brought to light. The specific stories, opinions and statements are then put into play in relationship to existing proposals of women's learning processes. I will conclude with a discussion of the implications for teaching practice and outline some questions for further research that arise from this work.

Valuing Women's Narratives

Western educational institutions rest on a foundation of liberal humanistic ideology which champions the notion of the autonomous individual who possesses free will and who therefore has the capacity to choose the course of his (sic) own life. In this scheme feminism means that, given equal opportunity, women will succeed within the existing democratic system and if they do not it is because the inability lies with the individual. This point of view is fundamental and unexamined in much of the literature by earlier feminist scholars, including those in the field of art education. This motivated many initiatives for equality of opportunity but the benefits have been limited.

As scholars and activists have worked to understand, explain and theorize women's experience, and to devise and implement strategies for change, a wider variety of perspectives have been articulated. In an effort to avoid the above mentioned limitations of liberalism, some feminists have grounded their discourse in women's life experience, the notion of "difference," and the social

politics of gender, race and class. This work has been helpful in describing the nature of the oppressions to which women have been subjected. As well, this scholarship has expanded inquiry to explore the multiple forces and practices that operate to perpetuate systems and structures detrimental to women. However, analysis grounded in concepts of gender difference becomes problematic when taken to the extreme view of prescribing a supposedly feminist "Truth" about female nature: moral superiority, love of peace, an affinity with the forces of Nature, and a predilection for nurturing. The result is a self-assigned essentialism with a consequent definition of good and bad attitudes and behaviours: an ideology that falls easily into the "all women are victims, all men are cruel oppressors" dichotomy. This does little to advance the feminine voice in the affairs of the world and thwarts efforts to critically examine how concepts of gender are constructed and played out in our lives. Obviously, these concepts are subject to ongoing examination. I note however, that essentialist perspectives are important and strongly held by many students at a certain point in their personal growth. Others may be resentful that they felt their demeanour, dress, ideas, and art works were being criticized by these essentialist standards.

Feminist researchers, operating from more flexible perspectives have made important contributions to the development of qualitative, feminist, research practice (Nielson 1990, Code 1991, Grosz 1991, Alcoff and Potter 1991). In particular, they have insisted that the gender of the researcher - and by extension, other qualities of her/his identity and background - are implicated in

research practice and knowledge construction. In the anthology of work that she edited, Nielson (1990) presents work by several feminist researchers who have pursued women centred approaches that implicated them personally in the situation under examination. Thus, in her view, they challenge the traditional notion of the disengaged, objective observer-researcher and debunk the notion of universal validity of androcentric constructions of truth. Nielson argues that such research provoked new questions about the nature of research questions, contexts, relationships between researcher and participants, and the variability and validity of conclusions. Equally, researchers have realized the necessity for careful contextualization of research projects from conception to final reporting.

Beyond simply enacting alternative research practices, Elizabeth Grosz calls for feminist scholars to confront established concepts of knowledge and knowledge production in a manner that "entails reconceiving the sources, aims, and goals of the form and functioning of knowledge" (Grosz 1991, 187). The grounding assumptions of epistemology, the discipline of philosophy which is "upheld as a source of 'absolute truth' about how the world should be known and represented" (Code 1991, ix) are considered suspect. The conventional notion persists that truths about human beings and their cultures can be denoted and defined exclusively through the disciplines of pure reason. Grosz argues that to divorce reason from the physical, material reality of the subject who is exercising the disciplines of reasoned thought, constitutes a fundamental contradiction of established social science research. The insistence that know-

ledge construction is divorced from the identity of the knower denies the possibility of "self- representations of the (sexual) specificities at play in the production of knowledges. "(Grosz 1991, 194) and incites "a crisis of reason" concerning the specificities and limits of knowledges.

Lorraine Code asserts that "epistemological questions are fundamental to feminist inquiry" (Code 1991, 315) and that gender is a significant consideration in epistemological concerns. Code opens her discussion of the paradigms and practice of epistemology, and the significance of gender in the construction of knowledge, with a well known citation from Simone de Beauvoir.

Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.
(de Beauvoir 1972, 161)

Code, Grosz, and others critique the assumption that the "representations of the world," legitimization of knowledge, and the authorization of knowers can be ascertained through reason alone. They also critique the assumption that researchers can arrive at 'absolute truth" which is objective, neutral, and universally applicable. Code confronts this position with an insistence that the identity of the knower is important. She point out that, as de Beauvoir observes, gender is an unacknowledged factor in traditional epistemological schemes by virtue of male philosophers' dismissal of women as players in the practice of knowing, thus establishing "knowledge" as the de facto domain of men. The subjectivity of the inquirer is a significant factor in epistemological evaluations; a "knower" is not a genderless, featureless abstraction but rather,

the sex of the knower is one of a cluster of *subjective* factors (i.e., factors that pertain to the circumstance of the cognitive agents) constitutive of received conceptions of knowledge and of what it means to be a knower. (her emphasis)
(Code 1991, 4)

Knowledge cannot be revered as neutral, objective or absolute, but rather is understood to be conditional upon questions of

the nature of cognitive agents; questions about their character; their material, historical, cultural, circumstances; their interests in the inquiry at issue. These are questions about how credibility is established, about connections between knowledge and power about the place of knowledge in ethical and aesthetic judgements.
(Code 1991, 7-8)

Thus, a space for women's voices in knowledge construction can be created when it is expected that subjective specificities, and conditions of relevance for knowledge proposals will be accounted for. The specificity of our lives in gendered bodies is key to women's relations to the production of knowledge, particularly in that the feminine, the body, and the arts have been allied in binary opposition to the masculine, reason, and the sciences.

Once the universal is shown to be a guise for the masculine and knowledges are shown to occupy only one pole of a (sexual) spectrum instead of its entirety, the possibility of other ways of knowing and proceeding - the possibility of feminine discourses and knowledges - is revealed.
(Grosz 1991, 196-7)

Although Code declares that "feminist epistemology" is an impossibility so long as "epistemology" is defined by androcentric, post-positivist, and empiricist standards, she allows that, "Feminists can be epistemologists . . . and epistemologists can be feminists" (Code 1991, 314). She advocates that feminist scholars engage in dialogue with the traditions of epistemology in order to reveal

androcentric hegemony and its consequences, and "to create space for productive relocation of knowledge in human lives" (Code 1991, 315). Such knowledge would not essentialize or prescribe the possibilities of either feminism or knowledge. She argues for a position of carefully defined relativism which demands of the knower a thoughtful and discerning evaluation of knowledge proposals. Relativism, as Code presents the concept, is not an indulgence in unqualified subjectivism or an acceptance of any and all knowledge claims as being equally valid. There can be many valid ways of knowing a phenomenon and various perspectives to consider. The implication, as stated by Grosz, is that,

knowledges must be seen as *perspectival*, partial, limited and contestable products, as the results of historically specific political, sexual, and epistemological imperatives. (her emphasis) (Grosz 1991, 209)

Knowledge, thus considered, may be "of strategic value in particular times and places, but not necessarily useful or valid in all contexts" (Grosz 1991, 209). The validity of proposals and knowledge claims is realized in practice; through a demonstrated capacity to adequately enable "people to negotiate the everyday world and to cope with the decisions, problems, and puzzles they encounter daily" (Code 1991, 3-4). However, Grosz points out that knowledge proposals,

do not simply *reflect* the social and historical contexts out of which they were developed; rather they help to actively inscribe or engender the meanings of the social. The challenge to prevailing norms of knowledge is not thus simply a narrowly institutionalized, "ivory tower" critique of theories. It is an attempt to stretch, rupture, and proliferate new meanings and modes of representation such that women may adequately represent themselves and the world. (Grosz 1991, 210)

As a researcher and art educator I am required to "negotiate the everyday world and to cope with the decisions, problems, and puzzles" which my students and I encounter. The subversive project for feminist researchers, as proposed by the work of Code, Grosz and other feminist authors, is not simply to learn *about* women from within the framework of established disciplines and practices. Rather, the intent of feminist scholars must be to conduct research "by, with, and for women" rather than research "on" women (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1986, 229). We need to carefully reconsider the processes of knowledge construction, while consistently taking women's experience into account.

A plurality of strategies, techniques, procedures and methods have potential to develop quite different conceptions of lived experience. One strategy for feminist research practice focuses on the life narratives of women in a wide range of circumstances; a practice through which Janet Wolff suggests, feminist scholars may "attempt to render visible the threads which connect experience and biography with intellectual work" (Wolff 1995, 15). Narrative inquiry is not unique to feminist research practice although I suggest that the feminist critique of ideas of androcentric, objective knowledge construction have been influential in attracting researchers to this and other qualitative methodologies. In the field of education research, narrative inquiry into teachers' and students' experiences is grounded on the premises that "people lead storied lives" and that narrative inquiry is "the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 2). Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin explain that,

narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the pattern of inquiry for its study. To preserve the distinction we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon 'story' and the inquiry 'narrative'.

(Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 2)

These authors view education as the "construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories" (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 2). In recounting their personal learning experiences in relation to community contexts, students "give us a way to recognize the processes and types of learning that occurs for individuals in our classrooms" (Krajnik Crawford 1995, 150). MaryAnn Krajnik Crawford argues that narrative is a method of inquiry which has the potential to reveal the transformational nature of learning processes as they unfold for students over time. She asserts that developing an understanding of "when and how" those processes happen is essential if we expect our students,

to question the assumptions, ideas, and values that constitute our society, to become both individual and social agents for change.

(Krajnik Crawford 1995, 159)

She argues that engaging students in the telling of their own stories situates them as active agents in the construction and reconstruction of their learning. In so doing they begin to reveal the complex personal and social issues that they bring to the learning situation, and which teachers must begin to understand if they are to assist their students in the processes of learning

Similarly, feminist scholars have recognized the unique access to lived experience that is provided through women's narratives - as autobiography, diaries, letters, or journals, or as biography, recorded and retold by another. I

would like to note several particularly valuable aspects of this approach to research. First, women's stories can reveal the process of construction of the self-in-society. As the Personal Narratives Group maintain, personal narratives

illuminate the course of a life over time and allow for its interpretation in its historical and cultural context. The very act of giving form to a whole life - or a considerable portion of it - requires, at least implicitly, considering the meaning of the individual and social dynamics which seem to have been most significant in shaping the life. (Personal Narratives Group 1989, 4)

Narratives may also suggest insights into the processes related to the evolution of subjectivity, language acquisition, and feminine identity development. As Renee Baert (1993) notes, "Any narrative requires its position of enunciation" and hence the need to understand the concept of "self" from which the storyteller, biographer, and researcher speaks as she recounts her story or pursues narrative inquiry. In the past three decades feminist scholars and artists have worked to subvert the social and ideological constructions through which "Woman"⁷ was excluded from speaking for herself. Initially the solution seemed relatively simple; "let woman speak her own body, assume her own subjecthood" (Suleiman 195, 7) as if subjecthood is a fixed point which is given or attained prior to engagement in the world. However, a "voice of one's own" and the question of how, and for whom it is realized has proved to be more complex.

Ongoing inquiry supports the view that narratives can trace the development of female subjectivity as "an ongoing construction" (de Lauretis 1984, 159)

⁷ I here employ the practice of capitalizing Woman to designate the patriarchal construction applied to female human beings. When written uncapitalized, women refers to "the real historical beings and social subjects who are defined by the technologies of gender and actually engendered in social relations." (de Lauretis 1987, 10)

which Baert asserts, "is a theoretical construct, one itself in process" (Baert 1993, 15). Narrative inquiry reveals the rich complexity of human experience and enables consideration of both internal and external elements in the exploration of gender self-identity and agency. The question of agency, becoming the subject of one's own story, and having the capacity for creative engagement, is critical in feminist practice in narrative inquiry as well as in discussions of learning and creativity. In the practice of art making the artist is situated as the creator of her/his own visual story, able to make visual representations of her/his ideas, able to reflect upon those representations and ideas, and able to act upon new possibilities that are generated. Put simply, personal agency "provides both the source of insight and the means of action which lead to social change" (Personal Narratives Group 1989, 6).

A long-standing feminist project has been to articulate the realities of how social structures and gender hierarchies impact on women's lives, and how the telling of stories can function to expose the imbedded assumptions of patriarchal authority. Personal narratives provide examples of women's responses to androcentric domination in society and culture. These are not just stories of resistance and rebellion. They also reveal strategies of negotiation, acceptance, or even embracing of systems of gender domination. Regardless of women's responses, their stories tend to reveal the dynamics of the systems in which they originate.

The authors who form the Personal Narrative Group conclude the introduction to their anthology of narrative research with a precise review of the

qualities that recommend narrative as a methodology for feminist research. They assert that narratives,

show the importance of the interpersonal relationships within which the life story emerges; they illuminate the significance of the intersection of individual life and historical moment; they address the importance of the framework of meaning through which women orient themselves to the world; and they allow us to explore the ways in which the interpreter's own context shapes both the formation and the interpretation of a personal narrative.
(Personal Narratives Group 1989, 23)

It is the question of "the interpreters own context" to which I will now address myself. Through a discussion of certain aspects of my experience in the world I will present the grounding out of which this study has been developed. It is by no means an all encompassing memoir; rather I have chosen to focus on the interactions and readings appropriate to the task at hand.

Becoming a Feminist Researcher

In "Feminist Art Education: An Analysis of the Women's Art Movement as an Educational Force" (1979), Renee Sandell elaborated upon personal, informal and formal educational paths that women appear to follow as they advance in the art world. More specifically, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule (1986) designate the family and the schools as the two most powerful institutions which influence women's learning. Dorothy Holland and Margaret Eisenhart (1990) reveal through their research that peer group and social milieu impact significantly on the educational decisions of college age women. I find these to be

discerning proposals. As I consider my route to undertaking and developing this project, I perceive the important roles played by my family, my personal, formal, and informal education, my peers, and the social milieu in which I have been involved. These elements provide the underlying framework for this chapter.

I agree that one's family has a deep and lasting impact on educational progress and choices, and I would say briefly that my own experience supports this general observation. I am the second child, and only girl in a family of six children. My parents are farmers in Manitoba and so I grew up in a rural setting. Without idealizing, I would say that I have benefited greatly from loving, respectful, and supportive relationships with my parents, my brothers, and my sisters-in-law. My daughter is, as she has always been, a treasure and a delight. My marriage to her father ended years ago.

Throughout elementary and secondary school I was always a good student and enjoyed the notoriety of being the class artist. I entered the School of Art at the University of Manitoba in the late 1960s at a time when North American campuses were rife with student unrest and social activism. Indeed, I remember my undergraduate studies in Fine Arts as a time that was more preoccupied with my marriage, a baby and notions of social activism than with artistic ambition. Nevertheless, I enjoyed creating images, and I felt that I learned some useful art making skills. I knew I wanted to paint and draw but my understanding of what art making meant for me was quite undefined. As for my relationship with my teachers, all of whom were men, I felt that generally they were unaware that I

was there. Most of the time that was fine with me. I don't recall that anything I produced provoked any particular attention. I graduated with a BFA and proceeded into teacher certification.

To continue in Sandell's line of thought, on the personal education level, I think my background reading for this project began with Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook which I read some time in the early 1970s. That is my first clear memory of reading and having the wonderful, amazing sense of, "Wow! Somebody else feels like that too!". The Female Eunuch by Germaine Greer, which I read soon afterward, brought similar moments of recognition. As a student from a rural community, living in an urban commune with my husband and daughter, I can't say that Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique connected as sharply with my situation as it did for one of the women in my study, but it contributed to my growing appreciation of women's stories. In the ensuing years a wealth of women's art work has been brought into prominence, and I have learned a great deal from the work of feminist scholars, artists and critics.

My sense of feminist purpose was formed in the radical, activist era of the early 1970s. Winnipeg, Manitoba was not on the cutting edge of radical action, but a growing number of women shared the prevailing idea that as women, we were oppressed by male dominated institutions. We were determined to work on the local level to enact change. In the sphere of feminist art activism, a highlight of that period occurred in 1975 when the Winnipeg Art Gallery, in response to International Women's Year, mounted an exhibition of male artists'

images of women. After vigorous protest by women artists and activists, the gallery made its resources available for an independent Committee for Women Artists⁸ to mount Women as Viewer, showing exclusively works by women artists. The protest activities and the provocative nature of the exhibition served to draw attention to the possibilities, or lack thereof, for women artists. The incident also stimulated debate on issues such as the persistent exclusion of women's' art works from critical and art historical attention. We now had a local experience of the phenomenon observed by art historians such as Linda Nochlin (1971), Eleanor Tufts (1974), and K. Peterson & J.J.Wilson (1976). These authors scrutinized the cannon of art history and insisted that indeed there had been many women who had produced outstanding work but that their production had been buried beneath the preponderance of works by men. Discussion ensued about the critical attention to the contemporary artistic production of women artists. Lucy Lippard's From the Centre: Feminist Essays on Women's Art (1976) enlightened me about the forms that feminist artists were using to express new and different ideas about themselves and the world. Judy Chicago's book, Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist (1975) described what she and other women experienced as they pursued their art careers.

In my personal life, my teaching in the public school system, my art practice, and my political and community work, I was in my own way part of the struggles, mistakes, setbacks, omissions and success of "Second Wave Feminism."

⁸ Initiated by artist, Sharron Corne and activist, Marion Yoe.

Through that experience I, along with other North American and European feminists, have gained not only the power to challenge patriarchal cultural constructions but we have also assumed the responsibility for questioning ourselves, our ideologies, and practices. My understanding of the complexity of feminism in relation to art making and teaching has expanded, as has my appreciation of the paths that we might take to "fully recognise the increased potential of women's place in art and art education" (Sandell 1979, 23).

I pursued my undergraduate degrees and began my teaching career in a milieu infused with optimistic principles of social justice and radical change.

Barlow & Robertson give an apt description of my peers and me.

A sense of new possibilities was brought to classrooms by young and enthusiastic teachers, whose services were suddenly in demand. Early members of the post-war baby boom, these new teachers were unlikely to have led campus political protests, but neither were they completely untouched by the prevailing mood of challenge, change and political activism. Few may have been trying to embody Teaching as a Subversive Activity, published in 1969, but many young teachers had made its passing acquaintance during teacher training. (Barlow & Robertson 1994, 5)

Feminist activism was a vital aspect of the "the prevailing mood." Along with small groups of like-minded women I was involved in consciousness raising encounters where we focused on our own particular circumstances as women. These encounters embodied an emphatic valuing of women's stories. Sandell pointed out that such privately initiated efforts are powerful educational situations for women. She maintains that personally initiated learning,

involved the sharing and developing of an ideology which would establish personal and professional supports in the short run and build towards eventual non-sexist changes in the art world and in society. (Sandell 1979 21

As we ventilated our experiences as daughters, wives, mothers and as fledgling artists and professionals we thought of ourselves not just as friends, but as activists too. We exposed the ways in which we knew we were oppressed as women and we believed that such an analysis could contribute to the universal emancipation of women. These discussions were gratifying, most particularly for the strong friendships that were formed, but I was troubled by what I eventually came to view as the self indulgent nature of these meetings. The commitment to activism lagged. I was confronted with very real sexist dilemmas in my classroom and professional life. Local action was needed too.

As a teacher I was involved in the Status of Women in Education committee of the Manitoba Teacher's Society. Unfortunately, it appeared to me that the enhanced status of women that was projected by the members of this group was merely that some women should advance into administrative positions. For them that seemed to be a sufficient goal in that they would then provide positive role models for female students. When some of us asked for assistance in integrating feminist principles into curriculum and classroom practice, the only real action was to review sexist language in textbooks. Necessary as it is for girls to have role models, I viewed it as an inadequate strategy for enacting real and lasting change. In my inner city classroom I worked with students who were truly suffering from discrimination and neglect.

Those girls needed a great deal more than role models and text books from which sexist language had been expunged.

What I felt then, but was unable to articulate, was that along with my students, (both boys and girls), I was pitted against institutions of thought and practice which always seemed to judge us as wrong, out of line, destined to fail. We were caught in a web of contradictions. It was commonly held that Canadian schools provided equal educational opportunities and that the success of each student was important for the common good of all citizens. In practice this proved to be untrue. The schools in which I worked were particularly insensitive to the needs of adolescent girls, most of whom were aboriginal or immigrants from economically disadvantaged homes. Their behaviour and resistance to engagement demonstrated confusion, resentment and alienation from their school experience (which included me). My response was to focus my day to day efforts on providing as safe and fair an atmosphere as possible in my own classroom, to stress the educational value of the visual arts, and to put what extra energy I had into activism for change. I frequently felt that my efforts came to naught on all fronts.

Much later I read an insightful analysis, written by feminist educator Linda Briskin, which illuminated my professional dilemma. Although not directed explicitly to the visual arts, she presents thoughtful critical interrogations of patriarchal attitudes which pervade educational institutions and diminish the quality of girls' and women's educational experiences. In her paper "Feminist

Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning Liberation" (1990) she discusses six ideological contradictions that girls and women bring with them to the classroom and which influence the ways that women engage in the learning environment. First, she points out that while motherhood is held up as women's life work, the actual activities of mothering are devalued; the women who do that work are also devalued. A second contradictory belief, and one that was especially pertinent to the girls with whom I worked, is that men will protect and care for women. This continues to be an intensely held ideology even when faced with the evidence of wide spread violence against women. Women internalize the myth and acquiesce to the powerful messages about what is acceptable female behaviour and "are passive, conciliatory and blame themselves in the face of violence" (Briskin 1990, 2). Sexuality is a third issue rife with contradiction. Heterosexuality is assumed to be both normal and natural, yet powerful social pressure and institutional policy are engaged in order to enforce this "natural" practice. The ideology of compulsory heterosexuality not only coerces women into denying the range of possibilities for their own sexual experience but enlists their support in homophobic discrimination. The fourth contradiction that Briskin discusses, the tension between attractiveness and intelligence, is another that had a profound impact on my students. Girls and women find that they cannot be both. While all my student were subjected to racist and classist discrimination, the girls were additionally imposed upon by the fifth and sixth point that Briskin raises. The notion persists that there is equal opportunity for success in school

and society and that boys and girls are treated equally in co-educational settings. Briskin points out that, "Many studies demonstrate that classroom dynamics - between teacher and student and between students - favour boys" (Briskin 1990, 4). More teacher attention is given to boys than to girls. Boys are rewarded differently, and for different things. The result is that girls are sidelined in classrooms.⁹ This is compounded by the final contradiction embedded in what Briskin refers to as the 'bootstrap' message: that hard work inevitably leads to success and happiness. This attitude fosters the expectation that success will not be restricted by lack of natural talent or environmental factors, but rather that the student is an individual who has the "personal power to change oneself and one's circumstances" (Briskin 1990, 5). The unspoken converse of this ideology is that failure is one's own fault because you were lazy and did not work hard enough.

Briskin goes on to point out the additional contradictions that women experience as educators, activists, and change-makers. Most particularly,

The contradiction between authority and expertise, on the one hand, and nurturing and femininity on the other, is central to the experience of women teachers; exploring this contradiction reveals that, in the relations between teachers and students, teachers are always gendered subjects.
(Briskin 1990, 7)

Briskin insists that a forceful challenge must be made to overcome the contradictions that pervade educational settings. She advocates a self-conscious political approach that advocates change as necessary and possible and that

⁹ See also Peggy Orenstein, School Girls New York: Doubleday 1994.

employs explicit anti-sexist strategies to counter the contradictory messages about womanhood and women teachers. Her proposals for change-making strategies focus on central aspects of feminist pedagogical practices which, she argues, will lead to significant social progress for women. A key point here is that "feminist pedagogy is about validating the process of teaching" which is intent upon "recognizing the relations of power - based on gender, class, race and sexual orientation - that permeate the classroom" (Briskin 1990, 22). "Teaching leadership" is a strategy which, "recognizes the expertise of the teacher, that is, she has something to teach" (Briskin 1990, 11). Assuming such approaches admits the institutionally assigned authority of the teacher, and by naming the complex power relations in the classroom, the teacher opens the possibility of addressing the prevailing contradictions. She goes on to assert that this initiative can change the power relations in the classroom and that,

Emphasizing the importance of leadership rather than rejecting it, teaching leadership rather than assuming it, naming the power relations in the classroom rather than masking them highlights student capacity and responsibility to act as change agents - as leaders - in the world outside that classroom.
(Briskin 1990, 12)

For me, the subject of ideological contradictions and power relations in educational settings echoed earlier espousals of those ideas as fundamental to socialist analysis of educational institutions. Social/educational activism in the 1970s was rife with "Marxist analysis" and intense debates about "the dialectic", most of which was a complete mystery to me at the time. Rhetoric aside, I and a

circle of other educators were committed to principles as outlined by Kathleen Weiler some years later.

Teachers are not simply parts of some mechanism of social reproduction; nor are their lives dictated by the demands of capital, racism, or patriarchy in such a way that they are mere automatons. Teachers are actors and agents in complex sites where social forces powerfully shape the limits of what is possible. But these teachers retain the ability to be conscious and to analyze and act within the socially defined site. (Weiler 1988, 148)

Within the debate of our leftist circle, gender equality was spoken of as an important issue but one that would be achieved as a consequence of overall radical change. What *was* clear was that men in our group who challenged the status quo in such terms were viewed as making important contributions to the debate. Their career advancement never faltered. Their marriages endured for as long as they wished. The women who aligned themselves with these critical points of view and who attempted to promote a feminist perspective of educational change soon found themselves in professional difficulties, they became very fatigued and their marriages ended. For women there was clearly a price to pay. There remains, once again, the sense that the stated agenda had failed to include real attention to the reality of women and girls.

In light of those "radical teacher" activities in the 1970s, the prominence of "critical pedagogy" in the late 1980s provoked a sense of déjà vu. Henry Giroux, a key proponent of critical pedagogy, remarked that, "Critical Pedagogy has arisen from the need to name the contradictions between what schools claim to do and

what they actually do."(Trend 1990,15) He proposes a practice in which educators take up

a particular posture of questioning received institutions and received assumptions [which] operate on two basic assumptions. One, there is a need for a language of critique, a questioning of presuppositions. . . . It goes beyond critique to elaborate a positive language of human empowerment.
(Giroux 1992, 10)

These are fine abstractions which are in themselves acceptable aspirations. Moreover, Giroux's fundamental insistence that students and teachers must be empowered to become agents of educational, democratic, social change is, to my mind, unquestionably valid and not antithetical to feminist concerns. Briskin's critique of pervasive contradictions and power relationships would seem compatible with such a concept and, Weiler works from within a critical pedagogy framework. As with the radical educators of the 1970s there is an inspiring energy and optimism for change. However, putting theory into practice has proved precarious.

Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992) made a forceful critique of critical pedagogy in which she revealed a dubious androcentric bias in the premises of a presumably progressive educational theory. She was provoked by her own unsatisfactory classroom experiences with this approach to examine the premise more closely. In "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy" (1992) she observes that by prescribing moral deliberation, critical reflection and rational argument, it is implied that teachers and students engage each other as fully rational subjects. She points out that,

Rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational Other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and other exotic Others. (Ellsworth 1992, 94)

In her experience, the privileging of these forms of educational engagement can operate to "regulate conflict and the power to speak" by universalizing the value of certain capacities of language and reason which have been defined and refined in the patriarchal power discourses of Western culture. I was reminded of my mystification in the midst of the past leftist debates; I could not understand how these words related to life in my classroom. When students come to such critical engagements feeling unskilled and inarticulate their contributions are stifled. Possibilities for truly innovative proposals for change are thwarted if they must be conveyed exclusively through the practices of reasoned thought. As Audre Lorde remarks, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Moreover, no matter how strongly felt, underlying emotions and conflicts are denied. When they do inevitably surface, rational argument is not possible.

As well as teaching, I continued to produce art work. I kept a studio, usually sharing space with other women. I became increasingly involved with the local art community and with a group of women, spearheaded by Sheila Butler and Diane Whitehouse¹⁰ who organized to promote the artistic production of local women. The founding of Manitoba Artists for Women's Art (MAWA)¹¹ was motivated by two strongly felt concerns, neither of which, I would add,

¹⁰ Butler and Whitehouse are artists who were teaching at the School of Art, University of Manitoba at that time.

¹¹ Now known as Mentoring Artists for Women's Art

were unique to the situation in Winnipeg. One factor was the lack of a stimulating, supportive art community in which women were respected participants. In her discussion of women's role in the art world Sandell remarked on how women were deprived of the benefits of the lively interchange of ideas, enthusiasm and values that were generated in Modernist art circles. She observed, as did others, that while women were included in such circles, they were generally present in their roles as "wives, mistresses, mothers, patrons".

Women have been second-class members of such supportive environments, since they have been supporters but not recipients of reinforcement or credit for creative work. Faced with obstacles to their artistic creativity in the school and in the studio as well as in professionally supportive groups, women have been particularly needy of a support system complete with female role models.
(Sandell 1979, 20)

This is an apt description on the sentiments of the founding members of Manitoba Artists for Women's Art: that we lacked a supportive environment and thoughtful and insightful critiques of work that would prepare women to launch and sustain professional art careers. As noted above, the Winnipeg Art Gallery demonstrated little support for women artists in general and was criticized for showing limited enthusiasm for exhibiting work by any local artists.¹² A network of artist run parallel galleries had been established as alternatives to the major galleries, but although these were very lively sites, most women felt that they experienced the action somewhat vicariously.

Manitoba Artists for Women's Art's proposal for the amelioration of this concern was to establish a centre of operations under the auspices of Plug-In, one

¹² This has changed significantly in the past few years.

of the parallel galleries. We established an energetic community centred programme, exemplary of the informal educational sites that Sandell noted as an important means through which feminist artists have enhanced their own experience as artists and extended their influence into the wider community (Sandell 1979, 24). Butler pointed out that the intention was to be inclusive and to function not as "reflecting a particular philosophy, but as a pragmatic response to an insensitive system" (Butler 1986, 24). To that end, we sponsored exhibitions of members' art works, informal peer critiques, reading and discussion groups, and presentations and critiques by visiting artists. All these activities were very successful. The positive response from a wide circle of artists reinforced the profile of Manitoba Artists for Women's Art as a lively, innovative, and open organization. As Butler noted,

Although inadequacies in Winnipeg made MAWA necessary, the city has provided a supportive context for the birth and continued existence of the organization. (Butler 1986, 24)

I feel that I benefited greatly from my engagement in these activities. The informal structure was appropriate to my situation since the demands of classroom teaching were a necessary priority. I valued the peer critiques for the variety and sincerity of discussion that was generated. Through the discussion groups and visiting artists talks, I began to realize the important developments in art and ideas that had been going on while I was preoccupied with teaching. I became increasingly more interested in contemporary art and the challenging

ideas that were being proposed about the creative process and the relationship of feminist perspectives to that process.

The second, highly influential programme, the Mentor Programme, was motivated by the need to support women in making the transition from art student to artist. The assumption was that the formal education of most local women artists had not prepared them for this step. The criticism was levelled that formal education had in fact alienated and undermined the confidence of women students in ways that inhibited their progress as artists.

Women have been permitted to attend art schools for over one hundred years but attitudes about the women's limited artistic abilities and their "proper" social role as wives and mothers placed women art students at a disadvantage. Women's participation and success in those classes was dependent on their ability to conform to institutions that were established for the training and education of men. Feminist's demands in the 1970s had provoked some changes such as the hiring of a few more women professors and the inclusion of more work by women artists in art history courses. Still, women students in the 1980s continued to report feeling alienated in the school environment. The felt experience of the Winnipeg women is aptly described by Grizelda Pollock.

The basic pedagogical plan is that the privileged independent spirits selected for the course at interview are given the opportunity to sink or swim. Space is provided, materials, a few technical resources. The student is expected to develop a programme of work, 'my work', that precious phrase, a project about which, from time to time a conversation is held in unequal, ill-defined and educationally lamentable conditions.

(Pollock 1985, 11)

Pollock goes on to describe this as the consequence of the hidden agenda of institutional sexism, characterized by "macho self reliance and aggression, the son's battle with the father" (Pollock 1985, 11). In her analysis, this situation of competition for recognition, jobs and sales of work undermines the possibility that students will develop a real and sustaining understanding of artistic practice. She declares, "The school sustains a powerful sense of the being of the artist in total mystification of what working as one entails" (Pollock 1985, 11).

In the Mentor Programme established women artists, such as Aganetha Dyck, were funded to assume the mentoring of promising new artists. Butler described the implementation of the project as follows.

Each mentor advised two participants on a one-on-one basis, spending an average of five hours per month over a ten month period. Mentors critiqued work in progress and discussed professional concerns such as grant applications, exhibiting work, and art - related employment.
(Butler 1986, 25)

The mentees were from rural and urban settings and a wide span of age groups was represented. Many had completed a BFA, but some were self taught. All applied for the position and selection was made by a jury of Manitoba Artists for Women's Art members. In addition to the programme outlined by Butler above, there were group meetings where all women assigned to each mentor met to critique work. Plug-In sponsored a group exhibition at the end of each session.

MAWA's public success became evident quickly. Exhibitions of women's art works became a common occurrence and women artist moved on to active participation in other photography, printmaking, film, and video collectives. The

abilities of many women were being recognized, they were seizing upon opportunities, and their ambitions were beginning to be realized. MAWA continues to provide these important services to the local community and has expanded its sphere of influence to include artists from across Canada.

In her MA thesis, Feminism, Manitoba Artists for Women's Art and Art Education (1989) Barbara Huber evaluated the educational benefits that the Mentor Programme participants felt they had received from their participation. Her attention to the personal perspectives of the women and the context in which they were operating recognizes that public success is not the only manifestation of learning. She also examined the ways in which the programme fell short of some expectations and how specific practices of mentoring enhanced the learning experiences of these women.

The main strength of the programme was seen to be the emotional support and empathy that was generated among the group and with the mentor. They particularly valued the forthright discussion, sharing and communication that was engendered in their group meetings. Most of the women who responded to Huber's questionnaire were around forty years of age and had significant family responsibilities. It is not surprising that there were frequent comments on the conflict between attending to family and community demands and devoting time and attention to art work.

The responses all indicated women arranged what they really wanted to do around necessity and that necessity is not their work or their careers but others' needs and others' desires. Perhaps that accounts for the aura of sadness about these responses. (Huber 1988, 139)

It was enlightening for them to realize that their mentor faced the same problems and had found ways to overcome them. Having privileged access to a teacher "who is a successful and respected artist and a successful and respected human being" provided "a model for integration of all as aspects of the female self" (Huber 1988, 132). Several commented that through the programme they felt that they had been granted permission to give their art work higher priority. Huber notes that,

in the Mentor Program a senior woman artist who can not only show ways of proceeding but who can simply, through a kind of professional acceptance, "give permission" seems to fulfil a need that previous (predominantly male) instructors were unable to meet. As such, the female role model seems to perform an important function in both symbolic and developmental ways. (Huber 1988, 131-2)

While the responsibility for maintaining relationships was onerous, the women were committed to keeping connection with others. In fact, some defined their artistic purpose as a gesture of connection, "as a link, a way of joining together the artist and her community" (Huber 1988, 147). In light of this priority,

It is natural . . . that difficulties in the program are equally seen to hinge on the failures of relationship. Most destructive among those cited was the sense of demoralizing criticism. Criticism was seen as demoralizing if it was not felt as grounded in a genuine care for the growth of the other person. The criticism thus was not seen to be given in the context of care and responsibility. (Huber 1988, 145-6)

Huber noted a decided reluctance on the part of most respondents to accept themselves as "an artist." In light of the mythologized, masculinized, stereotypes of "the artist" i.e. the lumberjack in work boots, the bearded Moses, the lecherous rake, or the biker in black leather, this is understandable. The

women could not envision themselves in this mode and it appeared that they could not move past this to formulate a more insightful definition.

While Huber noted several such self constructed restrictions, she also commented on the frequency of the remark, "I'm not doing enough work." This self recrimination harks back to Briskin's comment on the internalized "bootstrap" myth; that if one works really hard, one will be successful. As Huber point out, these women are working very hard but their labour is being absorbed into efforts that draw them away from their art work. They are stalled in a guilt filled conundrum. Some could foresee a lessening of family concerns but Huber notes,

the sense that they can construct a future more to their own designing is missing. "More of the same but slightly better" does not look like a prescription for a self directed life. (Huber 1988, 139)

Huber's conclusion is that for these women the learning experience was centred around the empathetic mentor - student relationship, situated in the context of a supportive peer group or community. Recognition of the social network in which the students functioned in the day to day world was essential. She asserts that "an effective education for girls and women will encourage, will "give permission", for desire, for action and for accomplishment" (Huber 1988, 153). She points out the need for a clear frame of reference. Since "Girls and women seem to feel that they do not receive accurate evaluations of strengths and weaknesses" (Huber 1988,153) they need to see the structure and the instructors as fair and trustworthy. She calls for greater attention to hearing what

women have to say about their life experiences and for a "more sensitive examination of the positive and negative influences of men and women teachers" (Huber 1988, 132).

The final springboard into my return to academe, and eventually to this research, was my involvement in a project that was critical in the development of my understanding of art making and teaching practice. I was a member of a committee made up of nine high school art teachers who were asked to develop a new secondary art curriculum for the province of Manitoba. We were assisted in this by Dr. Joan Walters from the University of Manitoba and Rae Harris from the Manitoba Department of Education. The existing curriculum was very open ended and philosophical and teachers wanted a clearly stated document.

In the committee we devoted considerable time to discussions of the role and context of art education in secondary schools and the social developmental and cultural context of secondary art students. Pressure, change and uncertainty seemed to be the only constants, and the issues of race, gender, ability, location (urban, rural, far Northern), and cultural diversity had to be addressed. We committed ourselves to developing a programme that addressed those realities. We reviewed a range of related literature on art education, creative thinking, and social change, which we assessed in relation to our understanding of the situation in secondary art classrooms. The educational assumptions that were articulated in the document were: art is "the communication of ideas and human experience in visual form" (Programme Guide 1988, 2), art education has the

potential to develop student's awareness and appreciation of their visual environment and of the "heritage of people in their own and other societies" (Programme Guide 1988, 2), and art making is the "dynamic process of fashioning ideas and feelings into meaningful forms" through a creative process that challenges students to search within and without for the information and skills necessary to realize an artistic statement. (Programme Guide 1988, 4) These goals offer potential for developing pedagogical practice that would be centred on the student and as such would offer girls the possibilities of making the connection between their lives and their artistic expressions.

The programme was expressed as being "idea centred" in that visual meaning is seen as the focus of art studies. Thus, ideas, topics and problems are the central concerns into which the issues of media, design, criticism and art history are integrated. It was proposed that,

Work undertaken in the art classroom should begin with an explicitly stated idea and that media and design should be explored in terms of their potential to express that idea. (Programme Guide 1988, 6)

Thus, skills and concepts, are taught, not for their own sake, but to facilitate the resolution of the particular artistic problem that a student is investigating. Following from that, it was asserted that, "the idea centred approach begins with the discovery, not the prescription of ideas and themes" (Programme Guide 1988, 6). This concept originated from "The Kinds of Schools We Need" an article by Elliot Eisner (1983), in which he contends that "we ought to develop in the young

intellectual autonomy so that they can become architects of their own intellectual journey" (Eisner 1983, 55). Further to that, he insisted that,

The ability to deal with the ambiguous and the problematic is more likely to occur in an environment where the ambiguous and the problematic are present and where students have the opportunity to formulate the questions as well as to work out the answers. (Eisner 1983, 55)

The concept of problem formulation became a central concern, and we explored just how that process could be enacted with students. Eventually we outlined the "inquiry approach" as a strategy for teachers to initiate a process through which students could become self directed in their learning. The expectation is that through participation in the inquiry process, students will learn how to define their own art making problems, issues and concerns and generate the appropriate solutions to the particular problems that arise as they develop and present their art works. In order to articulate more precisely what was meant by the "inquiry process" we looked to the work of Scott Isaksen & Sidney Parnes "Curriculum Planning for Creative Thinking and Problem Solving" (1985). They propose a six phase process through which problems are formulated, explored and resolved. They also point out that,

Fundamental to each of these stages is the oscillation . . . between imagination and judgement. Each stage will therefore have a divergent and a convergent phase. During the divergent phase a free flow of thoughts - beyond any usual effort in this respect - is elicited. . . . Each convergent phase involves the evaluation and selection of thoughts with the greatest potential. (Isaksen & Parnes 1985, 24)

To accommodate our particular project, the committee adapted and renamed the stages of inquiry that Isaksen and Parnes outlined: (1) Establishing

the area of inquiry. (2) Finding facts (3) Stating the problem (4) Searching for ideas (5) Defining the problem (6) Implementing and evaluating (7) Critiquing. (Programme Guide 1988, 33-4)

My participation in this project was extremely important to me for a number of reasons. The curriculum approach that we developed has provided me with a very workable model of how I can engage my students in an accessible, thoughtful, dynamic creative process . The inquiry process as I have employed it in various teaching situations has proven to be flexible and very amenable both to my expectations as an educator and the educational needs of my students. My expectation that this approach could provide women students with a learning situation compatible with their goals and expectations has been realized. I will detail the particular implications for the students I interviewed for this study in "Teaching ARTE 430."

The dedicated and collegial nature of our collective efforts on the committee was very satisfying. Our expertise in the classroom was recognized and appreciated, but we also extended our customary teaching concerns to include a wide range of theoretical work. I felt that I was using my mind in an entirely new way and this aspect of the project was an important factor in my decision to return to university after thirteen years of classroom teaching.

As a graduate student I had the pleasure of devoting myself to reading feminist discussions in the field of art education, art and art criticism. Feminist artists and scholars have engaged in lively discussion around the issues of

representation, subjectivity and art critical practice has been put forth by feminist artists and scholars. These texts assert not only the intellectual complexity of feminist scholarship in this field but also the necessity of finding the means through which theory and practice can act together to promote optimum learning experiences for women. Garber (1990) has argued that in fact, feminist practices can provide an effective proposal for restructuring the whole approach to art criticism in art education; one which can be exploited as a basis for an engagement with the broader issues of difference and cultural pluralism.

The discussion that I have presented in "Valuing Women's Narratives" provides an introduction to the feminist inquiry issues which supports my approach to my research project. I would like to review some additional work which delineates the context of feminist inquiry within the field of art education.

Sally Hagan (1990) refers to a "first generation" of feminist scholars who focused their attention on the recuperation of a lost history of women artists and push for the inclusion of these artists in the existing body of knowledge. Through the late 1970s and early 1980s a number of American art educators continued to address the issue of women's participation as artists, teachers and students. Georgia Collins (1978, 1979), Renee Sandell (1979), Collins & Sandell (1984), and Collins, Sandell & Sherman (1985) make important contributions to the discussion of the problems of gender equity and the possibilities offered by a feminist approach to visual arts education. Collins (1978) acknowledges the growing prominence of women artists - asserting that in fact they constitute a

new avant-garde - but charges that art education practice has lagged in demonstrating consideration for the learning situation of female students. In her view, women students remain subjected to negative connotations of "feminine sensibility" and the myths of male/female dichotomy. Faced with these attitudes, women students who wish to be recognized as artists are obliged to assume an integrationist strategy (Collins 1979) i.e. to take on the single minded, aggressive attitude maintained by men and produce work that permits no reference to the gender of the artist. Seeing this as an untenable approach, Collins concludes that,

as long as experiencing and coming to terms with one's body remains a valid basis for the perception of the world and the artist's possibilities in it, a sensibility based on the personal experience of gender should play an important role in art education. (Collins 1978, 15)

As noted above, Renee Sandell (1979) discusses the personal, informal and formal educational contexts for women's learning discussed above. She maps out the overlapping areas of women's studies, art, and education in a manner that situated Feminist Art Education at the junction of these three large domains and calls attention to the complexity of the issues at play in any discussion of the concept. In Women, Art, and Education (1984) Collins and Sandell et al. address their discussion of sex bias to classroom art teachers with the intention of raising awareness of the extent of the problem, encouraging critical inquiry, and promoting attitudinal change. Through the direct, well organized content of the book the authors make an important practical contribution towards enacting non-sexist classroom practice. They recognize women's' achievements as artists

and educators, draw attention to changes already occurring for women in art and art education, outline practical strategies for classroom practice, and propose areas for research. They argue optimistically for a discipline specific, non-sexist, pluralistic model of art education and envision the possibility that,

With some formal feminist art education content, art teachers could transmit non-sexist values and concepts in the arts to their students, and thus educate the younger members of our society and liberate them from unjust sexist influences. (Collins and Sandell 1984, 73)

A pluralistic model implies that the contributions and characteristics of men and women will be valued equally, a challenging aspiration which will hardly be achieved by these means alone. Pluralism, as aspired to in this case, is grounded in the liberal humanist notions of reason and tolerance: given better information, people will improve their ideas and behaviours. The universal sorority of women is assumed. Such views of pluralism fail to acknowledge the complex differences among women as well as those between men and women. People may hold deeply felt opposing views, often grounded in painful lived experience, which are not allayed through the inclusion of new information, rational debate, and admonitions for mutual tolerance. "Second generation" feminist scholars in art education have been challenged to incorporate deeper analysis of gender difference, considerations of race, class, and other differences into their studies of the theory and practice of feminist art education. Elizabeth Garber (1990) observes that attention has turned to "detailed analysis of

underlying social, institutional, ideological, and psychological structures of gender, race, class and other factors" (Garber 1990, 17).

As critical examination of gender issues in art and learning have continued new challenges have arisen. A major curriculum initiative in the United States called for the expansion of art curricula to include the study of art history, aesthetics and art criticism as distinct disciplines along with studio production. This was seen by some art educators as a devaluing of the art making experience and the imposition of elitist, Euro-centric values on an increasingly diverse population. Feminist scholars, sensitive to the pervasive nature of androcentric bias in the construction of knowledge, entered the debate to raise questions about the advisability of promoting the status of these disciplines without careful consideration of the implications for female students. Hagaman notes that,

The work of feminist scholars in art history, art criticism and aesthetics has made clear some of the epistemological inequities in those disciplines.
(Hagaman 1990, 34)

Hagaman further observes that feminist scholars tend to the view that,

the disciplines must not simply be modified to include women and minorities, but must be reconstructed so as to provide epistemological equality within the nature of the disciplines.
(Hagaman 1990, 28)

Some "Second generation" scholars focus their critique on the ways in which gender imbalance in art education is perpetuated so long as deeply embedded assumptions and values in art history, philosophy, art criticism and art practice go unquestioned. Women were not just forgotten in the construction

of established knowledge, the "amnesia is strategic and serves to ensure the patriarchal foundations of knowledge" (Grosz 1991, 206).

In her article, "What does Feminism Have to Offer DBAE? or So What if Little Red Riding Hood Puts Aside Her Crayons to Deliver Groceries for Her Mother?" Barbara Huber (1987) presents a forceful critique of discipline-based art education. She begins by pointing out that this major curriculum initiative is the most recent effort in the struggle to justify art education in schools. She argues that the arts are identified as "feminine" in western society and hence they are denigrated along with all else "feminine". Proponents of discipline-based art education are caught in a contradictory situation wherein they are attempting to validate "feminine" artistic values - "the creative, affective, intuitive, subjective, and unquantifiable" (Huber 1987, 37) - by advancing arguments founded on dominant "masculine" values - "the scientific, rational, logical, objective and measurable" - in which are embedded the androcentric biases that devalued the feminine in the first place. In response to her question, "So what does this have to do with Red Riding Hood?" (Huber 1987, 37) Huber replies,

In short, nothing at all. In fact she might just as well put down her crayons and run that errand for her mother because in the move away from the studio-based program which would focus on her work as an individual she will be faced with and influenced by the full weight of patriarchal tradition in philosophy/aesthetics, in psychology, in sociology, and last but not least in the tradition of education itself. On top of this she will be presented with an art history in which she has little if any place or recognition and a role model in the professional artist which is antithetical both to her upbringing and *perhaps* to her integrity as a person. (Huber 1987, 37)

In spite of outstanding research and forthright feminist art criticism, conventional art history studies maintain the privilege accorded to painting and sculpture. In such "masterpieces" Alice Mansell points out, "content and form are often consistent with the male dominated political systems that endorse them and the financial sources that support them" (Mansell 1988, 101) and that frequently "male perspectives on visual metaphors are taken to be both normative and factual" (Mansell 1988, 104). Beyond the concern that men's art works are discussed to the exclusion of works by women, the form of critical practice bears examination. As long as the discussion of all art work continues in a formalist vein, "as an articulation of the objective over the subjective, the mind over the body, sense over sensibility, and the analytical over the expressive" (Mansell 1988, 102), gender biases are repeated and compounded.

Failure to question the assumptions of aesthetics can also perpetuate gender bias. Huber (1987) reminds us that Western intellectual traditions are redolent with misogynist sentiment. Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Kant all make denigrating pontifications on the subject of women which leave no doubt that their discussions of human nature, including human conceptions of aesthetics and beauty, are exclusively addressed to the concerns of men. In the fields of psychology and sociology male theorists such as Freud, Piaget and Kohlberg have added the weight of supposedly scientific verification to the ideological presumption of female moral inferiority and creative impotence. To elevate the status of these intellectual traditions in art curriculum without critical

interrogation of these biases is to perpetuate conceptions of art from which girls and women are emphatically excluded.

Conventional discourse on aesthetics tends to divorce the work from the identity of the artist, isolate the work from the implications of a broader context, and evaluate works according to objective, abstract concepts. Such practice operates to control the meanings derived from the work and limit the quality of consideration given to art from diverse cultures and contexts (Mansell 1988: 105). Mansell reiterates Parker and Pollock's (1981) assertion that critics play an increasingly influential role in perpetuating the ideological values of dominant systems. Critics and curators can function as gatekeepers, anointing - through critical attention and selection for exhibitions and collections - the art works which conform to their notions of aesthetic quality.¹³ Contrary to a supposed stance of objectivity, critical judgement may in fact be influenced by unacknowledged personal taste, albeit a view voiced in appropriate critical language. Consequently, art produced by women may be dismissed as "personal, minor, or subjective" because the critic finds the content disturbing.

With regard to studio practice, continuing valorization of the traditional fine arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture operates to exclude women from acceptance as creative artists so long as those art forms,

¹³ See Matriart 5:2 1995 and ongoing, for "Who Counts and Who's Counting", a series of compilations of statistics on the representation of women artists in major Canadian galleries. Women remain seriously underrepresented .

retain their mystique of genius by the emphasis on the creator as a lone hero working against great odds, unique, fearless, following his own vision uninfluenced by those around him. (Huber 1987, 40)

Where "a majority of male studio instructors, functioning as translators, formulators of assignments, and role models" (Mansell 1988, 109) and where the intentions of the artist may not be considered significant in evaluations of work, Mansell queries how this "may affect the manner in which females interpret form and content both in making and understanding works (Mansell 1988, 105). She asserts that in such circumstances, women students risk having the intended meanings of their works ignored, altered or denied.

Like Mansell, Huber insists that ongoing evaluation is necessary to insure that "the inequities and warped vision of that tradition in which we find ourselves" (Huber 1987, 4) is not passed on. Teachers should be mindful that conventional analysis of art works are "interpretation and as such are open to further interpretation." (Mansell 1988, 111). Including art works by women artists in curricula, adopting approaches to the critique of all works that recognize the identity of the artist, and exploiting perspectives from a broad range of related discourses are seen as ways of opening up such reinterpretations. In studio practice it is asserted that, "Students need to be guided in the analysis and utilization of form and content as it best articulates their own developing ideas and experiences" (Mansell 1988, 111), thus placing the student and her artistic intentions at the centre of the teaching / learning experience.

Placing the student at the centre of *her* learning experience is an improbability in post-secondary art education, overshadowed as it is by the notion of the avant-garde, Modernist male artist. Donald Kuspit declares this modernist, avant-garde artist to be

a two-headed monster . . . both equally vainglorious and mythical . . . both born of the same matrix of discontent and anxiety. (Kuspit 1990, 63)

On one side is the "artist re-educator" who offers a visionary prospect of a world transformed through art. On the other is the "personalist artist" for whom art is "a special way of suffering" and who offers himself up as an example of how art and suffering lead to salvation and a "higher self" (Kuspit 1990, 64). Both models are based on the notion of the omnipotent artist, outside society - above the mundane, unimaginative, material, day-to-day - who pursues a precarious artistic existence, persisting in a critique of society and offering a never to be realized utopia. The artist is cast as the nonconformist rebel, an image with which, Huber (1987) observes, women do not easily identify. It is also a contradictory image when cast in the role of educator in a public institution.

Similar modernist models are considered by Carol Wainio (1995) to be prevalent in university level studio teaching. She discusses two approaches that are roughly analogous to Kuspit's two concepts of the avant-garde artist. One approach is to assert that "we need simply to tap and perhaps educate an innate creativity in our students" (Wainio 1995, 120) i.e. the "personalist artist" view that creativity will offer personal transformation. The other approach is to focus

exclusively on traditional art making skills i.e. the "artist re-educator" who will show the students how art will transform the mundane world.

Wainio considers the ideology and consequences of two modernist models which she calls the "Romantic model" and the "Bauhaus model", "both of which "require us to make our students re-enact, unconsciously, particular moments in the history of modernism, and thus offer them up to the student as truth" (Wainio 1995, 125). Neither she nor Kuspit view these models as mutually exclusive and neither results in a satisfactory learning experience for students.

For aficionados of the Romantic model, artistic creation "privileges the Romantic modernist moment - the radical break with the past and the transformative act of transgression and renunciation" (Wainio 1995, 121). In this view, the true nature of art is not teachable, although new students are introduced to a range of traditional technical skills which they assume are relevant and useful. Then abruptly, they are expected to renounce the skills that they have worked to acquire, in order to live out "a kind of mythologized transformative experience" (Wainio 1995, 122), to be an "artist", inspired by the aforementioned Romantic preoccupation with renunciation and transgression.

They are given to understand, subtly, or through terse, spiritual-master like comments . . . that they have been initiated and must now behave as such. Instruction changes. It becomes more personal, cryptic, full of gesturing and posing. Less is said, and a lot is assumed. Willing initiates or not, they have been tricked into a vocation, a calling. (Wainio 1995,122)

The Bauhaus model is enacted on the assumption that art is founded on a teachable, universal, formal, visual language. Proponents of this model feel that

the principles of this language can be taught through exercises and assignments which the teacher has constructed in such a way as to make students "see" and reproduce the particular visual elements. Formal properties are privileged over whatever expressive intentions the student may harbour.

Wainio addresses the collective concerns of students without particular concern for if, or how such approaches may impact differently on men and women. Her claim is that neither model recognizes that students will proceed in a rapidly changing world where they will be called upon to learn new skills and integrate them into their self-defined artistic intentions. Just as Kuspit calls for a reconceptualization which situates the artist *in* society, Wainio calls for teachers to "establish meaningful contexts for self learning" (Wainio 1995, 125) that relate to the experiences and expectations of their students. In Kuspit's view the artist should be involved in a critical, yet particular and intimate relationship with that society. Similarly Wainio suggests that, while teachers hold their own ideological positions, students should understand that these concepts are part of an open, evolving discussion in which they too can participate.

Regrettably, not all teacher-student discussions are open and evolving. In his study, Maurice Sevigny (1977) reports a very telling incident with "Arlene", the student with the lowest grade in the class (Sevigny 1977, 375 - 381, 402-406). Although the gender implications are not discussed, the observation and interview reveal an agony of confusion that this girl was enduring. Regardless of the instructor's inability (or refusal) to engage with this student, it appears that she

was so mystified and intimidated by the whole experience that at that point she had no way of taking any meaning out of what he said. His words and gestures simply don't seem to be connecting with anything.

I am moved to try to enter Arlene's experience, as was Ellen, the teacher in Jenny Diski's story "On the existence of Mount Rushmore and Other Improbabilities." Ellen takes an imaginary journey into the mind of her student, "Tracy" where, to Ellen's surprise, she sees that Tracy's mind was not a foggy empty space but was actually full of an inestimable number of doors and chambers. The problem was that

each of the doors Ellen tried was locked and there were no corridors leading from one to another. She began to get the picture of how it worked.
(Diski 1993, 23)

Ellen sees that for Tracy, things just happen and are understood as if in separate rooms that have no relation to other rooms of experiencing. Ellen's solution is to abandon her expectations that connections can somehow be made and to conclude that Tracy will lead a contented life in spite of failing to grasp an expansive view of history.

Perhaps Arlene, like Tracy has no wider context into which to place her learning, but I doubt that Arlene would take her failure quite so complacently. She recognizes her humiliation. She had experienced enough success to be accepted into a university programme, but for some reason she has no way of connecting her work and desires with the words and gestures of the teacher. To teach implies that there is some way of helping Arlene to open the doors and to

construct corridors to connect them. Presenting her with a barrage of concepts, alternatives and unexplained terminology only seem to aggravate her confusion. I wonder what has happened in her life and education to bring about this dilemma, and how has being a girl mattered in those experiences? One needs to know more about Tracy and her story.

The teaching scenarios that Wainio and Sevigny describe bear strong resemblance to the "pedagogical plan" that Pollock describes. However, much as I may agree with her characterisation, I think that a more careful examination is required. To move so directly to a categorisation leaves the particularity and the complex dynamics of actual learning situations unexplored: how do women come into those situations and how do they respond to the situation as a whole? Consequently, one could fail to recognise the means of resistance and subversion that students use and which could be built upon for real and lasting changes in teaching practice and institutional structure. We need to know a great deal more about the existing situation in order to develop strategies for effective change.

Developing strategies for effective change involves attention to the whole scope of pedagogical practices. I concur with Roger Simon's (1987) remarks that "pedagogy" is a more all encompassing term than "teaching." "Pedagogy" refers to the practical integration of curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, and evaluation methods, all enacted within a certain time and space. He also point out that when in practice in the studio classroom pedagogy implies,

a view of how a teacher's work within an educational context specifies a particular vision of what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment. (Simon 1987, 371)

As Jennifer Gore (1993) points out, as we engage in the development of theoretical proposals, there is a need to acknowledge the implications of the experiences of teachers and students in classrooms; that "much of the educational production of knowledge takes place at the very private, personal level of teacher and student" (Gore 1993, 49).

Sensitive reflection on personal experience in teaching a media arts course is the foundation for Ellsworth's critique of critical pedagogy. Her reflections upon her own actions as a teacher and the responses of her students provide forceful examples of her efforts to translate her principles into action. Magda Lewis also draws upon her own teaching experience to inform her theoretical work. In "Interrupting Patriarchy: Politics, Resistance and Transformation in the Feminist Classroom" she states the goal of her feminist pedagogical practice: "to self-consciously examine and question the conditions of our own meaning-making and to use it as the place from which to begin to work towards change" (Lewis 1990, 170). With that in mind she discusses the psychological, social and sexual dynamics of the feminist classroom which incorporates self-reflective discussion of her classroom experience as an aspect of her analysis. She uses several very moving citations from her students' journals to exemplify points that she raises in her text. Those moments when the students' voices are brought

forward provoke my curiosity to know the whole story about the educational situation they are experiencing and about which their teachers are writing.

Outlining the path of women's personal and educational development is the project of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule in Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind (1986) Their research is an inquiry into the processes of women's learning development and the factors that contribute to, or detract from, women's academic success. They hold the opinion that while prevailing theories may adequately represent the learning experiences of men (research having been conducted using male sample groups), these theories fail to seriously consider the ways in which women's life experiences differ from those of men. They also fail to consider how those differences affect women's learning experiences and accomplishments. The authors present an insightful description of ways in which women are cast as Other in relation to male authority. They discuss the ways women are confronted with the necessity of redefining their sense of self in relation to male defined knowledge. This research makes it clear how significant gender is in the lives and learning of women.

Belenky and her colleagues also emphasize that ongoing and appropriate teacher motivation and response is required to assist the learning process. An understanding of how the student regards herself as a learner is important in judging what kind of teaching approach would be appropriate. Therefore, in "Perspectives on Learning to be an Artist" (page 328) I will discuss their observations at length in relation to the narratives of the women that I have

interviewed. I organize my discussion of the ways in which visual arts learning relates to the learning phases and transitions discussed by Belenky et al. At this point I will briefly describe the concepts these authors present.

After conducting extensive interviews with women¹⁴ in various educational settings ranging from maternal and child care programmes for teenage mothers to prestigious academic universities Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule describe five positions

from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority. We show how women's self concepts and ways of knowing are intertwined. We describe how women struggle to claim the power of their own minds. We then examine how two institutions primarily devoted to human development - the family and the schools - both promote and hinder women's development.

(Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1986, 3-4)

They begin by describing *silence*: a state of being utterly intimidated by a dominating, arbitrary, castigating authority to the point where a woman cannot conceptualize the possibility of her own sense of voice. They discuss the original learning position wherein women as *received knowers* come to accept the ideas of external authorities and experts. As *subjective knowers* women students turn from the notion of external authorities and affirm their trust in their own inner "gut" feelings. Eventually women may come to reincorporate the knowledge of others back into their personal knowledge framework as *procedural knowers*. The authors

¹⁴ The use of "woman" and "women" throughout the discussion of this work can lead to the perception that this proposal is being applied universally to all women. I (and I think the authors as well) would generalize these ideas only so far as they might apply to North American women. To extend the proposal further would require further research.

observe a final phase, referred to as *constructed knowing*, where women confidently assume the responsibility for actively constructing knowledge and making connections between content, the learner, and the teacher. The researchers astutely observe that various life experiences undermine women's faith that they can rely on male benevolence to insure their well-being. This is noted as a highly significant shift of viewpoint. They also outline how formal and informal learning situations aided in the transformational shifts between phases.

It could be interpreted that these phases unfold in a lockstep manner, but it is equally possible to take the view that life experiences and formal learning situations eventually provide women with a repertoire of approaches that we learn to employ according to the requirements of the situation. It does appear however, that until certain concepts are established new approaches are unlikely.

As I said above, the research of Belenky et al. can alert educators to the possibilities of a particular student's standpoint, which may in turn suggest a pedagogical approach that will be most productive. Its strength and value to my understanding of the data is that progress as a knower is explicitly located within social and cultural interactions.

Still, the psychological concepts relating to the construction of "the self" remain largely unexplored. The question of the origins of women's sense of self, agency and creative desire is fundamental to understanding how these issues are implicated in social interaction, learning, and creative representational practice. Contemporary theorists propose various strategies of how the feminine self is

realized and comes to act (or not) in the world. Each of several theoretical proposals have held sway in feminist circles at points over the last thirty years.

Initially, women like the "body artists" of the 1970s, assumed that one can simply present one's person as "self" and take up the role of speaking subject. Unfortunately, the authority of "I", the speaking subject, is not so transparently assumed, nor is it willingly bestowed outside its gendered figuration. Artist Mona Hatoum, for example, realized that she would always be seen as a nude "Woman" in performance works; that viewers always had to deal with that element before they could become involved in any other aspect of the content that she was presenting. She performed in costume from that point on.

The possibility of women's subjectivity and creative agency are denied in established psychoanalytic theories. The process of individuation asserted by these theorists is complex and ensconced in scientific practice, but the verdict for female human beings is again to be cast as Other, denied voice, self and agency. Feminist artists and scholars have worked with, against and around these theories to exploit what potential they offer to feminist causes, to expose their androcentric bias, and to undermine the persistent predilection for relegating women to a position outside of discourse.

Psychoanalytic theory, particularly the proposals of Jacques Lacan, took a prominent place in feminist art making and criticism. Artists such as Mary Kelly developed works which centred on the artist's exploration of Lacanian concepts and the psychological underpinnings of gender identity in relation to creative art

practice. Psychoanalytic theory constituted the foundation of landmark texts by authors such as Laura Mulvey (1975), Kate Linker (1983) and were fundamental to the writing of numerous art critics and theorists. Psychoanalysis and other post-modern theories were taken as doctrine by some teachers - to the great bewilderment of many students who laboured under the impression that complex discussions of "Theory" were an obligatory part of art making.

Post-modern theorists worked to deconstruct the notion of an essential, unified, subject and to assert that human subjects are wholly constructed by social discourses and cultural practices. This concept opens up the possibility of understanding social/political power structures, such as patriarchy, not as trans-historical inevitabilities but as constructions within specific contexts. This also may seem to liberate women from a single, imposed, predetermined gender identity and offer possibilities for understanding and theorising about the construction of subjectivity. However, as Nancy Miller points out, women are positioned differently in this discussion.

Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by *too much* Self, Ego, Cogito, etc.

(Miller 1986, 106)

In fact, the leading complaint of feminist activists has been that women have been over acted upon by social structures to the point of oppression. When the line of the deconstructionist argument is pushed to the point of insisting upon the erasure of all categories, including woman, the whole feminist project is

in jeopardy. If there is no unified female subjectivity, the category of "woman" does not exist and hence the impossibility of female identity, even as maternal. Such a position renders gender invisible and negates any discussion of difference, sexuality or of the socio-political consequences of how we live as gendered beings.

As Vicki Kirby (1990) points out, psychoanalysis and feminism constitute a "dangerous liaison" since, in Lacan's scheme, individuation is realized through drastic suppression of the feminine. The Oedipus crisis is asserted as the privileged and unique moment of individuation, whereupon the boy child accepts the father's law and acquires symbolic language in compensation for relinquishing his former (albeit illusory) unity with the mother. Thus, patriarchal violence and denial of the feminine is embedded at the very roots of language and culture. Obviously, if male subjectivity is accomplished through denigration of the "lacking" female body, and the girl child is denied access to subjectivity and agency except vicariously through the father, such a theory has little to offer feminist aspirations to agency.

With regard to understanding how women realize a sense of self, agency and creative engagement, I have found the most useful proposals to be those presented by object-relations theorists such as D. W. Winnicott. His work derives from Freudian concepts, but Winnicott focuses attention on the means through which the human infant comes to realize a sense of self through interaction with the object world as opposed to an exclusively inner psychic phenomena of

radical individuation. Winnicott makes no distinction between the capacity of girls and boys to make these transitions.

The point upon which Lacan and Winnicott agree is that the earliest life experiences of the human infant within the mother/child dyad is the dynamic site of creative potential. Lacan refers to it as the *pre-mirror* stage, a narcissistic stage in which the infant makes no distinction between itself and the rest of the world, and experiences the world as sensations of fragmentation, drives, needs and the pleasure of having those needs met. Winnicott calls it *illusion*.

Winnicott was of the opinion that Freud had overlooked crucial questions about the emergence of human subjectivity. In his research on the very early processes in the development of personhood, he observed the interactions of mothers and their children and concluded that it is the mother (or primary care giver) who facilitates the emergence of self. The fundamental human illusion, Winnicott points out, is in the mother/child dyad, where the infant presumes a magical unity of self and the mother who, for the baby, is the satisfaction of all its wants and needs. In early infancy this illusion is sustained, unbeknownst to the child, by the "good enough mother" who devotedly provides the nourishment, warmth, and comfort that the baby desires.

The mother's adaptation to the infant's need's, when good enough, gives the infant the illusion that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create.¹⁵ In other words there is an overlap between what the mother supplies and what the child might conceive of.

(Winnicott 197, 12)

¹⁵ *Create*, as Winnicott uses the word, means conceiving of the idea of something that will meet an instinctively felt need.

Winnicott is particularly attentive to the necessity of the infant's fusion experience with the mother. The infant's inner illusion of unity and omnipotence is essential to its successful realization of subjective agency but it is neither possible nor desirable to sustain it. It is essential that the parent eventually disrupts the illusion, although Winnicott insists that, "she has no hope of success unless at first she has been able to give sufficient opportunity for illusion." (Winnicott 1971: 11)

Eventually the mother withholds or postpones attending to the infant's demands and the child must make her/his needs known through gestures to which the mother responds. The *transitional phenomena*, the infant's realisation of "the Other", (that which is exterior to her/himself) is actualised through interaction with a "transitional object". Winnicott observed that, as the mother becomes less attentive, the infant finds solace in caressing or sucking a corner of a blanket or garment. The infant's notion of effortless control over the blanket is still an illusion but this gesture was seen by Winnicott as the initial phase of the transitional phenomena. Within the first year the child appears to settle upon a transitional object: the one particular blanket or toy that becomes a necessary companion at bedtime, in solitary moments, or to allay anxiety during the periods when parental attention is withheld or directed elsewhere.

The eventual breaking of the illusion permits disillusionment; the frustrating realization on the part of the infant that she/he is not able to effortlessly create and control everything she/he wants and needs. Disillusion-

ment entails the recognition of an outer reality which one must negotiate in order to survive. It is in this shift from the illusion of omnipotence to the state of objective perception that the "self" emerges. The mother creates a space between herself and the infant which enables interaction with the objective world. This is a dynamic space which Winnicott designates as the site of experiencing,

To which inner reality and external life both contribute and which exists, as a resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping the inner and the outer reality separate but interrelated.

(Winnicott 1971, 2)

Winnicott observes that the transitional object plays a critical role for the child's initiation into this interaction in that it inhabits an intermediate area of experiencing, "between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived." (Winnicott 1971, 3) In his view the transitional object "is what we see of the journey in progress towards experiencing." (Winnicott 1971, 6) He observes that the object eventually becomes the recipient of very active manipulation as well as affectionate physical and verbal attention - what we know as play activity. It is through the baby's investment in the transitional object that Winnicott perceives her/his eventual development of creative play and subsequently, of adult artistic creativity. He elaborates,

This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or outer (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work.

(Winnicott 1971, 14)

Thus, through the transitional phenomenon, the child, from within the illusion, can begin to recognize personal agency in relation to an object "that is perceived by others as external to that being" (Winnicott 1971, 11) and with which s/he is playing. The transitional object is never actually discarded, but it eventually loses the potency of its meaning for the child. Gradually the transitional phenomena become diffused,

spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common' that is to say, over the whole cultural field. (Winnicott 1971, 5)

His interpretation of the "whole cultural field" extends into artistic activity and aesthetic appreciation and also into the broader concept of creative living; "the meaning that refers to a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality" (Winnicott 1971, 65).

Winnicott's work is useful in that processes of growth are situated in positive, accessible contexts in the world. It is possible to make links to feminist proposals such as de Lauretis' assertion that subjectivity is realized through interactive experiences,

and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and effect) to the events of the world. (de Lauretis 1984, 159)

The concept of experience is critical to this point of view and clearly is not to be understood simply as "the things that happen to someone." Experience as proposed by de Lauretis is a process of interacting, grounded in social reality

and the material and interpersonal relations that one perceives and comprehends.

Winnicott's work has also played an important role in the theoretical proposals presented by Professor Stanley Horner, which in turn have influenced my understanding of aesthetic response and teaching practice. Horner has made several proposals that exploit the concept of a fundamental inner subjective image interacting with the external object world. The dynamic of dialogue between the self and the Other (that which is outside the self) is fundamental to his concept of creative interplay of learning relationships, whether they are relationships with other people, our own art works, works by other artists, or written texts. Horner situates the site of meaning creation in the space between the artist and the work in creation, or between the viewer and the art work, in the same way that Winnicott situated the origins of creativity in the space between the mother and the baby. The work itself is therefore cast as the transitional object, amenable to manipulation in the imagination or in actual practice.

Horner (1989) proposed an approach to engaging in aesthetic experience with works of art which focuses on encouraging viewers, for their first engagement with the work, to abandon their attention to the demands of the real world and indulge in a subjective response to what they are seeing, to enjoy the illusion that the work is anything they want it to be. In a classroom situation the teacher would then encourage students to verbalize what their subjective

engagement with the work had been. A visitor to a gallery might simply make a deliberate effort to review the experience in her conscious mind. Students might be asked to explore variations in their responses, propose variations to the work itself, or perhaps develop completely new works. In other words, the viewers are encouraged to play with the possibilities that are offered by the art work, to engage in play activity with the work. All of this serves to securely establish the viewer's inner image illusion that the work can be whatever it is to them at that time. The work of art becomes the transitional object, amenable to the viewer's manipulation and an active participant in a provocative dialogue.

However, the meaning of an art work is more complex than a solipsistic response. In order to form a more complete understanding of the work and to open up the possible meanings of the work, the viewer must break the illusion. Formal elements influence the response the viewer has experienced and the artist's intentions are to be considered. As well, related artistic and cultural critical discussion may offer insights into the meaning of the work. It is Horner's assertion that the attention paid to establishing a strong inner image at the very outset enables the viewer to proceed with the art criticism of the work with a more secure sense of personal voice. That recognition opens up the possibility that there are completely new meanings that the viewer may produce.

This approach to the critique of art works has become key to my teaching practice. From the beginning of a course I tell students that critiques of their art works are not an occasion for me as the instructor to pronounce judgement on

their work. Nor is it a situation where the artist stands up and tells us what the work is about. Rather it is an opportunity for each student to present their work to an audience of informed peers. Each viewer, including myself, has the responsibility to give honest feedback about their response to the work so that the artist can assess how successfully s/he is communicating their intended ideas. To access those honest responses, we engage in the process of effecting a subjective illusion in whatever variation of the concept outlined above seems to be appropriate to the situation. The student who produced the work is encouraged not simply to accept or reject the responses, but ask for clarification and discuss her/his peers responses in relation to her/his own artistic intentions. Furthermore, the artist will analyze the elements of the work that have provoked certain responses in order to enhance desired elements and guard against elements that illicit undesirable responses.

Throughout this chapter I have tried, in the words of Peter Elbow, "to do justice to the rich messiness of learning and teaching" (Elbow 1986, ix) as I have experienced it. I present the narrative of how experiences and ideas work together, with the help of teachers, friends, students, written texts and art works to bring me to the position of knowing that I presently inhabit. I know it to be a selective telling, riddled with both deliberate and unintentional omissions. It is fraught with gaps and inconclusive moments which I tolerate in face of the expectation of this project to "figure things out, to reach conclusions, to arrive at stateable, portable, and even neat insights" (Elbow 1986, ix)

It is however, my introduction as a feminist, teacher, and researcher. Most importantly, this is the story of how, and under what circumstances this project came to be developed. In the following chapters, preceding the students' stories, I outline further research issues and describe the enacting of the project.

Context for the Study

Concordia University has always seemed to me to be an active, purposeful but somehow curiously "awkward in it's skin" kind of institution. It exists in the middle of downtown Montreal which on the one hand means that it is spread around in buildings that look very much like the unique mix of architecture of the city. It does not have the sense of being a "campus" as a unique and special territory. On the other hand, the fact that it is so physically embedded in the city seems to make it part of the dynamics and energy of Montreal itself. From the first time I entered the Visual Arts building I have had a sense that everyone feels that they are doing something of importance. Throughout most of the term, several hundred students slog through ankle deep slush, laden with bags and portfolios and make the risky crossing - even with the lights in your favour - of Boulevard René Lévesque to attend their classes and studios. Perhaps because my office/equipment room was located on the second floor just down the hall from the students' Café X, I witness a lively flow of traffic as students and teachers come and go, greet one another, meet and talk. There always seems to

be something of significance about these conversations. They are earnest but by no means humourless.

For the most part, students are attired in some variation of the "basic black", thrift store, art student uniform with the occasional splash of colour. They tend to look a little bit down-at-heel even though many defy the greyness of the winter months with shots of brilliant hair colour. This approach to fashion is not generally an affectation of Bohemian notions but rather, an economic necessity. Concordia's art students are not a wealthy lot. Like most Canadian students these days they hold jobs and take on debt to go to school. Fashion is important but art supplies come first.

Concordia was created in 1974 through the merger of Sir George Williams University in downtown Montreal with Loyola College, seven kilometres to the west along Sherbrooke Street. Sir George Williams had grown out of an English language, college level evening school begun by the YMCA to meet the needs of working people who wished to enrich their lives and advance their careers through education. The commitment to making university education accessible to all capable and willing students remains fundamental. Part-time students continue to comprise a large percentage of the student body. English is the language of instruction, although many bilingual Francophone students attend.

Within the Faculty of Fine Arts, the Visual Arts are comprised of Art Education and Art Therapy, Art History, Cinema, Studio Arts, Painting and Drawing, Sculpture, Ceramics and Fibres, Printmaking and Photography, Design

Art, and Inter-disciplinary Studies. Masters programmes are offered in Art Education, Art History, Studio Arts and Art Therapy, as well as Ph.D. programmes in Art Education and Art History. Ostensibly the divisions between departments are only as rigid as space and finances dictate. Students should have opportunities, and in fact are obliged to enrich their programme with courses from other areas. Unfortunately, this sometimes proves to be difficult to arrange and schedule in ways that accommodate student preferences. Art Education students are required to take up to forty-two studio credits and six credits in Art History. Students from studio programmes may take Art Education courses and hence the mix of students involved in my study. The expectation is that studio art programmes will "define a professional comprehensive education in the arts" which was "firmly rooted in a broad-based university education." (Faculty Self Appraisal Dossier Vol. 1 1993, 2)¹⁶

Women make up 63% of the total fine arts student population of twenty-three hundred students although 68% of part-time students are women. (FSA Dossier Vol. 1, 1993, 25-6) Students are drawn largely from the province of Quebec but, as the Self Appraisal report notes, there has been an increase in the number of International students and students coming from other Canadian provinces. Presently, French is the first language of 26% of students.

Students from Quebec entering any university in the province must first have completed a two year CEGEP¹⁷ diploma after their secondary schooling.

¹⁶ Hereafter referred to as FSA Dossier

¹⁷ CEGEP: Collège Enseignement Général et Professionnel

Those who enter the Faculty of Fine Arts will generally have had the opportunity to take art as an elective in high school and they will have continued on into a visual art programme at CEGEP. Student entering Concordia's Faculty of Fine Arts are selected on the basis of their CEGEP diploma and the quality of the portfolio they submit. Out of province students must have equivalent qualifications as well as a high quality portfolio. Older students may enter as Mature Students where formal high school and CEGEP standing is not required. Therefore, students range in age from their early twenties through to retirees.

Programme structure and curriculum are under ongoing review and noteworthy efforts have been made to be responsive to student needs. The impact of contemporary artistic and theoretical innovation is evident in curriculum initiatives in various departments. The Art History department, in line with contemporary perspectives in the study of art history, have developed courses dealing with feminism and gender issues in art history and the social and cultural contexts of art. Various changes were made to the structure and content of other programmes, such as in Interdisciplinary Studies, in response to increasing need for flexibility.

The ways in which women students experience their art education in this milieu and how they describe the value of that experience is the central concern of my study. Attention to the quality of women's education in the faculty has also been an important ongoing concern for some faculty members. In 1989 a group of women faculty met to consider the relationship of feminist practice and

feminist teaching. Their discussion focused on questions of how teachers might incorporate feminist content into studio curriculum but they noted two areas of resistance. Young women were seen to resist the concept of feminism, perhaps for fear of social derision. On the other hand, it was pointed out that,

I have less sympathy for mature male colleagues when they scorn feminism because of an implicit need for power, or when they assume that there is 'no need' for feminism, when they refuse to see that the harassment and demeaning of women students is a continuing problem, that assumptions continue to be made about women's art work as 'too feminine' i.e., bad.

(Hughes, Llipke, MacKay, Mullen, Saccá, Tenhaaf, and Tweedi 1990, 43)

In order to have a better sense of how faculty members view their roles as educators within this particular institution, I interviewed eight full time faculty members¹⁸ from across the visual arts section. I wanted to find out what consideration was given to the teaching of women within various departments and to gain some sense of the primary artistic and educational expectations of the departments. The faculty members were asked about the following: the general educational goals of their department; their understanding and approach to the concept of inclusive teaching; and what they felt were the most desirable learning situations for women in their respective areas.

These interviews revealed several interesting points. Although no one felt that feminism was a priority topic in departmental discussion, it was evident that gender issues have been on the agenda of the Faculty for some time, and that feminist concerns were seen to have been addressed through a number of

¹⁸ In the interests of confidentiality I have not identified the faculty members with whom I spoke nor have I credited anyone specifically for citations drawn from those interviews.

initiatives over the past ten years. I sensed that the emotional intensity, which a senior female faculty member warned, "builds up very, very quickly" around the issue was evident but carefully cloaked. The implications of feminist concepts for actual pedagogical practice proved to be a complex issue.

Along with my request for an interview I had sent each interviewee a synopsis of my research proposal as it was formulated at that time; prior to my formal proposal and prior to doing any student interviews. A comment in that synopsis, to the effect that instructors may feel frustration with the ineptitude of some women students proved to be quite provocative. It was repeatedly read into my statement that "instructor" meant "*male* instructor" and several people vehemently denied ever having heard male instructors make negative remarks about women students. A male professor acknowledged that some inappropriate remarks had been made from time to time but he insisted that such behaviour was certainly in the past. Apart from the assumed anti-masculine implication, it seemed that my comment was read to be far more of a condemnation of students than as what I assume to be a valid pedagogical concern: Some students have difficulties. What does one do about it?

The insistence that male teachers do not openly belittle female students suggests two things to me. In a positive light, there certainly are men who simply do not think or act in that way. The alternative is that the rest are savvy enough to realise what will not be tolerated in the company of their peers, which is less

encouraging. Simply to desist from bigotry doesn't constitute progressive pedagogy.

My more important concern is to reveal the active practices that encourage women's artistic growth, and I received a good deal of thoughtful response in that regard. Much of what was discussed was relevant to students in general, regardless of gender but I think there is justification for a senior female faculty member's statement that, "This society really doesn't support anyone's expression but it's quite hostile towards women's." In spite of this, and largely due to the efforts of this woman and certain of her colleagues, a new faculty member could assure me that, in her experience,

At Concordia there is this sense that women's voice is important and will be considered (in spite of) some retrograde people putting sticks in the wheels.

She made comparisons with a former teaching situation and went on to add, with respect to Concordia,

It's an atmosphere. It's the air you breath. One can feel that there is permission. That's what it is; it's an atmosphere of permission to pursue whatever is necessary in order that there be more inclusiveness.

There are some positive innovations that have moved to foreground women's position in the Faculty. The Permanent Review Committee in the Faculty of Fine Arts,¹⁹ representing faculty, students and staff, was established in 1982 to raise women's concerns in the Faculty. For twelve years workshops, discussions, speakers, performances and publications were presented under the

¹⁹ Now defunct.

auspices of this committee. Initiative on the part of this group resulted in the creation of the very popular "Women in the Fine Arts I & II" courses. These efforts have contributed to the perception that provoked one of my male students to ask, "How did this get to be such a place for feminism?"

Certain other courses and programmes were observed to be particularly amenable to women's learning. One faculty member commented on the high degree of student engagement he observed on the part of students in the *Women and Painting* course. The Studio stream in Cinema was cited as a comfortable and productive choice for students who don't want to make sync sound film in large crew situations, but who would prefer to work independently, with a minimal crew and a small camera. It is held that the notably high retention rate for women students in the Cinema department is largely due to the availability of this option. Flexibility and the absence of an imposed tradition were also named as the qualities that attracted women into such courses as *Women in the Fine Arts* where an interdisciplinary, mixed media approach is promoted.

The presence of women faculty was seen as an extremely important element in providing a desirable learning situation for women. As was observed

I don't believe that men can represent women's concerns adequately. I just think that women have to be there. For undergraduates its very important. That women are the teachers for undergraduate *and* graduate students . . . that students not see that, Okay, women are teaching undergraduates but they are not teaching graduates. Or they are teaching but they are not administering.

Another female faculty member declared,

There need to be women professors. I think that that is the first (thing). A male professor can be a feminist . . . but we all know that there are those different things that don't need to be said, can be taken for granted

It was noted by one woman that, although Concordia has a larger proportion of credit hours taught by women than comparable universities, in most departments the hiring of women full time faculty is still significantly below the number of men. Nonetheless, due to the large number of women part-time faculty, undergraduate students have the perception that there are a lot of women professors. The specific professional status of the teachers is often unknown to the students.

All the faculty who I interviewed were interested and concerned about their students and thoughtful about their educational practice. In most cases there was genuine enthusiasm about the learning that they saw happening and about the ways that they saw students responding to the programmes. Several exemplified their remarks with very specific examples of interactions with students and were able to reflect upon how their own educational efforts were received. A departmental faculty-student social event had provided an occasion for one professor to talk with students about what they felt made a good course.

What a number of students told me is that its a course where they are treated as an equal . . . at least they are treated as an intelligent person offering a valid point of view that they have taken seriously and researched somehow in whatever it is, and that the instructor respects that and is willing to listen to them and is willing to learn from them.

Several instructors used their own teaching experience to exemplify their opinion that the students themselves are the most vital resource for advancing

the concerns for the inclusion of diverse experiences into the learning process. They gave enthusiastic descriptions of the ways in which students from diverse life situations were able to bring forward their particular view of the world, both in their art and in discussions. Sensitivity to her student's learning was clear in one instructor's anecdote about a student's mispronunciation of an artist's name during a class presentation. The instructor resisted the impulse to interrupt and correct the student.

And I left it and I thought, it saved her from becoming, "Oh God! I'm not saying it right! I'm not doing it right!" and she could continue with her ideas and it was a very good presentation. Then later on I just made sure that I said the name at some point so she could hear it.

In response to my comment, that often the dynamics of such student - teacher interactions are really crucial in developing students sense of themselves as successful learners, confident in their abilities to go ahead and present their ideas, she continued,

There is the crux of what we want students to learn. We want them to learn to develop their ideas. We want them to learn a sensitivity to the mediums, whether it be writing, reading, clay, paint video; but to come back to themselves. I mean, there is so much self definition in art that's necessary that I think that the more we re-enforce their confidence in themselves and their ideas and their ability to scrutinise through their ideas and positions themselves.

This primary goal, which might be called an expansion upon the concept of "developing *voice*" was emphasised by other instructors and it was stressed that opportunities for this kind of growth should pervade all aspects of their studies. In the field of art education it was seen to be particularly important that,

the programme be handled in such a way that they find their voices as teachers . . . that students start attending to other people and what people are really feeling and saying and trying to develop the art in relation to that so that they are also developing *their* students' voices.

Other instructors presented discussions of educational objectives that stressed the development of critical thinking skills in order that students can make knowledgeable decisions. This is a valid and respected educational goal but one that I think should not be misconstrued to mean the same thing as the development of personal voice. The issue of ideological constructions at play in teaching situations was raised directly by two teachers. One asserted, "I think we do teach ideology. I don't think we can get away without it. We teach it. It's implied in every thing we do." My level of suspicion rose when I heard statements which insist that our struggle and that of our students is to function as individuals; to free ourselves from the imposition of ideological structures.

They have to acknowledge the conditioning process that has been played on them as well. So they have to ask certain questions. They have to want certain answers from their own personal point of view, not from a deciphered structure that someone else has in front of them - from a theory or a position related to some ideology that is floating around.

Given the context of the conversation, I felt that the emphatically not-mentioned ideology was certainly "feminism". The consequences of this teacher's point of view reverberated in my own class when I asked students to do a short presentation on the work of an artist who had influenced or inspired their artistic practice in some way. "Influence" was discussed in very wide ranging terms; concepts, subject matter, attitude, use of colour, medium, use of humour, etc.

Two students who were also students in the above cited professor's class and who seemed to be very impressed by him, insisted that there was no one who had ever influenced their work. Their work was utterly and uniquely their own! Ironically, this is in itself an ideological position but it is an ideology that offers the security of being the dominant Modernist credo of the self sufficient, inspired artist whose creativity and originality must not be fettered by identification with others.

My conclusion from these conversations was that all the faculty to whom I spoke were very aware of gender as an issue in educational practice and most were making efforts to provide a fair and open atmosphere for women students. Some, particularly the women with whom I spoke, were aware that more than that is required in terms of programme structure, curriculum content and teacher - student interaction; that the "when, where and how" require careful creative thought. Two senior faculty emphasized that efforts towards inclusive education need to extend beyond the classroom. One teacher asserted,

I would go farther though. I would say that the entire way students live at university, the way they see people treating other people at university - all the procedures that they run up against - the environment that they run up against . . . all is very important and not getting the kind of attention (needed).

Teaching ARTE 430 : Multi-Media

The Multi-Media course is designed as a studio/seminar which gives students an opportunity to develop basic skills with several art making

technologies: photography, video, sound recording and mixing, Super 8 film, and computer generated images. Students are expected to incorporate these various media into installation or performance works which may be site-specific or collaborative. I include a detailed description of the course to provide insight into the commonly shared teaching/learning experience of myself and the project participants.

My approach to structuring the course has developed from the programme I helped devise for the Manitoba curriculum project. I have incorporated the fundamental concepts of that programme into my teaching: that students can be engaged in a process of seeking the artistic issues that they wish to address, finding the most appropriate solution, and solving the creative problems that arise. Another important expectation in ARTE 430: Multi Media is that the students come to regard the technologies as tools, "amenable" to use in the expression of artistic meanings, rather than as amusing gadgets or as intimidating forces that dictate a specific kind of technical and aesthetic proficiency. (Randolph 1984) I have found that many students are extremely anxious about the use of technical equipment and afraid that their inexperience will frustrate their creative expression.

In order to develop a balanced perspective, I began two simultaneous strands in the first term: (1) the development of technical skills and (2) individual engagement in a process of formulating ideas and questions for inquiry about the content and artistic intent of each students work. Initially, this seemed to

exaggerate the workload but as the two aspects eventually merge, I think students found that they have a well developed concept of the questions they were addressing and of the media that they could select to best realize their particular artistic intentions.

I have found that the best way to calm student's fears about technology is through hands-on demonstrations of the equipment. Students need to feel the camera in their hands, see the light and focus indicators, and be assured that they do indeed know how to set the shutter speed. They also need enough information about the basic technical principles of the equipment that they can think through problems that arise. They may still be concerned that they have not "got it quite right" but they have enough confidence to begin to work with the equipment without fear of breaking it.

Simultaneously with teaching practical skills, I began the evolution of the artistic content. Each time that I have taught the course I followed a similar approach, with variations depending on the group and their interests. At the first class I presented a brief film montage that I had assembled from the "outs"²⁰ of a 16mm film that I made (although any art work might be used). The film presented silent images of people walking, a long moving shot of countryside, a moving shot through a city, more crowds of people with balloons and paper flowers and the sequence ended with a multi-coloured cloud of balloons rising into blue sky. After the screening I invited the students to verbalize their

²⁰ Film footage not used in the final production

responses to what they had just watched. Students have commented about movement, journeying, alienation, celebration, shifting from rural to urban, among other possibilities. Using the concept of *journey*, we brainstormed a range of possibilities: journeys for pleasure, journeys of obligation, spiritual journeys, a quest, particular places, dreams, memories. From the brainstormed proposals students were asked to comment on which ones were most meaningful for them, if any. Using this exercise as an example of the process of generating and selecting possibilities, students were asked to use their personal response to the film footage as the starting point for the subject of a work in any conventional medium that they felt was appropriate. It was to be brought to the next class for presentation. I suggested that regardless of what their responses had been, they should accept that as their starting point and continue privately brainstorming a range of associations until they arrived at an idea that was somehow meaningful to them. I also made it clear that if they already had a particular direction in their work they could use that as their starting point rather than the film. When the works were presented in class we engaged in a new round of responding, and I began to ask informally about how an individual might define the ideas of her or his project in a word or a phrase.

In order to encourage an easy transition into technological media, the second assignment was to use the first piece and produce two series of Xerox works (colour, black and white). Most of the original pieces would not fit into the Xerox machine so it was necessary to think about how and why changes should

be made, what impact additions and deletions would have, and what the response was to the new creations. In discussing this work I stressed that students should try to articulate the ideas with which they began and the meanings that they saw in the completed work. Thus they were encouraged to think about the content of the work they were producing and to translate their image ideas into words. The concepts that were explored in the Xerox work were evaluated and extended in a photography project which involved greater technical challenges. The content of each new project evolved from the one just completed and discussed. The process of generating ideas and making selections continued as students undertook assignments with each new technology. My role was to provide technical instruction, share my responses to the art work, continue to question the artistic intentions and outcome of each work and to suggest technical, artistic and theoretical resources.

The second term assignment is to develop the ideas that had been defined and to produce an art work using a combination of any two of the available media. Proposals were prepared and presented to their peers for discussion in small groups. In many cases these discussions have resulted in major changes in the choice of media and considerable refinement in the definition of the ideas. In the groups I have taught, students have dealt with issues of relationships, internal/external tension, cultural heritage, displacement, animal rights, gender, sexuality, surveillance, voyeurism and many other personal and cultural concerns. My role has been to observe the discussions, ask questions for

clarification, and remind students that the proposals were starting points, not contracts. I also make a point of being available to meet individually with students to discuss their proposals and to assist them as they continue to clarify their ideas. Most students have taken advantage of the opportunity at some point. I have found that careful listening is the most valuable factor in these conversations. When a student's ideas are suspended someplace between intense feelings, an inner image, and words, her ability to articulate her meaning can be quite confused. Careful questioning about what she does say is needed and inevitably the question is, "So why does this matter to you?" This question is difficult to answer, but it seems to me that it is a crucial question if she is to make the connection between her own experience and ideas, and the meanings of her art works.

I have found that the student's works are often quite personal, intense and insightful, as are the discussion about them. The classes that are devoted to presentations of the final projects have proven to be rich and exciting events. The work showed commitment and effort as well as ability to use the media with technical and expressive finesse. The verbal responses and discussions of the work demonstrated sensitivity on the part of the students to the ideas, the processes and to the people who had created the work.

As a feminist art educator, my intention is to reverse the studio art teaching situation described in Pollock's previously mentioned analysis; to achieve truly democratic, well defined, educationally enriching conditions within generous,

respectful and supportive learning environments, where women students are exhilarated by the challenges with which they are presented. The explicit agenda of gender equity should be unequivocal. Taking the leadership role, as Linda Briskin stated, is an important first step. I feel that it is my responsibility to provide the starting point and outline how the process might go forward. Needless to say, my practice is not always as clear and successful as I would wish it to be. I am often painfully aware of the gaps between intentions and practice.

As I have reflected on my teaching and as I have spoken with students, I have become acutely aware of the complexity of the student - teacher relationship. While the teacher is in the position of maintaining a relationship with the group as a collective and with particular students at certain times, the student's primary perception is of a relationship with the teacher. The student's relationship with her peers is secondary unless there is a specific effort to re-focus the relationships in a more democratic manner. The teacher-student power relationship is most intensely polarised when the student's art work is under discussion, either while it is in progress or when it is presented for formal critique. This is made clear in the stories that the women in my study tell about their interactions with professors. Whether she views the work as an "academic" exercise to demonstrate a particular competency or as an intimate representation of her inner self (among other possible views) the student looks to the teacher for affirmation and at the same time, she fears the teacher's judgement. As my study

reveals, the significance of that anxiety and the way it impacts on students learning is profound.

Developing Methodology

As I discussed above, many qualities of narrative inquiry recommend it as a productive methodology for feminist research. Through careful attention to women's stories researchers can reveal the qualities of life as lived and the inter-relationship of personal experiences and culture. The complexity of stories offers an ever-present possibility of discovering

first the world as seen through the eyes of the participants and then the basic social processes or structures that organize that world.

(Hutchinson 1988 : 124)

The practices of narrative inquiry are as complex and varied as the story-tellers and the sites from which they speak. The telling of stories is a multi-levelled process in which people are not simply recounting facts, but rather they are "engaged in living, telling, retelling and reliving stories" (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 4). Whether recalled from the past, unfolding in the present, or imagined in the future, the story, the teller and the listener are for that moment drawn into a shared experience, unique to that telling. The details of the stories change over time, as do the meanings that both teller and listener may discern. As a researcher, one is challenged to engage in a delicate mediation of what is said, what is heard, what is known, and what can be written.

Feminist and educational narrative researcher particularly stress the need for establishing a connected relationship with participants "through modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation" (Noddings 1986, 502). Hence, the development of relationship involves questions of

time, relationship, space, and voice in establishing the collaborative relationship, a relationship in which both researchers and practitioners have voice.
(Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 4)

The recognition and respect for the potential dialogic space and the human relationships with which it is entwined, constitute a fundamental component of studies that have influenced the way that I have developed this study. The research done by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) reveals the evident significance of self awareness, relationship to authority, and the roles of schools and family in women's learning processes. The issues that were detected in their study suggested some of the issues that I raised in the interviews. Of course, the particular focus of my study was on how these issues are implicated in artistic learning and production.

My inquiry into the dynamics of feminist and dialogical interaction brought the recent work of Lyn Brown and Carol Gilligan, Meeting at the Cross-roads (1993) to my attention. I was moved to anger, disappointment and discouragement as I read the finding of their five year study of the girls and adolescents. They observed a devastating shift out of relationship with themselves²¹ in order to maintain the "nice girl" image that they came to know was expected of them.

²¹ A move away from recognizing and expressing her own ideas and opinions in deference to those around her.

They observed forthright, saucy, self assured seven year olds who by the time they were eleven had begun to compromise their own wishes and subordinate their own voices. They demurred to avoid being ostracized by their peers and creating problems for adults. It was profoundly dismaying to realize how mature women, as mothers and teachers have been instrumental in expecting and enforcing "nice" behaviour. I heard those words of caution coming from my own mouth, to my daughter and to my students.

At the time I read that study, I was also reading as someone who was in the process of developing a study of women as learners. I was reading to understand the researchers. They tell a detailed story of their working process and their growing understanding of what is required so that the girls and young women feel they can be open and honest. With exceptional care, they reviewed every aspect of the study, remaining open to the unexpected and willing to depart from the original course of action. I was aware of their perceptive, intelligent analysis throughout the project even as they moved, without apology, outside what some of their colleagues considered appropriate research practice.

The discussion that they give reminded me that within the research interview there must be consistent respect for the dialogic relationship inherent to that process. In spite of years of research experience and careful preparation in the school, Brown & Gilligan were forced to re-evaluate their role and responsibility as researchers if they expected to establish a comfortable relationship of trust with the girls who they were interviewing. They quickly realized

that simply by holding to the questionnaires the interviewers cast themselves as outsiders: the asker of questions, the interpreter of responses, not someone to be trusted with true thoughts and feelings. The researchers became "a new version of something to guard against," and "most insidiously we became another reason for the girls to feel bad or feel judged" (Brown & Gilligan 1992, 12). They eventually adopted an open ended format that gave the girls a key role in directing the conversation and involved the interviewer in the role of active listening and responding, not simply asking and documenting. It became imperative that "we ask not only who is speaking but who is listening" (Brown & Gilligan 1992, 22). Thus, as feminist researchers, they recast their process of researching as a relational practice in which,

We attend to the relational dimensions of our listening, speaking, taking in, interpreting, and writing about the words and silences, the stories and the narratives of other people. (Brown & Gilligan 1993, 22)

The findings of this study are discouraging with respect to the psychological impasse that many girls experience, but the final picture was not completely bleak. They brought to light the role that women as teachers and mothers played in the process of self denial, and thus they opened avenues for change and growth. The researchers and some of the faculty at the school took time to examine their relationships with one another and the girls. They became aware of the ways in which they cut off girls' expressions of self. Because of this new understanding, they quickly modified their teaching and their interactions with the girls.

For me, the first practical consequence of this deeper understanding was to realise that who I chose to interview for my study was of serious importance. I wanted to engage in my research in a manner that would genuinely respect the students' participation, but regardless of my sincere intentions there was no reason why total strangers should volunteer to discuss the issues that are important to this project. I would not feel completely comfortable asking total strangers to talk about really personal matters. I realized that the students whom I would feel most comfortable interviewing would be the students I had taught myself and with whom I have established a relationship.

An additional consideration is the format of the interviews themselves. The issues raised by Belenky et al. in their research and the positions of knowing that they observed provided a useful focus for my initial questions. Several other studies focused on women as practising artists and noted issues on which I touched in the interviews. Nancy Wilton (1978) drew attention to the early lives and familial relationships of women artists and Nancy Noël (1981) studied creative processes as experienced by established women artists. Whitesel (1982) studied factors that influenced the career commitment of women Fine Arts graduate students. Their research, along with others already cited, confirms the need to query about family, schooling and social experiences as issues related to women's academic and career success. These issues are key to the set of conversation initiating questions that I prepared.²²

²² Appendix A

Being mindful of Brown & Gilligan, I wanted to encourage a conversation in which both the student and I could be active participants. However, without some degree of uniformity in the interviews the analysis of the data would be a truly daunting task. Therefore, I defined introductory questions for several general topics: educational background, family relationships, artistic process and decision making, followed by an outline of possible follow up questions, depending on the flow of the discussion. This approach gave some basic structure to the interviews and left adequate time for unstructured discussions about the art works. In this way I hoped to promote a comfortable and open dialogue that respected the interviewee's active participation while still keeping the project within the limits of my capacity to deal with the resulting data.

Interviewing

The selection of students for the study was a matter of coincidence. Since none of the women were in my classes at that time, it was a matter of who I met in the hallway at school or who could still be reached at the phone number on an old class list. Then it was a matter of when we could make arrangements for an interview.

In all, I interviewed seventeen women, in Montreal, between February and June, 1994. Two of the interviews were conducted at the Visual Arts building at Concordia and one woman came to my apartment. All other interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants. I had explained my project when I

set up the appointment, and I had asked the women to select about six art works that they considered to be important. They had all given careful thought to the topic and to the selection of the art works. Some had made notes and re-read their journals in preparation for our discussion.

I found each interview to be a very intense experience. Each was between one and a half to two hours in length, by which time both of us were too tired to continue. I began each interview by discussing the consent protocol²³ and then once again, outlining the project²⁴. All the topics were covered in each interview but never in the same order or with uniform attention to each topic. Gayle and Meredith for example, had a very clear idea of what they wanted to tell me about their work and I had very little to say other than asking for clarification on some points. With others I played a more active role in moving the conversation through the issues about which I was curious. We looked at the art works at whatever point in the conversation it seemed appropriate. Sometimes we talked about the art work all at once in a sequence chosen by the interviewee.

The fact that I knew these women turned out to be a mixed blessing. While I felt comfortable about asking these women to participate in my research, in most cases the interview began with an obviously nervous note in our voices. I think that that is to be expected since an interview is an extraordinary kind of conversation, no matter how amicable both parties are. In light of my experience I am in agreement with Janet Wolff who forthrightly contests the view that,

²³ See Appendix B for sample form.

²⁴ See Appendix C for sample transcript of my verbal project description.

power relations between researcher and subjects evaporate if we just manage to be dialogic enough in our research methods; it is still a matter of an encounter motivated, set up and more or less controlled by one party, whatever the sensitivity and 'openness' to the other. (Wolff 1995, 50)

Regrettably, power relations cannot be easily evaporated. Also, for most of the students I still carried with me the connotations of being "the teacher." Some women spoke very directly about their experience in my course and others made only passing reference, but I have no reason to suspect any negative sentiment behind the fact that some were less inclined to talk about their experience. Some actually asked if it was all right to talk about the Multi Media course in the interview. Evidently there was concern about what was acceptable in a research situation.²⁵ The comments that were made are forthright and valuable to me in understanding the dynamics that exist in my classroom and the role I play in fostering or discouraging participation.

The atmosphere of nervousness was dispelled as we moved into the interview, and once the student was talking about her art works I felt that we were honestly in conversation about something about which we were both intensely interested. Probably because most of the participants and myself are still involved in the Concordia community, the students tended to be guarded in their discussions about teacher - student interactions. Being "so close to home" was also a concern to me in writing the stories in such a way as to insure the anonymity of everyone involved.

²⁵ "Research" would seem also to be a concept perceived to be bound by formality.

The video camera was problematic. It was far more disturbing for the participants to have their image recorded than simply to speak and have their words recorded. They were concerned about their personal appearance and the state of their housekeeping. Most have asked for a copy of the tape, although they are not particularly concerned about having a copy of the transcript.

For the most part I simply set up the camera on a tripod near me, set a medium close-up shot (head and shoulders) turned it on and left it alone. To tape some of the art works I removed the camera from the tripod for more flexibility. On other occasions I moved the tripod to a new location. As the student being interviewed was speaking, she was certainly aware of the camera, but the initial nervousness did ease as the interview progressed.

The video tapes were invaluable to me as a researcher. First, they provided backup for the audio tapes which were sometimes of questionable quality if the participant didn't hold the recorder close enough while speaking. I also reviewed the video tapes for additional information, like facial expressions, and to verify certain interpretations that I was making as I wrote the stories. Most particularly, viewing the tapes kept me mindful of the particular personality of each woman as I undertook to analyse the contribution she was making to this study.

Using the video to document the students' interaction with the art works during the interview was very useful. Her gestures helped to clarify her meaning as she spoke about certain aspects of the work. Unfortunately, video shot under such circumstances where lighting is variable, space is cramped, and time is

short, does not produce very good documentation of the art works themselves. Additional still photographs would have been useful.

I have had occasion to speak with several of the women since the interviews took place and their interest in this research continues. They have also remarked that doing the interview was an important learning experience in itself. They had not taken time to engage in such a long term reflection on their work, nor had they made some of the connections between events and ideas that were now clear to them. I have found this feedback to be particularly gratifying.

Sifting and Sorting

In the interviews I was given richly detailed stories from a generous and talented group of women. The construction of theory from such personal information is a multi layered process both in practice and in negotiating the issues related to that process.

On the level of practice, transcribing the interviews was the first task in analysing the interview data. I transcribed eight of the interview tapes myself, I hired Irène to transcribe part of her own interview, I sent two out to a transcription typist, and four were transcribed by a friend. One audio tape was of such poor quality that it could not be transcribed. The two interview transcriptions that were produced by the transcription typist were of such poor quality that they were unusable.

Transcribing served as the first reading of the data. I installed a monitor next to my computer and played the video tapes as I transcribed. This added to accuracy and made the task of transcribing much more lively and enjoyable. A friend worked on the transcriptions at my home so I saw parts of the video tapes as he worked. I then reviewed his completed transcriptions.

At this point several things became clear. Seventeen interviews was too large a number to include in the compilation of narratives and I decided to include only twelve. The decision as to which ones to eliminate was made in part on practical grounds. I chose to omit the poor quality transcriptions. One tape had not been transcribed because of its poor sound quality. I had been putting off transcribing one tape and finally realized that, because I had known the participant as a friend for quite some time, I felt it was inappropriate to include her in the study. One other interview contained some very personal information that the interviewee did not want mentioned at all but which had great impact on her life, so I felt it was best not to include that interview.

It was not by design, but I realized that the remaining interviews represented three particular generations of women: a group of young women who had proceeded from high school or college directly into university, a group in their early thirties who had worked or studied elsewhere before coming to Concordia, and a group of women over forty who had quite varied backgrounds prior to enrolling. I have included four narratives from each group.

Having reduced the quantity of data, I proceeded to address the particular content that each one presented to me. The transcription process had given me an understanding of the most prominent themes: (1) an outline of each life narrative (2) family background (3) important teacher - student interactions (4) past and current ideology about art and art practice, and (5) the range of her art production. I also had an understanding of experiences that were particular to certain women. Each transcription was read again and these concerns were highlighted and colour coded. Summarizing notations and comments about connections to other information were made in the margins. I used coloured tags and labels to facilitate location of comments on the same topic at various points in the interview. I was then prepared to write my summary of each narrative.

Exponents of narrative inquiry are very sensitive to the power relations between researchers and their project participants. They insist that it is a paramount responsibility of the researcher to establish an egalitarian, collaborative relationship with participants throughout the research process. Unfortunately, the ideal is not always possible. As Acker, Barry, and Esseveld report,

commitment to minimalizing the power differentials of the relationship in the research was further confounded when it came to the analysis. We found that we had to assume the role of the people with the power to define. The act of looking at interviews, summarizing another's life, and placing it within a context is an act of objectification.

(Acher, Barry and Esseveld 1991, 142)

The researcher takes on the task of "constructed knowing" (Belenky et al. 1986) and this entails the responsibility for analysis. My task as a researcher

extends beyond observing "storied lives" and the context from which they come. As I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the project is then to "map" these individual perspectives onto the wider theoretical field of education and artistic production. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out,

The educational importance of this line of work is that it brings theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived. (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 3)

The concerns voiced by Acher, Barry and Isseveld show how careful a mediation is required in order to demonstrate respect for the participants while drawing together the broad, interrelated ideas that constitute a theoretical proposal. "Mapping" suggests the possibilities of sketching out the breadth of possibilities, potential relationships, and connections among the stories. The progress of the narratives of living and learning may overlap or diverge at certain points. I am reminded that such theory proposals are grounded on life experience and as Norman Denzin remarks, life is not lived linearly.

It is lived through the subject's eye, and that eye, like a camera's is always reflexive, non-linear, subjective, filled with flashbacks, after-images, dream sequences, faces merging into one another, masks dropping, and new masks being put on. (Denzin 1992)

Notwithstanding the compelling characteristics of each story, I am aware that,

The exploration of a cultural moment through the experiences of particular women's lives will not produce a single coherent narrative, but rather a series of distinct but overlapping perceptions. (Wolff 1995, 35)

Writing Stories

Connelly and Clandinin remark that "How to adjudicate between the whole and the detail at each moment of the writing is a difficult task" (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 7). Certainly, writing the stories of the women who participated in my research has been the most demanding task of the study. I have been challenged both personally and as a teacher - researcher to confront and resolve a number of contentious issues: From what position can I presume to understand what these women's lives are, and have been about? How deeply am I implicated in the meanings generated from this work? How can I recount their stories without taking them over and turning them into *my* stories? How can I convey to my readers the complex and tentative, but none-the-less profound, nature of the information to be derived from the words that the women speak and the words that I write?

As writer, my voice assumes the public place and such power as that role holds. My representation of these women is written in my terms and I control the terms in which the representation will go forward into the world. This is not necessarily unethical, but Jamaican author Michelle Cliffe has pointed out the threat posed when those in power take control of representational practices. The threat is that, through the denial of the voices and values of the group in question, they are relegated to object status, from which "only certain elements are chosen, re-cast, co-opted and made available to the definition of these people" (Cliffe 1987, 141).

Cliffe is concerned particularly about artistic representations but others have criticized this practice in social science research. In a survey of eight-hundred-eighty-one ethnographic cases, Oswald Werner and colleagues found that 45% were written completely in the words of the researcher - authors, only 10% even used verbatim quotations from their respondents, and only 3.5% were written entirely in the words of the people being studied (Werner et al. 1995, 6).

The stories of the women I interviewed are the very reason for doing this study and my intent has always been to make their words and ideas central to this dissertation. Since reprinting the interview transcripts is impractical and inappropriate to this project, re-telling their stories becomes my responsibility. Moreover, I wish to make proposals for teaching practice based upon the discussions of experience that the respondents talked about. Making these proposals requires that I assert my voice as a teacher and a researcher in the synthesis, interpretation and analysis of the information that I have been given. Herein lies the dilemma of the researcher/teacher who has set out to seek knowledge from the stories of her students. My first obligation in this undertaking is to present the ideas and perceptions of the women to my readers as directly as possible. I share with other writers the realization,

That writing about experience always is removed from actual "raw" experience, the overriding concern of these writers is shrinking the distance between the experiencing subjects and their accounts of lived experience.
(Ellis & Flaherty 1992: 4)

Film maker and author Trinh T. Minh-ha has written extensively on the delicate question of negotiating a position from which to speak ethically and with legitimacy about what one observes and deduces about the lives of others. Through her insightful film and written work she interrogates the ever fluctuating nature of our perspectives and proposes some possible redefinitions of problematic roles. One avenue is to recognize that one is taking on the role of a translator. This is to admit that inevitably there is a slippage between their words and mine, and that precise translation is impossible. There are important implications in this practice.

Whether you translate one language into another language, whether you narrate in your own words what you understood from the other person, or whether you use this person directly on screen as a piece of "oral testimony" to serve the direction of your film, you are dealing with cultural translation.
(Trinh T. Minh-ha 1992 :128)

So what, for me, are the dynamics of the cultural translation in which I am engaged? I am not making a definitive diagnosis of the lives of these women. Rather, I want to recognize the ways in which they see and understand their lives differently at various times along the way. In the text that I have produced I want to convey the sense that this is but one of several possible interpretations of the information, albeit a thoughtful and informed one. While I wish to respect the participants' words, what I have written is clearly my understanding of what was said.

I also have been conscious that our response to what we know about one another varies depending upon the role we play in the relationship. My status as

the teacher/researcher was not erased during the interviews although I am confident that we established a rapport of trust and generosity. Having the images of the women playing on the monitor beside my computer while I worked on the text, I felt that I could, in a way, continue the conversation that we began in the interview. This was the most valuable use for the video tapes. I recognize that the video image is transitory and illusory but, nonetheless, the tapes were a powerful tool for bringing back the vitality of the interview situation. I found myself laughing and crying all over again and I attempted to convey the vital qualities of the students' personalities in retelling their stories.

I was also intensely aware that the women who participated could be reading the words that I write. Most of them are still part of my community and are maintaining an active interest in the progress of the project. It is vital to me that their contribution has been respected and valued and that they should feel that has been the case.

I recognize that as I condensed and paraphrased what transpired during the interview there are many factors at play in my act of *translating*. Like the authors of The Challenge of Feminist Biography, I was confronted with the dilemma of my own subjective involvement and the privacy of my subjects.

We had to struggle through various stages of identification and rejection in order to achieve the distance necessary for a critical stance. We had to resolve issues concerning our subjects' need for privacy. A woman's struggles sometimes to fuse, sometimes to sever, the public dimensions of her life is one of feminist biography's most important themes. But, in unravelling the strands of that struggle, because of our personal involvement in our subjects' lives we also felt more conflicted about revelations that violated their privacy. (Alpern, Antler, Perry & Scobie 1992: 11)

The other side of that issue was also apparent. It took very little reflection for me to realize that some of the most crucial turning points in my understanding of myself and the way I see my role in the world are very personal and I would not write them into a public document. This made me conscious that, although the women were sincere and forthcoming about many personal issues, they had in many cases guarded their words. We had only touched on the top layers of experience and there were limits to the conclusions that I could draw.

My first writing strategy was to use as much direct quotations from the interviews as I could. This very quickly became an unwieldy text consisting of lengthy citations linked by "She said" or, "She continued". This approach also meant that my role was reduced to that of an editor, as if I hadn't been involved in the conversation and as if I had no right to interpret the words I was hearing. As well, as I read the interviews, re-played the video tapes and worked through the transcriptions, additional implications came to mind: my own subjective thoughts and associations in relation to certain remarks that were made, my recollections of discussions and other conversations with the woman, and my descriptions of her art works. On another level I found myself making associations with theoretical works that related to the unfolding narrative. For me this is analogous to the situation in the studio or classroom where the student's background, her verbal communication, her art work, the teacher's responses and impressions and the teacher's own background and knowledge are all moving in and out of play as part of the dynamics of the teacher - student

interactions. Much of this dynamic was eluding me as I tried to fit it all into an appropriate format.

My eventual solution to the problem of writing these narratives was to take the responsibility for constructing a text that outlines the experiences of the participant as I perceived them to have been related to me. Sometimes the narrative is chronological and sometimes it follows the trajectory of the interview. Coherence is not my goal. In the text I have included extensive quotations from the transcript. But I still found that there were remarks by the interviewee that made important contributions to understanding her outlook on a certain point but which didn't fit easily into the flow of the text. Sometimes these remarks were exemplars of a number of concerns that I had drawn together in the body of the text. Sometimes they reflected a slightly different perspective on the subject from a different point in the interview.

A final concern was how to inform the reader about the art work under discussion. Including colour photocopies would provide the reader with the most immediate access to the images, but in some cases the art work would be as identifiable as the woman's name or face. Therefore, to protect the anonymity of the participants, no images are included. The solution, albeit an insufficient one from the reader's point of view, is to provide my own descriptions and responses to the works. This adds an additional facet to the researcher's dilemma of how to honour the visual expression of the participant. The translation of image to words is inevitably inadequate and vulnerable to the writer overriding the voice

of the artist. In light of this concern I can only admit to the subjective and conditional nature of my descriptions and responses. Other viewers may respond differently. I myself might respond differently in a different setting. I note as well, that the written version of these descriptions were produced after viewing the works in the presence of the artist, listening to her discussion of the work, and reviewing the video documentation of the works.

In order to present the reader with all this information, I constructed the text to include "frames" positioned along the right side of the page. I have placed some of the additional "voices" into these frames and used variations in fonts to indicate the source of the information. My subjective observations and my descriptions of the art work are presented in "Arial." The participant's additional remarks are presented in "Copenhagen." I have used conventional footnotes for theoretical references which are footnoted and appear at the bottom of the page in "Times New Roman." This strategy serves to denote who is responsible for the corresponding text. My intention is to give visual suggestions as to the relative distance such information has to the purview of the original story teller. I also wanted to draw attention to the interplay of this information in the task of the "translator" and the reader. It is not tied into the text. It has a position but it can be read or ignored. It may serve to affirm the reader's conception of the situation or it may raise questions.

Since intensive speech analysis is not part of this study, the citations have been slightly edited to delete frequent verbal false starts and repetitions. Pauses

and hesitations have not been indicated unless they were significant. I have also deleted my own brief interjections and frequent "Ah hmm"s. [Laughter] has been included. Where text has been omitted, it is indicated by three dots: (. . .). All quotations within the body of the text should be assumed to be the words of the interviewee unless otherwise noted. Where particular names have been omitted I have placed a description in brackets: i.e. (her instructor). Any names that are mentioned refer to students in this study, authors or well know artists. All student participants are referred to by pseudonyms. Italicized words or phrases indicate emphasis on the part of the speaker.

There are two acronyms used by the women I interviewed which are particular to post secondary education in Quebec. "CEGEP" stands for Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionel. After graduating from Secondary Five (Grade 11) students are required to take this two year college programme before entering university. "UQAM" stands for Université du Québec à Montréal.

The narratives are grouped in sets of four and the individual stories are placed in alphabetical order within each set.

Dimensions of art works are given as width x height.

"But You Said . . . !"

These "under twenty-five" year old women are from among the group of female students at Concordia who have proceeded on a fairly uninterrupted educational path from high school, through CEGEP, and into university. They are contemporaries of my daughter; young women whose parents were, each in their way, committed to providing their children with the advantages of contemporary Canadian society. There are certain differences in the paths that brought them to Concordia but it was a decision that they made for themselves early in their lives. For these women, their art work is a central concern of their lives, one which they expect to be accommodated in any other plans or obligations.

Catherine

Elaine

Laura

Nathalie

Catherine

I interviewed Catherine at her apartment on a sunny winter day. She admitted to being nervous about the interview but assured me that she was looking forward to talking with me. Catherine is a perceptive, lively and attractive young woman who is struggling to overcome many uncertainties about her art, the world and her place in it. At the time of our interview she was nearing the end of her BFA in art education. Within that programme she had concentrated her studio options in sculpture.

While she did describe herself as confused, she was quick to add that she was also ambitious and that she had "incredibly a lot" of drive to pursue her obsession with her art. She viewed her art as her most comfortable form of expression. Throughout

And when I use words, or if I write, I feel like its in blood. I don't know why. When I speak, it makes me nervous and I'd rather do my art where everyone can have their own interpretation of the piece. I feel a little safe.

our conversation she frankly admitted to her insecurity in many areas of her studies and personal life. Although she is in her mid-twenties and has fully taken on the responsibilities for her own life she resisted being referred to as a woman: her perception of herself is that she is "young," rather than "adult." She had always cast herself as a rebel and an "alien", within

her family, among her peers, and in society in general. While she has given up her "crass and crud"

I never wanted to be part of society. I thought it was bogus!

forms of youthful rebellion she feels that she has found only a degree of connection to the social institutions in which she finds herself. Later, as we

discussed her feeling about responses to her art works she commented on how much she attended to other peoples reactions,

I don't think that that's necessarily important, but I can't deny that's a part of it. Because, you know, I'm an alien and my art is something that's there to feel closer to people and if that's not happening then . . . I think it's very giving, the way I'm thinking in that way.

Language and vocabulary were particularly conflicted issues for her; feeling that she lacked the intellectual finesse to articulate her ideas in what she perceived to be the academically appropriate manner. I gather that for her "language" and "vocabulary" are synonymous with what others in this study have referred to as "theory", meaning the theoretical analysis of art works in relation to scholarly discussions in philosophy, psychology and other fields. She certainly (and rightly) sees that *language*, *vocabulary*, and *theory*, originate outside her experience but she has not found effective ways to make that knowledge relevant to her "real" experience. She was sensitive to strongly voiced "politically correct" attitudes. She found her own fragile inner sense of self to be quite threatened, particularly by certain "feminist" positions. She was intimidated by peers and instructors who's pre-occupations were articulated in this mode. She had provoked confrontations with instructors and dropped courses because of it. Alternatively, she has resisted through silence.

I think that sometimes they go to such a point when they are talking about *political correctness* and *feminism* and things like that, they get outside the reality of what's actually happening out there. And they are all in their own little clique and they are all intellectualizing and it's like, "Excuse me. It's reality, you know."

There are several aspects of her upbringing that have contributed to her insecurities and lack of trust of those who presume to speak with authority. She is a member of a very cohesive and tradition-conscious ethnic community in which the church plays an important role. She was born abroad and immigrated to Canada with her parents and older sister when she was four years old. They lived within their ethno-cultural community area in downtown Montreal for several years before they moved to a suburban area at about the time Catherine was to enter high school. Both her parents worked outside of the home and her sister, being eight years her senior, assumed a major role in her upbringing. She became "more my mom than my mom." Catherine considers her sister to be musically and artistically gifted and she has great affection and respect for her. She said that she has come to recognise her parents as complex, emotional and free spirited people. Ironically, for Catherine the consequence of this was that,

Obviously when you are talking about close relationships like that, you always have your little disagreements and stuff. I have always tried to create a structure for myself because I didn't have any with my parents. It was really weird.

She is not close to her mother. Her single comment about her mother was,

She has really become somebody that's not herself anymore, because everything always revolves around my Dad. It's not financial dependence. It's completely vice versa in terms of finance. But she a wonderful woman, very happy all the time and it seems like she wants to block a lot of things.

She insisted that the points on which her parents did exert unrelenting control, such as very closed surveillance of her friends and absolutely no associating with boys, was not because of the dictates of their particular cultural

community. Rather, "It was just my Dad was a *freak!* " For her this attitude went beyond a paternal responsibility to protect and care for his daughters.

But the older I get the more I realise he is a wonderful man. He loves you, but - Men are selfish! Let's put it that way. . . . He had a very good ability to manipulate people. He's a total manipulator. Mentally, I mean. Abuse, physical abuse is something else but mental abuse sometimes really leaves scars that, I don't know. He's just still loving. He wasn't a bad father in terms of things that you hear, like molestation. Not at all. I don't know, I just feel that he was a person who did not have a lot of self esteem so he projected a lot to his "three little girls". You know, the mother, the two daughters. So it was hard for me to get out of that, and it still is.

She was reluctant to comment further on what had provoked this lack of trust in her father, which she projected into her later relationships with men. There seemed to be a feeling on her part that he simply wasn't there to take responsibility for his daughter. When her sister would intervene to help her get a little bit more freedom, her father's response was to place the responsibility for Catherine on her sister. This she saw as her father abdicating his responsibility towards her, as well as denying her ability to behave in a proper and responsible manner.

The only other family member that she mentioned was an uncle who was a photographer. As a child she had adored him and admired his adventurous pursuit of his art. His image was prominent in the only painting that she showed.

As a child she had first attended an English language school and then a school run under the auspices of the church and the cultural community. It was

harassed by one of the priests at the school.

He would just feel you. Whatever it was, whatever degree it was, the tension was there, so I don't care what. And he would do that to me, at recess, sometimes corner me, you know. And I was, "Oh I think I watch too much TV. So, maybe I'm taking this the wrong way. Maybe I should ..." When you're a kid you don't know! It was too bad though, because it was actually happening. And think of the disillusion that you go through when, you know, they are talking about this religion and expecting it and this man is completely taking advantage of you. I guess it's power or whatever.

She chose to attend a French language high school in order to become fluent in French. She was an average student but she felt personally disconnected from her studies and very much an outsider in the school environment. However, she felt that in her art course she was "permitted to explore myself." The crucial connection was with the teacher who befriended her. Her comment on their relationship reveals a basic and persistent scepticism about the sincerity of her teachers' interest and concern for her.

Maybe she thought I was a problem child because she was always very nice to me. Every time, the way I am, even now in university . . . my teachers always like the work I do, and I just I have a very low self esteem in terms of my creativity. It's really bad because I always think, "Oh. They know it. They can pick it up." And because of that they say it's wonderful. It's ridiculous the way I think about myself in that way. I don't give myself any credit. Now I'm starting to feel a little comfortable but I still feel weird when the teacher likes my work.

As much as she enjoyed her high school art classes she bowed to the argument that she needed to find a paying occupation and enrolled in an Interior Design course at CEGEP rather than Fine Arts. She only completed six months of the course. Then, as she put it, "I went through a crisis. Like, something

happened. I just flipped out. I got major anxiety attacks. I was afraid of everything." Apparently, the cause of this crisis was related the pressure she was experiencing due to many changes in her life: attending college, resisting parental control and her first important relationship with a young man. She has managed to find ways to understand and control the physical reactions to her anxiety attacks. She said though, that taking the Metro is an impossibility for her, that being the one remaining site of uncontrollable stress.

It was just this thing happening with my body, anxiety attacks happening. I was afraid I was going insane. I was hearing voices, I was reading about schizophrenia, wondering if I'm schizophrenic. They put me through all these tests and I'm completely normal. It was just anxiety. A lot of women go through that, I think. You go through anxieties where your body is responding in the most unusual ways, I just had to learn how to control it.

She was also struggling to resolve an important conflict. In her words, "I'm always denying myself of 'being an artist.'" The popular perception was that "being an artist" was socially unacceptable and financially unreliable. Yet artistic activity was the only area where she felt any satisfaction and every time she tried to pursue something else, "it was just not me." She eventually enrolled at Concordia, although she says that she was not immediately at home there either. She began studying art history but fled from what she perceived as a barrage of "language" and switched to art education. Painting offered no particular satisfaction. It was only when, as she said, "I found my medium, which is sculpture" that her artistic purpose became clear. She continued, "It just, I don't know. I just felt like I needed to do that. It's so *human*!" She elaborated on the attractive qualities of sculptural work.

It's something where your dealing with yourself. Your talking with people and your learning about people, and it's so much different. There's so much awareness involved in it and I needed to do that. At the same time, when I did go to Concordia, I didn't feel like I was an artist. I always denied myself, and then I finally started to get involved in something that I couldn't justify not being an artist. I can't paint or draw, not representational stuff, not even abstract stuff. I couldn't justify myself until I started to get more involved in sculpture.

Coincident with entering Concordia she was also making the decisive move of insisting that she was going to leave her parent's home in the suburbs and live on her own downtown. This caused a significant rift with her parents that has taken the intervening four years to repair.

I got out of the house and I wanted to be. They don't believe completely like a lot of (my) culture, like the female can't get out of the house and if she does she has to be married. They still have those qualms but they're not that much into it. But they thought, if you move out, its like they feel rejected or something. It's so different. They want to keep you, you know. They're very loving but they sometimes don't let you grow.

When I asked her to tell me about an important learning experience her reply was about an incident where she confronted an instructor, or in fact when she confronted her own intimidation. It had occurred in her first sculpture class.

I was very intimidated by this instructor but he was the most incredible instructor. I'm so happy that I took his class because I learned a lot. I was just intimidated because of his use of vocabulary, and just his presence was very . . . And he would look at women and he was like, he had his politically correct vocabulary but he would Yahhww! looking at the little bums and stuff. I guess its okay, but he just intimidated me. Just the way he used his I always feel like I don't vocabulary to insinuate things was come from an incredibly, intimidating. The critiques were *so intense*. intellectual family, and I Every class it was like that, and I couldn't talk. never considered myself . . . And then, I just couldn't do anything in the intellectual. Even as I class. I did show that "eye ball", finally, the last speak with you, I feel weird day before Christmas when we had to do our because I don't have that critique. Everybody had pieces and I showed vocabulary.

one or two pieces and then he started to tell me "Yeah, so what have you done? What's wrong with you? You haven't been producing. Is there anything wrong?"

And I'm there, "Umm, yes."

It's in front of the whole class and he's like, "Is it your class mates, your colleagues?"

And, I'm like, "No, not at all."

And he says, "Is it me?"

And I say "Yes, I think it's you. But I don't think I should take up the class's time in the classroom. I'd like to talk to you, after class if you don't mind."

And, he says "Okay. And he goes, "So you haven't done anything?"

And I said, "Well talking about not doing anything, I'd like to show you something." So I showed him this piece that was so subtle but, obviously it was powerful because he saw the piece, and he just freaked out and he shook my hand. So once again, I just needed to prove to him and the people within the context and the way the dynamics was going within the class. I was silent and passive, this passive little girl.

A small box, about four inches square was mounted in the corner of the room, just above our heads. She reached up and unwound a tie with which the front was fastened. It swung open to reveal a large eye ball, fashioned from ceramic or plasticine. I was affronted by its baleful gaze.

Showing that piece really, I don't know. It hit him too. He was really impressed. So I went to his office afterwards and we started talking and I just . . . I'm not very happy with the vocabulary I used but I needed to tell him what I felt, "Listen, you think you can manipulate people! " I didn't want it to be a projection of my inferiority complex if it was, but whatever it was, I just did not appreciate how I felt he behaved in class. "Like you just can't wait until you get manipulated. You're manipulating everyone constantly and then someone fucks you over, you know, then you respect that person." So he didn't know what to say. (laughter) So I felt very good. I got it off my chest but I still felt bad for doing it. And after that everything went well so, I learnt a lot from experiences like that.

I think it had a lot to do with the class. I needed to have some kind of shock value. In terms of being artists and having to verbalise it. I do believe it's important, when you have to talk about your art and theorise it and everything. But I just felt intimidated again. It was like the eye could be a little bit visual.

I find this encounter to be revealing in a number of ways. Most importantly for her, it was a moment when she had the courage to face her own feelings of intimidation and openly confront the male instructor's authority. She sees her persistent doubts about her instructor's sincerity as unreasonable but she still

must make a conscious effort to put her anxieties aside. She admitted that her barrage of accusations was not the most appropriate way of dealing with the situation but it would seem that the instructor took it in stride and maintain an appropriate, professional approach towards her and her work. It is significant, in my view, that her accusations of deceit, manipulation and over blown privilege are the same as her charges against her father.

Well after he saw that piece he was constantly telling me, " I want you to submit it for the sculpture show! You have to! You have to! You have to! So once again, it started from there, "Okay, he knows I have low self esteem and he's doing this to be (polite?) You know, and its like, "Come on! What does this guy know about me? What's this favouritism? Why's he going to do me this favour?"

As well there was the art work itself; the box which confines her "enclosed vision". One must exert oneself to open the box to see and to be seen. That hidden meaning and value was to become open and transparent as her work progressed.

To me it's like an opening. I don't want it to be like a womb but it's... I very much like that covered up and then, I think I'm really dealing with a lot of things that are maybe a little bit too revealing.

She also pointed out that the fibres course that she was taking at the same time provided an important balance to the challenges she was encountering in her sculpture course. It was obviously important for her to find that she could have useful learning experiences under two quite different teaching approaches.

And these two courses, . . . this is how I perceive it. It was a male course and a female course. But not because it was Fibres but just the way the dynamics of the class went. In the sculpture course you have to prove yourself, and it was such a power structure. Then in the Fibres course it was just very collaborative. And the same sort of creativity. Creativity was equal. It was not stagnant in both classes. They were two very different approaches in teaching from the teachers. And it was great, you know, taking those two courses. I realised that both of them were supportive in

their own way. I had to break that barrier with my sculpture teacher but it was wonderful, because they just had their own strategies in teaching. They both were very dedicated teachers. I respected them both.

She has also been struggling to reconcile a conflict between her own sense of herself as a woman and what she perceives to be a dogmatic feminist ideology. She feels that women have power, and that it is largely a dynamic sexual power. However,

C: Because we are so caught up in that media and trying to look good and we think that's wrong and what ever. We are kind of desexualizing ourselves and it ... But I feel ashamed of that sex energy, and it really bothers me, because most of the women who are commenting are women, more that men.

MC: *You mean commenting in a critical way?*

C: Yes. Little comments here and there. It's like, "Leave me alone! This is me." I didn't feel comfortable about it, and I still don't sometimes. But now it's like, "No, I have the right to be like this." I always tried to justify it by getting more education. I always considered myself to be ditzzy, which is too bad that's how

I felt. I feel like if I feed my brain, not because I am a ditz or I was, but to feed my brain so that I can, for myself, feel comfortable.

Is this really the message we are sending out to young women? That feminism means a denial of sexual pleasure? That sexuality must be neutralised through the intellect rather than enjoyed? That to delight in ones sexuality is to be a tramp?

She argued forcefully against the idea of "women's art" defined by a certain kind of engagement in the process of creation and a notion of a feminine affinity for certain kinds of materials. Later she showed me a box covered with tapestry fabric, glued (rather than stitched) and padded. The oval shape cut in the middle was filled with a piece of glass on which she had etched *Piss Off!*. She had created it in defiance of the perceived notion of the intimate, female, creative engagement of stitching : the notion of the process being "it's own little communication."

She said that her art works were fully conceptualised in her head before she started working. Journal writing was not important to her. She kept a sketch book in which she worked out the technical details of her projects. Her plans might be altered for technical reasons, but the basic concept remained as originally planned. Metal and glass have become her materials of choice, and she insisted that they were ideal materials for expressing human relationships. Her interpretation of this concept became clear when she discussed a work, *Incommunicado*, by Mona Hatoum which we had both seen at a recent show at Galerie René Blouin.

Her work, the things she does! It's great because they are so, I find they are very polished. Obviously, they are polished. They are all nicely presented but the concept is there. And the way she brings out that emotion is there as well. So it just works so well with the contemporary society and the way architecture is now and how everything is so cold. It works perfectly but she makes it more human by using these materials. It works well with what's happening now.

As we looked at the rest of the art work that she had assembled for me to see, it was evident that she was struggling to understand and formulate her own perspective on these issues through the work that she was creating. The first work, *To Invade a Visual Field*, was a rather formal work that she had done while exploring aspects of Minimalism and certain concerns that she had about the aesthetics of sculptural forms. She was pleased with

the simplicity of the form but she said that she had abandoned the conceptual notions that were associated with the Minimalist movement.

The letters that spelled out the title were engraved, one on each of a series of metal rectangles that were arranged across the floor, up the wall and around the corner of the room.

In the next work she had addressed her concerns about the dictates of "feminism". It was *The picture of the girl with the long hair and the beautiful lips and the beautiful lipstick*. It was her exploration of the problematics of the female image: If one finds satisfaction in one's mode of personal style is one inevitably compromising one's integrity as a woman? She undertook to consider "different stages of thinking about your image" and wondered how she could find a balanced perspective beyond other people's set of conventions about what she should or should not be and do as a woman.

A small metal square was supported by legs about four feet tall. On the square was placed a metal crescent, open at the top. An open sided cube about 4" square was mounted on a spindle between the points of the crescent. The top and bottom of the cube were pieces of metal in which a ragged hole had been cut. A photo of herself had been placed in that space.

She then showed me a simple formal work. As she was becoming aware of the complexity of her new found medium, she decided to try to "just deal with the materials itself." To that end she had simply sand blasted the words *Element that clarifies things* on a small rectangle of glass. This work provoked some important self reflection upon the place of her art in the face of criticism that students were producing work according to a prescribed formula.

I was questioning the kind of art I was doing. I was wondering if I was trying to fit into *that* because my things started to become more slick. But for me it was wonderful! I was still not confident because I was wondering if it's because I want to fit in within that criteria. But I just came the conclusion, "No, I don't think so. I just like it the way it looks." Maybe it's because, in my head, there are so many things happening that I'd rather have these pieces that are somewhat, maybe even distant. People say that my pieces aren't distant but I think they are. They are very cold some of them and very distant and very structured. So this one I decided, "Hey, I don't have enough place to write the word *clarifies* so I added an 's' on the bottom." (giggle) It was like, "I don't care if it's more, if it's not perfect. I'll just put a little 's' there." Because sometimes some of the ones I was doing didn't

seem very human. . . . A lot of my work is cold but there is always something that deals with a person in the end. Something comes out of it that's more dealing with the soul rather than this cold piece.

The last two pieces of art work that we looked at were from her most recent production. The first was a skateboard shaped piece of wood, mounted on rollers, around the circumference of which she had placed a row of little white pickets. At the blunt end of the board, a red toy Ferrari was parked inside a roofless house made of glass. There is a touch of cynicism in her explanation and in the title: *The Board Game*.

Well, it's questioning. That's all it is. It's just questioning what I always knew as a family, or the relationship within this culture, the relationship of a couple. What is it that they feel enriched with, like what enriches their lives? . . . I've made the little Ferrari there; the little dream of the Dad. You know, they're always thinking, "Oh yeah. I'll always have on the side and take care of my family." Then the glass itself is the house and the glass, the fact that it has no roof . . . also means something. Where, is there shelter? With what we've built, or what we perceive to shelter us? . . . I think it's just questioning. There are certain thing that I value within this little setting but some I don't, at all. (laughter) And whose little dream is it anyway?

Catherine was obviously most pleased with the final work that she had done. It consisted of a 12" x 18 " podium on four long slender metal legs, about five feet high. On the podium was set another roofless glass house with the words *Seduction* written in script on one side and *Salvation* written on the other. I asked about her motives for using those particular words.

Once again, it's kind of paradoxical because it's talking about domesticity and the domestic way of life. But you can be seduced to it or you can be seduced to break out of it, so it's the glass itself, right there. Like the materials speak for that. And salvation is sometimes, I'm always questioning that. I think it's a way, It spoke of fragility and delicacy. The little house seemed so isolated up there, so high on its little pointy feet. The windows and the decor reflected on the sleek surfaces placing illusory features onto the surface and infiltrating its pristine facade.

family is like salvation but, I don't know if it's necessarily a form of salvation because there are a lot of other complex growing and evolution that's involved in making a family. And it's so bogus because every family I know is insane! Not insane, but it's so over rated. There's always these problems that come along with it and it's always so covered up.

Throughout her years in Fine Arts, Catherine has been determined to forge her own trail, although she allowed that there were several of her peers upon whom she could count for good advice. She added that there was one other instructor who she might consult about solving artistic problems. While intensely theorised art criticism remained a problem to her she was certainly willing to give some consideration to theoretical writing.

She greatly valued the opinions of her peers, particularly some with whom she had become good friends. In the multi-media class she had made an audio tape in which she asked a number of students to talk for a few minutes about "knowledge". The tape was played back from inside a black box mounted on the wall along with a row of passport sized photos of the students. I asked her what she would like to say about that subject herself.

My whole definition was in making that piece and thinking about that piece and as to who gets the privilege to acquire knowledge within that building. And that was the piece that I was making. What, whoever, whatever background you come from you do have that, your own personalised definition of the word *knowledge*. For me, this is my definition Yeah. It depends who you're asking.

I then asked for her ideas on the subject of learning.

When I was younger I think the school systems really lacked learning for yourself. Like discovering things on your own rather than these authoritarian figures telling you this is what should be learnt. I think you can learn in so many different ways and this doesn't necessarily have to be art, or art education. It could be other subjects. The way I learn is

sometimes a painful process, basically, obviously from my own experience. And I think nothing could take that away from you, whatever happens.

Throughout our interview Catherine was quite candid about her doubts and uncertainties although I know that she was quite anxious about being too outspoken. I hope that she knows that my role is not to make judgement on her life and ideas but rather to try to understand how her perceptions of experience reflect the needs of women students. Her words at the end of her comment on learning lead me to believe that she understands.

Elaine

At first meeting Elaine appears to be a quiet, shy young woman. But as I had come to realise while she was my student, and as she revealed during our interview, there is more to Elaine than just the "nice, sweet young thing", "girl next door" stereotype in which she no doubt has frequently been cast. She grew up in a small Canadian city in a comfortable middle class home. Her parents were together until the death of her father two years ago. She has one brother. At the time of our interview she had just completed her Diploma year in Art Education and was preparing to return home. She was tired and a little uneasy. However, her insights on her art studio experiences were well informed. Elaine showed herself to be a young woman who is carefully and thoughtfully coming to her own decisions and opinions about her art making, her teaching and her place in the world.

I want to learn more about who I am and that's more what I'm trying to do in my art. I'm trying to learn more about who I am before I can go do, and that seems like a process. Before I can reach the next level. At this stage it's just, actually I'm just graduating and I'm really just trying to figure out

I learned a lot this year. I think more than I did probably in the last four years. Everything seems to have all come together now- what I learned about education plus what I learned about art this year. . . . So the art work that I'll be showing you, I feel that, this was before. But now I think I want a chance to go do it over again. I'm feeling like just all the principles of art have came together, and the reasons for doing art.

She described herself as a real Gemini who has always concealed her more active and dynamic self behind a very shy public presence.¹

¹ While received knowers can be very open to take in what others have to offer, they have little confidence in their own ability to speak. Believing that truth comes from others, they still their own voice to hear the voices of others. (Belenky et al. 1986, 37)

But I think since high school, I was very, very shy. I would hardly, I was a student who wouldn't speak in class, although I'd have all the answers in my head. And I would usually. I wasn't always right but I wouldn't say anything. I would stay at the back and be very quiet and nobody would know what I was thinking.

At the time of our interview her mother was preparing to re-marry and I sensed that Elaine was not completely comfortable with this situation. She discussed her relationship with her mother and her shyness.

MC: Why do you think that was? Being so shy.

E: Well, my mother I think, well, again you go back to your family. My mother is shy. And my mother had always, not that she means to do it, but made me self-conscious I think, especially about weight and appearance and stuff like that. I still worry about, "Oh you're fat or whatever." My mother always had said that. Now she realises that's what she's done and she's trying to change what she did. . . . But I think she ended up making me self conscious. And not just her, I mean, the whole world, society and I don't know it had to do with being a girl or not but I was very shy.

She was close to her father although he held fairly conservative views on what were appropriate activities for his daughter. Although she was in figure skating she was not encouraged to be involved in Yeah. But I took karate after, (Laughter) when I got sports and was in fact not allowed to take a judo older. class. Although she considered his opinions on art to be conservative she was influenced and encouraged by his interest in art. She has come to admire his artistic sensibilities, although that was not always the case. She speaks with wistful admiration of her father's art work.

He did art as well, but not this type of art. He did carving, wood carvings of birds and stuff. He did extremely realistic, and they were very technically sophisticated. I mean, they were good. He liked to do paintings as well, but of realistic landscapes, things like that.

She went on to add,

And he also did, he was artistic in other ways. We had a garden in our back yard and he would spend *hours* thinking about where he would place a plant, and how he would make the yard look. We put in a pond and he would plan that out too. He was very meticulous in how he would do anything. So our yard looked, well *did* look very beautiful.

Her father played a key role in her artistic development in two respects. His own artistic interests provided a model which, as a young girl, she was delighted to emulate. He made his art materials available to her and demonstrated his admiration by framing and displaying the "little, typical sunset" or the copies of cartoon characters that she created. She remembered,

Because he would sit, often at the kitchen table, and make a big mess of pieces of wood around, or whatever. (Laughter) There was paint and then he would just give me the paint and I would play around. Well I would always try.

As well, when Elaine was older, he was willing to engage in discussions about art and art making with her; to entertain her challenges to his own views on the subject. These discussions, which pitted his taste for realistic art against her convictions that abstraction was "*The Thing*", had an important motivating effect on her interest in art history and theoretical issues about art making. She expressed the desire to return to him not only with her arguments well prepared but with a greater acceptance of his art work and point of view. Her great regret is that his death has precluded that possibility.

And I tried to show him that later. But I always said that later on I did want to take what I had learned and bring it back, and teach him more about the relevance of abstract art, and what other kinds of art were about. But I wasn't able to do that. But now I wish that I had learned more, had given his type of art more credit. I was so on the defensive about "abstract" that I didn't give what he did really any usefulness either. But now I realise that what he did was very difficult to do. I don't

think that I could do what he did. . . . Now I realise thought that, I wish that I was more giving. 'Cause now I don't have a chance.

I recall that the death of her father was very difficult for Elaine to handle. She was working as the student technician for my course and therefore had very heavy responsibilities that particular term. Her father had passed away in the summer, but I was not aware of that until a combination of the flu, stress and repressed grieving caused her to collapse one evening. She was quite ill and the incident prompted her to seek help in dealing with her grief. At the time of our interview, a year and a half later, she had begun to try to find expression for her feeling about his death in the art work that she was doing.

While she was very interested in art as a child, it was her high school art teacher who provided the support and direction that encouraged Elaine to continue on into a university Fine Arts programme. Although the teacher had a reputation of being "hard" she found that,

It's odd, but if I had a high mark from her, I would get really high marks from this other teacher, but if I end up getting a high mark from her, I felt much more satisfied because I felt that I deserved it more. . . . She gave me 91 or 92 on my final project and she had a real smile on her face and I knew that she meant it.

She went on to describe her final project in grade thirteen. This project had been undertaken at summer school after an unsuccessful, although not failed year struggling to teach herself photography. The project was a very elaborate sculptural installation in which she, "being only eighteen, (laughter) I tried to think of all the world issues, tried to encompass them all into one big piece".

She began by having her classmates put graffiti on a large piece of brick textured masonite. At this point the interaction with her teacher became extremely productive.

It was supposed to look like a billboard. A painting of an eye, and very literal. . . (Laugh) The eye was blackened with all the colours where . . . It was when I think that the first step starting to really go toward abstract. Trying not to be quite as realistic and this is where she was helping me. She was really pushing me to try to make the colour to mean more and my brush strokes to be not so designed and she really helped me with this painting. I think it was the painting that I really had realised it. So the eye was all blank and it was different colours and I tried to get my brush stroke more free and ..

E: That was supposed to signify the destruction of the world, and going to the children. So I tried to take everything possible and put it all into one. (Laugh)

MC: *Pretty ambitious!*

E: A lot of it was very literal but I really enjoyed doing it. It was one of the first things that really ..

MC: *That's pretty appropriate for an 18 year old. Those are the kind of things that are concerns, and really wanting to say all that.*

E: Yeah. All at once. I was very happy with that piece.

To this was added a sculpted teardrop shape, a female form covered with a collage of newspaper clippings, and the form of a woman holding a baby. She is aware that the approach was perhaps overly didactic, she is none-the-less proud of her achievement. She was pleased to leave it at the school on the understanding that it would be displayed the following year. She was disappointed that it was destroyed by a new teacher who was unaware of the plan.

As well as this particular success, she reflected on how her introduction to art history in high school influenced her thinking about art.

MC: *So you mentioned being very shy, sitting in class, knowing all the answers, not speaking up. . . . But, you also mentioned you came to making a strong argument for abstract art, or for different kinds of art. How did that change happen?*

E: I guess it was through the fine arts, through studying art history that I started being introduced, in grade ten, I think it was, to movements, like Cubism, Surrealism and all the *isms* and the new ideas. So through that I

guess I learned "Oh, this must be what it really is, because this is the newest art, this is the last hundred years or whatever, fifty years. So I was, "Well, old art is no good, so this is what's right." So I was brainwashed or whatever. Well, young people are, they hear new ideas so they're quick to accept it. And that's what I did. (Laughter) ²

Along with the change of heart towards her father's ideas, she has now come to hold a very relativistic perspective on the value of art. She reiterated this point of view on several occasions during the interview.

Yeah. Well I think that all art is relevant now. It doesn't matter what year because it all goes through phases, and everything, the reaction to everything, and to anything. What I'm trying to say? The last, the next phase is reaction to the other one. And now we have a knowledge of all of these things so we can pick and choose what we feel is relevant to us, and then, create our own art. As well as everybody can try different styles.

She would never have come to Concordia except for a high school classmate who was from Montreal originally, and who was planning to return here for university. She took Elaine along to a Concordia presentation at their school and the possibility of doing a degree in Fine Arts took her interest. She has found the richness of the cultural community in Montreal to be a major advantage to her in her studies. She feels that she has been exposed to different artists and different kinds of art works to which she would not have had access in another situation.

That's somebody (Bill Viola) that I've never known about. Completely foreign to me. But I enjoyed the opportunity to see people like that. And in my photography class, people like Cindy Sherman. I think in your class you had her as well. Yeah. Just at a different level. I keep meeting professional artists and people who went to school all over world and there are people like ____ . I had him as a teacher and knowing that I actually was a student

² For those who adhere to the perspective of received knowledge there are no gradations of truth - no grey areas. Paradox is inconceivable because received knowers believe several contradictory ideas are never simultaneously in accordance with fact. (Belenky et al. 1986, 41)

of somebody who was well-known, it's just interesting. At the time I might not have understood a lot of things they were saying to me. I feel like you're often bombarded with all this information.

When I asked her to describe a learning situation that was helpful to her she discussed three situations, each with a different value. She not only appreciated the contribution to her own learning but anticipated incorporating her knowledge into her future teaching practice. First she commented on the course she had with me and my effort to have students develop an ongoing and expanding body of work, following through from assignment to assignment.

Just what you did of forcing, well not forcing, but the way you had us work with one theme the whole way through. That really helped me really learn how to develop a theme. Because I would always approach it at too much of a superficial level and then I'd just kind of move on. But being forced to go through it and really think about it, and also (to think) in different ways. Yeah. That is something that I think that actually benefited my thinking. I wish other people had done the same. Well, I can do the same now.

At a later point she described that process in more detail. Her original attraction to "Nature" had strong associations with her father and camping trips and the countryside near her home. She was drawn, in a rather undefined way, to making representations of trees. Her initial efforts were just drawings and photographs of trees, but she was soon aware that there was limited expressive scope without a deeper examination of her own intentions.

How did we began? It was a whole long, it was such a long process. I think I began looking at trees and what can I do with a tree, besides just painting a tree or photographing it? Asking, "What else can it say?" . . . I don't remember how I actually got to this. But I wanted to include myself in it somehow. I wanted to say something, so why not put myself right in it. These are still two themes that I keep working on. I like working with figures and I like working with Nature.

The second point that she raised was with regard to journal writing and the value that she has found it to be for her personal work and also as a teacher. In that regard her reflection upon her own high school experience provided an additional valuable insight.

In the whole programme in Art Ed. and in Drama I wrote a lot of journals . . . also this year in my studio. That's something that I would like to continue if I can make myself. Because when I do it, I sit back later and I look and it really helps me understand and guide my thinking. That's something that will stay with me as well. I did that with the grade eleven students (in her internship) as well, and I think it's really good for them. It's good for them and also for the teacher, because the teacher like I said, I was one of the quiet ones, and with my grade elevens, a lot of the quiet ones, I ended up learning a lot about them that I might not have known.

The third situation that she discussed was a reflection on her studio art making experience in Photography.

I think that the whole process. Last year I learned a lot about the technical parts of photography. I don't know the main thing, well, I think it was more of a technical learning how-to. I was really playing a lot with this double exposures and just playing with how to use photography and bending paper, using filters to make it darker or lighter or whatever. Just playing with things. All year. I enjoyed that. Just playing with the medium. It wasn't really anything. It was also dealing with themes but I guess the main thing though it was just the being in there and just playing with it and getting the opportunity to experiment.

MC: I know that you did a lot of investigation when you started my class. You did that last series. When you were talking before about the two sides of your personality, that was really the point where I realised that there's a lot more going on with Elaine (Laugh) than, then the way she just presents herself day to day. Because that, that series, of, well I would say, casting yourself as the wood nymph (Laugh) in a sense, which was really very daring, both technically, experimentally and all the rest of it. But also placing yourself in those photographs and in a very dynamic way that certainly was very strong and very, very much full of your presence. They were really quite an exciting series of photographs.

When I asked her about any discouraging situations during her fine arts studies she discussed her first term internship in an elementary school,

The one that would be the most discouraging was the first semester of my internship. That will always stay with me. That really took any self-confidence that I had been building up and just shot it all right down. She was *very* negative. Yes. She didn't make any effort of hiding it either. She was just not a very pleasant person. You know that was very hard to get past. I was really wanting to quit at Christmas because she really made me feel, "Why am I going to be a teacher? I'm not going to be a good teacher so why am I doing this?"

She credited her perseverance in the programme to pure tenacity, an attribute which she feels she shared with her father.

Well I just, I never quit anything. I really never will quit. Even when I've had other problems in my life, obviously, and I'll never quit. I'll just keep saying, "No, I'm going to do it and nobody's going to get the best of me!"

We began our discussion of her art work with one of the images from her final project in ARTE 430. That project had been installed in Studio B, a small studio with a black surround curtain and where theatrical lighting is available. The photographs were mounted on a large board that was suspended in the centre of the space.

I like to use art, it's useful to start to learn about myself before I can learn about other people . . . I often want to use myself in it. So, through this I am trying to say something. It's just not looking at my soul or anything.

Two slides, one positive, one negative were projected very large against the curtain. The slides were of a stand of trees and the photographs were superimpositions of her nude form over/through tree trunks and branches.

She explained how, having continued her work in photography, she had developed her technical abilities and that she had

reprinted the particular image that she showed me. She was emphatic that she couldn't possibly have shown her original effort, now that she knew how to achieve a better technical quality print. The photo was thickly textured with the image of tree bark. Her hands were thrust forward towards the viewer, past her wide eyed face and seemingly through the "skin" of the tree.

MC: The self that you present is very forceful, very strong and quite a dramatic presentation. And again, the courage to present yourself nude, although not terribly obviously so, except that we, as you look at it you're aware that you are; that your arms are folded over your breasts, that you are not dressed, that you are as you say, just natural the way you are and conflated with this image of the tree.

I'm trying to say something just about, basically about women not just myself. How we are portrayed, looked at in society, pushed around. So with this one I was trying to push back I guess.

She continued to discuss her effort in this photo to bring her sensitivity to the elements of the natural environment together with her questions about herself as a woman in contemporary culture.

There's also other symbolism in this, that shows a woman. I was trying, when I was looking for trees I was trying to find knots in trees and again, that goes back to the beginning. Just natural forms. Nothing with clothes or anything artificial. Just myself as a natural person and the tree as well. I don't want to get really deep about my art . . . Again it's women and society. It's just that I'm looking at myself though. Trying to push back and trying to show who I really am. I guess it's the one that's trying to let my other side show.

MC: Well, I had on the one hand, sort of the images of the wood nymph, a spiritual kind of concept from, from mythology. And its common in many forms in mythology. But also the image of Daphne, who transformed herself into a laurel tree to escape, I forget who was chasing her, with lust in his mind, but anyway that image too, which is also an aspect of woman's experience.

We went on to look at three more photographs. They were all very starkly defined images in which strongly lit human forms contrasted with deep,

ambiguous, black spaces. The first one, showing the sole of a foot on a patch of quilted fabric was a simple study of formal elements. She commented on the pleasure that she found in the textures and on how difficult it is to create an image that appeared to be so simple. This was followed by an image with a much more sinister ambience.

I tried to portray sort of, the feeling of trying to create a mood with the light . . . And again, it was many tries as well because when you're working with the high contrast, it's difficult to get. . . . Just because it was simple doesn't mean that it was easy. (Laughter) But I like this one because you're not sure what's going on in it. If that's a finger or hands behind her. You're not sure what's going on. . . . Why? Why are they there? What are they doing? An eerie kind of thing. What's going to happen next?	A woman lies face down with her head towards the bottom right of the image, her hand lightly touching her hair. Her neck and shoulder are in darkness but there is a subtle definition of the hand and arm. Strong light falls across her back. Four linear shadows make streaks along her spine. I'm not sure what they are.
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Although it didn't occur to me at the time of the interview, as I see it again now, I realise that her earlier reference to Cindy Sherman's work indicated a serious attention to some similar qualities. There was the same sense of the suspended ominous moment, pulled out of a dramatic narrative. The third photo had a similar sensibility, although Elaine's conversation centred mostly on the technical difficulties involved in cutting and joining two negatives for the exposure. The image seemed to show a woman's knee and thigh intruding at a sharp angle from the lower left of the frame. The surrounding space was very dark except for someone wearing a sweatshirt positioned at the

I'm still working with the figure. I was trying to use the light, playing around with strong light from the window. Things may seem simple or by accident but it was planned like her hand beside her head, and I had somebody else's hand as a shadow on her so you could just see the fingers.

lower right of the image. She/he seemed to slouch just slightly into a strong light that defined the fold of the shirt and caught the tip of her/his chin. Elaine was reluctant to discuss the content of the image.

Again, there's no really deep meaning or anything I'm trying to say. It's just the formal elements that I'm playing with, trying to . . . I just wanted it to be really ambiguous. What? Why is this going on?

I can find no relationship between the two forms either logically or aesthetically. I can't find a way to understand how the light could touch both of them as it does. But for a brief time I am drawn into the search for some connection, some way to "see" the situation into which she has placed me.

We then looked at a painting of abstract organic shapes, about 24" x 36". She discussed it primarily as an exploration into the complexities of abstraction rather than as a form of expression "just letting the shapes guide me". She was sensitive to the natural organic forms in the finished image.

I think the reason I like this is that in the end, it ended up just looking really flowing. It looks like it's flowing. I liked it. And some of the techniques that ended up coming out, the transparencies in some areas. There are still areas I could point out that I don't like but I guess, I thought that I had to learn the techniques on my own.

The situation of having "to learn the techniques on my own" seemed to have been the instructor's main pedagogical strategy, one which caused a certain amount of concern for her. In fact, it was in relation to this work that she raised some of the more problematic issues about the teaching she had received.

This was in Painting 300 when I had _____. He was really a free teacher, just let you on your own, and just explore things on your own. Which I did try to do, although I was discovering things too *completely* on my own. He wouldn't, didn't want to lay them out for you, but he'd give you *some* feedback that would help. But nothing in technique so anything in this I was just experimenting on my own.

When this instructor left part way through the year he was replaced by another instructor who took a more satisfactory approach.

The next professor, I can't remember her name, but she was more teaching techniques. She was more formal in how to do things and so I think that's why I sort of went through a transition that helped you use turpentine or helped you do glazing, and she was more technical. So it was really good that I had I had both worlds in that year.

She supported the idea that student's should be encouraged to expand their horizons but she was quite frank about the feeling of coercion to which she felt students were subjected. With the pressure of getting a good grade upon them, she felt that students were wise to adapt to the taste and style of the professor, and in fact that that was expected in some cases.

Some people, you can tell what they like and if you try to stray from what they like then your marks will show it. I know that's not a very positive thing to have happen. But it does. I know somebody who said that from a different professor, who happens to be *abstract*, I guess he would always say that he felt everybody had abstract in them and, sort of force them to do it. I like doing abstract though, but I felt that it was a good thing I did.

As we viewed the next drawing she revealed a strengthening of her own sense of what she wanted to accomplish in her work.

I felt myself struggling, through most of the year with drawing, because I would either too stiff or I would end up going the totally opposite way. I really wanted to be loose but I couldn't control being loose and being too stiff, so I would always be one or the other all year long. And it was a real struggle to do that. By the end I was happy with this, because I think I finally got the balance.

Throughout the interview she made reference to her concern with having her work viewed as "literal" or cliché. She raised this issue several times from

which I assumed that this had been a criticism of her work. When we viewed the last small painting that she had just recently completed, I detected a note of hurt in her voice. This small work also marked a crucial point in her recognition of and her determination to pursue her own expressive intent. As she said earlier, throughout university she had been more concerned with pleasing everybody else. Because the sentiments that motivated this small painting of daisies were so very personal and because she was deeply committed to what she was struggling to express, the criticisms of her instructor and her peers forced her to really confront the opinions of those whose authority she had previously accepted.

But other times, some things might be seen as being too literal, or too cliché, or something like. Or sometimes, maybe I just want to have the freedom to know I can go do it now. I don't care if it's cliché or anything. So what? So I can go do it. If I want to do a picture of a flower in a garden I'm going to go do it. So I'm maybe not showing it in any gallery or anything but I just want to have the freedom of doing it for the pleasure of doing it. That's why I wanted to do it in the first place.

There was still some accommodation of the other's point of view but she was convinced of the value of the personal meaning that there was in the work.

A couple of years ago it was my father's death. I was wanting to do something on that theme in my art as a way of figuring that out by myself and using it in my art 'cause it's a strong subject, and a lot of feelings. I've been trying to do that all year long, including journals and little sketches and things. So this was just one of the things. I mentioned that my father liked gardening, and the day that he died he planted daisies. That was why the daisy has nothing cliché at all to me. . . . There's a significant other reason for doing this one. . . . Nobody would know this I guess, unless I told you. So I guess this has a different significance of why I like this piece.

I was so touched by this explanation. Even now I can feel the hurt caused by the less than sensitive reception of the image that left her feeling "shot down".

I couldn't help going into "teacher mode" and so we moved into a short discussion of strategies for developing the imagery and retaining the sentiment that was central to the work.

MC: It seems to me, because it's such a discrete little square, you could develop them into a larger piece, using the same size of little drawings, that put in other information around, that leads closer to your reading of this particular image. . . . I see it almost like a storyboard of some sort. Like this is one shot in the narrative, or a larger piece. So I like the size.

E: Yeah I like it too.

MC: It's a really nice reference to all of those things you talked about, with your father in the garden. A garden is such a wonderful metaphoric image as well.

E: Yeah. That's what else I spent all year thinking about that.

Elaine is a young woman at an important point of transition in her life. Not only has she completed a significant level of her education but I think she has come to a new and important point in her sense of self and her relationship to knowledge and art making. As an undergraduate she had valued teachers who she felt treated her with respect and who welcomed her into the world of art and informed her about the ways of that world.

I thought that your class, that I learned a lot, like I said, about Cindy Sherman and Bill Viola and other people. Just being introduced to video art, I really felt that I learned a lot in that. When I was in photography, I had ____, and I felt that I learned a lot from him as well, 'cause almost every week he would show us slides of other artists, . . . Also, in my first year painting I had ____ and he would read us a lot of articles about art. He would read to us, and then we'd have a discussion about it. Pretty intellectual but it was really nice. I was only in second year then and I was only twenty, (Laughter) and it was really all new to me. One thing I like about fine arts though is that we're so open to discussions and we have our little wine and cheese parties. That's something that I really enjoyed, being able to sit down and have discussions with people and be relaxed. . . . The professors are open with you, on a level .

With the little painting of the daisies, she has realised that there is some thing that she wants to say, at least to herself, regardless of other opinions. She continues to look to texts and to the work of other artists for information, but she insisted that she would have to form her own opinions first and then seek the sources that supported her ideas.³ As well, she is committed to taking that perspective forward into her responsibilities as a teacher.

³ In fact, subjectivism is dualistic in the sense that there is still a conviction that there are right answers; the fountain of truth has simply shifted locale. Truth now resides within the person and can negate answers that the outside world supplies. (Belenky et al. 1986: 54)

Laura

Laura is forthright and unabashed in speaking her mind and standing up for her ideas and the way she wants to live her life. She is her own authority on what is best for her, what she likes, what she dislikes, what she wants to learn and how that should happen. In her view,

I think I'm a pretty practical person. I think that's part of it and I've never been taught to fear authority so I'm not so easily intimidated.

She was frank and unreserved, to the point of bluntness, in her responses and observations of people and events. This has brought criticism upon her for being self centred, but she made it quite clear throughout our conversation that, while she gives priority to her own self interest, it is not at the expense of her concern for others.

Actually I have a very nice comfortable life style now. My life I think horrifies my more puritanical grandmother and mother, who think that we should be maybe suffering a bit more.

She described herself as idealistic, happy, and content with her life, although as a recent graduate, she was at a point where she was facing some important decisions about her future. She has no well defined career ambitions, but she mused that, "I think I like the kind of jobs that involves initiative and that don't really have rules; that you have to be reasonably intelligent and have common sense." Further to that she said, "I'm not interested in fame and glory and being known after my death." Her view was that, "You do little things every day, that's what builds your life." and that was the foundation for her art work. She expressed a very broad definition of art.

L: I see art as really organic and all encompassing. And I see the world as an art form. And when I do a painting or a picture it's more like a result. It's a by-product of the art of life.

MC: *That's a nice way to think of it.*

L: Yeah. It's what you do when it kind of accumulates in you from your daily living. Like you go around, well I feel I go around and I collect, collect, collect, and then I kind of, you know, "lay an egg". (laughter)

I think you need, everyone needs a pleasant environment. I think to be happy you have to like to sit where you are. You have to like to look around. If you are always looking at ugly things you can't be happy inside.

In light of this, she placed great importance on the artist's need to be self aware and empathetic of those around them. In that sense, she considered herself to be,

an artist in practice, not necessarily a practising artist but practising *to be* an artist. I'm practising to be a good person. I'm practising to make the most of what I have, and the way I express what I have is through my art.

Of the women in the younger group, Laura is the only one who is married and happily so. In fact, she cited her marriage as the event that most benefited her experience as an art student. In the marriage she found emotional support in dealing with the issues of life and learning and economic security to fend off the detrimental effects of a financially impoverished student existence. With her husband she had established the casual and comfortable lifestyle where they could study, work, engage with the world or relax on their own terms.

We can lie in bed and eat candies or we can go for a walk. We don't have to wash the dishes until the end of the week if we don't want to. (laughter) That's what I mean by comfort. I can watch TV until two in the morning or I can paint all day. We do the laundry when we run out of underwear, or bake cookies. I don't know. I think you can enjoy anything that's not painful, if you put your mind to it. And I think I want to fit art into this lifestyle. I like this lifestyle.

She also noted that being married instilled a deeper sense of responsibility for how she lived her life. She was in the process of stopping smoking, and over and above the benefits to her own health, she saw this as acting responsibly towards her husband's health as she believes that she had no right to risk subjecting him to her untimely death.

L: Now that I'm married I feel more of a responsibility. I wouldn't do something that was dangerous. Part of why I quit smoking is because it's not just yourself. You have a responsibility to another person too. I'd be mad if he smoked. I'd consider that very inconsiderate of me, of my feelings.

MC: *And your health.*

L: And my health. Well, I smoked outside but ...

MC: *Knowing what we know about second hand smoke.*

L: Yeah, well I was always very careful with that, but I mean, you don't want someone to die before they're supposed to when you enjoy their company. I mean, you'd be pretty pissed off at them. (laugh)

Laura declared that, "I think that one of the main themes in my life has been fighting, fighting for my integrity; fighting to be recognised for myself." The description that she gave of her family background explains a great deal about why she felt that way. She is the eldest of three children and grew up in rural Ontario. She described a childhood with all the crayons, paper, tree houses and outdoor amusements she and her brothers could want. When she was thirteen the family moved to Montreal but two years later her parents separated and her father returned to Ontario. She and her mother stayed in Montreal until Laura finished high school two years later. She then spent a year in Switzerland working as a *jeune fille au pair* and her mother went back to Ontario to be closer to her sons.

Because she felt that my brothers were at a very important point in their emotional development and my father's not very good at that emotional nurturing and being aware of that stuff. She felt that she might lose them forever if she wasn't there now.

Laura remains close to her elder brother who also has interests in the arts. She admires her younger brother for his energy and audacity but admits that they don't really have much in common.

Laura said that she had a good relationship with her mother and then added some of the most perceptive and thoughtful comments on the mother-daughter relationship of anyone in this study.

L: I think there's still the usual anger but it's harder to express, I think, towards mothers. It's mixed up with a lot more than towards fathers. It's a lot easier to hate your father, I think, than to hate your mother.

MC: Yeah? What kinds of things do you feel are mixed up in, you say a lot of other things mixed up with it in relationship to a mothers?

L: With mothers, I think that a lot of women, a lot of my friends who talk about it, girls tend to feel, . . . more protective. Especially when fathers aren't quite the partner you think they should be for our mothers. I think girls feel more protective towards their mothers, so they can't be mad at them for not being the adult they think they should be because they already, I mean, for myself and a lot of my friends too, we all feel like maybe our mothers didn't have the best deal anyway. So there is that guilt.

MC: If you add to it by

L: By being mad at them you are just adding to their burden and you know that they are struggling anyway. So I think that a lot of daughters assume a lot of responsibility towards their mothers at a young age. I think with fathers you feel less protective because they're not, well maybe because they don't actually turn to their children as much. Mothers, I think, tend to turn towards their children for support. Fathers tend to remove themselves from their children.

Obviously her opinion of her father was less than glowing: he had in fact removed himself quite emphatically from her life. She admitted that she didn't have a good relationship with her father, nor did she know many people who

had good relationships with their fathers. By her description he was a "classic extrovert", a socialist ideologue, a "dabbler" who "does a million things, none of them well." In her opinion, "My father I think is the original hypocritically politically correct kind of guy." Our conversation continued.

L: Well, (laugh) now we're writing *polite* letters back and forth. At one point he decided that he didn't want to have any more relationship because he didn't like it. He didn't like *me*, and it just wasn't worth it.

MC: *He told you this in so many words?*

L: He wrote me it in a letter. But he had said that. He'd said that on and off, throughout. He kind of got rid of all of us, but another thing I think, with my father, and I think with other daughters, sometimes, a husband can get rid of his wife but he can't get rid of his daughter as easily and she just a constant, in their face reminder of reproach. My father, I know he doesn't like being aware. He doesn't like being responsible for his actions, and to have a child who says, "But Dad, I thought you said" I think it's just not comfortable, and I think daughters are threatening.

I made him feel bad. I was far too selfish. He couldn't have a conversation with me, because I was only interested in myself. A bit of a projection there but ..

She went on to explain how she felt that her father's socialist political ideology had been imposed upon her and her brothers. She admits that her father had provided them with a kind of ideal Romantic childhood where, "we played much more than we ever did chores." They were the envy of their friends, but as she said, "It wasn't so much fun to be his actual child." She continued and explained the fundamental contradiction in her father's imposition of his beliefs on the children.

He expected a lot morally and politically from us. Whereas other kids had to do chores but they didn't really have much in the way of those other kinds of expectations. I mean, we were supposed to always be aware of how other people felt and include them and be aware of the oppressed and help them. . . . It was expected of *us* but it wasn't like we had a choice. I mean what he said to us, he countered by saying to us. I mean, if you're a

socialist, you believe pretty much that you shouldn't force people to do things against their will. As a father you wouldn't say, "I am your father, therefore I own you and you have to do what I say." He also brought us up to question authority, but I don't think that he ever realized that he himself was an authority figure, and I think he felt really betrayed once we got old enough to point that out to him. I think he didn't like that at all.

It appears that there were other high expectations that her father placed upon her; "I know that my father always hoped that I would be another Emily Carr: writer/artist, you know." She was also acutely aware that he expected her act as a sort of surrogate to demonstrate his political convictions.

My father, being in love with French Canada thought I should go and draw all the people on the Metro, and sell it to the Metro people. He has no real idea about the reality of these things, which was always very embarrassing to us as children.

She felt that there was even more pressure on her, as the eldest but also as a young, "liberated" woman. "Because, maybe they would have been more afraid that I would just be a wife and mother or something. Something terrible like that. (laughter) God forbid!" Unfortunately, because she did not seem to live up to his specific expectations he has failed to recognise that she had set goals for herself and had accomplished them. As well, she was in fact extending herself to help others by doing volunteer work, teaching art to emotionally disturbed boys and visiting senior citizens. She observed that our society is "all about the middle" and those at the beginning and the end (children and the elderly) are forgotten. She was committed to making her contribution to changing that.

L: I don't like teaching, but I like the kids and I feel that it's something that is necessary, and I know that I'm good at it. It's not that I'm doing it as a sense of duty, although it is. I mean it's not the kind of duty that I hate. I wouldn't want to be a teacher. It wouldn't be a *job* that I'd do. I wouldn't do

it for money, but I would do it because I think it's necessary, if you know what I mean.

MC: Do you feel that you get something out of it?

L: I do because I'm doing something that's necessary. I'm doing something that's useful. And I'm making a change, I mean it's a whole radical - you start at the source. These are kids that if they don't have a sense of themselves they're gonna grow up and be in prison. I mean, they don't feel loved. They don't feel needed. They don't understand how to control themselves.

This was not her first engagement in some form of social service. In the year between working in Switzerland and beginning her studies at Concordia she had worked at a women's crisis centre, doing secretarial work, answering crisis calls. She did one crisis intervention, which she found to be frightening but exhilarating. That job earned her enough money that she could return to Montreal and enrol at Concordia: "the only university I could afford in the only city I could afford."

She admitted that she also thought that it was easy to get into Concordia and was pleased to realise, after she had been admitted, that in fact it was quite competitive. Her formal art background was not strong but she had very firm ideas about her art and its value to her. She had been very involved in art making as a young child but her high school experience had not been very enriching, because as she put it, "I hated it. I hated my art teacher. I thought he was a pervert." The intervening years have not dulled her distaste for him.

He liked me though, which bothered me even more, but I thought he was disgusting! Actually, I was reading my high school report cards and I was thinking, "God!! Can't he see how obvious it is, just his lecherousness!" I mean in his comments. It was so obvious that he wanted so badly for me to be *his student* kind of thing, which I thought was really sick.

In defiance of his odious presence she did no work in class, but she devoted her energy to her sketch book drawing outside of school. The first art works that she showed me were what she called her *Teenage Angst Cards*, images related to observations and experiences from her adolescence. From the original high school sketch book drawings she had

At various positions on the cards fluid, gestured, pen and ink lines seemingly formed themselves into the images of the characters that interested her: a girl on the Metro, a baby, an anorexic girl, a large nude woman. The one that she referred to as being her commentary on ART, was an image of a woman, very emphatically framed and hung on a wall with two little figures at the extreme bottom left, looking up and pointing at the picture.

created a collection of cards which she had litho printed and exhibited.

She chose to study art rather than literature, her other great love, because, "I thought it would be harder for them to destroy my enjoyment of art than it would be to destroy my enjoyment of reading." She was familiar with, and disliked the techniques of literary analysis but she "didn't realise that that would happen in art" as well. She added that she also felt that she knew that her abilities in art making were less developed and "I idealistically thought it would be a place where I could go and say, 'This is what I want to learn' and people would teach me. And it wasn't quite like that."

Her first years at Concordia were frustrating. "It was really rather unpleasant. I was disappointed because I wasn't learning." She was intensely committed to her own ideas about art and was dismayed to have her work dismissed: "The way I had been working so far wasn't drawing; it was illustration; it was cartoon; it was nothing; it had no merit at all." She felt that she was being compelled to abandon everything about her own way of working and

that she was expected to conform to a single "approved" aesthetic. She insisted that the criteria for *high* art that her teachers advocated were quite arbitrary and no more valid than her opinions of her own work which was being condemned. She remains cynical.

Abstracted. People all seemed to be using very much the same colour schemes. Yeah, abstracted and I thought it was too facile in a way. It was just as facile as what I was doing, but in a different way, and I don't see why that was okay and what I was doing wasn't. Because if I wanted to, and I did in some classes do what they wanted me to do, and it wasn't any harder than what I was doing. It didn't involve any new brain muscles. I got positive feedback and that just made it worse because then I knew for sure that they were full of shit and they weren't (sincere). It's just a game and I think the art milieu is very much like the academic milieu, very much like the "old boys" but also, the people at the top are kicking down the ladders. They are changing the rules because they're at the top now and if they let too many other people get to the top then that would mean that that they're not so special.

She was prepared to acknowledge that she had things to learn but she was not prepared to totally give up what she felt she already knew. Her description of her first painting class reveals how the issue was resolved with one instructor.

L: I hadn't taken painting before because I couldn't afford it and when I did it I wanted to do it properly. I didn't want to have to not have the paint (and stuff). I really liked my instructor. At first the personalities had to kind of get used to each other because I have a kind of a strong personality I think, but then we really got along very well. He realised that I wasn't just being a trouble maker, that I was asking questions because I wanted to know. I consider I'm paying money to go to university because I want to learn something. I'm paying these people to teach me what I want to learn. And I think I said that to him once and he was kind of shocked. Anyway, "Look. I'm paying

It's like cooking. You need to know basic rules, like that you don't add the thickener to hot water or it will lump That's a basic rule you have to know. And once you know those basic rules then you can do whatever the Hell you want because you understand the results. But I find at Concordia, it's really hard to learn. I mean you really have to harass people, to find out.

you. I want to know. I want to know something. Your not doing me a favour. I'm doing you a favour because I'm giving you money to learn." So he thought that was really funny after he finished being shocked. And since then we worked harder, I think, to understand each other too. And that was a good experience.

Once she managed to establish a rapport with the instructor she was more open to the assignments that he set.

He did exercises that I thought were useful. Doing the different planes of the foreground, middle ground, background in a painting. And that was really interesting because I hadn't really thought about it. I hadn't really seen it that way.

As well, he extended a necessary level of acceptance of the work to which she was so committed, thus allowing her to use his instruction to build upon her own foundation.

The way I started doing this. . . . I thought I'd do trays for Christmas presents. And I did. I did a whole series of fish trays and landscape trays. This was the tray. I varnished them and gave them to my friends and family for Christmas. So when I went back after Christmas, my teacher asked me if I had painted over Christmas, and I said, "Well, I made trays." I showed him some of the pictures of them, and he said, because in the second half we had to do a project, he said, "Well, why don't you do that?" I was really surprised because all the teachers before had said, "That's not art. You can't do that. Oh, that's just craft. You can't do that." He even said at one point "If you don't varnish them they're art. If you varnish them they're craft and you shouldn't varnish them because then they are worth less." (laughter) Yeah. So it gave me the freedom, instead of feeling like I had to create ART, I could just play, and I think I learned a lot about colour, about texture, about how to create certain effects. Because I was really enjoying myself.

The trays were about 28" x 18"
The first was a moonlight landscape in shades of dark blue. Hillsides rose steeply up to the left and to the right of a pond that occupied the foreground space. Four stark white, branchless tree trunks thrust up into the centre ground. The second tray was a forest of tree trunks on a rugged terrain, rendered in a monochromatic range of blue-greys.

Because she felt that she was now being accepted more on her own terms and with greater respect she was prepared to be more involved. She gained confidence, being able to work on a scale that she thought she could handle. Furthermore, "The subject of the drawing wasn't, we weren't judged for *what* we painted. We were judged for how we used the paint, how we explored with the paint." This felicitous situation was complimented by other courses in art history and art education that she was taking at the time where she felt that the professors were open and sympathetic to her point of view.

So that year everything kind of interconnected and overlapped and I think I learned a lot about painting, about what I wanted from painting, but also technique, which I find is really lacking at Concordia.

However when she entered her second year painting class she was even more sharply up against the same old problem with her new instructor. He was adamant that painting was not about representation and he was not prepared to entertain any notions to the contrary. The first term was very difficult.

Really not a good teacher. And not a very nice person, I didn't think. Sexist. Racist. Just not really someone that I had a lot of respect for, and even as an artist. . . . I think he's an arrogant little man.

The instructor dismissed her work as "not art" and she was immediately put on the defensive. However she was still prepared to accept her status as a student and make an effort to follow the teacher's direction. She found that her efforts were not received with any degree of tolerance.

L: I mean, he'd come and say, "Ah, Gesso over it!" I didn't know why. I didn't. And I'd say, "Why?" and he'd say, "Well, you know, there's no point

in explaining it to you because I'm up here and you're down here and anything I say will just go over your head. You won't understand anyway."

MC: He said that in so many words?

L: Yes, he did. He did. And I said, "Why don't you *try* explaining it. Maybe, I *will* understand." And he said, "Well I did and you didn't, so." If I'd had more presence of mind and if I hadn't been so incredibly insulted and boggled, I probably would have said, "Well, you must be a really stinky teacher if you can't. You shouldn't be teaching if you can't explain something to me. What are you doing here? It kind of makes me sick that you're being paid to be a jerk."

Laura's solution to the problem was firstly to get past the shock and disbelief and anger, and then really put in an effort to deal with her painting. She then started attending a first year painting class with an instructor who was more helpful and approachable. She also met with her instructor from the year before to get his response to her work. In the end, in spite of a reserved critique from her instructor, she finally had the satisfaction of completing a painting with which she was satisfied. She found that she responded to the particular emotional quality that she had created, and she was motivated to continue. Her assessment of the work was,

The painting was large: 5' x 4'. It was awash with subtly shifting threads of luminous blue-green-aqua colour moving horizontally across the canvas. There was a strong sense of flowing air and water, moving gently but with an understated energy.

Yeah, I'm pleased with it. I really do feel that I'm achieving something in the sense that I'm able to say more eloquently, more profoundly, more maturely, what I want to say.

An equally important achievement was that she had refused to be deterred by that particular professor and had taken responsibility for her own learning.

I found that by really going out of my way to get stuff I was able to learn. I mean, other people were still whining and belly aching, saying how much they hated (the professor). But I think a lot of people don't realize that it's like anything. If you want something, it's not just going to be given to you. Well sometimes it is, I mean, but that's more circumstance and luck, I think.

Most things you actually kind of have to hunt them down and beat them until they give you what you want. (laughter) And so it was a good experience for that, because I really had to suffer and persevere. I think that's what I learned that year. suffering and perseverance. (laughter)

When she took ceramics she found herself embroiled in another struggle to assert her own point of view. She had to deal with "another touchy teacher". In this case the instructor, in her view, was extremely "insecure about not being considered an artist. " Laura felt that this preoccupation really interfered with the instructor's ability to make helpful and sincere evaluations of the students' work.

In ceramics she wanted, well I think she liked this, but her final comment to me was that my work was "visually appealing". But the interesting thing is, that's not necessarily a good thing. I mean, it could also be an insult.

In her discussion around the ceramic bowl, embossed with pears that she showed me, she revealed the deeper contradiction that so disturbed her about the notion of *high* ART and the art / craft dichotomy. She felt that not only was she being expected to abandon her own ideas and values but she was expected to set herself apart other people who she liked and respected for qualities not related to art, and art making.

The reason I have pears in this bowl, I made this other bowl [but] it's got a big huge crack in it. It's green, dark green. I had yellow pears in it one day and I thought it was so beautiful. Actually there's more things I also made pears.

MC: Oh, that fit into it.

L: That go in the bow.

Again, in my painting class and in drawing classes, teachers are always saying, "If your family and friends like it, it's probably not good." Because obviously, they're uncouth. They don't know what art is. So don't do things for them, because it won't be ART. Don't do things that you would like to have in your house because that's not ART. That's something less. That's something slightly shameful, slightly tacky, embarrassing. I did this because I wanted to have something nice. I started making ugly things so that I would pass, so that I could graduate after spending years and money. But I wanted to have something nice to have, that wasn't useless.

Regardless of the resistance that she was putting up to certain instructors, Laura had always taken her learning to be a very serious matter. She was enrolled in the Studio programme but she had taken Art Education courses, not because she wanted to teach, but because,

Half the time I didn't know what the Hell they were talking about. I thought if I knew how to teach I'd be able to decipher what they were trying to get me to do, or learn, so that I could be a better student.

Although she gave a scathing denunciation of a certain art history text book, she appreciated that in her art history and art education courses she was being provided with material with which to work, and with experiences linked to the content. As she said, "To create you have to have input." Some of those experiences led her to some important insights about her learning and the art work that she was doing.

In Art Ed class we looking at a painting, imagining you are in that painting and what you'd see. That exercise I liked. That would be the approach that I would like to take because I think that's approaching it much more the way that I approach a book. If I can get drawn into a book, I consider that good . . . I think it should be a combination of appreciating, well like with literature, you appreciate the technique; you appreciate the way it makes you feel, whether you can get into it (or not). The suspension of reality is very important. Which is one of the things that I had with (second painting professor.) I didn't understand for a long time why, what it was that he still didn't quite like with my paintings. Actually it was when I was talking with (first painting professor) I finally understood. It's because they're not flat. There's depth to them. It never occurred to me they were supposed to be flat. Because for me, a painting is like a book. It's a world that you go into.

Laura is also an avid and sensitive reader of literature and that is another very important source of input to her art work. She remarked that, "I wish I could paint the way some of these authors write". The "rich bleakness, with

hope" in the work of Margaret Lawrence was a quality that she particularly admired. She expressed the aspiration that, "I'd like to paint with humour, with emotion, with insight. I'd like to capture so much. It's so *hard*." However, she feels completely capable of evaluating the work that she had done. Problematic areas were sensed rather than analysed and she knew that it was successful when she could "look at it and enjoy it."

Throughout the interview she reiterated her conviction that art making was her most expressive and enjoyable form of expression. However, her conclusion about her whole experience as an art student was,

I don't know if Art School was good. I don't know. I don't know if it taught me necessarily what I thought or what I wanted to learn. I think it taught me what I need to know for the real world, in that it taught me that I need to be really aggressive. I need to know how to get what I want from certain people. I need to not be intimidated. But those weren't things that people, no one said that.

Nathalie

Nathalie is a cheerful, well adjusted, intelligent young woman who has been a highly successful student. She is confident and sure of herself, as well as being able to reflect very clearly on her art work and her ideas. She graduated from the Studio Arts programme a year before our interview and she was actively pursuing studies that would take her into a dramatically different field.

She is one of the few women that I spoke with who grew up in a harmonious middle class family and who continues to enjoy an excellent relationship with both her parents. She is an only child but since both of her parents come from very large families, she has many aunts and uncles and, "I have thirty first cousins and a few of them are very close. They are like siblings, surrogate siblings, and their children, like, I'm like their aunt." Her father is Anglophone Protestant and her mother is Francophone Catholic, not an insignificant point in the cultural and political context of Quebec. She learned both languages simultaneously but she grew up feeling somewhat caught between two factions. When I suggested that she had the best of both worlds, she wryly replied, "And the worst." She was the only person who made any reference to the Quebec political situation and she has suggested that the outcome of the nationalist /federalist referendum would strongly influence her decision to stay in the province or go elsewhere. Of her relationship with her parents and her upbringing she said,

I think it was rocky at one point, the adolescent thing, but now it's quite good. My parents are both very independent people, and I was brought up to be quite independent too. And to make my own decisions. My mom was telling me when she was young people always told her what to do. So right from the start she said, "I didn't want you to do that." So she always used to make me choose, if I wanted. It started right when I was two. If I wanted the red crayon or the blue one, or what, and it progressed. I really learned to be able to decide at an early age. To make choices and not regret them.

She added that,

at the age of seven I started doing dance, classical dance and other things, and I did that for seven years. Music, that didn't pan out for me because I always had to move, so the dance was really important for me. And in drawing, I always drew from the age of two. I was always doing something with my hands. I really enjoyed it.

She is quite close to both her parents. She continues to live at home, although she says, "I don't think I would live there if we weren't three adults and we have our three separate lives." As a young child she spent a great deal of time with her mother who devoted herself to parenting and homemaking until Nathalie was eight. She then returned to work outside the home. She provided Nathalie with a strong example of commitment and independence. Her father travelled a great deal for his work. Of her relationship with her father she said,

Sometimes it's rocky because we're very similar. We're very stubborn and we both want the other person to understand, but it doesn't always work. (Laughter) But I think we both admire each other in different ways. I really admire him a great deal. He's very strong willed. He's lived through Hell, I guess, health wise. . . . In terms of art, he has no art training whatsoever, but if I ever need any advice on art, I go to him.

She commented further on her regard for his artistic judgement, "If I thought some thing was unbalanced or I didn't like the way it was, he would look at it and say, 'Oh, you know, it's that way.' or 'It's like this.' And he was right

all the time. (Laughter)" He also provided her with valuable introduction to technology and creative problem solving.

When I was a kid I used to spend a lot of time with him, taking apart motorcycles and putting them back together again. So he's taught me a lot about mechanics and how things work, and he's very, imaginative. If he doesn't have a part, he'll make it and put it together. So I learned maybe a lot about *art* from him in a non-traditional sort of way.

Her father has influenced her in another decisive way. Because he has an artificial limb (he lost a leg in a car accident before she was born), she has always had an awareness of prosthetics and a curiosity about technology in relation to the human body.

Nathalie felt that she had benefited from several positive educational situations. She attended an all girls private high school and she recounted an anecdote that demonstrates the school philosophy. One of her teachers had attended a convention of administrators from private schools where someone had gushed that, "At our school we educate our girls to be the wives of prime ministers!" To which Nathalie's teacher replied, "At our school we educate our young women to *be* prime ministers!" While this approach is to be lauded, there was a problematic aspect for Nathalie who found that,

It's funny, because in an all girls school it's non-traditional, (Laughter) for women to go and do art things. Because you really are almost in a maybe opposite way to other systems, pushed towards going into the sciences and non-traditional field.

She had determined for herself by grade nine or ten that she wanted to study in the Fine Arts. Her art teacher had played an important role in her arriving at that realisation. She valued the role her art teacher played,

to develop that, (artistic ability) and she helped me to respond to how important it was to me. And she *really*, I mean, she encouraged me. I don't think that, if she hadn't have been there that I would have done that.

Nathalie really had to defend her intentions to pursue that direction. Her marks in the sciences were excellent and "people were freaking out" because she was refusing to go into a science based field. I think that the fundamental crisis at this point was that she had made a decision to follow her own wishes and the same people who had always said that she should make her own decisions were telling her that she couldn't make the only one that really made a difference *to her*. It was her art teacher who really listened to her and said, "Well if that's not what you want, well just go ahead and do the art anyway." Nathalie dug in her heels. "So that sort of made me even rebel and refuse to do the SAT's so they couldn't force me to go." She also enlisted the active support of her art teacher to reassure her parents about her decision. This respected and sensitive teacher continued to support Nathalie's right to make her own decisions in the face of determined opposition. She affirmed her right to "follow her heart" and know that she would be all right. Nathalie went on to complete a certificate in Fine Arts at Dawson College and then to Concordia for her BFA. She insists that,

But, you know, that's (physics) something that I can pick up. I think I never had the fear that if I didn't do it when I was seventeen, I could never go back and do it. Because it is a fear. That was the fear that a lot of people had. If I don't do it now I'm never going to be able to do it. And I don't think that that is true. I think I sort of, was able to figure that out.

And such has proven to be the case. Throughout her fine arts education she had advanced her enduring interest in technology and the human body

through her art works and theoretical reading. Since graduation she has been taking qualifying courses in trigonometry, calculus and bio-medical ethics in preparation for entering graduate studies in bio-medical engineering. She comes to these studies not only with confidence but with a sense of personal conviction and purpose.

I'm not afraid of it. And I'm treating it more like a personal challenge to go back and do those now. I've always been very interested in technology, and technology and the body, and the potential that we have in terms of research. And what we know, and what we can do, and what we should do, and what we shouldn't do, and ethics. And then as an artist, it's one thing to be critical or to embrace something, but it's very difficult because I have limited knowledge in science. And I would rather be able to approach it from personal, well maybe not personal experience, but just from more knowledge.

She has come to understand her pursuit of bio-medical engineering not just as the acquisition of knowledge in that field but in a more particular and intensive sense.¹

I would also like the structure to see how people who do work in those fields and make those decisions, *come* to make those decisions. How are they taught to do their research? Or what is it that motivates them to develop that kind of technology?

Her CEGEP studies were characterised by two important features. The first was mentioned in regard to my question about important relationships. There had been a very close and lively group of friends in her class at Dawson with whom she established an enduring, supportive and highly motivating

¹They (procedural knowers) believe that each of us looks at the world through a different lens, that each of us construes the world differently. They are interested not just in what people think, but in how people go about forming their opinions and feelings and ideas. (Belenky et al. 1986: 97.)

relationship. The fact that they spent many hours together as a group fostered this *esprit de corps*. She asserted that the way in which they were encouraged to be actively and honestly engaged in group crits of each other's work not only encouraged their art critical skills but bolstered their individual self confidence and mutual trust and respect. This self confident engagement in critical discussion of class mates work met with some distressed reaction when they arrived at Concordia,

We had to learn to really tone it down. It's not because we were trying to be nasty it was only because we were really used to critiquing the work. We weren't trying to insult people. That's how they felt. They took it personally.

This caused her to reflect upon her feeling that at Dawson they had been prepared and taught, through discussion and example, what art criticism was about, and that perhaps, at Concordia,

maybe it's just because the idea of critiquing work hadn't been really discussed. It was just sort of something that happens without having maybe a discussion or forum about what it means and how it's come forward.

The second important development for her at Dawson was that one of her professors introduced her to post-modern theoretical writing. An enticing new world of ideas was opened to her, most particularly about issues of the body and feminism. She pursued her study of theory through independent reading and she admitted that in her enthusiasm for "theory" she was somewhat impatient with the resistance of other students. "I was just really, to me it was essential to deal with. And, I didn't really understand at first why you wouldn't want to.

And I would get frustrated and say, 'Well, you know, your just not dealing with it'." ²

She was pleased to find that theoretical perspectives were an integral part of many of her courses at Concordia. These ideas informed and motivated the art work that she produced. The first work she showed me was a lethal looking pair of false eyelashes made from small bits of blue aluminium and crinkled wire. In fact Nathalie declined to put them on for fear of hurting herself. She discussed the problems of how one would present such a work and revealed the two solutions that she had found. One was to show them in a metal World War II first aid box. The other was to have photographs taken of herself wearing the eye lashes and simply show them as slides or photographs. She had also made a breastplate, a piece of body armour from the same light weight blue aluminium sheeting. This too was shown as a photograph rather than in its object form. For her this was a gesture of control over her own representation. "Because there was stuff *about me*, in those pieces and I had to just not let it float freely out there."

At about the same time she had done a four monitor video installation for my course in which she undertook to deconstruct the visual representations of her own construction as a woman in contemporary North American culture. The viewer was presented with a recurring barrage of Nathalie: in family snap shots, school pictures, with friends, going to first grade, off to her high school

² These women (received knowers) feel confident about their ability to absorb and to store the truths received from others. As such they perceive themselves as having the capacity to become richly endowed repositories of information. (Belenky et al. 1986, 42-43)

graduation dance, and as an adult in a variety of fashions and costumes. Images of "the good girl" played against images of "the bad girl". The sound track was a montage of children's songs including "A-hunting We Will Go" at about the time you saw Nathalie wearing her father's hunting hat, rifle in hand. The songs served to expose the ways in which ideologies are constructed and perpetuated without ridiculing the images.

What I'm saying is in terms of portrayals of women and how women are presented, and how we are viewed by others. I would rather be in control of that. And to be able to laugh a little bit at the way that we are supposedly modelled to become.
(Laughter)

However "a few heated discussions" with her friends and greater life experience helped to provoke further self reflection. She has now come to a more reserved position on this question. She began to reconsider the role that theory should play in relation to her understanding of her own life and art.

N: But then it became almost easy to be really absorbed in it and I had to take myself back out. It was almost like this vortex that you get wrapped up into. You have to come back out. I think I could almost have done a degree in theory. If there would have been one, I would have done it. But then I had to come back a little bit and say, "Sure, it's good to have that knowledge, but then you have to bring it back to a personal level." Because it's easy to absorb theory, and then regurgitate it back out.

MC: *What, without finding meaning?*

N: Without finding your *own* meaning. I think you have to be able to sift through it. At the beginning it's so overwhelming, you don't know what to do with it. And then you get to a point where you are really comfortable with it. Now I can deal with articles or theories or whatever. And I can say, "Well, that's nice. This is how I feel about it." Whereas, at first you are just overwhelmed by it.

When I asked what particularly had provoked this shift in attitude she replied,

N: I just found it hard to work! I couldn't make *work* anymore! (Laughter)

MC: *Because you were - what? you were worried that it wouldn't fit into the theory?*

N: No. No, that never really crossed, I never got to that point. It was more that I was just so interested in the theory that ... (Laughter)

MC: *So the time, you mean?*

N: Yeah, time and ideas. I didn't write too, too much about it, but I started writing a bit. And I just wanted to go out and do anthro! I did anthropology courses. I did all kinds of other theoretical things, that, maybe it was good. But then I said, "Well, do I still want to practice? Do I really want to make work?" And I decided that, yes, I did. So I had to let myself come back up.

Her strong views and independent spirit stood her in good stead with some of her instructors at Concordia as well. She would not "suffer fools lightly".

As it went on you learned where to go. I think you have to learn, if you are working in a certain way. I had definite ideas about what I wanted to do. I wasn't in school to be taught how to do perfect charcoal drawings in my third year in university. (Laughter) I got to a point where I had to make decisions about the kind of teaching and the kind of learning that I wanted to do, and then I had to decide whether or not I was going to come here and tolerate certain things and just drive myself crazy, or find the kind of professor and the kind of group that I needed. Which is what I did. I felt confident enough that I've never felt really threatened, I don't have fear of this so-called authority. I didn't feel that way about professors, really. I'm here to learn and they're there to help me learn and they can learn too. So, if they don't want to learn, (Laughter) then I don't want to be with them. (Laughter)

This determination came with experience. In her first year painting class she came to realise the disagreeable consequences of forthright expression of her ideas. The instructor designated her as *The Feminist* and referred any questions on the issue to her. Moreover, she felt that he failed to deal with her work in a real way. He would talk about music and theory, why she shouldn't paint and anything else that occurred to him, "But still, he didn't help me at all with my work, and wouldn't deal with it. He said, 'I don't understand what you are

doing'. And that's it!" She felt that this was a serious abdication of his responsibilities and she didn't back down from making her views known.

I was strong enough that he didn't *destroy* me (Laughter) or anything. But it was like a constant fight. I would come in and I would know that I would be up against something again. Another eight thirty in the morning Monday where I would have to be on guard and fight. So I decided that I wasn't going to go through that again. If I felt it, right from the beginning, I'd get out!

I don't have anything personal against the person who was teaching the course, but it just that it wasn't the kind of thing that I wanted. And I couldn't leave. They wouldn't let me take another course. So I kind of had to cut a deal and find another professor. I couldn't register for another class. I had to stay in the class that I was in. Eventually he asked me to leave, which was fine with me, so we found a way to get around our little problem.

Fortunately these encounters were the exception rather than the rule. She was very grateful for several encouraging and stimulating

women professors. These women acknowledged her dual interests in art and science/technology and enabled her to see them as mutually enriching rather than as dichotomous. The sincerity of their interest and support was extremely important. "I felt that if I needed to discuss something, or if I needed help that I wouldn't feel like I was threatening someone. I felt like they were there to help me and they, they *sincerely meant it*." She noted that few of her male counterparts had received anything like that kind of mentoring. She valued the way in which her women teachers were open about their own artistic practice, let students know "where they were coming from", and welcomed her into the world of art making. She admitted that the student / teacher relationship is fundamentally one of difference, "Professors are practising artists. They have more experience that we do. We're here to learn. We're students. We know that". None the less

she felt that did not simply accord a superior status to instructors but rather led to certain responsibilities.

I think teaching on, maybe a personalised level, rather than to a whole class. I'm not talking about picking favourites, just being able to pick out things about each person and then to help them with those things, and not just on a general level. . . . Certainly, all of us have different interests and I think a good professor isn't going to go and impose a theory on somebody, or impose a certain practice on someone. They'll see what interests the students have and how to get them to interact with each other and how to get them to understand what they are doing. That's what I felt were the most positive experiences; where there was interaction not just on an "I'm the professor and you're the students, Listen to me!" level, but just from everyone.

As we continued to discuss her art works, an additional and perhaps more profound impetus to redefine her relationship to theoretical concerns came to light. One piece was actually part of a larger work which was disassembled at that point. She confirmed that the story she told about this particular work demonstrated how she came to understand that theory must relate to experience. She presented a black hat with a wide soft brim onto which, at one edge she had stitched several long wisps of hair. She laughingly stated that it was in fact her hair which she had saved when she had cut her very long hair. She then went on to describe the whole piece and the motivations for its production. It was a construction of a Christmas tree stand which had belonged to her aunt who had died recently, the hat mounted on a broom stick, a veil, and a photograph of her aunt wearing a similar style of hat.

N: How it's connected to her, is that she was my godmother. She was my mother's sister and she died of cancer almost three years ago. . . . We had exactly the same hair colour and the same eye colour. She was the only one

in the family that I'm remotely, in terms of hair and eyes, related to. So her death was really hard on me, because she was my godmother and everything, but also physically, because not only the hair and the eyes, we look alike. There are pictures of her when she was my age and we really *do* look alike. She never had any children. She adopted, well she had children, but they weren't biologically her own children. So biologically, I'm the person who she resembled. So physically, her death was really strange for me, because I could almost see myself in her death, and the sort of withering away of the body. When she died she weighed I think about seventy, seventy-five pounds and it was physically, for me, very traumatic. It took me a while. I did it last year. I had to make a piece about it. And when I did the piece it wasn't important to me to that point that people knew about it. It was more catharsis. It was hard for me to do that piece because I usually really am resistant to that kind of emotional kind of out-pouring. But I did it anyway, and I was pretty happy. The piece is down but I still have the hat. I'm going to keep the hat.

MC: Well it's wonderful. Just speculating on my part, but would this have some coinciding with your feelings that you were talking about, about translating theoretical understanding to personal understanding?

N: Yeah. And the hat itself too. Well, I call the piece *Mourning Hat*. And, even without the history about my aunt, to me, the hair, loosing my hair, or cutting my hair, that whole other issue too, with women. Well, to me it was like a symbol. Cutting away your hair, as a child and sort of coming up. And the loss of that, and maybe even vanity and care. About my aunt loosing her hair with cancer. It was just sort of the whole thing. She was very vain and one of the hardest parts for me to deal with, was that when she did get cancer, she lost the vanity, at a point. She didn't care anymore. And that was really, really hard because she wasn't vain to like a, she was just very concerned about the way that she looked. . . . So, when she lost her hair, it didn't bother her. There was nothing left in terms of that part of her, that we had always seen. It was almost a complete abandoning of her body. At one point she just, that was it. She didn't, that didn't bother her any more. She could just, she was free of it. And it was something that, I mean, it was like really, really almost a shock to see that. So that piece deals with a lot of stuff, I guess.

The abstract quality of theory, and the authority of the written word ,were being thrust into a whole new reality for her, not only because of the suffering of someone she loved, but because the details of her aunt's illness related so closely to the concepts that were her particular preoccupation. She had been made

acutely aware of "the body" in pain and decay and death but she could not avoid the very personal implications: What does this mean for me?

N: So that's something that I've lived through in the past few years. It's still hard for me sometimes, just to look in the mirror and remember her. And deal with my own mortality, too. To know that, I mean, from what we know about genetics and how cancer is passed on often. Sometimes I feel like I might be, it might be in me.

MC: *Yeah, I guess it's a reasonable fear.*

N: I mean I don't think about it all the time, but it's just sometimes that you think about it. So I think, in the work that I do, the body, and I don't really separate mind, like, mind *and* body. I think you're just all. But those issues come up for me. In terms of exterior too. Just the way that bodies are represented and science too. But also on a personal level. More and more.

At the time of our interview Nathalie was actively engaged in building the necessary foundation for her entry into bio-medical engineering but she did not feel that she had abandoned artistic practice. She did however have an expanded view of who was implicated in artistic issues and where her sources of knowledge could be.

N: I don't feel like I've abandoned art. I just think my brain is making the art right now. I've got a job so I do that, and I think even that is good experience, doing something that's not just even related to people making art. It's very easy to get wrapped up in your own clique, especially contemporary art, like I was talking about with theory. I think we need to go back to that. One of the reasons that I did decide that I had to come back is that it's just so removed from people who aren't studying. It's not because people who don't read all that stuff don't know about those issues and they can't deal with them. It's just that it's the way that it's written and the way that it's ...

MC: *Yeah, they just don't talk about them like that, or in those particular ways.*

N: And you become almost like a babbling tower (Laughter) Not everyone that I know is involved in art, and it's fun to talk about that stuff with my friends who have read it too, but I have to be able to communicate with other people, because I don't want to just show my art to people who in the Art School and other artists.

She was determined to disregard the ways in which both social and theoretical constructs could impose on her life and decisions "if I don't fit". While the discussion of "woman's issues" was important it did not negate the responsibility "to do things in practice too." She asserted the wish to include men in that exchange as well; to work to understand gender differences. She may have been less absolute in her thinking about art and knowledge but she was comfortable with her decisions and confident about her future.

I've been through a transition period for a little while and now I'm sort of getting back on. I have goals, but they are long term goals. So I'm not expecting, sort of wondrous things to be happening in my life right this minute. But I'm, I think, reasonably happy and content.

Growing into Being Myself

This group of women, in their early to mid-thirties, are among a group of students who have worked or studied in other areas for a number of years before deciding to attend university to study Fine Arts. They have come through a period of uncertainty, sometimes a period of crisis in their twenties, and they speak clearly about the efforts that they have made to change their lives. They see their Fine Arts studies as intimately connected to their personal growth and they are articulate about that relationship.

Irène

Jeanette

Kirsten

Olivia

Irène

Irène was in the very first class of multi media students that I taught and I have had several occasions to see her around the school in the four years since then. She is always cheerful and ready to talk about what was going on in her life. She is a sensitive woman who takes her work and her learning seriously. She described herself as someone who likes to be with people and who generally has an optimistic view on life. This presentation is somewhat belied by recurring bouts of stress related illness.

She admitted that academic learning does not come easily for her but, as her story reveals, she is remarkably determined and she has persevered against considerable odds to achieve her goals. Her post-secondary schooling, CEGEP, BFA and her Diploma in Art Education, had all been accomplished on a part-time basis over the span of eleven years. At the time of our interview she had completed her internship in the schools and was about to graduate from the Art Education diploma programme. Although her prospects for employment were uncertain, as was the situation with her current boyfriend, she was happy to talk with me and reflect on her life, art , teaching, and learning.

She is one of four children. Her father, a French Canadian, was in the airforce. Irène was born in western Canada and lived in several communities before her father was stationed back in Quebec. Her mother was from the Prairies and had returned there after her husband divorced her and custody of the children was granted to him. The end of the marriage was devastating for

the twelve year old Irène. A "new lady" arrived in their home shortly thereafter and she did not see her mother again for fourteen years.

Her relationship with her mother had not been particularly close, perhaps because she was a rather troubled woman who was over-shadowed in her children's lives by her more sociable husband. Three years prior to our interview, the marriage of a younger sister had been the occasion for a tearful reunion with her mother. Irène remembers her as a very proper, Catholic woman but she now describes her as "a person who loves to be around people", who is greatly enjoyed by others, and with whom she has a lot of fun. Her mother still lives in the West but they have been working to re-establish their relationship through letters and phone calls. As a child she had idolised her father.

We were all open with him and I always put my father on the pedestal, because he had all these great qualities. He would sew. He would cook. He would do all kinds of stuff what a woman would do. I found he had a lot of nice qualities and was very caring, until I was sixteen years old.

However, in order to maintain this high opinion of her father she had to suppress her knowledge that this was a flawed image.

Basically my father was trying to come on to me. Which was pretty awkward. In the beginning I didn't really know what was going on because I was really naive. He would kind of fondle, kind of thing. I guess at that point I knew it was wrong and maybe I didn't know it was wrong.

When her father became aware that she was sexually involved with her first boyfriend, he took that as his opportunity to demand, through coercion, that she submit to him as well. "That started the whole thing. So, basically for one year, I went through incest." She was very disturbed by this but it was not until a

woman who was a family friend noticed that there was some kind of problem that she told anyone. The woman had remarked: "Well, your hiding something in back of your glasses." This woman gave her a great deal of support and eventually helped Irène to confront her father. This was a terribly difficult episode, particularly in that other people took her father's side against her. She was given an ultimatum: stay on his terms or leave. She joined the army.

This turmoil impacted on the whole family. Irène was left feeling not only confused and betrayed but accused as well. Her sisters were left vulnerable to the same threat from their father although she was able to intervene and help them out of the situation. She feels that her brother, who is a sensitive and artistic young man has been detrimentally affected as well. Her father continues to deny his culpability and the wider family circle is divided on the issue. Irène has received a great deal of help and support from one of her aunts but she continues to avoid family gatherings where her father will be attending. Although she said that she has forgiven her father, she makes no effort to maintain contact with him. Irène insists that with the help of some strong and caring friends, an ex-lover in particular, she has overcome that childhood trauma. As well, I think she has begun to find ways to use her understanding of that aggression in her art work.

She recalled that she always loved doing art and that, "At one point, I was in a classroom, the kids would come around and say, 'Oh! *Tu dessines bien!*' You know, 'You're drawing well!' And after that, 'Bon', I'm going to be an art

teacher!" She took art in high school and remembers that as being where she felt most comfortable and successful. Needless to say, her ambition to become an art teacher was put seriously off course when she abruptly left high school and joined the army. After she left the army, she enrolled in a secretarial course in order to have work with which she could support herself.

However, she never abandoned her interest in art making and at the age of twenty-four she enrolled in a CEGEP Fine Arts programme at night school. It took her five years to complete the programme and prepare her application for university. She was unsuccessful in her application to UQAM but enrolled in that university's certificate programme in the hopes of developing her work and making a second application. Again she was turned down and when she finally managed to accost the Director and demanded a reason for her rejection she was told that her work was, "like, like a child, like *un adolescent*." It was "like you take a knife and you put it in your heart." Although she was terribly disappointed and experiencing profound self doubt, she re-applied to UQAM and Concordia as well. To her great satisfaction she was accepted at Concordia.

She showed me one of the works that she had done in the certificate programme prior to entering Concordia and which

she felt was indicative of the way she was working at the time. She went on to discuss an incident with the instructor of the course where she felt that she, and her work were getting the brunt of his

She had used strong colours and hard edged, geometric shapes to create an image of a female figure reclining amid green foliage and rock shapes. The foreground was filled with brown-purple wave shapes and the background was a geometric design of orange and yellow circles.

rather sarcastic critiques. She confronted him about her feelings. This seemed to come as a great surprise to him, since he apparently felt that she was doing well (although apparently not well enough to get into the degree programme). She had the satisfaction of finding that he gave more thoughtful attention to her work thereafter. At her final critique she received praise for establishing a sense of unity between her various works as well as the highest grade in the group.

She admitted that she really enjoyed playing with bright colour but that she had become too comfortable in the stylised geometric kind of representation and the very controlled "one colour at a time" approach. Moreover, "It wasn't giving me any emotion. It's like that at the middle of here (gestures to her body) where the emotions are. Ah! I felt nothing." While she recognised her desire to break out of that comfortable and previously successful style, it proved to be a difficult and painful process. It was not made any easier by the blunt criticisms of her first painting instructor at Concordia who was "not a guy that would talk too much at the time. If you want him to talk, you would have to talk to him, to get some feedback." Tears were shed before she found a freer and more expressive way of working. Curiously, she observed that,

Teachers that really have had a lot of influence on me were basically the ones that demanded the most of me, that demand a lot. They shook me up, but after that I would react. But in a good way, because after that, I would probably change my art, it could become better and intense.

It does seem that the instructor did eventually find a way of setting assignments for her so that they did engage her in the search for greater freedom

and gesture that she herself had been seeking. She showed me a series of three paintings that were done in her first course and she expressed her satisfaction with the progress she had made. There was a very definite change of form and palette. She had begun by working from a still life of rock pieces and drapery and set herself the task of developing depth and form, over and above the assigned task of working up the overall image through washes of paint. Her assessment was,

That would be a kind of cavern. I have been attracted to rocks, drapery, and combining that. I guess maybe because they have this kind of organic shape and they are very sensual. I think that in pretty much all the paintings I have been doing the organic shapes will come back. And the sensuality has to be very prominent. One thing that is very important for me to do in my work, is there has to be a sense of mystery which I don't always obtain, but I'm always seeking for that. Right here you don't really know what's going on to the dark, down in the dark zone. Something's maybe behind there. Who knows? That's for people to decide or not; to be go back and back or not.	The first was a tall painting in tones of blue. She had worked to highlight prominent surfaces and to articulate the complex folds. Large, drapery wrapped objects dominated the foreground space on both sides of the image. They were rendered more prominent by the very dark space behind them. In the second painting, three columns of rock pieces were placed in the foreground space and strongly contrasted against a deep and undefined dark background. The surfaces of the rocks were textured and carefully defined.
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As she showed me the next image she commented that it marked a breakthrough on another front. Instead of taking her usual laboured approach, she had completed the work in a single three hour session. Again, non-specific organic shapes pushed into the light in the foreground and were folded back into a deep and ambiguous background space. However, where in the previous work there had been a pillar of stone along the right hand edge of the work, there was

now a suggestion of a nude male torso with an abruptly truncated penis. For her, this had been inadvertent, it just appeared. She commented,

If you look at the left part here, you can see kind of a body of a man. Basically, that's what I saw in it. What happens in a couple of my paintings, some images come out, that you don't see right away. This happens, not because you want it. . . . I kind of like that kind of a thing. That doesn't happen right away, only happens when you're done.

Under the tutelage of her next painting professor, she had moved farther into abstraction. She had turned to using sections of found images as a starting point for her work in abstraction and felt that that had been a very useful approach. While she was struggling to grasp the technical and formal aspects of the art of painting she was also concerned that her work should be expressive of certain emotional qualities. In particular, she was fascinated by the suggestions of hidden, mysterious dark spaces embedded within the works. In light of her wish to capture this quality, she particularly valued the advice of her professor,

The first of three works from this course was smaller, and the foreground object/figures had now expanded to cover the entire painting surface. However, the softer yellow, grey, green hues that she had used were intruded upon by elongated shapes of black that cut through the calm aesthetic of the surface

He was saying that it's better to produce a painting, let's say in three hours time, because you're keeping the same emotions, the same feelings that you are into. Because if you change, the next day, when you go back to your painting you will not have the same emotions or feelings.

She then showed me two paintings with which she was extremely pleased. They both originated from a photograph of a swampy forest so the colours, shapes and spaces were related to that environment. She discussed the qualities that she particularly appreciated.

I really do love this painting because, even though it was very monochromatic, you still feel the strong gestures and you still see a sense of light. Light and dark in the paintings and a bit of volume. But if you compare to what I was doing before, the hard edge, here the edges are very soft. I was trying to get away from the hard edge as well. I guess it is one of my favourite paintings, (Laughter) I would say, because I did it in a short time and the emotions really come out here. It's very sensual again, very organic. You still see a sense that we maybe can walk in the trees.

I went back to a photograph which was mainly about trees and like a swamp in the foreground. But it's very dark, so again there is mystery in that kind of picture.

The final painting that we looked at was created from a very different motivation. Her ten year relationship with her boyfriend broke up, leaving her feeling quite depressed and alone. She was somewhat apologetic about the subject matter (a vase of flowers) but her main intention was to fight off her distress by bringing more colour into her work. "Just to give it, like giving it some light and distance. My life is a lot of colour, you know. I needed that to feel good about myself." She was satisfied that the painting had met her requirements.

She was no longer involved in painting, although she assured me that she had not abandoned the medium altogether. We went on to discuss the work that she had done in the Multi-Media class. Most of this work had been disassembled but she had photographs of some pieces and some parts of others. She had been extremely involved in her projects and she insisted that that work had marked a major turning point in the way she related to the whole process of art making. This was facilitated by the possibilities afforded by the different media but also by other aspects of the course.

It became very serious. I was very implicated in what I was doing, and I learnt a lot. I learnt about myself. I maybe tried to solve certain problems

with myself. It really helped me to do what I have to do in life. For future art works I'll probably try to deal with some things that are very close to me, maybe still related to such matters as I was dealing with about women. I had never thought I would do that because I was never into political or social issues. I'm not a feminist, a radical feminist. I am in a certain way a feminist because I'm a woman, but . . . I think it is important to deal with women's issues, because you're a woman. The multi-media class, I'd above all. It's the story to get close to yourself, I say that it did open up my guess to really express yourself and try to eyes, so I could deal with change things around you, what people think issues - incest or violence or about women too. So yeah. I learnt quite a bit. submission, that I would To really affirm myself I would say. never deal with before.

The first work in which she herself was emphatically implicated was a video production in which she and another woman worked together. Her collaborator had been working with photographic images of herself and this may have influenced the form the video project took. However another comment from Irène suggests that she too contributed a specific aspect to the project and that deeper concerns were beginning to surface.

I: I guess I kind of started off at UQAM. One art work I did, I mentioned to you, was about mummifying myself. Like a mummy. You could just see my eyes, and how my whole body like, was the mummy, right?

MC: *Wrapped?*

I: Wrapped. It wasn't really wrapped, it was wrapped paint wise, on cardboard. It wouldn't be in fabric. It would be in a glass kind of ..

MC: *And this was a painting, or a sculpture, or .. ?*

I: It was a sculpture kind of piece that I don't have anymore. But, I put myself in a glass chamber. I don't know why I did that though. I'll have to think about it. (Laughter) I guess it was preservation.

They produced a tape in which Irène was seen wrapped in a great length of black fabric. In a series of stop action shots, the black covering was removed to reveal another binding, this time in white. Her face was covered by a black mask. Irène recounted her feelings at the time.

It's just that the experience was like feeling draped in this, feeling sort of like you were tied up and you couldn't move. That was very awkward. I can't say that I was feeling bad, but I was feeling like you just can't do anything. Anyone could take advantage of you. The other person would unwrap you gradually and I had a mask on my face, a black mask. So you didn't know it was me.

The personal details of her life were not known to me or to her classmates but it was clear that the class discussion about the video brought to light important personal considerations for her. The quality of "mystery" was perhaps also a hidden pain. The experience of being physically restrained within the context of creating the video occasioned a crucial insight into the relationship of her personal feelings and ideas, to the content of her art works. She continued to examine the feelings of restraint, vulnerability and submission that were evident in the work, although more in the sense of the impact of those demands on women in general. As she began to work on her final project, she focused her attention on the institutions, particularly organised religions, that promote and perpetuate constraints on the roles of women.

I look back at my religious background. I am Catholic but I don't practice . . . I know that religion has overpowered women quite a bit in the negative view, where women had to stay home and produce the children. Women were not free to do what they wanted to do with their lives, and I didn't like that aspect. As I went through more research, I was looking at all the religions and women but mainly looking at all the submissive details that would go through time and history.

The performance/installation work that she produced consisted of a female form, cast from her own body, draped in black and bound with heavy rope. Beside it stood a lectern which she had build, and on which she had placed a

handmade book. The floor and walls were covered with a white cloth. Roses were strewn across the floor. To present the work she stepped forward and put on a pair of white gloves, "as if you were in church." She was dressed in black and wore a lace veil over her face. She then went to the lectern and read some of the passages from the book. The rest of the class were invited to put on the gloves and examine the text more closely. She described the texts to me.

I: I started off with the Catholic religion, since I come from that background. I went back to Adam & Eve. These are pretty hard scenes. Okay! Look at that! You see here the woman and the snake and all that. . . . Here you have the picture which really shocked me, . . . where you see the serpent with the woman's head. That is very shocking.

MC: *Really laying on the blame eh?*

I: Oh yeah, the blame and you see the man here he's covered up and you don't see hardly anything of him. The woman is given all this negative criteria, with the apple in the hand (Laughter) Shoot! It's like, no way! The next one here, are the nuns (Laughter) when they cover their heads completely and robes and whatever, and a priest talking. It says, this comes from Timothy, in the Bible. It's Timothy, passage two, I think. It says here:

I wish then that the man pray everywhere lifting up pure hands without wrath and contention. In like manner, I want woman to be decently dressed, adorning themselves with modesty and dignity, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothing, but with good works such as become women professing godliness. That a woman learning in silence with all submission. For I will not allow woman to teach or to exercise authority over men, but she is to keep quiet. For I was not deceived but the woman was deceived and was in sin.

So, I think that was a good part, a very good part. They say about the woman with the covering the heads again, you see an example of an old lady that has a scarf on her head. Okay? But that's like they say:

But every woman praying or practising with her head uncovered disgraces her head. For it is the same as if she were shaven. For if a woman is not covered, let her be shaven. But it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaven, let her cover her head.

Then it says:

A man indeed ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and the glory of God. But, woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman but woman from man. This is why the woman ought to have a sign of authority over her head, because of the angels.

MC: *Yeah, as you say, "Guess who wrote it?"*

I: Yeah, guess who wrote it. Yeah.

She went on to comment on images and text that drew attention to the double standard applied to women, to the seemingly unquestioned authority of the Pope and to the imposition of strict codes of dress and behaviour under other religions. The images were laser copies of religious paintings and images from newspapers and magazines such as *National Geographic*. The texts were from the Bible and other religious books as well as print media such as this photo caption,

Bright colours are worn for happy occasions. But if women wear colourful colours in the street, it's like if they were nude, seen nude, in our country.

There were some points where her observations were close to a "we/them" kind of simplification of complex cultural and political situations. However, her fundamental point was about the world wide role of religious dogma in the subjugation of women. At the end of the book she had made some references to women centred religious followings. She mentioned the work she had done in her Drama in Education class, where she had been introduced to the writing of Joseph Campbell¹. It had been an important source for her growing awareness of the spiritual power of myths, many of which included powerful goddesses. She concluded the book with a poem quoted in part below. It is entitled *When a Woman Feels Alone* and is from an unknown source. In the poem the author drew the archetypal image of the old woman as the *sage femme*, the midwife, who is woman's link to deep, primal forces.

¹ Joseph Campbell. *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth* with Bill Moyers. New York: Apostrophe S Productions, Mystic Fire Video in association with Parabola Magazine. Videotape recording. VHS 1/2 in. 1988.

From as deep as the ancient root of the redwood.
From as deep as a woman's heart sprung open
Again
To a hard birth or hard death.
Here under the shock of love I am open
To you primal spirit
One with rock and waves
One with the survivors of flood and fire.
Who have rebuilt their home a thousand times.
Who have lost their children and born them again.
The words I hear are Strength, Laughter, Endurance.

The poem expresses a kind of woman-centred essentialism that, I know is crucial to many women who seek to re-establish spiritual connections in which they can feel truly valued and empowered. When I asked about the response of her peers to this work, she reported that,

I think maybe they were shocked. They were very emotional. I remember, Hannah, for example, was extremely emotional about that. She even cried at one point, because maybe she felt that she was going through the same kind of thing in a certain way, where she had lived a certain submission.

Two years later, in her Diploma year studio class she continued to pursue her confrontation with the hegemony of the Catholic Church. She had come to speak to me about her original concept for the work because she felt I knew her and the ideas that she had been working on. She was reluctant to speak with the male course instructor. We talked about the research that she had done since she was in my class and I encouraged her to work from a position that she understood from her own experience. In the end she constructed a reliquary in the form of a Gothic arch shaped box, the front of which opened to reveal her artistic statement inside. The exterior was painted white with gilt trim and an elaborate

double cross was cut out of the front. An image of Christ was placed on each door and it had originally been presented with blue votive candles from the Oratoire St-Joseph. She had very deliberately chosen to use the obvious Catholic symbols that had been omnipresent in her upbringing. A small plaque hung below it, on which she had written:

The candles on each side of the
Reliquary are lit up in the Memory of
Women through History until this day,
Who suffered or died through torture,
burnt at the stake, beheaded and
who were and still are being mistreated
In our present society.

Inside, the back panel was covered with a collage of images and captions that specified the horror of violence perpetrated against women; women battered, abused, and murdered by their husbands and lovers; women burned as witches; the tortured martyrdom of female saints. Some of the captions were cut from magazines and conveyed the pain of survivors, "Being married to this man was like being a prisoner of war. He wouldn't even let me cry". Another read, "It's like living through your own murder. My whole life flashed before me". Others carried blunt and disturbing facts,

Violence against women is America's favourite violent crime. One out of every three women murdered in America is the victim of a husband or boyfriend. Every fifteen seconds a guy beats a girl.

In front of all this was a black haired Barbie doll, hung on a cross. She was bound with barbed wire and gagged. Irène explained that,

I chose the Barbie doll image for one reason; because it is a type of violence that is done to women, maybe more on an unconscious level. . . . But I would say that it would give women a certain stereotype image that would provoke some sickness too, like bulimia and *anorexie*. So I find that is very unhealthy, and say well, women shouldn't be made this way. It's not true. We're made with female shape, not all straight and skinny bones.

And putting on the scarf on her mouth would be to suffer in silence. Which would be related to me in certain sense. I did suffer, for a couple years before I came out with the incest.

She had also included images that depicted the torture and martyrdom of various, since beatified, women.

I: Yeah, but if you look at this one right here, it's very, very hard to look at. Where you see that the man, there's one man that pulling her hair, another one that has his long . . .

MC: *Pinchers*.

I: *Pinchers*. Ripping off her tongue. And you can see that she's really, she's tied up all along the body so she can't move. She can't even scream. She can't do anything. There's *Jeanne D'Arc, aussi*.

These last two works were particularly important and meaningful for her. She was quite pleased that the images that she had presented had elicited the shocked reactions that she had anticipated. She had the satisfaction of researching, developing and presenting art work in which she felt a personally implicated.

I'm on a learning process. Mainly all the experiences that we did in that course really gave me a lot and gave me more sense to my art work. . . . So for me that was much more important and to deal with subject matters that are more close to me, which I haven't really been doing in my other art work. Like they're not as close to me. And I find that I can go on from there.

Since she made a point of saying that her experience in the Multi-Media class had been so important to her, I asked her if she could be more specific about the qualities that promoted her satisfaction. She replied,

I didn't know what was really into this issue until maybe I talked to you, and you would question. It was your question methods that would make me talk. After that you would respond to that in a certain way that would. Well, I mean, from the questions I was asking, then you 'd say: "Well go that way, or go this way" you know. And from there, go whatever way and come back to you and talk about it again and see if I was on the right path. But there was always a continuous feedback, and a give and take all the time. There was always, I'm feeding you but you're feeding me at the same time, so there's always communication. . . . That's extremely important.

She asserted that she was "an artist above all before being a teacher", but since she is expecting to be an art educator, I asked her about any other qualities that she valued in a teacher. Her answer reflected insights not only into her own experience as a student but also insights provided by her teaching internship.

You have to be very diplomatic when you are teaching, when you're talking about a person's work. 'Cause that person's very sensitive, that person probably gave a lot in that work. Maybe it won't please you . . . but, you still have to try and find ways of giving positive criticism to the work. . . . You want that person to try to evolve, to go further, and to get better and better.

Irène had worked hard to reach this point in her life. Her strength of character has seen her through many difficulties. As she said,

I'm a person that likes to laugh a lot and have a playful surrounding. Just to make that feeling of aggressiveness, or try, to get that away. . . . Now I defend myself more than I use to, because I always was stepped on pretty much when I was younger.

Irène had been very open to the opportunity to speak with me about her life and work. Like many others in this study she anticipated that the research interview experience and the possibility to review the video tape at a later date would aid in her ongoing learning process. She commented that,

I never took the time really to address this issue (what I'm doing in my work) and talk about it. So this experience is a good experience for me, for

the first time to try, maybe from looking at the video I'll be able to see where it's leading me. (Laughter)

Although her relationship with her family has been difficult, she has had many very good friends to support and encourage her. In fact, she was on the verge of dropping out of half way through her last year because she had been ill and her internship had been disappointing, but a friend convinced her to push through the last four months. She was very happy that she had completed the year and achieved the goal that she had set for herself such a long time ago. Her wish for the future is that she continue to do her art work, perhaps develop her interest in jewellery design, and that she find some situation in which to begin her practice as an art educator. She goes forward with confidence and characteristic determination.

I have my place like anybody else and I will go for what I want, that I believe. Nobody can stop me. That leads the way.

Jeanette

Jeanette is a Franco-Ontarian in her mid thirties for whom studying in the Fine Arts Faculty has been the most positive experience of her life. She has overcome the damaging circumstances of her upbringing and learned to trust and take pleasure in her intelligence and creative abilities. At the time of our interview she was about to graduate from the Diploma Programme in Art Education, she was preparing to be married, and was eager to begin her teaching career. Her satisfaction was evident as she exclaimed, "I never thought I'd get here. Never in my wildest dreams!"

She had grown up in a Northern Ontario town where her father worked in the local pulp and paper mill. In spite of the environmental damage caused by the mill, the community remains attractive to her as a "nice little town", safer and more prosperous than the Montreal neighbourhood in which she has been living for the past four years. Class and ethno-linguistic prejudice were a reality, from the playground to the classroom, throughout her childhood and adolescence. She explained that, "the English community was the people running the administration side of it, the Francophones were always the blue collar workers."

She had attended a French Catholic school for her elementary and junior high education and then went to an English public high school. She remembered taking art for a year in junior high school and then again in twelfth grade. She always had excellent grades until mid way through high school. In spite of the fact that it was her first year in an English milieu, she placed third in her ninth

grade English class. Yet, in tenth grade a problem arose between her and the teacher and she had failing grades by the end of first term. She reported,

I was seeing the counsellor. There was obviously a conflict, a personality conflict. Today I think it was prejudice, I don't know for sure. But the counsellor told me that the only way I could avoid the problem was by going down, downgrading. So, instead of staying a Level 5 I ended up, to change teachers, my only choice was to go down to level 4 English. This is the thing that we French kids all got used to in that culture.

Unfortunately, the same teacher taught the only art course but, confident that "you can't fail somebody in art" Jeanette carried on with the course. "So I got through the year okay, without any verbal confrontations (Laughter) or anything. I knew she didn't like me so I didn't push it." Art was not a real priority in her life at the time anyway. She was very involved and successful in athletics ,

So I didn't get art, as far as I was concerned that was not part of my life. The major part of my life back then was sports. That's what maintained me. That's where I got my confirmation that people liked me. Whatever kids need out of society I got out of sports, discipline and all that stuff.

She aspired to become a Physical Education teacher but when she completed her high school courses the guidance councillor told her that her 77% average was much too low to even be considered for university. She did not even apply. She went to a college, took a secretarial course, and worked as a secretary for two and a half years before leaving her home community. During that time she enrolled in a recreational oil painting class where the demands for originality were not high but where she found that she had some skill and ability. Moreover, she really enjoyed it and found that it took her mind off the difficult issues that pervaded her personal life.

She said "Our family was always difficult. It was always a dysfunctional family." The conspicuous centre of the instability was her unrelentingly negative, alcoholic father.¹ She expressed understanding and sympathy for the very hard life he had led but she is also very aware of the destructive impact his behaviour has had on her life.

My Dad had a tough love strategy. Well first of all he doesn't know how to love, he doesn't know how to show love, so I never got that from him. We were five kids, I'm the oldest of five, four girls and one boy, and my brother got all the attention, all the love. If there was any to be given he got it all 'cause he was the son.

Nothing was ever good enough. If Jeanette did well at a sports event, he declared that it was only because the #1 athlete was ill that day. If she got 88% on a test and her sister got 91% she was criticised. She will allow that her father may not have meant it that way, that "when I say tough love, my Dad's strategy was 'You can always do better.' But he didn't give the love part with that, he just said, 'You can do better.'" Her self confidence was completely undermined. For years she had been convinced that she had been a poor student until this past year when she had to submit her old report cards to qualify for bilingual teacher certification.

I had no idea I had done so well, I had forgotten all about that, because to me, I hadn't done well enough, so I had just forgotten about it. And here I get my report cards and I'm up in the 90's, and I had no idea. It just blew me away to rediscover this, that I was a *good student*.

¹In speaking about "silent women" Belenky et al. describe a situation where, "These women are aware of power that is accrued to authorities through might but not through expertise. They do not envision authorities communicating their thoughts through words imbued with shared meanings. In their experience authorities seldom tell you what they want you to do; they apparently expect you to know in advance. If authorities do tell you what is right, they never tell you why it is right." (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1986, 27-28)

She was equally delighted and incredulous at having just been granted one of the Art Education Department's graduation awards for academic achievement. She remarked that, "It just really opened my eyes that, you know, all this belief that I grew up with, thinking I wasn't good enough, I was brainwashed."

Jeanette described her mother as being a proud woman who is well liked by everyone for her cheerful, helpful manner. She responded to my question about her relationship with her mother by first saying that her mother had always worked as a secretary. She went on to say that as a child, she had been very close to her mother.

I could never fault my Mother because she was always there for us. She was very loving. We were five kids, and she shared her love with all five. . . . Yeah. I wouldn't, to me, my Mother was an angel.

However she went on to tell me that the situation had changed.

It's changed and this has a lot to do with my Father being an alcoholic. I don't know if you're familiar with what alcoholism does to a family but my Mother's become what they call co-dependent. With the mental abuse of, "You're not good enough" like I just described, over the years my Mother has always also had to take a beating in that respect, mentally. When you've been told for thirty-five years that you're stupid, you lose.

She regretfully admitted that her mother had really just given up on the situation and her former good relationship with her mother was now much more difficult. She feels that her mother's inability to confront the situation feeds the dysfunction of the family, "which is really too bad and it pisses me off". Her image of her mother as a strong person has faded and when Jeanette visits her parents it is now her mother with whom she has problems.

J: I won't get into glitches with my Dad anymore because I've learnt how to deal with him. But I haven't learnt how to deal with her. Yeah, it's the hard one because the last thing I want to do is condemn her. I mean, my God, she's a saint for putting up with what she's put up with all these years.

MC: *Are you worried too?*

J: Yeah, definitely. It pisses me off it's because I know she had it in her before but she's given up. Now she's just feeds into the problem.

In spite of all this distress, Jeanette remains loyal to her commitments to her family. Holidays and family events are a high priority with her, even if they are sometimes difficult to handle. In spite of the way her father favoured him, her brother is very important to her and they are close. She made no particular description of her relationship with her sisters other than that they are in regular contact. However, she does feel that other family members, like her mother, have yet to confront the situation in a healthy way that will promote change.

The events of Jeanette's life have both forced and encouraged her to see the dysfunctional nature of her family and the damage that she had experienced because of it. She moved out of the confusion of home immediately after high school but the profound feelings of inadequacy, and the unrelenting desire to gain parental approval overshadowed her life for years. Secretarial work was not really a very satisfying occupation but it was approved by her family. Even when she moved from the community, she continued in that line of work for another five years. Eventually her lack of enthusiasm led to her being dismissed from her job, to her great dismay. "I was quite hurt. I had never had such a failure happened to me in my life, you know." First she had to admit that she really was quite fed up after eight years of working and that she could not

continue . She took the summer off and went to the beach to enjoy herself. By the end of the summer she had decided that she wanted to go back to school. Thus confronted with the frightening decision about what to do with the rest of her life she was forced to reconsider her priorities. ²

I went to the college, checked it out to see what was open, there were two programs left open. It was general arts and science . . . and Fine Arts. So I went into the Fine Arts Program.

Her intention was that she would take the course for a year to get back into studying and "just do this for fun." It turned out to be much more important.

It was strictly, purely for me! I was doing it selfishly. My family did not approve and that was something that was difficult. All through that programme I felt quite selfish because I was so used to doing things to please my family rather than myself. But after the first year I loved it, and it was for me, so I stuck it out, and I did it for 3 years. . . . I didn't take half, not even a quarter serious the way I'm taking it now, because back then I didn't think it would ever get me anywhere.

She did not take on the attitude of a diligent art student. She was disciplined enough to do her assignments and attend classes, but she maintained her social life and sports activities and "didn't walk around with art stuff under my arm all the time." Unfortunately her instructors didn't seem to take her all that seriously either. She came into conflict with one particular instructor over the marking in an art history course. Students were required to write weekly

² In speaking about the transition from dualistic, "received" knowing to "subjective" knowing where there is a realization and trust in one's own voice. Belenky et al state, "To us, it appeared that it was only after some crisis of trust in male authority in their daily lives, coupled with some confirmatory experience that they, too, could know something for sure, that women from these backgrounds could take steps to change their fate and 'walk away from the past'. For them, a return to education followed the onset of subjective knowing: it did not usher it in." (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1986: 58)

papers, each for a pre-set number of marks. She received good marks and very positive feed back, "He was really impressed. He didn't think I had this in me and he kept writing on my papers, 'You've out done yourself again" and ta, ta, ta." When she added up her marks at the end of the course she ranked as an A grade but she was given a B. When she confronted him about it his reply was that, "I wasn't an A student, so I couldn't possibly get an A. . . . Even if I'd earned it he did not believe I deserved it." Her appeals for fair play were dismissed. Her fragile sense of achievement was cut out from under her and she once more saw herself as never having the ability to measure up to the assigned standard.

She considered going on to university but decided that she should work and pay her student loans first. She returned to doing secretarial work but very soon suffered "burnout" and an emotional collapse which, she said, "changed my whole life".³ She was unable to continue working and had no other option but to take her parent's offer to return to live at home. This was "a real shocker, after ten years, because I came to confront the fact that my father is an alcoholic." She was already in a very vulnerable state and found herself in the middle of a very unhealthy situation.

I was being put in the middle of whatever incident. Where there was blame to be put, I was getting it because I was the vulnerable one. If my Mom and Dad were fighting it was my fault. If this happened it was my fault, so all

³ "As the survivor struggles with the tasks of adult life, the legacy of her childhood becomes increasingly burdensome. Eventually, often in the third or fourth decade of life, the defensive structure may begin to break down. Often the precipitant is a change in the equilibrium of close relationships; the failure of a marriage, the birth of a child, the illness or death of a parent. The facade can hold no longer and the underlying fragmentation becomes manifest. When and if a breakdown occurs, it can take symptomatic forms that mimic virtually every category of psychiatric disorder." (Herman 1992, 114)

this stuff. And I said, "Un-uhn, you're not going to do this to me. You invite me home to get better, you're not gonna put this guilt trip on me." And I'd finally had it up to here, and that's when I looked for therapy.

She had a very hard year. No other family members were prepared to accept her opinion of the situation. They refused to acknowledge the alcoholism problem. However, she persisted and came to understand the situation in her family and the impact it was having on her life.

It was a year of growth for me, a year of a lot of pain, but the best year for me, because it turned everything around. Finally I cut loose from my Dad. Up 'til the age of thirty I was doing things to please my family, but I couldn't please my family, and I realized that.

It was at this time that she met her fiancé from whom she received tremendous support and encouragement. With his help she came to the decision that she should continue her education. During that time she had an opportunity to teach some art classes, including photography and painting, at a local French cultural centre. That brief experience was wonderfully positive and convinced her that she should pursue a degree in art education. Concordia was her choice and the Art Education Department turned out to be the right place at the right time for her. The positive approach that she encountered with most of her teachers was a new experience for which she was truly open and ready.

At Concordia there was a new side, there was a new twist to art. It was dealing with you're feelings, dealing with what was inside of you. Dealing with your everyday life, and it was acceptable. To me, that was perfect for

I called my burnout a re-birth because from that point on I worked towards a new me. I learned I didn't like myself. I was really not very proud of myself at all. I didn't like anything I had done. I didn't believe in myself. When I had my burn-out, I started to learn about the cause and the contributions, I started putting everything together I was able to allowing myself to believe I could accomplish something.

me because it was what I needed. Actually for me it turned out to be very therapeutic. I mean, it was a growing period. I learnt so much about myself, and it allowed me to get to where I am now. It's only been in the last two years that I can honestly say that I'm recognising my self as, I can have confidence now. I know that I can be confident, because I have something to be confident about. I hadn't learned it before.

She contrasted this with a situation at college where the teacher took a student's work and he tore it apart in front of all of us. I thought that the most awful thing I'd ever seen in my life. If he had done that to me, I would have cried on the spot. It was a guy that he did it to, and he didn't show how he felt, but you could tell that he was hurt. How could he do this to him?"

Although she felt that her college diploma should have entitled her to an exemption from the

ART 200 introductory course, her chagrin dissolved under the tutelage of a wonderfully open and encouraging professor, "who drew the positive out of everything." She had an equally enriching experience in her drawing class.

She had made us read a Joseph Campbell⁴ book over our holidays, a mythology book. . . . Se wanted us to research something within ourselves that we got a connection from the book and we did a series about that. . . . It was the beginning of knowing how to research and connect art to it, to draw something from the research and connect it to myself. It was really there that that part of it began and I liked that. To me it was like the jackpot. It was everything I could ever hope for.

Her painting course turned out to be the one difficulty. She was quite prepared to admit that her work needed a lot of development and she expected that she would receive instruction as to how she could improve. She complained that, "The teacher gave us nothing to work with." He was, "an accomplished artist but not a good teacher," who in her view, "put his energy into those he believed were talented".

⁴ Joseph Campbell has written extensively on the power of myth in relation to human creativity, imagination and spirituality. Jeanette did not recall the particular text that was assigned.

So he didn't help those out who were there for Painting 200, supposedly a basic beginning course At Christmas I went in for my assessment. We had to bring five or six paintings to show and it was a twenty minute interview. During twenty minutes we sat and talked about the weather, what we were doing for Christmas, all superficial conversation. At the end of twenty minutes he said, "Okay, you're off the hook." And I went, "Excuse me, but I brought these paintings. I thought we were supposed to be looking over these paintings and discussing my work." And he goes, "Ah, Jeanette, let's face it. Your work's boring." That was the end of it. I never had the guts to come right out and say to him, "Listen, I paid for this course. Do you think you could come and teach me something?"

He would come into the course and sit by one or two people through the whole four hours every week, and laugh with them the whole time. If I was lucky, he'd come by my tableau once a course, sometimes he didn't come at all, and would make one remark to the effect of, "I hate purple, why do you use purple?" or, "I hate that icicle shape, why are you using that icicle shape?" It was all negative, so that was one bad experience that I had .

Nathalie, so competent and sure of herself, had the same story. Neither named the instructor but I suspect that he is the same one.

Of course it hurt . . . but when I put it all in perspective it wasn't just me who was getting it. It was every one else around. The person who got the attention . . . and this was another thing. There was one male in our class, fourteen females, and the male got the attention, the male got the A+.

The one work that she showed me from that time was an interpretation of a poem that she had found, "since my teacher was not giving me something to work with." For her it touched on ideas of loneliness and memories of the North where she grew up. Regardless of the instructor's disregard for her work she was pleased with the initiative that she had taken and with the final result.

It was a monochromatic work in blue, divided into three areas. The upper third was a dark, stormy sky with the moon low on the horizon. The centre ground was a smooth, slick, shimmering surface of water. The foreground was a wedge of rough ground in the left corner with two small trees.

She was very clear that she was not just expecting a pat on the back. She insisted that she believed in the value of constructive criticism which, "should be used in a way that will make you search further, always to search further, and

not necessarily to find the perfect, what's perfect." She also was able to draw meaningful connections between her personal life, her educational experiences and her role as an educator.

As far as who judges, it doesn't matter to me. Maybe I have a problem with being judged because I've been judged so much, because of my relationship with my Father, always looking for approval and never getting it. Maybe that's why I have a problem with stipulating this on anyone else. I believe in fairness. I believe in giving somebody a break. I believe in allowing people to grow. And by stifling it, by saying, "I hate," where's that going to get anybody? If I've learned anything, it's from going teaching myself, through the psychology courses and through my own experience. Kids are learning. They are people. They are like sponges and they need guidance. If you give them negative feedback where's that going to get them? If you give them positive, at least that gives them courage. It gives them the guts to try something out. If they fail, I think that comes in perspective. If you fail something one day but you make good on the other day, you learn.

The next year was equally satisfying. She was in a Drama in Education course where another very generous teacher opened up yet another dimension of artistic engagement. To her surprise and pleasure, her teachers would and did give A's and A+s when the work merited those grades. In ceramics she had another wonderful teacher, who again, "made me research, delve into myself again and to connect my work with myself." She continued,

It was always reflective work. It was always something that made you grow. His course was made that way, was structured that way.

In her second painting class she had a much more felicitous relationship with her instructor. He was an advocate of abstraction, which in fact was a painting genre to which she was quite amenable

Two small blue painting, about 12" x 10" and 14" x 16", were indicative of her work from that class. The first was of sleek panels of blue that overlapped as they receded into a deep vortex at centre right. The upper part of the second one was like a flash of Northern Lights across the sky. The lower part was a

when it was presented from a perspective that coincided with her own way of thinking.

colour with a patch of dark scratches that seemed to thrust back through an undefined space.

'This guy didn't know me from Adam, and we didn't talk a whole lot, but he would try to read my paintings. And abstract as my paintings were, the way he interpreted them was that I was getting my feeling out.

She talked about the projects that she had done in ARTE 430 as being extremely important in helping her come to terms with the relationship of self, art and learning. Her wish was to have the viewer focus attention on the many ways children are diminished by the language that is directed at them by adults and by their peers. She explained,

It was a rather elaborate installation in a small dark classroom which had been arranged in a variety of presentations. One corner was set up as a living room, and a video of children's cartoons played silently on the TV. The room was filled with the sound of an audio tape of popular music interspersed with verbal retorts to children. In another corner was a pile of children's fairy tale books. The final part was a series of computer generated slides with captions that spelled out the negative meanings and connotations of words used in everyday speech.

And the end of all the words being *violence* because if you get the definition of violence, if you don't look it up in the dictionary, you think violence is only a physical thing. But violence is not just a physical thing. It can also be an emotional, a mental, anything that violates anyone or anything, anything that violates is violent. It can be as subtle as these words, these nasty, childlike words, words that children use.

She was apologetic for her comment that for her much of her work was therapeutic rather than a manifestation of great talent. By therapeutic she meant,

Because it's making me grow. But if anything, it helped me to come to terms with my childhood. It helped me accept that it wasn't only me.

She continued,

It brought me outside of that and to realise that in everyday routine, normal life, such subtle things add up and make a child become what they become.

Through reflection and research for the project she gained some distance on her own experiences and realized that she must be a healthy, stable person in order to be an effective teacher and parent.

If anything that project helped me look outside, and it made me aware of how maybe I could change, because I can't change other people. If I'm gonna make a difference, it's by starting by myself, with myself.

She retraced the process of projects, thinking and art making that contributed to her personal and artistic development in that course. She had been particularly sensitive to the course structure where I had encouraged students to ground each new project on their learning from the one they had just completed. Her first work had been a very formalist drawing/collage. However, a photogram project that I had used as an introduction to the darkroom proved to be quite important to her in terms of content. Upon reflection, she realised that the bra that she had chosen as imagery for the project related back to the way she felt "proper" women were expected to constrain themselves. The other element, a maple leaf referred to the special relationship she saw her father extended to her brother as they watched the Saturday night hockey game on TV, probably a reference to the Toronto Maple Leafs. For the photography project that followed, she focused her attention on her response to a fire in her neighbourhood, particularly because she has a great fear of fire. She had printed the photo in very high contrast and I recall that I commented on how in doing so she had blacked out the details of the image that would have given it more depth and character. She had taken that remark very much to heart and started to think

that perhaps she should give more attention to the subtleties and complexities of the situation with which she was dealing.

The next assignment had been a Super 8 film loop/sound mix project to be presented as an installation work. She had collaborated with another young woman to produce a work dealing with street violence and the ever present threat imposed on women. As well this was immediately following the murder of four engineering professors at Concordia, and only three years after fourteen

women were shot at the *Ecole Polytechnique*. Rather than focus specifically on those events they chose to deal with the wider issue of violence.

J: That's where we decided to do the piece on showing how very easy it was to buy a gun. We went to Canadian Tire and we taped it. He showed us. It's a little bit harder than that to do, but I think what we just wanted to show

MC: *If you'd wanted to buy the gun, you could have.*

J: Yes. We wanted to make that point. And with the sound piece that we added to it, it wasn't subtle at all.

Garbage cans and rubbish were piled around a cement column in the studio. Yellow police tape marked off an area, in the centre of which was a chalk outline of a body. The film image, projected onto the column, showed a woman walking into a gun store, trying out several weapons, selecting one, paying for it, and walking out. The sound track was a montage of street sounds that faded away as a woman's footsteps became more pronounced. They were joined by a heavier step and a gun shot rang out.

Following our conversation about her work in ARTE 430 we began to look at the pieces she had selected to talk about. The first was what she referred to as her *Dysfunctional Chair*. The assignment had required that the students create a work that related to personal experience but it was also required that they research their concepts and relate it to a wider concepts of artistic practice. She explained how she had come to understand how, in a family where alcoholism underlies the general dysfunction, dualistic thinking dominates the whole unit.

Everything is black or white. There are no shades of grey. She had recognised that mode of thinking in herself but, happily she had come to realise that she had overcome the guilt, confusion and pessimism that formerly had pervaded her life. The dualistic characteristics were most emphatically black, white and angular on the leg that represented her father.

It was a ceramic work in the form of a three legged stool, the legs of which represented each of her parents and herself. Each leg was a mosaic of coloured tiles shaped and coloured to represent the unique characteristics of the individuals in the relationship. The legs came together around an elegantly shaped bottle of wine, the top of which protruded about two inches above the surface of the seat.

Her mother was represented in flowing curves, in less drastic contrast and with a panel that was an art reference to Jackson Pollock, one of many alcoholic painters. Jeanette's own representation was an irregular contour of curves and jagged cut aways. The tiles on one side were blue, almost iridescent, which she

said was to represent her dreams and the fact that she had accomplished many of them. They also stood for the happy rewards she had learned to give herself, like the trip to Europe the summer after she completed her BFA, and the lovely wedding day⁵ that she and her fiancé were planning. There was also a rough black side, "This is the *very* dark side. At my worst that's what this is showing. It's dark, it's ambiguous and it's confused. "

I made that discovery at my marriage preparation course . . . We were having a discussion in our seminar and the leader said something like, "Well, how could you've changed, how could you have done something? And the only thoughts that came to my head were very positive and then she came out with all the negatives parts and I go, "Oh Wow! I've won! I'm not thinking negative any more." She had come up with the negative stuff and all I could think was positive.

⁵" To wed means to join, to unite two different beings in a sacred search for meaning in our lives. Every soul wedding brings us before Being, before the ground of the soul. It is this soul wedding, the inner wedding, the royal or divine marriage, which for Jung is a symbol of the culmination of the individuation process. (Leonard 1987, 193)

With regard to the bottle of wine she said,

I vowed that, contradictory as it may seem, the day I drink the bottle will be the day my dad gives up drinking. Which may never happen.

The circular top of the stool presented the most optimistic element in the work. For her the circle represented the family unity that she so deeply desired. Notwithstanding the problems, she assured me that, "we always love and miss one another a great deal." She had divided the circle into three segments to represent the happy times in her childhood, like being at the beach in summer when her father would unbend a bit and play with them in the water.

A second ceramic piece was a more cynical depiction of the same issue.

It represents my family, the family revolving around the king, the Almighty, the boss of the family, the boss of the house. . . . The bigger goblet here, representing my mother, but not that much bigger, because my father treats my mother as a child as well. And the five kids, all different colours to demonstrate that we all turned out differently, every single one of us. . . . I guess that's probably normal in all families, but I'm so aware of it because I've studied what alcoholism does to family members. The writing, "This is a water goblet." or "This is a water decanter." because it's the hypocrisy that the alcoholism has brought to our family, the phoniness, "We drink but we don't tell anybody."

The bulbous base, long neck and red cork of the decanter conveyed emphatically phallic connotations. Around it were placed six goblets of different colours, each with its own off-centre tilt. The words, "This is a water decanter." and "This is a water goblet." were written down the sides.

Much of her learning in her BFA had been undertaken from a very subjective point of view. She was going to school to learn about art making for her own growth, to learn about herself and to find ways of expressing her feelings and ideas. She could now truly value her own judgements about her life and her art work and tell me that, "I am proud to say that I'm not looking for

somebody to approve anymore. That's not important anymore, whereas it used to be my whole life." She had been introduced to a wider body of knowledge and she had acquired not only the skills but the desire to use that knowledge. She insisted that her own ideas had a valid place in relation to the opinions of others.

I'll read everything that's been said on this or that, and I dissect it. I'm all over it and I come to make an opinion based on it. It in fact becomes an opinion. I mean, this critic had this opinion, this critic had that opinion, well I become the third critic. I make my own opinion from what I've gotten from each of them. . . . I'll always try to back up my opinion of course, because what you're doing in research is your gathering information from others and you're forming your own conclusions.

She recognised the contributions made by her teachers. Through her academic work she had come to appreciate the ways in which external knowledge could enrich her own internal understanding.⁶

Something really magical happens when I do research. I don't know if it's like this for everybody else, but I always manage to pull something out, and it always relates to me somehow. But it makes me grow and it makes me respect the artist so much more because I come to understand what the artist, or I think I come to understand what the artist is working through. So of course, how I do my art work, I look for in other people's art work.

Jeanette was looking forward with great optimism to a productive life, as an art educator, as an artist, as a partner in a happy marriage and perhaps as a parent. She had worked hard to accomplish her successes, successes from which her family and students stand to benefit.

⁶Belenky et al describe a position they call "Procedural knowledge; the voice of reason" that was fostered through formal, positive encounters with generous and knowledgeable teachers and/or counsellors. Women who hold this perspective hold new views on truth and power. "They have learned that truth is not immediately accessible, that you cannot 'just know.' Things are not always what they seem to be. Truth lies hidden beneath the surface, and you must ferret it out. Knowing requires careful observation and analysis." (Belenky et al. 1986, 93-94)

Kirsten

Kirsten is a quiet, sensitive woman in her early thirties. After working in a children's theatre troop for seven years she had enrolled at Concordia to complete a BFA in Art Education. She had just finished her teacher certification year and was taking some time to rest and consider the next step in her life. Like other women in this age group, she felt that she had come through a long period of confusion and insecurity and that her Fine Arts studies had provided her with a rich environment in which she had come to better understand herself and her art making. She now described herself as, "much more aware, more clear about everything." She reflected upon the changes in her life and described herself as,

Someone who has undergone a lot of changes deep inside, over the past ten years; going through a real struggle in my 20's, really unsure, really lacking confidence, really saying, "What am I doing?" and "I don't understand what I'm supposed to be doing or who I am."

Kirsten is confident that that period of uncertainty is behind her. She admitted that she can be very self-critical and that there has been an almost obsessive labour intensity about her work. She now recognizes that as a compulsion to be sure it was good enough, that she had worked enough to justify approval. When our conversation turned to a discussion about art criticism she frankly recalled a time when she simply didn't trust her own opinions. She thought her knowledge was insufficient, that she needed to know a lot more "stuff". She explained,

I may have had an opinion, I *did* have opinions before, but they were cloaked and I wasn't going to examine what I thought either, because I was too scared to examine what I thought.

Many factors have contributed to her present sense of self-confidence. but she spoke about two relationships that are particularly sustaining and stimulating. The closest is with her husband, a sensitive, artistic and musically talented man to whom she has been married for two years. For Kirsten, marriage has been exciting and fulfilling beyond her expectations. She valued the close and supporting relationship that she and her husband have, and she particularly appreciated the help he had given her throughout the "brutal" year that she had just completed. This relationship had developed during a period when she had been engaged in confronting and transforming the confused state of her life.

I think, before, I was barking up the wrong tree. When I first met him it was, this was when my perspective on people was changing. I was going through this whole transformation really. And all of a sudden I started to realise "Hey! Wait a second!" So that developed slowly but surely. He's wonderful; a very loving, wonderful relationship.

He had contributed his talents to several of Kirsten's projects, in particular, to her film/video/sound installations done in collaboration with Reva, the other significant individual in her present situation. Reva and Kirsten formed a dynamic and productive partnership to do an assignment in ARTE 430 and they have maintained their collaborative art production. The artistic collaboration has developed into a valued friendship.

However, before discussing her current artistic practice, I will sketch out her biography as she presented it to me. She had been born and raised in

Montreal. Her father had immigrated from Europe and established himself as a successful professional. Her mother is a Jewish Canadian, who had returned to university after a very acrimonious divorce and she now works as a social service professional. Kirsten has a sister who is six years younger than she. More than any other participant in this study, Kirsten grew up in a very artistically appreciative milieu. Her parents were very interested in the arts, and their social circles included many artists. They purchased art works from their artist friends and hung them in their home. They frequently took the children to galleries and museums and there were always materials and opportunities to do art work.

Her parents divorced when she was twelve years old. She and her sister remained with her mother after her father left the family. Her relationship with her father was seriously damaged from that point forward. She concedes that she was very sensitive to the pain that he had caused her mother and that she was influenced by her mother's bitterness towards him. However, she went on to explain that the situation was exacerbated by the fact that, "he lived with a woman who I really didn't get along with" and who, "really didn't want us there." Her relationship with her father remains difficult. As she said, "I don't think it'll ever completely repair itself My father has a lot of guilt."

She remembers herself as a very silent, shy child who didn't feel very strongly connected with her mother. However she observed that her relationship with her mother had improved significantly after her parent's separation.

All of a sudden, I could have a relationship with her. Before, somehow, something was in the way. Either it was my father or I didn't feel connected to her in any way at all, although she did to me, but I didn't to her.

After the divorce, "it finally opened a door." Her mother went back to school to study for a degree in Social Work and, "she started to talk to me honestly about feelings, and I started to open up, in that way, to her. And so our relationship really grew from there."

With regard to her sister, she suggested that the age difference between them accounts for the fact that they have never been particularly close. However, she reported that this is changing as they are finding more in common with each other, for example, the coincidence that they have both married men who came from South America.

There had been no particularly significant visual art education in either her elementary or secondary schooling. She had always taken ballet, jazz, and modern dance classes and when she attended MIND, an alternative high school, she became very involved in theatre. Attending MIND was a very valuable experience because it was a small school and there was an emphasis put on student involvement. Her interests in drama were encouraged and she went on to attend the theatre programme at Dawson College. She didn't feel that the programme was very well taught but she appreciated that she learned about a wide range of theatre arts and acquired some useful technical skills. For the next seven years she pursued a very enjoyable career doing theatrical works for students in schools in Montreal and Eastern Canada. It was hard work.

Every day we were doing two or three schools, five days a week. So that was gruelling but it was also wonderful, if you had wonderful people to work with, which I did most of the time. If you had some people who really liked to work in an ensemble, who were not prima donnas, then it was terrifically fabulous. And that was mostly my experience, that it was fabulous. I had great people to work with and we had a lot of fun. . . . It was great, but then I had a bad experience, a very bad experience, and I realised that I'd been lucky up to now. (Laughter)

She didn't elaborate on that "bad experience" but whatever it was, the impact was significant. Kirsten was forced to confront the reality that to continue working in theatre in Montreal was going to be very challenging. There are limited opportunities for English actresses and the audition process is highly competitive and ego bruising.

So finally I said to myself, "Well, either you're gonna go whole hog, and you're gonna sell yourself like crazy, you're gonna do everything you need to do, and push , push, push, or you' re gonna quit." And I said to myself, "That's not my style. I'm not like that. I have a hard time. There's gotta be something else out there."

So she quit and worked for two years in a toy store while she attempted to re-focus her career aspirations. This period of uncertainty compounded the anxieties that she mentioned above and she went into therapy for assistance in dealing with the dilemma. In that interval she began to produce art works, primarily small greeting card sized drawings and collages. She also taught a private student for a

And then going into therapy, which was a big thing to do and it was fabulous, it turned me around completely. And I think you really change yourself. Yeah, just totally, my whole perspective on life changes.

while and suddenly realized, "Yes, I like this! I could do this!" She applied to Concordia where, because of some previously earned credits, she could

anticipate completing her BFA in Art Education in two years. The personal gain from this period is remarkable.

I don't know how to describe exactly what, just that everything started to look different to me. So that was really something, because it just came from inside. It wasn't like going from my head down into my body, it was the other way around. It was coming up through me.

She spoke enthusiastically about the revelation she experienced as she became aware of a whole new dimension of herself.¹

So it sort of springing up out of your gut, I guess, and heading, it leads you. So that's sort of what happened and my whole perspective of life changed. And I developed a group of friends, female friends, who were also going through the same thing, which I still have and will have forever (Laughter).

Her supportive group of women friends had been extremely important as she worked to resolve the tension between her emerging inner voice and the ambiguous notion of external power that had hitherto seemed to ordain the way things were supposed to work. Her women friends were "going through the same thing". They could recognize her dilemma as their own and affirm her new trust in her own feelings. Her partnership with Reva and the work that they have done together has re-affirmed her belief that women really need a supportive relationship and true friendship in order to go forward in the world.²

¹ "Our reading of the women's stories leads us to conclude that as a woman becomes more aware of her inner resources for knowing and valuing, as she begins to listen to 'the still small voice' within her, she finds an inner source of strength. A major developmental transition follows that has repercussions in her relationships, self-concept and self-esteem, morality, and behaviour." (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule. 1986, 54.)

² "Affection . . . means the state of influencing, acting upon, moving, and impressing, and of being influenced, acted upon, moved, and impressed by other women. Virginia Woolf expressed this . . . when she said, 'Only women stir my imagination.' She might have added, 'Only women stir me to action and power.'" (Janice G. Raymond in Heilbrun 1988, 96)

'Cause I think there's a lot of support in the relationship and I find that for women generally, there's not a lot of support, on the whole social level I mean. In school, in the business world, we're more criticised. We *should* do thing. Men are free agents. They can do what they want, and not be criticised for it. Women on the other hand, we're under the magnifying glass a lot of the time, and so obliged, and "You should do" and "You shouldn't" and "You should". So we need more support, and we need people around us who are going to help each other together. Because out there on your own, I think it's really tough for women.

She is confident that her husband and Reva³, along with others in her circle of friends share this perspective, and she replied that it would be to them that she would turn for advice about her art work, should she need it. She allowed that she might consult with me, but that she really didn't feel that, "there's a strong link or a strong connection" with any other of her instructors such that she could confidently seek their advice. Theoretical ideas were interesting to her but not very important unless it "connects to something that I am doing." She placed her trust in those with whom she felt she had a common understanding of art and life. She felt that she could learn from her peers as she mentioned a fellow student who had inspired Kirsten to be less compulsive towards her projects.

I learnt that from (the classmate) in last year's class. Because I saw what she did, and I thought her work was incredible. It always moved me incredibly, and yet she didn't brake her head over it. She had some sort of confidence somewhere that could allow her do to it, and just be very simple. Just in it's simplicity, was so incredibly powerful.

Her conviction was so strong on this point that, when she originally started her teacher training at McGill and realised that there were no women instructors in that program, she immediately asked to return to Concordia. She had been

³ A classmate who is also a participant in this study.

accepted at both universities, and the faculty at Concordia were pleased to accommodate her change of decision. For her it was a crucial moment.

K: The great thing about it was that I made a really big decision. For a few days I thought about it, and I just took the decision. Which is something I often harp over much longer. I don't know, and should I or shouldn't I. And this time I really

MC: *You knew.*

K: Yeah, and that's starting to happen more and more. More, really what's right in your gut and you follow that. So that was really great that I could do that and not feel at all, "I can't phone. I can't phone." You know, to give yourself the permission to say, "Oh yeah! I can phone." I can say, "Can you?" and if they don't, they don't. And if they do, they do, take me back.

She went on to add that she had always advocated women's rights,

But it was never really in my gut. Then it really hit me in my gut in the past couple of years, something happened. I think it had to do with being in school, and hearing you speak about it and hearing other teachers who were sensitive to the topic. And some of the experiences that I was having through my growth. All of a sudden being aware of it, really feeling it.

Her experiences at Concordia had made important contributions to her growth. She felt that she had learned a lot, that she could see the development in her work and that she had also learned a lot about the ways of learning. She asserted that, "What came first was my personal development. That made it so I was open to these things." She valued teachers who had not only allowed for personal development but who had shown, through their teaching, that there were ways through which she could access her underlying feelings and ideas. This concept was introduced by an Art Education instructor who, "actually instructed us. He said, "You sit in front of this piece and you're not here to say if

it's good or bad. Your here to say what *you* see." This provided a situation where she had, "the guts to actually say what I thought about it."

So that was something that I really learnt, and through you too. You did the same process and I think that's invaluable, that I learnt so much from that and you, neither of you said: "This is what art is, and this is how it should be judged." Neither of you said that. You let us discover for ourselves what it was. And that now we don't need a vocabulary or a rule book to go on. And that was a big plus. . . . 'Cause it takes a while, it took me a while anyway, before I realised that the most valuable thing I could do was just sit there and listen to myself really closely and carefully. And the slightest little flicker of thing that went through my mind, that's what I should talk about. 'Cause they're only slight flickers. You can't identify them. And you folks taught me to listen to that.

But I don't think, every class doesn't do that. They really, really don't. I've been in other classes that I took, studio classes where I said to myself, "These people have never had the experience that I've had and they don't know anything about this experience that I've had". So they still don't know how to look at a work of art and go with what comes to them.

In her first year her ceramics instructor also made an extremely important contribution to her personal and artistic development. He had insisted that regardless of what she thought her work *should* be like, "What's gonna come out of you, you can't help. . . . You're going to have to let what happens happen." As she began to work she was surprised, pleased and dismayed all at the same time.

I started to realise that my stuff was very humorous sometimes, very child like and I didn't necessarily want my art to be like that. I wanted to be serious and taken seriously, whatever. And when I started to see what was coming out of me I was going, "Oh jeez!" (Laughter) But he was saying, he gave me permission. He really appreciated what I had done.

At that point she still felt the need to be "given permission. This instructor conveyed that to her and enabled her to open up to the potential of her own work, to realize that, "what you do, whatever it is, however it comes out, it's you

and you're going to have to accept it somehow and find a way of working with what you have. " She felt that there was less an attitude of "trying to mould you into something" but rather "I'm just gonna help you create more and help you to be the person (that you are)." She really appreciated that he had made the point so clearly. She admitted that perhaps there had been other teachers who held the same perspective but for her "That was the first time I'd heard that and that was important." Moreover, it opened the doors to another very important step. She eventually came to understand that, "The most important thing for me is always just accepting, giving myself permission to be, to do what I want to do." This experience gave her a very important model for understanding the teacher - student relationship.

Teachers that I really felt very good about, were those teachers who acknowledge the individual as the individual and who would give you permission to be who you are. And there is an amount of respect there that's very important. Because I think, if you're blocked all the time, how can you move forward? So I think that element is really important. That for me would be the most important element in a teacher.

Her major work in the ceramics course was *A Shrine to the Environment*.

She had worked very diligently to create the very complex clay forms and was very satisfied to have accomplished the technically challenging piece. As for the concept, she said,

I don't know how I came to this idea really. I can't remember (Laughter). But I knew what I do love, I love the idea of enclosed, almost secret places, these treasure places, or this kind

It was in the form of an industrial smokestack, about two feet tall, round, white and conical. A ladder ran up the front of it. She released a catch and the front opened to reveal a brightly coloured world. Vines and grapes hung down and flowers flourished among them. Dragon flies and butterflies rested on petals. Small ceramic animals sat on ledges or in the foliage on the floor.

of thing. That idea often is present with me. So I ended up building a piece that would do just that. There's this big dichotomy between the inside and the outside, so that would be the statement. So this is meant to be the smokestack and inside is all of nature and all its many forms. (Laughter)

She very much regretted that because she was asthmatic, she had not been able to continue in ceramics. However her process of personal artistic growth continued on all other fronts. She showed me a series of autobiographical collages from her first drawing course. The idea for this series had come from the little cards that she had been creating for her own satisfaction in the years preceding her arrival at Concordia. She described her thinking about the work.

When this project came up I thought, "Well, I've never done one of those collages on a large scale." So I decided that's how I would do my series. So it would be these collages on a large scale and integrate drawing somehow. When I started, when I did these little card pieces actually, I really felt that this was really something very personal, very original. It wasn't something that had influenced me from anywhere. It really came from myself. I'd never seen anything like it. It's just; "I did it." I loved these little worlds that I'd created. So I decided to try it for the drawing course. Which was a step for me too because, I never really integrated some of the things I'd done outside and sort of made the thread so they could work in a classroom situation.

The works presented a visual interpretation of her life experiences. She said that the first was a memoir of her childhood; abundant with animals and natural surroundings. The second was about

Each work was a complex integration of many images and ideas presented in black and white, with certain images developed in colour. The first appeared to be a green space around which were arranged images of trees, mountains and animals like cats. A dark charcoal arch framed the top. The second was framed on three sides by a presidium and a colonnade, drawn in charcoal receded into a landscape. A dancer flitted across the stage. A hand protruded from the floor and an oval face seemed to be tumbling through space towards the stage. In the third, another archway provided a view out of the middle ground, into the blue Greek seascape. Small houses and stairways were seemingly stacked up the hillside to the left. The fourth collage was seen from the perspective of a woman looking down her nude body and through the wedge of space between her raised knees. A child's face was superimposed on the left knee.

her experiences in the theatre and the third was about her travels in Europe. She concluded with an image which, she said,

Has to do with being a woman, just realising that I could have a child, that I could bear a child, and really feeling as a woman, that possibility. Which was something else that had happened to me. It was part of my transformation, which is something I could never, I couldn't even fathom the idea and all of a sudden my body was saying to me, "This is possible. You're ready to do this." So this was sort of looking into the future for me, this is really from my childhood into the future.

She went on to discuss how challenging she had found it to try to represent three dimensional space in her drawings and collages. I recalled that the mysterious quality that so intrigued her about that phenomena was quite evident in a collage she had presented in ARTE 430.

MC: I remember the collage that you did for that first sort of open assignment in the Multi Media class, was a collage, and secret places again, or deep space., I seem to recall deep spaces, that you had things hanging or kind of

K: I know. There was this one part where it was sort of like vines, and I remember you going up close to it and realising they were all little people and you sort of jumped back. You weren't expecting that. So that's what it was like, a secret place. That's something else that's always been important to me, something that's always been part of my aesthetic. When I started to work in three dimensions, that really came to fruition for me, the idea of space and creating space.

The next work she showed was a length of printed fabric that she had done in her Fibres class. It was her first important effort in colour and she was thrilled with the result. While watching the animated version of *Alice in Wonderland* she had been intrigued by the Grand PoohBah's question to

The ground colour was a vibrant pink-red. The words, "Who are you?" floated past in reverse with apparently unrelated elements like a chair and keys. Some of the multiples of the straight backed chair with a woven seat stood out strongly in dark blue while others, in gold, receded into the strong background colour. A very stylised female form, really only a head shape and two lines designating broad shoulders and arms seemed suspended between the layers.

Alice, "Who are you?" It was a question she was asking herself and the potential of the medium was conducive to an exploration of the complex concept of identity. For her the result had a very dream like quality, "because you have these layers of things, all these different images that are weird together." She had found particular satisfaction in the process of layering images, "all those different marks. . . . Silk screen, the hand drawn, and the photos, and photograms, and stencils." She had also taken pleasure in the rhythmic quality of the actual process of production.

She showed me another delightful piece from her Fibres class which she referred to as "a tent, almost a pagoda". The assignment was to create a habitat and her response was ,

I love the idea of habitat, an actual living thing, like the real thing. So I said, well I going to do my fantasy habitat. I did it, and it was like total fantasy to do it, to do it for my art class, and just have fun and enjoy it.

The tent was yellow and green in a kind of tiger skin pattern tie-dye technique. When it was properly mounted it would make a ring about eight feet in diameter and would stand about five and a half feet high. It reversed to reveal a blue background with irregular patches of pastel "clouds" strewn across it.

It was to hang on a metal loop and be hung from a tree. She described it as,

an open sky tent. It should have a very large, pink pillow in it that you can sit on, that's a bit elevated but I didn't get to that part. I realised after that it needed a huge pink pillow. It's really a fantasy tent, and this part comes out a lot, it's the theatrical part. . . . I ended up making almost stages and costume work. So this tent goes on a hoop and you can also reverse it.

She had some photographs that she had taken to document it installed as she had intended it to be. When it was hung in the tree it appeared as if it were a piece of the sky there among the leaves and shadows. Loose in the open field it was a living, ever changing phenomenon. It had in fact become something quite different. The

fabric had been hung on it's metal hoop and her husband had used a broomstick to hold up the harness from which the whole thing was suspended. She recalled,

It was a very windy day when we took it out to photograph it and it was something I hadn't thought about. Of course, these things are done out of context and once you get into context you go, "Oh my God!" (Laughter) So it was flying around. It was quite exciting. I was waiting for it to be still to take photographs of it and then we thought, this is just taking on another life by itself. It's becoming a costume and a wind sock, and I could imagine a whole choreography with several of these. A puppeteer would do something like that. So we were just taking all the photographs of it in movement. It had a lot of expression in its movement. So it took on a whole element of a costume. And something interacted too, something alive, something that was not static, which was like the performance part almost.

It was very clear however that a very significant part of her work had been the three collaborative works that she and Reva had done. The first had been a film loop/sound installation in ARTE 430.

We'd done that piece with a wrapping and the unwrapping, and it had to do with a woman's identity. I don't know if we had exactly the same reasons; they were a bit different. For me it had to do with this transformation I'd undergone when your whole perspective changes, everything changes. I felt this sort of unwrapping, as this A female form, shrouded in white, stood in the studio. A film loop of a woman twirling and turning a great length of white fabric in the air was projected onto her form. Beside her, on a fabric screen, was the image of a woman wrapped in black, turning as the fabric that bound her was pulled away. Soft Celtic drum rhythms surrounded us.

unwrapping from yourself, unravelling of yourself. Sort of getting stripped down to what's real. I think we just sort of went on from there in a way. This also for me had a lot to do with perspective, and how a woman sees herself, and what we're told our world is, and how that can be such a burden almost. It comes out like a *film noire*, and that is the feeling it is meant to have because that's sort of what it can do to somebody. If you think, "I have to be this. I have to fulfil this role." this is what you have to do, there's just no freedom in that. So it's a whole perspective we're brought up with. It was what I was brought up with, and most women have been brought up with.⁴

⁴ "As serious and responsible as these young women appear from outside, they often harbour unspoken desires to be free from prescriptions of others. They dream of escape and release.

The collaborative aspect was an exciting innovation for both her and Reva. They found they had a similar aesthetic and that they each had a theatrical bent. Kirsten felt that they had been naturally attracted to each other and they found that "Our ideas clicked." They were also approaching similar issues in terms of their lives as women. Kirsten could state, with conviction that "A lot of it just was there. It was there. It didn't need to be researched. We knew it ourselves." They found that they could develop their working concepts and that their ideas could evolve in a mutually enriching manner. Kirsten was delighted with their ability

to go on to something new and to still be working together and connected and still linked and still both moving along the same wave length.

The second work that they produced together was another film loop/ sound installation entitled *Dreamscape*. It was developed from their shared curiosity about Jungian archetypes and enthusiasm for the filmic image. The film had been shot in Super 8, partly outdoors, in February, with the help of a cast and crew of friends and Kirsten's husband. They faced considerable technical challenge and were tremendously happy with the outcome. Kirsten had been fascinated by still photography and she was thrilled with the process of filming and

As I entered the darkened studio my path was dictated by a path of candles. The sound of wind and church bells could be heard over the racket of the projector. I felt obliged to move along towards the flickering light of the screen at the far end of the studio. The black & white Buñuelesque images demanded my attention: a couple in a dark dining room, a woman in a bridal gown running through the snow.; a couple in a dark dining room, a woman in a bridal gown running through the snow.; a horse running across a field, a shovel digging through the snow into the dark ground. But between me and the image I so desired to watch was suspended a beautiful white "bed", a dream marriage bed, created with an eyelet edged sheet and pillows in matching slips. On either side hung cut outs of chandeliers.

They can be intensely subjective, spilling out the truth about themselves, about their views on life and living, in their diaries and daydreams." (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule. 1986, 66)

the realization that she could "capture images well." Kirsten didn't discuss the content of that installation at much length, other than her comments on the value of the collaborative process.

The project on which they had worked over the past year had recently been shown at the student gallery in the Visual Arts building. I had video taped the installation a week earlier and played it back as Kirsten and I talked about the evolution of the project. Kirsten and Reva had met with a group of women friends to participate in a ritual performance which they had video taped. The tape had been edited and presented on three monitors within a circle of found, natural objects hanging from a circular support. They had begun working independently, but they had abandoned the notion and amalgamated their ideas into a joint work. Kirsten had been planning a complex project involving a papier-mâché fountain, "as a place, that modern man would put himself or herself . . . And this was somewhere where people would go to be quiet, to be with nature to be with themselves." It would be linked to ideas of spirituality and meditation and "also the idea of water, and the womb, and all these metaphorical links." However, as she was preparing her project, she kept finding things and saying "Oh, I've got to give this to Reva for her project." She was also starting to think about the practical problems involved in successfully realizing her project while she was in such a heavy programme. Another collaborative work seemed very appropriate.

Reva was talking about her ideas and she came to me and said, "Why don't we work together. We already have several projects. Why don't we continue our body of work?" And I thought "You're right!" So we discussed our ideas and how we wanted to, she also wanted to make an installation piece. She also wanted people to interact with the piece. Her piece was also spiritual like mine was. It had to do with nature, and people, acknowledging the personal. Also there was something about giving. . . . So that just fit in perfectly with what Reva was working on.

They also shared concerns about the implications of technology in relation to Nature and the disconnected, out-of-community ways of living that they saw around them. They wanted to enact a ritual that re-affirmed their sense of community, a community of women.

The idea was that this was a group, that this was real people doing something that was important spiritually, with other people. But by doing it and then having it put on to the media that's not personal. It can be very depersonalised and you're sensing this dichotomy all the time .

She later recognized that there was a highly significant moment for her in the ritual. There was

a point at which each participant placed something of personal value into the centre of the circle.

What I ended up offering was a piece that I'd made. I hadn't thought about it, I just sort of chose it. I hadn't really thought about it very in depth. Then afterwards I thought "That's really interesting, that's a step for me." Because there's something about myself, that I'm dedicating myself more to my work, that I'm actually taking my work and saying, "Here, this my work." which is a change. It's something that's been happening slowly, since I came back to Concordia.

The tape began with images of many little pieces of bone, wood, feathers and corn stalks hanging from a circular hoop in a windowed corner of the gallery. Within this circle was a circle of three video monitors on stands, and surrounding the base of that circle was a circle of millet. Muffled percussive sounds , soft droning. Lengths of coloured fabric were handed to the women who draped the fabric around themselves. In a curtained space, a golden circle of grain surrounded a collection of small objects. Bells and drums. The women enter and circle around the ring of grain. Hands open to reveal precious things. They are laid inside the circle. Rhythms change. Movements quicken. A circle of hands appears around the ring of grain and the designs they make intrude in to the centre space. Fabric swings through the air.

Kirsten recognized that she had come to a point where she could truly value herself, her ideas and the art that she could produce. Moreover, she could extend herself to see her role in the broader role of art in society.

I think sometimes art is like a trigger for people and it stands on it's own, apart from the artist. You make it with an intention and it's important for that intention to come through too, and we talked about being responsible for it and every thing like that. But I think also what's nice about art is that it triggers people's imagination. It triggers their own creativity and I think that's a great thing, a great gift that art gives .

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Olivia

Olivia is a robust Québécoise who presents herself in an open, direct and cheerful manner. She described herself as "Very, very polyvalent. Because I do all sorts of things." This was certainly true. She was teaching an art class for pre-school children and teaching swimming lessons. The weekend prior to our interview had been devoted to a *peinture en direct* event. She was engaged in learning another art form, this time in film animation. She was always active and busy with a variety of things. Her work in ARTE 430 had been characterised by thoughtful sensitivity to visually intriguing phenomena and pleasure in the exploration of new and different artistic possibilities. In particular, she embraced video production with delight and enthusiasm and produced several works including a multi-monitor installation for her final project. She produced other videos, some of which were incorporated into projects for other courses.

She had an active and happy childhood in Montreal and later in a suburb of the city. She is the eldest of three children. She has a sister who is three years younger and a brother who is ten years younger. As a child she adored her father and he was equally devoted to her. For her, he was "super important."

I was very close to my father, very, very close. He always encouraged me. He believed in me so much. He was always there and this is what is so important.

In her perception, he "played more a maternal role" in that he spent a lot of time with the children and participated a great deal in child care tasks. Her only comment about her relationship with her mother was that, "I wasn't that close to

my mother and probably she was not a strong woman model for me in a way." When I asked directly, she did acknowledge that her mother occasionally would "do colouring book with me". She admitted that at the time of our interview she was estranged from her parents although she was confident that, "There's going to be an arrangement some how, some way. But it's not now." She declined to elaborate on the issue.

As our conversation began she was eager to tell me about one of her earliest memories of school; a vivid image of herself in kindergarten, wearing her little apron and with a paint brush in her hand. She reiterated that, "Yeah, and I was so proud of it! I took that *very* seriously." Olivia's elementary school education took place in a period of energetic educational innovation in the early seventies.

When I started school, in early seventies, there was a lot, like it was the *Peace and Love* era. People were talking ecology and peace and understanding and everything like that. I think I went to a good school. There's another thing. I was going to a school where there was a French part and an English part. It was ____ School and I think it was a special school in a way. It was an innovative school, because it was different, and we did a lot of art.

As well as encouraging her artistic development, the school actively demonstrated a commitment to gender equity among the students. Olivia's observation was that at her school,

One thing that I remember very well is that boys and girls were equal. There was nothing about a boy being stronger or more intelligent or whatever. And I believed that, when I was younger. I took that. That was it. I was never bothered by it.

She admits that at one point she much preferred to spend her time climbing trees with the boys and even to have "kind of wished I was a boy". However the

prevailing philosophy of gender equality in that school convinced her of the truth of that principle. "So for me a man was equal to a woman. For me, I really took it that way. And I really, really believed that." This concept was supported at home as were

I was surprised later when I would see girls not being treated equally and saying nothing. I was like, "Why does she accept that?" I was feeling that way. It was so strange. I was wondering how come I believed that and a lot didn't. That how I felt. It's really funny.

her artistic interests. Her father had artistic interests in which she was welcome to participate.

He liked to draw. I think he didn't have enough background, but he liked to do it. I remember when I was very young, he had a table for industrial drawing. . . . I don't know what he did but I remember only the table like that. It really impressed me. I know he was drawing and he took a lot of time with me. I was the first of the three children and he, I know he took a lot of time with me, doing collage and all different things like that. These are good memories. I had a lot of fun doing these things. It was a special moment, I remember that. It was very, very important for me.

She also has a vivid memory of a very special gift.

Oh! Another thing I remember. My uncle. I had an uncle that I really loved, that I really liked and he bought me a Prismacolor box. A *big* one! The big one. Sixty-four!

They were well and carefully used.

Unfortunately, at her second school in the suburban town to which the family had moved, art classes were, "more like *bricolage* and things like that." Art was not offered in her high school although she did study music. As well, she pursued her training as a swimmer to a standard where she has been able to support herself, in part, as a swimming instructor. Coincidentally, it was her role as a swimming instructor that brought her artistic abilities to light.

I was preparing some little drawings, just to help kids understand the rules of the pool and things like that. I wanted that to be funny, attractive and (punches one hand into another) Punch! So they would remember the rules. So I did those little *affiche* and someone told me, "Hey, that's nice. Why don't you, you never thought about doing this in your life?"

The people who offered this positive response were "second parents" who she greatly respected. They not only pushed her to begin taking some night course at a CEGEP but they have also maintained ongoing support for her efforts. By this time she was well into a BA in psychology, which she completed soon after she began to investigate her artistic potential. Her intention at that point was to become an illustrator.

She found these courses in graphic design to be very exciting and taught by a "good teacher" who was always *disponible*¹ and took time to talk to her and explain things to her. Another teacher also went out of her way to accept her into a class for which she did not have the prerequisite course.

She was great! She was an important one. She helped me a lot. . . . 'Cause I started to learn about Betty Edwards² which demystified a lot of things about drawing. She was very stimulating. She would bring books to each courses. She gave us a lot of ideas, a lot of things to try at home and she told us, "Experiment. Try things." And she would suggest us ideas. She would show us techniques, also. She would show us a technique but then she would tell us, "Push it. Try. You can mix this and this together, and then, this and this." . . . She introduced me to illustration, to drawing. In this course we had our first nude model, all these things.

As Olivia went on to explain, this woman gave her the belief that she could be successful, or as Stan Horner would say, fostered her illusion that she could create.

¹ Available

² Betty Edwards. *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* Los Angeles: J P Tarcher 1979.

So it was the real world of art, that started there for me, I think. ... Also she gave us a lot of feed back and she would tell us the good things about what we did and . . . She was very encouraging. Yes, because I felt I was good. I felt, yeah, that's true. I felt I was good enough. I should continue. She helped me to think I should continue, that I had some talent and I could do something with it.

These instructors helped her to prepare her portfolio for her applications to Concordia and UQAM. She was not accepted at either institution. Not to be easily defeated, she opted for the one year visual arts certificate programme offered at UQAM and prepared a new and successful portfolio. This time she was accepted at both universities. Several factors played into her decision to choose Studio Arts at Concordia. One was that in her perception, there was very little respect for students from the Certificate programme among the general faculty at UQAM. Second, the portfolio and application interview process at UQAM was "very scary!" and impersonal. In contrast,

At Concordia they would talk to you. They would be very human. I don't know, they were very nice, very kind. Also at the UQAM interview, you didn't have to bring, they already saw your portfolio somewhere, but it wasn't there. At Concordia you brought your portfolio and they would look at it with you, so you could comment. You could say, tell the story around the piece and things like that, which was good.

As we began to look at her paintings she revealed not only how various teachers had influenced her work but how certain experiences in her life had been incorporated into her imagery. The first series of paintings, entitled *Desire Affectif*, were stark black and white depictions of chaotic emotion. The three paintings were based on her experiences during the four summers when she had worked in a home for "maladjusted kids." They reflected how deeply moved she

had been by the distress of these children and how much she wanted to communicate that distress to the viewers of her paintings.

O: For me it is the feeling that is there. What I was always happy about is when people would say, "Whooow! Ahhh!" They can't explain what's there, necessarily but there's something and it, it's shocking in a way.

MC: Yeah. *There's a sinister ..*

O: Yeah. But that's what I wanted to show. So I made a lot of sinister paintings, like when I was working there. But this is what they live, these children.

Although she knew this job to be a very important one, she found it to be very difficult and had been forced to quit.

I don't think I'm good for helping them, for now. Maybe in a few years, I'm going to be more mature and I'll be able to handle them. But right now it's too difficult. Really, the suffering of kids, this is one thing that I really don't understand and I want to fight against that in any way I can. So my paintings were about that. It was about kids' suffering, kids getting old too young, living adult things when they are young for that.

Olivia described how she worked from photos found in newspapers, magazines and psychology texts to create the images. She employed the technique outlined by Betty Edwards where, by inverting the image to be copied, one removes the pressure to reproduce what one recognises to be something in particular. While I think this is sometimes rather gimmicky, it seemed to be an

In *Desire Affectif* there were misalignments and a rather twisted appearance in the boy's facial features. They sat beside one another but the girl was turned away from the boy. Her shoulders were hunched and her arms were tightly folded around her body; an emphatic gesture of disassociation. His attention was directed away from her as if she were not even there. In *Desire Affectif II* the faces of three screaming children lunged out at me from the black surface. It was full of unrelenting noise. The largest face crowded against the lower left corner, eyes bulging. A smaller round face was thrust up from the bottom right edge. The third sprang up through the centre right towards the top edge. Their mouths were all wide in a kind of scream. Across the upper right was a row of emphatic vertical brush strokes. In *Desire Affectif III* the tormented faces of two boys, each isolated in darkness each on his half of the canvas affront the viewer with their distress.

appropriate means to representing the inverted world of disturbed children. As well, her approach of working in sharp contrast from the black background seemed rather like a formula but the stark drama This was an important teacher too, 'cause he really helped me a lot, in finding new ways of painting, new technique. Like one time he would bring a candle and bones and all the lights were off and we would paint from a black background. We'd only need the white so this was great. The results were like amazing! I always do that now.

seem well fitted to her expressive intentions. She had been introduced to this high contrast approach by the instructor in an introductory studio course at Concordia and it had become fundamental to her style of painting, since it enhanced the high impact emotional quality that she wanted in her work.

The next work we looked at was inspired by the work of Velázquez, about whose work she was quite enthusiastic. The discussion of the painting began with her comments on the teachers of that particular class. Her assessment of the professor originally assigned to the class was that he was "a very nice person but I don't think he was a very good pedagogue." She intimated the nature of the problem in a later comment that,

I think that one thing that is very important in teaching is to give something to your students. You cannot let them do what they want and discover things by themselves because if you want to discover things by yourself you just stay at home almost. It's a little bit better than staying at home but not that much.

When this instructor fell ill he was replaced by an energetic and popular young woman. "She was excellent!" Olivia particularly valued the way in which this teacher was willing to share her knowledge with her students. Over and above some basic technical information about the preparation of one's canvas,

colour mixing and proportions for oil paint mediums she introduced them to a variety of texts related to their projects. As well,

She would bring us ideas. She wouldn't just tell us "Just do what you want." She would come and give us a choice, like a challenge.

We were not obliged to do it, which was good, but we could if we didn't have any idea. So we had the possibility. We were not obliged just to invent something from our self, necessarily. Because it is not everybody that will find an idea just like that.

One thing I realised is that once some new teachers come in they are full of.. they have to prove something and they have a lot of energy, a lot of things to give and they are very affective in their teaching usually. And this teacher, she was great!

The teacher's suggested that students might take, "an idea from the present, something from the past and something from the future . . . in your life" to develop as a concept for their work. Olivia had destroyed her original effort "because it was too intense for me and I didn't like it." However she continued with the same motivation for this second effort. The large painting, (about 4' x 3') that we were considering at that point had originated from a collection of sources. She had been reading *Alice au Pays des Emerveilles*³ in which there was an illustration of a *chevalier*.⁴ Her interpretation of that illustration dominated the painting, or at least the horse did. The top edge of the canvas cut across the shoulders of the knight so he was visible only from the shoulders down. Off at the extreme right was the sullen image of the princess from the Velázquez painting *Las Meninas*. Again Olivia had worked from a black background with predominantly white drawing. In this work however, she had begun a careful introduction of colour. Areas of blue, red and yellow mingled with the black and

³ Alice in Wonderland

⁴ Knight

white in selected areas; blue in the girl's hair, rust red rubbed into an area behind the *chevalier* and onto the horse's armour.

The next painting was vibrant with colour. It was a large work, about 2.5' x 4'. She noted that she was still working from the black background but in this case that feature became more than a background element used for dramatic contrast. It

The running figure of a man, rifle in hand dominated the image. A large white collar suggested a 17th century style of dress. The sky behind him was afire as he cast a frightened glance over his shoulder. There seemed to be another figure following him. A blaze of red was engulfing his feet.

now also served as an integrated element of the work. In fact, the background was fully worked with colour and the clothing of the man who was running towards the viewer was left in black. She explained her inspiration for this work.

At this time I was following a Multi-Media class and in this class I did a piece with photos about violence, and there was one photo in there, a guy running with a gun in his hands, *away* from something, *away* from the bomb exploding, or whatever. I just started with this photo, up side down again, and then I just continued in Velázquez mood. So I was getting into something else, even stronger there. . . . But this Velázquez type, Velázquez is very shhh! Jumps into your eyes.

The next work that we considered was an important one for her in terms of putting forward a provocative proposition that had some relationship to herself. She was very pleased with it and marvelled that it should have come out of a very difficult situation where she was extremely angry with the instructor.

I didn't like him at all. I had big problems with him. I don't know. Our personalities didn't fit together. And I'm very cool. I'm very, I accept people as they are, usually, unless they are *very* incompetent and this was the case.

As she laid out the series of ten, 14' x 18' sheets of paper on the floor she told me that they were intended to be seen as a series, all lined up together. The

first in the series was white and black conté on a dark taupe paper. The next was white on black paper, others were on dark olive green and the final pieces in the series of ten works were coloured felt pens on white paper. The drawings were executed with bold, fluid lines that delineated the strong features of her portrait. As the series advanced, more colour was incorporated, first as background and then more and more into the image of the portrait itself. The words "*Follow the steps of your mother, and don't ask too many questions*" were printed in awkward, child like letters, in the border of the page. The letters seemed to march along the line,

In each, a bold line started about three inches down from the right edge of the sheet, moved across the page for about fourteen inches and then dropped to the bottom edge. This divided the paper into a large rectangular space at the lower left with a three inch border across the top which became four inches wide along the right side. Each rectangle was filled with an image of the lower two thirds of Olivia's face. They were cut off just about half way across the eyes. In most the eyes were either not completely drawn, not drawn at all, or darkened in as if she was wearing dark glasses or shaded by a hat. There was the same impassive, silently resisting expression on each face.

Coincident with the introduction of colour into the images was the appearance of a white pear shape, floating horizontally in space, like a speech bubble in a cartoon. As the series progressed the pear shape was placed higher on the page.

tumble down the edge of the drawing, and scrunch together into the bottom right hand corner. I asked her about this sentence. She replied

I was just provoked to make people react and ask questions. Because I like to make people think if possible ... And this is one I just wanted to write down just to make people react and say, "No! You don't follow the steps of your mother. Hey! And you ask questions!" This is what I wanted to do.

I was curious that perhaps there was a closer, personal reference, particularly in light of the self portrait and her reluctance to discuss her relationship with her mother, but she would concede only that, "It's just, I guess it's me in front of that. Woman in front of comments like that."

In each drawing, at a different position on this line there appeared an icon or symbols. It was an irregularly drawn circle inside of which she had drawn a child's schema of a girl: a circle for the head, a triangular body/dress, four lines to denote the limbs and a line cutting across the ends of the limbs to make hands and feet. The little icon seemed to roll along the line and her position on the line indicated where the drawing fit in the series. She acknowledged the inspiration she got from children's writing and drawing styles and drawing materials, "That's another 'kid thing', felt pens." Our discussion around this work brought out several additional points. One was in relation to her perception of her own process of creating art works. She volunteered,

O: I never really think about it at first. I really like to let myself go and do what I like to do, even if there is no sense necessarily. And then I like to discover something after. I like to learn from what I did.

MC: And at that point that you feel you've discovered, you can use that to build other things?

O: Yeah, yeah. Of course. 'Cause this one I know I'm going to do something else with it, for sure, 'cause I really like it. . . . But, usually what I like to do is, I put them up on my wall. I think it's a good idea. I always did that from the beginning. And after a while I get tired of it and some of them I never get tired. Then I say, "Okay, these ones are stronger." The ones that I don't get tired of, it's because they say something. I test them, in a way.

The other significant point arising from this work was that it reawakened her interest in film animation. The repetition of the basic format, the evolution of the drawings and the rolling icon all reinforced her predilection for that media. We reminisced about a flip book and Super 8 film animation, featuring a pear in

the starring role, that she had done in the multi media class. Her enthusiasm was evident.

I just realised that I made the pear flip book and Woow! I really liked the results. I was very impressed. I wanted to do some more and I started to read on the subject. I started to get some books and the more I read the more I was, Woow! I wanted to do that! Then I heard about a technique of sand on glass and moving sand around, and this is spontaneous, too. So I decided to call (Animation professor) and I went to see him and I brought the portfolio. I showed him what I did and I ask. Well he proposed to me to use the machines. There's the video animation machines and he proposed to me to do that. That was before I entered the program. So from just before Christmas up to the end of the year, I played with the machine, with sand. After I tried to paint on glass. Anyway I did a lot of film, video film with that, a lot. I just played with the machine. It was easy to use. The machine was, just press, super easy. You don't have to learn. (laughs) It's not difficult so I just had to play with the things in front of the camera, which I did and I had a lot of fun. This really convinced me that, Yes, I wanted to go into animation for sure! Because the sand thing was, Woow! Amazing! So I entered into the program the year after. And then I did Animation I last year. My film was screened on the year end .

The final works that she presented to me were some prints. She had attended a monoprint workshop and she had been greatly inspired by two aspects of that class. First of all she was pleased with the free, spontaneous quality of the process itself.

Because I like to do things fast and when it's finished, it's finished. I don't like to rework, and rework on something. So this was perfect for me.

Second, the approach of the guest artist/teacher to the development of ideas and the personal meaning of one's art work had a real impact. Her response was to create a print which depicted a childhood memory.

This was another important step for me because I was starting from images first, and I wouldn't start from *me*. This guy was doing a monoprint workshop where you would take ink first and then you would take off the

ink by rubbing with towels or tools, whatever. And he started from his life. He showed us a bunch of prints he made, probably fifty, sixty prints he made and it was all on himself. It was great! It was beautiful! It was strong. It was really amazing. I really liked his style. He showed us the technique and then we started to make things. We could do whatever we wanted but I wanted to do something on me. I just did three prints that I liked. . . . This one was my house where I used to live when I was very young, and this is me saying good-bye to my Dad.

A broad grey space seemingly brushed in with rough strokes took up almost the bottom third of the print. In the centre of the upper portion, a small figure was coming through a dark doorway onto a short flight of stairs. A window was roughly marked in the upper left and another small figure looked out from it. Both figures were simple and featureless.

A final print was an aquatint. For this work she was again dealing with the issue of disturbed children. Once again it was a situation where the professor who "had a lot of knowledge, like he had a lot of experience and he was very, *imposant*⁵, he took a lot of place," was replaced for the last term for some unspecified reason. To replace him,

This new little teacher come in and he had no experience . . . and it was like, "Oh no!" Everybody was reacting "Oh no! What kind of year we're going to have! La la la" But then he was great. . . . I had lot of fun in that course anyway. I had a lot of frustrations but I had lot of fun too.

Part of the frustration was that her natural inclination to a quick and spontaneous process was thwarted by the necessarily slow and repetitive nature of the etching process. However, it would seem that the instructor established a rapport that motivated commitment to "seeing it through." This led her to further comments on the qualities that she appreciated in her teachers.

This is the most important thing I think for a teacher. It's the relationship you have with them and if it works, it's like, Wow! You can push yourself and go further and further, and further. And we don't get tired of it. It's not difficult to do it. But if it doesn't go well together. Much more frustrating.

⁵ Imposing

I guess the qualities I liked the most about teachers was they're very human, I don't know if you can say that in English. And they adapt to your personality. That's what I like, when they can try to find, help you to find solutions, from who you are. Okay? And this teacher, he was great for that. He really respected each of us and he would help us. He would encourage us in our strengths.

We did not view any of her video work from my class although we did discuss her main intentions with that work. Early in the year she had worked on a very successful work in collaboration with a fellow student. They had used a Super 8 film loop of rats fighting, slide images of military combat taken from magazines, large mirrors placed so as to reflect the viewers' images, and a chaotic sound montage to provoke discussion about how we are all implicated in conflicts. The video installation *Purple Sun* that she presented for her final project was a circle of monitors, playing in sequence.

O: I really liked the medium of video, 'cause you can do beautiful things with that. What I really liked, what I started to do was playing with attraction and repulsion, like finding a way to do things that are attractive to people so that they are coming to see it, and then, Oh! Then they realise; it's not that nice. That's what I did with the piece with five

MC: *Monitors?*

O: Videos.

MC: *Purple Sun?*

O: *Purple Sun*. So this was very attractive. People would come and Wow! The colours are beautiful. And then as you start to see what is there it's like, Owh! Yuch! It's images of .. I guess what I like is to make people think, and we think when we are shocked somehow.

MC: *Yeah, when there's some, something that disturbs your ..*

O: Whoof! Your way of thinking, I guess. Ooops! There's something else.

My initial reaction, as she had intended, was to the colour and movement of the images on the screen. It was only upon closer scrutiny that I realized that the images depicted the horrors of violence, war, and aggression.

I think that Olivia's description of herself as "polyvalent" was very appropriate but I don't think that this should be construed to mean that she was

unfocused in her pursuits. At several points she described her perspective as "global" and she asserted that, "I like contradiction, and I like opposite views and I like the fact that people think different things about one subject. I really like that." She affirmed her intentions to always form and present her own opinion, "But I like to see it all, I like that global view." Her enthusiasm and curiosity for the world, and art, and knowledge, the ways in which she can participate in these spheres has not diminished. I think that she is perhaps more thoughtful and reflective than she was when she began her fine arts studies. She remains deeply committed to social issues and her responsibility to do what she can about them. At this point she sees her teaching responsibilities in the painting class for five year olds as one small gesture in that regard. She intends to maintain and enjoy her contacts with Montreal artistic communities such as the lively group in the *peinture en direct* events. As a woman she takes pride in her accomplishments and in the sense of strength,

As I get more mature and every thing I think.. Oh yeah, I'm very happy of being a woman and it's great. (laughter) Okay! I think we have a, a great power that we don't realise.

She recognizes the problems that women face but she is convinced that "There's a lot of space for us." She accepted that as artists women had to work hard and "try not to quit" but then added that, "I think that everything is wide open for women."

Wisdom and Endurance

This group of women, from among the group of students over the age of forty, have come to the study of Fine Arts after many years of career, family involvement, or years of crisis. They shared the wealth of their life experience for me in this study. They are a very diverse group in terms of class background and the particular events of their lives. However, they have all provided their reflections on how their lives have unfolded over time. They were candid about the particularity of their experiences as "older women" and insightful about their art practice and the process of their learning.

Barbara

Hannah

Meredith

Reva

Barbara

Barbara is certainly the one of the most remarkable women who I interviewed. Her artistic achievements might seem modest to some but within the context of her life story each brush stroke is a call for celebration. Her immediate

response to my question about how she would describe herself was, "Very happy!" She is unequivocal about the value of her four years at Concordia, "You know, I think that one thing that school has given me is a future." Later in the interview she elaborated that,

You see, I'm talking from a woman that's lived in fear, maybe twenty or thirty years, and all of a sudden found freedom. . . . And I've never had that. All my life I've never had that. And here I am, fifty years old and I don't have anyone telling me what to do. I can make my own decisions.

As an artist, as a woman, I feel free. Free to be myself. Free to say what I feel. Free to express what I feel in my art. I'm proud of being a woman.

Autonomy and education, let alone art and the prospect of a happy future, were unimaginable throughout most of Barbara's life. She was born in Europe and endured a childhood and adolescence of physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hand of her father. Her father "was in business" and her mother worked for him in the business. Barbara was the eldest of four children, two of whom apparently escaped their father's violent abuse while Barbara and her youngest brother were the targets of his tyranny.

There was two that was abused, me and my brother, and the middle two weren't abused. They were the ones that were going to succeed.

Not surprisingly, she and her younger brother were, silent, frightened, withdrawn, and profoundly betrayed children. ¹

He was so abused that he couldn't talk. He started to stammer. And he had, a Hell of a time communicating with people. The same with me. I mean, I couldn't talk. I didn't talk to *anybody*."

She was isolated from other children and the family moved frequently so that, even if a teacher was concerned enough to question the cause of her bruises, she was gone again. She frequently withdrew into an imaginary world when the real one became too grim. Her father dictated every aspect of her life. She was forced to struggle with the profoundly conflicted dilemma of all abused children: how to develop a relationship of trust with someone upon whom she was dependent but who proves repeatedly that he is untrustworthy and dangerous; how to explain to herself why people who should be good were doing such terrible things to her.

Consequently I was very shy. I wouldn't talk. When I was fifteen, my father *chose* a friend *for* me. I wasn't allowed out, to play with other kids. And this friend, he had an affair with her and she got pregnant by him.²

The discovery of this "affair" brought about the end of her parents marriage. Barbara was eighteen years old by this time, and her life was obviously scared by the tragic dysfunction within her family. Her father is still alive but she has not seen him for many years. The pain of his ridicule and blame are still

¹ Judith Lewis.Herman.Trauma and Recovery New York: Basic Books, 1992. "Chronic childhood abuse takes place in a familiar climate of pervasive terror, in which ordinary care taking relationships have been profoundly disrupted. Survivors describe a characteristic pattern of totalitarian control, enforcement by means of violence and death threats, capricious enforcement of petty rules, intermittent rewards, and destruction of all competing relationships through isolation, secrecy and betrayal." (Herman 1992, 98)

² Judith Lewis Herman. Trauma and Recovery New York: Basic Books, 1992. "Survivors frequently describe patterns of jealous surveillance of all social contacts. Their abusers may forbid them to participate in ordinary peer activities or may insist on the right to intrude into those activities as well. . . . Thus, even those children who manage to develop the semblance of a social life experience it as inauthentic." (Herman 1992, 100)

with her. Silencing his powerful and condemning voice has been a major task and a major accomplishment throughout her studies.

B: Yeah, I guess, I found a constructive way of . . . getting my emotions out. . . . Yeah, of getting my emotions out, in a constructive way.

MC: *So how did that happen?*

B: By just being allowed to be me. By being able to put down on canvas what I was feeling inside, and not being made fun of. Because if I had done that years ago, even in _____, my father would have said "That's a load of rubbish! What d'yah, what's that mean? That's not a picture! That's not a painting" So yeah, that's what I've learned. I've learned how to express my feelings in a constructive way. And that's a *great* gift, for me to get.

She continued to live with her mother after her father's departure and she described a relationship in which her mother was abnormally dependent upon her for support, advice, and as a confidante,

Because she wouldn't make a move without me. So I was her prisoner. I realised, as I got older that I didn't have a life. In those days I didn't drink. Occasionally I drank and that was it. So when I was twenty- six I said, "Well that's it ! I've got to get away."

It was not clear from our conversation whether her mother had been aware of the father's abusive behaviour, although I cannot see how she could not have known. There was some suggestion that she spent a lot of time away at work. The description of her mother given above suggests that the possibility that she too was tyrannised by her husband and was incapable of defending herself or her children.³ Whatever the causes, Barbara felt not only undefended but

³ Judith Lewis.Herman, Trauma and Recovery New York: Basic Books, 1992."She perceives daily, not only that the most powerful adult in her intimate world is dangerous to her, but also that the other adults who are responsible for her care do not protect her. . . . From the child's point of view, the parent disarmed by secrecy should have known; if she cared enough she would have found out. The parent disarmed by intimidation should have intervened; if she cared enough she would have fought. The child feels that she has been abandoned to her fate, and this abandonment is often resented more keenly than the abuse itself." (Herman 1992, 101)

burdened with the inappropriate demands of her mother as well. She did not accuse her mother but in the end she did leave. She admitted to having felt a great deal of guilt for leaving her mother, but she strongly resisted her father's accusation that she had caused her mother's death (many years afterwards) by refusing to stay and care for her.

Her relationships with her siblings remains difficult. She described her elder brother as being "just like my father" but she acknowledged a closeness to her younger brother who had suffered with her. She observed that her sister seems much older than her in outlook and appearance although she is in fact eight years younger. Her sister has admitted to witnessing some abusive incidents but tended to downplay their seriousness. Barbara has concluded that she has little in common with her remaining family. They are now in the past.

Her social withdrawal and alienation from her peer group was extreme. Her early relationships with men tended to be abusive, either physically or emotionally. She had no close friends. Even now she considers herself to have only a few close friendships. She escaped to Montreal in the late 1960's where she supported herself as an office worker and as a child care worker. In spite of her efforts to suppress the terrible reality of her childhood, the psychic injuries took their toll. Eventually she was living on the streets, homeless

I found out that every time I had an emotional upset, in my life, I drink. It's like an escape. They say the alcoholic anaesthetises him self. That's what I would do. To stop the pain I would take a drink, or a drug. The reason probably that I come back now, is because I have a stable relationship, for five years. We're both in the program. We're both going to school. And there's no anxiety, apart from life.

and drug and alcohol addicted. She is candid about that period of her life and her struggle to overcome her addictions.

I was very, very sick. I had cirrhosis of the liver and I was in a bad way. I went into detox and managed to get sober for about a year, and I was in the AA program in 1980, and it's only in the last five years, since coming back to school that I've managed to stay sober, longer than a year. So I've been sober five years now.

For Barbara the link between the emergence of her art making ability and her sobriety is very clear. Her artistic ability is obviously quite surprising and wonderful to her, but it is seen as a gift, not really creditable to herself.

I got to a point in my life where I was on welfare and not much prospects for the future. And so when I sobered up, I found out that I could draw, and paint, which I'd had when I was a child, but it was always denied me, you know. I had passed an entrance exam to go to an art school in _____, when I was twelve and my father forbid me to go. So it was kind of scrapped. Anyway when I sobered up, I realised that I had this *gift*.

Through this period she also came to realize and accept that she was a lesbian and her relationships with certain women proved to be invaluable supports to her recovery and to the development of her artistic abilities. She described a comfortable and secure point in a relationship, living in a large house with a woman who noticed the quality of a drawing Barbara had begun.

I was sitting out on the patio, and I was just doodling, and I started to draw my friend's son. She looked at it and said, "That's good. Why don't you come to the flea market? She used to go to the flea market every weekend, in _____. "Come to the flea market with me and maybe you can make some money, doing portraits." So I said, "Well, I'll try." And that's what I did for all that summer. I did just portraits.

With this encouragement she was able to realise a modest success throughout the summer. However it was not to last. When she fell back into drinking she would cease to "do art". Her present relationship with a woman who has experienced many of the same difficulties has provided a very important support for Barbara's continued sobriety and artistic and academic efforts. She received not just encouragement to go to university, but inspiration from her partner who had undertaken an even more daunting task; to pick up her education where she had left off in high school.

Barbara entered art school with what Professor Stanley Horner would refer to a very fragile illusion of her capacities as an artist.⁴ She felt that she had discovered her gift; her ability to draw. She felt herself to be very lacking in the skills and know-how of creating art and she felt that as a Studio student she would be taught how to go about it. She admits that her initial rather naive landscapes and paintings of small animals were just a starting point. However, the kind of educational engagement that she encountered left her frustrated and alone in a search for which she was given very little advice or information. The instructor challenged her to break away from the security of the images that she had been doing and to launch into an area of personal expression.

After I'd done a few cats, dogs, (Laughter) basic things, he said, "Now don't copy anything. Just go from your feelings." And I said, "Okay." So I did that and I said, "Well, I don't know what it is." And he said, "Well, think about it. What are you feeling when you are doing this? When you're doing this, here? And I said, "Well, I feel angry." He just let me go.

⁴ Dept. of Art Education Colloquium, Concordia University. October 1994

Once she had embarked on this road she was completely engaged in a surprising and confusing confrontation with representations of her personal struggle to regain control of her life. Unfortunately, she felt totally abandoned by the instructor who urged her to pursue that path and from whom she expected to receive guidance and direction.

And not be afraid of it, not say, "Oh my God! Look what I did!" Which I used to do that, in my first year. Because I had all this black and reds coming out and (shakes head) and I said, "Oh my God! What what? Does this mean I'm crazy?" Because, you know, I've been called crazy.

First year I was in class, I'd come home and say, "That guy doesn't know what the Hell he's talking about! He's not teaching me anything! He's just leaving me alone!" He left me alone! I wanted him to teach me, because I thought I didn't know anything. So I was expecting to be taught how to paint. And how to draw. (Laughter) And it didn't work out that way. They just left me alone! And then there was one guy that I had, What's his name? Oh, anyway. I hated him! Because he would come up to me and he'd say, "Yes. Yes. OK." And then he'd walk away! And I said, "Well, tell me! What? Is it OK? Am I doing the right things? What am I doing wrong? What are my good points?" And he wouldn't tell me!

The single beneficial consequence of this attitude on the part of the teacher was to provoke her to anger, which eventually turned her attention to her deep inner anger that she had held inside for so long. Her description of a second encounter further exemplifies a refusal on the part of the instructor to acknowledge her and recognise her expectations.

One of my painting teachers was also into sculpture, and I was taking sculpture as well. I cornered him in the wood shop and I said, "Look! You've got to talk to me! I want to know! What's my good points? What's my bad points? Where am I going wrong? I feel as though I'm going wrong." He'd look at me and he'd *laugh*! And he said to me, "Well, if I was to evaluate you now, I'd give you a C."

Well, I'm not one of these people who have to get A's. As long as I can get through all right, I don't care. So I said, "Oh. That's great!"

So he said, "Oh."

(Laughter) I said "Well, so what are my good points? What's my strengths?"

And he said, "Well, don't you know?"

And I said, "No." He said, "Well you go home and you think about it."

That's all he said and I was so angry! (Laughter) So I came home and I said to ____, "That jerk! You know he's a real jerk! Tells me to go home and think about my strengths."

Barbara very gamely struggled to find a benefit in these encounters; to find the ways in which she could learn. "So that made me start thinking. 'Well, he must see something that I don't'. Of course, having (my partner) to talk to and she kind of helps, you know." It became clear that her interactions with her partner and with several more sensitive women instructors provided her with the acceptance, reassurance and guidance that she needed.

B: They brought out the best in me. All my female teacher's have brought out the best.

MC: *How do you think they did that?*

B: Because they had an understanding that, I felt that they knew where I was coming from. And I didn't get that with the male teachers.

Barbara's earliest efforts in painting were primarily landscapes. She now has a very insightful reflection on why she was drawn to those kinds of images and the how she has come to value different qualities in her art work.

B: I used to (Chuckles) *love* landscapes, and I used to *love* flowers, but I don't any more.

MC: *Why?*

B: Because life, to me, life's not a pretty picture. And I think the reason why I was attracted to landscapes and pretty pictures, was because that is how I thought the world was. Or in my own world, that's *how I wanted it to be*.

MC: *That's how it was supposed to be.*

B: Yeah. So I would always go for these beautiful landscapes and it's not that way, you know.

This new understanding is coupled with her realisation that through her art making she has a positive and productive avenue to emotional expression that previously had been turned dangerously inward.

Instead of going to a bottle, or a drug, I've been able to go to a canvas and put it down there, what I'm feeling. Whether it's happiness or whether it's sadness.

In our discussion about art works centred around five works in particular. As well, we discussed a video work that she had done in my multi-media class. The first one was a mixed-media work that she had presented as her very first assignment in my class. She had begun the painting (gouache on paper) earlier as an abstract, free flowing expression of emotions. When I asked my students to present a work developed from a motivational exercise that focused on personal interpretation, Barbara re-worked the original painting into *The Story of Malcolm*.

MC: *So what is the story?*

B: Well, "Once upon a time, the world was beautiful. The air was pure and the earth was green. Until, now. The earth was green and fertile. Then along came mankind. Now we have a nation of terror, pollution everywhere. Current wars. Food wars. Land wars. Man has slowly destroyed our beautiful world. The children of the next world will have much to change. This is the story of a little boy named, Malcolm, who tried, and tried, to change the world. He was only six months old." So I sort of put in things that are important to me like the children, bombs, the dogs, the lost jobs. But I see images in here. I can see kind of the mess the world is in. I like it. I like the colours. And that's it.

A brightly coloured painted patchwork, approximately 28"x 36" with photographs of babies and words like *Promise, Bombs*, super imposed on the brush strokes. The paper had been neatly trimmed with pinking shears and then glued onto a larger backing. Along the exposed edge she had written the words the story.

She went on to pick out certain individuals whose photographs were included in the collage; an old man she knows who begs in the Metro, a child

from a day care centre and Malcolm who had died accidentally at a very young age. She affirms her conviction that for her, in art making, things just happen. This opinion was expressed in several instances as we discussed her art works.

That was when I was first splashing around and not really knowing what I was doing and something came out of it.

We moved on to *Going Towards the Light*, a large oil painting on canvas. Her first remark, as she moved her hand across the surface of the painting indicating the two small figures at its centre, was that, "I put that as me and my sister. Going towards the light." This painting marked her overture into work that was expressive of her own ideas and emotions. At the urging of the instructor who had aggravated her so much she had admitted the anger that she felt and undertook to represent aspects of her life experience in her art.

I would go back to it, over, and over, and over, and over. Because I wanted, this to me represented my past. This here, the black. And at that time I was going forward into the light. And I didn't know how to represent it. So I had this picture in my mind of, not God, but Goddess, as my protector. And it just came out like that. It's not proportioned right or anything, but it's, it's the way I felt at the time. It's just going into the light.

For her, the flames very clearly represented her inner rage. In this context I would suggest that the fire also holds potency to cleanse and cauterise the pain of the past. The darker figure that she had

A large canvas, perhaps 3' x 4' was spread out on the floor. My attention was drawn to the central female figure whose bright, white form rose from the red and yellow flames that licked upward from the bottom of the image. Her arms reached over the flames as if to embrace two small silhouetted figures (one slightly larger and forward from the other) who stood amidst the flames at her feet. Symbols of a crescent moon, stars, circles and another less specific form were inscribed into the bright blue sky of the upper corners. A row of crossed lines suggested a distant cluster of teepees. Long tendrils of hair floated in a sensuous curve around her form, echoing the lines of the flames that rose to meet them. Here was a powerful and benevolent deity who was indeed reaching out to shelter the small figure who Barbara identified as being her fragile present self.

identified as her sister was also said to represent the past. The smaller figure, who still holds the hand of the other, seems to advance towards the goddess, and in fact the deity touches her shoulder. I felt a great tension of hope and fear.

Barbara spread out a second, smaller painting on the floor and commented that it was an abstract from about the same time. Again she moved her hand across the canvas, pointing out the areas to which she wanted to draw my attention.

B: I'm always going up to brighter colours. This is my past here. This is me. I guess it's my, questioning myself. And this is birds and that's a figure, and there's animals. I'm always stuck in that kind of thing.

MC: *So this was done about the same time? And you feel there's a relationship?*

B: Yeah, for my present state. That's what I'm into now. This sort of thing.

MC: *So this was, this was done when?*

This was leading up, this was done in 1992? Just when I was starting to come into my own. But I still wasn't satisfied because I wanted to make it more tactile. So then I started working with wax.

The next work was two wooden panels worked with encaustic in earth tones and black. The two panels fit together to form a complete mandala although Barbara told me that they have been displayed joined at the bottom edge and opened at the top to form a deep V shaped split between them.

An intertwining network of black lines divided up the surface of the canvas much like a leaded glass window. The segments at the bottom of the canvas, in the area that she indicated represented her past were painted in dark blues and greens. Bright red, yellow, pink, coral and pastel tints filled the upper portion that she indicated to be her future. Within the organic, curving shapes are semi-concealed depictions of her own face and the other animals and figures that she mentions. There was a sense of uneasy, unresolved fluidity about the work.

The surface is divided into a pattern of diamonds and ellipses with strong black outlines. As I watch the close-up of the surface as scrutinised by the camera, I am surprised by the richness of the colours; deep reds, purples, oranges and luminous golds appear where I had originally seen simple earth tones. I am equally delighted by the small figures that I find etched into the dark background. They hold hands and their plump forms cavort around the perimeter of the design.

Last year I was working with wax, and got these two. This one is very heavy. Yeah, just board. This was '92 and this was '93. Last year. It's got to be polished. It's a mandala, and it represents female growth. It's a Mexican origin.

She asserted that for her the thickness and weight of the encaustic on board signified strength. Later, when I asked her to explain further, she declared very earnestly that,

Life's work. You have to work at it. You have to work at everything today, whether it's a relationship, whether it's just looking after yourself. You have to work at it. And a piece of work that expresses that, is usually thicker than paint. It's encaustic, or it's sculptured, or it's, you know. It's got substance to it. That's what life's about.

The final painting that she presented to me was one that she had done on her own, outside of class. It was an imposing depiction of a rather formidable matriarch, enrobed, and wearing a peculiar head-dress of feathers and ornaments, and an elaborate necklace.

I was first drawn to the round, dark, deeply lined face of the figure that dominated the 3' x 4' canvas. The mouth seemed rather tight with a prominent lower lip. The eyes looked out at me with, I felt, a rather bemused expression. The ornate head dress was a bit cramped at the top of the image and the body appeared very large in relation to the face. It could have been a self portrait. As with *Going into the Light* the colours were clear; alizarin and ultramarine blue sometimes combined into purple, tinted with white, gold yellow for her headgear. Also as in the other painting there was a minimum of modeling and there was only a very shallow space created for the figure to occupy.

B: Yes! The eyes follow you, and (my partner) freaks out sometimes. She says, "You know that painting, the eyes follow you everywhere." And it's true! They do! Sometimes you're looking around and all of a sudden, there are these eyes looking at you.

MC: *So how did you come to paint her?*

B: Well, she reminds me of my mother, actually. Without all the head gear. It's my mother's face, somehow. And I always have the feeling, she's here.

MC: *Your mother?*

B: Yeah. I feel her presence. When we first came here, this house was haunted. My studio, you couldn't go in it, it was so cold. And we found out that a guy had died here. So we did a whole routine; incense and exorcism. And he's gone! But, my mother's here now.

MC: Well, you brought her.

B: Well, I know, because I haven't seen my mother for years, but we feel her now. And since this has been here we feel her all the more. . . . I don't know that I want her looking at me every five minutes. But, she's happy.

The video work that we discussed, although we did not view it that afternoon, was a very simply constructed piece entitled *Abuse: Something We*

Don't Want to Talk About. Barbara had managed to avoid being either melodramatic or voyeuristic by maintaining a very simple style and through the very honest, straight forward manner of her partner's words. In the tape she interviews her partner who speaks very directly about the impact of an abusive childhood on her life. She just sits and talks while the camera, in extreme close up, focuses on segments of her face, most particularly her eyes.

As I noted above and as she pointed out in several other works, the attention to eyes was a very important consideration.⁵ A preoccupation with eyes is not uncommon as I, and other classroom art teachers have observed. However I recalled an occasion while she was my student, when she commented on how carefully I watched my students, especially while they were speaking in class. I then recognized I was being carefully watched as well, particularly the direction of my gaze.

Ultimately, with insight and support from instructors, particularly in her Art Education courses, Barbara has come to recognise and value her abilities to empathise and communicate with others in need. This too she sees as a gift that she can share. While she recognised that she would not work well in a large group setting, she was excited about the success of her work with individuals

and in small groups. She holds the conviction that out of the suffering of her life she has gained sensitivity and insight which she can extend to help others, through teaching and most particularly through imbuing her art works with those qualities. The study of art history and theoretical discussions hold no interest for her. She values the authority of her own new-found inner voice and the voices of those around her with whom she feels empathy.

B: I thought "Well, how can I do that in my paintings?" And the only way I can do it is by just doing. Not thinking out something that I want to paint. . . . I'm realising that I've got this gift. I can just zero in onto the people, pick up their feelings, and they pick up my feelings, and it's an instant communication. . . . So that's where my strength lies. And as for my paintings, well, I don't know if it will take me anywhere. I mean, I'm not going to be a great artist, but people will see my work that will be able to identify, and say, "Oh, I'm not alone any more."

She projected this concern into the possibility of working in an art programme in a women's shelter or a drop-in centre for elderly abused women which she and her partner are hoping to establish in their neighbourhood. These plans are not very concrete. Nor are her expectations for herself as an artist overly ambitious. But her resolve is absolute. As she told me, she is happy and she has found the freedom to make her own decisions. And a future.

⁵ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* New York: Basic Books, 1992. Adaptation to, this climate of constant danger requires a state of constant alertness. . . . Thus, while in a constant state of autonomic hyperarousal they must also be quiet and immobile, avoiding any physical display of their inner agitation. The result is the peculiar, seething state of "frozen watchfulness" noted in abused children. (Herman 1992, 99-100)

Hannah

Hannah is an open and friendly woman in her early forties who was in the process of making important changes in her life. She is a Métisse¹ who had grown up on the western Canadian prairies and she was returning there to live and work after living in Montreal for more than twenty years. Her departure was scheduled for a few days after our interview. The four years since I had her as a student had been filled with intense work and growth for her and she now felt drawn back to the Prairies. At this decisive moment in her life I found her to be intensely involved in personal reflections on her life, art and relationships.

Leaving Montreal, it's the first time I've left a place feeling full. I feel full. I feel rich. I feel so much love from the people I've been sharing my life with, my friends, and the people that I've been doing the group work with, the people at school. And it's just so amazing! Why am I leaving? I must be crazy! It's like, there's so much here. I mean I could have so much work here and I can make a lot of money. I'm doing well. But something is calling me and I need to go back, to connect with my mother. I feel there's work there for me to do. I don't know what. I know I'm more grounded there. I feel more peaceful. I need to get out of the city. I need to live with nature. It's very important.

She was going as a kind of act of faith. "I'm trusting now a lot in the spirit and letting my spirit guide me. I'm going to the West on faith. I don't know what I will be doing." She had completed her BFA in Art Education two years ago, had struggled through a number of problems and taken two years of training in alternative medicine.	I know I'll be working with people in groups. I like the group energy and I find it very powerful and empowering for all of us; where there's no one better than the others. I'm not a teacher. They're my teachers as well and we work together. I'm just a facilitator. I like that and it's that way of working in the circle, the power of the circle.
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¹ A woman of mixed Aboriginal and European parentage.

Her description of herself at this point in her life was enthusiastic and optimistic.

I'm a real social butterfly, these days. (laughter) I've really come out into the world, a lot. It's been a gradual evolution. The work I do now is creative in a different form. I do Healing Circles and I use art, I use drama, I use psychology, I use ceremony. I use a Native tradition, so I use spirituality as well. And I'm very much involved with people. I think I'm coming to a place of balance, where I'm introverted when I need to be.

She was the fifth child in a family of eight children. She described a childhood full of gangs of children sent off to the park and open spaces to amuse themselves while their parents attended to the work. Those busy hours spent out of doors instilled in her a great affinity for the sky and space of the prairie landscape, a desire for which was also motivating her return. The situation did not allow for many art making activities. Her parents could afford very little in the way of materials or opportunities and the school offered no art programme beyond poster contests, one of which she won. Her artistic awakening came much later in life.

The seasons are different too, because the summers have longer hours of daylight and the winters have longer hours of night, so you have beautiful skies, night skies in winter and daylight in summer and clouds and stuff. So my love of beauty and aesthetics I think came from Nature and from that, the wide open spaces

In spite of the very full household, or perhaps because of it, she grew up feeling rather isolated. She described her parents as loving and hard working but with all the work of caring for a large family there was little energy left for one-on-one attention and affection. Her observation was that "there wasn't much bonding going on" which, "influenced me a lot in terms of having a problem with that space, that intimate space where there's a bonding between me and my art." She described the break up of her parent's marriage as a truly traumatic event for her as a twelve year old girl, and in fact,

for the entire family. Her mother left the community and their father had the responsibility of raising the family alone.

My father was not able to really communicate what was going on, so it was kind of left for me to figure things out. The whole family seemed to just split apart and there was a separation between everyone. We kind of all went into ourselves to lick our wounds. There wasn't a communication of what was going on. It *was* very traumatic. So I was kind of lost after that.

Although there was a certain restraint on her father's part, and an inability to be expressive, she speaks with great respect and appreciation about his commitment and his responsibility for his family. She declared that her parents were "wonderful people." Hannah had occasional

My father comes from a different generation, and he is who he is. He is a good man and he works hard, you know, but there's not a lot of communication on a deeper level. So I've learned to sort of accept that.

visits with her mother after her exile from the home and Hannah had lived with her for a year when she was eighteen.

That was also difficult because there's other things going on, but I always loved my mother and I always understood her. And I had a very strong bond with my mother on some level, even though she wasn't with me. And I'll never stop loving her. And I always understood, you know, where she was coming from.

My mother and I are very connected. We have become closer over the years and she has been very loving, supportive, encouraging. I'm very lucky. I've a wonderful mother and a wonderful relationship.

She also spoke of the separation that had developed between herself and her siblings. She had very little communication with them for most of the twenty-two years since she left home .

I cut myself off from my family for a long time. When I went out to Vancouver, and especially when I came to Montreal, there was no communication. When I actually did connect with them again and started going back to visit, it was a gradual process of reconnecting. But I come from a different reality than most of them.

She left home at the age of eighteen, spent a year with her mother and then moved to Vancouver where she met the man to whom she was married for the next twenty years. Shortly after their marriage they moved to Montreal. Their son was born here and for many years Hannah was a homemaker and child care worker. She took an active interest in the children's art making activities but her own art making was "to doodle and to do drawings." It was only after her husband observed this slight interest and urged her to do something with it that she enrolled in a recreational art course in still life drawing, offered through the Protestant School Board. She went on to do a portraiture course at the Visual Arts Centre. Her evident pleasure with those course motivated the next move.

Then my husband said, "Well, if your going to keep taking courses, why don't you go to Concordia." He's a graduate of Concordia. And so I did. Well, I wasn't quite ready for that level of art because I realised that everyone there had background in art. Most of them had been drawing and painting all their lives, since they were kids. And they know basic stuff like how to mix colours. I had no idea! About paint, how to mix colours, anything. It was very traumatic.

However, she persevered as a part time student, over the course of ten years, first as a Studio major and then in Art Education. Her fundamental conflict in Studio Arts, was over the issue of process versus product. Her personal ideology has been deeply committed to the priority of the creative process, with little concern for the final product: if the process is right the product will be too. This idea was reinforced by her experience with one of her first paintings. After a difficult time in her first year painting course, she took the painting home and painted over it, " just for myself, just to see what I would do on my own."

And just started painting with what I had there, very spontaneous. And it became impressionistic. I was just going with whatever happened, and an image started to appear. It started to come alive. Before I was just putting paint on canvas, but it started to come alive and an image started to appear.

For her, at this point, the image just appears, almost magically through an intuitive rather than rational process.

It felt good. It felt really good. And I just left it like that. To me that was a completion of that course, my first painting course, to do something just for myself and to allow it, for it to talk to me and tell me what it wanted to be. . . . When I worked with this I knew exactly when it was finished and it finished with those little spirit people there. I just put down my brush and I walked away and I said, "It's finished." I thought, "Whooo boy! "You know, all this fear and agonising, "When is the painting finished?" and I *just knew* when it was finished. The whole thing was it was just spontaneous and it was liberating to work that way. And I just left it. And that was it. It was over.

There is a road in the middle, the road curves. You can't see what's around the corner. There's the trees and then there's this light in the forest. You know how light sparkles off of leaves and water. It's sort of got that sense of this vitality coming in, this light coming into it. Then you can see there's these ridges underneath. There's a square in that lower right hand corner and then there are two overlapping kind of rectangles, sort of towards the upper left and in the middle of that right rectangle there's a bit of white. When I stood back and looked at it, they looked like people, all crowded together. They all looked like spirits. Facing towards the light.

She has come to a point now where she gives greater regard to the finished product but she sees it more as a question of valuing what she has achieved through the hard work of the transformational, creative process rather than as valuing the object for itself. This reconsideration has been encouraged to some extent by the admiration people have expressed for this particular painting and another that she produced in a similar manner. That work was of similar dimensions to the first one, approximately 45" x 30". She said that she had done this painting for her mother when she came to visit her here. Again, the process had been spontaneous for her.

That work was also a landscape. In this case the canvas was divided equally into sky and earth. I had a strong sense of space and wind, a summer day on the northern Prairies.

What came out of it was earth, and sky, and texture, and vibrant, the vibrant light and air, the feeling of light and air and clouds and, and thick dense forest, sort of mountainous terrain.

However, her progress towards a sense of balance has been difficult. Her unease and sense of inadequacy to meet the production demands in Studio Arts prompted her to transfer into Art Education where she found a more comfortable milieu; one that was more compatible with the needs she felt at the time.

I transferred into Art Education and *that* was really exciting for me. Because all of a sudden, instead of being product oriented it was process oriented and that immediately freed me up a lot and I loved it. I played with it and I had so much fun with it. We did things like collage and we did things like mock classes where I was the teacher and those kinds of things. It was an aliveness in it. I also realised that Art Education was more socially oriented and I was, at that point in my life, ready to be more sociable, rather than be alone in a studio or an art room with my painting. I had been very introverted most of my life and when I started going to university I started meeting people who I had common interests with and I started wanting to be more with people and Art Education gave me that as well.

This coincided with a period of dramatic and unsettling events in her life. Her relationship with her husband was disintegrating and she had ended the marriage in the year before I met her. Through her engagement in various holistic practices she has come to view her artistic, spiritual and sexual experiences as inextricable. For her, artistic creativity is dependent upon the flow of one's sexual, spiritual and physical energies: an impediment in one sphere of experience will impact directly upon the rest. At some point she had come to realise that the trauma of her parent's separation had been compounded by an incident of sexual abuse. She did not elaborate on the incident but she wanted to make it very clear that the perpetrator was not her father. She was very concerned that that be specified. She has come to realise that it had serious impact

on her life and she feels that realising and confronting that trauma has been a vital task for her recovery and personal and artistic growth.

I just blocked all my life. I had blocked because of the experience, the sexual abuse, I had blocked my sexuality and my creativity, and that makes sense why in school, I couldn't get into art. It was there in me but it would come out in little moments in time, it would come through . . . It explains a lot of things. I was very happy to find out I had sexually abused, because it explained so much. I was happy to find out. I went through a lot of the releasing of the pain before I actually knew what I was releasing. When I was in that year, that painting class and those two years that was very important, a lot of releasing going on for me. I was crying a lot. I was blocked. I was working through a lot of stuff and I didn't know what it was. I kind of found out about it after I had already released it emotionally. So it wasn't so traumatic to find out at that time and it was actually, it was a good time, a good way to do it I guess.

The creation of one particular drawing (which she would not show to me) was a key point for her in this realisation. I cite her description in its entirety.

It was really weird because, the day I made the image, I walked into painting class and it was like I was in a trance. I think something shut down in me. I put up a paper and I started painting and I painted for an hour or two. And all of a sudden I kind of snapped out of it and I stepped back and I looked at what I had painted and it was a woman with her legs spread and you could only see the bottom part of the body and her vagina was like *a fire*. It was on fire. When I stepped back and looked at that I thought, "I don't remember doing that!" I looked to the guy next to me. He was standing there, his eyes were (laughter) big like this (laughter) and I looked around the room and there was this sweet young thing over there, a young girl, and she was like (laughter) Ahhh! Shheesh! She couldn't look at it. No one else was looking so I kind of rolled it up and took it down and went into the other room that was empty. I put it up and I looked at it. I thought, "What the Hell is this?" My teacher came to the other room and he looked at it with me and we sat down and we talked a bit about it. He first started talking in terms of aesthetics and composition and it was like, (laughter) "Never mind!" Then he asked, "What is that about?" I don't know! I couldn't say! I didn't want to say! I was too embarrassed. And he says, "Is it about birth?" and I said, "Yeah!" (laughter) He says, "I'd like to see maybe more emotion in it." And I said, "She has no emotions." And that really scared me too. I didn't know what that was about. But I *did* know what it was about. And it was very blatant. It was just *too* real. I guess that if I had done it more in an image that was subtle, but, it was just right out there staring him in the face. I just said, "I can't talk about this." I took it down and put

it up at home and I looked at it for a while and thought about it. I realised I was very repressed, sexually and very terrified of my sexuality. *Terrified* of it. But the passion was inside of me and what was blocked was my sexuality which was blocking my art, my creativity. They are one and the same.

Her confusion was further compounded by an incident of harassment perpetrated by one of her professors at about the same time. I gather from her discussion that it was the professor who had tried to discuss the fire painting with her but she was guarded about that. At the time she was in the midst of ending her marriage and confronting issues of sexuality and passion. She had appreciated his efforts to be interested and supportive of her struggles and she admits to being flattered by the attention he gave her. What began as friendly flirtation became phone calls and invitations to visit him in his studio. But when he really showed his true colours by sending her a vulgar postcard when he was on vacation, she told him not to call again. His response was to make rude and hurtful remarks to her when he met her in the hallway the following term. She said that she did not report the incident until a year later when she joined some other women who were making a report. There seemed to be no further action. She had not followed it up. This happened the year before she became a student in my class. She felt her creative energies to be close to paralysis.

From her particular experience as an art student and having studied in art education, she raised several points about the qualities required of "good" teachers.

Just to be able to communicate with the teacher on a personal level, not just with the work of art but with the person who's creating the art . . . for a teacher to be aware of that individual and sensitive to them and to what art is to them.

She was quite emphatic about the influence of an instructor on the way in which she worked in that class, but she also acknowledge a concern for certain kinds of limits.

I guess in a sense I was using art as therapy, as part of my healing and working through what I was going through. I don't know if I should expect teachers to be able to work with you on that level. But I needed that. It was part of my art. I don't know if it's right to expect teachers to be able to do that.

She credits the new and different possibilities that she discovered in the Multi-Media class with opening up the freedom to work in new ways and helping her to "unblock." "It became multi-dimensional and I was able to bring myself into it. I *became* the art." I asked her to elaborate on how this came about.

Because you were very supportive of my process, and accepting of what I needed to do, and what I couldn't do. And that was very important . . . Like you really *understood* the process that I was in, and you allowed me it. You also allowed me that space by not making those demands on me, that I wasn't ready for. And also, giving me time for that personal interview really meant a lot to me, because I wouldn't have been able to talk with you in the classroom situation about it. You actually gave me time outside the classroom and that meant a lot. Definitely.

She described that transformation in great detail when we discussed the Multi-Media performance that she presented as her year end project. An underlying element of that work was an awakening of her connection with Aboriginal spirituality. She had of course been aware of her Métis heritage but had been distanced from it for most of her life. While doing research for a term paper she interviewed Aboriginal people living in Montreal who spoke about their profound sense of alienation in white, urban culture. She suddenly became aware of how strongly similar their feelings were to her own feelings of disconnection and isolation.

When I did that Multi-Media project, was when I started really bringing it together. My intention was, "I really need to bring my art together with what I'm going through in my life." I said that. It was like a prayer. I *need* to do it. I can't stand the split any more. It worked inside of me for months. I didn't really do anything about it but things were going on inside. When I started actually working it was so clear. I just went and did it. I went from one step to another and it was so smooth, the transition. It was difficult but it was smooth at the same

time. I called my mother and asked if she could send me some slides from my childhood. I got a friend and we did some shots which I put into the slide presentation. It was my psychological process of what I was going through at the time. The images were about my childhood and the process of becoming. The issues that I had to deal with as a woman. The sound effects that I put together, it just came together so beautifully. The whole piece went from the psychological to the spiritual, to the healing.

When I did the performance, the whole piece, and it was all put together, that day I went into the room, I didn't know what I was going to use to sit on or lie on. I was going to lie down in front of the screen and have these images projected behind me. I walked in and there was this beautiful big old Victorian chair sitting there, and I said, "Thank you! It's perfect!" . . . I had the images on the screen, I had two slide projectors, if you remember, fading in, and it was very ethereal. I was sitting there, against the wall, in this chair, in my white flannel night-gown, like I was sleeping. I was curled up in the chair sleeping, and the image that came on was me in that flannel night-gown, laying in bed. The image was like a trick photography, where you can show the image coming up and it looked like my spirit rising up from my body and going out through the door. At that time there was breathing. It was like breathing, how it sound when you are asleep. . . . Then when I went out through the door the next image was me, out in the middle of the city and I was saying, "Who am I?" And then the breathing started, the heart beat started. You started hearing the heart beat, and it became increasingly more chaotic. It was like, "Who am I? Where am I?" It was like this ghost image wandering through the city, lost, and feeling invisible, and not having an identity. Then I said, "Remember?" and I had images of my childhood. I said, "But your not a child anymore."

The next image was a woman actually tied to a chair and gagged. And like a little girl, I've got braids and mini skirts. But it was this feeling of female in bondage and being abused. It was a very powerful image and I had one woman coming to me after that in tears because of that image. She related to it. It got more chaotic and I said, "Who am I? Who am I?" and it was getting really intense and the heart was going quicker . . . It built and became very intense and chaotic and then it kind of stopped. Everything stopped. The image was of me sitting up in bed with no face. It's like I had this mask that covered everything and it's like I had no face. I don't know who I am, and it ended like that. . . . The images stopped and then I got up out of the chair I was sitting in and I went over to this table and I turned around, and I never thought of it but people though that was sort of like I had my dream and I'm getting up and I'm starting my day. But I was actually putting on a mask and I turned around and it was. "Ahhh!!" They saw me in this

And I looked at her (Freda Kahlo's) work and I really connected with her. I have also been through surgery and physical pain. So I knew what she was feeling and I saw, the torment in it. At that point it wasn't about my sexuality. It was more about being trapped in a physical body that's painful. When there's surgery there's pain and your trapped. You have to go through that pain.

mask. They didn't expect that. I went to the centre and I had this little bag of candles. I had seven candles and I took them out and I put 'em in a circle around me. With each candle I did an affirmation and I did seven candles. I said, "I am that I am. Into this world I am born. With sacredness I am born. I accept all life as sacred. All that I see is a reflection of me. All that I see is sacred." So I went through, basically the seven shacras and affirmations. It was very empowering, putting them in the circle around me. And with the mask I was pure spirit. I didn't have an identity. I was a spirit without an identity. But as I started the affirmations and I put them around me, I was creating an identity for myself. And bringing in the spirituality. With the images on the screen it was my psychological life, my emotional experiences, my subconscious. I was bringing in the super conscious or the spiritual. And the last candle, I put it down and I said, "I am that I am." Then I took off the mask and I said, "I am your sister." And it, Ahhh! I felt it. It was so real. I brought in the human and I connected. I connected with life, with people. And when I share, I'm saying, "I'm just like you." There was silence and that was it. I walked away and I waited. It was silent and I thought, "It's finished." I didn't know what to do. It was beautiful. And it was beautiful, the feedback. The whole thing was totally *from* me. I never even *thought* of how to affect other people. It was so important to do this for myself. And *it changed my life*. I realise now the power in ritual and I brought together all my parts and I centred it and I brought myself together. I integrated everything. I integrated my past. I integrated my spirituality, and my humanness and myself as a woman. . . . And it just all came together in that short time.

She concluded,

You know what that taught me? That taught me that my art is for *me* and the more I do it for me and not for the teacher, not for the response of others, not for the critique, not for the marks, the more I did it for me the more powerful it was and the more impact it had, the more it affected people. That really blew me away because I wasn't thinking about that. It was totally selfish. I think it was the most selfish thing I have ever done in my life and the first time I've ever done something selfish. And it felt *good* !(laughter) It literally changed my life. After that my life opened up. My spiritual journey began at that point and things that happened after is another story. It was amazing. I had an incredible summer of connecting with my spiritual, Native spirituality. I met incredible people. I journeyed with Native people. It was so powerful. And I *know* it started with that performance.

MC: It was a very powerful moment. I remember that morning, going to school and thinking, "Hannah is presenting today and she was talking about rituals. Rituals make me nervous."

H: Oh, really. (laughter)

MC: So I was thinking, Okay, what's she going to make us do? (laughter) Because you were talking about audience participation and things like that. And I mean, it really was a very moving experience. It was not only a situation where it was very clear how it came together for you, and the silence following it was a demonstration, I think, of how involved people had been with you. You're right, it wasn't uniquely your experience. You brought your audience with you in a really powerful way.

She showed me a small sculpture that she had made the next summer as she embarked on her quest to find her connections with Aboriginal spiritual tradition. Again she talked about the process of creating the work as being spontaneous and intuitive: "It kind of made itself." She did however have a very sure analysis of the significance of the elements that she had used. For her it was a gesture of binding together powerful and significant elements: earth, and water as feminine elements wrapped within the four directions, which in Aboriginal tradition signify the four winds and the four races of humanity. The rock was a grounding and embodying element, "to connect me to the earth and to my body and to be here and now, present, in the moment, you know, and not to be spaced out." The wire wrapping was like a cocoon, "Containing. I needed to be contained and centred. Grounded and centred and contained." She pointed out that she had come to understand that this was a common desire for abuse survivors,

There was a substantial piece of stone, perhaps 4" x 6" x 3" over which she had placed a pyramid constructed of four 18" long pieces of tree branch. The branches and the rock were bound together with wire that looped around and around the construction. The last element was a white shell suspended like a chrysalis, from the peak of the pyramid and, in a most remarkable manner, it was perpetually vibrating. There was no apparent cause for this. The teacups were not rattling in the cupboard. The apartment was on a quiet street. But the shell continued it's circular movement throughout my time there.

Children who have sexual abuse often we tend to leave our bodies, so to speak, part of us leaves, and we disown our bodies. Many of us do. That's how we cope with it. So I needed to bring myself back into my body and to the earth.

Of the shell she said,

It's also a very feminine shape, that shell. It's very vaginal. It's like protecting my feminine self, in a sense too. And the movement within the form is just, "Yes! I'm alive! I'm alive and I, and I move! and I grieve but I move within my sacred space."

The creation of this work, more than any other, seemed to represent her present sense of being centred, grounded, balanced and confident. "And it made me appreciate where I'm at. I'm at a really good place!"

She went on to show me a number of ceramic works, some sculptures and a number of containers. All were roughly textured and finished in natural engobe or iridescent raku glazes. Working in ceramics had been very gratifying for her because,

There was a lot of freedom in that too. The teacher was very liberal. He gave us assignments but he left us a lot of freedom. He gave very basic, abstract assignments which gave us a lot of freedom within that. So I really enjoyed that.

She discussed two pieces as exemplary of her artistic and symbolic intentions in these works. One was a sculpture about a foot high which featured a woman and a horned beast locked in an evidently pleasurable, carnal embrace. For her this work related to aspects of Wikkān philosophy and represented an opening to,

Earthiness, and passion and joyfulness, playful, playful sexuality, but it's acknowledging the beast within and loving it. The sexual energy between male and female and I also see it as sacred and divine.

This perspective was enthusiastically represented in several other works in which she felt she was achieving the kind of personal artistic, physical and spiritual unity what she had been seeking for so long; a coming together of opposites which/who in that unity still retained their individual character. A recurring example was that of a male head placed within an open female head. "The male always seems to be in my head."

When I asked her if she felt that was a positive thing or a problem she replied that,

Initially it is a problem when I get too much in my head, too mental, too intellectual. But I also feel that I have to also accept my intellect and not fight it, not disown it. I feel that I have to contain that within the body, within the

feminine. And the feminine contains the masculine. The masculine cannot contain the feminine because it's not a vessel. The feminine is the vessel. . . . So as long as I can keep that male energy contained and not let it dominate.

The second significant ceramic work was a jar, about eighteen inches high which expanded gracefully upward to a diameter of about ten inches and then closed into a very brief, narrow neck. The cover was formed in the shape of the head of a hawk, the image of which she said had appeared to her in a meditation vision.

I realised, it's a spirit vessel. It's a vessel that contains my spirit which is essentially what ceramics is and it's what our bodies are. So my body is the sacred vessel that houses my spirit, and the bird is a symbol of spirit in the Native tradition.

She referred to this as a sacred object, among others that she has created "as tools" for the spiritual quest upon which she has embarked. One features four small totem animals, placed at the four power points along the rim of an open jar in which a candle burned. I felt that these works made a very fitting conclusion to our interview. Through them Hannah was able to present me with a clear impression of her ideas and the things that were important to her at that point in her life. I enjoyed her open and generous manner. Some things had not been easy for her to discuss but she regarded her participation in my research to be just one way that she could give back for what she had received. I am grateful for her trust.

Meredith

Meredith is a pleasant, outgoing woman in her fifties who had enrolled in her fine arts studies on a part time basis many years ago. She had been in my very first class of Multi-Media students and we had had occasional conversations throughout the intervening four years, usually when we happened to meet in the hallway at school. The women in my study had all prepared for the interview by thinking back over their school experience, reviewing journals, and selecting the art works for discussion. Meredith had been particularly thoughtful and had made notes on the art works and on the contribution that various instructors had made to her education. She took charge of the interview and covered most of the issues without much query from me. Throughout our conversation her forthright recollections reflected her good humour, wit and curiosity.

She began by pointing out that her advent as an art student had come only after a full twenty-five year career as a social worker, as well as being a wife, the mother of two children, divorced and re-married. So for her, "part of my whole artist development is to feel like an *artist*." There had been very little interest in art in her family, other than that her mother "had quite an eye." She had no particular memory of art making in either elementary or secondary school. However, she had been a Sunday painter ever since her architect husband gave her a set of water colours to occupy herself while she waited for the overdue birth of their first child. Art and the baby arrived in her life at about the same

time. She asserted that she had never been shy about her art but that she hadn't really taken it seriously either.

It's always just been something *jolly*, that I've done on the side. And when people have said, "Gee! That's good." I just thought, "Oh, that's jolly! Don't you think that's jolly!" It's a word that I've often used, which I now realise that I don't like anymore. But that was my whole kind of coming to art.

She assured me that she now considered herself to be an artist although it had taken her a very long time to come to this opinion. She could now say,

It's the most important thing that I do. It is an important thing to do, that I do it, and have some competence at it. I think competency has some thing to do with it. I think I first of all see art as important which I didn't really. I thought it was *wonderful*. It really hummed for me, but I had no realisation that it was an important thing. So I suppose it's that, and competency.

She then posed the question for herself, "So how was I making the change?"

She began to answer her question by telling about her naive pleasure in simply going out on a summer day to paint with a friend who was an artist.

One of the other things that's interesting is that the things I choose to paint are still part of what interests me. It's just that I had no idea. I mean, I thought it was just the most wonderful thing. On my days off, there I would be. I have a very close friend who's an artist and in the summer we'd both put our children into day camps or something, at the same time, the same two weeks, and then every day we would take off. Take our lunch and go out and paint all day. So she taught me a lot.

She whisked out two acrylic paintings on masonite which depicted important social and political events of the time: the Watts riots and Jane Fonda in Hanoi. She had worked from *Time Magazine* photos to produce a very simplified, non-rendered representation of the events. Over the Jane Fonda painting she had added bold, black, stencil-like lettering to spell out the title. She

then presented another painting of women playing tennis, which she said was of her own invention. Again the forms were flat areas of muted colour. A sense of depth was created by the scale and placement of the figures and through the use of a strong white line cutting diagonally across the surface and diminishing into the background. She then showed a brightly coloured patterned work as being representative of another preoccupation from that time. She remarked on the flatness of these works.

Yes. Flat! I didn't know how to do *anything*. I didn't see anything else. I mean, I only *saw* contours. I didn't *know* there was anything else. So it didn't make any difference (Laughter) . . . But I didn't see anything besides, I didn't see volume. I didn't see light. I just saw straight contours, shapes and colours. So I was never bothered. I never felt tense about the whole thing. . . . Entire pleasure! Entire pleasure! I could do it anywhere. You could sit me anywhere and I'd find something.

She eventually came to recognise the limitations of the way that she was working in her painting and her artist friend suggested that some formal lessons might be helpful. This was one of the factors that prompted her to consider enrolling in a formal program, but it was a combination of factors that finally brought her to Concordia. On the personal level, "It was just then that my husband had left, and I was *not* feeling good. I was really feeling bad." On the professional level she was finding her career in social work to be increasingly bureaucratic, less involved with people and less rewarding, "It wasn't quite so kind of real and invigorating as it used to be." Her plan was to, "add a dimension and learn to be an art therapist." She remained ambivalent about initiating the plan but with the urging of a psychologist with whom she was consulting with

regard to her marital distress, she went to speak with a professor in the art therapy department at Concordia. To her dismay, she was told that she would have to complete a full under graduate

Well by this time I was late forties and, you know, thought I was a thousand years old. (Laughter) I mean, an undergraduate degree! Give me a break! (Laughter) I'll be dottering!

degree in Art Education before she could even be considered for the art therapy programme. She considers herself to have been extremely fortunate that,

He saw that I was very disappointed, but he was extremely thoughtful about it, and he said, "Why don't you register anyway?" These are the olden days. "Why don't you register anyway? You obviously really like your Sunday painting and at the minimum, that will interest you immensely. It will definitely expand your horizons and you'll be enormously interested" Of course he was absolutely right. So it was very wonderful to have somebody who was so thoughtful about the situation. He must have known that I would be hooked (Laughter) from day one!

Again her psychologist had to urge her to submit her registration even though it was late. To her delight, "They did accept it. So there were a bunch of wonderful things that came together instantly. Instantly. And successfully." She continued to work and took one course per year for several years. Then,

M: Because social work was interfering with my art, (Laughter) I asked for a year's leave of absence, which was delicious! And then I took two or three courses. I had a *wonderful* year. So then I asked for another year. And (Laughter) took another year. I really *still* didn't wish to leave social work, to make that commitment and I asked for a third year. I mean, even I knew MC: *Sooner or later they were going to say, "No."*

M: Yes. Yes. And rightly so, I mean, I couldn't disagree. But why I need somebody else to say that to me? I could hardly remember what social work is about, but I was that reluctant to leave. And even then, when all that was decided, by the time I put my written resignation in the mail, I can remember sort of tottering up to the mail box and putting it in, at quite last minute. . . . Anyway, I guess it was a sense of my own of ambivalence about doing it.

At that point I asked if she could review her personal life and bring that aspect of her story up to date with her artistic pursuits. She and her two brothers were raised in a comfortable upper middle-class home. She described her mother as a gentle "kind of an old fashioned person" who carried out her role of wife and mother in traditional fashion. However, in her own guarded way she bolstered Meredith's desire for a degree of stimulation beyond the domestic sphere.

My mother was quite thoughtful in realising that you want something for yourself. You have to be a person. But she said, "You have to do it part-time, and you have to do it around the edge. But you still have to do it, and as your children are older you'll have more time to do it." But in terms of the relative, kind of importance (shakes head).

Regrettably, her mother suffered from periods of profound depression, and was indeed incapacitated for several years before her death. Meredith expressed great sympathy not only for the distress and hopelessness of the sufferers but also for "the chaos it causes around." She did not elaborate on the implications of the "chaos", either for her personally or in general.

Her father was a dynamic entrepreneur who had rescued a moribund family business and built it into an international concern. He was deeply committed to the creation of the company, not simply as a financial success but as something "real" that had been "made really well". He was an active, sportive man and included all his children in his boating and skiing activities. It was apparent that he was the centre of attention whatever the milieu, public or domestic. Meredith observed that she was most like her father and that she got along well with him, but there were some reservations as she continued.

He's very funny. He has, well, he had a wonderful sense of humour. So, if you could overlook his controlling part, which mostly I could, because I didn't much run into it. But he ran his own show. Always. Always. So it was only later that I realised, "Hey! That's not all right." Because I didn't really run into it earlier. It didn't occur to me. I didn't find a lot of problem with it. But after a while you realise that you had to go along with his expectations.¹

In our conversation after the formal interview,² Meredith was anxious to clarify that she didn't want to leave the impression that her relationship with her father had been wholly beneficial. In fact she insisted, he had been a "massive negative " in her life. I would suggest that coming to recognise and take her right to a place at the centre of her life, rather than at the margins of world given over to masculine privilege, has been a major challenge throughout her adult life.³

And it took me again a long time. I don't know *where I was*, in all those years, in my head. It took me a long time to, kind of readjust my thinking. To think of women as really competent. And *important*. Because it was kind of defined as men's work was important, and women did nice things around the edges.

She studied social work at McGill. She was married in her early twenties and continued to work until the first of her two children was born. Motherhood was fine, but she "knew right away" that she needed something more "to keep

¹ Linda Schierse Leonard, The Wounded Woman: Healing the Father Daughter Relationship (Boulder & London: Shambhala, 1983), 37-8. In Speaking about the betrayal of daughters who are relegated to a passive and inferior position Leonard says, "Our culture has collaborated in this betrayal. Women have been praised for their compliance, their adaptability, their gentleness, their youthful sweetness, their obedient co-operation with their husbands, who are "form to their matter." Women who live out their lives in this archetypal pattern of existence have simply remained fixated at a girlish level of development. Like Peter Pan ... they remain eternal girls."

² Field notes. Used with permission.

³ Linda Schierse Leonard, The Wounded Woman: Healing the Father Daughter Relationship (Boulder & London: Shambhala, 1983), 38. Rather than develop herself on a personal and professional level, rather than working out her own identity, rather than finding out who she really is through the difficult task of self-transformation - the eternal girl usually gains her identity from the projections others have upon her.

my sort of adult mind busy." Interestingly enough, it was her mother who suggested that she find a part time job. Through one of her former professors at the School of Social Work she got a job as a part-time researcher which, in time, led to very fulfilling part-time work with a major social service agency. She remarked that this was a somewhat extraordinary situation at the time, in that her husband consented to her desire to work; "that's fine as long as you have time to keep the children and the house, and everything." She admits with amazement that, at the time it didn't occur to her to question his right to make those kinds of stipulations on her intentions. She was equally dismayed to recall that in her professional work she was unquestioningly accepting of the fact that men occupied all the upper positions in social service agencies, "I was nowhere near there. I don't know why." But doubt insinuated itself into her consciousness and the book that was a catalyst for thousands of women in her situation served to give her words to name her experience.

It crept up. The first thing that I can totally remember, I guess I'd been working for two years when I read Betty Friedan's, what was it called? *The Feminine Mystique*. Yeah. I remember her talking about where I didn't know why I had to work then. I'd been walking with my friend on the street, pushing children and I was telling her of some of the problems of working. She looked at me and she said, "Why are you doing that? Why are you working? I mean if it isn't pure joy, why are you doing it?" And I had no idea why. But the question really bothered me. I had no idea. I had no words for that, at all. And Betty Friedan put words for me. She put words! I remember sitting on a bus, going along Sherbrooke Street, and it was dark, so that it was lit in the bus and dark outside. I'm sitting, reading the book, with tears pouring down my face. Tears of *recognition*. I couldn't believe this! And there are people outside, waiting to get on the bus (Laughter) all sort of, lined up and I'm suddenly, (gestures tears coming down her face) and there's people looking at me in the window. I remember that particular

scene of how wonderful. . . . The last chapter, I've no idea if she'd changed it but it's a long time ago. It's probably totally out of date now but the last chapter dealt with the problems of it. That if you are in fact going to take on this double role, the problems. That was so touching! So that was my most major beginning.⁴

In spite of her feeling that she didn't fit comfortably into the conventional role of wife and homemaker, she gained from the marriage in a couple of important ways. First, as I mentioned, it was her husband who gave her the first paint set. He was an architect and their social circle included artists and other creative people. As well, they were able to travel frequently to Europe where he introduced her to the museums and galleries. These trips fostered her enduring passion for the history of art, although at first it was really a case of trying to hold her own against her husband, who seemingly, "could absorb by running through". She remarked that, "So I'm a bit competitive and decided, 'How should he know so much and I shouldn't?'" She got up early and read up on the sites for the day, "Because I wanted to get out to the museum and say, "Well do you remember this, you know, the Bellini? " (Laughter)⁵

She has taken great pleasure in the art history courses that she has taken and found them to be very helpful in developing her current body of work. She

⁴ Linda Schierse Leonard, The Wounded Woman: Healing the Father Daughter Relationship (Boulder & London: Shambhala, 1983) , 55. "The first step of the way in transforming this pattern is to become conscious that one is out of relation to the self, to know and feel there is more in oneself, a higher power beyond ego-impulses to which one has not related and which is frequently revealed in dreams "

⁵ M.F. Belenky, B. M. Clinchy, N. R. Goldberger & J. M. Tarule Women's Ways of Knowing: The development of self, voice and mind. New York: Basic Books, 1986. 42. In discussing "Received Knowers" Belenky et al. report, 'She 'learns' the material; that is, she stores a copy of it, first in her notes, and then in her head. She does not transform the material; she files it "as is." She willingly reproduces the material on demand, as on an exam;"

quickly moved beyond simply remembering who painted what. The courses in visual literacy provided important technical information as well as definitions and vocabulary. A course in the methods of art history had introduced her to research methods and to a variety of perspectives on art criticism. A course in Contemporary Canadian art which stressed current art production in the context of Canadian culture, "was really helpful and I thought it was well taught." As she said, "I just like theory anyway. I mean, it's just a pleasure. It's just ideas, but I think that it yet gives you another way to look at things." The value of the art history courses was consolidated in two painting classes where the instructors were particularly knowledgeable and enthusiastic and incorporated art history content into their presentations and critiques.

When she entered the Fine Arts Faculty she felt herself to not only to be quite incompetent but also that she was stereotyped: "Because you know, what do little old lady painters do? They do little old paintings." When I asked her to elaborate on her experience as a mature student she was candid.

You know, one of my friends who's also doing this, always says that we are "Goodie Two Shoes." You've always got your stuff done on time and you've done twice as much work as was really expected, and you've got it all done on time. That's actually quite embarrassing after a while. This year (professor) asked us to make a page of notes on a particular article and have them in her box by Friday. Whenever it was that we had the class she said, "Well I've gotten, I've only gotten one." Well, everybody in the class would know. I was the only really mature student. (Laughter) . . . One of the young students who likes me, likes the work I've done and I've been in her class for a couple of years, but you know, when we were talking she said she was terribly busy, and had to earn money and had to do this and that. I mean, she really did say, "You know, you have nothing else to do."

However, overcoming her own uncertainties about her motivations and goals was of greater concern for her than worrying about her fellow student thinking that she was a dilettante. Some situations were mixed blessings. She recalled one class where "I guess we were an extraordinarily incompetent class." Everyone seemed to be lacking the skills that the instructor expected them to have already acquired and her perception was that, "he gave me, and maybe it was all of us the feeling, that, 'What are you doing here anyway?'" The strongest impression that she had from him was "Why are you dabbling in my field?" However, he did impart some useful technical knowledge and wisely recommended that she abandon acrylics in favour of oils. Moreover, he made a very thought provoking remark to her.

M: He said, "You're really a wonderful student. You listen, absolutely wonderfully. You're totally willing to try out anything." He said, "You're nice to the other students." (Laughter) . . . "But" he said, "you might want not to be such a good student any more, and concentrate on your own stuff, more carefully." So he really had labelled in a sense, where I was at.

MC: *Being a nice person.*

M: Yeah. I'm good at it. I still saw art as just jolly. "So you want me to do something else. Well, what a good idea! Maybe that'll work." And either I'd like it or not. I guess, I was always a bit too old to much care if he didn't like what I did. . . . I'm willing to try out the ideas and use what I like and throw out the others. I don't feel imposed on by an instructor. It's too late.

At this point in the interview she very clearly identified three important threads in the story of her progress through her art studies. The technical learning that preoccupied her first years was the first of these threads. An expanding repertoire of ideas, imagery and concepts was a second thread. The third one was the whole question about learning to see herself as an artist. It was

very clear to her how certain instructors had aided in the development of each aspect; contours, gestures, layering of colours, collage, movement, pastels, and compositional unity.

We returned to viewing her art works in a more or less chronological order. The first painting was about three feet square and depicted brown, gold and red fish swimming through a glowing yellow background. She did not make any comment on the subject matter and only commented briefly on the way in which she had painted over, scratched through the paint or rubbed off areas with rags to create the mottled colour field and the varied surface texture of the painting.

The next piece was a set of four 12" x 14" almost cartoonish portraits of a man. Three were of little interest to Meredith and she directed my attention to the most "painterly" of the four. Her comment was that,

M: I just find it the most interesting. I like the real eye. And I just like the technique. It's more complicated. I like the collage.

MC: *Oh. The eye is actually a collaged piece.*

M: Yeah, it's a collaged eye. But the whole thing together, I learned a lot from it. Talking about techniques, it was a technique of disguising something and these were different colours, putting in different colours and what not. So, using the *same* object in a lot of different ways. That was early. Early stuff. But I like it. It was very helpful.

MC: *So you're satisfied? There's a satisfaction with the, the end product as well?*

M: Yes. Yes. Although I'd never much cared about that. It didn't matter to me. I've thrown out *tons* of stuff. . . . It's *never* been important to me what the net result of the whole thing. It was always the process that was *terribly* important. So that's when I didn't think I was an artist. (Laughter)

An awkwardly drawn blue head shape seemed to float on a mottled background of muted ochre, orange and green. The eyes were placed high on the face, accented by strong red brows. One eye was painted yellow and the other was a photo of an eye. The nose was defined by a row of diagonal white lines and the mouth was a series of four small white squares.

The next painting marked a slight shift in the way she was valuing her work. It was a larger painting, about 4' x 3' that originated from a magazine photograph, of which she said, "I didn't change very much about it either. It just came like that and I liked it." She had successfully created a translucent sense of light, or as she said, "It's about a bit of, kind of transparency. It's about people doing things that are a bit mysterious." Beyond that she had no concern for the meaning or content of the work, "No thought. No information. No analysis. Simply, "Yeah, that looks good." However, this piece invited two important

moments of wider recognition. The first was that the painting was chosen, by a vote of her peers, to be included in the annual student painting show. Later when she had hung it in her home, a guest admired it and offered to buy it. Her response was,

She had used a palette of muted but quite vital tones to represent what could be a group of people in a public park on a summer evening. A group of young men and boys stood or squatted in the centre ground and women passed behind them. It had a sense of being a foreign place although I could not say just where.

"Buy it? You buy things from real artists! Buy it! What would you do with it?" and she declined the offer. She did not consider herself to be an artist yet.

The next painting was about 3' x 4' and represented work from her "glitz" period. A trip to Mexico had inspired the innovation and she was enthusiastic about having the confidence to indulge her own notions.

I just had fun. I guess I felt a little bit better about how I could do things and they wouldn't be quite so foolish looking as originally I was afraid to do that kind of thing because that was just foolish looking. I guess I felt more confident about, "What do I like?" and "What do I not like?" And I liked doing it. (Laughter) And *I like glitz!*⁶

⁶M.F.Belenky, B. M. Clinchy, N. R. Goldberger & J. M. Tarule Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind. New York: Basic Books, 1986. 53. In their discussion

She attributed no particular significance to the puffy, white-blue iridescent form (which I saw as a large bird perched on a branch) which dominated the canvass. Two beady red eyes stared out at the viewer. She insisted that she had selected the image from a book on the basis of it's aesthetic merits and that her working procedure had been deliberately spontaneous.

Yes. I put a whole lot of, I collaged things. I can't remember if I just did it over another painting that I had had that on or just started with it like that. But I often have done that. Just started with something because I like that rough look. So I'll just collage stuff on without any idea of what it is I'm doing. Sometimes I'll use just cheese cloth and something just to have a rough look. I was into surface. Surface texture and glitz.

This approach had been encouraged by a series of weekend seminars with a Jungian psychologist where the intention had been to create imagery through spontaneous, non manipulated exercises. It would seem that this at least began to introduce the idea that the work could be about something that came from within herself, rather than from an external source.

So I have a true belief in all that kind of stuff; that there's all kinds of imagery under there which you don't know about. And in fact, don't even necessarily want to meddle with or take away or anything. I mean, you want to see it. It's yourself and it's interesting, for better or worse. So probably I should have told you, but that's a strong influence. Yeah, it makes me often just turn a painting over and paint on top, so interesting things will come out the bottom.

Meredith's interest in the potent, spontaneous moment was consistent with another of her long standing amusements. She had always been the snapshot

of "Subjective Knowers" Belenky et al. discuss a woman they feel exemplifies some of the concerns of a women in this mode learning. "She was no longer subject to the dictates and whims of external authorities and no longer agreed with what some people was simply a matter of right or wrong. Things for her were not so clear cut as before. She no longer thought of herself as dumb, a know-nothing."

photographer in her family and social circles, and her photographs were popular and amusing gifts. She avoided the conventional posed shots in favour of the unguarded moments at the end of the party, "when people are looking a bit loose." She had very little understanding of the technical requirements of photography until she took the Multi-Media course many years later. She was not overly concerned about correct exposures or focus and in fact enjoyed the imperfections of the images.

She first began to put this interest to work more seriously for a project in a painting class where she used photographs, laser enlargements and transparencies to superimpose an image of lemons on an ugly building in downtown Montreal. She certainly credited her experience in the Multi-Media class with opening her eyes to the potential of technology to advance her artistic range.

I guess the biggest jump in an area that I couldn't have done by myself, was the technical stuff that I learned in your class. I really could not have done that. I had a feeling of myself moving into the twentieth century. As the children say, I'm just moving in as it's moving on. (Laughter) But that was a real sense of learning. You really just had to learn how to use the dark-room. . . .And I guess all kinds of technical things don't put me off as much.

She did not speak in any detail about her work from that class but I recall that she became very involved with using series of images, placed in particular relationships to each other, to sketch out stories and ideas. She had eventually done a larger body of work in this vein which was shown in the VAV Gallery in the Fine Arts building. She had created a collection of witty images through the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated images. The one that she showed me

featured the eyes and hair of the comedian Roseanne and the lower face of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. While she began this work for the fun of it, it led her to another important step.

But my interest in all that was to put together sort of, actually polarities of people, all kinds of different, sometimes to mix up sexes. To rip it up and mix up sexes and things like that, and see what would come out. Now, I guess that's another quite important thing, 'cause I was doing that for fun. I always thought that was funny and interesting. But I have a friend who's an artist [and] she happened to come to some party here and was looking in my studio and she liked it and she said, "Put a few more of those together, and I'll show you how to apply for a show."

Meredith was now ready to take up that invitation without hesitation. Her friend showed her how to photograph her work, prepare the slides and write up her application. Her first attempt for a show at a local gallery was refused but she then applied to the VAV student gallery and was accepted.

M: Which of course is a better place for me to start to show because it made me nervous, to begin with. So that was really a big. First of all, I guess, to say that a friend has had really a big influence. And second, to say that having a show or some kind of exhibition has a *big* influence in feeling.

MC: *How did you feel about that?*

M: Well, I didn't feel very Okay while I was doing it. While I was doing it I just thought "Gosh! I'm right out on a limb. What am I doing here?"

Her friend continued to play the role of mentor and showed her how to hang her work and attend to the other practical details of having an exhibition, all of which was greatly appreciated. She thus had the satisfaction of seeing her work placed properly in a legitimate art space. She sensed that with this public exhibition she was viewed differently, with greater respect, by her friends. She was no longer "a little old lady, doing little old paintings" in her eyes or theirs.

The show was right at the beginning of the school year so she had very little feedback from her fellow students. However one young man did remark that he didn't really care for the work, "but it seems to talk, they seem to talk to one another." That notion intrigued her; "And I thought so too. So why don't I make a whole piece where they deliberately talk to one another?" From this seed of an idea, in combination with her knowledge of art history, she had developed several small sketches and a number of works, one of which was on exhibition at the time of our interview. She has since had a second exhibition of this work.

The piece that she showed me was entitled *My Dinner with Salome* and consisted of twelve little paintings, each about four inches square and each matted and placed on a "three down and four across" grid. Each depicted an aspect of the setting or personage from the story, each playing out their own particular role in the drama. She explained the development of the idea as she pointed out the various characters.

This is that small one where it occurred to me, "What would it have been like if I'd have gone to the dinner, where John the Baptist's head had been brought out, if I'd have been there?" So I called it *My Dinner with Salome* and I took that from a Fillipo Lippi. Who would I have wanted to zero in on, and what would they have been doing? I would have wanted to see people's hands. I certainly would want to see his head. I would want to see Herodytus, I think that's her name. And of course, I would want to see Salome.⁷

⁷ M.F.Belenky, B. M. Clinchy, N. R. Goldberger & J. M. Tarule Women's Ways of Knowing: The development of self, voice and mind. New York: Basic Books, 1986. 113. "Connected knowers develop procedures for gaining access to other people's knowledge. At the heart of these procedures is the capacity for empathy. Since knowledge comes from experience, the only way they can hope to understand another person's ideas is to try to share the experience that has led the person to form the idea. "

She had come to the point where she was seeing the situation through her own eyes, asking her own questions, using her knowledge, and giving free reign to her wit and curiosity. She had obviously been coming to this point but there were two important considerations that helped her achieve it. The first was that she had an opportunity to produce a very innovative photographic presentation for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the McGill School of Social Work. She had the artistic satisfaction of finding a dramatic way to represent a rather dreary piece of architecture and highlight the very human quality of the work that goes on inside it. She also had the satisfaction of presenting herself to her former colleagues with a new and impressive set of skills.

The other thing was that to do this McGill project, it was the first real thing that I've done out in the community for other people. It was awfully nice for me to go back to my social work friends, because I kind of dropped out the bottom, because I never meant to leave, to go back in another capacity. I'm not just an older woman, I'm back in this other capacity. And that was, that was a really important thing.

The consolidation of all this came about when her painting instructor, upon seeing that photographic project, suggested that she might try to bring all of those parts of her life together and focus that experience on her art work.

Actually this year's instructor, ____ I found very, very thoughtful. She's the one, she said, "You should put your social work together with your art." She's the first person who's ever said that. . . . I always meant to ask her if she had ever known a social worker because most people, I think they really don't know a social worker, so their not sure what you might be doing. I forgot to ask her that. Because she was so quick about it, the whole thing. No. Nobody has really, totally put that together. Although certainly, in your class, there was an expectation that your work should relate to yourself. But it wasn't quite as clear, I think. Or maybe I didn't find it as clear as this next jump.

The class with that instructor had occasioned another extremely important insight for Meredith. The professor held regular seminars where she presented work and engaged students in the discussion or comparative ways of looking at art. Meredith pointed out that,

The whole purpose of the thing, her purpose was that *style carries value*. So you wanted to be sure that, if that's the value that you wanted to express then watch your style. Watch your style. At least know it. At least know what you're into.

Not only had she been encouraged to understand that she could be personally implicated in the content of her paintings but she had the responsibility to deal with the implications of the representations in her work. She was no longer simply learning a technique or enjoying a "jolly" spontaneous process. Her intellect and knowledge were involved as well.

M: You know the kind of thought that went with the those kinds of things. I found it *really* helpful. Her feeling was that we had learned painting, or learned about painting, swallowed a whole lot of stuff, without really knowing, and it was there and you didn't know about it. What was "a good painting"? What is a unique painting? This is "painting"? But you want to know that's just what somebody said and you might want to think about ..

MC: *In what context and in what sense.*

M: You want the whole, you want to be free in your mind to have the whole range of possibilities, and then pick and choose. But that was very helpful to me. I really liked that.

At this point in her life Meredith was unabashed about defining herself as an artist; as someone who could competently engage in the pursuit of important artistic goals that she had set for herself. She no longer considered that being former social worker and an older woman were incompatible with the idea of

being an artist. In fact, when she described her creation of a sculptural piece that she had created on the theme of "Older Women" she concluded,

And I said something about taking the, you know, the mundane and the reality and transforming it into the kind of creativity and something about endurance. I can't remember. Competence, I think, and endurance. Which I think is what older women are all about.

In order to arrive at this point Meredith had worked very hard. She has had the advantage of having the resources to pursue her education without economic anxiety. At the same time, that was a hurdle to get past, too. Her own sense of self and agency were constrained for years by the unspoken bargain, "Be nice, do what's expected of you, and you will be taken care of." She has had the support and encouragement of good teachers, mentors and friends in her quest to find her place in the world of art making. She continues to enjoy the confidence and thoughtful advice of her family, particularly her daughter and her husband. She concluded that, for the future, "My ambition is to get better. Is to get better. It's to continue. I don't think I can say anything more than that."

Reva

Reva is a vivacious woman in her early forties. Her manner is direct and she was very forthright about her reflections on her life and work. She has a young daughter who is the greatest priority in her life. She has been an active artist and enjoyed a modest commercial success with her work. She has a wide range of interests and concerns in her life; literature, film, philosophy, metaphysics, and social issues. She did a BFA in painting and design at Concordia in the early 1970's when it was still Sir George Williams University. She went on to pursue a career as a fabric designer and as a teacher of fashion design before her daughter was born. She returned to university to earn a Diploma in Art Education after the break-up of her marriage necessitated that she embark on a new career path. At the time of our conversation she had just completed the first half of her teaching certification.

Her discussion was rich with detail and insight. She moved easily back and forth through the narrative of her life, drawing the connections between events and experiences, pinpointing moments of insight, describing the impact of relationships and ideas on her art work. She had prepared for the interview by re-reading her journals and selecting the art works and she elaborated on the process of her learning with very little prompting from me. The various aspects of her life are at times completely intertwined in her conversation, particularly when she discusses her experiences over the past two years.

Reva grew up in Europe where her father was in the diplomatic service. She was eight years old when she moved to Montreal with her parents and brother. She has maintained important ties with her European cultural heritage through her mother and her mother's family. There was a tradition of dynamic women and of artistic engagement in that family. Her grandmother was a craftswoman who wove both utilitarian and artistic pieces. Her great aunts were actresses and writers who set a valuable example for their niece.

Her relationship with her mother has always been close and mutually supportive. She said that her mother is a very inspiring person and the most important woman in her life after her daughter. At Reva's urging, her mother took up painting when Reva was in high school. She has become an accomplished watercolourist and she offers a well informed point of view on Reva's artistic work. Reva considers her to be a very important mentor. They can also share frank opinions on everything from the personal to the philosophical. As an adult, Reva has become a confidante and support for her mother, first during the very traumatic termination of her parents' marriage and later through her mother's painful recovery from an automobile accident.

On the other hand, her relationship with her father has been quite distant for the last twenty years, ever since he abandoned Reva's mother, quickly remarried, and moved to the United States. Understandably, her mother was devastated by the betrayal and the impact on Reva was profound as well. Her confidence in her father had been undermined in adolescence by what she

viewed as a serious misrepresentation on his part. So then the relationship with my father took on a completely different complexity. My dad is a very sweet man but he's very hidden and buried. . . . My brother and I have had a really hard time with him.

Her fragile confidence in her father was put to the test by his abrupt departure from the family. Unfortunately it was a scenario that she was to relive in her own marriage.

That's a great source of disappointment to me, that my marriage went on the rocks. Because there is a basic, yeah, there is a basic anger.

She can recognise the implications of this disillusionment for her in her relationships with men: "but it's a *trust*. It's a trust thing." In spite of her desire to focus on the positive and develop relationships, there is an inner voice "always pulling me down and saying, "Maybe you should be alone. Take care of yourself. Don't depend on anyone." Nonetheless, she appreciates her new ability to set limits on her engagement in a relationship, that she is no longer willing to, "carry on, doggedly. You know, like I did in my marriage, knowing that *I will persevere*." Her thinking has changed. She is prepared to risk the termination of the relationship rather than suppress her own wishes and expectations.

The estrangement with her father has softened over time. She does maintain contact but she says, "He doesn't call me and I don't call him that much." She does acknowledge that he has always been supportive of her in her education and career pursuits.

He always gave me the freedom to do whatever I wanted. That was the best thing about our relationship. He encouraged me. He didn't necessarily want me to be an artist, because he said, "Well, what are you going to do for a living?" But he never disallowed me, and he encouraged me to have

other things to fall back on. He's very proud of me and he thinks it's great that I went back to school.

There have been several highly significant educational situations for Reva. The first of these about which she talked in detail, was her BFA studies in the early 1970s. She remember that to have been a very

flamboyant era at SGW with "happenings" and political actions but not a lot of attention to technical know-how. The prevailing artistic credo was, as she put it, "It was a time of abstraction. Pure abstraction. And by Golly! You were going to do it or die!" She described an alienated learning environment where, "The personal was not involved. You were absolutely not there to deal with anything personal."

She was a diligent and capable student and she was selected by a highly respected professor to attend a special studio class.

As we were looking at the first of the paintings that she showed me, she described a crucial moment in asserting herself in defence of her solution to an artistic problem. When she presented her final work of the year she found herself in conflict with her professor.

People didn't know who I was. Even my friends in the department. We didn't know who we were. It was totally like you were just cool, and you were there, and you were doing your abstract thing and you were (pose) (Laughter) and it had nothing, it was devoid, I think of any sort of reality in terms of what your life was about. . . . It wasn't connected for me.

It was a canvas about 24"x 30" painted in an abstract patchwork of colours: some muted yellow greys, some subdued violet. A trio of clear coloured shapes immediately attracted my attention: one red orange, one purple and one turquoise, grouped together and placed slightly right of centre. The "cat's tail" was a black wedge cutting into the centre of the bottom edge of the painting.

(He) and I had this run-in. He was very interested in the space that I used, which is quite shallow space. He called this "the cat's tail" here. . . . And he said, "Why did you put that in there?" And I said, "Because it allowed an

entry into the bottom. It was like a hole. Instead of it being a positive space, like this one, it was a negative thing." He absolutely went crazy and said, "You know, it ruins the painting. It changes the idea of shallow space." Anyway, we went on and argued about it for hours.

She persisted in her argument and she remembered it with satisfaction.

It was the first time I asserted myself with a mentor / teacher and I said, "It's going to stay exactly that way." And it has. For all these years. For twenty-one years. It was my break. It was my first break with the idea that I'm the underling, I'm the student, and you're my teacher and you know more than I do. I wanted to try to feel my way through my own process and say, "This is what I believe in." Which is very important, I think and I haven't been able to kind of come back with that kind of *force*. That was the first time I asserted myself and it was the last time I've really done it with such clear purpose. It was a purposeful discussion and I stood my ground. I think he probably admired me at the time, though he thought I was irritating.

She went on to add, with regard to this teacher,

He was definitely in charge. He is a presence and you know he's there, and you argue with him. But he had a great sense of humour, and I think that's what allowed me to do it. If he was going to argue with me, we were going to have a funny kind of comical exchange and we were going to be serious about it. You know what? It was never a put down. With a lot of other professors that I had, which will be nameless, it was a put down. It was not an exchange of ideas and you definitely felt that you could not go further. You had to either agree with them or get out. So this was, I think, my first example of good teaching. Also, being a student and going past the role of "student" moving on to the next level. That was the day that I discovered, "Okay, now I'm moving beyond the idea that this person knows everything. He may know a lot of things about a lot of things, about his own work. But he doesn't know about *my* work! And if this is something that I believe in then I'm going to stand up for it." So there you go!

He allowed us and I really believe that he allows you to discover and to explore. People say that in his class you only do one kind of work. That's not true. What he's trying to teach you is to look at your work very carefully, to examine it, to push yourself around. He allowed me to go through a whole bunch of different things and he encouraged my search.

With this important lesson understood, but feeling the need for some practical training in order to earn a living, she went for a one-year programme in fabric design at a fashion institute in New York. Her inclination to this field was inspired to a degree by her interest in the weavings done by her grandmother. On a more immediate level, she had some summer work experience with the mother of a friend who was a designer. Before she had completed the course, she was offered a job with a Montreal company where she worked for several years as a designer and buyer. While she enjoyed the work and the opportunities to travel, the hours were long and the pay was low. She eventually quit to take a job teaching in the Fashion Design department of a local college.

She found that she enjoyed teaching and put a great deal of effort into revamping and updating the curriculum of the course that she was assigned. She feels that she made a lasting contribution to the courses by insisting that there be more study of the relationship of art, art history and design. She particularly enjoyed her relationships with the students and several of her colleagues. This did not include the administration, who expected her to spend a great deal of unpaid extra curricular time on exhibitions and competitions. She left the college after several years to do free lance design work and to start a family.

The free lance work wasn't overly successful but she did have time and space to return to her own painting, ten years after finishing her BFA. She was able to attend classes with her mother at the Thomas More Institute and indulge her abiding interest in literature, social issues and philosophy. She also enjoyed

the support and encouragement of her mother-in-law who was a respected artist and art educator.

Reva began to build a body of art work which she had some opportunities to show and to sell. With

this series she had embarked on an exploration of the figure in her work, a subject which had been

pretty much ignored in her BFA courses in favour of abstraction. She now felt that through figurative work she could better explore the questions of relationships, absurdity and humour with which she was concerned at the time.

The arrival of her daughter put her artistic pursuits on hold. Her daughter had life-threatening allergies which caused her tremendous discomfort, right from birth. Reva lamented that "for four years I didn't sleep." Her anxiety and total preoccupation with her daughter was neither shared nor appreciated by her husband, and the marriage was put under considerable stress. The acrimony of their eventual separation continues to disturb her.

As her daughter's health stabilised, Reva was able to take up her painting again. She found a valuable supporter in a woman who was the owner of a small gallery in her community. This marked the beginning of a very productive period for her. Although she found the role of the solitary artist to be rather dismal, she was quite enlivened by the opportunities that the gallery offered to make connections with other women artists and to participate in group shows.

One of the few works from that period that she still has is *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* which is a small work on paper in tones of grey-blue, depicting a nude male figure with his arm extended and making the irreverent middle finger gesture. Over his head two emphatic strokes of colour, one blue-green, yellow-green cut across the sombre space.

That was going very, very well for me. I was really enjoying it. I did a lot of group shows with women. I've done a solo, never thought I had enough work or really cared to be out there flailing away by myself, I was commercially, mediocrally successful, if you can say that. . . . But I enjoy just doing the work and I enjoyed being with the women. I think I really got that feeling of group, that identity in a group.

The work that she showed me from that period was another figurative work on hand made paper. When Reva presented a slide of this painting in ARTE 430 a year and a half earlier, responses from her fellow students had provoked her to realise something that she had not previously considered.

I'd done it for about, let's say six years, I guess, using this large bodied, large shouldered androgynous person. It was pointed out, actually, in your class, that it was myself, that I was doing myself. I forget who told me, but it was a bunch of people who said to me, when I showed that painting, they said, "Reva, you did a self-portrait." "Really?" It's interesting, that's when things started to click for me.

It was about 36" x 48" and depicted the torso of a rather androgynous figure. The facial features were only suggested on a head that seemed too small for the bulky torso. The shoulders were overly large and there were no arms; as if they were pulled sharply to the back or as if in a straight jacket. It was painted in mottled areas of blue, white, red, mauve and purple. The back-ground was vibrant in red, yellow, orange, and alizarin.

I call this *Woman Bound*. It had a lot more to do with my state of mind at the time. This was right before my ex-husband left. So it was more about the prison, that I was in. The red is that bloody time in my life, and it certainly was bloody in terms of starting a divorce which took three years to get done.

She then showed me a work of handmade paper, richly coloured and mounted in deep folds on a white backing. It was one that she had kept from a large number of these works. She had worked with another artist to learn the process and had been very successful both artistically and commercially with this work. She followed this with a small piece on hand-made paper that she

declared was her favourite. She regretted that she had never managed to reproduce the particular qualities that she found so attractive in this work. It was a richly and vibrantly coloured little jewel, produced through the careful layering of acrylic colour on the thick, textured paper. She continued,

So this to me is very, to me, it's very Italian; sienna tones and I don't know, I was working with a lot of browns and ochres and reds, which are not my colours, because I'm usually in a clear palette range; sort of the reds, the blues, the yellows.

This shift of palette was in response to an admonition from one of her former instructors. She had consulted him concerning the possibility of applying to the MFA programme at Concordia. Although she did not pursue the MFA route, her reflection on their conversation and her response to it have provided her with some useful insights into her learning process.

One professor says, "Do you realise that you have a definite palette, that you keep re-using. That could get to be boring?" (Laughter) And I said, "Not really." But I mean, every time somebody says something to me, at first I tend to take a negative view, as if it's a slight. Now I see, being in teaching, in the reverse position. . . . You try to make them open up into something else. And he always did that. (He) always would make me angry in a way, make me think about what I was doing, and then I'd go back and think about it and something else would pop up, maybe even years later. But it would stay there. So I think that's what's interesting about this. . . . I think, (the professor) telling me that about the colour, when I started working with the paper I was being very careful to try different things.

Reva remembers this same professor from her undergraduate years as someone, "who was always interested in where you were getting your ideas. He was the first one that ever asked me, 'Why are you doing this?' "¹ This was an

¹The original must be lost so that it can be regained; it must be torn. We must be disillusioned (Winnicott, 1971), it seems, precisely so that we can, each of us, manifest out of our "surroundings" a wholeness that secures us in our innermost time and place. (Homer, 1987, 55)

important question for a young woman who, as she recalls, "was doing at that point, sort of stalking women, half human, half machine parts." At the time her response to his provocative question was simply, "'Cause I was starting my feminist period. I'd been reading Germain Greer a lot." But the significance of the question has stayed with her.

As she prepared to return to university she knew herself to be moving into different areas; expanding the colour range of her palette; pushing for greater texture, depth, and dimension; opening up to totally new art experiences. So she was in an ideal frame of mind to undertake completely new aspects of art making offered in the Multi-Media course she was obliged to take. She undertook the assignment in photography, film, sound and video with a little trepidation but soon realised that the processes and the discussion around the work were provoking some important realisations.

It's definitely the 3-D kind of environment that I'd never worked with. Because painting is flat, it's 2-D, it has a certain life, but it's very, very different when you create something 3-D. It's space where people walk into. The first thrill I had was watching people trip through your class (Laughter) through our little maze of candles to get to the movie, to the projection screen, and to go through that, watching reactions. There's this point in my life where I want the art to be interactive. Dialoguing with paintings, we can talk about that. But I don't think the same thing happens as in a Multi-Media installation, where there's things going on at different levels.

An important realisation was that her work could be, and in fact was, about more than formal concerns or abstract social issues; that it was deeply personal, as her peers comments about *Woman Bound* revealed. As she said, "But it's when I came back to school that it allowed for that potential of allowing for who you

are to come through." The class discussions with her peers were important in facilitating her deeper consciousness of her artistic purpose.

It's interesting, that's when things started to click for me, when we started discussing things, after we did our first prints and things that we were doing in photography. Then we did the video and it was just this discussion that started meaning a lot to me, in terms of my work.

She plunged into an artistic investigation of her family background when she presented her very first assignment.

We did that with that first project when I showed my great uncle, the dwarfed person. I had no idea that I was going to do that, and when I did it, I was just sweating that day, when I had to show the thing and the music. I thought, "Oh my god! I'm going to put music to it?" That's when I realised how much I liked the idea of using different things together in combinations. I didn't know where that idea came from. It just popped into my head. I said, "I can't just show this thing, against the wall. It's going to be so boring. "Because of the repeated image I thought, "It needs something. It needs to put it into some kind of context, because your not really putting it into any context." And that haunting music came to me. It was such a sad piece of music. To me, this man's life was a celebration, but it was so sad what happened to him; the meningitis, the dwarfing and everything. . . . But, the class just opened that for me. Everybody reacting positively. I loved that class. I loved the people in it.

She went on to do a photographic work about her mother which continued her fledgling inquiry into the drama and dynamics of her quite remarkable family. However, when I recommended that the students work in pairs on an assignment that involved Super 8 film and a sound montage, she formed a very productive and enriching partnership with a fellow student. "I got involved with Kirsten, and that was the greatest thing that's ever happened, I think, in my life in terms of my work." She had been quite intrigued by a collage of curious little figures in a fantasy space that Kirsten had done very early in the course. This

very felicitous collaboration was thus founded on their mutual sensitivity to each other's work. "They (the collages) are really, they, sparked something in me. I immediately recognised a way of working, an interior, exterior process that she'd been working on for a long time." Kirsten is a calm and sensitive woman, ten years younger than Reva. She has great respect for Kirsten's artistic sensibility and has found that they have a great deal in common. Reva outlined some of the dynamics of their partnership.

Her whole environment, she lives it, (art) she breathes it, she sleeps it. . . . I enjoy her. Her process of thinking is very clear, it's not muddled at all. I certainly can be muddled, and she kind of directs that. She gets the good stuff out of me and points us on a path, and I do the same, I think, for her when she gets in. We're a support team, and we support each other a lot. And not only do we support each other with our installation work, but in our lives as being students again, which is tough.

We started our collaboration with you. Her photography also. It was that, remember that wonderful figure looking through the window with that reflection, that she did? That was when we got the wrapped / unwrapped which (my TA) said was a hijab, but it wasn't, that veiled figure. ... We did the video too. The inner, the interior/ exterior city thing at her apartment.

She went on to describe the evolution of the relationship.

Now that Kirsten and I made these films, now we're attached to one another. It didn't start out that way. When we worked together last year, we were very busy on the film. Very busy with school, but it wasn't a personal relationship in the sense that it is now. It has developed over time. The most important thing about Kirsten and I, in terms of this work is that we are always thinking about the work. The work comes first. We call each other up, "I had an idea for the sound track. I had an idea for this. I had an idea for that. "But as now we have interwoven the work, we have also gotten into a personal thing with our lives, and we started to realize that, "Ah yes! That's where we get these ideas from!" Because it's only in the recent past that we started talking about our pasts, as children, and what makes us tick in terms of the art process.

I asked her to elaborate on her perceptions of the creative process and the generation of meanings in their work together. She explained that there had been two routes. The first was in Jungian psychology and the importance that Jung put on archetypes and dreams and their relationship to psychic experience. The second source was through a Drama in Education course where the focus was on the role of ritual in human expression. She went on to describe the trajectory of the creative collaboration that began with the film loop/sound montage installation.

That's what sort of went from the archetype, doing the Jung thing with the wrapping and unwrapping of that silhouette, got into a consciousness about the body, the figure, the archetype of the woman, the unfolding. We used the wrapping and the unwrapping as a metaphor for what we were beginning to discover in ourselves. What is this? What are we? What women archetypes do we want to kind of work with? I keep coming up with "hero." "Warrior", "hero", and "heroine." It came out in my work, so that 's why we started using that figure. It also came out in Kirsten's work. She had the same type of wrapped figure in her collages. They're in there. We started to see that, "Okay, we pull this and we pull this. There's this archetype that we're working with that's unconscious."

A female form, shrouded in white, stood in the studio. A film loop of a woman twirling and turning a great length of fabric in the air was projected onto her form. Beside her, on a fabric screen, was the image of a woman shrouded in black, turning as the fabric that bound her was pulled away. Soft Celtic drum rhythms surrounded us.

Both women are committed journal writers and they used the process of writing to develop and integrate their ideas. Kirsten's husband's musical talents were called upon to assist their production when they made a very poetic video work that explored metaphoric images of interior/ exterior experience.

They chose to continue working together for their final project that year, *Dreamscape*.

Then we moved into *The Dreamscape*. We wanted to still work with the archetype of "the bride", the archetype of the, "the black bride" which is in that book² that you gave me. Thank-you very much. It was a great help. . . . That (the dark bride) was sort of the opposite to the personae in shadow, which Jung talks a lot about and we wanted to really work with that idea of the negative and the positive, the human elements that each of us have. That's why we concocted that black figure with the little umbrella. That was sort of an afterthought. It came in after I read the piece that you gave me from that book. Then we needed something that counterbalances. 'Cause this was the idea, I think we started off with the idea of a dream. . . . sort of fragments, everyday experiences, that sort of interior crazy world. We weren't really sure when we started filming, what we were going to do. We had a script. We wanted to use "the bride." So we set up an eating scene. When we got there, we realised the dining room had an old, ancient sort of seventeenth century look so we went with that. Okay! That's it! Everybody goes in a costume!" We didn't make it modern day. We made it sort of set back in time a little bit. We could really play with the idea of time sequencing. In dreams, again thinking of a film like *Repulsion* (Polanski). The distortions and all that, we wanted to play with that. That's why we have things working in different time sequences and things that don't make sense. Feet coming out of beds into black muck, horses running around, into the bride running up and down the wall, clocks in the snow. That was the Scandinavian thing. We just had to do it in February. We didn't want to do it in the snow. But it was more morbid, and dramatic. It had that foreboding and that kind of heaviness to it. . . . So it worked for us. I think, that piece worked while we were doing it.

We wanted to pursue the Jungian idea; what do we get out of dreams? Do they relate to our experience at all? Are they just things that fumble through your brain at night and you shouldn't pay any attention to them? Or are they really precursors to things that are important in ones life, and one should be paying attention?

As I entered the darkened studio my path was dictated by two rows of candles. The sound of wind and church bells could be heard over the racket of the film projector. I felt obliged to move along towards the flickering light of the screen at the far end of the studio. The black and white Buñuelesque images demanded my attention: A couple in a dark dining room, a woman in a bridal gown running through the snow.; a horse running across a field, a shovel digging through the snow into the dark ground. But between me and the image I so desired to watch was suspended a beautiful white "bed", a dream marriage bed, created with an eyelet edged sheet and pillows in matching slips. On either side hung cut outs of chandeliers.

² Linda Schierse Leonard. *On the Way to the Wedding: Transforming the Love Relationship* Boston & London: Shambhala Publications. 1987. Death and the Wedding is a frequent theme in dreams. One woman dreamed she was at her own wedding in a beautiful white dress. The atmosphere was full of sparkle and warmth. Suddenly the wedding became a funeral. Now the dress was black and the atmosphere bleak. (Leonard 1987, 19)

Kirsten's last scene with the digging and the muck and all that stuff. . . . So, as we worked on the film Kirsten came up with more things and so did I. I did the bride thing with the black umbrella. We wanted it to be a compilation of ideas about our own experiences about dreams and I think too, to really get people thinking. You know, what is this state? That's why we had the (suspended) bed.

She drew some very appropriate references to the film work of Chaplin, Bergman and Buñuel. She marvelled that she and Kirsten had really managed to plan and execute the film considering their inexperience and the difficult circumstances of the shoot.

It was difficult to work with. We were working in minus twenty below weather. Outside. We were frozen. Poor Kirsten, her hands were just rigid! Rigid! I don't know how she held the camera! And I was running out there in my little wedding dress. Her husband was out there, being very cold. And it was just, it was great! It all worked together.

Reva and Kirsten had continued to work together to produce *Necessary Rites* which had just been shown in a year end exhibition. It had been conceptualised through an intensive journal writing process in which they had been engaged through out the past year. Reva had been pursuing her interest in ritual performances and once they became engaged in the process of developing a project it began to evolve as a performance piece. Neither were prepared to do it as a live performance but an alternative was available through the use of video. "So then we got some friends together and we had an evening of ritual performance. We didn't even know what it was going to be. "

I had video taped the installation at the gallery and so Reva could give me a running commentary on the work as we played it back on her television. She

began with some comments about the bits of bone, birds' skulls, feathers, wood and tree bark that she had collected over the summer while vacationing on a small island in the St. Lawrence River. She found these objects to be "singularly beautiful" in their

The tape began with images of many little pieces of bone, wood, feathers and corn stalks hanging from a circular hoop in a windowed corner of the gallery. Within this circle was a circle of three video monitors on stands, and surrounding the base of that circle was a circle of millet. Muffled percussive sounds, soft droning.

state of decay. Her early intention had been to call the piece *Skin and Bones*

about the covering of things and the unearthing of things, and the structure, the under pinning of what I consider natural phenomena.

As my video recording focused on the monitor images of the women performing the ritual, Reva began to describe the motivations for the performance.

This is the beginning of the ritual. We are covering ourselves with cloth. . . I got the idea about using the cloth first to do something significant in terms of the beginning of the ritual to make sure that we didn't look as we did when we came off the street. . . . This is the only costuming, basically. We weren't going to start painting our faces up. We didn't want to do a ritual that looked "Tribal" or any culture's rituals. We wanted to make our own. We did a simple thing which worked very effectively. Each person chose a colour that they felt for. Each person had to bring an object, as you'll see later, that they felt for. These are the objects that I collected. These are the same things we used in the ritual circle as in the sculpture installation.

Lengths of coloured fabric were handed to the women who draped the fabric around themselves. In a curtained space, a circle of grain surrounded a collection of small objects. Bells and drums. The women enter and circle around the ring of grain. Hands open to reveal precious things. They are laid inside the circle. Rhythms change. Movements quicken. A circle of hands appears around the ring of grain and the designs they make intrude in to the centre space. Fabric swings through the air.

The original tape had been extensively edited and inter-cut with re-taped footage of the same tape playing on a monitor. This TV within the TV produced

the additional consideration of how technology is implicated in our perception:
"I mean, how does the fact that you are watching this ritual on a TV screen feel?
You're not participating. And you can't be participating. "

Reva was evidently thrilled with the many aspects of learning that had been manifest in the creation of this work. She had initiated a deeply felt personal artistic inquiry in partnership with Kirsten whom she respected and admired. Her reflections upon her experiences, both in discussion with her peers and in her journal writing, brought her to ever more interesting insights and meanings. She had profited greatly from the effort that she had put forth. As have I from her generosity of time and her candid discussion of all these concerns.

Threads and Traces

As stated above, knowledge proposals derived from the students' stories are relative, and perspectival (Code 1991, Grosz 1991). In the chapters preceding the women's stories I provided a description of the cultural and institutional contexts in which this study is situated, and the personal and theoretical perspectives from which it was developed. I have written the stories in a manner which informs readers about the perspectives on learning held by these women at a certain moment in their lives. At this point, my task as a researcher is to suggest the narratives constituted by the stories and propose possible ways such narratives might assist my colleagues "to negotiate the everyday world and to cope with the decisions, problems, and puzzles they encounter" (Code 1991, 3-4). The challenge here is to make a meaningful summation while avoiding totalizing theoretical assertions. My intent is for researchers and teachers to consider my ensuing comments in the manner that Alan Peshkin proposes,

When I disclose what I have seen, my results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibilities and shape their thinking about their own inquiries. (Peshkin 1985, 280)

Connelly and Clandinin point out that the meanings and structures of events are not necessarily evident in the chronology of the stories. It is the meanings of events and the explanatory structure which "when added to the chronology, make it a narrative" (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 9). They suggest

that an initial consideration is to provide a descriptive overview, "like the notes playgoers receive as they are escorted to their seats." They remark that,

A 'narrative sketch,' something like a character sketch except that it applies to the overall inquiry, is useful. It is primarily a chronicle of the inquiry.
(Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 11)

Such a "narrative sketch" begins with the participants. The women who participated in this study were all students in various sections of the course that I taught over a period of four years. I have come to feel that they constitute a fair representation of the personalities that could make up any given art class at Concordia. I have no difficulty viewing this group as an ensemble which an instructor could be meeting for such a class.¹ Taking this view of the group helps me keep the question of teaching uppermost in my mind as I work through the meanings that come forward from the narratives. I have been given a great richness of material and I have selected the following issues for further discussion.

As I have worked through the stories I observed the women's attitudes about themselves and their art work at crucial points in their learning and art making. I will first present an overview of my observations, the factors that influenced the student's attitudes and the educational situations that promoted personal and artistic growth. There are family and social issues which featured prominently in the stories. The significance of father-daughter relationships was evident in the narratives, as was the mother-daughter relationships. There are also several notable issues raised in the art works that were presented.

¹ In my experience, a class of fourteen to sixteen students would also include two to five men. The younger group of women would perhaps have a larger representation.

As I examined these stories I found two theoretical proposals which are useful in the process of mapping the narrative possibilities. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule present a description of phases of learning in women's lives that I will explore in relation to its implications and usefulness in the field of art education. Proposals made by Stanley Horner offer a framework in which to conceptualize the positions and the transitions that allow the learner to be securely grounded in subjective knowledge and assume agency in her life and art. These will be considered through the process of mapping, or bringing together storied experience and theoretical proposals to propose narratives of learning and teaching.

Hopes and Dreams : Sink or Swim

The most emphatic point established in this study is the way in which these women see the art making experience as catalytic in their growth towards a sense of self and agency, both as artists and as members of society. The fundamental quest for all twelve women was to draw together the three threads that Meredith very thoughtfully pointed out: acquiring technical competence, developing significant artistic content, and coming to see themselves as artists. As they reflected upon their lives and years of study, they articulated stories that showed how they struggled to weave the unruly threads of life and learning into a pattern of their own devising. They demonstrated a remarkable ability to seize on the experiences that were offered to them and use them to their advantage.

They learned the technical skills they set out to learn and they learned how to acquire new skills as they were needed. They listened to the advice of their teachers, experimented, reflected on their experiences and eventually came to understand how their particular understanding of themselves, the world, and art, could vitalize the content of their art production. Most came to see themselves as artists, or at least potential artists either through a confident reappraisal of their art or through an equally confident redefinition of the term "artist. "

As I interviewed, transcribed, and wrote the stories about their lives, their learning and their art, I have been struck by both the particularity of each story and by the various experiences that they had in common. I do not mean to say that the same things happened in their lives but rather that there are certain similar qualities to their experiences that are worth noting in the context of their progress as students. Their commitment to their journey towards artistic self-expression and their tenacity in pursuing their goals is one such noteworthy quality. Barbara's story is one of the most outstanding in this respect, but all the students indicated that studying Fine Arts was not an easy task.

Of the women I interviewed, only Reva and Nathalie entered their university education with a confident sense of their ability and potential as artists. Reva was re-entering to begin a second degree, having graduated with a BFA fifteen years earlier. In the interim she continued her art practice and had enjoyed some success. Nathalie felt that her CEGEP experience had given her a good grounding in the range of art skills and knowledge that she required to be a

successful university student. All the rest entered university, or re-entered, feeling deeply moved to do art work, but they felt varying degrees of inadequacy about engaging in an active art practice. For all of these students, the decision to study art was vitally linked to a new-found but fragile sense of self identity. Many felt that they were being "selfish" for the first time in their life. They also felt that they were taking a remarkable risk. Jeanette and Nathalie entered the college art programmes against the expressed wishes of their families. Meredith hung on to her day job as long as she could before she resigned to become a full time student. It took many years for her to abandon the notion that she was retraining to become an Art Therapist and admit that she was a painter. Barbara put herself on the line to be successful after a lifetime of pain and disappointments. Elaine, Laura, and Catherine began their studies in a state of great uncertainty about the direction that they would go in their lives. Irène and Olivia made repeated applications before they were accepted. Most were taking on financial debts that they had no idea whether they would be able to repay.

It is apparent that for many of these women, their decision to go to art school was preceded by a major disruption or crisis in their personal lives. In the case of Reva, Hannah and Meredith it was when their husbands divorced them. Barbara was near death before she acknowledged her alcoholism and its reasons, and made the decision to be a sober artist. Being fired from her job provoked Jeanette to enter the college art programme, and an emotional collapse preceded her realisation that she wanted to enter the Art Education programme. A

disturbing incident related to her work also caused Kirsten to examine her life plans. Catherine suffered a debilitating emotional crisis prior to her decision to do what she really wanted to do - study Fine Arts. For Elaine, Laura, Olivia, and Nathalie (since she had already made her stand) the decision to continue into university after high school or CEGEP was a less traumatic decision. Laura's intention to study seemed to have been respected by her family but she had to take some time to work and save money to support her first year at university.

For most of these women, when they arrived at Concordia their attitude towards learning could be characterized as conflicted. While they felt that they were making a radical and absolutely essential assertion of their sense of self, they didn't necessarily expect that intimate personal expression would be the purpose of their artistic efforts. They were seeking fulfilment of their desire to be recognized for who they are and what they could produce. In some cases, Barbara and Hannah for example, their long suppressed artistic ability had been recognized by their partners, friends or family. This was an important affirmation of the personal satisfaction that they felt about doing art work. However, they felt that they lacked art making skills and they were optimistic that they would receive instruction that would ameliorate their technical incompetence.

Unfortunately for several of these women, neither their needs nor their expectations were met in some of their early encounters with their professors. A majority reported first year instructors who disregarded and/or belittled them and their work. The expectation that they would be given practical instruction

turned out to be a vain hope, particularly in their painting classes. The "Romantic" artist model that Wainio discussed was often in evidence among their teachers. Students seemed to encounter few instructors who would set assignments in which there was a clear aesthetic purpose, or who would engage their students in critiques that focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the work. As Jeanette said, "He gave us nothing to work with," and then he dismissed her work as "boring."

The response to this treatment was dismay and anger. Laura bluntly confronted her teacher and demanded that he pay attention to her work. Irène had done the same thing at UQAM. Catherine, Olivia and Jeanette were greatly provoked and spoke out. Barbara was furious when her instructor laughed at her rather than meet his professional responsibility to deal with her and her work. Others were reduced to tears.

It is curious to me that some women who, in my opinion had been treated very disrespectfully were still willing to credit those teachers with having taught them well. This would suggest how some women art students are vulnerable to taking on the contradictory "boot strap" myths particular to the field of art. Irène's comment about the instructor who reduced her to tears was that she had been impressed by teachers like him who "demanded the most of me. They demand a lot. They shook me up, but after that I would react." She seemed willing to overlook or suppress the personal distress that she had endured. Barbara expressed a similar opinion. When I questioned her further she revealed

that while she still accepted the "shock troops" approach as valuable, she had relied upon her partner and other sensitive and supportive teachers to restore her confidence in herself and her art work.

Laura, on the other hand, recognized the negative situation for what it was and she was able to turn it to her advantage through her own initiative. She sought out better instructors and gave herself credit for learning "suffering and perseverance." Catherine considered her confrontation with her professor to be a very important learning experience, not because the instructor had set up a learning situation, but because she finally asserted herself. Nathalie researched her professors before-hand and chose those with whom she wanted to work.

Reva described an argument with her painting professor in her earlier undergraduate studies which also demonstrated a young woman asserting herself in defence of her art work. She remembers it as a stimulating and valuable encounter. It is important to note that in that situation, she sensed that she had the professor's continued respect in spite of their difference of opinion.

Fortunately, many women in this group reported positive encounters that offer models of how students' expectations can be met. Early in their studies student's responded well in situations where there were assignments that had particular technical and/or aesthetic problems, and where they were presented with a choice of thought provoking subjects on which to work. Elaine and Olivia spoke appreciatively of a young substitute painting instructor who gave basic instruction on subjects such as how to properly prepare canvases and use

painting media. She suggested assignment themes for students to use if they chose. Both students valued the way in which this instructor shared her knowledge with them and brought them information related to the work that they were doing. They found her teaching to be much more beneficial than the approach of the "free" teacher she was replacing. His approach had been to leave students "to explore on their own" while giving limited feedback. That "free" approach left them feeling as if they were being expected to prove themselves in a contest where the rules were being kept secret and where those "in the know" were, as Laura said, "always kicking down the ladders."

Kirsten's ceramics instructor provided the kind of thoughtful interaction that she needed in order to get on with her fundamental task of self-realization. Whether knowingly or intuitively, he recognized her delicate subjective voice, and encouraged and supported her in bringing forward aspects of what she felt was her concealed inner self. Hannah and Jeanette also spoke favourably about a ceramics teacher who "gave very basic, abstract assignments which gave us a lot of freedom within that." This teacher also "made me research, delve into myself again and to connect my work with myself." Jeanette spoke of a painting instructor who, "Didn't know me from Adam," but who was very sensitive to her efforts at emotional expression. He offered the very simple and effective advice that she should work small and stay very close up to the work until it was finished in order to maintain the emotional intensity of the moment.

Most of the women did acquire skills and know-how in spite of the laissez faire attitudes and lack of educational engagement that they reported on the part of some teachers. Olivia relied on found images as the starting point for her paintings and used the "Betty Edwards technique"² repeatedly as an approach to outlining her work. As well she produced many dramatic paintings using the technique of working from a black background. For quite a long time Meredith chose to work from found photographs and produced a number of attractive works from which she learned a lot about the craft of painting. Kirsten and Hannah were pleased that they had learned the technical skills necessary to make quite complex ceramic works. Catherine learned how to work with glass and metal, and Elaine re-learned photographic skills that had confounded her in high school. Having these approaches at their disposal contributed to building confidence in their artistic abilities even though the content of the images remained relatively unexamined.

As I noted, many of these women had experienced a traumatic personal turning point or decision prior to attending university. Important transformations continued to occur throughout their studies. Most significantly, they shifted from a position of thinking that they were at university to learn some art making skills, to thinking of themselves as (potential) artists. They realized that they had ideas of their own - ideas that came from their particular knowledge of art, themselves and the world, ideas which they could develop and share with others.

² Betty Edwards in Drawing on the Right Hand Side of the Brain suggests students reproduce drawing from an image that was upside-down throughout the exercise.

This development was knowingly fostered by some teachers and unwittingly provoked by others. The above mentioned ceramics teacher exemplifies the former: a thoughtful teacher who stimulated and guided his students, accepted their individual needs, and as Kirsten said, "gave permission" for them to be who they were. For Catherine and Nathalie it had been their high school art teachers who had "given" that permission. A guest artist who did self-reflective work inspired Olivia to do a simple monoprint about a childhood memory, the first work in which the content related to her personal history. Jeanette's first drawing teacher structured her assignments so that students had to read a thoughtfully chosen book and develop a series of drawings that connected the author's ideas with the student's own experiences. All of these teachers gave their students the message that who they were and what they knew was a perfectly valid consideration for inclusion in their art work.

There were instances of less well considered but nonetheless useful interventions on the part of the teacher. A disdainful professor's remark to Meredith that she, "might want not to be such a good student any more, and concentrate on your own stuff more carefully" was an important observation on his part. The remark provoked her to reflect upon her artistic and personal expectations, and she was ready to respond positively when her next instructor urged her to find ways to include her experience as a social worker as an aspect of her art work.

Barbara's experience with her first-year painting teacher was another situation where, although she didn't feel that the teacher was very interested in

her artistic development, he did pose some important questions. He directed her to work from her feelings which focused her attention on her intense inner anger (initially directed at him) as an impetus for her paintings. She came to accept that the landscapes she had been doing were in fact a fantasy and what she knew about the real world would be the content of her paintings.

Events in the students' personal lives continued to have a profound impact on how they dealt with artistic issues. One of the most poignant reflections in the study is Elaine's comments about her attempt to develop imagery that dealt with mourning her father's death. She struggled to find a way to make the connection between her memories of him and her own feelings, and the effort was quite lost upon her teacher and her classmates. Nathalie also experienced a great loss when her aunt, to whom she was very close, died of cancer. While she had been very aware of the artistic and theoretical questions around the issue of the body, this event really "brought it home" to her just what theory meant in lived experience. The sculptural piece that she produced about that experience was informed by this new insight. Fortunately, she had the benefit of sensitive and well informed teachers to encourage her in her efforts.

The emotional turmoil in Hannah's personal life both instigated and was partially resolved by the multi media performance that she presented in my class. The break-up of her marriage and the confusion of her new life as a single person were very hard for her to handle, and it was through developing and presenting the performance that she was able to centre her attention back on the

fundamental values of her life. She too had the benefit of a supportive learning environment.

"Theory" and "vocabulary" were suspect elements for most of the women in this study. Catherine was struggling to deal with what she felt was a tyranny of intellectualism in artistic practice, but other women just said that those topics didn't seem relevant to their art work or their lives. Laura was interested as long as the instructor was amusing and exhibited enough cynicism to convince her that s/he shared her irreverence for the subject. All of the women had taken art history courses at one time or another, but only Meredith, Reva and Nathalie expressed any real enthusiasm for the study of art history and cultural criticism. Reva had read widely on a number of subjects and valued the inspiration and insight that she knew she could gain from the authors she read. Meredith's interest in art history began with her visits to European art galleries. She had pursued that interest, expanding her knowledge of art history and incorporating that knowledge into her current painting through using visual references to Renaissance paintings. Nathalie was enthusiastic about the post-modern theory to which she was introduced in CEGEP and she continued working to understand those ideas and their implications for her art and social experience.

The authors mentioned most frequently by these women were Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung. Campbell's work on spirituality and mythology was introduced by both Drawing and Drama in Education teachers. The creativity workshops based on Jungian concepts that Meredith had attended promoted her

abiding confidence in her inner, intuitive creativity. *The Dreamscape* and the other collaborative installations that Kirsten and Reva developed were influenced by Jungian concepts and archetypes. Their texts seem to have a quality that is appealing to several women and which encouraged them to make connections between their personal quest for a sense of self and the wider world of ideas.

The women who participated in this study had strong views on the subject of art education and the qualities that they felt were fundamental to good teaching. The most commonly stressed point was that the student needed to feel that she was being acknowledged by the instructor and that she was respected as a person and as a student. Kirsten expressed her appreciation for teachers who demonstrated their respect for students and who "acknowledge the individual as the individual, and who would give you permission to be who you are." Olivia also mentioned the importance of teachers who respected individual differences and who could "adapt to your personality." She added, "That's what I like, when they can try to help you to find solutions, from who you are." She noted a particular teacher who "really respected each of us and he would help us. He would encourage us in our strengths." Students expect that teachers would get to know the interests and abilities of their students and encourage interaction that included instructor and students alike. As she reflected upon the enriching relationship she had enjoyed with several of her female instructors, Nathalie considered the positive effects of teaching,

maybe a personalized level, rather than to a whole class. I'm not talking about picking favourites, but just being able to pick out things about each person and then to help them with those things.

Hannah reflected on her experience in my class as a particular example of a teacher extending herself to meet a student's needs. The private discussion that we had was particularly important to her because she felt able to express feelings and ideas with which she was having a great deal of difficulty. She said that she felt that her process of growth was understood and she was allowed enough space to work through her personal distress and go forward.

Nathalie spoke for others in the group when she concluded that for her, the most important learning experiences happened "where there was interaction not just on an 'I'm the professor and you're the students. Listen to me!' level, but just from everyone." She went on to affirm that she recognized the particularity of the student and teacher roles, that "professors are practising artists. They have more experience than we do. We're here to learn. We know that." She along with the others expected to be part of a learning situation where knowledge was shared in a respectful, well considered and democratic manner.

Feminist scholars, such as those I have discussed above, have observed and analyzed the impact of significant personal relationships on women's learning. This present study contributes to feminist understanding in the area of creative work. Clearly, parents play a crucial role in the development of their children and the interviews showed that almost all of these women had difficult, if not injurious relationships with their fathers. Meredith's description of her father as

"a massive negative" would hold true for several others. The troubled nature of this relationship had significant life consequences of these women. It also had implications for their progress towards self directed artistic expression, and had serious implications for the teacher - student relationship.

In this study, the positive rapport between Nathalie and her father offers an example of this relationship being played out in a healthy and productive manner. She has grown up with a secure sense of her father's love, protection and his commitment to her happiness and well-being. Through his determination to overcome his physical injuries, he provided her with the valuable example of determination and strength of character. Furthermore, he included her in his own particular interests and preoccupations as they repaired his motorcycle and pursued other technical and mechanical projects.

Studies of highly successful women (Tessman 1982, 1989) indicate that this kind of inclusion as an extremely important factor in fostering creative abilities. Tessman finds repeatedly that the nature and degree of involvement of the father with his daughter's cognitive, imaginative, and creative efforts are highly consequential in determining the degree of future motivation towards the use and development of those abilities. A particularly important variable within this frame of reference is the degree to which the father allows the daughter to share in his own thought process - his particular form of inspiration and his personal mode of speculation.

The "good enough father" is a terminology adapted by Susan Kavalier-Adler to suggest a complementary role to the "good enough mother" that Winnicott describes. This suggests a paternal relationship in which the father demonstrates his capacity for communication with his daughter, and "for mirroring, attunement, sharing, permeability of his own thought processes, and availability for identification and admiration" (Kavalier-Adler 1993, 65). Accordingly, he is accessible to his daughter's creative questions and can provide valued support, encouragement and critique, as Nathalie's father did. Elaine also valued the way in which her father had engaged her in discussions about art issues and she said clearly that those discussions motivated her study of art history and criticism. Elaine and Olivia reported that, as children they were thrilled to work along side their fathers as they pursued their artistic interests. Such reminiscences reveal the valuable role of the good enough father as a model for creative endeavours.

Unfortunately, positive examples of a father's appropriate contribution to the daughter's development were not prevalent in this study. Most of the women I interviewed reported some degree of alienation from their fathers. The underlying reasons are much deeper than one conversation could discern, but the apparent causes of the disrupted relationships were a sense of abandonment and in some cases, sexual abuse.

In the most extreme situations where women reported physical and sexual abuse, the trauma they endured and the profound disruption of their creative development was evident. As the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse of

children has become a serious social concern, many authors have contributed valuable insights into the devastating effects on the lives of girls and boys who suffer abusive situations. Trauma and Recovery by Judith Lewis Herman (1992), to which I have referred in this study, is but one example.

In the present study, several students discussed how their imagery related to the rage they felt when they recognized the abuse they had suffered. Barbara insisted that the representations of fire in one painting related to that deep felt anger. When Hannah spoke about her painting of the woman with fire blazing from her vagina she said that it was about her repressed sexuality. While this was apparently the fundamental issue, it is possible that the fire was actually a representation of her deep suppressed rage at what she had endured and about which she was as yet unable to speak. Hannah eventually came to understand the relationship between her creativity, sexuality and the abusive incident in her past in terms similar to those discussed by Linda Schierse Leonard. In Leonard's opinion, when women repress hurt and anger, their creativity becomes paralysed (Leonard 1983, 117). Study of the significance of fire imagery in women's art work is perhaps more appropriate to the field of psychology and art therapy, but obviously art educators are confronted with these representations as well. The extent to which images of anger are evident in student's art work, and the pedagogical response to those images is an issue for further investigation.

In my study there are several examples of situations where the daughter's trust and confidence in her father was undermined, inhibiting her ability to take

responsibility for her learning. Narratives such as those of Reva and Kirsten, tell how the father's apparent duplicity and abandonment of the family left the daughters feeling alone and betrayed. In other situations, such as with Laura, the father's predisposition to remain "the eternal boy", unable to provide reliable, consistent support for his daughter, was equally disruptive. Alcoholism proved to be yet another form of abandonment. Catherine and Meredith grew up within the sphere of charismatic, self-centred men who dominated their daughters lives, albeit with a facade of benevolence. Catherine characterized her father was a selfish manipulator who treated all the women in the family like little girls, and she still resisted being called a woman. In her outburst at her professor Catherine characterized him in precisely the same way that she characterized her father. Having been harassed by the priest in the playground at her elementary school and experiencing conflict with her father, she was acutely tuned to contradictions. This example serves to suggest how a father-daughter rupture may carry through to teachers - student interactions.

Problematic experiences with their fathers inhibited the creative work of many women in this study but this study also reveals the paths that these women have followed in order to overcome that difficulty. Some sought professional counselling and others benefited from supportive and enriching relationships with friends and partners. For all, taking responsibility for their artistic production was synonymous with taking renewed responsibility for themselves in the world.

While the issues around the father - daughter relationship were obvious early in the interview process, it was only later that I realized that the mother - daughter relationships were troubled as well. Almost all the women whom I interviewed said that they had good relationships with their mothers and they described their mothers as generous, loving women. They then went directly on to discussing their problems with their father. Beyond this avowed love and respect, there seems to be a kind of uncertainty, even reluctance, as the women talked about their mothers. Reva was one exception in that she frequently mentioned her mother and the stimulating and supportive relationship they now enjoy. She was equally forthright about how difficult their relationship had been at times. For Hannah, maintaining her connection to her mother was of paramount importance, and she undertook her move back to the West to reaffirm that relationship after many years of distance.

However, as I listened to so many women describe the distress caused by their fathers, I asked myself, "Where were the mothers while all this was going on?" Then I had to ask, "Why are the women themselves not raising that question?" This led me to consider the mother-daughter relationship as yet another way of understanding the creative behaviour of these women.

In some situations, as with Barbara, it was clear that the father had dominated all relationships in the home, and he had so profoundly betrayed everyone that no healthy relationship was possible. While this may be objectively understood, the abused child has the justifiable expectation that her mother

should protect her and is doubly betrayed when the mother fails to do so. Jeanette described her family as having similar, but less extreme dysfunctional dynamics. She had great respect for the love and care her mother had shown her but she saw her mother as being only slightly more significant than the children. All were under paternal domination. Jeanette regretted that it now appeared that her mother had given up on the possibility of changing the family situation. The consequences of this acquiescence can be seen in Jeanette's and Catherine's narrative. Leonard observes that if both mother and daughter are dominated

the mother in her passive dependence does not provide a model of genuine feminine independence. So the daughter is likely to repeat the pattern of feminine dependence, or if she rebels, she does it out of a defensive reaction against paternalistic authority rather than out of her own feminine needs and values.
(Leonard 1983, 15)

Both Jeanette and Catherine, (who described herself, her sister and her mother as "his three little girls") had to launch themselves on independent paths against the resistance of their fathers and with no model provided by their mothers. It has been a challenging task for both of them.

Laura, in her forthright way, offered insight as to what lay behind the uniform assertions that all was well in the mother-daughter relationships. She admitted to "the usual anger" but she allowed that the relationship with one's mother was much more complex. She was sympathetic about the distress her father had caused her mother and, like Kirsten, expressed a desire to be protective of her mother. As a daughter, she did not feel that she could express anger for the disappointments her mother may have caused her because,

by being mad at them you are just adding to their burden. And you know that they are struggling anyway. So I think that a lot of daughters assume a lot of responsibility towards their mothers at a young age.

Laura could articulate the contradictory feelings of love, anger, obligation, guilt, disappointment, and the desire to protect, that were active dynamics in her relationship with her mother. Her comments suggest that this was an active issue among her group of friends as well.

Further consideration of the impact of parental relationships on the work of artistic women implicates one in a particularly complex web of psychological interpretations of desires and motivations. Thought provoking as these concerns may be, I have chosen to limit my discussion here to issues as they may be implicated in teaching situations and the observed attitudes, practices, and art works of the students in this study.

Concealed and Constrained

The discussions about the art works in the interviews that I conducted are an important part of the study. A hundred or more art works were presented and discussed by the women I interviewed, and they were as diverse as they were numerous. My particular interest is in the discussion of the learning that went on in relation to the production of each piece. The conversation was lively as the women discussed what the work was about and how their relationship with the work had developed. The significant ways in which the art works are

implicated in the personal and artistic growth of these women is the prime value of these works to the study and is discussed throughout the dissertation.

The significance of certain recurring images was evident in the discussion and narratives of the participants. Images of bound and constrained bodies appeared in Reva's paintings, Kirsten's collages, Irène's video and reliquary, the film loop installation produced by Reva and Kirsten and Hannah's performance piece. For these women such imagery reflected active resistance to the way they felt their lives had been over determined by social, cultural and religious forces. The unravelling of the bindings was an obvious gesture of liberation. For most, it symbolized not only that they could win personal freedom, but also they expressed a desire to extend the joy of that new found freedom to other women.

The imagery of several women involved representations of a concealed, secret self, which evolved into a more open revelation of self. Catherine, Kirsten, and Irène all created works where a deceptive exterior covering was opened to reveal a rich, startling interior. The *Eyeball* that confronted the viewer who opened the box, was an effort on Catherine's part to represent the concealed "vision" that she was trying to show to the world. She aspired to represent strength and transparency and found ways to do so through the materials with which she worked. In the case of Kirsten's *Smokestack*, the doors opened to reveal a "garden" of richly coloured fecundity. One series of Irène's paintings depicted solid rock-like forms around which were dark, ambiguous spaces. The doors of her *Reliquary* opened to expose images of the many forms of violence perpetrated

upon women, a history of which she knew herself to be a part. The analogy of dark secret places as the site of a secret, as yet unrevealed, self was explicit in Jeanette's and Irène's paintings and it was an aspect of the work that they readily discussed in relation to their personal quest for self awareness. Irène also made the remark about the dark spaces in her paintings where, "right here, you don't really know what's going on in the dark, in the dark zone. Something may be behind there". The importance of these particular representations is told in the artists' narratives.

Two other students discussed paintings where dark and undefined shapes and spaces had provoked reactions from professors that mobilized the women students to defend themselves. One was the abstract, patchwork of coloured rectangles that Reva had done in her earlier undergraduate painting class. All the shapes observed the requisite (by the standards of Formalist aesthetics) integrity of the flat surface, except for one irregular black shape that refused to maintain itself as a painted shape on the canvass surface, but rather it opened itself up as a receding space. Reva insisted that it was "a way in" and the professor "went crazy" insisting that it could not be left like that.

Laura's large blue-green fluid looking painting also provoked conflict with her taciturn professor. She commented with surprise that, 'It never occurred to me that it was supposed to be flat!' when she finally realized that that was the reason why he did not appreciate the painting. On one level, these interactions

were confrontations with authority with which individual women had to deal. They stood their ground and defended their ideas and their paintings.

These men seemed to feel particularly confronted by the instability of the elusive elements in these paintings. The dark space that breaks the unity of the surface and the fluid depth that utterly obfuscates the surface both evince the potency of the unknowable, which can be cast as the undefinable feminine. I suggest that within the fusion of the illusion state during the creation of the works the women artists were intimately connected to the sensations that energize the illusionistic space, and they permitted those sensations to emerge into their work. When women connect with the energies underlying the feminine notion of "self" there are complex ambiguities which they must and can, be willing to tolerate. It is possible to read the male professors' reactions as an attempt to eradicate this intrusion into the masculine order that exists precisely to suppress the potent threat of such a feminine strategy. It would seem that the challenge for women is not so much to tolerate ambiguities but to evade the repercussive gesture of the masculine. It is reassuring that in both cases these women disregarded the critique rather than let such confrontation thwart their aesthetic development.

The content and approach to the women's art works reflect change of perspective as well as development of art making skills. The following chapter details one way in which learning and developing a sense of oneself as an artist may be understood.

Perspectives on Learning to be an Artist

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule (1986) describe phases of learning processes that they observed in the lives of women. Along with five positions of knowing, they observed transitional phases, shifts in perspective that were instigated through certain kinds of social and academic interactions. They assert that, for women to become active social agents and contributors to the construction of knowledge, they must see themselves as beings who can have ideas of their own which they have the ability to present. In my study, this concept is analogous to the idea of considering oneself to be an artist. The researchers assert that for women, learning is a process that is profoundly influenced by social, cultural, and personal experiences. These researchers point to the family and to schools as the institutions which most affect women's sense of themselves and their capacity to learn.

The work of Belenky et al. offers one way of viewing the information that this study has yielded. It is one way to bring the observations and insights of the women whom I interviewed into play as considerations for teaching practice. However, it is important to clarify the expectations and limitations that I place upon the use of this theoretical framework. First, while this developmental theory acknowledges underlying psychological aspects of individuation, it is primarily a description of observed relationships between women's behaviour and social- cultural factors. As such, it draws attention to the types of manifest behaviours and articulations that are presented in a classroom situation and thus

the proposal provides a context in which students' attitudes and artistic expressions may be considered. Their descriptions serve as flags to alert me that a student, at least in that time and place, holds a certain attitude towards herself and her work. Consequently, she may have a particular set of expectations of me as a teacher. With that in mind, I can work with the student so that her work proceeds in the most educationally and artistically productive way.

One danger of any kind of systematic outline of development is that the terminology for aspects of a process may be applied as labels to particular individuals. For example, throughout Women's Ways of Knowing a student who verbalizes a certain world view is said to be a "Received Knower." This is a rather totalizing appellation and an over simplification of human complexity. As a teacher in a studio I may be able to recognize certain attitudes that relate to the descriptions that Belenky and her colleagues provide, but I must recognize that there are limits to the information available to me. I can privately surmise certain circumstances of a student's broader experience, but I generally have access only to the art work that she presents in class, her discussion of her own work and her responses to the work of her peers. To place a label on the student is to preclude her capacity to be other than what I say she is. I therefore emphasize that these are descriptions of phases or positions in a process of development, not descriptions of individuals. The examples that are given to illustrate various points are credited to participants in the study but it is evident that the examples are drawn from across the collection of narratives. Furthermore, it appears that a

woman may express interest in an approach that suggests a capacity for a certain phase of knowing while maintaining a different attitude to certain other aspects of her art making process. The role of the educator follows from the perception and interaction in the particular moment.

None of the examples that are discussed in Women's Ways of Knowing relate to learning situations in the visual arts but, as the women whose stories I present show, visual arts production, learning, and women's developing sense of self are intimately related. An outline of these relationships follows. I indicate the positions identified by Belenky et al. followed by their descriptive phrase and an analysis of how the findings of this study relate to these positions.

0. Silence : Absence of voice.

This phase is characterized as life in a world that is dominated by an all-powerful, "might is right", unpredictable, usually male authority. Unquestioning obedience to that authority is seen as essential for survival. Consequently, from the position of *silence*, a woman recognizes no inner sense of self control, acts on impulse and instinct and sees herself as powerless and dependent. She is limited to the actual, the concrete, the specific. She has no comprehension of the imaginary, the metaphoric, of generalization, context, values, or motives. She cannot trust her own ability to understand and remember. She sees life as a polarity of winning and losing. A formal schooling situation which assumes a capacity for representational thought and manipulation of symbolic systems would be an impossible challenge for someone in this position.

I had not anticipated that anyone in this study would relate to the position, and obviously no one interviewed in this study presently experiences this very deprived situation. However, Barbara certainly characterized her childhood under the tyranny of her abusive father as a time of desperate silence. She in fact said, "I mean, I couldn't talk. I didn't talk to anybody." She lived "in silence" for a large part of her life.

Transition:

To make the transition out of silence, a woman must come to realize that she is capable of making human contact with others; that she can make that gesture and be acknowledged. It was observed by the researchers that motherhood often proved to be the turning point. With concrete, non-judgmental instruction a "silent" woman can realize her ability to respond appropriately to her baby and begin to see herself as a learner. It is crucial that her ability is recognized and supported with repeated positive reassurance. I do not have enough information to say how Barbara transcended her silent state. I can only say that by the time she made the decision to come to Concordia, she had done so. By that point she had confronted her alcoholism and had come out as a lesbian. She knew that art making was closely linked to her personal happiness and to her recovery. She also saw herself as someone who could learn how to be a better, more skilful artist.

1. Received Knowing : Listening to the voices of others.

The position of *received knowing* describes a woman who has come to realize that she can listen, understand and remember. For her, receiving and retaining the words of an authority constitutes successful learning. She holds a dualistic view of right and wrong, good and bad, true and false in the way that, in high school, Elaine was convinced that abstract art was good and realistic art was bad. In CEGEP and her first years at university, Nathalie was vehement that post-modern theory was the only explanation for the important questions of art and culture. Women who hold the viewpoint of received knowing sincerely believe that there are right ways to do everything and that once the person who knows how tells you the procedure, you will be able to do it too. This describes the expectations of Barbara, Hannah and others when they entered Fine Arts studies. Laura confessed that, "I idealistically thought it would be a place where I could go and say, 'This is what I want to learn' and people would teach me. And it wasn't quite like that."

This quality may even be apparent in the representations that students produce. In relation to expressed perceptions of visual representations, Meredith recalled a point when,

Yes. Flat! . . . I didn't see anything else. I only *saw* contours. I didn't *know* there was anything else. . . . I didn't see volume. I didn't see light. I just saw straight contours, shapes and colours. So I was never bothered.

From within the position of received knowing, a woman may experience confusion when expected to produce original work. She has no comprehension

of her own ability to formulate new ideas and express them. She clings to her conviction that art is whatever art is accepted by the appropriate authority, be that peers among whom she is recognized for a certain kind of imagery, teachers, or her family. That may be landscapes in the case of Barbara or Laura, "abstract" in Elaine's case, or flat contours in Meredith's case.

The source of knowledge, truth, and the right answer is vested in authorities outside herself - parents, teachers, books, political or religious leaders. Those authorities are perceived as predominantly masculine although they may act through female deputies. A woman holding this perspective has accepted an unspoken bargain: if you do what is expected of you, you will be looked after. Like Meredith as a young working mother, it never occurs to her to question the authority of the men in her life. In reflecting on that period of her life Meredith remarked,

I don't know *where I was*, in all those years, in my head. It took me a long time to kind of readjust my thinking, to think of women as really competent and *important*. Because it was kind of defined as men's work was important and women did nice things around the edges.

I think that women in this phase of knowing can operate in a highly competent and even sophisticated manner although they are actually just performing to meet a standard set by others. As an office worker, Jeanette was conducting herself according to standards set by her father and her employer. Similarly, Meredith was a good wife, a loving parent, a competent social worker, a Sunday painter, and an art student for many years before she realize that she

was always just doing what others expected of her. Nathalie pursued Post-modern theory with enthusiasm but the words were not connected to her own understanding of the world.

Transition:

The first suggestion of moving away from "received knowing" is a woman's surprise when she hears others give the same answer that she thought of but did not verbalize. Elaine put it this way,

Since high school I think I was very, very shy. I was a student who wouldn't speak in class, although I'd have all the answers in my head. I wasn't always right but I wouldn't say anything. I would stay at the back and be very quiet and nobody would know what I was thinking.

At school a received knower finds a peer group with whom she realizes a sense of equality, mutuality of experience, and reciprocity. These realizations form the foundation for the eventual recognition of her own voice. Elaine's Grade Thirteen art project provided her with that experience. After leaving her work in theatre, Kirsten valued the "group of friends, female friends, who were also going through the same thing." She was into a period that she recognized as transitional and they affirmed for her that she was not alone on that road.

Another indication of transition appears when, to her dismay, a "Received Knower" begins to realize that the experts, in whom she had such confidence, do not always agree. Different authors express contrary opinions about the same art work. There may be inconsistencies between what those authorities expect of others, and how they themselves behave. A father who should have protected

his daughter molested her. Fathers who said they loved their families abandoned them. Fathers who demand high standards from their children were found to be weak and inconsistent. Teachers who espoused an ideology of free expression are intolerant of work that does not conform to a certain style. Right and wrong are no longer clear cut and the student must look elsewhere for answers. Such women find that the source of those answers is found within one's self.

Belenky et al. critique the opinions of theorists such as Ericson, Kolberg, and Piaget who assert that the shift away from adherence to external authority is a central task of adolescence. In the opinion of W. Perry (1970) academic exposure to diverse opinions provides the catalyst for the shift out of authority dependent dualism. The research done by Belenky et al. revealed that, for many women, exposure to diverse perspectives is an inadequate strategy to promote a shift in perspective. Two other factors impact more critically on the shift in women's lives: (a) The realization that their trust in male authority had been betrayed through disappointments, abandonment, and/or abuse. (b) Some confirming experiences supporting her ability to know.

2. Subjective Knowing : The inner voice : The quest for self.

I don't know how to describe exactly what happened, just that everything started to look different to me. So that was really something, because it just came from inside and it wasn't like going from my head down into my body, it was the other way around. It was coming up through me. (Kirsten)

The shift to subjective knowing is a major developmental transition which impacts on a woman's relationships, self concept and many aspects of her

behaviour. At this point there are important implications for art making and learning. Subjective knowing is characterized by a woman's recognition of her inner voice as a "gut feeling" and her shift to vest her confidence in that voice as authority. The participants in this study offered many expressions of this perspective. Kirsten was quite explicit, "So it's sort of springing up out of your gut, I guess, and heading, you know, where it leads you." The experience of learning is viewed as a mysterious, magical process where the right solutions "just happen." Several women expressed this attitude but Hannah's description of her intuitive process of painting her first self-directed painting clearly shows the faith and the enthusiasm that make this such a vital phase.

(I) just started painting with what I had there, very spontaneous. . . . I was just going with whatever happened and an image started to appear. It started to come alive. Before I was just putting paint on canvas but it started to come alive and an image started to appear. . . . It felt really good to do something just for myself and to allow it, and for it to talk to me and tell me what it wanted to be. . . . When I worked with this I knew exactly when it was finished and it finished with those little spirit people there. I just put down my brush and I walked away and I said, "It's finished." I *just knew* when it was finished. The whole thing was just spontaneous and it was liberating to work that way.

Several women spoke of how, once they let themselves go into the process of art making and abandoned their conscious notions of what their art should be, (what they thought others thought art should be), surprising and disturbing things surfaced. Kirsten had this experience in her ceramics class where she found her work becoming playful and free-form rather than the more serious forms that she had expected to be creating. For Barbara it was very distressing,

"because I had all this black and reds coming out" in her work once she tapped into the anger and fear that she been repressing. However, she was compelled to struggle to find the ways in which she could represent her painful past, her faith in a protective goddess being, and her remarkable optimism, regardless of how inept she felt her painting skills to be. Hannah reported that her painting of a woman with fire blazing from her vagina had been produced "in a trance" and that it wasn't until she "snapped out of it" that she really saw what she had produced. She felt that it was only after she had abandoned conscious practice that she was able to connect with her repressed inner sexual, creative self. It had been a profound and "terrifying" experience but an extremely important one for her artistic and personal growth. Upsetting as it was, it affirmed her belief that truth about herself comes from within and that one must evade the restrictions of the conscious world in order to access that truth.

For all the women in this study, learning assumed the form of an intense quest for self. It was indeed *the* overwhelming issue for most of them. The phase of subjective knowing was a vital point in that pursuit. Intense commitment to the value of *process* was fundamental to their learning throughout that time, and they generally disavowed the value of the work that they produced. The *art-making process* was synonymous with the process of self awareness and self expression. The process involved permitting herself the pleasure of indulging her desire to do art work and to finding the ways that she could be "good at it". It

also meant freeing herself of external restrictions and delving into her inner "true" feelings in the hope of answering the question, "Who am I?"

Relationships with families, parents, husbands, and others may become oppressively restrictive to a "subjective knower," who may initiate an escape to a new context of her own choosing. This motivated Catherine to move away from her parent's home since, "They love you, but they don't let you grow." Jeanette suffered through a difficult and conflicted period of growth before she could finally leave her parents and go to study in Montreal. These women felt compelled to "stand up and take care of themselves" and they removed themselves from the restrictive situation. They were prepared to act in defence of their right to their own work and their own ideas.

Such vehement independence could have negative consequences. At this point in her personal and artistic growth, a student may be quite arbitrary in her resistance to instruction and critique from the teacher. A "subjective knower" is determined that she can find the way that is *her way*, and she will establish her own criteria for its success. On principle, she doubts the credibility of teachers, so they have to prove themselves to be trustworthy and credible. Expressions of this attitude ranged from Meredith's remark that "it didn't much matter" what an instructor thought, to Laura's blunt comment that a certain teacher was "like the kind of dog that even when they wag their tail they might still bite you."

The changes in a "subjective knower's" life have considerable impact on her self concept. While this phase of learning is energizing, dynamic, and highly

productive, it is also confusing and marked by periods of instability and uncertainty. Many of the stories detail periods of crisis. Belenky et al. comment that images of birth, rebirth and childhood are often used as self description in relation to passing through this period but these were not common metaphors among the women in this study. Jeanette referred to her recovery from her emotional collapse as a rebirth but none of the women showed or discussed visual reference to the subject of birth or rebirth.

In a school setting, a woman who is strongly subjective in her outlook may be perceived by her instructors as excessively emotional and personal. As a teacher I felt my own anxiety as I anticipated Hannah's performance in my class. Few of us are prepared for raw emotional outpouring in public places. However, when the quest for emotional depth and true feelings is the most fundamental task for a woman, this will likely be the content of her work. In fact, this study makes it clear that a student must be able to make that connection between her art production and the meaning of personal experience, in order for her to value the work that she does. This is also a prerequisite for her taking responsibility for her own artistic growth.

My experience with Hannah showed me how, through my engagement with a student, I could help her use the emotional intensity which she was feeling. Through my conversation with her, I "gave permission" to admit her emotional confusion and use it as a powerful motivation for her work. Equally important, by engaging her in a dialogue about her intentions I introduced her to

the process of dialoguing with her own ideas. She followed her own intuitive process for the evolution of the ideas, but she then engaged in intense questioning of the means through which her ideas would be expressed. She was intensely self absorbed but she developed a powerful work into which she could invite her audience, rather than repelling them.

Confidence in one's own inner voice of truth was also evident in the words of several women, including Hannah, when they spoke about "just knowing" when an art work was finished. For Meredith her work was successfully complete when it "hummed" for her. Laura relied on her sense of "when I can look at it and enjoy it" to assess the success of her work. The approval of peers, teachers and friends was still a consideration, but it was not the first concern, nor was it essential.

From a subjective position, a woman values herself and other women like her as sources of truth, knowledge, and mutual understanding. Barbara had come to value her ability to establish empathetic relationships with people who had been through similarly hard times. She was committed to finding ways in which she could share the benefits of her art education training with them. Reva credited several women with having been inspiring and supportive at crucial points throughout her life. Both she and Kirsten made a powerful assertion of female solidarity, first in their act of collaboration, and then in the content of their work. Reva commented that,

We're a support team, and we support each other a lot. And not only do we support each other with our installation work, but in our lives as being students again, which is tough.

Kirsten also valued the supportive relationship within the collaboration. Their commitment to the need for a community of women had been the main motivation for the production of *Necessary Rites*, as Kirsten explained.

I find that for women generally, there's not a lot of support, on the whole social level I mean. In school, in the business world we're more criticised. We *should* do things. Men are free agents. . . . Women on the other hand, we're under the magnifying glass a lot of the time, . . . "You should do" and "You shouldn't" and "You should". So we need more support, and we need people around us who are going to help each other together. Because out there on your own, I think it's really tough for women.

Several women expressed similar attitudes, particularly with respect to whom they would trust for feedback on their work. A few women named an instructor with whom they felt they had established an empathetic relationship but many of them insisted that they would not seek advice from their instructors about solving a problem with their art work. Instead they said that they would talk to a trusted friend, a fellow student, or someone in their circle of friends outside of the art school. They placed great value on the "untrained eye", untainted by rules and hidden agendas. Nathalie, for example, valued the advice of her father who had no particular art training, and she was very interested in the opinions of children.

Belenky and her colleagues suggest that, in light of her personal negative experience with specific men, a woman who holds a subjective perspective may generalize that negative evaluation to all men. Catherine's exclamation, "I can't

handle it! I can't handle being with guys. It's so weird. I don't know. I'm heterosexual but, *Oh!* They just drive me crazy!" certainly fits that description, but the considerations of the male/female issue was generally more restrained among the women in this study. There seemed to be more of an undefined wariness or cynicism on the subject than across-the-board condemnations of men. Kirsten voiced her observations of masculine privilege within her discussion of the value of female solidarity cited above. Irène pursued an intensive series of works that focused on the suffering that women endure. She focused on the ways that male dominated religious institutions and various forms of religious dogma not only condoned but enforced the demand for women's submission to their dictates. In her most recent sculptural work Catherine took a more cynical view of how masculine privilege may present itself.

I've made the little Ferrari there; the little dream of the Dad. They're always thinking, "Oh yeah. I'll always have that on the side and take care of my family. And then the glass itself, the house and the glass, the fact that it has no roof (that) also means something. Where's ...? Is there shelter?"

Subjective knowing is also characterized by a distrust of logic, analysis and abstraction and an emphatic anti-rational, anti-academic, and anti-scientific stance, since all the above are seen as functions of male authority. Laura for example, was very open to the richness of literature but she was not willing to entertain any kind of analytical exercise that would ruin her pleasure of reading. She was quite dismayed to realize that works of visual art were also subjected to criticism and analysis.

All of the women I interviewed allowed that they could deal with the demands of writing a critical discussion of varying points of view that would incorporate their own perspective as well. However, only a few women expressed a real enthusiasm for such an assignment. Most preferred to rely upon their own subjective judgement. Catherine was really struggling to come to terms with this issue. She had been totally intimidated by sophisticated use of theory and vocabulary. She felt she had been not only excluded from that realm of artistic and feminist discussion, but she felt herself to be criticized as well. However, she seemed to realize that to simply refuse to address her intimidation was to cut herself off from information that she might need to go forward with her career. She believed that she needed to find a way into that material.

While the perspective of subjective knowing is an important step towards achievement of an autonomous personality, persistence in heeding her own voice exclusively, and an excessive stubbornness to "go it alone" can lead to problems. Someone who cannot find ways of expanding her understanding and accepting the external world may find herself lonely, isolated, and embroiled in unproductive arguments. If challenges to opinions are always taken as personal affronts, they cannot be seen as proposals for different ways of seeing the question. Also, persisting in the view that art making is exclusively about the process of creation and that the product is irrelevant is to deny an important personal affirmation, that her ideas are valid, that she can represent her ideas in her works, and that those ideas can be communicated to others.

Transitions:

Having established an awareness of self, the subjective knower begins to consider herself a new and interesting object of study. She begins to observe herself and her interactions with others and starts to see others as "others" in less stereotyped terms. She starts to hear herself think, as Kirsten's reflection reveals:

'Cause really, it takes a while before, it took *me* a while anyway, before I realised that the most valuable thing I could do was just sit there and listen to myself really closely and carefully. And the slightest little flicker of thing that went through my mind, that's what I should talk about. 'Cause they're only slight flickers. You can't identify them.

Furthermore, she becomes aware of the contradictions between her own experiences and those of others. Again, Kirsten observed,

But every class doesn't do that. They really, really don't. I've been in other classes, studio classes where I said to myself, "These people have never had the experience that I've had and they don't know anything about this experience that I've had.

Each person's right to an individual point of view is an important principle for "subjective knowers". She values attentive, non-judgemental conversations because, through them she establishes connection with others. Moreover, she gains knowledge about herself, as did Jeanette when she described a moment of insight in her marriage preparation seminar. For the subjective knower, inquiry into herself, and her wish to understand those around her is impetus for an emerging interest in analytic tools and procedures for systematic learning. Reluctantly, she begins to devalue the power of the inner voice, to question its validity. Her subjective relativism was founded on the assumption that everyone

is entitled to their opinion, and that as Elaine said, "all forms of art are valid, and then you can pick and choose." She comes to realise, as did Kirsten, that one may end up having to agree with everything and that you need some better way of deciding what your choice should be. Since one can no longer simply parrot appropriate responses as did the received knower, one must struggle to reposition oneself in relation to established forms of knowledge.

There are three learning situations that were mentioned by participants in this study that, in my view, assisted them in extending their understanding of how they can start to accommodate external elements and retain confidence in their inner voice. One was through exposure to Jungian psychology and to the writing of Joseph Campbell. These author/ities were seen to be in agreement with what the women themselves felt. Exposure to these texts opened up the possibility for reconsidering the credibility of theorists. They offered the women public ways of understanding the inner experiences to which they were deeply committed. Dreams came from "within" and were understood to be intimately linked to the "true" self. Jung's work acknowledged the validity of dream experience and provided a way of comprehending both the dreams and the "self." Campbell's work acknowledges the link between spirituality and mythology (history and community) in ways that corresponded to the views and beliefs of these women.

The second learning experience that gave some of the women a means of placing their own subjective opinions into a more critical environment was an

aesthetic response process in which they were engaged in some of their art education classes. Students were encouraged to indulge their subjective feelings and responses as the first step of the process of art criticism. Both Laura and Kirsten valued this kind of experience as being a way to appreciate art works without needing "a vocabulary or a rule book to go on" (Kirsten). Not only did they have "permission" to use their own responses as the foundation upon which to develop a critique of the art work, but they were offered a flexible process through which they could incorporate external factors such as the artist's perspective or a critics opinion into their critique.

A third situation that promoted a greater acceptance of structured procedure, was the teaching practicum that several of these students had just completed when I spoke with them. They realized that their convictions about the subjective, spontaneous creative process were very difficult to translate into an effective teaching practice. Elaine and Irène both mentioned how ill-prepared they were to analyze a process and design a lesson to help children learn how to use a medium or technique. As they worked to find ways to structure meaningful learning experiences for their students they came to realize that they needed to understand the technical and organisational aspects of art making. They were critical of their own experience because they felt that important information had been left out of their education.

3. Procedural Knowing: The Voice of Reason.

This phase is characterized by the realization that,

Intuitions may deceive; that "gut" reactions can be irresponsible and that no one's "gut" feelings are infallible; that some truths are truer than others; that they can know things that they have never seen or touched; that truth can be shared; and that expertise can be respected. (Belenky et al. 1986, 93)

Women in this phase begin to appreciate the complexity of the subjects with which they are involved, and they begin to accept an understanding of truth as a result of deliberate and systematic analysis of information. Objectivity becomes a much more important consideration in viewing any given situation and generating solutions. There is a realization that while one's own ideas are valuable, one must think before one speaks and opinions must be substantiated. Meredith was challenged to a more complex consideration of her painting practice by an instructor who impressed upon her that,

The whole purpose of the thing, her purpose was that *style carries value*. So you wanted to be sure that, if that's the value that you wanted to express then watch your style. Watch your style. At least know it. At least know what you're into.

Skills, procedures and techniques are now found to be important in order to satisfy academic demands in the process of self expression. It is important to understand not only *what* people know but *how* opinions are formed. Nathalie, for example, was eager not just to learn the content of bio-medical engineering, it was vital that she

see how people who do work in those fields and make those decisions, *come* to make those decisions. How are they taught to do their research? Or have, like what is it that motivates them to develop that kind of technology?

Acquisition of skills enhance the individual's sense of control within her particular sphere. For example, Meredith had wanted to acquire painting skills

so that she could be seen to be competent, but she came to see the development of skills as important in order to do the things that she wanted to do. Developing her technical competence in photography was important for Elaine so that she could accomplish particular artistic goals she had set for herself. Reva and Kirsten pushed their skills in editing video to make the distancing aspects of video technology evident in their work and thereby placing that concept as an element in the work.

Procedural Knowing takes on the perspective of objectivity in that attention is focused away from the self, towards what one seeks to understand. Procedural knowing appears to take two different approaches which are defined as *separate* and *connected* modes (Belenky et al. 1986 100 - 130). Separate knowers appreciate critical thinking and debate. Like Nathalie, who is prepared to challenge the research processes in which she is about to engage, they are prepared to doubt knowledge constructions. Separate knowers are suspicious, but they are eager to learn and employ techniques of analysis to evaluate arguments. Nathalie was ready to return to her studies in the sciences but she was aware that the answers that science could give were not absolute.

The perspective of connected knowing was a more common approach among the women I interviewed. As with separate knowing, connected knowing acknowledges the world of words and encourages a greater respect for reason. However, connected knowing foregrounds the value of personal experience and empathetic connection in the learning process. As Jeanette's remarks below

reveal, one can build on one's subjective conviction that the most trustworthy knowledge comes from personal experience but there are also ways to gain access to the knowledge of others. She expressed an enthusiasm for research that reflected a thorough engagement with the material when she commented that, "I'll read everything that's been said on this or that, and I dissect it. I mean, I'm all over it!". However, there was also "something magical,"

It always relates to me somehow, but it makes me grow, and it makes me respect the artist so much more because I come to understand what the artist, or I think I come to understand what the artist is working through.

Hannah was enjoying the ways in which she was able to first of all, bring together the many level of her own artistic, spiritual, sexual and intellectual energy. Her ceramic works and the sculptural pieces were strong representations of how she had worked towards an understanding of the unity of body, spirit and intellect. Furthermore, she had great satisfaction in connecting her own understanding with the particular forms of knowledge that she had acquired in order to help others.

As enriching as procedural knowing may be, there are also pitfalls to a too-strict adherence to procedures. The most important concern is that most methodological structures are not of women's making. One is still operating within rules that by and large are inherited from institutions developed by men. Those rules and structures can restrict the generation of new discoveries and new questions. Furthermore, if one is preoccupied with the form of critical argument, the content may be ill served.

Transition:

According to Belenky and her colleagues, women continue to engage in a process of self examination but by this time they employ learned procedures in the process of sorting out the pieces of the self and in a careful examination of personal perspectives. They undertake an

effort to redeem the self by attempting to integrate knowledge they felt intuitively as personally important with the knowledge they had learned from others. (Belenky et al. 1986, 100)

They sense the possibility of "weaving together the strands of rational and emotive thought and of integrating objective and subjective knowing" (Belenky et al. 1986: 100) They can no longer accept the restriction they experience in the existing structures of knowledge making and therefore feel compelled to establish new ways of proceeding.

5. Constructed Knowers : Integrating the voices.

Belenky and her colleagues write that women may eventually come to understand that "all knowledge is constructed and that the knower is an intimate part of the known" (Belenky et al. 986, 137). These women recognize how "truth" is a matter of context and that frames of reference are significant. As well, frames of reference are intellectual and social constructions and as such they can be constructed and reconstructed. Consequently, "questions and answers vary throughout history, across cultures, from discipline to discipline, and from individual to individual" (Belenky et al. 1986,138). Constructed knowing is characterized by determination to put systems to one's individual service rather

than conforming to them. Question-posing and problem-posing open exciting new possibilities as "they feel responsible for examining questions and developing the system that they will use for constructing knowledge" (Belenky et al. 1986, 139). Assumptions about knowledge are subject to evaluation and re-evaluation.

In this phase "experts" are appreciated, but to retain respect they must demonstrate an appreciation of complexity and a sense of humility. They must accord equal weight to experience and abstraction. Ambiguity and contradiction among experts are not seen as problematic but as intriguing and challenging, opening up new space for investigation. One's intention is to seek and make connections, to tie together pieces of knowledge, and to create opportunities to participate in the construction of knowledge.

Within the position of constructed knowing women experience the value of entering into a union with the subject. They acquire the ability to establish empathy with others, be they people, written words, ideas, images, or objects. The capacity for dialogue, understood as being the capacity to speak and listen to others simultaneously with the self, becomes an extremely important concept. Conversations are dynamic exchanges which include active listening as well as speaking and questioning.

There is a realization on the part of constructed knowers that one's ideas are of interest and value to people beyond one's own safe circle. While one is aware that "womanly voices" are often disregarded in many settings, there is a

sense of obligation to communicate with both men and women, even if there are challenging responses. Women in this phase demonstrate a commitment to action and a desire to influence the quality of life. Knowledge and ideas extend into the sphere of lived experience, which, as Lorraine Code points out, is where epistemological proposals demonstrate their validity.

In my reading of the data there were no particular examples of this more all-encompassing approach to art and learning arising from this study. Having the opportunity to participate in the manipulation of ideas and to put those ideas into action is necessary to fully realize this phase of knowing. I am confident that continued engagement as artists, teachers, and researchers, in stimulating and collegial settings will facilitate progress into this view for many of the women in this study.

Constructed learning is what I endeavour to exemplify through this study. I aspire to incorporate the collective experiences of these women into the ongoing construction of knowledge by, and for, women as learners in the fine arts. I have set out the personal, cultural and academic contexts from which the study was developed and from which the participants were drawn. Should the reader care to analyze them, my subjective, procedural/connected, and constructed moment are chronicled in "Becoming a Feminist Researcher." For me, engaging with the stories of my students provoked reflection upon my own learning experiences and perspectives on knowing. Similarly, Jean Clandinin observed the effect of narrative research on herself and her colleagues, and remarked

We began to know our own stories better by hearing other's stories. As we listened to others' stories, we not only heard echoes of our own stories, but saw new shades of meaning in them. (Clandinin 1993, 2)

As I make theoretical connections in this dissertation and pedagogical connections in my teaching, I call upon personal knowledge to help establish empathy with other authors, ideas, and my students. The process of researching and writing has involved me in the complex negotiation between subjective perceptions and the degree of objectivity necessary for constructing knowledge proposals. Out of this effort has come personal understanding about the dynamics of teaching and researching which, when placed in conversation with other authors, will suggest new possibilities for teaching and learning.

Illusions and Disillusions

As discussed above, Stanley Horner (1987) provides a poetic way of perceiving the inner dynamics, expectations and learning needs of visual arts students. He asserts that the role of the teacher is first to foster the student's strong inner *illusion* of unity with their work and then to promote *disillusionment*, the insinuation of external considerations into the student's subjective view. Consequently the student is required to push beyond her/his existing notions of beauty and security. Horner proposes concepts as analogous and archetypal, so his ideas may be extended to various artistic and educational situations.

The processes of illusion and disillusion are considered integral to the creative process. The terminology of illusion and disillusion is derived from the

work of D. W. Winnicott. As discussed earlier, Winnicott stresses the value of the fundamental illusion of unity in the mother-child dyad and the necessary disillusionment enacted by the "good enough mother" to permit the formation of the child's identity in relation to the objective world. In his view the human capacity for creative play and artistic production originates in the transitional phenomenon and the child's interaction with a transitional object. Thus, the creative process can be understood as an interactional experience between one's internal self and the external world.

Horner employs the illusion/disillusion concepts to reformulate a description of teacher/student interaction. He proposes that it is essential that each student be permitted to fully indulge in the illusion that she has the ability to be an artist - that she *is* an artist. If the illusion of artistic accomplishment is sufficiently well established, it can sustain her through the difficult experience of disillusionment. Horner points out,

The original one (illusion) must be lost so that it might be regained; it must be torn. We must be disillusioned (Winnicott 1971) it seems, precisely so that we can, each of us, manifest out of our "surroundings" a wholeness that secures us in our innermost time and place. (Horner 1987, 55)

As an artist becomes involved in the process of creation, she enters into the illusion that she is one with the work. This was particularly apparent in the descriptions that were given by Hannah, Barbara and Kirsten when they spoke about moments of intense involvement with their art work. The instructor who encouraged Jeanette and Irène to stay physically close to their paintings and to

complete the work in one session was setting up a situation where the illusion could be sustained. Even to step back to take a look would be to break the illusion, to be disillusioned. Eventually one does "step back" into the conscious world and consider what has transpired, but it is done with a full sense of the pleasure of the illusion state.

Most of the women whom I interviewed could be said to have had a very fragile *illusion* of their creative ability when they began their fine arts studies. As I outlined in *Hopes and Fears* above, their various experiences prior to admission to the university had provided some with a grounding upon which they could build with some degree of confidence. Others, like Hannah and Barbara found themselves in a bewildering situation where their fellow students all seemed to be far more capable and "in the know" than they were. They felt that their initial efforts were inept and the experience was frustrating and discouraging.

Several women discussed situations which established their secure illusion of artistic participation. Jeanette commented on her introductory studio class where the professor's positive attitude towards all the students' efforts was very encouraging. As a second year student, Elaine appreciated a course where her professor presented various texts on artist's works and encouraged discussion about them. As she said, "I was only in second year then. I was only twenty and it was still really all new to me." She felt that she was being offered a way into a world of which she wanted to be a part.

Olivia described her experience in an illustration course at UQAM in which the teacher enabled her to say, "I felt I was good enough. I should continue. She helped me to think I should continue; that I had some talent and I could do something with it." She was very clear about how the teacher had created that feeling.

She was very stimulating. She would bring books at each course. She gave us a lot of ideas, a lot of things to try at home. She told us, "Experiment. Try things." She would suggest ideas. She would show us techniques. She would show us a technique but then she would tell us, "Push it. Try! You can mix this and this together, and then, this and this." . . . So she introduced me to illustration, to drawing. In this course we had our first nude model, all these things. . . . So it was the real world of art, that started there for me, I think. . . . Also she gave us a lot of feed back and she would tell us the good things about what we did. She was very encouraging.

This teacher gave Olivia what she needed in order to feel that she was successful and that she could learn to be even more so. Nathalie also reported an experience at CEGEP where she felt that she was given ongoing encouragement and taught ways to deal with artistic problems. Hannah, Kirsten and Jeanette had the same stimulating experience in their ceramics class. Catherine was less specific about how the illusion had been fostered, but when she discovered sculpture, "her medium", she was able to engage in her studies in a whole new way. The illusion that she could be a successful painter was achieved only after Hannah's course was finished and she proceeded to work on her own to paint the kind of image that she wanted for herself. The illusion was supported by her peers' admiration of the work. Similarly, Laura started to produce the painted trays as Christmas gifts and the pleasure and satisfaction that she had in painting

and giving them carried through into her painting class. The teacher was accepting of her chosen format and subject matter and set assignments that helped her deal with the technique of painting, which was the area in which she wanted to have advice.

It is apparent that if a student is to continue to develop both personally and artistically, the illusion of accomplishment must be disrupted. Disillusion opens a space in which to seek and find new possibilities, a space where she can play. This space, in which the art work takes on the role analogous to the transitional object, is the space which permits dialogue with the work. Thus disillusion opens the possibility of critical appraisal of the work and considered attention to necessary refinements and revisions of meaning and technique. Horner refers to disillusionment as a tearing of the illusion, but my observation is that for the women in this study, such a drastic gesture was not necessary. Disillusion can be as simple as stepping back from the piece upon which one has been working. There seems to have been some brusque and premature interventions that may have been intended to accomplish disillusion, to "shake her up," but there were several more subtle and successful efforts. Meredith's confidence in her ability to paint "competently" was well established when her teacher commented that maybe she should not be such a good student. Whether by design or accident this intervention was well timed to provoke her to think differently about herself as a student and as an artist. It was the silence at the end of Hannah's performance that brought her out of herself and made her realize that there was

an audience who had been involved in the work as well. In the years preceding her enrolment at Concordia, Reva had enjoyed a degree of success and recognition for her art work but she had resisted making conscious connections between the images and her personal experiences. She maintained the illusion of their aesthetic and intellectual value until an insightful remark from a fellow student made her realize that she was painting self portraits - that the images reflected aspects of herself that she had avoided confronting. For the students in ARTE 430, my expectation that they should express their subjective response to their art work in words serves a disillusioning function, since the inner experience must be translated into the external world of language.

These examples serve to demonstrate some of the thoughtful teaching strategies, the self initiated moments, and serendipitous events that constitute the flow of illusion and disillusion for students. As Horner and Winnicott state, the pleasure and security of the illusion experience sustains and motivates the student to understand and benefit from the disillusioning gesture. Such concepts also imply a definition of pedagogical practice.

The "Good Enough Teacher"

My purpose in undertaking this study was to better understand the learning experiences of women students. My first concern is that such an understanding benefit my own teaching practice. Furthermore, I hope that the stories that these women have shared with me can in some way be extended to

benefit other women students, their male counterparts, and other art teachers. The effort to translate the information presented in the stories into educational practice raises questions of pedagogy and the role of the teacher.

Pedagogical recognition of the knowledge that women students bring to the studio - classroom, and the knowledge that they construct throughout their art education, is crucial to advancing the feminist agenda in art and in education. The representations which these women create of themselves and the world as they experience it, are vital contributions to the social and cultural dialogue through which knowledge is recognized. Their stories and the narratives derived from the stories offer valuable indications of the qualities of pedagogical practice which will enrich women's creative participation in social and cultural dialogue.

Not only do Winnicott's theories contribute the concept of illusion and disillusion as a metaphor for the practice of teaching, but his work offers the possible terminology for the desirable teacher. The above discussion of the illusion/disillusion processes might imply that the role of the "good enough mother" provides the model for teaching practice. However, I suggest that the role of the teacher is more than to reprise the role of the "good enough mother." Kavalier-Adler (1993) asserts that there is also an appropriate role for the "good enough father" in the girl's realization of creative potential if one re-appraises the oedipal fantasy in the father-daughter relationship. Rather than persisting in the traditional notion that the girl's fantasy is to get a baby *from* the father, Kavalier-

Adler asserts the idea that it is more appropriately understood as a wish to create "*with* the father" which can be fulfilled by a woman's creative work

The notion of creating "with" the father suggests a further definition of the educator's task in the creative learning of women students. While the teacher enacts disillusionment s/he must also be amenable to the process of "making with" which provides the invitation to play and to create. As discussed above, Kavalier-Adler points out that the father - daughter relationship involves not only taking interest in the daughter's creative work but requires that the father allow the daughter to participate in his own creative endeavours (Kavalier-Adler 1993, 65). Nathalie, Elaine and Olivia recounted childhood memories of such invitations to create with their fathers. With regard to teaching, Nathalie spoke of precisely this gesture on the part of her female teachers. Not only were they approachable individuals but, she declared

if they are able to discuss their work with you, I think that makes a big difference. If they can let you into their little art world, their own production, it becomes a lot easier to understand where they are coming from. . . .Because if you don't know what the person is doing, then it's a lot more difficult to see where they are coming from when they speak to you about art.

Illusion and disillusion are required in order to enable and promote artistic growth, but students also need to know that they have not been abandoned on the path that they are pursuing. Belenky et al. are emphatic on the point that women learners require ongoing, consistent recognition and affirmation. The women in this study frequently expressed the desire for the instructor to guide

them through technical processes. Most particularly, these students wanted to feel that they had the professors assistance as they worked and that s/he recognized their artistic efforts with appropriate critical attention. They expect and require the sustained accompaniment of the knowledgeable "insider" to "show them the ropes" as they negotiate their way. It would seem that either male or female teachers may adequately perform this role depending on the perspectives of individual students. It is a question of making and sustaining a connected relationship of respect. Meredith received this kind of assistance from a woman friend who was an experienced artist, and Reva's first exhibitions were guided by the woman who owned the gallery. Notably, both of these examples are from situations outside of the classroom.

I suggest that the "good enough teacher" must be amenable to taking up the role of the "good enough mother/father" as the student progresses with her art. This teacher is attuned to the needs of the student and can engage with her from a position that establishes the most productive situation for the student's learning. A good enough teacher recognizes the dynamics of illusion/ disillusion and develops ways to enact the ongoing supportive function that is required if students are to realize the benefits of that process. Such a teacher conveys her/his expectation that even tentative ideas will be presented and that they will be accepted and developed in an atmosphere of collaboration and respect.

The good enough teacher allows for the possibility of knowledge evolving from personal experience, and accepts that gender is an important factor in

women's life experience. When women perceive personal experience to be like the dark shadowy parts of Irène's paintings, they need help to translate their ideas about that experience into the public language of art. The good enough teacher models the behaviours that re-establish women's confidence and generate meaningful participation. In the guise of the good enough mother, the teacher creates a safe place for the student to move past the intense emotion of that experience to gain an, albeit personally engaged, objectivity from which she can initiate art making in the public setting. This teacher works with students, through questioning, or recommended systems, to help each student to define her own questions and to find the most compatible procedures for pursuing artistic solutions. Such a teacher creates an atmosphere where judgement is suspended, but discussion is not. S/he models the practices of critical discussion of art works and ideas and creates situations in which students are expected to implement those skills.

The good enough teacher recognizes that artists, whether established or aspiring, live and create as part of variable, gendered, social, cultural, political and economic contexts. S/he recognizes that artist/teachers as well as their students are involved in the construction/reconstruction, representation/re-representation of those contexts. S/he makes personal, artistic and pedagogical experience, and the knowledge therefrom, available to students. Moreover, s/he emphatically invites students to participate in the cultural practices of knowledge construction.

Questions for Further Research

A number of questions for further research arise from this study. The question of what male students' life narratives would reveal, and the educational implications of how men view their art making and educational experiences is one such question. Men and women share in educational situations and the experiences and points of view that male students bring with them to the studio or classroom influence the learning environment. As well, pedagogical practices that benefit women may also benefit men.

Many positive models of pedagogical practice were discussed by the students I interviewed. More intensive discussions with those educators would expand upon the descriptions given by the students and provide a broader pedagogical perspective on successful teaching practices. These teachers have much to offer their colleagues.

The particular responses of women students to male and female teachers is another question about which I am curious and which would require further research. If some women students, who as "received knowers" regard men as authority, regard women teachers as less credible than their male counterparts and illegitimate in their position as professors, what then are the implications for the pedagogical practices and evaluation of women instructors.

The imagery that women students develop in their work, particularly when it evolves from personal experience, also warrants study. Continued inquiry in

these areas promises to further illuminate the dynamics of pedagogical practice and enhance the learning experiences of women students.

"Expressing Myself"

The notion of "Self Expression" is ubiquitous as a fundamental *raison d'être* of artistic creativity. The phrase is imbued with the ambience of Modernist myth - the notion of a unique, core Self yearning to manifest its omnipotent vision through the spectacular artistic gesture. Like the avant-garde artist that Kuspit discusses, the image here is of a Self who is more visionary, more perceptive, more talented, and far bolder than other members of society. Historically, this is a notion that male artists have taken very much as their own, but in which at times women have assumed they could also participate. As this study has shown this is not a simple manoeuvre for women, and in fact for the women in this study, the quest had a significantly different agenda. For these women, the self that became the subject of their artistic gestures is variously elusive, tentative, repressed, and hesitant, but also at times forthright, confrontational and impassioned. It is a self that is embodied and engaged in the world. It is at times pain-laden and rage-filled, but also joyous, generous, and full of humour and optimism. It can be a sexual, seductive and passionate self as well as thoughtful and analytic. The self is inconstant, changing over time in response to events and interactions in the world. These women revealed selves who were inspired to explore, reflect, analyze, and seek insight into the complexities of their inner

lives and the cultures in which they live. The self that is expressed through their art works is sometimes uncertain and contradictory yet, determined and adventurous. The self of their "self expression" is not a unified, forward marching entity inevitably in charge of its own self-chosen destiny, but rather its definition is conditional on complex interrelationships of conditions and contexts.

A significant issue in that interrelationship of conditions and contexts is the misconception that Self Expression - the creation of the spectacular artistic gesture - is defined in terms that include women. As discussed above, sometimes women internalize myths, only to find their aspirations foiled by the contradictions inherent in such notions. Like the avant-garde personalist educator artist, some of the women expressed the wish that their art work should show others what they ought to know - shock the viewers, shake them up, and make them think. Some students had internalized this attitude as an acceptable pedagogical approach. But, whether viewed from the perspective of philosophy, psychoanalysis, or social history, the Self of Self Expression can be seen as constructed to explicitly exclude Women. This study reveals strategies that the members of this group pursued as they recognized the contradiction and undertook to circumvent exclusionary practices. As I noted earlier, for these women the art making experience was seen as "catalytic in their growth towards a sense of self and agency, both as artists and as members of society." In doing so they have contributed to a redefinition of artistic creative agency.

These observations and insights into the relationships of life and art as they developed for these women over time have been realized through the practice of narrative inquiry. The students' life narratives present a cross section of personal backgrounds and document the motivations, successes and disappointments that define their artistic growth. For most of these women, becoming an artist began from a simple heartfelt desire to create images and forms. As Meredith said, "It was wonderful! Entire pleasure!" They were thrilled, and they gained immense personal satisfaction simply from "doing art" either as children or later in their lives. Yet, they understood that what they were doing was not accepted as having the qualities that they knew, or thought, elevated representations to the realm of Art. They went to university with the expectation that they would be taught the necessary skills and that with hard work, they could make better art, maybe even make Art. As Laura observed, this was naive and many of these students experienced great frustration.

Nonetheless all these women persevered and found ways to acquire the instruction they wanted and the support that they needed to become more skilful creators. The realization that they could create art works that had significant meanings for themselves, and that they could communicate those meanings to others, came primarily through pedagogical interventions. Some of this teaching was informally offered by knowledgeable friends and associates. For some students, the pedagogical approach that an instructor extended to the whole class offered the focus, information and encouraging atmosphere from

which the student gained confidence to address issues about which she felt strongly. These instructors designed assignments that required that the student consider their own experience and ideas in relation to thoughtfully selected themes or topics. At the same time they demonstrated or modelled the problem solving and art making skills required for the assignment. They supported the student through her efforts to accomplish those skills. For some students the opening for the incorporation of personal experience and ideas came through more private interviews, conversations or critiques with empathetic teachers. Their stories tell the particular ways that these women experienced the satisfaction of bringing together art and their lived experience. As they began to invest their works with meanings drawn from their own particular life experience, they came to understand the significance of "self expression" and what it implied for them and their art work. Many came to value their ability to reflect on their lives and art works and to enjoy the confidence that enabled them to engage productively in their chosen community. As artists, members of communities, and members of society, they view their artistic work as the transitional experience through which they explore their personal inner space. Simultaneously, they seek to make and sustain connections with the society, culture, and ideas that inform their learning and art making.

This study presents the experiences and observations of twelve women and while they discuss a diverse range of circumstances, they are grounded in a defined context. Notwithstanding the particularity of these stories, the study

serves to exemplify how practical and theoretical concerns of feminist discourse may be played out in a visual arts educational setting. The study reinforces Jennifer Gore's contention that "much of the educational production of knowledge takes place at the very private, personal level of teacher and student." This study offers examples of such constructive interactions and maps possibilities for empathetic understanding of student's perspectives on life, art, and learning. Each of these stories contribute to the wealth of knowledge by, and for women, and expands the vision of how the ongoing construction of female subjectivity might proceed.

Carrying out this research project has been an enlightening experience which was made all the more enjoyable by the women who contributed their stories to it. Their generosity in recounting the stories of their lives, their ideas, their hopes and dreams, has enhanced the understanding that I and other art educators have of women's creative efforts. Our conversations in relation to the art work from their student years revealed how intimately the production of the work was connected to an individual's concept of themselves as women and as aspiring artists. Through active participation in art production these women came to recognize the power of their personal and artistic capacities. That knowledge enriches their lives and relationships, inspires their art, and motivates them to insist that their work is part of the artistic conversation.

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Appendix A - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The highlighted headings indicate topics that I intend to discuss with each woman. The ensuing questions suggest further inquiries that may be pursued, depending upon the response to the initial question.

A. Personal History / Background:

To begin I would just like to talk a bit about you and your personal story. Can you tell me about yourself? Are you from Montreal? Can you tell me a bit about your family? What program are you in? What year?

2. What kinds of important things have happened in the past few years?
3. How would you describe yourself at this point in your life?
4. Is that how you would have described yourself in the past (before you started studying, for example)? Where there any particular turning points?
5. Have you always done art work? Thought of yourself as an artist?

B. Relationships: A number of existing studies suggest that our family, social and work relationships have a great deal of influence on how women think about their artistic and educational progress, so I would like to talk about relationships. What relationships have been important to you? Has (have) that (those) relationships(s) changed?

2. Can you tell me about your relationship with your mother? father? siblings?
3. Have there been relationships that have been important to you as an artist?

C. Gender: What does being a woman mean to you? Being a woman artist?

D. Education: As you know, this project is concerned with women, learning, and art, and the role of art education in women's lives. So I'd like to talk a bit about your art school experiences. How did it come about that you are here at Concordia?

2. What do you think will stay with you about your experience in Fine Arts ?
3. What has been most helpful to you in your studies here?

4. Can you describe an occasion where you feel you learned something significant?
5. Have you come across ideas that have made you think about yourself, or the "world" or your art work differently?
6. Have there been any art learning situations that have been discouraging to you? How have you dealt with the discouragement?

E. Art Works: I'd like to spend most of the rest of our time talking about your art work, particularly the pieces that you have here today. How do you feel about them?

(Looking for motivations, ideas, concepts, process of creation)

2. If you have a problem while working on a piece, where do you go for help?
3. How do you know that your work is successful?

F. Authority and Decision Making: When you look at an art work, whether it is your own, by a well known artist or by a fellow student; can you tell me about the process that you personally go through as a viewer, in responding to the work?

2. Who do you consider to be an expert in the field of art, and how would you know they were an expert? In learning about art making, can you rely on experts?
3. Are some art works better than others? Why?
4. If, for example, you were preparing to write an art history paper, and you read two articles by two different art critics, discussing the same painting or body of work by the artist, but which expressed quite different points of view on the work, how would you use that information in your paper?

G. Conclusion: Just to conclude, do you have any conception of what your life will be like ten years from now? Anything else that you would like to add, just to sum up?

Appendix B - STATEMENT of CONSENT to be INTERVIEWED

As a Ph. D. student in the Dept. of Art Education at Concordia University, I am conducting research on the subject of undergraduate women students' learning experiences in the Faculty of Fine Arts. I request your consent to be interviewed as part of this dissertation research project.

Miriam Cooley_____

I, _____, agree to participate in a video and audio tape recorded interview with Miriam Cooley on _____ 1994 at _____, _____ on the above stated topic.

I understand that this interview is being conducted for research and educational purposes and that both video and audio tapes will be analysed in the course of the research. The anonymity of the interviewee will be respected in all written presentations. Participation in this interview is voluntary.

Interviewee:_____

Consent for the Use of Interview Video Tape

Having completed the interview, I _____ consent to the use of the video tape for public presentations of an academic, research, educational or documentary nature, with the understanding that it is not possible to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewee or her art works in the video format.

Interviewee :_____

Appendix C - Sample Transcript of Introduction and Project Description to Participants

Interview Transcription # 3: _____
March, 1994

(Catherine)

Miriam: Miriam Cooley interviewing (_____) in her home on March 29, 1994.

This is research that I am doing for my Ph.D. and the purpose of my study is to look at the ways that women learn about art and to look at the experiences that you have had in art school in relationship to your background and your family and all the other kinds of that go on in your life. The kinds of question that I am going to be asking are influenced, come from my own experience, my experience as a teacher, and other research, done by various people that suggest that certain things influence certain aspects of women's learning. Much of that research hasn't been done about Fine Arts. They don't even think about it. So that's why I think its very important - since there are so many women in art school - that we try to find out about the things that are successful, most particularly, in your experience as an art student and the kinds of things that have been beneficial to you and have helped and supported your learning. So then we, as educators, can build on those experiences and make the optimum kind of learning experience for women who are in art school. After all it is a pretty important part of your life.

So, the questions that I am going to be asking deal with some of your background; who you are, how you think about yourself, and your life and what you are doing. A bit about your family background and how you think about those kinds of things. Your actual experience in art school and to look at some of your work in relation- ship to, how you think about them. And, some questions about decision making: how you decide about your art work and those kinds of things; how you make decisions in that process. And anything else you'd like to say.

Its part of the procedure for doing research make sure that you understand what I'm about. You can certainly ask questions if you're not clear on it. Its important that you understand that its completely voluntary. You have no obligation to give me this interview, and you have no obligation to say anything that you don't want

to say. You can stop the whole interview if you want to. I'm audio taping it so that I can transcribe what you say, and I will be video taping it as well. Now, the video tape is so that I have some record of your you doing this, but also particularly to centre on your art work. In research, when you consent to be a subject like this, in any of the written documentation your anonymity is guaranteed so that you can feel that things you say are not going to go into places that you would chose that they didn't. I mean, I'll give you a pseudonym in the written presentation. However, with a video cameras, its very hard to guarantee your anonymity. So, there are sort of two levels of consent here. One is that I can use the audio tape and the video tape for the purpose of my research, for the dissertation, and for any academic pres. ntations that I might give about my research. There is an additional consent to use the video tape in a wider area. Now we can leave that until after the interview, until you know what you have said. And if you are comfortable with that you can give me consent "for public presentations of an academic, research, educational or documentary nature, with the understanding that it is not possible to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewee or her art work in the video format." So, we can leave that until after, because, much as I would like to be able to use this further, my priority is that you are comfortable speaking to me for the purpose of my dissertation.