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The Endless Well
An Ethnography of Creativity and Imagination among Contemporary Artists

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A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Sociology and Anthropology

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

December 2002

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ABSTRACT

The Endless Well An Ethnography of Creativity and Imagination among Contemporary Artists by Guy Laramée

In the framework of a thesis in cultural anthropology, the aim of the project is to examine the way contemporary artists enact and give meaning to the concepts of “creativity” (or “creation”) and “imagination”, and see how these meanings can be further re-interpreted in the light of a model of consciousness developed by a Zen master, Albert Low. The project examines this question from the angle of “Consciousness Studies” and more specifically the anthropology of consciousness. The project is based on a fieldwork that is two fold : 1) an immersion in a graduate program in Fine Arts in Montreal over a period of one year; 2) a survey through interviews of professional artists. Creativity will be examined as a Western concept, but relations will be established with non-Western world views, mostly Eastern (mainly Zen Buddhism). The central issue of this project is to give meaning to the “urge to create”, as it is experienced by professional creators.

The rebound effect of this questioning is to bring forward two other issues. The first one is the re-location of the “new” into experience. The project might then manifest itself as a critique of past views of creativity in aesthetics and anthropology, views that have presented the “new” only in term of social appraisal. The second issue is the meaning of trying to put the inexpressible into words, or the tension between discursive and non-discursive cognition, which is also the tension between intuitive and analytical modes of knowledge.

**To all my teachers and colleagues, and specially those who showed me that every
knowledge has a price.**

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(Section) 1- INTRODUCTION

The story of this project is a long one. I would like to think that it started in 1995, when I finally set to put words to my ambiguous feelings toward my artistic practice, but in fact it started in 1979, when I dropped university to become an artist. In fact, one could say that it started even before that. Maybe I am only part of a chain of searchers – and every human being is –who asked for the meaning of life.

Indeed the source of this project is very personal. It stems from a deep professional concern about the origin of “creativity”. Having been a professional interdisciplinary artist for nearly twenty years, I came to experience a deep doubt about the “usefulness” of artistic creation, as it is experienced and promoted in the West. This questioning about the roots and purposes of “creativity”, in an artistic context, originated in the form of two interrogations : why such a big societal emphasis on producing “new” things – a consequence of which being the tremendous quantity of artistic products on the market now ? And why at a more personal level does this urge to create often translates into a seemingly neurotic state that combines compulsion, obsession, restlessness, exhaltation and depression ? The central question of this investigation is the restlessness of “creativity” and “creators”, i.e. the fact that far from quenching one’s thirst, creative acts call for more creative acts.

At the time I first formulated the questions of this research, my life was that of driving one production after another. My ‘job’, or my vocation, requested that I invent worlds after worlds, that I live in them for periods of up to four years, and that I then migrate to the next one. In 95 I started questioning the endlessness of it all. Where did

this incessant creation came from ? Was it but another 'artist's sickness', as I used to call it at the time ? Or was this frenzy a manifestation of a malady, the malady of thinking, as some Eastern spiritual practices seemed to suggest ? Was this restlessness only a Western phenomena, or was it part of what it means to be human ? Or even more scary : was 'I' the one who was getting 'sick' ?

What shook me and propelled me into this query was the recent story of three artists. One friend had just got out of a terrible personal crash. Her studio work had cut her in two. It had taken her more than a year to get out of what looked like a deep existential crisis – something that doctors would call a mental illness. Another colleague was still recovering from a similar ailment. In the midst of a 'crisis', a 'paroxysmic' episode, she had had moments of telecognition, and a very disturbing state where she could hardly communicate with her social surroundings. Lack of access to spiritual interpretations¹ – I hypothesized – had driven her into the hands of the medical system, which did not take long to diagnose a mental illness. The third person was... me. Following the writing of an opera, in 1991, I had lost my mind. Indeed we were not alone. The story book of artists was replete with cases of this 'Van Gogh syndrome'.

My questions were exacerbated when I stumbled on Peruvian healers. Between 92 and 95, for a total duration of a year in total, I did some amateur field work among healers in Peru, mainly the Ayahuasqueros of the Amazon. I wanted to find another frame of reference to establish an ontology of imagination. The questions I asked where : where does these 'images' come from ('images' in the broad sense, including other sensory realms and feelings)? Can we go beyond an individualist view of symbolic productions ?

¹ There exist now across America a network of psychologists who are qualified to discern form psychosis what is now called 'symptoms of spiritual emergence'.

The contact with these people was very troubling. Here were practitioners who induced 'visions', "castles in the air" as Joni Mitchell has it, but their purpose seemed to be very different from that of artists. It was not entertainment or aesthetic pleasure they were after, but the healing of others. Their art strove to touch and influence the real, not to retreat into imaginary worlds. But the healers could not help in my dilemmas about art making. I could not make sense of their cosmology, and would certainly not become one of them. The gap between their culture and mine was too big.

Back home I used the pretext of a journalistic article² to interview five practitioners of five different disciplines : an art therapist who is also a Jungian psychologist, an acupuncturist teaching Qi Qong, an actor renowned for her introduction in theatre of techniques to alter consciousness, a 'creative' in a publicity agency, and a Zen master, Albert Low, who was to become my main anthropological resource. But the more views I added to my palette, the more mixed up I became. Here were worldviews that just seem to contradict each other. I needed a unifying paradigm, and paradigms are, as Wilber rightly argues, practices (Wilber : 1996) . I even turned to the apprenticeship of Chinese medicine...! Indeed, here was a very promising paradigm, which apparently had succeeded in bridging the gap between matter and spirit. Deception again. Med schools, be they Chinese, have other agendas than answering those sorts of existential quests.

All this time I had found very little comfort in the company of my artist colleagues. All around me the Zeitgeist was that of an unconditional apology of imagination. I was not sure if this was not the self justification of image junkies. The fact was that without wanting to, I had moved outside the parameters of that worldview – the 'art world'. At the same time, I was still convinced that if there was to be a purpose to art, it was in the

answering of questions like those. Was not 'art' the most direct way of getting to the core of life ? Or was it me who was starting to ask too many questions ? Was I getting caught into a world – thinking – that could not help making sense of the other world – non-thinking ?³

Issues of health and sickness had mutated into very existential questions, questions of life and death. I had asked the forbidden questions, Gauguin's three questions, the three little phrases that had driven him close to suicide : where do we come from, who are we, where do we go. These were indeed questions for the Grand Western disciplines – Philosophy, Anthropology. Half convinced, I finally turned to anthropology, because at least ethnology promised to bring me in contact with humans in the flesh. There, at least, I would be in the company of travelers, people who had apparently found a solace in meeting the 'other'. Without noticing, I became what anthropologists call, half ironically I presume, 'native anthropologists'. Having traveled on three continents, my 'mission' (sic) was now clear : I had to go back 'home', to go back to my tribe – artists – and ask them, ask myself, Gauguin's three questions. These questions would not be only verbal. I would go back in studios, rehearsal rooms, stages, galleries, and interrogate the events to see if I hadn't missed anything. And indeed, I discovered I had. I found, among other things, that what I had viewed as paralysing contradictions could be seen otherwise : contradictions could be embraced as *paradoxes*, and what allowed for that embrace was precisely creativity. Indeed, 'creativity', now a trendy password for very different endeavours, could get its definition precisely here : in that which allows one to stand in the midst of ambiguity.

² Laramée, Guy : L'Imagination est-elle une maladie ? In Guide Ressource, Montreal, October 1997

³ As we will see, this might be indeed one of the troubling conclusion of this field work...

* * *

What first decided me to pursue the investigation was an intuition about the nature of the 'creative process'. During my professional life, I could sort out two processes that are apparently distinct, which at that time I named "imagination" and "intuition". Even when non-linguistic, imagination was intellectual, a form of thinking among others intellection; intuition was not. Moreover, the possibility that intuition might not be personal implied the necessity to do an intercultural survey about how this mysterious class of phenomena was perceived by other cultures. Theocentric cultures became the focus of my research, for the possibility they offer of a pan-historical model linked to what is nowadays called "consciousness" in the West.

But what really convinced me to spend the three years of research that this project demanded was my encounter with Albert Low. It is only in 1999 that I would stumble on a book that would transmute my mute dilemma into a creative paradox. Albert Low, the director of the Montreal Zen Center, had just published 'Créer la conscience', his Magnum opus in his own word, and that book not only addressed directly the problem of the ontological status of 'images' by re-framing the whole problem into the terms of an Eastern 'epistemology', namely Zen Buddhism, his book also made creativity the center of an anthropological model. Low's views on consciousness became central for me and they framed most of the present research. It is through his eyes that I formulated my research questions. It is with his ideas in mind that I went to the field. And as I had already been convinced that worldview, paradigms, myths in the anthropological jargon, are actually practices, and that only through the daily experience of these practices one can come to grasp their meaning, in May 2000 I became Low's student. Indeed, this

proved to be decisive in my comprehension of what he calls, in an effort to translate Eastern views to Westerners, “non-reflective awareness”.

This field trip was thus truly multifaceted. I used every opportunity life provided me to answer this query. Every human I met, every stone, became an ‘informant’. In fact, the fatidic question this project ask, modestly and in a somewhat oblique way, is : ‘What is the mind ?’ This is not an easy question. A Zen story illustrates very well its paradoxical nature. A monk, who had surrendered to the discipline of Zen, and who was standing in the middle of the most arid desert of despair, asked his master, Joshu : ‘I beg you, please calm this mind of mine’. Joshu answered : “Bring your mind here and I’ll calm it”. The monk replied : “I have looked everywhere, and have found nothing that can be called mind”. Joshu said : “There I have calmed it”.

* * *

What becomes clear for me is that the central question at stake here is nothing more than the reformulation of an old dilemma of Western cultures. For when one asks what is the difference between imagination and discovery, *bricolage* and inspiration, craft and insight, old and new, one in fact asks about the relation between Knowing and Being (i.e. what is thought to exist and what exists in itself). The questions I asked to the ‘field’ can be summarized by the set of questions I formulated in my thesis proposal :

- 1- Could a part of “imagination” hinder the experience or states of non-reflective awareness?
- 2- Can the ‘religions of awakening’ give us another view on the ‘spell of the creator’ (the sometime obsessive need to create) ?

- 3- Can a field work among contemporary artists, informed by oriental models of consciousness. give us the elements of a model on the « state of creativity » (creativity as state instead of creativity as production).
- 4- Can we find the traces of a common denominator, a set of universals, that would account for the sameness of creativity and creative acts in different fields (science, humanities and arts), starting by different artistic disciplines (see Briggs and Csikszentmihalyi) ?
- 5- Can this sameness be seen as the ground for actual and future interdisciplinarity?
- 6- Is there a validation for creative acts that lies outside culture (i.e. that has nothing to do with social validation) ? Is this a terrain for immediate, intuitive, a-personal and a-cultural validation ?
- 7- Should we sustain the view of creativity as being made of two basic and sometimes contradictory components : insight (or inspiration, prophecy, divination, non-reflective awareness, trans-personal experience, or authentic creativity) and imagination (or craft, invention, mental construction, reflective consciousness, personal experience or internal dialogue) ?
- 8- Can we assess 'creativity' interculturally ? How do we assess creativity in the first place? How about creativity in interpretation (for example in what is defined as 'traditional' or 'replayed') ? Can the anthropology of emotions help us on that ? Does the assessment of creativity point to heuristic methods and what would be a phenomenology of Heuristic endeavors (i.e. aiming at inducing discovery) ?
- 9- Can a model rooted in eastern meditative practices serve as a ground for an intercultural model of creative processes ?

- 10- Can we ultimately answer the question : “Why create” without resorting to naturalists explanatory/causal models (in physiology, psychology, sociology) ? Should we stick to phenomenology ? Can an answer to the ‘Whats’ and ‘Hows’ stand for a “Why” ?
- 11- What sense can we make, from the point of view of Western artistic practices, of the anthropological enterprise of making sense of art ? In other words, reversing the lens, what is the value of discursive cognition for practitioners of non-discursive cognition?

The rebound effect of this questioning is to bring forward two other issues. The first one is the re-location of the ‘new’ into experience. The project might then manifest itself as a critique of past views of creativity in aesthetics and anthropology, views that have presented the ‘new’ only in term of social appraisal. The second issue is the meaning of trying to put the inexpressible into words, or the tension between discursive and non-discursive cognition, which is also the tension between intuitive and analytical modes of knowledge. Another side effect of this way of problematizing creativity is the following : wanting to make sense of creativity by anthropology, one inevitably ends up also having to make sense of anthropology by creativity. The question : what do creative endeavors mean to some humans ? thus becomes ‘Of what use can be anthropology to creators ?’ This also brings forward some very interesting challenges, the first of which being the difficulty of rendering a non-linear, mostly non-discursive phenomenon into a linear cultural production : discourse.

Indeed, this work has become for me an enterprise of communication and reconciliation. Communication with the academia first, with whom I had cut the bridges twenty years ago. But first and foremost communication and reconciliation with parts of myself that are still, today, at war with each other. Thus in a way I have confirmed Low's model : the other is right here, in me.

(Section) 2- 'CREATIVITY' AS PROBLEM

Abstract :

This section is dedicated to providing some theoretical background to the question of creativity at large. It begins by positioning the concepts of creativity and imagination within the recent history of Western thought. It goes on with a brief survey of how the concept of creativity has been received and used in anthropology, and above all by post-modern anthropology. The argument is built in favor of conceptualizing creativity otherwise than as being instrumental to the building of culture. The author argues against linear views i.e. views that either depict creativity as 'caused' by culture or as 'causing' culture.

An argument of method - the necessity to do a tabula rasa in terms of explanatory schemes - brings the author to visit the phenomenological methods. Phenomenology calls for the need to examine creativity in term of consciousness, and various positions on the concept of consciousness are reviewed, both within and without anthropology. These specific positions are presented in order to find similes to the main theoretical framework, i.e. Albert Low's model of consciousness. The traditional materialist/idealism debate is stirred, and it paves the way to an argument in favor of putting 'native epistemologies' on par with anthropological knowledge.

For in order to examine creativity in term of consciousness, the author asserts that intellectual methods are not enough. Thus an argument is built as to invoke the necessity to recur to paradigms that include a practice. The author tackles the question of using 'native epistemologies' to do anthropology - namely Eastern epistemologies based

on meditational practices. Finally, Albert Low's model of consciousness is presented. His model becomes the main grid through which the field work is stiffed because it answers the author's two main questions : about the endlessness of creativity and about the possible link of creative breaks to non-reflective awareness.

(Section) 2- 'CREATIVITY' AS PROBLEM

Central Hypothesis :

'Creativity' (or 'creation', that is : any human creative endeavour) is at best a non-reflective moment that is distinct from reflective invention (i.e. imagination or "fabrication" : the fact of thinking out solutions to problems).

'Creativity' is thus explored here as being different than problem solving; creativity is explored as "state" or "state of being-knowing" (see later conceptualization of the continuum-ambiguity Knowing-Being).

Consequent hypothesis :

'Creativity' is an attempt to step outside 'culture'. It is a discontinuity that cannot be accounted for by linear and causalistic models.

Ultimately, creativity would be "a-cultural" in the sense that the terrain for its validation is not the social, the culture. In this lies its relation or affinities with epiphanies and "aesthetic experiences" (according to the definition given by Maquet, 1986).

(Sub-Section) 2.1 DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Note : in keeping with Low's model (see segment 2.3.2), which reposes on the notion of a whole that is ambiguously dived into smaller wholes, I have chosen to present the authors' point of view integrally, and this in great part to respect the complexity of their

thought; indeed the argument of most of these authors would be simply incomprehensible if it's line were to be broken. Thus the review is done text by text, not point by point : I have not dissected the reviews to make them fit into my own grid. Nevertheless, the texts are arranged as to build my argument, and my line becomes apparent in the progression of the review and in the commentaries I wrote to weave the reviews together. Reviews purport to be faithful to the authors' point of view. When needed, I have included my own commentaries within brackets : []

2.1.1 : Forewords

I can count on one hand the times I have heard artists speak of 'creativity' or of 'being creative'. Artists don't use that word. In Montreal, on the French side you'll hear 'la création', which term encompasses both the generic act of creating (including the sum of all creative acts, past present and future, and a reference to an essence), the milieu (the people doing it, the institutions heading it) and the conjunctural problematic of creating. On the English side, I am told, you might hear the word 'work', 'the work', with a probably unconscious reference to alchemy (Briggs). 'Creativity' ? This is the jargon of psychologists, businessman, and all those specialists who turn their gaze to those strange humans who invent strange things. It is a description of an 'other', the other we wish we would become. In fact, when you hear the term, you can start suspecting that the person feels that creative, she's not.

So why use the term in a study like this one ? The fact is that *the term has become a rallying point, a keyword to express a worldview*, and that world view is not only Western, it might very well be American...

2.1.2 : Theoretical Openers

2.1.2.1 : Weiner, Kearney and Lubart

Weiner : Creativity and Beyond : Cultures, Values and Change

Robert Paul Weiner, an interdisciplinary scholar from the humanities, published in 2000 a groundbreaking book called *Creativity and Beyond, Cultures Values and Change*, a book that might be the first real attempt at a cross-cultural study on the ground of the concept of creativity. This book is so enlightening to anthropology that I think it deserves a detailed review.

The word creativity did not exist before 1870 and “was not widely used before 1950” (Weiner 2000 : 1). Creativity, as capacity to create, to bring something new into being is now major value in our Euro-American societies. To be called creative is a form of praise. ⁴ It is part of democratic dream of “self-actualization”. (It is also important to notice that nowadays, creativity and invention are equated with ‘discovery’ in the sciences). There are now hundreds of creativity consultants in United States and Europe. Creativity is on its way to become the cornerstone of what is called “global culture”.

Creativity became a hallmark of the post WWII period. Weiner writes that “Already in 1937 the first “creativity training” programs were introduced by General Electric Corporation.” (Weiner 2000 : 5). In 1940 : creativity finds its way into most English dictionaries. During the same period, Universities and the U.S. army started conducting studies on the subject. In 1950, the key note address of the president of the American Psychological Association was calling for a generalized focus on creativity. 1957 saw a major interdisciplinary conference on creativity – gathering star intellectuals

⁴ Todd I. Lubart notices the same positive value of creativity in non-Western societies, although less unconditional than in the West. (Lubart).

such as Margaret Mead and Eric Fromm. After the War, the Business world had already started to trumpet creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and “creative problem solving”, in conferences and in publicity. Economists such as Julian Simon and Peter Drucker started to single out creativity as the ‘single most important economic resource’.

Weiner observes that the frenzy race to creativity addresses a fundamental need, but also exacerbates the frustration of those who cannot fulfill this ‘need’. The emphasis on creativity is both fulfilling and creating desire and need. From 1950 to 1980 the number of books on creativity had grown from 186 to 7000. They “almost universally advocate creativity”. One interesting thing is that the concept of creativity is inherently interdisciplinary (Gardner 1993, in Weiner 2000 :7). That is : it relates to fundamental values of society, values that cannot be contained by the traditional disciplinary divisions of the academia [like other interdisciplinary fields like ecology, peace, gender relations].

The Etymology of the word creativity comes from the hypothesized Indo-European root *ker, kere* (to grow), through the Latin *creatio* or *creatus* (to make or to grow) (p.8) But is creativity a single phenomenon ? Weiner notes a remarkable agreement between creative individuals and psychologists. There is a general consensus on four phases to creativity : preparation, incubation, illumination and elaboration. [Deschamps (2002) traces back this model to Wallas (1926), but also mentions growing dissensions (Ghiselin (1952), especially regarding its linearity (Deschamps : 5, 13, 20, 71, 72, 83)] Weiner also mentions a similar four phase model, as brought up from the ethnography of Maduro (1976) in his study of 155 traditional painters in India; but in this Indian model, the first phases are of a meditational character, and less individual-orientated.

The characteristics of creativity according to the dominant view are: Creativity involves bringing something new into being; it is possible in every domain of activity; it is accessible to everyone, anywhere; it is good; creative individuals are : open, flexible, willing to take risks; "Freedom, democracy, and tolerance encourage greater creativity, and creativity strengthens society". (Weiner 2000 : 9) [Wiener makes us realize that extending creativity to everyone and everything cancels out its meaning. Creativity has to be defined against a backdrop of non-creativity. And this is where the concept become dubious of being a modernist apparatus to denigrate tradition.]

Calling something creative is thus a mechanism to attribute value : distinctiveness, originality, uniqueness, (interesting, exiting, appealing). Creativity manifests an important American value, and U.S patriotism includes "a belief in newness, innovation, change and the future"; indeed, "America has successfully marketed its conception of creativity to the world." (Weiner 2000 : 125). Indeed, the tabula rasa of both the European world and the native world led to the myth of the 'self-made man', whose original figure is Benjamin Franklin. He was truly America's Leonardo da Vinci doubled with a famous politician.⁵

From the start, the independence of America from the Great Britain was rooted in a mythology of Promised land, chosen people. This in turn was rooted in a tradition of protest, embedded in Protestantism. Weiner notes : "One of the most interesting of American contributions to creativity is religious freedom." (Weiner 2000 : 126). Creativity is embedded in the first amendment to the U.S. constitution : no state religion, no prohibition against any religion. It is the plurality of belief systems that make

⁵ Lubart notices that the value of creativity in the East is not so much linked to distinctiveness of the individual but to a fusion with an existing Divine order (Lubart : 342-3).

creativity possible, Weiner argues. United States have probably the biggest number of religious movement per square mile. Creativity is also linked to rights : Free speech, assembly, print and belief. The Constitution itself is legislating on the new : it describes how new laws can be passed to amend the old ones .⁶

In 1960s American schools began to emphasize creativity in curricula, in order to supplant learning environments dominated by "rote learning". But there is a paradox : art education is on the wane. Direct U.S support to the art is pale, (even if we should not forget that tax credits give art a considerable boost). Creativity is mostly channeled in science and commerce, but the U.S. have also the highest museum attendance per capita in the world.[But of course, there are only museums in first world...]

The American emphasis on creativity now finds echoes around the world. This is linked to three factors : Economical supremacy; massive immigration; the emancipation of minorities in U.S.. The U.S has often been seen as uncultured and uncouth, but this 'U.S. non-culture' also contributed to the collapse of the distinction between high and low culture. Creativity is portrayed as "crossing the next frontier".(Weiner 2000 : 134). It is a Daniel Boone sort of image. The metaphor generally in use to portray it is the "push toward the unknown", the "chance to escape the past". (Weiner 2000 : 135). Weiner writes : "Incorporating traditional European ideas of "progress", "culture", and capitalism and the biblical ideas of "chosen-ness" and "making a way in the Wilderness", this cluster of concepts supported American expansion across the America continent and as far as Vietnam." (Weiner 2000 : 135). Indeed massive immigration and the success of

⁶ [We can note that Thomas Jefferson's idea of a continuing revolution, always questioning past generations, contrasts with the First Nation's seven generation principle (where every decision must be weighted according to its consequences for the next seven generations)]

U.S. expansionism were used to prove that “everyone want to be like us”. (Weiner 2000 : 135). [This ideology of liberation (liberation from the past) is still used today, and is closely linked to democracy and the ideology of freedom of individuals (itself linked to a constitution of the self as individual)].

The practice of science and of ‘pushing the next frontier’ attains fetishist proportions in the U.S.. No wonder Americans won “a large proportion of Nobel Prizes” (Weiner 2000 : 136). John F. Kennedy’s 1960 speech known as the ‘frontier’ speech trumpeted creativity : (A brief exert of that speech) “It is time...for a new generation of leadership – the new men will cope with new problems and new opportunities...The new frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises – it is a set of challenges... It would be easier to shrink back from that frontier, to look to the safe mediocrity of the past...But I believe times demand invention, innovation, imagination, decision. I am asking each of you to be new pioneers on that new frontier.” (Schlesinger 1965, 59-60, in Weiner 2000:136).

This speech, as many others from many other presidents, reinforces clichés of American revolutionists : the Marlboro lonesome cowboy, even the beatniks, the hippies and all the Rebels Without a Cause. Disneyland propagates this cliché as is testified by the names of its playgrounds: Frontierland, Fantasy land, Adventureland, Tomorrow Land. America feeds on the archetype of the rebel, the non-conformist, the maverick, the iconoclast. The American has no other God than Himself. But there is a paradox again : iconoclast heroes propagate society’s main values: truth, justice, and the ‘American Way’. It is a conformist individualism, conformist in its advocacy of individualism. The individualism is not creator of values, in the Nietzschean or Beaudelairian sense. The

“Do your own thing” states in fact that everyone *should* be creative. For creativity is necessarily good, and American.

But there is a local resistance to this mythology. For example, Christian fundamentalist resist developments in medicine. Environmentalists resist genetic manipulations and some business expansion. Weiner believes that maybe it is not so much creativity that is at stake in this individualism, but an “obsession with faddishness”. (Weiner 2000 : 140). He writes : “Indeed critics from both Left and Right argue that the openness, tolerance, and opportunity of America, far from encouraging profundity of creativity, have instead deadened them. If everything seems possible, if the frontier seems wide open and everyone can cross it,...then the need to struggle, the essential challenge is diluted, standards decline, and creativity disappears.” (idem)

(Indeed the United States is threatened to be surpassed. Japan has a “disproportionately high level of innovation”; Japanese now “win more patents than do the American” (idem). Result s: competition reduces leisure time [a fact that might reduce creativity, as idle time I essential to creativity (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Consequence : creativity is channeled more into innovation (technical) and problem-solving than in art and self-expression. This is a reminder that much of U.S. creative people were born abroad, and much of U.S. inventions are re-adaptations. Many ‘U.S.’ creations are the result of globalized economy. It is the economic and military power that allows for a dissemination of the U.S. ideology of creativity. And the internal multiculturalism gives the country the mean to relate to other cultures more fully, that is, to be able to incorporate their creations and create for them.)

Conceptions of Creativity in “Traditional” and “Non-Western” Cultures.

But the American dream is not the only possible repository for stories about how new things and people come into being. Weiner spends some time - too little indeed - on identifying elements of non-Western views of creativity. But the first bone, he finds rapidly : non-Western societies are allegedly ‘traditional’. But what is a tradition ? Weiner begins by lining up some usual assumptions :

- “The more commitment the new members and following generations have to the customs and belief they inherited, the more the group may be called “traditional” (Weiner 2000 : 143). (Hence ‘tradition’ is a measure of the inheritance of beliefs).
- A common Western view is : “traditional society determine the condition of creativity, while a modern society is determined by the creative activity within it”. (Weiner 2000 : 144).
- The ‘traditional’ is that which is sufficiently revered as to serve as model for future work.

In brief : ‘tradition’ is what is revering [trusting] the past, and providing a worthy framework for future developments.

Understanding ‘Culture’ as tradition certainly helps to conceptualize sets of behaviors as coherent whole, but it is very questionable, argues Weiner [pretty much in the line of the recent critiques in anthropology]. The West defines itself against a background of traditional cultures. However, “hardly any culture on earth has been able to maintain its tradition completely unaffected by outside influences.” (Weiner 2000 : 147).

How then can we see if there is anything like what we call 'creativity' in 'traditional cultures', if they are defined a-priori as non-creative cultures ? ? Weiner begins by comparing Bali versus the U.S. : culturally correct acts are encouraged in Bali; culturally incorrect statements will be qualified as 'not Balinese' and be outcast. While in the U.S. the social prescription is not as obvious. But Weiner reminds us of the incredible inventiveness that is needed in precarious material situations faced by so-called traditional societies. Also, tricksters and fools are part of most 'traditional' culture, which reminds us that these traditions are also traditions of parodying tradition.

Weiner argues that the *opposite of creativity is not tradition, but routine*. Traditions are not necessarily routine. It is the spirit with which one does things, not the things in themselves that counts. He then comes the point : the locus of creativity changes according to cultures; the meaning of 'creating' also changes according to cultures. For example, many performing arts locate creativity in the interpretation and re-interpretation of a fixed material. Storytelling, for example, demands literally the re-creation of stories. It could very well be that oral tradition be more creative than literate ones. The irony here is that it is literate cultures which fixed oral cultures, and made them appear as static in space and time. Moreover, adherence to a style does not entail a 'lack of freedom'. On the contrary. Reproducing the mood of a Raga is not parroting the Guru, Ravi Shankar says. In fact, we discover here that it is the West that could be seen as less creative, with its fixation on the 'object', seen as immutable, while the non-West understands that creations have to be re-enacted to exist. Weiner says that Victor Turner granted anthropology of a very useful framework when he identified creative states with liminal

states. This is a way to link art and society, since every period of social change is born in/ accompanied by a state of great creativity. Many non-Western cultures prepare creative endeavors with lengthy rituals and prescriptions, like the prohibition of sex and alcohol. This is troubling to the West because it aims at moderating the significance of the individual, while the Western model is entirely based on individual prestige and fame.

* * *

This review of Weiner's magnificent work sets the tone for our study. Indeed '*Creativity*' is a concept, a way to regroup isolated acts, facts and artefacts by identifying elements that we find are common to them. So we can say that what is actually creative, in behaviors or productions, is actually created by a discriminating mind. The 'creativity' in things is not independent from the person that identifies it. *Creativity is created.*⁷ Following Weiner, we can see that the current concept of 'creativity' in the West, as capacity or propensity to 'create' the new, is closely linked to the birth of modernism. Should we say, as De Duve suggests (De Duve 1996) , that 'Creativity', in the postmodern light, becomes "a fruitful regulative idea of modernity" and so that Creativity, like modernism, is dead... ? Certainly not. Every culture seems to rely on myths of creation to juggle with what already presents itself as a paradox : *the paradox of continuity and change.*

Without doing a detailed survey of creations myths in non-Western societies (see Marie Louise Franz : Patterns of Creativity in Creation Myths, 1976), we must assume that the 'New' exists in every culture, under different forms, and that each time it has to be explained in the culture's own terms. That is : both in terms of content and in terms of

⁷ From Richard Kearney's Wake of Imagination, we find that in all times imagination, as creativity..had to imagine itself.

the conditions of its emergence. Although in the West it is mainly psychology which concerned itself with this concept, there is also a wide array of disciplines interested in the phenomena of the birth of the new. So this project started with questioning the endless production of artifacts, and led us toward an examination of the processes involved; but right in the beginning we discover that we are ourselves part of the picture : the thing we want to examine. 'creativity', is a myth created by our culture. Now the 'History of the New' in the West is itself far from being monolithic. Weiner's analysis of the evolution of the concept of 'creation' in the West goes in the same sense as Richard Kearney's story of the concept of imagination (Kearney 1988). Indeed, it seems that no era in Western history could get away from having a concept of imagination. *In all time Imagination had to imagine itself.* Kearney had one layer to this reflectivity, by linking images of imagination to clear and definite metaphors : the mirror (pre-modern), the light (modern), the hall of mirror (post-modern). Pre-modern imagination was theocentric. The model portrays the artist as a craftsman. The martyrs were semi-gods or saints. The pre-modern imagination is mimetic and its image is the mirror. The modern imagination became anthropocentric. It portrays the artist as an inventor. Its martyrs are artists. The modern imagination is productive, and its image is the lamp. Post modern imagination is ex-centric. The artist became a bricoleur. Here, everybody becomes a martyr. The post-modern imagination is parodic and its metaphor is that of a "labyrinth of looking glass".

* * *

Discussion : creativity and religion

Now to me all this points to one thing : the underground relation between creativity and religion, both as a set of fundamental beliefs *about* the world (Low's

'Awareness of' – see later), and as a set of dispositions, a way to *be* the world (Low's 'Awareness as'). Todd I. Lubart, another author who examines creativity cross-culturally, notices that in non-Western cultures, creativity is encouraged for secular purposes but discouraged in the field of religion (Lubart 1999 : 339-349). He hypothesizes that there is a sort of law of maintenance of pattern in culture : the deeper a set of practices or cultural axioms is rooted in culture, the less the culture is willing to let them change. This is an argument of 'seriousness' ('you don't play with serious things') and my fieldwork partly confirms the classical association, in Western psychology, of 'creativity' and 'playfulness'. But besides that Lubart runs the risk of being uselessly circular : 'the deeper the more rigid' is a way to say twice the same thing; things that don't change don't change. Weiner has a more productive approach and we shall go back to him once more.

A major factor usually used for distinguishing the West from the rest is religion, Weiner says. The West is secular, traditional societies are not. Clearly, the dominant Western conception of creativity poses a threat to religious belief. Therefore a Western view of creativity might be identified as "egoistic, immoral, aggressive, blasphemous, destructive of society and the environment, and even illusory." (Weiner 2000:160). The illusory nature of individual creativity in Asian religions is particularly interesting because it addresses the Western fascination for the logos (the true, the real). *For many Hindus and Buddhists, the endless creation of the new is in fact the manifestation of our burden : this is how we are caught in the wheel of suffering and illusion, of birth and death (i.e. the notion of 'Samsara')*. Only enlightenment, awakening, can liberate one by showing that there is no self. Weiner goes on : "Creativity in the Western sense might be

seen as absurd from common Hindu and Buddhist perspectives : either nothing new ever comes into the world, or there is an endless stream of “new” but insignificant things” (idem). There have been great school of art in Asia, but most of them aimed at teaching the ‘worthlessness of human striving’ and the need for detachment from desires.

The Tao te Ching advocates *we wu wei*, passive doing and action-less activity. The sage is portrayed as the one who “does not seek fulfillment”, and is “not swayed by desire for change”. (Weiner 2000 : 161). The Japanese concept of MA, as presented by the famous architect Fumihiko Maki, “refers to the ‘between’, the space within which everything takes place...The goal is not to fill the void or to impose shape or order to the world through human will, but to be receptive to the nature of the cosmos and to work with it.” (idem). Throughout the World, creativity is and has been explained by creations myths; the spiderwoman shows the Navajos how to weave for example. As in the pre-modern West, creativity is seen as firstly divine not human (see Eliade). The personal creativity is but a manifestation of the divine power to create.

Weiner uses creativity to question the legitimacy of the division tradition-modern. It is because of our linear conception of time that we can accept the notion of a creation *ex-nihilo*⁸, the “breaking into history”. The question of ownership is the manifestation of the schism of the modern from its past. When do societies stop being traditional ? When their ritual objects are put on sale, Weiner says. Two inventions mark the entrance into modern times : laws of patent and copyrights. In this, the West breaks with the ‘inspired imitation’ of non-Western cultures and of its own past. The West proclaims an ideology of merit over inheritance, of equal opportunity. This ideology of equal opportunity

derives from a view of society as a collection of individuals. It goes against the idea of pre-destiny.

Lubart (1999) reiterates this. He too portrays the Western view of creativity as linear, and therefore pretty much product orientated. Eastern views are circular and therefore identify the locus of creativity in states of mind, not in products. Lubart's view is helpful, not so much because it reveals a fundamental East-West schism, but because it reveals the reflective nature of imagination. One could ask : is this view of the West as linear and the East as circular itself linear or circular ? Is the view of modernity as a break in tradition, is this view bounded to come back, or is it just a moment in an historical line, never to come back ?

Lubart also noticed the different locus of creativity according to cultures, but his position reveals the double-bind of trying to locate creativity, from the outside of a culture as from the inside. He uses the example of Samoan dances to underline that in non-Western cultures, creativity happens in minute changes, and not on the structural level. But one could very well ask : what is a minute change and what is a big change ? Who sees 'structure' and who decides that it is not affected ? In fact this is a BIG question, and it is a question anthropology have obliquely started to ask itself, as we will see in a moment. Indeed, when we say something changes, WHAT is it that changes ? *By what mechanism of perception do we both identify a 'thing' (i.e. something that is constant, that maintains identity, that in a sense does not change), and the change in/of the 'thing' ?* And if post-modern writers are right to say that nowadays, everybody changes (see Thompson 1996, Hall 1996-2000, McLennan 1996, Lyotard 1994), *if there*

⁸ as we will see, the negation of the creation ex-nihilo is itself part of the post modern thinking, and can be used as a justification for a regression to positivism and causalits models. From every angle we take it,

is no fixed culture, no 'point de repère' we can rely on, etc., then who is stable enough to see 'things' changing ?

Weiner reminds us that creativity, like beauty, is –also- in the eye of the beholder. A philosopher would see an innovation in business as a variation on a theme (business), a much as a biochemist might see an innovation in rock music as mere variation on the theme of 'rock music' (and vice versa for the chemical formula to the rock musician). This is in my opinion the most productive part of Weiner's book, although it is merely a beginning. It could help us delineate *an inside and an outside* to the concepts of 'creativity', 'imagination', 'invention' and 'discovery/revelation'. First it underlines what we already noticed : 'creativity' is a concept, a creation, and *it is circular in the sense that it uses itself to describe itself*. But secondly, we see that these concepts are context-dependent (Lubart 1999 : 340-3). From the outside, they can be seen as cultural markers, cues that cultures use to delineate themselves from other cultures. Pivotal to this is the capacity to create the object 'creativity' itself, and in this, the problematic of 'creation', of 'newness' is pretty much the same as the problematic of the 'beautiful'. Newness is a phenomena that is experienced as pertaining to objects. What is fixed and what moves, the status quo and the innovation, continuity and change, are relative to the observer, the experiencer. And yet, like Kant showed for beauty (Kant), the new, as the old, *have to be* located outside of oneself. In Kant's words : they 'give themselves *as*' being objective.

Reading this imperative – the 'as if' of objectivity - on the first level only leads us to fatal miscomprehensions, as we will see in our critique of linear models. We have a movement in authors like Csikszentmihalyi (1996), Boudieu (1988) and Lubart (1999) that strives to de-ontologized the new by re-placing it in a sphere of relativity, relative to

there is no way out of the paradox continuity-change.

society, that is. Thus from an argument about the dependency of 'creativity' and the new upon context, we slip toward arguments of social determinacy.

* * *

2.1.2.2 : Creativity in Anthropology : new object, old concern

Weiner forces us to see the notion of creativity as a cultural construct. Following him, we already started to ask ourselves questions about the localization of 'the new'.

What can be the contribution of anthropology on this issue? Would we be satisfied with the socio-politico analysis that makes Weiner question even the notion of the new in the first part of his book, which is the slant the authors of *Creativity/anthropology* (Lavie 1993), as most post modern anthropology, seem to favor ? Should we go even further and argue with sociologist Bourdieu (1984) that the new does not really exist, since it is always the re-actualization of a cultural capital ? Would we be satisfied with a cross cultural nomenclature (see Lubart (1999) for a good bibliography on this), alluding that multiplicity grants us the right to forget about 'structure', 'unicity', universals? Or should we not go back to religious studies and 'consciousness studies' in order to return to the ground of a common denominator to what it means to be human, and thus reconcile anthropology with its founding paradox, the paradox of continuity and change ? In the following section, I shall review the place that the concept of creativity has had in anthropology.

'Creativity', as concept and cognitive unit, is certainly not the favorite theme of anthropologists nowadays. Browsing the main indexes with this entry, one hardly finds enough to write a term paper. Many reasons can be thought of for justifying this.

1) Anthropology has been traditionally more concerned with continuity than discontinuity. Rapport goes in that sense when he writes that "individual creativity has remained a submerged strand in anthropological perspective, drowned out by the demands and rigors of structure". (Rapport 1997 : 41)

2) The discipline has been concerned with 'non-Western/non-modern' world views where the Western 'creativity' is not forefront.

3) It is hard for anthropologists to grasp the "end of history in us" (Laramée : 2002) that is postulated and produced by a creative attitude, because anthropology, being part of an academic culture predicated upon the constant reference to 'the literature' upholds an attitude of continuity with the past where breaks have to be constantly justified with an existing body of knowledge. As Bruner (1993) notices, knowledge in the West is a property, claimed as such, which is done through bibliographies and quotes.

Bibliographies, he observes, are basically statements of power positioning authors in the hierarchy of the discipline. A quote is "a political statement that stakes the author's claim to a position within a particular scholarly tradition". (Bruner : 330).⁹

4) The post modern turn accepts knowledge as creation, but discredits truth through extreme relativism, itself a consequence of the shift from the Logos to ethics (i.e. leaving to the 'good' to decide of the 'true'); this new ideology of 'contextualism', advocating multiplicity and negating unicity (i.e. returning to cultural particularism to negate structure) may be due to the extreme intellectualism of the tenants of this current. *It is*

⁹ But in the last instance, what continuity do authors assert when they inscribe their text in the line of a discipline, in the context of a 'culture' ? The continuity of their own self (Low, Nisargadatta). For 'culture' is constituted in the same act – the same text – that justifies one's position in it. For phenomenologists, 'self' and 'world' are born in the same moment. This is why, I hypothesize, creativity, in the experience, can be seen as the momentary canceling out of both 'culture' and 'self'.)

precisely this intellectualism which might not allow many post-modern thinkers to access certain regions of consciousness, themselves often characterized by a feeling of unity and universality.

5) 'Creativity' is just not the right word. Anthropologists instinctively question any myth that is too closely linked to modernity. In their critique of modernism and in their own mea culpa vis-à-vis their past affiliation to colonialism, anthropologists became suspicious of the discourses of innovation.

Indeed the last reason maybe the closer to Ocam's razor. Using the word 'Creativity' might be putting the finger right into a wound, the wound that is at the very origin of anthropology. 'Creativity' might have been present throughout the history of anthropology, in the form of the paradox continuity-change. A case might illustrate the preceding point, and it is the case of the birth of a sub-field within the discipline : Development anthropology. James Ferguson wrote an article on development in the 1996 Routledge Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology, and this article illustrates very well the double bind of anthropology regarding the 'new'. Is the 'new' focus on creativity in anthropology the result of the pressure the labor market exerts on anthropologists ?

Development anthropology was born in an academic climate where anthropology was asked to prove its relevance, "when anthropology was particularly challenged to show that it had something to say about change, not only stasis, and about the modern world, not only the 'tribal' one". (Ferguson 1996 : 158). In the 1970's, in front of the failure of many development projects (locally speaking), development agencies were

forced to slightly shift their focus from mere economic development to questions of human welfare. This called for sociological analysis of local societies, and it did fit nicely with an employment crisis in the discipline of anthropology. Ferguson mentions the study of Escobar, who showed how intellectual rigor was gradually sacrificed to the demands of development agencies. After all, anthropologists, like many others, have to *create* their job...

Meanwhile, a whole group of academic anthropologists had kept their distance from this growing field, contenting themselves in taking it as an object of ethnographic enquiry. To make sense of this division in the discipline between applied and theoretical anthropology, we have to realize that anthropology is still defined according to its origins, that is : 19th century Evolutionism. Why is that so ? The traditional divisions between disciplines within the academia are certainly a main cause. Ferguson argues. Anthropology distinguishes itself from Sociology by its object of study : mostly Third World cultures. Ferguson observes that "it is a particular kind of people that anthropologists are typically interested in seeing change", even when they study the 'developed' world. (p.159). A recent change in terminology, from 'primitive' to 'local', should not have us forget that it is generally the "least 'developed' who are generally understood as the most local". What Ferguson tries to tell us, is that evolutionism is still here, this time in the form of a schizophrenic split. He writes : "We are left, then, with a curious dual organization binding anthropology to 'development' : the field that fetishizes the local, the autonomous, the traditional, locked in a strange dance with its own negation, its own evil twin that would destroy locality, autonomy, and tradition in the name of progress...Anthropology resents its twin fiercely... 'Development' haunts the

house of anthropology. Fundamentally disliked by a discipline that at heart loves the things that development intends to destroy, anthropology's evil twin remains too close a relative to be simply kicked out". (p.160).

Ferguson's article should not lead us to forget that another 'development' of the discipline, post-modern anthropology, was founded precisely on the critique of the too close association of anthropology with political and economic powers. Far from calming the schizophrenia, this critique threatens to make the discipline explode from within. For it is the whole project of reifying an 'other' that is under fire. Indeed the question of 'creativity', or the question of the 'new', might be touching anthropology in the core of its founding dilemma - the paradox continuity-change. In the post-modern era, what this paradox might have come to expose is the limitation of discourse as a way to deal with ambiguities. Two examples support this.

Olivia Harris (1996) writes an article in line with the title of the book of which she is part, 'Grasping a Changing World'. Like this title, which could very well be a pun (I assume it's not), her article exposes, despite of her will I fear, the impossibility of 'grasping' the paradox continuity-change¹⁰, at least not in the way reason usually makes sense of things.¹¹ Going to one end of the continuum, by examining how anthropology dealt with the notion of 'anti-change' (i.e. tradition), she identifies three moments in the history of anthropology, three ways the discipline had of grappling with this paradox. "The modernist moment is constituted by the idea of rupture." (Harris 1996 : 3) In this view modernity needs to define itself negatively as anti-tradition. "...The structuralist moment is a temporality of continuity." (Harris 1996 :5) The particular is dismissed in

¹⁰ Which paradox could be worded here as : no continuity without change, no change without continuity.

¹¹ See Low's fanning of ten stages of thinking duality, appendices 7.1.

the will to go to the generic, the structural, the universal. But those two moments are already gone. The post-modern era is one "of fluidity and indeterminacy" (Harris : 6) The post-modern moment is "profoundly skeptical of any postulate of continuity and of generalizing project." (idem). Twenty lines later Harris writes that post-modernism "hypostatizes fluidity and change as a permanent condition"...(idem). The permanency of change, the change in permanency... But Harris is aware of the paradox, and she quotes Gadamer for introducing the concept of 'living tradition'. Indeed, post-modernism makes us realize "how ad hoc and untheorized are our ideas about change" (Harris : 12) But we are not out of the wood yet : the concept of "living tradition" is useful because it "refuses the absolute dichotomized understanding of the opposition between continuity and change and asserts that change is grounded in continuities" (Harris 1996 : 13) Negating dichotomy...change grounded in continuities (and vice-versa, since we're there...)... We might just be going as far as language can go here.

Creativity/Anthropology

In 1993, Smadar Lavie, Kirin Narayan and Renato Rosaldo edited the first and only anthropological book to my knowledge to deal exclusively with the concept. Reviewing the most relevant texts to our field work, among the 13 of that book, might help us seeing how creativity has been – implicitly – and is now – explicitly - inscribed in anthropology, to fit the post-modern agenda. Thus this review might give us clues as to explain both the presence and the absence of this concept in the discipline.

The three editors begin by putting this book in line with Victor Turner's work on the Ndembu, which, they recall, "highlights the dialectics of innovation and tradition".

(Lavie, Rosaldo & al, 1993 : 3). Indeed, Turner first forged his concept of liminality, and then of that of liminoid to account for those interstitial zones that were the ground for creativity. Turner is the one who saw the artist as liminal figure (see *The ritual Process*, 1969). But the introduction already installs the discomfort that one can have with the whole of the articles, if not with the way many anthropologists manipulate the concept of creativity. First the definition of the concept that the editors extract from the articles proves to be limited : they say that the authors “broadly define creativity as human activities that transform existing cultural practices in a manner that a community or certain of its members find of value”. (Lavie, Rosaldo & al, 1993 :5). Roy Wagner’s idea that creativity is always emergent is curiously put besides Sapir’s notion that “creation is a bending of form to one’s will, not the manufacture of form ex nihilo” (p.5 in Lavie, Rosaldo & al), and thus is as much a selection and a recombination as it is a thinking anew. **We see that here ‘creativity’ is not a *capacity* but an *activity*; it exists only as a *recognized continuity*; and it is placed on the level of *value*, of *judgment*.** Here we are not that far from Levi Strauss’ bricoleur (1966), whose role consist solely in re-arranging pre-existing cultural units. And from there, this slipping from aesthetics into ethics is not far¹². ‘Creativity’, as concept, becomes instrumental in the handling of pre-conceived social determinisms, not the key notion it should be in my sense to re-examine our assumptions in regard to the prevalence of ‘culture’ upon insights. Only Schieffelin’s text seems to escape this agenda, by reversing the genealogy between cosmology and performance (the latter being the producer of the former).

¹² Following Maquet (see later), I suscribe to the point of view that aesthetics experiences cannot be reduced to their ethical aspects. The last Venice Bienale has as a slogan : “Less Aesthetics, more Ethics”. The same tendency was observed at the last Documental in Bassel, Germany. The willingness of artists and

As we will see, although the book makes some important contributions, especially in supporting the post-modern redefinition of 'culture' as a permanent reconstruction, it does little to answer fundamental questions : *what IS creativity, what IS the new, and how the new can originate from the old, that is : what differentiates the new from the old and how is this distinction established by agents; how can a recombination be deemed 'new'*.

The first part, "Creative Individuals in Cultural Context", seems to be aimed at demonstrating that exceptional individuals do not escape social determinism. James W. Fernandez (1993) writes about Ceferino Suarez, an iconoclast village versifier of northern Spain. Ceferino felt the tension and ambiguity between generic and individual identity, and wrote poems as expressions of his desire to face the unwillingness of the village to encourage creative individuality. Another contributor, Kirin Narayan (1993), tells a story about a guru who is telling a story about gurus...true and false ones. In Swamji's story, people accept to have their nose cut in the promise of a religious ecstasy. But the ecstasy is a lie. Victims accept to play the game because they are afraid to lose the face even more. Narayan's reason for bringing this story in are twofold : first the story is a nice exemplar of the creative power of the 'liminal renouncer', whose creativity includes self criticism and who has a social impact because it reinforces and is reinforced by his religious authority. By accepting the risk of casting doubts about his own authenticity in front of his disciples, the guru paradoxically reasserts his authority as the one who is wise enough to escape social structures. But the story is open because it is made in the form of an enigma, and although it is utterly pedagogical – it is a lesson about credulity and the

curator to abandon the aesthetic portion of the artistic experience is something that will be discussed in the ethnography (3rd chapter).

fact that the locus of deity is oneself - it is irreducible to a moralist tale. By playing on a multitude of layers of ambiguity (should the storyteller telling a story about the hypocrisy and self-serving-ness of storytellers be included in the story, as are included the credulous listeners ?), the Guru calls for the creative abilities of his disciples/listeners. Secondly, and more central to her essay, Narayan uses this example to prove that "story telling is a creative ability" (Narayan 1993 : 43). The nose cutter story is based on a known story by Swami Dayanananda, a story telling that "fakes breed further fakes". But Swamji recounts it with a difference. Indeed, *religious traditions based on fixed texts need traditions of exegesis to constantly reactivate the meanings of those texts*. Exegetes are fundamentally storytellers. Narayan quotes Slater who thinks that creative thinkers are the ones who lead you through old stories while allowing you to develop new conclusions. Swamji ultimately reveals his stance : his story is a way to say that the whole universe is the Guru, and that's why one should not revere creative individuals – Gurus – too much. It is indeed a native and religious view of creativity as meta-individual.

Marjorie Shostak (1993) uses Turner's notion of the "artist as liminal figure", and Devereux's model of art as harmless safety valve for taboo subjects, in order to examine the case of three creative individuals among the !Kung Sa. One of them is a healer in trance who, like other healers throughout the world, creates patterns of meaning and truth for her community. Shostak finds parallels here between the travels of the healer and the voyage of the artist : both delve subterranean worlds of human psyche; both articulate underlying wishes and fear; both peel off "successive layers of consciousness" (Shostak 1993 : 61). But this healer's 'creativity' is played on the mode of a contact with

divinities, and the dances she contributes to revitalize are entrusted to her; they are not only the result of her personal creativity. Jimmy, a creative individual more gifted than normal, also received his musical gift from God. Separated from his community both by character and by fate, his isolation keeps him away from residual jealousies and help keeping his paranoia and feelings of persecution at bay. There are not too many liminal persona like him in the !Kung's life, Shostak says. Creativity is fairly well distributed and flourishing. But still the experience of these individuals confirms Devereux's model of artists as transmuting "painful or upsetting truths into beauty" (Shostak 1993 : 69). It also fits Turner's opinion that most extreme forms of creative expression "may indeed require a truly and permanent liminal status" (idem).

The second part of the book, "The Creation of Ethnography from Experience", strives to reposition the ethnographer on the side of creators. Indeed, ethnographic finds seem to be as much created as they are discovered. Don Handelman recalls his memory of Washo shaman Henry Moses Rupert, who became an expert at weaving his past encounters with ethnographers in the text of his life history. This made him "a most creative individual, one who radically changed his own epistemology of belief in ways that had practical and substantive effects on his healing" (Handelman 1993 : 143). Handelman thinks that most of the debate about reflexivity in anthropology can be reduced to phenomena of ownership of knowledge and career building. Protests to include the voice of the other are mere "artefacts of our own culture". (Handelman 1993 : 148). In a footnote, Handelman mentions Farber & Sequin's work on Bengali jatra playwrights to say that "proprietaryship over the authorship of textual productions is not universal" (Handelman 1993 : 151). Here authors do not even expect to be cited, and

certainly do not claim ownership. "Farber attributes these characteristics of authorship to Bengali conceptions that creative energy is part of cosmic energy that cannot be owned but merely possessed or shared." (idem).

Smadar Lavie explains why she called creative individuals among the Mezena (Bedouins) "allegorical types" (Lavie 1993 : 174). Those were individuals who improvised on traditional tribal forms by "poetically 'adjusting' these forms to the lived experience of the present". (Lavie :174). Those were gifted Mzeni who "re-constructed the thematic meanings of social context". (Lavie 1993: 175). By doing so, they were able "to eliminate open-ended discontinuity and to transmute the paradoxes of precarious reality the Mzeina take for granted into an allegory of temporary make-believe linked to the immortality of tradition" (idem). Lavie construes her own presence among the Mzena as having added another allegorical type to the Mzena pantheon, and notices that by doing so, by narrating her own story of having been fooled by 'the fool', she became her own anthropological construct.¹³ She sees that her Bedouin identity, "The One who Writes Us" has fused with her anthropological self. [And we are left to believe that both are creations.] Here too, creativity is doubly instrumental : it is noticed only when it modifies social relations and it is used by the anthropologist to say something about social relations. [Even more questionable is her notion that creativity is that which transmute paradoxes into certainties.]

José Limon analyses Américo Paredes' mid-1950s study of the *corrido* – Mexican ballad in the context of the lower Texas-Mexico border. Paredes' study is centered of the story of Gregorio Cortez, a Chicano who murdered two Sheriffs and was later acquitted.

¹³ Interestingly, there is a growing conceptualization among artists of the phenomenon of 'auto-fiction', i.e. artists consciously constructing their (artistic) self as a fiction. (see Parachute no????)

Cortez story inspired ballads which inspired generations of Chicanos searching for an identity. It also, through Paredes' book, started a line of resistance in the form of a "total poetic global designation for the Chicano movement". (Limon 1993 : 191). Limon says his own telling of those stories is merely adding another verse to the ballad. Limon's ultimate goal in resituating Paredes' work within anthropology is to welcome his stylistic inventions as early post-modern "blurring of genres between ethnic autobiography, historical ethnography and...between folk poetic forms" (Limon 1993 : 206). He wants also to argue, against Clifford who thinks that ethnic discourse may be more restrained in terms of innovation due to professional pressures (tenure, etc.), that "from the margins of ethnicity, we may be able to obtain a more reflexive, innovative and critical discourse" (Limon : 206). [Limon does not really study 'creativity' though, but rather artistic utterances that have social influence. His study is product-based, not process-orientated. It is a view of 'creativity as critique'. But we have to ask if creativity, and what kind of creativity, can manifest itself under such a heavy loaded program of social critique.]

Renato Rosaldo's objective in examining Ilongot visiting is to demonstrate that creativity is linked to "social unpredictability". Social relations, in the case of the Ilongot from Northern Luzon, Philippines, are marked by a time that is relational and depending upon open interactions, instead of the Western "time-discipline" predicated upon a synchrony with a machine. This Ilongot time and resulting unpredictability allows for "social grace". It is an "exemplar of forms of social life marked by mutually adjusted action and openness to uncertain futures". (Rosaldo : 1993 : 257). Clearly for Rosaldo creativity means improvisation, but in a social context. He quotes Hugh Brody who, in

his ethnography of Athabascan hunters says that “the decision is taken in the doing; there is no step or pause between theory and practice. As a consequence, the decision – like the action from which it is inseparable – is always alterable (and therefore may not properly even be termed a decision). (p. 263 in Rosaldo, p. 37 in Brody 1982 : *Maps and Dreams*, N.Y. Pantheon).¹⁴

Edward L. Schieffelin returns to the Kaluli of New Guinea to examine the link between performances and the construction of reality. The specific context he studies is the “scéance” where mediums in trance intercedes between celebrants and spirits. He begins by noticing that many anthropologists are aware of the “limitations of this emphasis on the logico-meaningful, discursive aspects of ritual meaning”...and “have called attention to the nondiscursive aspects of ritual, emphasizing that rituals gain effectiveness by being performed”...“Rituals and their symbols are effective less because they communicate meanings...than because in performances, meanings are reinnovated in social interactions. The participants are engaged with the symbols in the mutual creation of a performance reality rather than informed by them as knowers”. (Schieffelin : 272). For Schieffelin, it is not so much a matter of what Kaluli believe is happening; it is a question of learning why Kaluli accept the content of scéances and the messages of medium as true communications with true spirits.

Kaluli mediumship is different from theatre because it has consequences in the real life. (277). It is also different from theatre because here audiences must participate. On a first and somewhat factual level, this is done mostly through chanting. But on a

¹⁴ [In passing, this should be enough to confirm that ‘agency’ is a concept stemming from a world view where ‘individuals’ make ‘decisions’. For the concept of ‘decision’ is unthinkable if it cannot be backtracked to a ‘decision-maker’. Could ‘forces’ or ‘the Universe’ be said to make ‘decisions’ ?]

deeper level, audiences are ultimately the creators of meaning. Seeing that audiences find so much with so little cues from the medium, Schieffelin concludes that "they create the meaning they discover". (Schieffelin 1993: 287). Schieffelin uses his own 'discovery' (creation ?) to argue that in the case of the Kaluli, we don't have a fixed cosmology that is enacted by performers; rather the cosmology is created all along, within performances. Meaning, in the Kaluli séance, is an emergent construction, not the text as structure of meanings of symbolic analysis. The séance is not providing information, it is setting audiences into motion. It is not 'content', but the medium of the séance itself that is the repository of meaning. Then a center-periphery dynamic that points to Low's model (see later): "[The séance] entices, arouses and intrigues so that the participant constantly strives to get hold of something that always seems just out of grasp." Performances are gripping not because of the poignancy of the symbolic material, "but because the symbolic material is incomplete". (Schieffelin 1993 : 292) Thus the reality and the conviction lie in the tension caused by the ambiguity of the medium's performance. In that context, audiences have no other choice than to complete the performance with their creative imagination.

In conclusion, Schieffelin notices that without exegesis (canonical behavior or dogma), each participant of a ritual performance "creates" [receives ?] a specific meaning. Therefore he deduces that the intersubjective symbolic meaning is a negotiation between participants.¹⁵

¹⁵ [Here we see that for lack of a model that would allow one to stand in the midst of the ambiguity between the 'imaginary' (the non-material) and the real, a model like the one Corbin derives from the writings of the Sufi mystic Ibn 'Arabi for example (see later), Schieffelin has to shrink back to naturalists epistemologies, and interpret the meanings people get from their communication with spirits as inter-agents concatenations.]

In the epilogue, Edward M. Bruner recalls that even if superorganic theories of culture already acknowledged the obvious role of exceptional individual in social transformations, changes nevertheless happens everywhere. The identification and location of creativity echoes one's definition and location of culture. A view of culture as a rigid and oppressive whole will call for a big man view of creativity; a view of culture as dynamic and ever changing, where meaning does not pre-exist to its performance, such a view will allow small scale agency.

Turner did a lot for anthropology by focusing on process and reflexivity, but his view of creativity was still on the extra-ordinary side of reality, Bruner argues. He notices that all the essays abandon the pursuit of authenticity for the examination of process. [Of course this assertion shows that the notion of 'process' is itself a cultural construct : one can claim to be examining processes which are to another observer merely products, not processes; in my sense, the authors do not really assess creative processes, but rather create categories (product) that they manipulate in order to make us believe that they are examining creation in the making.] "Rather than ask what culture is, ask how culture is achieved, produced and made believable." (Bruner 1993 : 326). If culture is seen as role making instead as role taking, then there is room for creativity. Anthropologists have to be creative because they are engaged in the same enterprise as their informants : storytelling.

Bruner notices that these essays all focus on political issues. "*The point is not creativity in opposition to politics but creativity in the service of politics.*" (Bruner 1993 : 330).¹⁶

¹⁶ [Thus the study of creativity becomes instrumental to the study of power relations. Power relations are seen as the common denominator of creative acts: they are seen as precluding and wrapping up every

Bruner ends by saying that performances are never twice the same, and that authenticity is constructed. Audiences are creative agents creating the meanings they discover. Change is inherent to structure [as structure is inherent to change, we could add...].

Comment :

What is wrong with the way this book approaches the 'anthropology of creativity' ? 'Creativity' is seen as instrumental to a change in culture, when creativity could and should be in my sense defined by non-instrumentality. One of the conclusion of the work to be surveyed (Csikszentmihalyi 1996) is that creativity is autotelic, i.e. it not only flourishes without external rewards, but it is best stimulated in a context where it is an end in itself. Like in Cohen (1994) and Rapport (1997), the later of which himself commenting on this work (Creativity/Anthropology), 'Creativity' is used as a concept to give back agency to individuals. Creativity is thus framed in a 'individual versus society', 'Creativity versus Structure' dichotomy. Rapport's project is pretty much the redeeming of the individual "who makes himself or herself ex nihilo" (Rapport 1997 : 1), while Cohen seemed to be more cautious about the coalescence self-individual. Creativity is thus the concept that allows anthropologists to revisit the classical philosophical problem of free will. But the twist is that in defending that Structures are not born *sui generi* (Rapport 1997), because they are the product of creative and individual endeavors, we ironically end up examining creativity for its capacity to be productive, to generate culture, in short : its function.

creative act. Why talk of creativity, then ? In a way, this is not too far from functionalism. Some anthropologists might have inherited from psychology a view of creativity as problem-solving, a view that

In Creativity/Anthropology (as in most post-modern anthropology, we could say), we have a conflation of two terms : creation and construction. What do we mean exactly when we say something is “constructed” ? On which background do we decide what is constructed and what is not ? ‘Nature’ ? If everything is constructed, even nature, then of what use is the concept? At this point we heard many authors use the words ‘creativity’, ‘creations’, and we assumed that they all related it to ‘newness’, without defining what we meant by ‘new’. In fact, *the ‘what’ of ‘new’ might very well be a ‘where’*. Identifying what is newness is in fact locating the moments of its occurrence in experience. Indeed where is the “new” ? In the object ? In society ? In the beholder(s) ?

2.1.2.3 Critique of linear views

In the following section I would like to do a critique of linear, causalistic, deterministic, models of *creativity as social validation*. I will examine one specific case : the model of the world renown specialist of creativity, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and will continue to examine the issue in my critique of Bourdieu in section 2.2. Csikszentmihalyi’s model is not linear because it presents five stages in the occurrence of creative acts: it is linear in my sense because it places creative acts in a causal chain : creation happens when you mastered a field. And his position is disturbing as we will see, since he is also the one to argue for the autotelic nature of creativity (inwardly motivated).

is now questioned even in psychology (Deschamps 2002).]

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi : Creativity, Flow, and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention (1996)

Csikszentmihalyi is acknowledged in many fields as one of *the* specialists of creativity. This present book is the result of a specific study conducted between 1990 and 1995 at the University of Chicago, with 91 “exceptional individuals”, whose person were chosen on the basis of having made a difference in their respective domain. They also had to be older than 60, and most of them were Nobel prizes.

Csikszentmihalyi has a thesis: “There is no way to know whether a thought is new except with reference to some standards, and there is no way to tell whether it is valuable until it passes social evaluation. Therefore creativity does not happen inside people’s head but in the interaction between a person’s thought and a sociocultural context.” (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 :.23).¹⁷

Csikszentmihalyi presents a systemic view of creativity. Creativity involves three elements, he says: 1- a culture with symbolic rules; he refers later to this as the ‘domain’(ex.: mathematics); 2- a field of experts “who recognize and validate the innovation” (the gate keepers, the institutions, etc.)(Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 6); 3- a person who brings novelty in the symbolic domain. In this model, the person is but a small part of the creative process. But this systemic model is based on a very specific definition of creativity : “a process by which a symbolic domain in the culture is changed”. (p. 8). In other words, for Csikszentmihalyi *creativity is what is validated as*

¹⁷ [Note the slips: the new-ness (novelty) is evaluated against a background of old-ness, and this background is necessary social. This means that new-ness needs to be ontologized to exist. The ‘new’ is out there, so it is necessarily objective (or intersubjective). In this process, the ‘new’ becomes an object, a ‘work’ (oeuvre), not a process or a state. But what about you, who walk in the street and suddenly encounter a ‘new’ form, feeling, combination of colors or whatever: do you have to wait for a committee of experts to *feel* this ‘newness’ ?]

such by a 'culture' or a field. [We see here a definition of creativity as the 'future of culture', not as a moment of consciousness or as a property of an agent, a group of agents or a system.]

Csikszentmihalyi's is a model that borrows extensively from cybernetics. It is an informational model, as we see in the following reasoning, that is brought forward to justify the claim that creativity is a matter of mastery of a domain and of validation by a field. First, attention is a limited resource. You cannot learn physics and music simultaneously [something that will be disproved by individuals in his sample]. There is only that much information that one can process at a time. Therefore, "to achieve creativity in an existing domain there must be surplus attention available" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 8). As cultures "evolves" [his words], it becomes increasingly difficult to master more than one domain of knowledge, since the knowledge becomes more and more specialized. [We see that while his study may apply to domains based on the handling of 'information' (undefined in the text), it may not apply to domains where information is sometime a hindrance. i.e. arts.]

For that reason, Csikszentmihalyi acknowledges that creativity often happens at the frontiers of domains, or "at the intersection of different cultures". Creative breakthroughs often happen when an idea of one domain is transposed to another domain, and/or when the tension in a specific domain becomes evident when observed from another domain's perspective. Often a field becomes too self referential, and the dissatisfaction with this leads to creative breakthroughs. No dissatisfaction, no creativity. The resolution of tension in the creative process starts with the sense that there is "a puzzle somewhere, or a task to be accomplished" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 95) [Akin to

the case of the Kaluli we just mentioned, the promise never fulfilled of Borges, the 'germ' of Briggs and Coleridge (Briggs 1988), the nul point of Low (1999).]

Csikszentmihalyi observes that each culture articulates differently the contradictory injunctions of conservatism and expansion. Too much discovery entails the saturation of culture with information, not enough discovery implies its stagnation. "Cultures are conservative and for good reason. No culture could assimilate all the novelty people produce without dissolving into chaos." (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 41). It is the field of experts that is in charge of keeping an equilibrium between these two tendencies/needs.

Domains can encourage or hinder creativity on three levels : 1) Clarity of the structure (the clearer the structure, the rules, the easier it is to create); [again vision that is based more on the assessment of creativity than on creativity itself]. 2) Centrality within the culture (the more the domain is central, the more it will attract the interest of talented individual, the more also the initiatives will be encouraged). 3) Accessibility (if a domain is too protected by too many gate keepers, creativity will be discouraged).

Csikszentmihalyi argues that in more structured domains (mathematics, music) creativity shows earlier. It is easier to acknowledge a discovery in physics than in psychology, because it is more readily demonstrable.¹⁸ But creativity is also like an accident, and accidents are properties of systems, not of individuals.

The creative personality

In fact if there is a common denominator between creative people's personalities, it is their complexity. Csikszentmihalyi uses Howard Gardner's findings, notably the evidence

that creative people use both convergent thinking and divergent thinking.

Csikszentmihalyi enumerates a number of striking and recurring paradoxes in those creative personalities :1 - Energetic –Quiet; 2- Smart –Naïve; 3- Mature - Immature (assuming or not assuming one's shadow, in Jung's terms); 4- Playful – Disciplined; 5- Realist – Imaginative; 6- Extroverted – Introverted; 7- Humble – Proud; 8- Highly gendered – Androgynous; 9- Rebellious (iconoclastic) - Traditionalist (conservative); 10- Passionate(attachment) - Objective (detachment); 11 - Suffering –Enjoyment; 12- Curiosity (openness) - Perseverance (obsessive-ness'). [That should be enough to destroy every pretense to ever make 'creativity' predictable...!]

There are traditionally five acknowledged steps in creativity : 1- Preparation (becoming immersed); 2- Incubation ("ideas churn around below the threshold of consciousness" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 91); 3 - The Insight (or AHA ! moment, or Eureka); 4- The evaluation (self-critique and self-doubt); 5 - The elaboration (Edison : 1 % inspiration, 99% perspiration) . The author specifies that this is not a 1,2,3, linear model. Darwin already spoke of a "chain of little Eureka". (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 81). Csikszentmihalyi reveal the inference at the base of this five step model : "creators remember coming to a sudden insight into the nature of a problem, but does not remember any intermediate conscious step. Because of the empty space in between sensing a problem mid intuiting its solution, it has been assumed that an indispensable stage of incubation must take place in an interval of the conscious process." (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 98) [In other words, the unconscious is first and foremost in the analyst's mind... It is a measure of the ignorance of the theoretician, as much as of the

¹⁸ [Following this logic, a field art would simply not exist, because it is largely based on cognitive indeterminacy. At the same time, Csikszentmihalyi's argument could account for the rise of conceptual art.

subject.] But of course, this notion of 'incubation' can hardly apply to people who are not familiar with a domain. [And therefore if we were to find that individuals are creative outside their domain (or outside their culture, as the author himself suggests, then the whole model would collapse.)

Csikszentmihalyi makes a brief allusion to a connectionist model obliquely related to awareness : "The insight presumably occurs when a subconscious connection between ideas fits so well that it is forced to pop out into awareness." (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 104).

The Flow of creativity

This is in my sense the most productive part of Csikszentmihalyi's model. Csikszentmihalyi notes that creative people unanimously love what they do, regardless of the consequences. Jacob Rabinow says "you invent for the hell of it". (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 107). It seems that it is not in fact 'what' you do, but 'how' you do it that counts. Which leads Csikszentmihalyi to define his notion of 'Flow' : an "almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness." Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 110). He further defines flow with the help of 9 descriptive. In Flow: 1- Goals are clear every step on the way; 2- There is immediate feedback to one's action; 3- There is balance between challenges and skills; 4- Action and awareness are merged; 5- Distractions are excluded from consciousness; 6- There is no worry of failure; 7- *Self-consciousness disappears*; 8- The sense of time becomes distorted; 9- The activity becomes *autotelic* (from the Greek : an end in itself).

as fulfilling the need for clarity.]

The last point may be the most important. Most things in life are exotelic, i.e. linked to an external reward. [We find here a clear link to religion, as defined by Bateson : a non-instrumentality that protects structure.] On the clarity of goals : "Here the goal is to restore harmony in the system by reconciling opposites". (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 114). Goals are not easily found in art according to Csikszentmihalyi. [This again betrays his view of creativity as problem solving.]

Surroundings :

Csikszentmihalyi seems to be unaware of contradicting himself, when he underlines that many think like Dan Campbell that the environment makes no difference. This is because by definition, creative works are unique. It is not possible to make a controlled experiment. Adding one layer of contradiction (or paradox ...) in his model, Csikszentmihalyi notices that "Creativity is not determined by outside factors but the person's hard resolution to do what must be done." (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 135). Csikszentmihalyi seems to be unaware of another paradox : the fact that flow mobilizes all the attention, and yet that too much concentration can dry the well. He notes that "devoting full attention to a problem is not the best recipe for having creative thoughts." (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 138).

Comment:

The Csikszentmihalyi's view is a Cybernetic approach that sees discovery as new information. Attention is seen as quantitative and knowledge as additive, and therefore a 'surplus' of attention and knowledge is necessary to make a difference. But his own field

work contradicts this model, when he finds for example that prodigies are rarely creative; in fact, being a virtuoso (handling a lot of information simultaneously) generally hinders creativity. It is also a view that seems biased toward cultural evolutionism (cultures as evolving in complexity) and so the more advanced cultures are the one who display more 'things' (a view that is circular, as all unilineal evolutionism, since this inventory of 'things' or 'discoveries' – their categorization - is obviously ethnocentric : technological advance, development of conceptual thought, etc.). It is also a very ethnocentric epistemology, in the sense that knowledge is seen as accumulation and articulation of 'knowledges', not for example as an emptying of the mental box, like in Eastern epistemologies for example.

The equation of the assessment of novelty with its social validation is flawed. Since the totality of the existent (synchronically and diachronically) can never be summoned in one given moment this proof can never be made. In the process itself - many interviewees talk about that - it is flair that guides the discovery, not social assent. What IS this flair ? Quick processing in the brain-computer ? Csikszentmihalyi counteracts this phenomenological data by inferring that the successful creators 'must have' internalized the field's criteria, something that is disproved again by the study and the model themselves, since the most successful creators are very often those who create a new domain altogether. The observed non-instrumentality of creative acts - the fact that they are performed for their own sake , the noticed reconciliation of opposites and successful dealings with ambiguity, all this seems to contradict Csikszentmihalyi insistence in social determinacy. Subjects do not create because of social relations (social determinism), but compose with social relations, and create *in spite of them* : that is, they

maneuver around constraints and use constraints as tools to go beyond constraints. Stravinsky used to say to he felt free only when he knew well what were his constraints. Therefore, the model, more than the study itself - leaves aside a fundamental aspect of creativity : creativity as state. Moreover, for the mere concept of 'creativity' to make any sense, it has to be posited as anterior to social validation. It has to be an a priori. Social validation comes after the fact, and is the collective expression of a process of validation. The 'new' might be a breach between different cognitive processes and therefore, as phenomenologists showed, a theory of perception (identifying the 'new') must come with a theory of expression, since there is no perception without project (Merleau-Ponty showed that psychological theories that see perception as association with memories and recognition turn in round in an infinite regression; seeing perceptions as remnant of prior perceptions does not explain much ...).

Csikszentmihalyi oscillates between two contradictory positions : creativity happens between domains, and "creativity can be manifested only in existing domains and fields" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 29). Women, for example, cannot be creative at nurturing, or in her wisdom, since these are "loosely organized domains"...! There is the "paradoxical situation that novelty is more obvious in domains that are often relatively trivial but easy to measure" (Csikszentmihalyi 1996 : 29) So, we may ask, is it the *validation* of creativity or creativity per se that is 'measured' here ? How can creativity generate new domains if it is so dependent on the field - so much as relying exclusively in its social validation ?

On the topic of creativity as an accident versus creativity happening only after mastering the field : isn't the vision of creativity as accident best served by the metaphor

of “*naïveté*”, instead of ‘mastery’? The articulation of mastery and accident follows the usual lines of thought : master your discipline and then you will be able to notice accidents. How about if creative people would be those who can create despite their accumulation of knowledge ? How about all the data that suggest the innocent arrogance of creators ? Why insisting on creating linearity (knowledge, *then* creation) when obviously creativity manifests as the discontinuity par excellence ?

One thing that needs to be mentioned is the applicability of this research to creativity at large. Aside from being mostly homed in a very narrow definition (social validation), *and maybe precisely because of that definition*, the study is based on a very specific sample. First to the question asked by Csikszentmihalyi as to why natural scientists accepted more readily than artists, for me the answer is simple: the whole enterprise reposes on a validation protocol that is proper to science and foreign to art. Scientists fit well in scientific studies. Secondly, the choice of senior Nobel prize winners manifests the circularity of the research. *If you chose Nobel prizes to demonstrate that you need to master a domain and conquer a field before being creative, well... you are likely to confirm your hypothesis*. Choosing self-taught people, or anyone who made it outside academia (Nobel prizes are strictly linked to the academia) would have given a totally different portrait. Again, the self-taught artists I know of are renowned for keeping a distance with the academia and its researchers. They feel -and often resent - the cultural gap and the plays of power that are orchestrated by schools.

Nevertheless, Csikszentmihalyi’s study brings some important contributions, among which is his notion of ‘Flow’. The capital conceptualization here is the conception of creativity as ‘autotelic’. On this aspect, Csikszentmihalyi remains on the terrain of

phenomenological report. Also, the re-discovery that creative personalities have nothing in common if not that they share complexity is something we find in other studies (Briggs 1988). However, the concept of 'complexity' in personality brought by the author is basically a statement of ignorance, as are other notions such as 'chance', 'indeterminacy', etc... But this pointing towards paradoxes should have lit a lantern somewhere. The same is true with the 'mysterious time' or 'the loss of self-concern' in creativity. Even if the author makes efforts to link his finding to a social psychology framework, psychology at large does not seem to be ready yet to go very far beyond the personal self. This shows in the curve of the piece. The author starts by stating out loud that creativity is not located in the individual but in the interaction individual-field-domain. But he gradually slips in the traditional personalist approach, trying to find clues in the personal histories of individuals. In short, the author seems to be unable, like most of social and behavioral sciences, to think in other terms than : 'if not individual, then collective; if not social, then individual'. We will have to wait for the social recognition (that is : academic...) of trans-personal approaches in psychology to envision a third pole to the collective-agent exclusive dichotomy.

* * *

Linear /causalist models are Etic stances. They seek to ascribe causes to phenomena that they witness from the outside. They do not consider the experiential as self-justifying. For example they do not describe on what experiential basis agents encounter newness, and certainly cannot satisfy themselves with such Emic views. If aesthetic experiences and experiences of the new are only socially determined recognition, how does this recognition happens? Consequently, these views cannot truly

account for phenomena of chaos in creativity, like the dread of 'not knowing what to do next', anxiety crashes about the futility of it all, in brief the chaos (Deschamps 2002), something that my field documents abundantly.

It is important to realize the notion of creativity and novelty as socially determined leads to an infinite regression (where is the frontier between the new and the old if the new is but an emanation of the old ? How can the new be of the old ?) But despite my critique of Creativity as social recognition, it will become clear, from the fieldwork, that socially recognizing spontaneity (and having to live with this social stamp) is *one of the most fundamental paradox of creativity*. I think it is possible to use Gestalt psychology's notion of "figure against background" (Merleau-Ponty 1945) to realize that although "figure" is distinguished from "background" (analogy: the new from the old) and although the two are irreducible, the background (the culture) is necessary for the perception of the figure (the new). It is this tension between "Culture as continuity of intention", and "novelty as discontinuity" that would ideally be brought forward by an anthropology of creativity.

Indeed, the pointing to a confluence between aesthetic experiences and experiences of newness should ring a bell. If there is a confluence between aesthetic experiences, experiences of newness and creativity, it is to be found first in a thick description of these experience in term of consciousness. Anthropologist Maquet's thesis (Maquet 1986), who looks for intersections between aesthetic experiences and states of contemplation as they are described by practitioners of Eastern disciplines of meditation, might be the natural way to start this work (see section 3.2.2. on discourse in Active Imagination). If we accept creativity as a concept, then we must accept the possibility of

locating it outside culture and outside the individual psyche. We must accept the possibility of at least another pole between these two classic magnets. Because after all, 'creativity', as a conceptual unit, is a postulate of indeterminacy.

(Sub-Section) 2.2 : QUESTIONS OF METHOD : FROM METHOD TO ETHNOGRAPHY

The 'other pole' for which we try to make room is not a third kind of agent (apart from individuals and culture) like magic, psychic or natural forces. What we want to examine, and this is what we mean by 'creativity as outside culture', is *the possibility of a 'state of being', that would not have its origin in culture, but which would rather be the source of culture*. To test this hypothesis, we need to suspend explanatory models, as we need to suspend even our belief in the possibility of such a thing as 'culture', in terms of a shared *Weltanschauung*. If we need to navigate through experience without recurring to causality, then phenomenology would seem to be the proper method to use.

2.2.1 : Phenomenology

On a practical level, phenomenology rejoins anthropology in the will of the later to take its informant seriously (Goulet & Young), that is : at face value. Without entering into details, I will do here a brief summary of some key notions of the Husserlian phenomenology that I found pertinent for this ethnography.

The first important step of a phenomenological method is the Epokè (also called the phenomenological reduction), which is in fact the *suspension of all judgments of existence* (Husserl 1982 : 70)). Husserl founded his phenomenology on a critique of naturalism. Naturalism postulates that knowledge can attain its object (that some knowledge can be true, that is : that the object can be known for what it really is). Following Kant, Husserl saw that Knowledge can never reach its object, because this

reaching would then be another knowledge. [As we will see, this is similar to the position of Bateson and Low : Being and Knowing are irreducible (one to another)]. But Husserl departs from Kant as he starts feeling that the Noumena (that which hides behind appearances, phenomena) is an unnecessary hypothesis. His phenomenology becomes a science of phenomena. Phenomena are defined as that which appears to consciousness. Phenomenology is a method that reconciles the researcher with appearances : appearances are all there is.

Husserl's 'return to the things themselves' can be interpreted as a will to limit oneself to appearances, while leaving away all inferences in regards to causes, explanatory models, etc. It is also a call to go back to the most honest level of evidence. Doing this, Husserl reverses the genealogy of Being, of things : it is not 'wavelength' that causes 'red', but the opposite: it is because of 'red' that we can perceive needles on a meter, signals on an oscilloscope, and build theories called 'wavelength'.

Husserl looks for a level of evidence that would be indubitable (apodictic evidences). He finds it in the Cogito Ergo Sum of Descartes (I can doubt of everything but the fact that I doubt). Further generations of phenomenologists will question the exact nature of this Cogito, but suffice to say that nevertheless, the phenomenological reduction always point back to a consciousness, to '*vécus de conscience*'¹⁹. But this consciousness is a strange thing. While it is in reality all that 'we' have, consciousness is always about something, and this something is always something else than consciousness. This 'aboutness' of consciousness, the fact that consciousness is always about something else than itself, is described in phenomenology by the concept of intentionality. Consciousness is not like an empty box occupied by '*vécus de consciences*'; a

consciousness without an object is unconceivable.²⁰ Consciousness *is* its content. If consciousness is not a passive receptor of the world, which world would arrive to it through the senses, then consciousness is always on the run, outside of itself, looking for a world out there. This is important, and even more in our case, since for Husserl this was the only way one could conceive of imagination, thinking, and all of those moments where a consciousness goes beyond what is immediately experienced.

Phenomenology is often times portrayed as a return to subjectivity. This is far from the intention of its founder and of most of his successors. Husserl thought that we could go back to appearances without attaching those occurrences to a naturalist subject (a human being in the flesh). Sartre demonstrated that the Ego was transcendent, i.e. that the 'I' was a conglomerate of phenomena, memories, etc (Sartre, 1943). Suspending all judgments of existence means exactly that : for a moment, subject, world, all vanish. Paradoxically, this also means that 'consciousness' and 'world' are not two different entities, but coalesce. 'Consciousness' and 'world' both come in a single movement, in what Husserl called 'Lebenswelt', the 'Life-World'. But this life-world is not only the known, it is also the unknown. This world is not the physical or energetical world of positivists, however. It is a world that can be experienced directly. The 'world' becomes, with Merleau-Ponty, an 'horizon', the background behind the figure. It is a reservoir of possible experiences.

Phenomenology has a slow penetration in cultural anthropology. The main difficulty for anthropology to adopt phenomenological method is the fact that the

¹⁹ lived experience in consciousness

²⁰ Later on, as some author will have us consider the distinction between consciousness and awareness, we will see that this phenomenological notion of intentionality might have a limited scope. Intentionality might

discipline is predicated upon a certain number of assumptions : culture, agency, etc. without which it seems to lose its very foundations. Indeed, Husserl always thought of phenomenology as a discipline in itself, something that would be different from 'regional sciences' as he called natural and social sciences. There is another shortcoming in trying to 'apply' or 'use' phenomenology in research : the concept of Epokè is very slippery. A very brief review of three major phenomenologists in anthropology is enough to prove Merleau-Ponty right : a total epokè is not possible:

In Michael Jackson, the 'horizon', a notion he borrows from Merleau-Ponty, becomes the world of social determinism; the co-presence consciousness-world in M.P., the fact that 'consciousness' and 'world' are given simultaneously becomes a way to justify that the collective precludes the individual; it is an aborted epokè, where the suspension of all judgments of existence stops at the gate of sociology.

Charles D. Laughlin's position is much more problematic. He tries to redeem neurophysiology with phenomenology (in this strange framework of 'neuropsychology') without really explaining how the step is made, i.e. how we pass from a natural world (nerves) to a world of phenomena; if it is true, as anthropologist Maquet writes, that all we have access to are mental representations (Knowing), then the nerve cells, the brain, cannot be given a special status (outside of Knowing and determining it). Of course, Phenomenology cannot be spared of Being, it cannot make the physical world disappear as idealists would like to; but it describes this thing called 'world' as it is : as a *mode d'apparition*, as knowledge about Being.

be valid for consciousness, not for awareness (presence). It might not reach the 'states of pure knowledge' or 'knowledge without content' of which the Eastern literature makes abundant mention.

Jacques Maquet's position seems the more promising, since he accepts the limitations of consciousness – its 'aboutness' - and contends efficiently with the task of describing phenomena. But his epokè also stops short, when he decides that some objects, in themselves, have the power to induce the aesthetic experience more than others. He seems to contradict himself when he extends this privilege – talent, propensity – to situations that are clearly non artistic, i.e. non-human (a shattered city after a bombardment is aesthetic in itself). In short, he naturalizes the beautiful and sublime.

2.2.1.1 Limitations of a Strictly Methodological Approach : The Need for a *Practicum*

Phenomenology justifies the need to examine consciousness in its own terms. But phenomenology could not be an end in itself. This is the paradox of phenomenology : finding a fool-proof method that respects the fact that life cannot be contained in methods... While some authors seem to see this method as a panacea, we cannot afford thinking here that the quality of the method guarantees the validity of the results; and while some authors look for intersections with existing spiritualities and elevate this method almost to the rank of a religion, we cannot think that phenomenology could ever be a substitute for practice (see Deschamps : 2002 for an example of such wishful thinking). What some authors seem to forget is that phenomenology is a tool for *intellectual* inquiry; the concept of Epokè indeed suffers the lack of prescription as to how operate the suspension of judgment, and it is predictable that some phenomenologists would look in the directions of practices that are very explicit in terms of prescription (Eastern meditation practices, for example). But then there is the danger to

confuse a theoretical system (phenomenology, philosophy) with a practical one that strives precisely to go beyond the intellect.²¹

2.2.2 : Creativity and consciousness

Thus phenomenology served us as a bridge to let go of causal models and go from explanation to comprehension , and so we are launched into an examination of 'creativity' in terms of 'consciousness'. But first what do we mean by 'consciousness' ? Before presenting my main reference on this (Albert Low's model), I would like to see how the new fields of Consciousness studies and of the Anthropology of Consciousness address the issue.

Anthropologist Charles D. Laughlin says that "the trouble with consciousness is that whereas we all claim to have it, science is unclear about what it means by the term" (Laughlin, 1992 : 1). Laughlin acknowledges the number of views that co-exist today, and notices that "no anthropology generated theory of consciousness has reached prominence in the general science of consciousness". (Laughlin 1992 : 1). But anthropology must force to be heard, because it has an important point to make : countering ethnocentrism, "showing the importance of culture in forming interpretive sets" (idem), demonstrating the variability of human experience. The anthropology of consciousness emerged in the 70's, Laughlin says. but the interest of the discipline can be traced back to Lang (1896) and Tylor (1881) (idem). From a very brief survey of the issues of the Journal of the Anthropology of Consciousness (AOC), published by the

²¹This point and its direct link with the art practice today will be discussed in details in section 3.2.2. During an interview, a teacher of methodology in the department at UQAM, strong defender of phenomenological methods, seemed to be unaware of that distinction. When I made that distinction clear, she still refused to

Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness (SAC), itself affiliated to the AAA , the least we can say is that this sub-field is far from reaching a consensus. The SAC and the AOC seem to have been more concerned by Shamanism and related practices, and very little by Eastern practices of awakening nor even by central religions (Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, etc.). However the need to go beyond cultural particularism is felt, and some authors advance timidly on the ground of unifying models (as if anthropologists, fearing essentialism, would leave this terrain to psychologists).

Michael Winkelman's *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Consciousness* is such an attempt (AOC 5(2) July 1994), a case that I bring here for its possible contribution to the definition of our object (consciousness). His article aims at elucidating the domains encompassed by the term consciousness, and demonstrating that "the exclusive claims to defining consciousness made by ... rationalist traditions (Psychology, Philosophy, Cognitive sciences) are untenable." (Winkelman 1994 : 16) Winkelman begins with etymology. Of all the definitions given by the Oxford English dictionary, we notice that they all contain an element of reflectivity (the subject knows himself knowing).

'Consciousness' comes from *Conscious*; the Latin roots of conscious are *com* (with) and *scire* (to know). Together they mean *to know with others* (American Heritage Dictionary : AHD). The Original etymology , from the Latin conscious means 'knowing something with another' (not with others). It was probably borrowed from the Greek *syneidos*, meaning knowing with others. "The conventional interpretation is that the Indo-European root of consciousness is expressed in *skēi*, which is the extended root of

separate the two types of endeavours. For her, the suspension of judgement of phenomenology was very close to accessing a different state of consciousness.

sek, which means to cut, split or divide (AHD p. 1539), implying knowing by making differentiations." (Winkelman 1994 :18) (I underline.)

Winkelman first interprets the *com – sciere* (or *con – scio*) as reflecting the "communal dimension of consciousness". While consciousness involves an awareness of one's self, Winkelman says, and while "...this egoistic state encompasses a sense of separatedness from communality, it is nonetheless defined and constructed in a cultural context."²² Winkelman notices that : "Characterizing consciousness exclusively in terms of rational, cognitive and linguistic functions is inadequate on a number of grounds, including those of human psychology and experience, animal behaviour, cross-cultural manifestations and the perspectives derived from the Asian contemplative traditions." (Winkelman 1994 : : 19) Winkelman thinks that the West has yet to incorporate the advances made by contemplative tradition in the East. "Wilber has provided a number of important syntheses of Western and Eastern perspectives on consciousness. His Spectrum of Consciousness (Wilber 1977) illustrates a number of levels of consciousness." (Winkelman 1994 : 24). Laughlin et al. consider the Abhidharma, one of the three parts of the Buddhist scriptural source called Tripitaka, to be the best developed of the analytical systems for describing consciousness. " (Idem : 24) Winkelman notes that mature contemplative traditions, because they describe and give access to a "great range of transegoic states of human awareness, functioning and consciousness", are superior to current Western scientific views in that they invalidate the claims that rationality is the ultimate state available to humans. (Winkelman 1994 : 24)

²² [In my opinion this is highly interpretative, as revealed by the Indo-European etymology (to cut), and reveals the sociological bias: it could rather mean : to hold together in one's mind. 'Together' does not have to mean 'social'. Here the author reveal two of his *a priori* : separatedness in the egoic state is from other subjects, and culture comes before consciousness (or the individual for that matter).]

* * *

From this I retain two things : 'Consciousness' is like 'Being': it is a self evident notion that must be used in the elucidation of its content (you must use the verb 'to Be' to know what 'Being' is – Heidegger). The other thing that I retain is the intrinsic division within consciousness. And this is the notion we have to keep in sight. What the etymology signals is its inherently reflective nature (knowing that you know), not its social component (see Low's survey of etymological interpretations, Eastern and Western : Low : 1999).

Sartre :

Indeed many Western authors have pointed to the inner schism in consciousness, to the point that, as the etymology suggests, *one could use that schism to define consciousness*. Sartre, in an effort to reconcile phenomenology (i.e. what appears to be) and ontology (i.e. what is), saw the fundamental gap that separates consciousness from Being. In his monumental Being and Nothingness, Sartre opposes the "en-soi" to the "pour-soi" (the 'in-itself' to the 'for-oneself'). In the 'en-soi' (another name for Being, the real, etc.), there is no division. "Being is" (Sartre 1943 : 32). But what of negations, of 'what is not' ? It is first in negations, in 'non-being', and then in bad faith, in desire and in time that Sartre finds consciousness, and the schism that traverses it. Indeed, to be conscious is to be 'present to oneself'. But who is present to whom ? The "pour-soi" is precisely "that which has to be what it is not". Consciousness is ek-static. It looks for itself in things, the most important of these things being the body. "Consciousness is consciousness of something : this means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of

consciousness; that is : that consciousness is born carried on a being that it is not” (“nait portée sur un être qui n’est pas elle”) (Sartre 1943 : 28). And here we have Sartre’s definition of consciousness : “a being for whom it is in its being question of its being in such a way that this being implies another being than itself”. (idem : 29, 81). The ‘presence to oneself’ is precisely what is the meaning of Sartre’s ‘*pour-soi*’. And this is precisely the origin of the word ‘reflection’ which came to mean thinking. Thus the ‘*pour-soi*’ is a dynamic unity of a ‘reflected-reflecting’ (idem : 112). « *Le pour-soi est l’être qui se détermine lui-même à exister en tant qu’il ne peut pas coïncider avec lui-même* » (idem : 114). The Self cannot be an ‘existant’ in the world, since any coincidence with itself makes it disappear (113). You are who you are because you are that which you are no longer (your past) and that which you will become, otherwise your ‘identity’ and ‘continuity’ would not be.

Thus in that view the lack (le manque) is not something that happens to humans. Humans exist because ‘missing’, lacking is their nature. And here Sartre comes close to the Buddhist model that we will see in a moment : “Human reality is suffering in its being, because it comes to being as perpetually haunted by a totality that it is without being able to be it, since justly it could not attain being (*l’en-soi*) without losing itself as reflection (for-itself, ‘*pour-soi*’)” (idem : 126). In other words, it is precisely this capacity to *see ourselves seeing* that alienates us from the world. Man is that being by whom the lack, the negation, but also the possible, come to the world. Sartre begun his work by addressing the question of ‘lacking’, and the lack is central to his work, something we will put to profit when the time will come to propose anthropological models of creativity.

The other side of this is the all-inclusive nature of consciousness, and this is good news to cultural anthropologists. Being cannot include Knowing (i.e. 'matter' cannot grant reality to 'spirit' (or mind) since matter comes into existence through spirit; anthropologists would translate this as : 'matter' is a symbolic meaning). Consciousness is the source of all possibilities, in the sense that only consciousness can be what it is not yet. There is no outside to Being – future, knowledge, etc.. Which has Sartre says that "there can be consciousness of laws, but no laws of consciousness" (idem : 21). Consciousness has to be studied in its own terms.

Critiques of Sartre :

Here I would like to address one critique that comes from the new field of the anthropology of the senses, because it questions very pertinently the universal value of Sartre ontology according precisely to the line discussed here, i.e. consciousness as being at the center and at the periphery of oneself. Constance Classen (1998) has argued that Sartre's phenomenological ontology was guilty of originating from a strongly visualist epistemology, a view she criticizes and very rightly so, for being incapable of grasping many world views that do not place vision at their center. Classen takes an example in *Being and Nothingness* where Sartre builds an imaginary situation to prove that an onlooker in a park would sense his dominion on the landscape threatened by the arrival of another person. The watcher would become the watched, and therefore would become an object for another person. Classen objects to this presentation that a blind person would probably not feel threatened in this situation, and that therefore Sartre's model applies to vision alone. Furthermore, this amounts to say that Sartre reproduces the basic premises

of Western cultures, since in using vision he uses a sense that these cultures are using precisely for its propensity to foster relations of domination – in the way for example vision separates subject and object.

Classen's critique is troubling. If we follow her line of argumentation, proximity senses (touch, smell, taste) would not suffer the same dichotomy subject-object. In my humble opinion a close reading of *Being and Nothingness* reveals that Sartre's thesis does not need a bias towards a specific sense to be valid. Another imagined situation might help us to see why. Imagine you are a blind person who is spending the night in a hotel room. For the purpose of this demonstration, imagine you have shut off the lights and pulled down the blinds. The room is pitch black and you are lying on your bed, eyes shut. No visuals here. Prone to a melancholic feeling, you start humming a tune dear to you. Carried on by the feeling, you start singing out loud, and then louder and louder, until a faint sound coming from the other side of the wall has you stopping. Someone just cough in the room beside you, so gently in fact that at this very moment you perceive the thinness of the wall. At this very moment, you understand that someone has been listening to you all this time. How do you feel? Don't you feel that your world has been shattered by another "gaze"? Don't you feel threatened by this 'watcher', because this 'gaze' transformed you into an object? In my opinion, this suffices to demonstrate that we should be careful in dismissing Sartre because of his visualism – visual he certainly is – because the relations he examines are relations in consciousness that do not need the senses to exist. For example, Sartre's demonstration of the watcher-watched problematic in shame can be applied to imaginary situations. One does not need an ontological other to feel shame. In his application of his center-periphery model to traumas resulting of sexual

assaults. Low demonstrates that touch can be the locus of a watcher-watched dynamics. Smell would seem to pose a bigger problem to Sartre's model. Indeed, in smell, the object is not constituted by distancing but by participation. But smell is still the locus of a self-other dichotomy : knowing that others can smell unaccepted body odors (farts, bad breath, perspiration) can make you feel shy. *In fact one could say that the anthropology of the senses and Sartre are far from being contradictory and ultimately go in the same direction.* For example the admirable demonstration that in pre-modern Europe, *sensations* and *feelings* were not disjoined as they are today (Howes & al 1991) in my opinion points to the constitution of the senses in consciousness. Phenomena of kinaesthesia signal this also : the borders between the senses are constituted culturally, which means that 'something' outside the senses has us perceiving the senses.

Another critique of Sartre is that of Durand (1969). While acknowledging that Sartre did a lot to distinguish imagination from naturalists stances (imagination as recognition, depiction, memory, etc), Durand argues that Sartre's view is essentially negative, that of an imagination as 'un-real'. Sartre should have seen that imagination forms the back-bone of cultures. In my opinion Durand, like psychology, is concerned exclusively with *the content* of imagination. Sartre, like transcendental spiritualities and consciousness studies, is concerned by *the fact* of imagination, not its content. Durand looks at the various liquids that are poured in the bowl. Sartre looks at the bowl itself. The two views are far from being contradictory, provided that they admit the limits of their own focus (which Durand doesn't).

Bateson :

In a way, Bateson echoes Sartre, and announces Low. Bateson (Bateson & Bateson, 1987) wants to find the function of religion but to do that, he first needs to define the system in which it will operate. On his way Bateson meets the millenary dichotomy in religion as in science between Matter and Spirit, or matter and mind in modern terms (Knowing and Being in Low). Bateson gives to the poles of this everlasting dichotomy their ancient Latin names : *Pleroma* (matter) and *Creatura* (mind or spirit).

Materialism is not a solution (Bateson refers to Kant and the impossibility for knowledge to 'touch' Being.) "Materialism is a set of descriptive propositions referring to a universe in which there are no descriptive propositions" (Bateson & Bateson, 1987 : 62) The stuff science is made of is not material, its mental. There is no such thing as 'chlorine' in 'nature'. Chlorine is a class, but class don't 'exist' either, because there are "no messages or classes in the prebiological world". (Bateson & Bateson, 1987 : 62) But Idealism is not a solution either. "It is a man-made notion that 'hardness' is immanent in one end of a binary relationship [between mind and matter]." Idealism and Materialism explain nothing because they separate mind and matter as two different orders, and tell nothing of the way they can meet. Bateson refuses the Cartesian superstitions : either the existence of the supernatural (he's too holistic for that, there must be a system that includes the supernatural and the natural) or the materialistic view that quantity can determine pattern (i.e. consciousness as a product of the complexity of matter).

Bateson argues for a systemic necessity to restrict the flow of information to certain areas. Certain types of information must not be found in certain areas, or they destroy these areas or even the whole system.²³ Bateson gives the example of the unconscious processing of information in the brain. We do not know how images are formed in perception. All we have are images, finished and complete, and we have to trust them. If we knew how they are made, we could no longer trust them. So Pleroma requires Faith, and Faith requires Oblivion, or Unconsciousness.²⁴ Knowing for example that self-consciousness destroys spontaneity, Bateson wants to find "What sorts of ideas create distraction or confusion in the operation of that matrix so that creativity is destroyed?" The systemic need for the lack of self-consciousness to maintain boundaries is what we have called 'Mystery'. [This is also the ground for what Bateson calls 'Grace' (Bateson : 1973).]

Here Bateson reverses the traditional evolutionist stance of 'magic evolving into religion'. The opposite is true, he says: magic is the deterioration of religion into purpose. It is the un-purposiveness of religion that makes it so adaptative. Magic destroys this by

²³ [It would be interesting to parallel his notion of systemic disorganization by the inappropriate routing of information, with Mary Douglas' vision of pollution as the blurring -or lack of definition thereof - of categories (Douglas 1966).]

²⁴ [This shows how hard it is for one's thinking to coalesce truly with ambiguity; and this supports somewhat Bateson's insistence about the inability of language to get outside the subject-predicate relations, i.e. to handle relations, not things. Bateson says we do no 'know' within the actual performance what is going on, if we knew, we could not perform it (p. 22). But in saying this, he uses what he wants to demonstrate. The 'what' in the 'do no know' is neurological. 'What we do not know' (in the moment of perception) is what science tells us that is happening: neurons firing to other neurons. The ultimate reality, Being, cannot be within perception itself. Ultimate reality is in matter. Where is matter? Out there. But this is an error of logical types, in Bateson's own terms or a categorial error, in Kant's terms: Merleau-Ponty would say that this is '*faire de la perception avec du perçu*' (Merleau-Ponty 1945). Phenomenology refuses the leap into a naturalist ontology for that reason. That would be falling into the old trap of verifying the veracity of knowledge by measuring its correspondence to another knowledge, this time deemed true, i.e. equated to Being. But phenomenology is not exempt of the paradox: phenomenology has a slant toward idealism (being is in knowledge) very close to Indian philosophies, but very close also to a simple denial of Being.]

injecting the 'mean-to-an-end logic'. Thus magic is posterior to religion [chronologically, phenomenologically or ontologically, Bateson does not say.] There is a systemic similitude for him between religion and aesthetics, because "Aesthetic unity is very close to the notions of systemic integration and holistic perception" (MCB, in Bateson & Bateson : 199) He sees religion as a way to protect communication appropriate to *Creatura*, a therapy against distortion and pathologies. But he sees also the paradox in the deliberate search for revelation, and the danger of transforming the protective unconscious into a conscious purpose.

* * *

Bateson displays a remarkable understanding -however biased by his biological and cybernetic attachments - of the paradox between part and whole, each part being a whole in itself His understanding had two facets : ethnographic and epistemological. As Mary Catherine Bateson said of the ethnographic side: "One way of interpreting his emphasis on unknowing is as an insistence that boundaries be maintained so that multiple forms of discourses will continue to be possible." (MCB, idem : 187). And the epistemological facet resides in the nature of these boundaries, or in the nature of the terms bound by these boundaries. He defined these boundaries as isolating : sacred/secular, aesthetic/appetitive, deliberate/unconscious, thought/feeling.

Bateson's model serves us as a port of entry into religious epistemologies. Bateson was too linked to Western science to actually allow himself to stay in the midst of the ambiguity he noticed (*Creatura – Pleroma*) but he came very close, at least intellectually. He touches the basic double bind that we found in the terrain : *the notion of making a project of spontaneity*. His model also justifies, as Maquet's model but in a

more abstract and less experiential fashion than Maquet, the connection between religion and aesthetics.

2.2.3 Native epistemologies

To Sartre, even the pre-reflective cogito (before thinking) is ek-static (i.e. divided, since it too cannot attain being-ness). In wanting to 'understand' religion, Bateson ends up explaining it and including it in a 'system', and this system looks pretty much like science. Bateson and Sartre were thinkers, and their writings show no indications that they had a non-discursive practice. In our will to start the approach maneuvers that will lead us closer to ethnography, closer to the field, here is where we have to depart from pure thinkers and rejoin practitioners.

This divided nature of consciousness is no big news to the East. But in Eastern practices of awakening, there is an outside to consciousness, or better said, 'consciousness' is included in a bigger whole : 'awareness', or non-reflective awareness in modern term, which is the 'no-mind' of D.T. Suzuki and Zen. This is the supposedly 'unconscious', according to Bateson and Western psychoanalysis, which according to the East, is far from being a reduced version or a diminutive of consciousness (Low 1992, 1995, 1999, 2001). Here I would like to present two cases of models which posit an alternative to consciousness as a divided whole, the last case being the model I chose as a backbone for this thesis. But first something must be said on the hierarchy of knowledge.

Anthropology has recently emphasized the need to recur to what is ironically called 'native epistemologies'²⁵, in the movement to 'take our informants seriously'

²⁵ This reminds me of the time in the 70s and 80s when 'world music' were still called 'ethnic music' ...! Of course this was done in a mixture of respect for the difference and desire to demarcate the West from the

(Young & Goulet 1994). But as anthropologists know, these 'epistemologies' only later become codified in what appears to be beliefs systems; they first stem from practices, they *are* practices that carry injunctions. Wilber insisted that the whole alleged intersection between modern physics and Eastern religions was bogus, since there was no way for a physicist to know what a Zen master knew without submitting himself to the practice of Zen (Wilber 1996). He insists that a mere similitude in language does not confer similitude to experiential facts. Mathew Kosutha, a lecturer at an interdisciplinary conference that was held at UQAM in February 2002 ("Entre savoir et croire") argued for Buddhism being one of the oldest experimental sciences, and the historical Buddha as being one of the first scientists. At the same conference, Gabriel Lefebvre argued that calling something 'belief' was manifesting an observer stance; for participants, there was only knowledge. In *Being Changed* (Young & Goulet Ed. 1994), anthropologists discover that only through fully participating to the cultures they study will they be able to grasp their nature. Some knowledge cannot be access through the intellect alone. Edith Turner, wife and colleague of the late Victor Turner, discovers that her husband was wrong about the Ndembu. Their justification for their ritual was not symbolic; it was to be taken at face value. E.Turner does indeed witness the spirits they are talking about, but only after she could let go of her normal way of seeing the world, and this comes in certain conditions of emotional readiness (E.Turner, in Young & Goulet 1994).

However, recurring to 'native epistemologies' seems to be more readily accepted when anthropologists use the frames of references given by their informants to validate their own experience; crisscrossing 'cultures' and using a framework developed in one

rest. Western music was not ethnic; it was just...music. Is 'anthropology' considered a 'native epistemology' ?

culture to explain another culture seems to be less frequent, if not altogether strongly discouraged in a time of ultra relativism. Personally, being a self-taught artist, and feeling that most anthropological writing is often alien to the cultures I visited, I am often more compelled by non-academic sources than by academic ones.

Nisargadatta :

One of the testimonies of world views positing 'awareness', or non-reflective awareness as another pole to 'consciousness' is the one left by Nisargadatta Maharaj. The point in bringing Nisargadatta here is to get a first hand verbalization of a religious epistemology, in the context of a discussion about consciousness and awareness. Since the book I am reviewing (Nisargadatta 1973) consists of transcription of interviews, it qualifies in my opinion as ethnographic source. Nisargadatta was not a learned man. Born in a poor family near Bombay, he grew up almost without education. He became a manual worker and then a shop keeper. In his mid-age, he met Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, a teacher of the Navnath Sampradaya, a sect of Hinduism. His teacher died soon after they had met, but he left a strong impression on Nisargadatta who, three years after their first meeting, came to 'self-realization'. So in a way, Nisargadatta's case is not the result of what we conceive generally as formal training.

One of the most salient feature of his teaching is **the distinction between consciousness and awareness**. Awareness is not consciousness, and is foundational. Awareness is thus opposed to consciousness : "There are level in consciousness but not in awareness. [Awareness] is one block, homogeneous. Its reflection in the mind is love and understanding. There are levels of clarity in understanding and intensity in love, but not

in their source.” (Nisargadatta 1973 : .403) Consciousness is bondage, awareness liberates. So the escape from pleasure and pain, fear and desire, occurs only when one takes stock of what one is not, and one is not only consciousness. Mind can go so far as to see what it is not, but that’s all. But it becomes very difficult the interviewers to have a foretaste of the state in which Nisargadatta claims to be. All our notions, all our language is in consciousness, and Nisargadatta, points to the outside of consciousness. Birth and death, time and space, exist only in consciousness, not in awareness. Awareness is being, and being is refractory to knowing, by definition. “Awareness is primordial; it is the original state, beginning-less, endless, uncaused, unsupported, without parts, without change. Consciousness is on contact, a reflection against a surface, a state of duality. There can be no consciousness without awareness, but there can be awareness without consciousness, as in deep sleep. Awareness is absolute, consciousness is relative to its content; consciousness is always of something. Consciousness is partial and changeful, awareness is total, changeless, calm and silent. And it is the common matrix of every experience.” (Nisargadatta 1973 :29).

The non-local character of awareness, and to a certain extent, of consciousness, dictates that one be prepared to abandon the person. The person is a creation of consciousness, of imagination, and plunging into awareness dissolves it. “You were never born, you will never die” is more than a metaphoric image for Nisargadatta. : in the evidence of the now, the physical and historical birth of the individual is not even a bundle of memories, it is a belief based on hearsay. This constant denial of second hand evidence is what makes for this simile with phenomenology, but the simile stops at the door of words. This recurring theme in these interviews is what grounds his teaching into

a transcendental subjectivity of sorts, as the ultimate validation of evidence : “You are the proof of everything, including yourself. None can prove your existence, because its existence must be confirmed by you first.” (Nisargadatta 1973 : 161). Would we to look at this material with a philosophical eye, we could see a proposal for a new post-Cartesian Cogito (or apodictic evidence) : not ‘I think’, but ‘I am’ : “God is only an idea in your mind. The fact is you. The only thing you know for sure is : ‘here and now I am’. Remove the ‘here and now’ the ‘I am’ remains, unassailable.” (Nisargadatta 1973 : 198) Nisargadatta displays an almost unbearable radicalism : *we are not in the world, it is the world that is in us*. And he means it literally : “In reality, time and space exist in you; you do not exist in them. They are modes of perception, but they are not the only ones.”(Nisargadatta 1973 : 205)...“What happens to the body and mind might not be within your power to change, but you can always put an end to your imagining yourself to be body and mind.” (Nisargadatta 1973 : 210) “...You are not in the body, the body is in you ! The mind is in you. They happen to you.” (Nisargadatta 1973 : 212).

Nisargadatta, makes a few comments that makes it possible to link his teaching to creativity. Awareness is timeless, and this timelessness of awareness is akin to the instantaneousness of creativity. This timelessness is not eternal duration, but out of time altogether (time does not have an objective existence, but exists only as a manifestation of memory; Sartre too saw that time was a result of the ek-static nature of consciousness, not its cause : consciousness was not in time, time was in consciousness). Nisargadatta, also comments on the compulsory nature of ‘creativity’: He sees the endless mental production as bondage, as he sees passion as bondage. The idea of staying in this constant cascading of thought, in this hopeful mental vortex, as if a solution was eminent, is no

solution. But to try to stop is not a solution either. There is but one remedy : to stop the search for remedies. And this is of course the ultimate paradoxical statement (creation is inevitable, necessary and self-destroying). This is very close to the thinking of Albert Low.

The link to our main hypothesis and to anthropology could be the following : Nisargadatta's notion that 'we are not in the world, the world is in us' could be translated to cultural anthropologist as : 'we are not in culture, 'culture' (as an intersubjective inference) is in us.' And we are back to our hypothesis of 'creativity as step outside culture'. In fact in Nisargadatta it would be a step back : it would not be imagining a 'thing' such as 'creativity' and putting it outside another thing called 'culture'; it would be withdrawing from assumptions about 'culture' altogether. Cancel out the notion of 'a culture', and the problem vanishes.²⁶ Or said otherwise : *find the place where 'culture' ceases to exist, and you might very well find 'creativity' there.*

Finally, Nisargadatta opens the possibility for a *new type of reflectivity* : not a reflectivity immersed in its (mental) productions, merely covering them with further layers of thought (which is the meaning that is given to the term 'reflectivity' in post-modern anthropology), but a 'turning of awareness upon itself' : being conscious of being conscious, and then of being aware of being aware. "... As long as knowledge means description in term of what is already known, perceptual, or conceptual, there can be no such thing as self-knowledge, for what you are cannot be described, except as total negation. All you can say is : 'I am not this, I am not that' ... You observe the heart

²⁶ As the dissolution of their object of study might be hard for cultural anthropologists to swallow, I feel the need to make the following precision : 'Culture' would still exist for those who do not follow Nisargadatta's prescription. Following Nisargadatta's prescription, you might be able to go back to

feeling, the mind thinking, the body acting; the very act of perceiving shows that you are not what you perceive.” (Nisargadatta 1973 : 2) This new reflectivity is not self-forgetfulness, but full self-mindedness : “When you know what is going on in your mind, you call it consciousness... Then comes awareness, the direct insight into the whole of consciousness, the totality of the mind. While the mind is centered in the body and consciousness is centered in the mind, awareness is free ... Mind is interested in what happens, while awareness is interested in the mind itself.” Nisargadatta 1973 :.221) Low says that psychology is interested in the content of the mind; Zen is interested in the phenomenon of the mind. Likewise, art, when it denies content over form, might be operating the same change of focus. Moreover as we will see in the field, the type of transcendental subjectivity proposed here may be akin to artists seeking ultra-subjectivity in unquestioned authorship.

Albert Low: “*Créer la conscience*”

If Albert Low’s book looks sometimes like a ‘Theory of Everything’, in my opinion it is because as in the case of phenomenology from the moment one decides to study consciousness in its own terms, one has to bring every thing into it, instead of sprinkling it over things as we do usually.

Albert Low has been the director of the Montreal Zen Center for the past twenty years. He is a former student of Roshi Philip Kapleau, himself s student of Yasutani Roshi. In 1999, he published his Magnum Opus, ‘*Créer la conscience*’ (recently published in English : *Creating Consciousness*), a book that is the result of almost forty

‘culture’ by going back to the discriminating mind (consciousness). But who knows, you might not...or you might not be able to believe in it as before.

years of practicing Zen. Low's book, like Bateson's can be seen as the attempt to translate a religious epistemology into an anthropological model, and Low's premises are pretty much the same as Bateson's (Bateson & Bateson 1987). For Low (as for Bateson), the relation between Spirit and Matter is still the central problem of Western civilization.²⁷ But neither materialism or idealism are viable solutions. Spirit is not the product of complexity, as materialists have it, and matter is not a product of the mind, as idealists pretend. The poles of this very old debate, spirit and matter, Low renames them Knowing (Spirit) and Being (matter). Knowing is defined as everything that is not Being, and Being as everything that is not Knowing. His main framework is that there is in the universe (or consciousness, depending on whether the focus is on Knowing or Being) a fundamental ambiguity, the ambiguity that posits one as being two and two as being one.

At the center of Low's thinking is an intuition that pre-dates his training in Zen, but which was confirmed by his first Kensho (awakening) : *we are simultaneously at the center and at the periphery of ourselves*. This is the meaning he gives to the first Buddhist axiom that 'to live is to suffer'. Thus this dualism Spirit/Matter, Knowing/Being has its source in an inherent wound. Consciousness acts as a buffer to cover up that wound, and it does so by the mean of a *constant creativity*. Violence is nothing but failed creativity. Low draws inspiration from the work of the Jesuit Anthropologist Teilhard de

²⁷ There is a nice dialogue between Bateson and Low, although one can see that Bateson's point of view is only theoretical (Bateson did not have any religious or spiritual practice). Like Low, Bateson is interested in religion for the possibility it offers of arriving at a systemic model of man. In Low's term, we could say that both men tackle the same ambiguity, but from opposite ends of the telescope. Low's approach the ambiguity from the ambiguous side, in the midst of it's irreducibility; by trying to reduce it, Bateson approach the ambiguity from the other side, the un-ambiguous side; but as Low says, this un-ambiguous side is not devoid of ambiguity. As a matter of fact : what sense does it make to say that some things *should not be said* ?

Chardin. While acknowledging that his main work, "Le phénomène humain", suffers from De Chardin's long standing ambiguous relation to both theology and science, Low thinks that De Chardin had a fundamental intuition of the teleological nature of evolution (human and non-human). His desire to answer the atomism of science by bringing the concept of an irreducible atom of consciousness brought him to envision evolution as the perpetual attempt to reach what he calls 'the Omega point'. Low will rename this teleological target as the 'Nul Point' : *the interval between Knowing and Being*.

Low's intuition translates as a new understanding of the concept of conflict : *we do not experience conflict* (as something that would infiltrate our lives and be imposed on us), but *conflict is what makes experience possible*. Conflict is the source of experience, because it is the source of consciousness. 'Experience' come from the Latin *Periculum* and it means both attempt and peril. So the fundamental wound of the universe, the motor of evolution can be summarized in the following statement: "I am at the center, but that which I am central to is myself, equally at the center". But there can be only one center, by definition, hence the fundamental tension that lies at the heart of consciousness.

Bateson used Zen Koans to develop his notion of 'double bind'. His concept is a way to make ambiguity accessible to the intellect. Extending Bateson's notion to creativity, we can see that *conflict is basic to creativity*, as it is to violence in Bateson's model. But *this conflict is ante-cultural, it is not a product of culture, rather culture is its offspring*. Evolution theories and sociocultural analysis describe conflict but tell nothing of its origin [no model can yet satisfyingly unify gender, race and class violence, psychology and anthropology]. Now Bateson saw that double bind is not only present in schizophrenia, but also in humor, poetry and art. Arthur Koesler, a theoretician of

creativity, saw that 'bissociation' was at the center of both creativity and humor.

According to him, humor and creativity happens when a situation or an idea is perceived simultaneously on two planes of reference that are normally deemed incompatible.

This conflict that originates from the ambiguity of a two that is one, and a one that is two, is present in all world religions. The Sufi called it Unus-Ambo. This ambiguous nature of experience ($1=2, 2=1$) translates into the ambiguity Knowing OR Being, hence the imperative : "**Que l'un soit !**". This either/or provokes an oscillation between Knowing and Being. When this oscillation attains a certain speed (as in meditation), there is the creation of the Nul Point, which is neither Being nor Knowing. The fundamental difference between Low and Teilhard De Chardin is that for Low, the Center is not attainable (we can never reach the Omega point). Therefore, evolution can be seen as the impossible and perpetual attempt to reabsorb the Nul Point, in order to quit the periphery for the center. But this is doomed to fail, since 'my' center is 'your' periphery, and your center is my periphery. Again the Center is unique by 'definition'.

Center:

The desire to attain the Center becomes the desire to BE the center. But it is impossible to attain or to be the center. But what is this magic 'Center' ? It is impossible to define it, Low says. The sole idea of location depends on Space-Time, itself dependent upon the Center. The Center is neither mental nor physical nor symbolic; it is not an archetype nor a concept. [In a way it is the unknowable.] Mircea Eliade commented abundantly on the Center. For him, it is the locus where all the essential modes of being meet. This means that we cannot reduce the Center to a symbol. The Center is non-Knowing/non-Being. It is the sacred space-time and it is included in Unity, while profane

space is delimited by the frontiers of experience. Sacred space used to be physical (merging with a physical location). But today it became delimited by the behavioral space. The Center is the locus of strong tensions. It is both origin and destination. It is linked to the Creation as it is linked to healing. In modern Psychology, only Jung acknowledged the importance of the Center in the equilibrium of the psyche. But for him the Center remained an attribute of Knowing (an archetype). For Jung, the Center is the Ego, to which all contents of consciousness are linked. The East has always recognized the importance of the Center, probably because it was less subject to the division body-spirit. In Japan, Ki is at once spiritual, material and energetic. The West took the dichotomy subject-object as granted, therefore psychology is just starting to examine the notion that 'Me-That' emerge from a common field..

From here on, Low examines the consequence of this framework in matters of awareness and consciousness.²⁸ His central thesis is that we cannot be aware of the world (*présent au monde*). We are always at a remove from the world, a fact that Kant recognized on the level of logic, i.e. the impossibility for knowledge to attain its object (since this 'object as it really is' would be nothing more than a new knowledge of it). Low distinguishes two types of awareness : 'Awareness-as' and 'Awareness-of'. In the 'Awareness-as', there is no subject (for example 'to hear'). In the 'Awareness-of' there is the birth of reflexivity. There is a subject and an object, and the subject is beginning to be aware that he/she is aware (for example 'to listen'). Therefore, to be aware of the world is in fact to be 'Aware-of Awareness-as-the world'. It is the birth of consciousness. (Here

²⁸ Awareness-as is not personal. Neither is it a superior consciousness. It is the elementary condition for the emergence of consciousness.

Awareness is synonymous of Knowing, since Being cannot be known as Being). The 'Awareness-as-Awareness' is what is called in Indian traditions the Samadhi.

Me :

The 'Me' (which is not yet the 'I') is born when there is a dualism center-periphery.²⁹

The Awareness focalized on a center is the Awareness-of. The Awareness-as is devoid of center, it is not therefore 'my' awareness, since it is not yet focalized. It could be linked to what psychologists name the unconscious or the pre-conscious. But Psychologist often take this Awareness as a deficiency, as a not-so-conscious level of awareness, while for Low it is the primary - and maybe more inclusive - level of awareness. This 'Awareness-as' is not consciousness (consciousness begins only with the Awareness-of). It is the non-mental of Buddhism, the 'meditation' of the Sufi, the recall of oneself of Gurdjieff

The 'Me' is the 'Awareness-of-Awareness-of ...'. It is the beginning of consciousness, the birth of the separation between the subject and the world; it is the beginning of an 'interior life', but it is also the beginning of a vicious circle. It is the Uroboros of the Ancients, the serpent biting its tail. Nietzsche called it 'the abyss of anguish'.³⁰

You :

²⁹ The 'Me' is the point of view. The 'Me' does not *have* a point of view. The 'Me' *is* the point of view. That which *has* the point of view is the 'I', because in the 'I' there is identification with the point of view. Thus animals share the 'Me' with humans, but not the 'I'.

³⁰ Our language does not allow to talk of dynamic unity, but only of parts in relation with other parts. **This entails that we cannot help but see the source of movement as an agent.** But the intention, the motor of evolution encapsulated in this folding of awareness upon itself is not the property of an organism. (This a way to say that the now trendy return to the concept of 'agency' in anthropology origins in a worldview that is predicated upon the individual, i.e. the 'I' as being indivisible.)

Two of the existing antidotes to the horror generated by the wound center/periphery are 1) the awakening to 'You' (the 'other') and 2) the establishing of a center. But for Low, the 'Other' does not need the existential support of a 'real' other; that does not mean that it is imaginary or illusory.³¹ In other words, 'You', the 'Other', does not depend upon the sensory data. Awareness-of-Awareness-of... (hereafter Awareness-of...) is already 'You'. It is because 'You' is in already consciousness, because consciousness is divided, that we can (or must) project 'you' in Being, in a 'real world' out there.³² The 'other' only gives expression to 'You'. For example, 'You' can be bestowed upon objects, machines, people, groups of people, God, etc.. Looking in the eyes of somebody is to become at once subject and object. So the threat of the other comes from the Awareness-of..., which is, as we said, a reflective Awareness. Reflective awareness (or consciousness) can lead to ecstasy when it comes to see itself objectively, when it loses contact with Being. The reification of the 'You' (body or idol) is the loss of the noumenal, but also the loss of love.

What is interesting here is that in this view, **'Me' and 'You' are upstream of experience.** The meeting of 'Me' and 'You' therefore happens in another world, not a world of objects, but the *intermediary world of creative imagination* (which is not fantasy, but of utmost reality). Since the Awareness-of is upstream of consciousness, we

³¹ The feeling of being watched is the same whether there really is someone or not. The same is true of children afraid of the dark, or of the feeling of a presence in an unknown house. The actual physical presence can be a trigger, but never the source of this feeling. The rub is that there is not two Awareness-of, but only one. Awareness-of is an awareness folded upon itself, reflecting itself. 'You' emerges from this folding of Awareness upon itself.

³² We could say that in this view, to attribute consciousness to an 'other' is already a false problem, or a bad way to formulate the problem, and this is a way to understand the undividedness of awareness : consciousness is not in the other, it is the other that is in consciousness. This looks pretty close to idealism, but in my sense it is not. As Low says : for the idealist, the created is in the mind of the creator. For Low, the creator and the created are in creation. Both are created.

cannot "grasp the other as a form in consciousness". One of the function of consciousness is precisely to avoid a direct contact with the 'You'. 'You' is like a hole in existence through which one can touch heaven and hell. Creativity, Romantic love and spirituality are all this push towards the recovery of the lost unity, and this unity was lost when Awareness turned upon itself – with the birth of reflectivity. The motor of Zen for example is 'The Great Doubt', or 'The Great Nostalgia'.

Ideas :

The idea is the eye of Unity. Unity is already implicit in perception, as Gestalt psychology demonstrated. The act of perceiving is the act of creating wholes. But are these totalities created or discovered ? Low uses the term Idea in a different way as it is generally used nowadays. We are the inheritors of Descartes, for whom the idea was a concept. For Low the Idea is neither cognitive nor representative. The Idea is not a transcendental entity (of which things would be samples, as in Plato). It is *not opposed* to reality, and *not about* reality. Its etymology goes back to Greece: Idein, 'to see'. The Idea is generative. We need Ideas to perceive. "The Idea is that by which a thing is what it is: in this sense, the Idea is more like a window than a picture." (p 241). The Idea reveals relations. The Idea can concentrate the power of Unity as a magnifying glass and can go so far as to create whole worlds.³³ But to *speak* or write about Ideas is to transform them into concepts.

³³ An interesting distinction is done here between Analysis and Intuition. Analysis comes from 'analyein' .- to cut in pieces. To analyze is to isolate simple elements and combine them into complex relationships. Intuition does the opposite. It isolates simple relationship and goes in the direction of unique elements, dissimilar and complex. Analysis is a spiral inwards, from the particular of parts to the hearth of things, the unity of complex relations: Intuition is a spiral outwards, from simple relations perceived as wholes -the heart of things - to a gathering of justifications. Analysis reduces, Intuition incorporates. The Idea is the dynamic field between analysis and intuition.

Strategies for the restoration of Unity

1) Language :

In this center-periphery dynamic, the Word has a special role. Many religions say that at the beginning, there was the word. To name is not to apply a label to things. To name is to bring things into existence.³⁴ The Word fix the idea of the world. The 'Om' of the Indian tradition is not a symbol. Before the Word, everything lies in a penumbra of sorts. It is a consciousness without any clarity, without stability nor permanency- there is no future nor past. Quoting Helen Keller, and referring the torpor one experiences in the practice of Zen. Low thinks that a consciousness without the Word must be the most anguishing or distressful state that one can experience. The Word create center to things. Words embody perfectly the ever broken promise of the center, the 'something that is going to happen'³⁵ but which never does. This is why people chat endlessly. This is a way to fix the Center. But by doing so, words lose little by little their power. We need more and more myths, philosophies, sciences, ideologies, psychology and literatures to reach this Center.

Words are the embodiment of the Idea. In Sanskrit, linguistic roots are verbs : the word is a thing that is happening, a notion that acknowledges that the Center is a dynamic Unity.³⁶ Heidegger saw that language is an antidote to dread. In language, the world becomes 'something somewhere'. An ambiguity that is not contained, that stays

³⁴ See Witherspoon on the generative power of words among the Navajo.

³⁵ Low says that consciousness always promises that the center will emerge as form. The Prajnāpāramitā Hridaya Sutra says that form is emptiness and emptiness is form.

³⁶ See Witherspoon, Gary : Language and Art in the Navajo Universe (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press); for Navajo too, 'things' are verbs.

unconfined, generates dread because “the possibility of Unity devouring itself is manifested”. (p312). An unconfined ambiguity equates the loss of the Center.

In the optic of existing strategies for the management of ambiguity, the Word is a double bind of sorts. “We have created consciousness with the Word in order to avoid hell and in doing so, we relinquished the Paradise. Some people however, thanks to the creative power of the Unity, can avoid the obstructions of consciousness, escape its verbal atmosphere and even describe, hesitantly, what they found.” (p355).

2) Creativity :

This ardent longing for the Unity is the unarticulated cry or shout (*cri inarticulé*) that is the ultimate motivation for the creative act. But this creativity is not only human. “It is only by accepting to see creativity as inherent to the universe that we can attribute it to humans.” (p.205). ***Therefore creativity is not a luxury, it is a necessity.*** The notion of ‘germ’ has been used by numerous creators and theoretician (T.S. Eliot, Henry James, Briggs) to describe the beginning of the creative process, this unknown that seeks an expression. The poet must find the words, but s/he does not know what words s/he is looking for before s/he finds them. One does not know what one wants to say before saying it (T.S. Eliot, p. 208 in Low 1999). Bateson too acquiesced to the fact that in science, as in art, we only know what were the problems once they are resolved (see *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*). But the germ is not yet an idea, not even an emotion.

The suddenness of Creativity is proverbial. In Creativity, the spirit/mind feels it is overwhelmed by itself. This suddenness that also characterizes authentic love and spiritual awakening is nothing but the irruption of Unity. But the same suddenness

characterizes violence. Violence stems from the same need for Unity, but in violence, Unity can be reached only if one of the two adversaries is eliminated.

3) Religious solutions :

The mandate of Religion is the management of this intermediary zone between Knowing and Being (this zone that translates as: *the ambiguity of being/knowing-oneself as the observer and the observed*). But religion do this in a different way than language and creativity do : religion at its best aims at transcending the duality, not only containing it. People from different cultures and era have used different strategy to reinforce the Center, but they are encompassed into two generic types : violence and creativity. 1) The sacrifice is such instance where violence is managed by being ritually performed. The victim becomes sacred because profaned. The ambiguity "this is this/ this is not this" is enacted by the mean of a simulacrum that becomes more real than reality, as in theater for example. 2) Magic has been denied reality by people like Sir James Fraser. For him, magic is bad science, and following the same vein, we would have to conclude that poetry is bad prose. Low thinks we have to recognize that one of the main aspect of magic is the management of ambiguity, something it does by expressing metaphors through their actualization. The Temple [as the Altar, we could add] is an instance of such a living metaphor and as such it is the source of a vital power that is real: it is a monad, a whole and it escapes historical time. The Temple gathers discontinuous moments [the rituals and epiphanies], moments that lie outside chronological time and that erupt into chronological time as pouches of eternity. This is also true of creativity (this is the instantaneous-ness of the Eureka) and therefore, these moments have their own time, irreducible to chronological time. 3)Devotional and transcendental practices

are the third type of religious solutions. According to Low the heart of the Sufi tradition (an example of devotional practice) is “the desire to attain a pure relation Me-You”. Sufism acknowledges the existence of an intermediary zone, between matter and pure spirit, a zone that is called active imagination. (see section 3.2.2 on active imagination). Zen (an example of transcendental practice) is one of the religious paths that acquiesce to the necessity of penetrating ambiguity to restore Unity. Hence the emphasis on creating in the disciple a mass of doubt that amounts to a double bind. Low thinks that clarity is but one dimension of reality. But it can never be the referee of reality. Some infiltration of ambiguity into science can be found in the theorem of uncompleted-ness of Godel, in the Law of uncertainty of Heisenberg, and in the logic of Lupasco. Low thinks that the problems of humans do not come from the ambiguity itself, but from its circumspection in words. A fixed ambiguity creates consciousness, experience and existence. The awakening of Zen is the awakening to the mistake of trying to grasp the nul point.

Highlights of Low’s model :

- Low’s model is truly anthropological, in the sense that it tries to give sense to the whole of Man.
- His model bridges the gap between Eastern and Western epistemologies, at least on the level of language, which makes it all the more anthropological.
- It is a model that is all-inclusive, in the sense that it accounts for itself as myth. It is a story that explains the role of stories in the constitution of the real.
- Low makes the distinction as Nisargadatta between Awareness and Consciousness. Consciousness is reflective, awareness is not necessarily.

- Low's model reconciles non-teleological science (Darwinism) with teleological religion, through an 'empty teleology'. It therefore explains 'evolution' as a gradual layering of consciousness, and allows for a dissociation of the notions of 'progress' and 'evolution' through the notion of 'involution'.
- The model places creativity at the center of a teleological, 'involutionary' model.
- In this model creativity is necessary and inevitable, not contingent.
- In this model creativity is a property of the universe, not of the individual.
- The tension center-periphery – as an inherent characteristic of consciousness - is a useful model to understand the obsession of creators (the restlessness, the hunger for always more creations); furthermore, when put in correlation with the secularization of modern societies (religion no longer being able to do the management of this tension), this tension could account for the creative hunger of modern times. It links with Weber saying that art and erotic replaced religion.
- This model also allows for a unification of religion, art and intellectual knowledge.
- The model allows for a unification (that is not a reduction) of the phenomena of Satori, Kensho, and Eureka, by *situating them outside culture, without putting them into 'nature'*.

2.2.4 On the introduction of universalist models in anthropology

Low's model claims to be valid for everyone and every eras, and yet he feels the need to say that the genre to which his book pertains is mythology. Sartre, Bateson, Nisargadatta all claim to describe the world as it is. And yet at least two of them (save Sartre) see the catch of words, the catch of theories that claim to touch the real. We seem

to be in the grip of a monumental contradiction, where *we need words to say what words cannot do*. What sense can we make of this ? And how in the first place do we dare introducing a universalist stance (Low and Nisargadatta) in anthropology, in a time where the discipline seems to have 'solved the problem' of universals ?

The object of anthropology, humanity, is constantly redefined, as a consequence of the anthropological inquiry itself. This should not surprise us : the same is true in all discipline, scientific or not. The possibility for a Logos of Man (anthropo-logy) depends on the existence of 'Man', a generic category if there is one, a category overheading a group of beings who partake a number of features. 'Consciousness' is certainly one of these features, even it is still to be defined, and even if some of the exemplaries of this category lack of it (for example people in coma are still humans). And even if we agree that it is locally defined, the fact that we are still *looking for a different version of a same thing* is an indication that we are using the capacity to be 'conscious' as an a-priori, before any definition, in order to define what it means to be human.

Post-Modernism supposedly succeeded in banning structuralism, and to a lesser extend hard-core phenomenology, by proclaiming the 'end of all grand meta-narrative'; structuralism would die from having through that structures preclude experience, and phenomenology from adhering to the notion of 'essence', itself an outside of existence. Besides biting the tail of self-contradiction – this proclamation being rather 'meta' itself (Thompson 1996 : 578-90; McLennan 1996 : 644), the post-modern critique of structuralism and phenomenology often forgets what it owes to those two currents. Aren't 'structure' and 'phenomena' another lexicon for 'continuity' and 'change' ?

In my sense, a true phenomenological approach would try to seize *where* does universality 'happen': this 'where' is not a place in the world, as a natural entity – not even 'consciousness' and certainly not an individual mind – but *a place among phenomena*. In other words : it is certainly a categorical error to reify essences, to give them existence. But the same categorical error is responsible for their denying. For one needs the essence of the word essence to deny essences. In fact we could say that Post-modernism is a return to naturalism because in it, we go back to the identification of 'names' to 'things'. In Post-modernism, names are the things they indicate. Post-modernism refuses essences because it thinks that essences are in the realm of Being, when it is obvious that they pertain to the realm of Knowing only. Refusing essences as if they were in the 'real world' is forgetting that they are a necessity of language. Thus what we need is not a condemnation of essences, but restricting the applicability of language.

Furthermore, universals, essences, do not have to be known by all to exist : the number 2 'exists' (here we tackle the limits of language...) outside illiterate John Smith's ignorance of it (Husserl 1970). One needs the essence of the number '2' to refute it. To add to this : ***Universals may be local !³⁷*** Beauty and Rage are two examples of states that can be seen as self-justificatory, a hard fact to swallow for many post-modern thinkers who are not equipped to deal with universals. However, some of them find universals even against their will. Renato Rosaldo discovers that in the grief following the death of his wife, he finds the same rage that has the Llongots avenge their deaths with

³⁷ In his second period, Husserl withdrew from his notion that 'truth is absolute by definition', and tried to explain truth through his notion of 'intersubjectivity'. In my sense, 'Universals' cannot be the result of an agreement, a consensus between subjects. *And this because the building block of intersubjectivity, 'subject', the 'Individuals' is already a consensus.* The universal cannot be determined by the relative, by definition. I propose to withdraw from the notion of 'Universals', like things among things, and lean towards the notion of 'universality', which is closer to the experiential fact : a state, an awareness that is

headhunting. This hard fact was not available to Rosaldo before the death of his wife. He had tried to explain it away, but when he experienced it himself, he comes to the conclusion that nothing can explain the rage in grief. In grief there is rage. His find is experiential. It is paradigmatic. Kant demonstrated that the beautiful has to *give itself as* absolute to exist. In beauty, beauty *is*. How seriously would you take someone who would tell you : 'Oh! This is really beautiful but in fact it is not the thing I find beautiful but my social conditioning...' ? Anthropologist Maquet expounds on this by saying that beauty, like meditative states, amounts to a suspension of judgment. Coming back from the experience of the beautiful, we can say 'oh now I understand, it is because of the traumas in my youth' (sic). But then understanding beauty is not experiencing it. Another more philosophical way to say this is that judgemental states cannot found non-judgemental states. The same is true of ethics. The true cannot found the good, and vice versa. Closer to our study is the troubling discovery that the 'Center' is *both* relative and absolute. Relative, because there are many centers, as many as there are individuals in fact, and even more, since individuals are often torn apart between conflicting selves. Each 'center' is locally valid. Absolute, because there can be only one center. A Center', to exist as such, must be unique, or at least more central than the others, otherwise it loses its power as a center. For example if media arts become more popular than sculpture, then sculpture, as the center of Guy Laramée and of a bunch of other people, is thrown at the periphery and it thus weakened as center.

characterized not so much by certitudes (in the sense of 'dogma' or 'doxa') but by an absence of doubts (see section 4.1 on attitudes). Moreover, this is closer to Eastern epistemologies.

In fact we see that we never departed from the ambiguity Knowing-Being that we underlined here : words, numbers designate and create 'things' as if they would contain them, and still, the 'things' created by language always escape language.

In order to seize the complexity of the issue on the terrain of anthropology, I would like to offer a case study : Michael Winkelman's critique of Wilber in the name of cultural relativism. This will show, I hope, that a new way of thinking is needed to deal with paradoxes of that sort. Winkelman examines Wilber's Integral Theory of Consciousness, which posits that some level of consciousness are superior to others, and that there is an evolution of consciousness in history, from lower stages to higher stages. According to Winkelman, Wilber argues that "the position of shamans in the evolution of consciousness is assessed by placing their practice in the context of the levels derived from contemplative traditions of the East, which are presumed to represent a universal evolutionary sequence, both from ontogenetic and phylogenetic developmental perspectives." (Winkelman 1993 : 4) Wilber places his three stages, subtle, causal and absolute on a historical line. Shamans are said to have not entered into the causal and absolute stages. Winkelman answers : "The notion of superior stages is incompatible with many anthropological findings and perspectives, including : the realizations of cultural relativism, the characterizations of general and specific evolution as manifested in levels of socio-cultural evolution of political integration, the principles of ecological adaptation, and the recognition of a lack of directionality in the domain of physical evolution". [The last step of the argument is important, since it makes us intuit of a link between Evolutionism (even Darwinism) and cultural relativism...! : a lack of directionality that is the fruit of superior, more evolved theories...!] And later : "Cultural relativism reflects

the understanding that a culture's behaviour makes sense in light of its own beliefs and resources, and establishes that there is no culture-free point of view to evaluate which cultural form is more highly evolved in a cultural, moral or spiritual sense." (Winkelman 1993 : 6).

Trying to find an absolute value to relativism is a risky business... Winkelman tries to redeem himself through examining function : "Buddhism and shamanism aspire to different states of consciousness. ...In the highest developments [of Buddhism and classic yoga], attention is fixed upon consciousness itself." (Winkelman 1993 : 5). This leads the practitioner to experience states that are "totally isolated from the social context" (idem). Given the social implication of the shaman, these states would be of no use to him.

The author equates 'more evolved' to 'better adapted'. There is a twist in Winkelman's argument. He confounds social role with states of consciousness, and measure development through adaptability to the environment, social and natural. Winkelman evaluates states through function, but he is the one who identifies function. Thus we have two incompatible worlds : one says that it is possible to compare, the other says that if we are to compare we must use the internal criteria of the culture form which we take the trait. Since there is no common ground between cultures, it is impossible to achieve this cross-cultural analysis. Winkelman says tacitly that there is no 'consciousness' as a generic property of humans. This goes in the same direction as the recent critiques in anthropology who argue that categories such as 'Shamanism' must be abandoned, alluding to a 'fact' that those practices that are subsumed under the term are

too local and different to be compared. At this pace, we might pretty soon drop language altogether...

Winkelman gets himself into trouble without apparently noticing it, when he writes immediately after that Anthropology and Transpersonal psychology converge in seeing that cultural relativism might be both a tool for this evaluation and a transcendental truth. "The cross-cultural approach has advantages in providing multiple perspectives that are more encompassing and complete"... "Cross-cultural observations and multi-method approaches provide a basis with which to identify the invariant underlying structural properties of the human knowledge system (neurognosis), independent of the variant patterns of human and cultural behaviour through which they are manifested." (idem)

In such a mish-mash of contradictions, the only way out for Winkelman is to do what Bateson tries to do : replace relativism in a naturalist perspective (i.e. relativism is more adaptative to the survival of the species). And indeed one could think that here is the only useful contribution of Winkelman : quoting Schoun who says that "Exoteric cannot be exclusive expressions of unique truth, because the expression assumes a form, and no form can be the only possible way of expressing the truth." (Winkelman 1993 : 7). Schoun admits contradictory views, because they are only *parts* of an Integral view that theoretically includes the sum total of all point of views (infinite).³⁸ This is why relativism is grounded in the metaphysical realm, because it "supersedes the limitation of the rational mind". (Winkelman 1993 : 8). Thus every religious system is superior to the other in some aspect. The dogmatic statement is thus legitimated, it is the expression of a *certain* truth, a relative truth. Spirit possession can be viewed as a lack of control, or as

allowing oneself to be overtaken by spirits. Buddhism “void” or Samadhi can be seen as detachment, or as “refusal to address the everyday realities”. (Winkelman 1993 : 8) What is valued and how it is valued depends on the cultural context. Then thanks to cultural relativism, the new unifying paradigm (sic), we are now allowed to re-introduce universalist schemes, which will have only a local but still useful value...And so are we of re-introducing religious fundamentalism, fascism, etc..(re-sic).

We can see that the war between universalism and relativism is in fact a dance. When Mead found that sexual behaviour was learned, she found in fact a universal : humans are cultural (which is the greatest universal of them all, indeed). Now to return to the hypothesis of creativity as step out of culture : if we equate ‘consciousness’ in Low’s model with ‘culture’ in anthropology, then this ‘out of culture’ is not matter or biology; it might be called ‘the unconditioned’ in Martin’s term (Martin) – which is not the innate in the sense of the genetic, it may be called ‘unreflective awareness’ in Low’s terms, or ‘true self’ in the Buddhist Sutras. We should insist once more on the difficulty to grasp and use the notion of an undivided consciousness (or rather awareness)³⁹; the individual is the new center of our times, and it is very hard for us to quit that center. So instead of rejecting cultural relativism, we should welcome it for the possibility to stay in the midst of ambiguity. Eastern epistemologies could help us accepting the contradictions of cultural relativism by treating them as an unsolvable paradox, unsolvable at least on the

³⁸ This view of the whole as sum of parts is the trademark of an analytical view, as we saw earlier.

³⁹ To see the persistence of our thinking in term of the ‘individual’ equating the biological organism : the reader will probably have thought of this ‘undivided awareness’ as a potential property or state of an individual, of a person. But the paradigm is much more radical : Undivided awareness means that there is no difference between you and me. Awareness is not sprinkled onto individuals. The division between you and me is illusory. There is only one awareness, and it reposes in nobody in particular, and in everybody in general. There is only one mind, not a collection of minds. Thus to enter into this non-divided awareness is not to acquire, as the person that you and me are, one more property, but to dissolve all properties.

level of language and reason. As we will see, 'creativity' might be a first step in grasping paradoxical thinking.

(Section) **3- ETHNOGRAPHY**

Abstract :

In this section, I present the data gained through one year of field work as a graduate student in an art school (Université du Québec à Montréal). Save the general description of the context, the material is structured along three main categories : 1) the notion of 'project' in contemporary art; 2) the creative act per se, i.e. what is often labeled as 'the Eureka', inspiration, intuition, etc.; 3) the center-periphery dynamism in the creative self. These categories are artificially divided in three chapters, each of which beginning with a literature review. The curve of these three chapters first establishes (in the first two chapters) the two poles of an apparent dichotomy : projection and spontaneity, planning and intuition, instrumentalization and non-instrumentalization or art (and creative endeavors in general). A special sub-chapter is devoted to the relation of discourses to practices that have been portrayed as essentially non-discursive. The material is then sifted through Albert Low's thesis that consciousness entail a center-periphery dynamism. The curve of this last chapter of section 3- is important to mention : the author aims at validating the notion that self-other dichotomies can be seen as emanating from a permanently split self, i.e. Low's idea that 'other-ness' is anterior to experience.

The whole section is structures as to answer the two foundational questions of this study: endlessness of creativity (and consequent restlessness of creators) and the link of creativity to levels of consciousness and awareness. The conclusion of chapter 3 fuses the two questions in one : Could it be that the answer to endlessness/restlessness lies in the reflective and split nature of the self, an ek-centric self that constantly looks for itself outside of itself ? And is not creativity an expression of the need for the self to escape reflexivity ? In other words, is not the ek-centric nature of the self an answer to this quest for the new ? This questioning is voiced explicitly in sections 4- and 5-.

The section problematizes the question of reflectivity by 1) asking if reflectivity is antinomical to creativity and 2) by making extensive use of first person methods, in the form of quotes from the author's field notes.

3- ETHNOGRAPHY

3.1 DESCRIPTION OF FIELD WORK

3.1.1 : Premises

I did my field work as a student in a graduate school of fine arts in Montreal. Being an artist myself, it seemed natural in a study of creativity to turn to people who claim to be professional 'creators'. But what is 'art', who is an 'artist' in the 21st century ? Art, as a Western denomination (Maquet 1986) has become a field that displays strong transnational characteristics. Although the social ties between agents are often times very loosely knit, we have a community in the sense that 1) artists share with other artists in the world a common definition and similar performance of their practice; 2) at the center of their performance activity is the notion of "tour", i.e. having the shows travel internationally ideally.

My study is grounded in the art milieu in Montreal. I found two comparative studies for the same population. Deschamps is a researcher from the field of Education who did a phenomenological survey of 19 artists, out of which she closely followed three (Deschamps 2002). Her study aims at revealing the phenomena of 'Chaos' in creation. Her study enlightens the interweaving of profession and professional life for the artists. Creative crisis almost always correspond to personal crisis. I have used her study throughout this paper.

In 1985, Bernier & Perreault published a sociological survey about the general condition of the artist. Their sample consists of 18 professional artists in the region of Montreal. I read this enquiry once well advanced in the writing of my thesis. The main thing I have to say is that this reading was a big confirmation of my data. The space lacks

here to bring in all the data that was cross-validated, I can only entice the reader to read the work.

These two studies are remarkable for the level of penetration they allow in the lives of the informants. However something has to be said about the nature of the knowledge that both studies bring. Both studies are done from the outside, in the sense that the researcher did not try to gain membership in the community. They were not nor did they become artists themselves. Despite a quite extensive research of the literature, I failed to find of any similar field work as mine (i.e. as participant). I think this fact has to be addressed.

There exists an important sub field of sociology that is concerned with art (the sociology of art). The same is true for anthropology (aesthetics). The sociology of art is concerned with exactly the same object as mine : contemporary art productions in the West. Anthropology has traditionally focused on non-Western aesthetic productions, the consequence of which being that I have not found yet a single ethnography of contemporary artists... In his magnificent work on aesthetics, Maquet (1986) confesses he did not consult one single artist. "Should we consult them ?" does he asks candidly. This adds to the relative scarcity, in anthropology, of theoretical work around the concept of creativity. How could that be?

For me there are two main differences between sociology and anthropology. Sociology takes 'society' as its main object. Thus the sociology of art is still "concerned essentially with the context of production, of dissemination and of reception of art works." (Uzel 1997 : 25). Sociologist Heinrich warns us against the "sociological hegemonism, which haunts this will to encompass everything in the discourse of the

sociologist” (Heinich 1992 : 12). In anthropology, one often gets the feeling that ‘culture’ has come to mean ‘society’. But such a reduction would not only deprive anthropology of its object of study, it could impede the study of non-societal phenomena.

But in my sense, outside delineating its object differently than sociology, for me the basic difference between sociology and anthropology is the level of participation in the field, or better said, a different positioning in the participation-observation continuum. Cultural anthropologists are apprentices. They learn a culture, not so much by interviewing and doing statistics – all external observations, all tools of sociologists – but by attempting to become a member of the culture they are interested in. Most of the time, they can only afford a partial membership. So to explain the relative absence of ethnographic work among contemporary Western artists, one could first examine what kind of participation anthropologists sought or were able to get in that ‘culture’.

3.1.2 :Field Report

My field research was done mostly at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). I did some peripheral interviews outside the campus, mainly to examine from the outside of academia the tension between schooled and non-schooled practitioners; I also attended to my normal professional activities, this time with the eye of the anthropologist. But I soon realized that the school was going to be my main resource : it gave me access to a wide basin of practitioners – professors, ‘chargés de cours’, students, all of which opened on a variety of very diverse networks.

In the spring 2001 I was accepted as student in the graduate program of Visual and Media Arts at UQAM. The program aims at forming professional artists, artists who

will work in the idiom and milieu of 'contemporary art' (i.e. non-commercial). I have been an interdisciplinary artist for nearly 20 years now, but studying visual arts in an academic context provided me with an interesting challenge since, as I see things, the main 'obstacle' today to a true melting of disciplinary frontiers is the divide between private practices (studio) and public practices (performing arts). Having worked mainly on the 'performing arts' side of the frontier, and having practiced painting and sculpture for 10 years on my own, I was aware of the difference between the two sets of cultures. Although through the years I gained professional membership in performing arts, I did not yet consider myself a member of the visual arts culture. Now that I was having the chance of entering this milieu by the front door (i.e. the university, the other being the street or self-teaching), I decided to use this as an opportunity to do field work.

The program has two concentrations, teaching and creation; I enrolled at the fall 2001 as a part time student of the creation concentration. My field officially started in September 2001, but in fact it really began in June, since I had to produce some drawings for the beginning of classes. It ended in June 2002, so to speak. That is : I stopped taking written notes.

Technically speaking, I took four classes over three semesters : The 'Atelier de création' I, II and III (Creation workshops), and the 'Séminaire de création' (a seminar devoted to discuss the theoretical problematic of each student). My field work consisted roughly of 95% full immersion, as participant-observer (including informal conversations), and 5% of interviews. I feel the need to put the interviews outside the participation-observation continuum, because they were staged by me and I feel that both me and my co-researchers (Deschamps : 'informants') felt them as being truly coming

from 'outside' the actual school situation. That means also that I became of full member of the student body through a non-equivocal participation.

Formal classes were far from being the only instances of my participation to the field. Casual conversations with fellow students and teachers, lectures, group exhibits and solitary work in the 'ateliers' kept me quite busy. The faculty provided each of the 17 students a place in one of the three studios available. The faculty itself occupies four floor of a whole pavilion (aside from the 30 students at the Master level, the school has a student body of about 500 students at the undergrad level). Each floor is relatively specialised. Since I was accepted on the basis of a sculpture project, I asked for a space on the fifth floor where all the heavy shops are (wood, metal, stone, ceramics, plaster, resin).

The short curve (a typical week)

For fall and winter terms I had classes one Tuesday out of two, and on Wednesday. The classes lasted between 3 to 4 hours. The full-time students had two other classes per semester, one methodology class (alternating with the seminar class, every two weeks), and one theory class, on a specific topic (two classes on the new technologies in the first semester, a 'subjectivity and identity' class and a 'performance' class on the second term). In the Summer term, I took the mandatory Atelier de creation II class, which was of a different type than the two previous Atelier classes, in that it focussed less on production, paradoxically for a production class, and more on reflection. Indeed, most of the class was devoted to a very free written correspondence between students.

Besides these roughly six hours of class per week, I devoted not less than 15 hours, and generally 20 hours per week to solitary work in my atelier. Of course this does not include the search for inspiration at the library, nor the time spent thinking about the work, at home, in the street, everywhere in fact... I had to start focussing on a project, my thesis project, the phases of which were to be presented in gallery at the end of each semester (excluding the summer semester). Occasionally during the week I would chat with my co-workers in the atelier (not very often though, not too many students actually used their work space at school) or go have a lunch or coffee with my other student colleagues. A typical week would also include a vernissage on campus, sometimes two. Parties would often be organized around those events. This means that a typical week meant spending more or less 35 hours in the field.

The long curve (the full year)

The program is of the 'mémoire-création' type, which means that the work is expected to be split equally – and equally evaluated – between an artistic production (to be presented in a professional setting outside UQAM) and the writing of a thesis around one's preoccupation (either preoccupations brought forward by the artistic work itself, or surrounding its situation into a historical and social context). The first year is devoted to fulfilling '*scolarité*' : with few exceptions, full time students are not expected to have any formal classes during the second year. The purpose of this first year of the program is to provide students with the necessary tools to be able to conduct the following year of solitary research, which is divided between creation and thesis (the requested length for the thesis ('*memoire*') being between 30 and 60 pages).

The fall semester and the winter semester were each concluded by a group exhibit in the CDD (Centre de Diffusion des étudiants à la maîtrise en arts visuels et médiatiques). Each time this process was quite intense. The *'point de chute'* of the first year is also the choice of a director (thesis supervisor) and the submitting of a research subject, which subject has to be approved by a special committee. This is a painful process for students, for their subject is very seldom accepted the first time (only one out of 16 was accepted at the first round). Students go back to work with their director, sometimes up to three times, to the dismay of their directors (directors seem to be always spellbound at this, and to never understand why committees – on which they sit once in a while - refuse what committee members themselves supervise...!)

Being a part time student reinforced slightly my double status (anthropologist and artist) for I could not follow the group in each of its activities. 'The group', as with every other cohort, was also a very flexible unit and although I noted an incredible cohesion between members (the director of the program said she had never seen such a strong cohort in 15 years of teaching), sub-groups were often formed. Although students acknowledged my double status, they nevertheless considered me a full member of the group, and even sometimes as a sort of 'supra' member ("Guy is the doctor of the group" –Claire), in the sense that my total involvement (artistically speaking I probably worked more than anyone else, probably also to gain my status) and what they could feel of my previous artistic career (I avoided pretty much to expound on this) succeeded in leveling most inside/outside dualism. I was one of them, period. But at the same time, students and teachers felt that my questions (I became identified as the one asking questions) were coming from a different set of preoccupations. Re-affirming the affinity between art and

anthropology, some students praised me for “always asking the best questions, right to the point”; teachers beg me to attend conferences in order to ask my questions; but some students, mostly the ones at home in critical theory (in art), also seemed uncomfortable with my liminal status. I think they felt that my questions challenged the self-containment of art theory, and of their own practice and situation within the field, by the same token. I finally learned through one teacher that I was perceived by the students as the erudite of the class.

Apart from the question of social status, I felt that this double nature of my presence in the group was restricting my full participation – and this is probably why I resolved to work twice as hard as many of them in the studio. Indeed, many teachers alluded to this obliquely. Professor Schofield said I had put myself in something very demanding. Visiting artist Townsend said “it must be a lot of readings...!”. Finally Monique Régimbald came to the point by saying that I should not carry my anthropology into art making. The two sets of premises were contradictory (see section 3.2.2.4 on discourse / non-discourse). Thus to be a full participant I had to be ‘not too much anthropologist’. This was not a question of social identity (‘le paraître’); it was a question of being able to set the intellect and intellectual reasoning aside while I was creating. I understood that very early, and decided that I would not conduct too many interviews, nor any activities that would set me apart from the group. Again, that was not so much to gain identity, nor to ‘play the game fully’: I felt viscerally the relative antinomy of two ways of seeing, of ‘acting out’ the world. In one the world was a given.

in the sense that it could be known through linguistic representations, in the other it was not.

As noted earlier, one central problem of the research is the relation between reflective and non-reflective modes of consciousness. On the level of the practical inquiry, this problem translates in those terms : How can non-reflectivity leave traces in reflectivity ? (i.e. the problem of the creative amnesia reported by creators : remembering the content but not the context, the "what" but not the how", nor the "why" of insights). Worded otherwise, to get closer with our concern of also making sense of an anthropological enterprise on that subject matter : How can ethnography, in itself a reflective enterprise, inform us about non-reflective moments and/or instances, without destroying the object it wants to study ? This field work also casts the existence of different types of 'reflectivity' as is presented in Low's model and in Nisargadatta; in personal conversation, Low makes a sharp difference between "being one with" (a non-reflective awareness that is a greater presence) and "being identified with" (which is more or less an oblivion of oneself, in instances of fascination, for example).

Being conscious of that paradox, I had to use the proper methods of integrating and creating the field, not to avoid the paradox but to fully plunge into it. As mentioned earlier, this project called for a full participation, not only the observation of creative process as they happen to others. Participating in creation is necessarily to be in charge of creative decisions. Here witnessing was to be-come a creator. In this sense, the method I used was close to the point of view of ethnomethodology which considers that "accounts are not simply representations of the world; they are part of the world they describe"(Hammersley & Atkinson 1996). In this sense, the choice to ask the question of

'what an ethnography of artists means to artists', to ask 'what non-discursive knowers make of discursive knowledge' is not only the result of a theoretical bias, but a necessary outcome of the project .

The data I gathered is mainly of three types. I took extensive notes of in-class exchanges, both on the spot as raw notes and afterwards in the form of first draft analysis. I reconstituted interviews, by mixing the same kind of rough analysis with chronological narratives. (I had also access to some of the required writings of most of the students.) But what distinguishes this field, I think, is the insights allowed by my complete immersion. Thus I decided to adopt a Heuristic method (Moustakas 1990, 1994) and for part of the field work, I became the phenomenon I was studying. At certain moments, in the midst of the creative process for example, I became my own informant. Since the field work purported to give an inside vision of the creative process among artists, I found this method to be most appropriate. I also found that while the exchanges with co-creators gave me insights about their own process, these insights could never be as rich and meaningful as the ones I could directly gain through the observation of my own process. Data had to pass through me to exist. Insights were provided by becoming a member, not so much by observing members from the point of view of an invitee. I am aware that the level of generalization that one can attain through such a method is limited, but nevertheless, I think the qualitative depth that is attained this way compensates largely for this limitation.

3.1.3 : Heuristic research

"The mind cannot be explored by proxy."

-Humphry Osmund⁴⁰

My data includes a great deal of in dwelling about my own experience, and this is something I feel the need to posit within the field of anthropology. In the past, ethnography could be seen as being part of the objectivist /positivist project of the Enlightenment. Thus ethnography depended on finding a "real culture", "out there". The current project can be inscribed in the critique of this objectivist stance. Although post-modern anthropology did not succeed in eliminating the need for an object of study, this object is now more and more seen as dialogical. But even if now we accept more readily first person accounts as ethnography, we cannot escape the Knowing-Being paradox. We still need an object and this object still needs, in a way, to be "out there". The discovery that there was no Being without Knowing does not save us from considering the equation from the other side : there is no Knowing without Being.

Generally speaking, ethnographies are the product of researchers who are outsiders; these researchers are intellectuals who want to dirty their hands in the daily life of a 'culture' that is foreign to them. These researchers participate in order to observe, and consign their observation in the form of a discursive thinking. Sometime, they will observe in order to better participate.

Here this distance is considerably reduced. For a big part of the field work and of the resulting report, the subject has become the phenomena he wants to study. That does not mean that the ethnographic work is about the personal life of the researcher (it could

⁴⁰ in Baker, John R : *"Teaching Consciousness at the Lower level"*, *Anthropology of Consciousness* 7 (1) p.10.

be), but rather that evidence is singled out and brought back only when it is directly experienced.⁴¹ I find that this method – one of the many possible “first person methods”, is not only utterly relevant, but maybe my only possible choice given the specifics of the field. In this case, the researcher, being an artist who report about art making on the ethnographic mode, participates in a making whose success is measured by the capacity it provides him/her “to see oneself in the work” (Martin 1992 : 67, 73).

Anthropologists like Larry Peters (1981) have argued that the personal experience of the anthropologist in trance can serve as ethnographic datum. This has been contested by David Holberg, who believes that the anthropologist’s experience is not valid because it grows out of a different set of expectations. Robert DesJarlais counter-argued that the anthropologist is still influenced by local setting and the process of his/her immersion (Leavitt 1997). Maquet thinks that “Anthropologists are not trained to deal with purely mental phenomena ... the experiential method seems to negate any possibility of critical knowledge.” (Maquet 1986 : 249). But Maquet thinks that there is a solution: “As a discipline of the humanities, anthropology is concerned with meanings. In this case [aesthetic experience], the meaning lies in the inner experience of the beholder. Anthropological observers can certainly become beholders instead of being observers of beholders.” (Maquet 1986 : 249). Ultra-subjectivity has still a dubious status in anthropology, and probably very rightly so. What we should look for is not a return to subjectivity. We should rather use first person methods to reconsider our object. As Husserl demonstrated, objectivity is inescapable, for consciousness exists through ‘objects’, topic, themes, specific focus, etc. In the field, when I talked of my

anthropological research and of my interest in phenomenology to the teacher of the methodology class – a specialist of phenomenology, her opinion was that in my case phenomenology was not exactly the appropriate methodology. Since I was going to be at the center of the research, as subject, she thought Heuristic methods would be more appropriate. She directed me towards Moustakas, a precious resource indeed.

* * *

“The proof of the sweetness is in the mouth not in the sugar.”

- Nisargadatta : 99

Clark Moustakas is a psychologist and social science researcher who was launched into Heuristics through a study of solitude. “The root meaning of heuristic comes from the Greek *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” Moustakas :9). Moustakas quotes a poet, Moffit, who was also a heuristic researcher (Moustakas 1990 : 149) : “You must be the thing you see”. This is the injunction : Become the phenomena you want to study. The consequent emphasis is put on the *internal frame of reference of the researcher*.⁴² Roads, in “Talking with nature” (1987), writes : “write from the point of contact which you are.”(Moustakas 1990 : 1).

Heuristic research begins with a question that is of personal relevance to the researcher : “*The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one’s self and the world in which one lives.*” (Moustakas 1990 : 15.). Heuristic research places the searcher’s self at the center of that quest and query.

⁴¹ In anthropology, this relates also, but not exclusively, to the relatively new field of micro-ethnography (see Abu-Lugod and the study of her own pregnancy).

Moustakas quotes the psychologist Maslow (1966) : “there is no substitute for experience, none at all. All the other paraphernalia of communication and of knowledge – words, labels, concepts, symbols, theories, formulas, science – all are useful only because people already knew them experientially” (p.17 in Moustakas 1990).⁴³

Moustakas feels the need to distinguish Heuristics from phenomenology:

“Whereas phenomenology encourages a kind of detachment from the phenomenon being investigated, heuristic emphasizes connectedness and relationship.” (Moustakas 1990 : 38). The focus is on the “recreation of the lived experience”, [not only its depiction]. The main step of Heuristic research is “Formulating the question”. For Polanyi, the “hypothetical method” is always *based on deep, self-concerning questioning*, that is : “real questions” [questions that matters to the searcher]. The question must be stated in “simple, clear, concrete terms. ” (Moustakas 1990 : 41) The definite characteristics of a heuristic question are : it seeks to reveal essence or meaning; it aims at the qualitative rather than the quantitative; it engages “one’s total self and evokes a personal and passionate involvement and active participation in the process.” (Moustakas 1990 : 42). It “does not seek to predict or determine causal relationships”. (idem). It is “illuminated”⁴⁴ by descriptions, illustrations, metaphors, poetry, dialogues “and other creative rendering rather than by measurements, ratings and scores.” (idem).

⁴² [As we can see, the advantage for ethnography is double : giving access to the “inside” of experience, while at the same time revealing the researcher’s point of view, ‘re-inscribing the author in the text’, in Postmodern jargon]

⁴³ The consequence for our project and for the writing of ethnography in general is that the writing must entice the re-creation of the experience for the reader. This is the essential and only validation possible (first hand knowledge instead of second hand knowledge). Heuristic research is an Epistemology that places personal experience at the center, not only at the level of the find, but at the level of validation.

⁴⁴ We see here that the concept of “illuminating” a questions, a problem, transcends the boundaries of ‘discovery’ and advocates for a jump on the side of ‘creation’.

This process should lead to one sole question, in the form of ‘ what is the experience of’ or ‘what is the meaning of’. On the long run, *the searcher comes to love the question, not only for the possibility of answer but for the possibility of discovery; the question becomes the center of one’s world. It colors everything.* And yet the fear of meaningless subjectivity is still lingering, as attested by Carl Roger, in his advocacy for heuristics : “...it would tend to do away with the fear of creative subjective speculation. As I talk with graduate students in the behavioral sciences, this fear is a very deep one. It cuts them from any significant discovery...A second effect would be to place a stress on ...disciplined personal commitment, not methodology...” (1965, p. 98-99 in Moustakas 1990).⁴⁵

But an area of heuristic research that might be more dubious to scientist trained in positivism, is the way that it is intrinsically linked to the personal development and growth of the researcher. This “vested interest” in research is precisely what a certain type of science tried to dispense with. Moustakas refers here to what is labelled Symbolic Growth Experience (SGE) in psychology. “Symbolic growth refers to a sudden, dramatic shift in perception, belief, or understanding that alters one’s frame of reference or world view. *The internal change or revision is usually connected with an external event but the connection is synchronistic, an intentional or spontaneous happening rather than the result of a cause-effect relationship.*” (Moustakas 1990 : 99, emphasis is mine).

⁴⁵ [We could read here a program for Emic research in social sciences.]

3.1.4 : Reflectivity inhibits creativity

This field work exemplified two paradoxes of creative inquiries : one on the topic of reflectivity, and one on the topic of the ambiguous nature of creative productions in regards to the relation between Being and Knowing.

Firstly, on the level of reflectivity, while the field was more or less constituted by me – my reflective attitude, forcing me to “relinquish the conflation of place with cultural production” (Amit 2000 : 5), reflectivity became contradictory to my full participation in it. Practically speaking, this led me to abandon the idea of doing interviews. Let’s explain this. Even if I concentrated my activities around one physical location and one specific community, I was aware, maybe because in a way it was simply a prolongation of my professional life, that the ‘field’ was not so much bounded by parameters of space and time, in other words a ‘culture’, all of which in passing would have had to be pre-determined as pertaining to the ‘field’ before knowing the field. The field was in my case bounded by a reflective attitude. Being a Grad student in a Fine Art school was certainly new for me, but this was not newer (stranger) than usual situations arising in the midst of one’s artistic practice, all disciplines confounded. Clearly it was not the situation – me being ‘there’ – that created the field, but a certain ‘distance’ I had chosen to take from it. I would enter ‘normal’ activities with a different mind set, a gaze turned upon itself. I would carry a mirror, so to speak. The fact that I had gained membership (even if partial) prior to my implication into the field is a corollary of the nature of the field. You do not become an artist in 2 months.

However, and here is the first paradox, in the midst of action, the field would have me forget about it. I would feel this oblivion (if this can be said...) in many ways : I

would stop taking notes, feel the pointlessness of even talking about these things, etc.⁴⁶ I had to translate this into a conscious attitude, and thus I resolved to abandon this observer stance I had entered into. This translated in the will to create as little as possible of situations that might induce reflectivity, in me and in my co-researchers (informants). Concretely, I dropped interviews.

And this leads us to the second paradox. I realized that through inducing too much reflectivity in my informants, I could literally fabricate all the data I wanted. Thus while realizing that this ethnographic work was pretty much akin to an art work – that is : a creation – I came to touch the fine line that separates an authentic creation – a ‘true fiction’ – from an inauthentic one. And this has to do with a reflection that has cut itself from Being. Another way to illustrate this is in explaining my choice of privileging writing over electronic recording for my field notes. For me, it became clear pretty early that writing was more ‘accurate’ than tape recording, in terms of translating /transcribing events. First, tape recording tended to make me lazy. I ‘knew’ I could ‘come back to it later’. But that was a big illusion (and a wonderful topic of research in a civilization that depends more and more on various cults of archival). For each successive listening of the tapes would only *add* another layer of ‘meaning’, and the question is : layer to what ? To my memory of course. The other question is : what was added to my memory ? Reflectivity. I would realize that instead of opening myself to the world – the events and people I had come in contact with – this layering was in fact cutting me from the world, and making me enter into a loop of reflectivity with myself. Funneling experience into phenomenological units has to be done right away (assumed as soon as possible, as close

⁴⁶ Furthermore, I got the very clear message from agents to stop wanting to control the outset of my art work, a very productive advice that I decided to use for field work.

to the event as possible), because it is always done right away anyway; delaying the funneling does not guarantee detachment and exactitude, but only further distance from original 'meaning'.⁴⁷

So I tried hard to get to the core right away. I would try to condense my encounters not 'factually' but semantically. I acquiesced to the findings of phenomenologists who say that intentionality is always imbedded in perception : perception is always, already, meaningful (Merleau-Ponty 1945). It is through meaning that we perceive, not the opposite. Therefore 'chronology' became secondary, as I perceived more and more through the field work that chronology too was a construction, a fabrication. 'Chronology' did not preclude to the cognitive units my field note writing forced me to gather and constitute, as if it would be the arcane record of the True Historical Being of the field, but chronology existed through these units, these 'meanings'.

As I said earlier, for one major aspect of the field work, the examination of the 'Eureka' phenomenon, 'meaning' was a direct consequence of my involvement in the process of creating art works. I would get more of it in activities that mattered to me, that is, activities in which I would be totally involved , in which I would put my life on the line, so to speak. The field called for intense and prolonged solo work; it induced solitude. This solitude was not to be lived only, if even at all, on the reflective mode, that is in thinking, and certainly not in thinking too much about oneself. To be productive, this solitude had to be spent in action and focused on a 'project', if only the project of putting

⁴⁷ And here we come back right into our subject and we stumble into another paradox that phenomenologists might have foresaken : the relation between reflective and non-reflective awareness. In short : is there a 'meaning' outside the reflective awareness that constitutes that meaning ?

the hands on stuff on a regular basis. Therefore, Moustaka's guide to heuristic methods became my guideline.

* * *

There are thus three ways to consider this field work :

1- As a case study ("the world in a grain of sand" - after Blake): in this view, the field work would be a sample of the art field at large. It would be a *part* that would inform us about the *whole*. This would be an adhesion to the analytical method, which can be viewed as a spiral inward, trying to go to the center of things by accumulating views/part and then trying to glue them together to get a full picture. The success of this field work would then be measured by its capacity to give an exact representation. This evaluation would have to be guessed, and this guessing would be predicated on the assumption that a vision of the whole – as sum of parts – is possible.

2- As a story (« Je passais par là, voilà ce que j'ai vu » - David Le Bretton quoting Ballandier, lecture at UQAM): the field would then be essentially the recounting of a line of events, the tale of many encounters as it is filtered by one of the actors. The success of such a field work would then be estimated by its capacity to present itself as a whole.

3- As a creation ("the world is in the eye of the monk" - Zen saying): this view would present the field work as an invention that claims to be a discovery, like an art work. This would be an adhesion to an intuitive method, which can be seen as a spiral outward : an initial insight *is* the whole picture, and the subsequent gathering of evidence has the purpose of supporting this initial apodictic evidence (justifying it), not of creating evidence. The success of such field work would then be gauged not so much by the capacity of this fiction to be taken as real, but by its capacity to make us marvel about the

mystery of the world. The resulting wonder would be like a strange déjà vu, the feeling that we already knew everything it contains, not as a prejudice, but as capacity to experience things directly, as a different mode of awareness. This third view would place the reader right at the center of the world, a place where no external verification is needed, because the world is always – never was anything but – what we know of it. Such ethnography would be good if and only if it allowed the reader to feel himself/herself as a whole.

3.2 AN ART SCHOOL : CREATING CREATIVITY

3.2.1 :The cast of the play : list of the informants and description (the names of students have been changed to preserve their privacy):

Students :

André : Late thirties, professional artist living outside Montreal; his work and project focus on the ethica, ecological and sociological aspects of technology. He questions the prevailing visualism through installations involving the whole body.

Aline : Late forties, professional artist living outside Montreal; her project focuses on the creative process itself through the metaphor of 'the thinness of the image'. Medium : mixed with emphasis on video.

Nadine : French student and artist in her early thirties, her work and project is video based, and draws inspiration from the deconstruction of architectural concepts and images.

Claire : French student in her mid twenties, works on the border between seduction and violence through video installations.

Dan : emerging artist in his late twenties, his work and project is a questioning of the notion of comfort through the invention of fake home/quotidian situations. Medium : performance and installation, including video.

Françoise : Professional artist in her early fifties, her project uses linguistic situations – namely problems of translation – to extend her painting into graphism

- Gilbert** : Professional artist in his late fifties, he uses exclusively human hairs (he is also hair stylist) to make installations which involve actively the spectator.
- Guy (author)** : Professional artist in his mid-forties, his project questions processes of obsolescence and ideologies that present knowledge as accumulation through installations made of eroded books.
- Hélène** : Emerging artist in her late twenties, she injects preoccupations about space coming from architecture into the making of (video) installations.
- Éliot** : Emerging artist in his late twenties, his work and project draws inspiration from various themes : landscape, the Haikus, poetry of space.
Medium : sculpture and installation.
- Janine** : Emerging artist in her late twenties, she is concerned with the oblivion of the body in modern societies. Her installations strive to go beyond visualism toward kinaesthesia.
- Mona** : Emerging artist in her early thirties, she realizes video installations and *mono-bandes* (short films) focussing on the relation of the body to space.
- Marcello** : Brazilian student and professional photographer in his early thirties, his project is centered on the writing and persona of Wittgenstein. Medium : video, photo and installation.
- Cécilia** : French student in her late twenties, her work and project explore the frontier between seduction and disgust by the mean of unbearable optic paintings and installations.

- Michel** : Professional artist in his early thirties, his work and project draws on the notion of 'semiotic terrorism' to expose and denounce relations of power.
Medium : interventions, performances and installations.
- Murielle** : Emerging artist in her early thirties, her project investigates the frontier between the public and the private through the symbolic violation of private spaces. Medium : photo, video and video installations.
- Nicole** : Emerging artist in her mid-twenties, she is interested in re-enchanting the banal and exploring the ways the quotidian is constructed. Medium : installation.

Teachers :

Stephen Schofield

Anne Ramsden

Robert Saucier

Monique Régimbald-Zeiber

(Diane Laurier)

Jean-Pierre Demers (assistant)

Other staff :

Gilles (technician, wood shop)

Barbara (secretary)

Jean (technician, metal shop)

Exterior interviewees :

Jean-Pierre Perreault

Sylvain Émard

Larry Tremblay
Liliana Berezowski
Manon Labrecque
Richard Purdy

Other professionals (occasional interactions) :

Louise Bédard
Geneviève Letarte
Ganesh Anandan

My method of presentation will be the following : in chapter 3, the experience will be gathered under cognitive units, then in chapter 4 the link will be made between these units (pan-thematic articulation). There will be no chronology aside from the long and short curve I provided previously, and this, because I do not adhere to the myth who sees 'chronology' as representing the bottom line of the real, that is : a historicist view that insists that there is an objective succession of 'moments': 'moments' are already *meanings*.

For the structure of this exposé, I adopted a "Part reflects whole" approach : each chapter is an holographic image of the whole. This approach may seem artificial, in the sense that it is clearly a structure that I impose on the material to be able to read it. What allows me to do this is a principle of Active Imagination - as found in Corbin (1969) in his description of the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi (see section two of this chapter). Translated into secular language, this principle states that 'information' (knowledge) is only revealed when a grid is superimposed onto the world. We could very well say then that it is the grid which creates the info, but that would be too simple and would forget that what

we have is a paradox : a grid alone would create nothing, 'something' has to pass through it *although we have no way of knowing what this 'something' is outside our grid.*

In the following three chapters, I analyse the data in term of three key notions : the notion of project in contemporary art making , the Eureka or the creative act per se, and the Center-periphery dynamics of the self.

(Chapter) 3.2.1 :THE PROJECT (Smelling, preparing, foreseeing)

3.2.1.1 : Situation :

'Artists'⁴⁸ in post-modern times live through projects. They submit projects to galleries, festivals, biennales and funding agencies. Concretely speaking those projects are most of the time expressed in written form, and may or may not contain visuals. It is delicate to determine if the CV, the text describing the "*démarche*" of the artist and the visuals describing his/her past realizations are part of a project, but since no project can be accepted without them, we might say they are. In this context, it is not surprising to see Graduate art schools duplicate this mode of practicing 'art'. Indeed, grad students at UQAM are expected to center their MA around a project – thesis and exhibit - and to defend it in front of a committee. Full time students spend the first year defining their project, and their second year realizing it. This project is expected to be defensible in the sense that discourse (the thesis project and the thesis) is supposed to be able to account for it. A 'project' that could not be put in words would be rejected. In this context, discourse justifies art, probably more than art justifies discourse.

So we are far from the heroic era when the artist would wake up and start working outside any preconceived scheme. Or maybe is it that such a mythological being never existed ?

⁴⁸ Post-modernism did certainly not succeed in bringing together some categories modernism had divorced : the avant-garde artist, the bricoleur, the artisan, the amateur. In my sense, the modernist avant-garde is still pretty much the role model for the post-modern avant-garde, even if this is done in a more diffuse manner. For the matter of this ethnographic work, we want to consider the non-commercial artists that consider themselves today, openly or covertly, as 'the artists', i.e. the avant-garde. 'Artist' will thus be reserved hereafter for members of that mostly self-defined category.

That such an anti-project artist ever existed or that it may survive today, a thing is certain : the entrance of art in the university corresponded to a profound change in the profession, as testified by the present director of the School of Fine Arts at UQAM, Monique Régimbald-Zeiber, during an in-class discussion. In the sixties and seventies, gaining recognition meant integrating Western societies basic axiom : that of continuity of culture through education. In this movement to trade freedom for security, art making was projected in the camp of conceptualism. Now things had to be planned, and that meant they had to be thought. To be included into the university meant to become one discipline among/like the others. Recently the FCAR (the organism in Québec devoted to the public funding of scientific research in universities) conducted a three years consultation which ended up in modifying its criteria for the admissibility to research grants. This was a consequence of the growing dissatisfaction of art teachers, who argued that the FCAR criteria were modeled on scientific research and had nothing to do with the specificity of the research in art. But we might have a double bind here : although officially a teacher can now ask funds to finance his/her studio work (i.e. research in art's terms), it is very unlikely that a teacher will get money to paint... The transformation of the artist into a researcher – something that is proselytised in the methodology class – has the double effect of having art making miming science. At least two teachers avowed to me having modified their 'project' in order to get the money. In both cases this amounted to including new technologies. How far artists are willing to go to integrate society is a difficult question. The debate is still hot as to whether art signed a devil's pact when it joined the university, as testified by the debate during the Colloque

de la commission de recherche de l'Université Laval⁴⁹, on the integration of art in the university. In this section, I would like to attempt a description and dig the implications of bringing in the notion of project in art. What I believe is at stake here is the paradox of having practices that were traditionally predicated upon spontaneity and trying to fit them into an agenda.

3.2.1.2 Theoretical opener:

Boutinet wrote an *Anthropology of the project* (*Anthropologie du projet* 1990-99)⁵⁰ that might prove useful as a door to our task. Because he writes in a time when the project has become the emblematic and paradigmatic figure for modernity, Boutinets surprisingly prefaces his book with a nomenclature of seven possible 'pathologies' (*dérives*) and side-effects to projects, i.e. cases where an emancipatory and creative imaginary moves into its contrary, a luring, lurking and alienating imaginary. 1) Such a societal emphasis on the project has the consequence of moving those without project – unemployed, drop-outs, etc. outside of society. 2) The "mania of the project" leads us through a hiding away the non-existing; it fragilizes us and projects us in the realm of the ephemeral. 3) The project manifested as imperative from the outside induces artificial mimetism, where new projects are mere copies of previous ones. 4) Projects are enmeshed in identitary processes and thus might be inducers of narcissism; actors use them to cut off social ties. 5) the fifth '*dérive*' Boutinet calls "procedural or technicist

⁴⁹ See De La Noüe & al. : *La création artistique à l'université*. Québec : Université Laval &Éditions Nota Bene, 2000

⁵⁰ Although not an anthropologist himself, it is interesting to see why Boutinet posits his work in that discipline. Boutinet is looking for a "third level discourse" going beyond description and interpretation. He privileges a transversal approach that goes beyond the parcelling out now found in human sciences. But he

obsession” (Boutinet 1999 : 6). Totalitarianism and subjection to technology is one of the risk of this culture of projects. 7) Finally, living in the future one risks the dangers of wishful thinking; this type of project easily becomes a tool to defend social ranking.

Boutinet is an existentialist as he writes : “The fragility of the figure of the project stems mainly from the fact that it must keep the individual from coinciding with himself; as novelty consists of a simultaneous creation/destruction, it purports to be the expression of multiple possibilities, but never [the expression of] possession : the constitutive presence gives itself on a backdrop of absence.” (Boutinet 1999 : 7). Boutinet discerns four dimensions to projects : first he acquiesces to the recent re-injection of teleologies in biology, by scientists such as J. Monod [morphic fields]. Thus evolution would not be driven by haphazard mutations, but rather life itself would move towards “something that is exterior to it”. Projects have secondly a clear cultural connotation. We are led to think that ‘traditional’ societies were spared of the notion of project, but it might be rather that in non-industrial societies, projects were “coextensive to the existence” (Boutinet 1999 : 298). Industrial societies are predicated on obsolescence, and the resulting need to build innovation as a prescription. Boutinet distinguishes two types or two moments in technological cultures : cultures of expansions and cultures of crisis. Technological cultures of expansion promote and identify themselves to ideologies of progress, are offensive and conquering, use the project as a tool for the necessary critique of the existent, and build in mechanism of anticipation the legitimacy of their grip upon their own future. Technological cultures of crisis draw back upon micro-realizations, and go from the global to the local. But doing so, it is the whole vacuity of their foundation that

is aware that such a unifying perspective is bound to meet unsolvable dilemmas that will force it to adopt a paradoxical language in the form of an open-ended, un-finished theorization.

is exposed. Techno-cultures of crisis will privilege incremental changes, and not radical innovation. It is precisely those incremental changes that fragilize societies, because they are not durable. Only radical, structural changes will last, because they are not a mere re-organization of existing patterns, but propose a real 'inédit'.

Thirdly projects have clear existential issues. Projects are always of a subject, about objects, establishing preferential relationship with certain objects while rejecting others. But what projects reveal is foremost the anguish of a subject who feels "*jeté là*" (the *Geworfenheit* of Heidegger), thrown into a world without the least necessity. The project is a way to orient and give meaning to the casual and the gratuitous. While projects help a subject to escape routine, repetition and morbid sclerosis, projects also manifest the fall, the dereliction, in a word projects may end or even worse, they may fail. Projects reveal their finitude to humans. And fourthly, here is the self destroying implication, where the methodology turns back onto itself, the double bind of a culture who feeds onto the obsolescence of others : such a culture ends up projecting itself into a constant obsolescence. It is though constituting the frailty of time that modern culture are so fragile : "In underlining the obsolescence of the present moment, [the project] comes, within the multiplicity of its [own] figures, to put itself into question ...: projects follow one another, neutralize one another, destroy one another, the next one being the contestor of the preceding." (idem : 308). Projects manifest the hope of humans who want their revenge over technology, since projects are the exclusivity of humans. They are the cry of humans wanting to reaffirm their position of subjects through the control over objects.

As we can be read between Boutinet's lines, there is a fundamental contradiction in projects, the contradiction between freedom and security. It is to escape marginalization, repetition and ultimately death, that humans and cultures draw back onto innovation. But "methodological anticipation" (idem 310) intends precisely to organize the future, a thus to cut the way to improvisation and impulsions. Looking for the sense and meaning of existence amounts to discard the casual, the absurd and all that the promise of the unknown itself.

* * *

Boutinet is looking for an anthropology of the project and what he finds is an anthropology of time [in the same vein as Rosaldo's study of the Ilongots].⁵¹ Anthropology's history already includes a rich nomenclature of different behavior towards projects. But these different attitudes toward the future have been organized in various taxonomies, most of which seem to reinforce the division tradition-modernity, which might be but another name for the classical Western division intuition-reason /rational-irrational. Levi-Strauss' classical text on the bricoleur (in *Savage Mind*, 1966) underlines two different frames of mind. The engineer starts with an abstract project and subjects abstract 'materials' to his will. Thus his projects are more 'pure', more abstract, less tinted by culture (sic). The bricoleur has to do with what he/she finds. It is the artifact that will dictate the result. A pair of old skis calls for a lamp. The bricoleur has no plan before he/she meets the collectable. Thus the bricoleur is profoundly bound to the 'culture in the thing' he/she finds. What is marvellous in Levi-Strauss is that in trying to rehabilitate the 'savage mind' he denies it. The intuitive mind is no less science than our

⁵¹ See Hall, Edward T. : *The Silent Language, an anthropological study of different constructions of time according to cultures.*

science, which amounts to negating its specificities. How the magic 'clic' is operated in the bricoleur's head, why the skis called for a lamp and not a coffee table, why skis can be something else than skis in the first place, and where does the engineer's idea for the bridge come from, Levi-Strauss 'scientific mind' is unable to say.

John Leavitt's study of the schism between prophecy and poetry seems to be more promising, by re-affirming the ontological specificity of 'inspiration', 'revelation', i.e. prophecy (Leavitt 1997; see a detailed review in chapter 3.2.2- of this section). Indeed the prophecy is a typical anti-project. Even if it is invoked, it always come 'from the outside' of the seeker, so in a way its content is not premeditated; it is always linked to Being (i.e. it is objective) : it cannot be arbitrary (i.e. subjective).

3.2.1.3 : Description

In the field, I could witness this implicit division in many ways. There was the constant call by teachers to 'let go of control' over the process. Paradoxically, it was this loss of control that would allow for authenticity to emerge. And authenticity could happen only if the piece came to have a life of its own, which I interpreted as 'the piece coming from Being'. But paradoxically, it was often the same teachers who pushed students to refine their 'project'. Some teachers though seemed to be specially aware of the paradox. One senior teacher was even reported to refuse to supervise a grad student because he simply did not believe in 'making art that way' (doing a thesis on a 'subject'). As we will see in the end of this section, Professor Schofield, a new teacher in the school, was very critical of the emphasis that had been put on the project. He thought it was putting the carriage before the horse. There had to be some room left for accidents to

happen. Accidents were warrant of authenticity. But if you were to stay all day long before your computer thinking about what you would do, accidents had very few chances to happen. For Schofield, accidents were the result of a confrontation with an 'other' and that other was matter.

The tension around premeditation in art might be *the local embodiment of the paradox continuity-change*. This paradox in the field of art gets its content from the definition of art as non instrumental. Program director professor Ramsden said that "the only motive for art is to be without motive". De Duve tries to approach this through his idea that 'art' is nothing but a proper name (De Duve). Art is what is named art, not in a generic way (family name) but on a one to one basis. Bateson goes in that sense when he says that the purpose of religion and art is to be outside conscious purpose. Csikszentmihalyi finds that creativity is impeded even by the slightest external command; even the injunction to be creative is enough to turn creativity off.

The critical examination that I would like to do here proceeds from this definition of art (as purposeless and incongruous). The paradox of introducing the notion of project in art is twofold : 1) how do you plan to be spontaneous; 2) how do you set up to become a vocational or professional creator (spontaneous full time).

3.2.1.3.1 Three time frames

In the field (the graduate program at UQAM), I found that the 'project' takes three forms or time-frame : short term (non project); medium term (punctual); long term (life line, career). The project brings forward a problematic of identity (A=A), both as self-definition (as artist), as definition of process (art as practice) and as definition of product

(art as defined by its outcome). Of course how, when, and why is there alleged continuity – i.e. when is the project coherent, continuous, respected etc.- is part of the definition of the project. I propose to use Merleau Ponty's (1945) figure on ground, a notion he borrowed from Gestalt psychology to account for assumptions in perception that cannot be accounted by the experience per se : the ground under the figure is not perceived, but it is assumed to 'continue' 'under' the figure. It is in this tacit assumption that the figure is born.

3.2.1.3.2 : Three kinds of projects

In the field, I found basically 3 kinds of projects :

1- Intuitive, indefinite (*Finding what you want to define*; like a smell). In my own process, there were numerous instances where I felt something quite definite was there, in emergence. I could feel its irreducible flavour and yet could not put a finger on it. In this sense it was very hermeneutic, like finding in the course of action what exactly you are looking for. Briggs speaks of the 'germ' as being both definite and indefinite: Csikszentmihalyi (1997) quotes a poet who can smell a poem as if it were wandering around the house. At this stage, words are not here yet, or they are vague, poetic, voluntarily vague; artists are superstitious that stage, not wanting to tell too much of fear of losing it; my field was certainly no exception.

2- Planned (*defining what you want to find*). The thesis proposal at UQAM somewhat duplicates and fosters the model of funding agencies; the research proposal equals grant application. The possibility of a planning of the research rests on some assumptions : a) the artist is a researcher (like others); b) words can sum up, reduce

capture the smell; c) words can preclude to creation, organize it, pre-determine it, produce it, determine it;

3- Anti-project (awakening). The whole field is in tension between the affirmation and negation of planning, as open defiance, as refusal of the concept of 'work'. Michel, one of the main defenders of projects loved last minute work because of the pressure it exerted upon his planning. When pressed to be consistent with the justification she had built as a proposal for research and when put in front of the contradictions it contained, Mona took refuge into 'avowing' having made her proposal up to fit the program; essentially, she always played it by ear, she said.

More than a working schedule or a roadmap, the 'project' can be seen as *bubble of meaning*. Mona woke up one morning with a project that was so clear that she had to propose it to a gallery; the project was accepted. Although most students were at the very beginning of their career, many of them had developed a very intuitive and personal way of dealing with projects, that is : a way to avoid thinking about them. The project is often a locus of anxiety, where one realizes that being an artist is like looking permanently for a job. Then passivity comes as a solution when students realize that the reception of their work is out of their control. Teachers' position on the topic were more nuanced and more slippery. Schofield dismissed projects, but still gave a lot of references. What was one to do with them ? Saucier was aware that projects had to leave room for discovery, and still he devoted half of a Creation workshop on the building and discussion of a written project that would probably never be realized.

3.2.1.4 : Three manifestations of the project

Truthful to my plan of a structure where the whole is reflected in the part, I will duplicate here the structure of section 3- (project, creative act, center-periphery) and distinguish three manifestations of the project in my field : as project, as active imagination, as a manifestation of a center-periphery dynamic in consciousness.

3.2.1.4.1 : Project as project

The project can be seen *as a narrative*. All along my own project with books, I developed a narrative, a fiction about the people who inhabit those miniature landscapes, people who live in books; another fold of the story recounted the 'holes in books' affairs that shook library in the 80's. When I told professor Saucier I doubted about including this narrative in my project, because it represented in a way a dismissal, an abandon of sculpture, he told me that he always told himself a story when creating. But whether this story had to be included in the piece or not depended how far one could go or was willing to go. Students mostly welcomed, in the required proposal of research, the possibility to clarify their focus on a 'topic' (this topic was basically to be formulated as a title, followed by a page of proposal). 'Narratives' in that sense are more tools for communication than actual proto-fictions, although teachers and students were aware that the formulation of the project was always a work in progress.

More problematic is the way the project, as narrative, brings forward the notion of *content* in art. The project tends to make art 'programmatic'. It makes it look like it would have a 'thesis' to defend⁵². Susan Sontag, in a classical article, critiqued the first degree reading of 'content' in art and the way it fostered an orgy of interpretations, most

of which had the effect of seriously side-tracking art making. Prof. Schofield mentioned in interview that when students resorted to discourse to ground their art making, most of the time they ended up with very mundane, very cliché solutions.

The 'project as narrative' is also enacted when *the project becomes a beacon* keeping the audience alertly into expectation. In lieu of the traditional in-class presentation – something art students do to account for where they are at in their work, Marcello did a performance. Because his performance was built on the refusal to explain art, this enlightened the fact that 'projects' are really stories we tell ourselves and others : *the promise of disclosure is the fuel of these stories.*

The project can be seen *as personal mythology, as myth.* Many artists still need a myth. The need to make sense of such a non-sense is so strong sometimes that the absence of a unifying myth can lead to madness.

3.2.1.4.2 : Project as instrument for active imagination

It is no wonder that projects at the grad level in fine arts at UQAM are born into a methodology class. 'Projects' are pretty much methodological tools. As Murielle told me, when she is lost she goes back to the project. It is a way to keep a constant focus on an 'object', even if language is not really the right tool for the task because it belongs to another region of consciousness.

More important is the fact that 'projects' are really *tools for 'projection'* in the cinematic sense. Mona delighted Saucier's class (where we spent half of the class preparing, defending and judging a project of exhibition) because "it increased my

⁵² One can see this manifested in the way I described the students' projects in the Cast of the play. I could not describe the work of students otherwise than in terms of 'content'. The 'what' of art is problematic in

capacity for 'projection'". But the troubling point is that it is the project which is giving content to revelations. *Projects are tools for active imagination*. An excerpt from my field notes relating my own process will explain this point :

October 18th

" I was in the library and was looking at books on the tables, as usual. Books laid on tables by others are like a statistic sample of the whole library. What happened today happens all the time, when I let myself be swayed away by this little game of mine. I look at books randomly and inevitably I find something of relevance to my work of the moment. Today I found a couple of pictures of textures and structures that interested me. They all had a relation to landscape. Then I found pictures of Arabic alcoves, with their million of little niches, and I thought "oh wow ! this is a nice project for sandblast !". What is worth noting is that it is not really the content of these 'revelations' but the state they put me in. It's like if these images plot to be there at the right moment. It's like if there would be a will, external to me, guiding me. At the same time *I can't forget that it is my project that gives sense to those finds and transform them into discoveries*. It is the project that 'creates' the link, the meaningfulness. So all in all, it is *a very paradoxical state where the 'discoveries' come about because your project is throwing its own light onto everything, and yet, there would not be any project – anything sustainable that is – were it not of those calls from the outside*.

This could give the impression that my random peeking into abandoned books and my subsequent extracting of inspiration is a 'game', something that can be played at will. But it is not, and this is what makes it mysterious. You do not entirely decide when it's going to work. There is a feeling that there is an 'other' that must agree to pick up the phone, and it is this feeling that makes the game 'objective', discoveries relevant, and revelations what they are : revelations."

-Excerpt from field notes

As *tool to induce 'visions'*, to provoke revelations, the artistic project is not so different than the 'model' in science. It tints everything. In a way, it is like the hypothesis that is being tested, but we should take great care in handling this metaphor. The art project is not necessarily the project of a demonstration : most of the time, at the project stage, it is like a questioning without a specific question. Professor Saucier, who devoted half of his class to projection, insists that *the good project is the one that makes a jury*

itself, regardless of the question of projects.

dream. A project that will be accepted is the one that *makes a jury feel that the project is his*'.

The project can be also seen as *a chain of little Eureka*s. It is the lace into which those beads are strung. In my personal process, the project stopped to be an ominous other almost every time I set myself to work, as testified by the following field notes excerpt :

October 25 :

“Concretely I started doing the sandblast and this at least comforts me for two reasons. First I think the piece is going to work. The effect is beautiful. It really allows to enter a miniature world. Second I realize that there can be – will be – room for discovery at each stage. I was scared that my ‘painting by numbers approach’ would kill the piece’s life. I had such a precise idea of the result that the remaining process looked pretty much like a boring execution. But that’s not the case. Just Yesterday I ended up opening the floor of the valley, literally. Why not having an empty bottom ? Like if the canyon/fortress would actually be sinking, pouring out of its center. Drained.”

-Excerpt from field notes

The project can be seen as an *entity which comes to have a will of its own*, and this both at micro and macro levels. At some point I found that I could let the nozzle of the sandblaster do the job. I would place it somewhere and wait for the directions the natural erosion would impede to the work. At the macro level, again and again teachers would enjoin me to let the project fly. Prof Régimbald said I was leading the project, I was not led by it, not yet. She said that my restlessness, although not really healthy, was the sign that “something is looking for you”. Aline entered the class one day in a very troubling state of exhilaration. Arriving late, she broke into the class discussion and she couldn’t stop talking. She said she had found it, or rather the project had found her. It is this feeling that the project is objective, that it has a life of one’s own, that it pre-exist in a way to one’s will, it is this feeling that makes one feel that the project is ‘discovered’.

Many professional creators will keep a number of simultaneous projects on the go (*sur le poêle*), as a way of preserving freshness. This simultaneity is an antidote to the obsessive effect a project can induce: it is an antidote that can be seen as forcing oblivion and incubation, that is : forcing the creator to retreat from a too willful attitude.

Choreographer Jean-Pierre Perreault says in an interview with me that he developed mechanisms of oblivion – he has to be reminded of what he choreographed the day before; this oblivion keeps him fresh each time he enters in rehearsal. Playwright Larry Tremblay says in interview that he can't work on one text for more than one hour. He gets bored and unproductive. Also he needs not to have too many things to think of to be able to write. Therefore we could deduce that it is because projects are so poignant, so taking, that they can make themselves be forgotten by one another. How many simultaneous projects one allows oneself to be simultaneously immersed in, this depends on many factors : one's 'gluttony' seems to be decreed by one's need for freshness, which is proportional to one's degree of 'compulsive' behavior. Robert Lepage's appetite is proverbial... Does this reinforce the argument for an 'incubation phase' in the classical psychological model (Deschamps : 2002) ? Or could it not be interpreted as a sign of a link between the Eureka and non-reflective awareness, in the sense that putting aside memory is a way to get focus ? *Focus* then would not be so much what we mean as thinkers, but a difference type of presence, unencumbered by too many thinking residues.

But more to the point, we might have the root of a vicious circle here, something that could be related to the Buddhist concept of the Wheel of Samsara, or the wheel of birth and death : to keep productive, creators need more and more projects, because they need a way to foster oblivion. Only projects can be taking enough to do the job. Projects

becoming more and more taking, one needs a growing number of them to be able to forget about them. But this is not so different from our Western culture of distraction.

Thus all we can do for the moment is notice the apparent contradiction between a group of phenomena – intuitions – that seem to defy all predictability (something that will be developed in section 3.2.2), and a mechanism that seem to be often borrowed from other regions of consciousness, other sets of practices - planning. Of course relying on projects in art – projects as meanings and plans that can be verbalized – questions the way discourse can subsume non-discourse, a theme we will develop at length in the end of section 3.2.2.4. Questions on our menu are : do we have different – irreducible and somewhat incompatible - regions of consciousness here (reason and intuition for example)? Can intuition be submitted to discourse ? Can intuition be even though of in linear term, like in a plan or a schedule ?

3.2.1.4.3 : Project as Center :

To be immersed in an artistic project is like *being at the Center of the World*. My account of my return to painting, during the winter break, gives a pretty good idea of this feeling.

January 8th :

“Pretty soon it’s going to be over. A couple of touch ups in the face and it’s done. I feel like it’s a whole life I’m ending here. For three weeks – only three weeks ? – I’ve thrown myself head and toes in that painting. And now it’s over. I feel like a kind of mourning. Pretty much like if I would have lost a promise of immortality. Borges, in his Story of Eternity, contrasts a certain conception of time – in the Catholic dogma – with his own experience of time. His’ is pretty much a timidly avowed epiphany, and it’s basically aesthetic : A certain street of his childhood at the violet hour, triggering certain sets of memories, and the feeling that ‘time’ is a hoax.

Indeed, it is hard to leave a project that generated such a huge amount of energy. For whole afternoons, I forgot to eat, to have coffee breaks. I could stand on my feet for hours without seeing time passing. I would come to the studio a bit tired, but as soon as I would glance at the canvas my tiredness would magically

vanish. For the canvas would give me orders. I would know immediately what I had to do, and I would be freed, for the rest of the day, of most of my need for projection, anticipation, planning. It is in this, I think, that I was refreshed. I knew I could trust the process, the canvas would tell me everything I needed to know. For three weeks I did not want to report on it out of fear of losing it. Even at this very moment writing about it seems a bit 'forcé'. It was so strong, how could words ever get there ? At the same time, how could they do otherwise, given the force of the experience ?

Nothing was basically new in this painting. What was new was to go back to it after so much time spent at doing academic work. One can get carried away by ideas - I guess - but can one get in ideas this total integration of thoughts and feelings ?”

-Excerpt from field notes

I spoke earlier of the *project as beacon, as promise*. It is precisely because it can promise so much that the project can become the center of the world. Students were generally so elated after a bout of immersion into their project. The project, as the studio, became for me an inescapable magnet. Again I wrote in October :

“Why did the book project became such a magnet ? Because in its company I feel sovereign. I feel I am in the company of a friend, someone with whom I can converse in silence. That’s it. Someone with whom I can be equal. Mutual sovereignty.”

-Excerpt from field notes

It is this promise of a dialogue that makes for a center, a center that is dynamic, because constantly revealed, constantly escaping. Paradoxically, the project becomes an *other that is oneself*. The project becomes a center because it *becomes oneself*, a most paradoxical statement. Like Low says, the promise of the center is for one to become the center.

The artistic project becomes a center also in the sense that it becomes a *way to reach a lost unity*. In one of the typical exalted, emphatic, and somewhat proselyte ‘*envollées*’ that would characterize my coming out of the studio, I wrote :

“I am starting once again to feel the smell of truth. What is truth ? It is the feeling that all things are one. I feel that because I started accepting – once more – the power of limits. For example : books and only books.⁵³ It’s a feeling of being contented with one’s center, a feeling of no longer having to run after things, modes of expression, aesthetics, etc.. Like if one meal could encompass all the flavours. It is the feeling that one could say it all with one thing. It’s the feeling that ‘it is all the same thing after all’, hairs (Gilbert), slices of images (Mona, Murielle, Hélène), slices of time. Slices everywhere.”

-Excerpt from field notes

Projects are *unifying principles* . They unify broken parts around a center that is dynamic. When criticized about the “too many things” in his last piece, André said he wanted “to make an ensemble”. My own association of mundane elements in an installation was criticized until I gave the audience the unifying principle, the ‘project’ : indeed, my installation had a narrative; it was a lab, not an exhibit hall. Once the plot was given, the audience integrated the elements without any problems. *Projects integrate whole and part*. Low says that one concept we generally use to describe ‘unity’, i.e. the integration around a dynamic center is that of ‘simplicity’. Low underlines the difference between two different simplicities. : quantitative and qualitative.. The quantitatively simple is that which is not composed, that which has few parts. The qualitatively simple is that which shows the integration of parts. In science it bears the name of the razor of Occam, i.e. the principle that one should not multiply hypothesis and unknown variables.

To look for the center, to stalk it, to lie in ambush awaiting for it is also to hope for a *re-enchantment of the world*. A good case for this was André. André was obviously looking for a **re-unification of a world** that had been torn apart. His constant insistence on socio-ecology, on finding ethical ways to integrate technology into art were a persistent indication of this. His guilt amounted to an obsessive drive to re-explain again

⁵³ At many stages of my own production, I started having doubts about doing the whole of my sculpture/installation project with books as my unique material.

and again what he was trying to do. His quiet and prudent allusion to contemplation, the sacred, his half hidden concern with metaphysics, all were wrapped in an obvious fear of being cast away as New-Age-y. Outside the usual ways of handling the senses in art – fine arts as being visual – André was working hard to find a center, to affirm it, to sell it, as if this center – his work, his project – would be the crucible for a re-casting of a broken world.

The other side of the coin is *'the project as mask'* in front of an other. During my first one-to-one meeting with Prof. Saucier in the Winter term, I realized that I was using the project and its theoretical formulation as *a shield*. I was using this alleged concern of mine with time and sculpture (and the resulting obsolescence of sculpture due to the societal emphasis on time-based media), as a way to deal with my professional anguish. Even with the distance allowed by doing field work, I had started to fear for my professional future as sculptor.

3.2.1.5 Self-Other

a- Self :

As I started to expound above, the project can certainly be seen as *presentation of the self*, both to oneself and to others. As presentation of the self to the self, the project comes to be a surrogate definition for the self. Briggs brings forward the notion of *Themata*, a notion that in Briggs comes to mean 'central life theme' (or project in our case) (Briggs 1988). Themata is a notion Briggs borrowed from Keegan and Holton, who used the term of themata as a way to identify the "thought forms" that are the "sign post of vision" in the lives of creators. They are guts assumptions formed in early childhood

and show an impressive stability over the years. These thematas are imposed upon experience. They are often linked to the memory that is remembered as the first. For example, when asked what was his first memory, Einstein remembered a time when he was five. He was sick and in bed, and his father gave him a compass. He remembers being totally impressed by the fact that the needle did not move. He said that from this moment on, he felt that the universe was continuous, that there were forces forcing things to act a certain way - holding needles in place despite the rotation of the casing. There was invariance. Briggs explains Einstein's strong attachment to the theory of relativity - often called the theory of invariance - to this themata, or central life theme, because Briggs says it would be hard to explain otherwise Einstein's obstinacy to defend his theory in front of a growing adhesion to the Quantum theory and its postulate of uncertainty. For Darwin the central themata was gradualism. Holton identified a hundred of thematas and he thinks they are basic tools for primitive perception.

Closely linked to this notion of themata is the notion of Nuance, Briggs says. While thematas are abstract themes, Nuances are the actual images that are the repository of thematas. They are the "raw material whose distillation is the creative act." (Briggs 1988 : 40). They are Holons. Edison's 'drum and stylus' (he saw a seismograph in a museum while being a child) led him to the invention of the movie projector. Virginia Wolf's earliest memory is that of lying half awake in a nursery while being immersed in the most delicious light and hearing the sound of the waves - an 'image' of pure ecstasy, which literary critics say permeated all of her writings. Gruber (in Briggs 1988) sees these memories as 'images of wide scope', emotionally and aesthetically charged images that can be verbalized. "Nuances and thematas are clearly related.

Nuance is the aura s that surrounds a themata, the energy that infuses thematic convictions. It is the vibrating field around thematic magnets. (Briggs 1988 : 47). We all have those magnetic poles in our lives, Briggs says, but their role is best reveal in those who become creators [who is not ?].

Nothing would be easier to demonstrate in my field work. Projects were inescapably linked to life history, in ways that they allowed the class to slowly penetrate into each student's life theme. Detailing the correlation for each student would be too long but to name a few : Michel had collected the coins his mother was bringing him back from each of her travels; Michel was now directing a group, 'L'Internationale Virologie Numismatique', where he subverted dollar bills. Gilbert has been a professional hair stylist all his life and is now working exclusively with hairs, in sculpture. Dan has always worked alongside his father who is a home-painter; he now design projects that have to do with parodying the culture of home decoration. There was a clear revelation of life-themes both in terms of the content of projects (interests, focus, theme) and in terms of the form it would take (mediums, processes, "languages"). These 'thematas' were clearly exemplified in proto-projects, at the admission : Mona wanted to work with ergonomics (she had a life-long love story with movement and dance); for Michel everything was clear, his project was already ready to be realized the first day he came to school ("theoretically, it's all clear; it's materially that I'm not sure"); I noted in my field notes that my own first images contained the whole project, and they were certainly linked to my life-long concern with epistemology and obsolescence. Without even knowing the life-stories of students, the amazing thing is that their projects would

reveal it. Professor Régimbald was specifically eager to make that link, when she commented the correspondence she had ask us to build with one another.

The medium can become a project, and in this the art project is one of the few projects which can exploit this *medium as themata*, in the sense that in the past, it had been sufficient for art to play of itself. Right at the beginning of classes, on September 6th, I wrote :

“As we are visiting the different workshops – video, sound, print making, wood, metal, photography, pottery, plaster, stone – there is a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity. One could see in oneself and in others the glittering of emotion as one would meet again familiar grounds. And conversely, the dull edges of boredom [or the fuzzy contours of anxiety] when we were visiting a land we had never inhabited. I was bored and anguished when I visited the media labs. Bored because I already know I have little affinity for that kind of environment – clean and dark. Anguished because it seems to be the cool place to be in nowadays. I always dread the day when this is all that is going to be left. Buttons and screens. We could feel that dread also when we were visiting the dinosaurs : lithography, serigraphy, all obsolete monsters. Even for them, computers were now changing everything. And then my eyes would open wide and large when we would enter the wood shop and the metal shop. Yes, home indeed. The long hours of success and failure and despair. Yet a home. A home not so much for the familiarity of the past – maybe a little still... - but for the possibilities entailed. An old playground that is not yet exhausted. All the things you can do. Like parents and friends. All the threads you can pick up. Olds threads yet winded in so many ways. Exactly like a game. And yet all this might be over in a couple of years...

I could see the same flicker in the eyes of people when they would come to their personal playgrounds. Marcello, the photographer from Brazil, would jump right in front of everyone when he would enter ‘his’ dark cave. Having a hard time hiding the smile on his face, he would drink like a nectar the technician’s maps to the equipment. It was touching to see. One could then begin to feel what ‘affinity’ means. Like people bound to be together. Like an old couple, they bury in consented ignorance the feeling that their relation is not eternal.”

-Excerpt from field notes

Even the strongest group critique could not undermine this tacit resolve that was expressed in ‘one’s own way of doing things’. Mona, shaken by a critique, nevertheless decided to return –stick to, that is – her old way of doing things. After nine months of suggestions and critiques, I decided that my first idea was still the beast. At least I could

get a connection to it, it encapsulated all the feelings and the root metaphors of my life. It was the source, the fountain.

This '*stubborn familiarity*,' this '*medium-process as home*' was exemplified in my meeting with installation artist Jean-Pierre Gauthier. When I told him of my doubts about sculpture, that maybe I should think of including some moving parts somewhere, he said "It already moves a lot !", acquiescing to the visual 'vibration' of my million index card piece. He told me that although he specializes in motorized installations, he always resisted the pressure of having computer controlling his devices. "I don't need computers ! There are many other ways of doing it.", he says, alluding to his special brand of *bricolage*. Professor Schofield insisted that successful artists often worked at the frontiers of obsolescence, where things start to lose their usefulness. Visiting artist Jana Sterback confirmed that view. For her, new technologies are still too enmeshed in the nets of usefulness to be 'useful' in art. Most probably Schofield was trying to foster an idiosyncrasy that is often voiced in art as 'finding one's own language', which is another way to express a desire artists have of finding a direct link to inspiration.

In a way, the program at UQAM is reinforcing the idea of themata, of life-theme thesis project. Marcello, an ex-philosophy student, is building a project on his life-long icon : Wittgenstein. Marlene is obstinately trying to seduce us with her idea of disgusting art... Françoise finds inspiration in artists like Wenda Koop who, like Françoise, lived a prolonged exile. In the Seminar class, we were asked to present our 'artist family', that is : the group of artists with whom we would be honored to exhibit, the artists in which we find commonality of themes and treatments. The results were striking, and would have delighted people who believe in culture as replica. Sometimes students appeared to be

cloning those masters. Claire was presenting Anette Messenger, Orland, fitting her obsession with contagion and seduction; Murielle was presenting Liisa Ahtila and Rineke Dijkstra, Michel Kabakov, Mona Rafaele De Groutte and Marie Suzanne Désilet, Janine Yoshio Suda. Another and more productive (sorry Mr. Bourdieu...) way to see this – other than see cultural capital reproduced – is to say that students were desperately trying to find similes with their life-long preoccupation. They were trying to fit these artists in their life, and not the opposite (emulating culture). Otherwise why would they sustain their mimetism, their mimicking with such force ? Where would they find the force, the drive to imitate, to emulate ? Was it not rather that they *recognized* in those persons *something that they had always known* ? My personal experience tells me the second hypothesis is much closer to reality. Culture cloning is not an appealing model to me. Probably creativity is my own themata...

b- Other :

The art project, as it is promoted in the avant-garde and in universities today, can be seen as exterior to art making and as a requirement of discourse. A troubling case to me was brought up by one of my colleagues sharing the studio with me. One day I noticed that Françoise, an already proficient professional painter in her fifties, was painting the sketches I had seen her explain very enthusiastically to Nicole. This surprised me because it was a 180 degree change from her previous work with logos on bags. I asked her :

- “No more bags and logos ?
- “I feel stuck with that project. I can’t figure out what to do of it.
- “Why not PAINT, just PAINTING ?
- “ I wouldn’t be able to talk about it. Painting does not need to be explained. It’s just there. And since we are at the Graduate level, *I can’t get away from the need to have a topic* (emphasis is mine).

- "Do you realize what you say ?" I asked, aghast. "It's completely deviating your work!"
- "I know, I know. But painting I can do at home. I can SELL them. I don't need a master's degree for that."

A mind inclined to conspiracy theories would be prompt to denounce the tyranny of discourse, the power relations within and without the establishment etc.. Indeed, a whole branch of contemporary art seems to have adopted the 'Art as making enigma' paradigm. Enigma making is an easy way out of a situation that requires more and more that discourse be forefront. Enigma still retains the uncertainty of art, while promising to interpreters their daily meal. Enigmas are an easy link to discourse, as a social link to institutions and non-artists. Although this tendency to reduce art to '*devinette*' could be moderately felt throughout the year in group critique, a despite the fact that teachers repeatedly voiced their intention not to do so, a case illustrates very well the dominion of conceptual art on the milieu. A famous Montreal critique was invited to the final in-class, group evaluation. Throughout the 8 hours (!) session, he kept acting as a detective, striving to detect 'meaning'. At one point I took the microphone and asked why, in Françoise's case, which was a blatant case of a very sensual and colourful painting – the only 'painting' of the whole exhibit, in the classical sense – why in her case we did not even talk one second about the basic material of her work : color !. The critique and the teacher answered that it was hard to speak about color... What they meant, as I interpreted it, was that speaking of colors, one could no longer play the game of clues. One could no longer attach 'themes', 'topics', 'issues' to the art work. I came back with the example of Susan Sontag (1966) who heavily criticized the over-abundance of interpretation in art. The critique argued that Sontag had had a very narrow interpretation of interpretation... He defended himself from 'decoding enigmas', but a minute later he

was back on his tracks. As we will see in the third section, the issue is very complex, and cannot be reduced to a power game where artists capitulate in front of the forces of the 'market'. Artists working sometimes for month in isolation, and receiving a response to their work in form of clever words, might come to want words like addicts crave for drug.

More than a mere move on a check mat, art projects in the contemporary art world might be thought of as *will asserted*. Projects are certainly claims, and claims in front of an 'other' that is not always known. They are claim of ownership (of ideas, of methods), claims of identity, claims of power over oneself and others. Michel was a clear example of this, probably because his art purports to engage politically and very strongly with a social reality he criticizes heavily and even sometimes despises. His assertive attitude was a way to send a message, to himself and to others, that things were to be done anyway, the way he intended them to be, that you like it or not. The link of art projects to *identity as will* can be seen with obvious clarity in grant writing. In a workshop on the topic that was offered graciously to students, the appointed coach made it clear that what a jury was looking for was a line of coherence in one's C.V. and text of intention. Therefore it was of utmost importance to make the submitted project appear to be a continuation of one's work. Continuity had to be constructed. It had to be identified and magnified. Continuity was warrant of seriousness, of course, but it was also a token of authenticity, a proof that you were not to succumb to the latest fad, a proof that you were genuine, original, and able to keep the head out of the crowd. What about discontinuity, then, that is after all the back bone of my thesis? Well... in my own experience, the best bet when you want to do something you never did before and you

want to have governments funding you is to...hide it ! I found that I could build myself a persona, the ever-changing-interdisciplinary, that accounted for all my wanderings...!

3.2.1.6 A critique from within

Professor Schofield was aware of the weight this emphasis on the project could have on spontaneity, as he explained during an interview in February 2001 :

“...Maybe in my teaching the notion of project overtook the rest (*pris le dessus*), but I have tried, in the class *atelier de création*, the class you attended, not to let the project come forward too much. I have talked often about taking care not to be too overwhelmed by this idea of project. In the program, this idea of project is too strong. This is why, for example I have taken an enormous distance from the idea of writing a research project. I think it would be better that it would be done IN the *atelier* (one’s work space) and that we look at what have been done, instead of projecting in the future. Because often I find that when people project forward, they tend to take pretty conventional ideas, to say the truth... Accidents that come from a practice are much more interesting than how people can project... You ask someone to think of a new idea, or to answer to a new question, and they have the tendency to come up with the answer that is the most obvious. I’m not very “project” in my teaching (laugh) ... (and certainly not in a first “atelier de création”)... but maybe the institution as a whole led you to think that this was the case.

Q : If we say that the accidents are more interesting than the line we try to force onto the work, nevertheless, it’s hard to provoke these accidents...

S : That is : we can put ourselves in a situation where accidents can happen. Of course if you are working in the atelier and you start working with materials, an accident can happen. If you stay on the computer and start writing a description of what you intend to do, its very unlikely that an accident will happen.

Q : So for you the discourse inhibits the...

S : Its not that it inhibits, I think it has been put at the wrong place. It’s been put before instead of after... It’s just that I think that this idea of trying to define by the cultures, hmm...because it corresponds a bit to a buying offer (*offre d’achat*), to a quotation (*devis*) for a pail or a water heater; in fact I find that this is a model of a consumer society, it is an academic model. Because it’s not so much the idea of discourse as the idea of predetermining by the text...this is what I resist to. I would expect that the discourse be so present that it would disappear; in a certain way it is like the air around us. It’s everywhere. We’d be dead in three minutes were it not to exist, but because it’s everywhere, we don’t think [about it] anymore. So I think in fact that discourse should be... because discourse means two persons - dis-course - it should be intertwined (*intercallé*) in our work, but

this tendency of predetermining, it's a bit different from "discourse". I do not think that discourse equals project."

-Transcription from video tape

We can now ask *what is the opposite of the notion of 'project' in art ?*. Playwright Larry Tremblay's comments on his own creative process suggest that it is "having no program". The fact that he, like others, cannot write if he knows or anticipates the end results is what allows me to think of *'improvisation'* as the antinomy of project. Going further into this we find that a generally shared definition in the field of *'art as the practice of undoing expectations'* reinforces this tension against the notion of project in art. In a discussion about our exhibit of the fall semester, Mona mentioned that she had received the critique by artist J.P. Gauthier that the text of her video sounded too much 'Master's thesis', i.e. it was too scholarly to 'work' in the realm of art. During that same exhibit, I witnessed a conversation between a student and the potential thesis director to whom she was explaining her work. The teacher made an oblique comment about her over-justification of her process by saying, with the overtones of a reproach, that there was "a lot of information in the piece, in what you say". In conversation with Michel, we both agreed that the group critiques – and art schools for that matter - were somewhat artificial, in the sense that in 'real life', artists cannot resort to captive audiences to 'explain' their pieces. Professor Saucier went as far as to say at numerous occasions that this 'captive audience' – i.e. the context of the Master degree - was the only opportunity we would have to have the resource of a community. It was even a feeble way to build such a community, since those peers would be immersed in their own projects after the end of classes, and this rarely available for critiques. Many students started making plans for such group critiques during the second year of the program, when there are no longer

any classes. But Saucier's further comments, that it would be almost impossible to gather peers after the degree, were already confirmed by the helplessness resignation and the in the tone of those early calls for a 'continuation'. My own thesis director echoed Jean Pierre Perreault when he said that, like him, he was taking an early retirement because he did not believe in schools anymore. Why ? The tale that university was a place to do research was mere wishful thinking in the case of art schools. With three days of teaching per week, one day of departmental tasks and the peripheral assignments (correction, union, etc.) professors simply did not have any time left to do research, meaning their own art work. When I asked privately the director of the MA program how her own work was going, she confessed she was going crazy because there simply was 'no personal work anymore'. She was too busy to do art. The School director said she did it during the week ends, or at night after school...

Going back to this 'no project', I could witness several times a strong resistance of students to long term goals, something I explore at length in the section about attitudes and specially in the section called 'no-work', where I have tried to go beyond stereotypes of art students as lazy bums. This resistance to the project was sometimes expressed in a claim for freedom, but most of the time it was very naïve, as this example with Mona shows. On a Sunday afternoon in our shared studio of the fifth floor, I helped her with her backdrop for her video shooting. When I asked her about her lighting, about the type of atmosphere she wanted, she did not know. It was a very positive not-knowing, like someone who wants to keep playing it by ear. At another occasion, she voiced her intention of "getting loose", of "exploring", of just "doing things" without much concern for long term goals. On another occasion, commenting about my own tri-annual plan, she

said we had to take care with projects. I took her comment as meaning that they could drive us crazy. Short term goals were better, and more humble, she said.

More troubling is the discovery that art schools might not be 'teaching'. "*L'art ça ne s'enseigne pas, ça s'accompagne*" (Art cannot be taught, only accompanied) said professor Régimbald while reading a text she had written on the integration of art to the university. "So if art schools do not teach art, what do they teach?" might we ask, like Terry Sefton, candidate to a PHD in anthropology, said to the 2001 Annual Meeting of the Universities Art Association of Canada (October 18-20 at UQAM).

Is it enough to say that the project is the locus of an intense negotiation of power ?
Is it enough to say that the project is the manifestation of power relations ? Certainly not.
What is 'power' ?

3.2.1.7 : Summary :

As a way to conclude this section on the project in art, and as a means to pave the way to a partial validation of Low's model, I can already say - as will be demonstrated in the following lines - that Art projects, in the context of contemporary art, are clearly at the core of a center-periphery dynamics of the self. They place oneself, as they are placed themselves, in the very delicate and sometime painful situation of being simultaneously at the center and at the periphery of oneself. Projects could be seen as '*don de soi*', i.e. giving oneself to something other than oneself. And in this they promise and deliver some relief in this center-periphery dynamic. While seeing how the data can be interpreted in the light of Low's model, I also realize that this model intersects with most of anthropology's deepest concerns, the first of which being the self-other relationship.

As said earlier, the particularity of Low's model is to place the self-other relationship upstream of experience. A 'physical' other is not what is responsible for this self-other dynamic, it is rather its consequence, that dynamic being so ingrained in consciousness that it becomes its founding axiom.

The project is *the inside-out of consciousness*. It is an impossible center, un-localizable. It acts as an outside in the promised re-unification of self and world, and as an inside when it becomes a *necessary anchor*. This realization came to me in May, after roughly nine months of immersion. Seeing the problematic from all angles, witnessing several waves of alternating worship and despiction of the project, I came to see it as a *paradoxical anchor*, both necessary and in the need to be transcended. **For the center is both of oneself, belonging to oneself, and out of oneself, since it manifests in the project in terms of attainment.** Thus one strives to become the center precisely because one is the center... Along the year, the project became for some of us this *portable home*, both home and parasite. A kind of *home-boat*, a place to negotiate familiarity in front of the unknown. Just before the winter break, Éliot's confession was revealing in that sense : "You're doing something for years, and then you start something new. And then you look back at your old work and you ask : 'Why not that ? Why am I departing from what I used to do ? [meaning in his case the core of his '*démarche*', the poetic assemblage]." Thus for Éliot, change was not only beneficial. It could uproot one.

Projects are fragile, but the fragility they manifest is the fragility of a center that is both relative and absolute. For projects are always bound to fail. Even when they succeed they fail : the center they promise never comes; the ad-equation sub-ject / pro-ject / ob-ject (Boutinet 1999) is never realized; finally the subject cannot become the center.

Agnes Martin goes in that sense when she says that art students should not fear failure for it is precisely failure that is the ground of artistic creation. Thus *the sentiment of disillusion and disappointment is not an offspring of creation, but it's very source* (Martin : 67-70). In other words : it is not (only) because you have failed that you continue to create (which is the traditional paradigm): **it is because you will fail that you first started to create.** **The future always comes before the past**, of course (phenomenologically speaking, in the experience of the project). From a naturalist point of view, it is because there was a past that there will be a future. A phenomenology of the project might indicate that it is because of the future that there is a past, it is because we project ourselves forward that we can look behind to see what has been. It is too soon to expound on this, and to really dig the idea that social dynamics surrounding the art project in a contemporary context, are a manifestation and a result of this painful and very generative situation (center-periphery paradox of consciousness), not its origin. We will have to wait the third section of this chapter for this. But we can already say : in the experience itself, art projects are not so much a result of social relations – in a cause-effect fashion; rather : social relations are the result of a project. This is not an ontological argument but a phenomenological one. What allows this assertion is a reversing of the genealogy of Being that is allowed by a return to the experience.

(Chapter) 3.2.2 THE CREATIVE ACT

3.2.2.1 : Theoretical openers :

The curve of this section goes from *history* to *anthropology* to *religious studies*; it follows the path that traverses three key words : **imagination, inspiration, epiphany(revelation)**. Kearney (1988) shows obliquely that the West could never solved the paradox between the real and the imagined. Leavitt (1997) paves the way to the paradoxical thinking of Corbin by re-inscribing prophecy in poetry, and Corbin (1969) presents us with a Sufi model where the two poles, the real and the imagined, are seen as mutually generative.

1- History

Imagination : Kearney's Wake of Imagination

From pre-modern times, the Western views of imagination have always been torn between a view of imagination as a gift of God and as a challenge to God. Even the modern and post-modern eras, the divine is always present if only in denial. A modern reformulation of this dilemma – the 'imagination as curse and blessing' (here and following : Kearney 1988) is to say that men and women in the West have always been concerned with truth, with what might lie behind what they perceive. For the early Hebrew, imagination is what tears Man apart in desire (to be what one is not, to know what is unknown). And yet, imagination is what makes Man a man, for it is paradoxically the fall from paradise that leads Man to want to return to God. Voiced in a modern dialect, *because of Knowledge, Humans want to find Being*.⁵⁴ The biblical myth of the

⁵⁴ [Which is the ultimate paradox ! It is because of knowledge that we know of Being but it is because of knowledge that we cannot *meet* Being (coincide with it).]

Golem, that man-made man that is devoid of the capacity to think by himself, reproduce himself and create, is the early version of our artificial intelligence myth, and is a reminder of the degeneration of an imagination that feeds from itself. Imagination in the Greek mythology first bears the stigma of thief (Prometheus was chastised for having stolen creativity to the Gods) . Like in the case of Adam, imagination is an act of rebellion against the Divine order. Art is doomed to be an artifice : Its freedom is arbitrary, its originality is a simulation, a mimesis. It is Plato who gives imagination its first Western philosophical foundation. Plato opposes epistemologically reason and imagination. Reason knows, imagination imitates (mimesis). Aristotle replaces truth in this world and the images into the psyche of Man. But Kearney notes that even if Aristotle is one of the first Westerners to place imagination in man, imagination is not yet productive. In the Classical and Medieval West, which are born into the Judeo-Greek crucible, imagination is always an intermediary between Man and God. It is never totally an internal property of a subject. The Greek myth is fatalistic. There is no pardon to be asked for having stolen the power to create. The price and reward for this crime is pride. On the other hand, Adam makes imagination evil by his own choices. There is no wicked semi-Gods in the Bible. Adam can join God again if he repents.

The medieval imagination is, Kearney says, Onto-Theological. It is a synthesis of Greek ontology and biblical theology. Again we see the same divorce between Man and God [or between Knowing and Being]. Augustine believed that imagination was an obstacle to contemplation. In the writings of Aquinas, *imaginatio*, or *phantasia* is depicted as a 'storehouse'. It preserves sensible experiences in the form of derived

copies. Images are analogies which hold meaning. Aquinas thus combines the noetic⁵⁵ realm of Plato with the Aristotelian absolute necessity of images to mentally represent forms of being. Here again, without submitting itself to reason, imagination deforms reality and become demoniac. Most medieval thinkers share a common belief that images are never originals. Thus images can usurp the power to the intellect and without its supervision, they are responsible for the confusion between the rational and the irrational. In short, medieval thinkers see imagination with great suspicion. However there is an important exception in this medieval condemnation of images. Developed in Eastern Europe and

Middle East, Iconography leads progressively to Iconoclasm. As the middle ages ended, the Humanist Renaissance will see the birth of the cult of illusion. The human subject will become the center of the process, both as object of spectacle and spectator.

Did the modern world come to terms with this divorce between the real and the imagined, between Being and Knowing ? It would seem so...but a close reading of Kearney invalidates this. The passage from the pre-modern era to modern times is the passage from a mimetic paradigm of imagination to a productive paradigm. Imagination, in modern times, become the "source of its own truth". (Kearney 1988 : 155). Kicking God out of the world, what the moderns will question is the notion of representation, the notion that images are 'images of something else than themselves'. Kant will keep Being but will say that it is inaccessible. Descartes abolishes the notion of knowledge as a correspondence subject-object and present it as a correspondence subject-subject. Kant will come to see imagination not as a by-product of experience, but as the root of

⁵⁵ [noetic : concerned with the object in itself]

experience. Imagination synthesizes, connects the perception (sensations) to pre-existing forms (understanding). It does so only because there is a 'transcendental ego' who links all the experiences together. [In other words, it is only because these experiences are 'my' experiences that I can deduce that there is a world out there.] The Romantics will go to the end of this self-referential imagination and declare that imagination is all there is. But doing so, they threaten the Enlightenment and science, which still need Being as 'something out there'. Unable to sustain their magical rapport to reality, Romantics will fall back into the idealism of a self-contained individual (Starobinski, in Kearney 1988 : 188)

From the mid 19th to the mid 20th century, from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to Sartre, the existentialist movement will temper the romantic view by making of creative imagination not a panacea, but a predicament. Heidegger's alternate concept for Man, 'Dasein', comes from Kant's transcendental imagination. Kant discovered that Being as a "permanent presence" is a product of a finite man projecting himself into a conceptual time. Heidegger sees Kant as the first modern to interpret Being in term of time. Past, present and future, all are mere images according to Kant. ***"It is only by virtue of the synthesizing horizon of imagination that something can be experienced as necessarily the same through change."*** (Kearney 1988 : 194). But Heidegger thinks that Kant drew back just in time not to see the destructiveness of his discovery. If the mind pre-forms everything, what is it that is out there ? What is the "real" world ? As Heidegger says of Kant : "He saw the unknown; he had to draw back." (in Kearney 1988 : 195). Heidegger

anticipates Sartre in the sense that he sees the Dasein (man) as a Being-toward-its-death. He anticipates the end of the concept of Man, and the end of imagination.

Sartre negative view of imagination as the 'not-real' is a byproduct of his ontology, based on a schism between Being and consciousness. But it is because 'le pour-soi' cannot touch 'l'en-soi' that man is free, free to imagine, condemned to be free... But Sartre is not out of the paradox, since for him poetry is the opaque side of imagination, and prose it's transparent side. Prose is closer to truth, because less imagined...

The goal of postmodernism is to undermine the humanist notion of imagination found in existentialism as an original creation of meaning. But, post-moderns discover, there is no origin, only an endless play of linguistic signs. There is no meaning outside language itself, the medium is the message. In the postmodern crucible, diachronic narration (beginning, middle, end) becomes a-chronic repetition and recurrence. The metaphor has thus made a full circle and we are back to the beginning, only with a difference. The mirror made lamp is made mirror again, but now we are in a hall, a labyrinth of mirrors that reflect nothing but themselves, *ad infinitum*. The parodic imagination is the imagination of a transparent copy. The deconstructionists push the model of reflexivity beyond the subjective inwardness. It is a culture, a world, a structure that reflects upon itself, not upon an individual subject. Kearney sees in postmodernism a return to the paradigm of the mimesis. Images are copies, but the original never existed. The original 'original' was itself a copy. Derrida concludes that this is the death of truth. There are three consequences to draw from Derrida's position, according to Kearney. First, we can no longer ask the question "What is imagination?". There is no essence to imagination, nothing that would separate it from the rest of the world. Second, we can no

longer ask the question “Who imagines ?”. There is no origin to meaning, no subject, transcendental or existential. There are only fictions in operation, writings who write themselves. Third, we can not ask “How to escape?”. There is no escape. No outside or inside. Plato’s cave is contained in another cave. Parody is the only *Paradis* (Sollers in Kearney). The result of postmodernism is thus an Apocalypse without end.

* * *

Kearney’s remarkable survey is troubling. Does Post-modernism succeed in pulling its head out of the paradox ? Of course not. Postmodernism is seducing. It reads as Eastern philosophies (In Zen : ‘From the beginnings not a thing is’). But we should take care with premature ‘*rapprochements*’. Linguistic similes can be a smoke screen (Wilber 1996). In my opinion, post-modernism is a subtle reassertion of the positivist dogma: reality is outside yourself. Why can’t you pretend to be ‘original’ any more ? Because to do so you would have to exhibit original productions, ‘out there’, in the world. Since every-thing has been done, you would be a fool to pretend you produce something that is not referential in a way. Again, the principle of reality is deemed to repose outside the individual. Reality is a judgment of reality, a judgment done by the others on the basis of the exteriorization, the manifestations, the products of your persona, not on the basis of your state of being. Post-modernism uses what it wants to demolish : Unity. But there must be a preliminary unity (in the self, or in the experience) to discover that the unity is threatened.

Aside from killing themselves with their ultra-relativism, in my sense deconstructionists are positivists hiding their heads in rhetoric, because they still conceive truth as a noumena, a thing under the things, a reality under the appearances. Since, in

their digging for the truth, they realize that their dig will be endless (there will always be a rock under the rock you dug), they declare that truth was an illusion. But this reposes on a very primitive notion of truth. Heidegger made us think when he revisited our notion of truth. He did so in going back to the Greeks, for who truth was *Aletheia*, dis-closure, un-concealment, revelation. But the fact that truth unfolds can be seen as an invitation to reconsider the way we see truth. We could *see truth as a verb instead of seeing it as a noun*.

2- Anthropology

Inspiration : Leavitt's Poetry and Prophecy (1997)

Leavitt's introduction to *Poetry and Prophecy*, provides a very good background to the problem of 'inspiration' by drawing with minutia the history of the schism between poetry and prophecy in the West. In particular, he points to a historical moment where poets started their migration from the land of seers to the land of craftsmen, the passage from Archaic Greece to Classic Greece. Unfortunately, academic research has gradually artisanized poetry and psychologized prophecy. The progressive raise of the concept of 'artistry' - under the impulse of literary criticism, structuralism and then post-structuralism - means that the prophetic nature of poetry is progressively denied. The cultural particularism that dominates anthropology today translates into a refusal to psychologize, to find generic and universal correspondences. Leavitt implicitly refuses this turn, when he asks : 'Are Mantic utterances really - only - performance ? Are they really - only - deliberate ?' Wanting to dig the notion of 'inspiration', Leavitt finds himself forced to accept, at least temporarily, the idea that part of poetry, as in prophecy,

comes from 'elsewhere' than the personal self of the '*déclamateur*'. Despite the trendy academic prophecy (sic) of the disenchantment of the world, Leavitt thinks that words still have power. That does not mean that prophecy and poetry should be confounded. For poetry is a language about language, and it is for that matter eminently reflective, *while prophecy is totally non-reflective, its source being not in the speaker but elsewhere.*

The 'poetic function' is said by structural linguists of the Prague School to coalesce with language. On the other hand, the various terminology used for prophecy point to its extra-linguistic source/destination. But poetry in many societies is deemed prophetic. First prophecies are uttered poetically. And poetic language per se is either divine or demonic. Both ways, words have power. This overlapping finds its way into language. For the Greeks, prophecy is *enthousiam, manticism, mysticism, ecstasy, poetry.* For the Latin, it is inspiration, *possession, divination, vision, oracle, trance, vaticination.* For the Germans, it becomes *seership, soothsaying, witchcraft, weird.* All these terms are marked by their supernatural source. It is the Greek link of *mantis* to prophet or seer that makes Leavitt adopting 'Mantic' as the basic marker of a direct contact with an extraordinary source. But Leavitt's emphasis on the mantic aspect of poetry diverges from the current acceptance of poetry and prophecy as socially accepted discourses.

Some societies, like Archaic Greece and ancient China, automatically equate prophecy and poetry, Leavitt says. Etymology and ethnology point to this ancient association. In Latin, Vates is seer, '*devin*' prophet. The Shaman, as Halifax showed it, is the society's poet. 'Inspiration' comes the Latin '*spirare*', to breath, to blow, which is also the root of 'spirit'. The Greek '*enthousiamo*' points to the presence of the divine inside the poet [*theo* in thou]. The two 'functions' have thus been linked in language, but

in language also have they been distinguished. 'Poet' comes from the Greek 'to make'. 'Text' comes from the Latin 'to weave'. In Greek and Indic languages, the poet is designated by terms of carpentry, woodworking and tailoring. And these metaphors are clearly presented as opposed to the mantic function.

In Archaic Greece, the poet has the ability to sing hidden truths. Homer receives his poems from the Muses. The Greek term for truth, Aletheia, is composed of a negation, A, and a predicate, Letheia, that means forgetting, oblivion. Truth is thus a not-forgetting.⁵⁶ Poets are the guardians of knowledge, past and future. Prophets are fore-speakers, fore-tellers. Oracles are prophecies in verse. In Classical Greece, Poet-prophets become 'Poietes', makers, but still they are not 'Rhapsoidos', the weavers of words commenting on the 'work' of poets. In three dialogues of Plato, Socrates identifies the different types of madness (mania) bodily, mantic and poetic. It is Aristotle who rehabilitates poetry, but only as craft. No longer expressing the divine presence, it instills a purifying response by provoking the Katharsis.

Hebrew poetry is not based on fixed metrics but on semantic and grammatical parallelism. Hebrew verses are thus more or less a stylized prose. Christians and Hebrews place the emphasis on the content of the Bible, not its form. Leavitt notes the difference between the Greek world and Middle-east: "Throughout much of Western history, then, we find a division between the Greeks, seen as beauty-obsessed masters of craft, and the Hebrew, seen as God-obsessed mouthpieces." (Leavitt 1997 : 17). Leavitt thinks this is the origin of the tension in the West between Craft and Inspiration in the West.

⁵⁶ Leavitt's interpretation is tinted by his adhesion to linguistic paradigms of etymology. Heidegger proposes another interpretation (in his text *Parménide*) as 'un-concealment'. Therefore Aletheia might not mean so much a 'not forgetting things', as lovers of discursive things like Leavitt would like it, but rather a

The Neoclassic West has put an overwhelming emphasis on the technical tricks of the poet. This is the rise of poetry as craft -only. But despite that, it was always recognize that a part of poetry is not accessible through hard work. The tension between craft and inspiration was never totally abandoned, as is testified by the rediscovery of non-classical traditions in the mid 1700s (Homer, ancient Scottish poems, folk poetry, etc.). German, British and French romanticism have placed poetic emotion and inspiration as central to their doctrine.

Some of the most influential movements of the 20th century were aggressively mantic, as testified by the poetry of Yeats, Pound and the Dada, and later the Black Mountain poets (Olson), the ones drawing inspiration in Shamanism (Duncan), and the Beat poets (Ginsberg, Kerouac, Snyder). These people looked outside the classical Western canons. This was the birth of a collaboration between anthropologists and poets in the form of what is called ethno-poetics. This did not stop literary criticism from distancing itself from the actual literary movements, and to put the emphasis on the technical craft, the internal patterning and the projected effect upon the reader. The New Criticism was full swing into 'artfulness'. Structuralists of the 60s also, refusing psychologism, thought that beauty and effect come from artfulness, not from any magical or mantic quality. Post-structuralism and deconstructionism, having no interest in inspiration either, pushed internal analysis to its breaking point.

The evolutionists Frazer and Tylor saw mantic utterances as linked to primitive stages. Levy-Bruhl saw them as a distinct logic. Psychoanalysis saw in them the archaic root of personality. With the advent of World War II, a breakthrough allowed Nora

non-forgetting of oneself in the experience, a different sort of awareness. Too bad we cannot ask them directly...

Kershaw Chadwick, for example, to publish her *Poetry and Prophecy* (1942). She brought forward the argument that anthropology must include literary investigations, since prophets-poets are the preeminent intellectuals of non-literate societies, their living 'bearers of oral traditions'. During this time, comparative religion sought to define the sacred, the numinous. Thus we got Rudolf Otto in the 20s, Mircea-Eliade in the 30s and Joan Halifax in the 70s.

Starting with William James in the beginning of the 20th century, psychology offered from the beginning two major options. There is the pathologizing option that still today lists, in the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, such things as "trance and possession disorders". The other option is still psychological but non-pathological. It fosters various conceptualizations, such as the notion of "deep play" (Lewis 1958), the notion of "peak experience" (Maslow 1964), of "Shaman as persuasive healer" (Levi-Strauss 1949, Frank 1961), of "Possession as psycho-therapeutics" (Adler & Zempleni 1972, Corin 1979), of "transcultural psychiatry" (Prince 1980, Kumayer 1974), and of "psychosomatics".

* * *

Leavitt's piece is of major importance in our context. If we extend even slightly his line of argument, we can see that in negating Vision, Prophecy, and the Mantic dimension of poetry and art in general, we deny art the right to lay an eye on Being. We make it arbitrary. Leavitt presents us with a local manifestation of this paradox between Knowing and Being. He places this paradox in time (prophecy) and present us an episode of the perpetual swing of the pendulum : we want to reach Being (prophecy), but the more we do we realize it is only Knowing we reach (poetry) - realizing knowing is all

there is, we reify it (prose) and give it value of Being (humanities); then the roads forks in two : you can either opt to go back to finding Being outside yourself (objectivity) or you can look for the Being of Knowing (gnosis). This the way of Nisargadatta, the assertion that all utterances are ultimately Mantic, i.e. non-personal. But this 'knowledge' is accessible only when a special state of the self is reached :

"The immutable neither lives nor dies; it is the timeless witness of life and death. You cannot call it dead, for it is aware. Nor can you call it alive, for it does not change. It is just like your tape recorder. It records, it reproduces - all by itself. You only listen. Similarly, I watch all that happens, including my talking to you. It is not me who talks, the words appear in my mind and then I hear them said ... There is nothing in my mind. You hear the word so do I hear them. The power that makes everything happen makes them also happen". (Nisargadatta 1973 : 433)

Anthropology seems to be caught in the paradox in its own way. Mantic utterances are allowed to be trans-personal but only in the sense that they are cultural ... But 'prophecy' is the same as 'intuition' or 'creativity' : first you need to accept it as hypothesis; second you need to follow the prescription of those who claim to practice it : you need to transform a belief into a practice; only then are you in position to *maybe* experience it (Wilber 1996). But a leap of faith cannot be reflective (wanted) without destroying itself (Bateson 1972, 1973, Bateson & Bateson 1987). And we are back to the paradox again : where do leaps of faiths come from ?

3- Religious studies

Epiphany (revelation) : Henry Corbin's Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi (1969)

Henry Corbin's study is an exegesis of the abundant literature that was left by the famous Sufi Mystic Ibn 'Arabi (mid 12th to mid 13th). Ibn 'Arabi have been deeply misunderstood by Islam, Corbin thinks, probably because he was one of those who saw that imagination could have a positive role in faith and spiritual advancement.⁵⁷ I organized this review around some notions that are key to our subject.

1) We cannot assess the reality of Imagination if we do not have faith in its offspring.

Corbin warns us that the Imagination he is talking about is not fantasy. It has little to do with our modern acceptance of the term. It is the magical production of an image, while fantasy is "the exercise of thought without foundation in nature, it is the Madman cornerstone." (Paracelsus, in Corbin 1969: 179). Psychology, Historicism and Sociologism have had the effect of transforming Gnostic knowledge (i.e. positing real being) into agnostic knowledge. But Imagination in the sense used by Ibn 'Arabi has noetic value : it 'creates' being [i.e. worlds that are real]. Corbin explains the difficulty of penetrating Ibn 'Arab's view for our modern dualistic minds : "What essentially is the creativity we attribute to man ? But is an answer possible unless we presuppose the meaning and validity of his creations ? ... How can we accept and begin to elucidate the idea that man feels a need not only to surpass a given reality but to surmount the solitude of the self left to its own resources in this imposed world... unless we have first experienced this need to go beyond..." (Corbin 1969: 180). The problem is that we [science as art] no longer believe in an intermediary world, real and attainable, between matter - attainable by sensory data, and a spiritual universe - accessible in faith. So the

⁵⁷ Corbin opening words : "Ibn 'Arabi, a rebel, an iconoclast, a syncretist or a mystic ?" is my sense his way of acquiescing to the links between epiphany and creativity.

degradation of imagination into fantasy is complete. Imagination secretes Imagination, i.e. the unreal.

2) *Creatio ex nihilo* is a modern myth

The notion of *Creatio Ex Nihilo* is not part of the Sufi doctrine, but ironically, has become the subterranean foundation of the Western idea of genius, the hallmark of a laicized world. Corbin asks if there would not be a correlation between this idea of *creatio ex nihilo* and “the degradation of the ontologically creative Imagination”. (Corbin 1969 : 182). For Ibn ‘Arabi, the idea that something would sprout out of nowhere is unthinkable, since everything was there from the beginning, even if only in potential.

3) No God without Man, No Man without God⁵⁸

Central to the thinking of Ibn ‘Arabi is the notion of “God created in the faith”. God imagines creatures and creatures imagine God. But by this recognition of the dependence of God upon Man and vice versa is not the relativisation of Imagination as to make it the mere product of Man’s invention, quite the contrary. In Ibn ‘Arabi, Corbin says, there is the elevation of these Imaginations to the rank of Theophanies. God knows Himself by our knowing of Him. This relation of the Knowing and the Being of God in images is expressed by the reciprocity between God and Man: “By knowing Him, I give Him Being.”... “I am known only by You. You are known only by me.” (Ibn ‘Arabi, in Corbin 1969 : 254)

4) Images are relative but real

⁵⁸ Although it is a bit reductionistic to do so, for the sake of this study we can replace God by Being and Man by Knowing.

Why images are so important to Sufism And Ibn 'Arabi in particular ? Because they are the only form that God can take for Man [translation : Knowing is all we can get of Being]. Allah is not God, but the way God presents Himself to Man. It is the 'God in the faith', the God impossible without faith. *the image that cannot appear unless it is wanted*. Again that is not to say that this image is fiction, on the contrary. The fact that images are the necessary and only possible intermediary between God and Man accounts also for the sadness that is beheld upon Allah. Allah indeed means sadness, deep longing, nostalgia, and expresses *the impossibility to reach God outside our image of Him*. "The form that disclosed itself is the form of the receptacle. It is both that which discloses itself and that to which it is disclosed." (Ibn 'Arabi in Corbin 1969 : 198). "The colour of the water is that of the vessel which contains it" (Mystic Junayd in Corbin, 1969 : 266). Images are what make Man different from God, and if refused, God cannot manifest Himself to Man.

5) God [or Being] as a perpetual re-creation

Since it is impossible to contemplate God directly, the Koran needs a support. This support, the Imagination or the image is projected by the force of the Himma, the power of the heart. The Himma, the creativity of the heart, is not the intellect. Central to the view of Ibn 'Arabi according to Corbin is also the notion of God as recurrent creation. God is not the fixed form of the Dogma, and the true mystic is prepared to see the form of God changing. Thus the ascension, the resurrection of the disciple. *the awakening is the increasing capacity for acceptance of forms forever new*. The science of the heart is the overcoming of the distinction sacred-profane. To 'wake up' is to start seeing images as what they are : images. But again, this is not a descent into relativism and incredulity

(‘Just images...!’), but rather the elevation of the usual mundane world to the rank of Image, i.e. to the rank of a theophany. Thus Imagination is not an allegory; Corbin says of the allegory that it is a “rational operation implying no transition either to a new plane of being or to a new depth of consciousness”. (Corbin 1969 : 14). Imagination is a ‘cipher’, a symbol : that which announces a distinct plan of consciousness., a mystery, inexhaustible, never totally explained.⁵⁹. Symbol is not Allegory. *So to ask the question : “do these images exist outside of us?” [as ‘spirits’, angels, gods, etc.] is to miss the point.* Corbin asks us to reverse the genealogy of Being. We cannot say that in “The flower is beautiful”, beauty does not exist. Images are upstream of Being, they are the crucible of Being, otherwise we negate the epiphanic function of our being.

6) The real cannot be personal

The fact that God is a recurrent creation entails that the individual creativity and imagination is but a moment of the total Theophany (the whole creation). The Active Imagination is hermeneutic : it is always reinterpreting itself through its creations, its ‘subjects’. *It is because it is not you who create that your creation is true.* The reality of Imagination is not the reality of the physical world, and the two levels should not be confounded, said Eliade. *The illusion is not in the imagination, it is in confounding, misunderstanding the mode of being of images.* Corbin says the *Himma*, the force of the heart, is almost equivalent to the Indian Chakra, or to the *Enthousiamos* of the Greeks.

7) *Coincidentia Opositorum*

Thus God [and Being] are impregnated of ambiguity and paradox, something that is expressed by the notion of *Coincidentia Opositorum*. [Being is at once in Knowing

⁵⁹ (This is in concordance with Maquet and his definition of symbolism :for example the musical score is a symbol, it calls for further executions (Maquet 1986). It is in discordance with Pierce’s semiology :

and outside of it. Corbin acknowledges the frequent reference to dreams and visions in Ibn 'Arabi's writing. It is the need to interpret dreams, to go beyond them that reveal the double nature of images as necessary and unavoidable intermediary. For it would be impossible to see beyond the dream if it was not a dream. This is the ultimate rehabilitation of Imagination as the source of Being.

8) Unity of worshiper and worshiped (or of the imagined and the imaginer, in modern terms)

There is in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi a mutual reciprocity of microcosm and macrocosm much like what is found in Indian mysticism. Corbin says. The disciple is encouraged to see himself as the imam, the totality of the creation. On the subject of the level of reality of these cosmological equations, Corbin admits that it is 'psychologically true' that the 'God created in the faith' can be seen as a symbol of the self. But this equation is not possible without God's will [or without Being, in modern language], and it is here that we step out of psychology into religion. The theophanic symbols are God. Understanding images as images is *freeing the self from the personal*, otherwise it would be idolatry. *The trans-personal is not the social*, something that is demonstrated by the fact that Ibn 'Arabi encourage the disciples to pray in private. The association sought is not with a group but with God. Corbin says the theologians were and still are scandalized by this praise to 'oneself-as-God'.

9) The image and disciple as mirrors

symbols as equivalent to linguistic referents)(Uzel 1997)

A recurrent analogy in Ibn 'Arabi's writings is the one to the mirror.⁶⁰ When you look at an object in the mirror, you don't see the mirror. But you know very well that you see a reflection, a thing in the mirror. You cannot see the mirror and the object at the same time. Forms appear in mirrors, but are not *of* the mirror. Still the mirror can be clean or dirty. *Imagination can be opaque or transparent. When opaque, it leads to multiplicity and dogmatism. It imprisons the beholder in the diversity of its manifestations. When transparent, it is impossible to confound the hidden and the manifested, the worshipper and the worshiped. This is why God cannot be contacted outside faith; the meaning of theophanies are only accessible in theophanies.* There is also the analogy also with the colored glass : "the coloration of glass receiving light : the light is impregnated with a shadow which is the glass itself " ((Corbin 1969 : 192). The disciple finds God, but is not God. And the glass can be more or less tinted, but never the light itself. There is no embodiment or incarnation of God. There is 'interpolation'. One could never become one with God, something Ibn 'Arabi condemns as heresy and idolatry. [In modern language : Knowing cannot attain Being, and the modern name for that heresy and idolatry is 'reification'].

10) Beauty as epiphany

Finally, Corbin notes that beauty is a prevalent theme in the whole of Sufism, because "beauty is the theophany par excellence." (Corbin 1969 : 274). Beauty in this context is not the purely aesthetic pleasure. It is the contemplation of human beauty as a numinous and sacral phenomenon.

* * *

⁶⁰ There is ground for inter-cultural validation here : the mirror is a root metaphor in Zen as in Buddhism in general, and Kearney tells us that it is a central metaphor throughout the Western history.

Throughout the presentation by Corbin of the work of Ibn 'Arabi, we cannot help but find this central notion of faith. There is an obvious link to many religions here, as there is to art, and in our context (anthropology), a clear link to Low ('Zen cannot be a means to an end') and to Bateson ('religion cannot be purposeful; Being is born in faith, religion protects faith'). Faith is a very difficult and abstract notion to our modern sensitivities. It has the flavor of a blind belief. The notions of total engagement, unconditional love, non-personal involvement are very hard to grasp for our very purposeful minds, because what is needed is precisely a step outside the intellect. However, 'creativity' seems to be a terrain where this total involvement becomes possible again, because stripped of all religious connotation. Often artists or scientists, after having experienced this ecstasy of a total engagement with their work, will come to consider religious metaphors with less apprehension (Csikszentmihalyi 1996).

Also we discover that, for Ibn 'Arabi, as for other visionaries of religious discipline, admitting the role of images and of Creative Imagination in the genesis of Being is not sinking back into the arbitrariness of relativism, but rather canceling out arbitrariness altogether. It is the reversing of the genealogy of Being, akin to what phenomenology tries to do. Images are the primordial and only available reality, and yet, they are still images of something...

By the same token, we discover that the modern insistence on the autonomy of imagination, in free will and in the ideology of innovation, has precisely the same effect as the canceling out of innovation in its reduction to the 'social mechanisms of culture': imagination, as reflectivity, comes to play of itself, to be circular, thus unreal.

Paradoxically, in 'freeing' imagination, we might have condemned it to the personal, the arbitrary, the futile.

One of the key aspects of this acquiescence to the 'image as image' in the context of this field work, is recognizing *the value of the personal character of revelation* (You (artwork) are known only by me, I am known only by You). In modern parlance : in revelations as in intuitions or in epiphanies, Being thus takes a form that is suited to the 'cultural background of the person'. *The relative becomes the absolute*, because ultimately it is all there is. Here we could compare this notion of the manifested with the absolute with Sartre's notion that the modern era accomplished a great advancement with the reduction of the noumena. to the phenomena, the reduction of Being to its apparitions (Sartre 1949 : 1).

There is a tremendously large area of research here, for in the 'East' (if there is such a thing) there is a wide array of positions on imaginations. Nisargadatta represents to my knowledge a very modern version of the pole that denies any reality to imagination. At 180 degrees of Ibn Arabi, imagination is seen here as a hindrance to the penetration into awareness.

3.2.2.3 : Description

In this section I shall describe the moment of revelation, what has been coined as the Eureka, or breakthrough, insight, intuition, inspiration, etc.. The progression follows the macro-organization of that chapter : **project, active imagination, center-periphery dynamics of the self.**

3.2.2.3.1 : Active Imagination as paradoxical project : the Eureka as anti-project

This is the phenomenology of the creative break: the voice from the outside, that which lies outside the line of history, the schemes of anticipation, outside planning, outside oneself, while integrating the past and future in a greater or different whole, i.e. a new standpoint, a point of view from which to reconsider the world. Although I want to examine the Eureka as anti project, as discontinuity, it will become clear in the second section of this sub-chapter that project and Eureka are in a reciprocal relationship, since according to the principles of Active imagination as outlined by Corbin, there is no revelation that was not sought. However, since my hypothesis relies on the notion of creativity as discontinuity, 'discontinuity' as a cognitive unit must be defined.

Eurekas are unpredictable (Csikszentmihalyi 1996) and therefore unexplainable. This is a simple fact of logic, but it is also an experiential evidence. I mentioned earlier my 'game' of opening randomly books that have been left on tables in the library. A psychologist will try as hard as he/she can about any explanatory model for these casual discoveries I made out of random picks, but for me they remain hypothesis about a black box that cannot be opened. The experience of those moments of discovery is always accompanied by a certitude about their unpredictability. Marcello confirmed this one day that we were discussing one of his projects in my studio. We were figuring what to put inside his '*pinata*' in form of statue of liberty, when suddenly Marcello cut short to our discussion : "Bah...it's going to happen when I watch the TV. or something [i.e. I'm going to find it when I'm thinking about it the least]." Psychologists would argue that this

demonstrates a 'phase of incubation in the sub-conscious' (Csikszentmihalyi 1996). But this looks like trying to save explicability at all cost. The fact that Eureka's are Anti-expectations should rather lead us to think that *they are an instance of 'non-self'*. Why would we want to save the self at all cost ?

I think it is more productive for an anthropology of creativity to drop causality for a moment and consider the Eureka in the light of other worldviews (i.e. from the East). To go into that direction, I propose to hypothesize that they might be seen as '*awakenings*', that is as *non-reflectivity, non-thinking*. My field work supports abundantly this hypothesis. My own breakthroughs always occurred when least expected. They always had this 'out-of-the-blue-ness', this freshness that was getting me out of myself (*me sortir de moi-même*). If they did not, then they were not Eureka's. They were intellectual work. The more I could do to 'craft them out', was to stand in a state of quiet observation. And even then, what I would feel was more a sense of beauty than of Eureka. The advantage of 'beauty' is that it would instill this freshness that would make me seeing again. After an Eureka, sometimes I would jump on my note book and note them. My written notes would invariably look like this :

- 1) "Shaking ! The bowl on the fridge ! Luc's little shaken houses ! Earthquake !" [translation : a glass bowl on the fridge suddenly started shaking, or rather I came out of the fog of my thinking and noticed it. At once the connection was made between a previous work that I had planned for a choreographer, and the book piece (my thesis project). I had been wondering what soundscape to put in the installation and there it was : earthquakes.]
- 2) "Taking photographs of the ruins of the *Palais du commerce* (future Grande Bibliothèque du Québec). I got the idea of movement detectors to start the shaking of the bowls. Then, the breakthrough : why would they trigger the shaking when people come by ? Why wouldn't they STOP the shaking when people come by ? Like crickets, objects fearing people, hiding from them, inhibited by them. How did I get this ? I DON'T KNOW ! But it was sudden. Like the shaking on the fridge. Like being called by someone on the street. Like Keller breaking the fog [I imagine]."

-Excerpt from field notes

Witnessing J.P. Perreault re-building a choreography in rehearsal was very similar. He would shout : "That's it ! That's it !", and try to jump out of his wheel chair (he had been injured). Witnessing my thesis director Michel Goulet coming into my studio was like watching a bird of prey from a distance :

"Many times he was about to leave and suddenly he was noticing something and coming back. His eyes were stalking the whole of the space, looking for cues in everything I had discarded. On one of his scans, he noticed a book I had left open on my bench. He looked at the title : "A Search for Method" (A chapter in a socio-anthropology book : Towards a Science of Mankind). "There it is !" he said exhilarated. "There it is !". Then he looked at other books that were piled up besides the bench. One of them called his attention : "Theories of Personalities". "There it is !" he said again. "Imagine how a title like that would influence your work, your choices ! You would tell yourself things like : "Not too high a stack, because a theory of personality bla bla bla..." He was opening the windows of my atelier. He was carving a hole in the wall, a way out. Here was my *bourreau* and my savior.

I had explained that I had discarded all allusion to text, afraid as I was of being illustrative and anecdotal. He had agreed : "We know what's inside those books anyhow." He was thinking out loud : "Inventory, accumulation, knowledge..." Then he came back, smiling, for a glance at the title : "A Search for Method. That was a nice "*hasard*" (coincidence)..." And he left."

-Excerpt from field notes

Sometimes I could feel the same freshness of the Eureka when, writing my field notes, I would get carried away by a wave of creative writing. My tiredness would vanish. When visiting artist Martha Townsend (N.Y) came to my studio, she concluded our meeting by saying : "Do it ! Just do it !" It was her way to entice me to drop the reflective mode in order to create. On February 27, I wrote :

"I work a lot on plasters now. They give me some level of unpredictability...some dialogue. Things happen casually, like yesterday. I SAW the landscape in the earth that I had let to soak...The irregularities were what attracted me immediately. But it's pretty much like an awakening, that Eureka stuff. You wake up. It wakes you up. I can understand why people could say –

like in paganism – that ‘objects call you’. ‘They’ call your attention. Because you wake up to something, what happens to be in the field of your attention when you wake up, you take to be ‘talking to you’ (*interpeller*).”

-Excerpt from field notes

Artist Richard Purdy says he got the idea for the video of his doctoral thesis when his camera was stolen. He had to buy a new one, and it had a ‘mirror feature’ on it. He basically pushed the button and the whole video was there, in that sole gadget. “Bad luck always served me well”, he said.

In my own experience, and this could account for the proverbial sloppiness of artists in term of intellectual work, reflectivity was antinomical : when in it (creativity, Eureka), I felt no need to report about it. The richer episodes of my field work made for blank pages...! Somewhere in April : “ Incredible creative energy. Fell frustrated when I’m not in it. Sweeping everything. No much to say. In the midst of it, not much to say”. October 20 : “I’m not reporting very often about my personal process these days. I’m too absorbed in it to even think of jotting notes...!” November 5th : “I don’t write that much on my own process now. I don’t feel like it. It seems that it would stop it...that’s all. It’s with me all the time. I look at architecture books, but sometimes I feel it’s just distraction. Too much info. I need to dig the project itself...References can hinder the process.”

Many students like Janine felt it a burden to constantly speak about our own work in class. Janine was fed up of it. One student, Aline, had as a thesis project an hyper-reflective project about her own creative process. Most of her presentations seemed to bore the other students, because by looking too much at itself, the project was looping itself in. It was unproductive. She said she had a problem the moment she started thinking about doing/building something. She blocked. Later in the year, she confessed that I had

had a role in undoing her block, because I had pointed this looping reflectivity to her. A few students realized that they were doing the piece in their head and that this was unproductive. When I asked Marcello how his piece was advancing, he told me that the piece was advancing very well in his head (he had done nothing); the problem was that he was not sure to like it anymore...Nicole exposed the same dilemma in interview. She was working in her head. But with all this thinking, she was having the impression that the work was done already (and that there was no need to do it materially). When she sees the result in her head, and it's not satisfying, she stops doing it. But she's aware that if she would do it, the result might be different (that we she anticipated of it). Because even when she executes meticulously what she has in mind, it still gives something different from her anticipations.

Q : "So it comes back to the question : what is the use of thinking of it in advance ?
N : "I don't force myself to think ahead. It's non-stop...! (At home, everywhere)."

To further make the point that they are experientially outside of causality and reflectivity, *Eurekas can be envisioned as Wholes*. As mentioned earlier, close to the moments of insights, I was starting to feel the smell of truth again. This feeling had to do with their undivided-ness nature. Insights (Eureka) were sometimes providing root metaphors condensing months of work. Finding casually the writings of Borges on libraries, books, and Babel was for me this sort of crucible. Months of groping in the dark were given meaning, a *raison d'être*. My attraction to middle east landscapes and temples carved in the rock [and trying to carve them out in books] was given sense by a single word : Babel.

Eurekas are linked to the concept of Origin, as exemplified by this dialogue with my thesis director Michel Goulet :

-“Do you remember how you first came to this idea, sandblasting books ?

-“No.”

-“ If you could only remember, your problem would be solved !”

Putting Eureka outside causality is also putting them outside time and space. One way to grapple this difficult point is for example to realize the *amount of meaning included in a ‘flash’, an insight* .⁶¹ Insights would come with meaning and story included. After a documentation session, I wrote : “At some point...I noticed that the view from underneath included the ‘sky’ on the wall...It was an instant realization as I saw the image on the LCD screen of the camera. The image had an emotional value attached to it. It told a ‘story’. It was unintended. It was not ‘coming out of me’ “. For ‘flashes’ are all inclusive; they are a big storage-room of meaning, endlessly big. They are like the world contained in an atom: “Then immediately, I saw a link [of the book project] with my card project. For in [the case of the latter], it was clear that I should aim at carving a valley instead of a mountain range. Why ? I don’t know. Images and justifications came afterwards. Symbols came after the fact...” In the following quote from my field notes, I try to put words on that feeling of cohesion, on that root image, but unsuccessfully. I go back to the process : “It came in a flash but the flash carried something else : the tension between the macro and the micro...The valley had the incommensurable dimension of time and knowledge, the endlessness of landscape and mindscape. The temple was the opposite. It was the end. The source and the ‘*aboutissement*’. The landmark of the quest. Its teleology, its raison d’être, its beginning

⁶¹ It is in that sense I think that we can think of insights as ‘images’ and vice-versa. It is in that sense also that we can extend the sense of ‘image’ to other sensory realms and to cognition in general.

and end.... Both scales would probably contrast and reveal the ambivalence of the miniature : at once smaller and bigger than nature.” *The interesting thing in this description is not it’s content, but how it reveals my incapacity to enclose the richness of the insight in words* (or in anything else for that matter). The insight is both generative of that effort of rendering, and of the incapacity to complete the rendering. It is this propelling into the dynamics of a permanent incompleteness that might account for their attractiveness.

On a phenomenological level, we could say that *the Eureka is inclusive of the project, not the opposite*. The example of Mona waking up with a project in mind goes in that sense. So the Eureka is not so much a case of anti project as a case of reversing the genealogy of things. We could see projects as extended memories of eureka, as dilated eureka, instead of seeing projects as including many Eureka (like in this ‘chain of little eureka’ new theorization in psychology (Csikszentmihalyi 1996). We could go as far as to say that it is the timelessness and spaceless-ness of the Eureka that includes the time-bound project, not the opposite. That would leave way more room for ethnographic research than our usual linear-time based approaches.

Eurekas certainly *enlighten the difference between Intuitive and analytical processes* of ideation. In my field work at UQAM, Dan was unanimously seen as a case of non-linear thinker. “Often I start from a point and I build around” Dan said in a seminar class. This is the definition Low gives of an intuitive approach : all the meaning is included in this initial ‘starting point’. Further developments only confirm the central position of that point. Intuitions, Eureka, insights, as central ideas in projects, can be seen as *unifying principle*. The feeling, in creation, that ‘too much stuff’ in a piece, like in the

case of the last piece by André, is not that there are 'too many things', it is the lack of a unifying principle. For 'things' are isolated one from each other in the same movement that identifies the lack of coherence. There are not 'things' first, and then the feeling that there are too many of them. It is the impossibility to find them a common ground or category that accounts for the feeling of disorder (Douglas). During my last installation, students found some of my material distracting, until they figured out the unifying principle. Then it all made sense to them, and they were able to accept the alien elements as being part of the whole.

The Eureka is often a *foretaste of unity*, and it has been described by creators as *a smell* (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, Briggs 1988). It is after half-blindly carving a series of holes in books that I finally found that this project was about hidden and inaccessible spaces. The 'meaning' of my wanderings into middle eastern imageries was finally revealed in finding Borges' text : the Library of Babel. The Eureka then comes as a confirmation of a gut feeling, as a re-cognition, coming at the end to lock things up. At various occasions I got the message that a diffuse smell is better than one that is too clear. When I started wanting to clarify my original images of valleys and lost temples carved in books, I ended up with a deceiving sand castle imagery... That was threatening the original impulse. My meeting with Professors Schofield and Dupond confirmed this. Schofield thought my temple was "like a title", the columns were too indicative. Dupond thought that *I did not leave enough room to their imagination*. Things were too obvious.

Eureka can be considered as *state rather than content*. This is in my sense much more productive for anthropology. In a way, they have nothing to do with content. In the beginning of March I wrote :

“Much ‘energy’ is spent finding solutions to problems, and problems in order to keep one busy finding solutions. Much hope is generated when ‘flashes’ happen. Flashes are likely to condense ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ in one single cognitive moment. I found that in front of ‘flashes’, I could have at least two attitudes : I could run after them, trying to grasp them, embody them, realize them; or I could see that the ‘cognitive moment’ had very little to do with the pretext of its occurrence. For example the pile of bricks I found in the corridor. They express what I’m looking after but still, isn’t [that discovery (the bricks themselves)] just a moment where I was outside of myself ? I find I am trying all the time to redeem ‘moments’ into ‘art’. This creates a tension. For everything is drawn back to its potential use in the art making. I try to seize and grasp occurrences of non-reflectivity, as if the state these occurrences put me in was in the surroundings in which I find myself when they happen”.

-Excerpt from field notes

Eurekas are certainly feelings as much as ideas. My casual encounter of unexpected ideas in others’ open books created a feeling I wanted to ‘reconduire’, pursue. This was a feeling of connectedness with space and time, something Jung described as synchronicity, the feeling that one is at the right place at the right moment because one is connected with things in time. An oblique confirmation of this (Eureka not depending upon its content) could be seen in the choice – often made by artists – of privileging the effect over the content. When I drew Françoise’s attention to the morbidity of the poem we had just heard uttered by a student, she agreed but ethics did not keep her from liking the intensity the poem had, and the effect it had provoked in the audience.

Seeing *Eurekas as recognition* is not contradictory with seeing them as instance of suspension of disbelief, of memory, or reflectivity etc. One could think that it is one thing or the other : you either recognize something you already saw , or you discover something you never saw before. Considering the Eureka as recognition is not here going

back to psychological associationism⁶², quite the contrary. It is the feeling of recognition that matters, not its content, as one can realize in the following account :

December 17th :

“There are two words : destiny and revelation. Yesterday, when I finally opened the book about Babel, I really felt I had found what I had been looking for since the spring 2000. I felt I was revealed the reason for all my wanderings, the reason for my unreasonable attraction for the land of the Bible, the reason for all this search – about the power of words, my mixed feelings about imagination. It is a strange feeling that of suddenly being at the center of oneself. For I felt that this tower was in me. We could hypothecize for years the reasons why this myth is so pervading, but yesterday I couldn't care less about universals and explanations. For I was history, I was the center of it, The world was in me. I was finally seeing how I was giving it life. It may sound all too pompous, but it was a very simple feeling, no desire to shout over the roofs. Just a big laugh. Like discovering something immense, and yet like if it'd been there all the time. Like finding cues that fit too nicely together to be strangers. It's even hard to write about it. It all seem so futile, this diary”

-Excerpt from field notes

In interview, professor Schofield described clearly this ambiguity between the referential and the non-referential (new-recognized) :

“There are certain (of my) works where, to use a word of Barthe, there is a kind of striking (coup), or two things : or it seems that I never saw it before, and at the same time it seems like it looks like something I always believed in. It's a bit contradictory, but it confirms something that I always wanted to be true (always hoped that it would be true)...”

-Verbatim from video tape

So the feeling of recognition is the feeling of newness. Things suddenly make sense. At the same time you feel like coming back to life. It is subjectivity and objectivity merging. Choreographer Sylvain Émard says when he came back to his choreography after a day of absence, he “saw it as if for the first time”; he knew instantly how to deal with his previously unsolvable problems. Merleau-Ponty describes eloquently something similar with perception : walking on the shore, one sees something and feel that it is

⁶² See Merleau-Ponty's critique of associationism in *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (1945).

about to make sense. A mast on a sanded boat comes out of the color patches. When the 'solution' (perception) is given, it is the previous indeterminacy that makes no sense.

In the light of what has been said, *Creativity can be seen as self teaching*. It is discovering a privileged and intimate relation to the world. In *Ways of Knowing*, Jean-Guy Goulet (1998) presents a culture in which self-teaching is axiomatic : the Dene Tha. The Dene of North Western Canada will prefer seeing a person die rather than imposing on her an exterior knowledge. Goulet tells of many instances where children handling very dangerous materials - a chain saw, playing in a broken glass window- were left on their own of fear of disturbing their learning process. 'Knowledge' for them is unthinkable outside personal experience. Without being left to one's own mistakes, one could not learn. There is a link here to artist Agnes Martin (1992), when she alludes that there is something of life that can't be learned in group I wrote in mid-December :

"...I see a sharp contrast with [discoveries through references], (i.e. someone has gone more or less where you are going and describes the territory to you) and the kind of discoveries one makes by oneself. Sometimes I want to shut off all references and find it by myself, pick it up in the air, not in books... The joy lies in this moment where things come to you, from nowhere. Of course the paradox I underlined previously [needing a project to find things that are 'relevant'] calls for an engagement in/by/with objectivity. Discoveries must appear 'as if' [and only as if] they would be made by you, only you, and for the first time."

-Excerpt from field notes

As result of acceptance of solitude (see later) Eureka underline this privileged relation of the self with itself. Cases of collective creativity do not contradict this. : like Françoise commenting on my work and putting my books vertically instead of horizontally – something I eventually retained ; like Mona intervening on my piece and giving me orders (!) which I ended up following; like me objecting to Marcello un-

reflected looping, something that was heard by Nadine and influenced her to the point of having her changing the piece she presented in the exhibit (!); all these case do not disprove the fact that insights give themselves as a renewed and privileged relation with the world.

The intimacy felt for the produced 'images' express their close link to a self that is not necessarily the auto-biographical one, i.e. the individual self. This close link to the self maybe the ultimate promise of creativity : *it is going to be yours*, not in the sense of a socially defended ownership, but in term of generation, of generative power, in terms of Being the source of the generation, the Genesis. 'It is to be yours', a social interpretation, in another culture/context (less bound by the myth of the individual) could be voiced as : 'You're going to be his' '. Creativity as self teaching points to a confirmation of the notion of active imagination (as developed in Corbin 1969). It is not the content that matters as the fact that it is yours. It is not only the matter for the 'image' to be in line with a personal symbolism (a personal mythology); it is first the reaching of a recognizable state; that state is a state of unity, with the material, with oneself. *It is a state of adhesion, of un-dividedness*.

Feeling the need to distance themselves from the romantic myth of the 'creator-as-God', authors have argued for a model in the form of a chain of little eureka instead of a model of 'Eureka as Big Blueprint' (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, Briggs 1988). In my own experience in the field, I could certainly experience the two poles/models as equally valid. I already presented field notes that were quite emphatic. Here are some others where Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' is validated:

"Got this idea of a Moraine (ice ever flowing from a Glacier) out of index cards. Books on top. Very few piles. Lots of cards. It was not a big Eureka. Just a

quiet image. Does the Eureka, it's emotion happen when you receive the image or when you bring the image back ? (Like in dreams : the emotion, not of the dream, but of realizing you are dreaming.)”

- Except form field notes

On painting :

“Another thing I can say retrospectively : there was no Big Eureka, nothing that would throw me on the floor, knock me down in ecstasy or having me run naked in the streets like Archimede. Rather : a constant flow of discovery. A somewhat calm steady and warm delivery of selflessness. Sometimes I stopped, became self conscious and noticed I had been humming a tune in my head during all that time. But truly, how can I say I was in my head all that time when I did not pay attention to it [when I was not ‘there’ to notice it] ?”

November 11th

“The idea of very little openings in big mountains is strengthening. In fact that would invalidate the Big Eureka model. Not only a chain of little eureka, but a persistent presence, a little voice that whispers over and over the same thing, and who finally wins when the mental agitation is over.”

- Excepts form field notes

Does the ‘chain of little eureka’ model, as continuous flow, contradicts my hypothesis of the insight as discontinuity ? Don’t we have the same invalidation with the notion of ‘creativity as state’ – a ‘state’ being usually defined through its continuity in time ? On the contrary : it points to the need to redefine the notion of ‘discontinuity’. ‘Discontinuity’, in this case, would be a stepping out of time altogether. It would not be a discontinuity *in* time, but a discontinuity *of* time. If we recall Nisargadatta and Sartre, time exists in consciousness, not outside of it. It is through the divided nature of consciousness that time is born. *Here ‘discontinuity’ points to non-reflective awareness,* which I call a ‘state’ well aware that I am trying to make the most out of the constraints of language.

3.2.2.2 Active imagination as active imagination : paradoxical reciprocity

(of imaginer and imagined)

I have already presented Corbin's exegesis as a possibility for a non-reductionist model. I would like to examine here how this bi-laterality was experienced in the field. Although the Eureka can be seen as a discontinuity that nothing can account for, a 'néant' in Sartre's terms, a 'neither Knowing nor Being' in Low's, the paradox is that the Eureka does not happen in a vacuum. Revelations come when they are called. This search-find is not so much a dialectic, in the sense of an *alternation* of opposites, but an *ambiguistic*⁶³, a simultaneous *co-presence* of opposites : the sought-for (the project) and the non-sought-for (the Eureka). But what we want to explore in this section is the fact that *the project is a projection, of oneself in things, of one's 'faith', dedication, involvement*. In the field, one instance of my personal process exemplifies remarkably the bi-laterality of Active imagination, the paradox that discoveries are created (projected, invented, constructed), and that creation/projections are discovered :

December 10th 2001

“Went to see galleries yesterday. Mostly boring, as usual. It is like hoping for water in a desert. Doomed. Not so much because there is little water, but because it's a desert ! The medium, as spectacle, is not generous. But : The last gallery I visited was a small room in an architect office. The exhibit did not retain my attention. But then, in the entrance, blocked by the open glass door, was a cabinet with all sorts of rolled plans, all neatly classified. They were standing up, straight up like columns. And there it was ! In a moment I had the pay of my day. Plans ! Architectures ! Columns ! In boxes on shelves!⁶⁴

I entered the other space, dark space, and started to talk with the guy there. Then again ! Behind him was a mold. A negative space exactly like the ones I had intended to carve in books. And a mold of what ? The head of an iron column...!

⁶³ This is a term I coined as an alternative to dialectics, which still repose on the impossibility for opposites to coalesce. In ambiguity, contradictory poles are simultaneously present, without a movement in time. See Low in Annex

⁶⁴ The reason for my excitement is that this was like seeing the images of my dreams materialized. I had thought of an arrangement like this, with rolls that would be carved as towers by sandblasting their tops. Also, one should note that the emphatic tone is in itself interesting.

It was too much. The feeling of a revelation. Something you cannot deny for even if you know perfectly well that it is "in you", depends on you, belongs to you, it is also there, in the things, in the order of things, in the precise succession of events. That day, there was a feel of "objectivity" that made that call "*incontournable*."

Comments (tentative phenomenological analysis) :

What is interesting is that this 'occurrence' (the correlation event-personal project, the "synchronicity") gives itself as a paradox. It is at once :

- Not striven for, not sought, outside of one's planning or will, and
- "Waiting for me", understood as "being there because of me, my project, my intention".

In the moment of revelation, the "flash", the Eureka, gives itself as a recognition - I recognize the "image", the meaning as *pertinent* - as if it would have been waiting for me (addressed to me personally). But also in the moment of Eureka, I realize that the Eureka exists because I did not expect it, at least not in this form-moment. It is this double and paradoxical nature of the Eureka, I think, that can make it uncomfortable : its "out of my will" aspect grants it objectivity, while the felt personal responsibility grants it subjectivity. *Both feelings are contradictory and simultaneous.*"

- Except from field notes

I already underline the paradox of the novelty as recognition, and I mentioned that this was not reinforcing Bourdieu's associational thesis (beauty as social reproduction of cultural capital) but rather undermining it. Active Imagination can be seen as *dialogue with the world*. It is finding a terrain for an unmediated dialogue with life. It is also a way of *being informed by everything*. This is akin to Blake's 'world in a grain of sand'. Everything one meet becomes fuel for the fire. On September 11th, I wrote : "It is like if everything would inform me of this one thing that I am trying to find. The Development class informs on creativity; terrorists inform me on the book project." Often I wrote that I felt like if something was waiting for me at each corner. Seeing creativity as state of consciousness allows inter-cultural comparison : is this feeling that one is dialoguing with the world, is this 'voice of an other' that is found *in* things, are these feeling and voice the same as the presence fetishists and animists 'project' upon the world ? In painting, I found the canvas was giving me orders. When I voiced to a colleague student that the

little books had started talking to me, she said that this was “why one has to do one’s own work oneself” (and not sub-contract the execution, like it becomes trendy nowadays). This dialogue is experienced in the synchronicity of finds. On September 30th,

I wrote :

“Then it happened... In the acceptance of this unbearable loneliness... I picked up the books I am about to cut. Cheap encyclopaedias. Very cheap. They are beautiful. The whole project is there, in the images. But there is something else. Like ‘something’ that guides me. I open a book, the terrace gardens...! Go further : early sculptors; a bit further : a plan for a paper for kids ! But it’s not even in the content of these ‘revelations’ [they all relate quite directly to my book project, that involves carving landscapes and architectural complexes out of books] or even in their matching together. It is in the *possibility of doing it otherwise*. It’s non-linear in a way but on the other hand the line is very straight. Things happen as they should because there is no other way they could have happened. This is the voice of the non-separatedness. You don’t conform matter [materials] to your wishes. You take what is given to you. You advance guided by a flair, it’s an all including system. There’s not even ‘flair’. But the system is complete”.

- Except form field notes

I already presented notes where I committed myself using words such as ‘destiny’. Out of the context, this may sound a bit...exaggerated. What I tried to express on the spot was simple: it is a feeling about the ineluctability of the becoming of things. It is a *feeling*, pretty much as our ‘certitude’ about determinacy, social or physical is a feeling.

Artist Richard Purdy told me that he found the references for his doctoral thesis by walking in the alleys of the library. It always happen like that for him : he does not use bibliographic searches so much. He looks at books and picks up the most beautiful... I myself have to say that I found more bibliographical references (for the present thesis) this way than by looking for them on a computer. Chance, randomness, haphazard discoveries of references are certainly nice ways to ‘use’ non-linear methods. But again,

if the gain is interesting, for me it is more the feeling of being *'interpellé'*, called, that matters.

The other side of this coin is the pain of seeing the communication broken. Re-reading my notes I find that the feeling of solitude is stronger when the project gets lost, or when it is not clear enough, that is : when the dialogue is absent. This manifests also in my fear of doing the wrong move; this fear can be seen as the fear of arbitrariness, for when you 'see' what to do, when the piece tells you what to do, why would you be afraid ? It is the fear of being cut from the world, of being on one's own, of not being able to rely on a dialogue with the world. I felt this when I got back to the book project in January, after three weeks of absence. Tremendous doubts would overwhelm me (in February for example) and they were mostly related to thinking too much in advance. Going back to the 'here and now' of doing was the only solution.

I would hypothecize that this alludes to the necessary relation to Being in revelation : there is a truth, something real to find; discoveries even in art are not arbitrary, but the sign of a relation to an unknown other (Corbin 1969). This is also related to Csikszentmihalyi's notion of Flow. *For 'revelations' are as much –and maybe more – a reception as an emission (a projection).* This lead me to think of *Eureka as voice from the outside* :

“There is definitely a relation between 'insight' and 'coming out of oneself'. It is like waking up, coming out of the fog of the internal dialogue. Then everything you 'see' becomes an insight. But you fixate it ("There it is !"). and this makes you come back into the fog of the internal dialogue. So insights appear as short beams, flashes of light. But do they necessarily have to ?”

- Except form field notes (mid-January).

This might be why some artists, influenced or not by Eastern paradigms, say that creation is not *of oneself*, but rather done *to oneself*.

That being said, let's go back to the phenomena of Projection: what we want is to penetrate this paradoxical feeling of bilaterality, of mutualness in active imagination. On many occasions I started seeing my project everywhere. For example while I was working on volcano forms, I started seeing them in the street, in garbage, and consequently started collecting objects in that shape. Many times I came to doubt that this was very sane, for I feared that I was cloning myself in things. Seeing other students like Mona being blinded by their project, barely noticing their entourage (i.e. the developments in the work of others and caught in a sort of bubble, all this did not make for a good prospect. Indeed the project invariably *comes to tint everything*, which accounts for the phenomena of artists creating self-fictions and identifying with them. This project tinting everything is not so different from the testing of a model in anthropology. One gets to see the world through that lens and only that lens. So was I getting so drunk with my project that it was starting to induce an insane addiction in me ? Or was it rather that coming to see the world only in term of this project, I was realizing that what we call 'the world' is a projection, and that there is no other way to perceive things than to project a grid on them ? (we will come back to that question)

The concept of Creative (or Active) imagination, as developed by Ibn Arabi and Corbin, forces us to blur the usual distinctions between the real and the imagined. After an intense photo and video documentation session, I experienced mild 'hallucinations', for lack of a better word. I wrote afterwards :

"...It was a dream. I noticed when I came out of it. There was not much awareness, i.e. self awareness, awareness of my position in it. I was immersed in it, having forgotten who I was. Low says that self-awareness is a step higher than being swallowed by a scene. Indeed this is how we characterize dream : being

swallowed, and we know that we've been swallowed when we come out of it. Aside from that, I am really afraid to be swollen by the Biblios thing [my MA project]. It starts to invade everything. It becomes a phantom with a life of its own.

When I got out, I noticed my tiredness had vanished. In fact, I could have gone for hours. Then I passed on a street and something called my attention. It was as if a part of a house would have been truncated. Like a new architecture. It made sense, the building was new. Then I realized it was a shadow, a tree, projected on the wall. The shape still retained my attention for a while [the 'illusion' persisted]. Was it heightened awareness due to three hours of paying attention to shapes, colors, shadows ? Or was it that the dream was still lingering on ?”

- Except form field notes

I chose to present this segment in its entirety because it shows my ambiguous feelings about the whole experience. Was it *less* than an awake state, or was it *more* ?⁶⁵

Active imagination is a useful tool in the relating of art to other domains of consciousness and life in general. The artistic project can be envisioned as *active dream*. Professor Saucier repeated many time that in submitting projects, we should aim at “making the members of the jury dream”. He said that “there is a sort of magic around a project”. He also said that the projects which were accepted were those that had induced so much active dreaming in jury members, that they had come to think that the project was theirs. Professor Schofield and Dupont went in the same direction : I had to leave room for the audience. In our first group exhibit I had made a text relating my piece to my personal experience with archives. I got the comment that my text was superfluous (“These are the things we don't want to know”- Ramsden). My text limited the scope of the piece, it made it too personal, that is : it did not leave enough room for the spectator. Saying too much was like not doing enough.

⁶⁵ I purposefully re-inject an unilineal grid here, as a way to express my concern. I am aware that in anthropology, this 'better or worse' framework is a strange if not dubious way of posing problems. However, in all disciplines that deal overtly with consciousness, as in our daily and mundane lives, personal 'evolution' seems to be an inescapable concept.

A troubling find in the field is that it is also, if not mostly, the audience that is making the piece. One way to de-sociologize this statement is to say that pieces are constructed in the active imagination of them. After one of André's presentations, where he had literally bewitched us with his light ring in the dark, the audience reacted by actively reinforcing the ambiance, to the point of defending it :

"People felt the dispersion [caused by André's suggestions for additions] and sort of "asked" that the piece be left as is. People felt the fragility of the ambiance, or was it our fear of losing what we had just built ? For we had certainly contributed to that piece. The piece was not just 'out there', it was in all the expectations and fabulations it had sparked. I rose the question as to whether or not André could expect the same in a gallery setting, with a very diluted crowd. That was like kicking him in the shins... One thing that became evident [for me] is that the collective participation in the creation [through audience-ship] is not only diverting the creation away in the evil world of ideas...The [art] piece is not complete without the imagination of the piece, because the piece IS that : a whole network, actual, potential, of feelings that can be reactivated at will, that connect to other life experiences, that make you feel the web and your place in it.⁶⁶ The 'piece' is an ever-growing affair. The piece is not in the piece, it is in the 'meanings' and 'feelings' it generates and re-generates constantly. So in a way, this is what we intuit when we start 'imagining', 'fabulating' around and about the piece. We not only put it in the world, we, as well as language, bring it to existence."

-Field notes, September 2001

Another event crystallized my thought on this. In the first exhibit, I had made a spiral index card piece, in which I had cut a small entrance door and a length of a tunnel, long enough to hide a pen flashlight, suggesting that the whole of the cards would be traversed by this tunnel. Professor Saucier told me of a little girl who, seeing the piece, asked if he believed I was crazy enough to dig the whole of the cards...! Saucier asked her if it mattered. She left, wondering.

⁶⁶ It is important to realize here that this web is not primarily 'social' or 'cultural'. Suspending judgement about 'the social' and 'culture', I am forced to realize that 'social relations' are included in that web of feeling, and not the opposite (i.e. that the web of feelings would be part of a greater whole : social relations).

Some students seemed to be well aware of the ambiguitics of active imagination : Nicole wrote : “The gaze which believes what it imagines...of course there are no proof.” Professor Régimbald thought this was a ‘*grosse phrase*’ (a Big Statement) which indicated that artists could not drape themselves in the weight of the proof (“*la lourdeur de la preuve*”). The other side of this is the capacity of well rounded pieces to do the job of the spectator. The frontier is tiny. New Media are more or lees sweeping the field of art now, students feel more and more compelled to work with video, and one way to understand this phenomenon is certainly to see the capacity of those media to ‘capture’ audiences. Michel was well aware of this when he said that ‘capturing audiences’ was one of video’s tricks and gimmicks.

The Importance of ‘leaving room for the audience’, the fact that the ‘jury has to imagine your project as his project’, plus the phenomena of the active construction of feeling and meaning by audiences, and not to forget the whole debate on interactivity in new medias, for me all this points to *the link between the state of creation and the state of the aesthetic experience* (aesthetic defined as contemplation, (Maquet)). These states are far from being passive. This conjunction of phenomena prescribes the conditions for a *communion*, more than a communication (Maquet 1986)..

3.2.2.2.3 Active imagination in a Center-periphery dynamic

1- revelation / eureka :

To create is to be at the center of the world. This is the meaning of the word ‘create’ after all : “to bring up something from nothing” (“*faire quelque chose à partir de rien*” –Larry Tremblay, personal communication). Thus *Creation is a sort of ‘do-it-*

yourself of the world', the important thing being that it be done by you. All cosmologies seem to include a narrative of how the world was created (Eliade 1957-87, Von Franz 1978). The etymology of 'original' points to 'origin' and that origin can be understood in term of time or in terms of 'source' (Low 1999 : 15-28).

In the artistic creation, Ideas – before projects - become centers. Ideas become homes of sorts, and this home changes or migrates as ideas get displaced by others. Ideas become pleasurable places, places you want to inhabit. They are pouches of meaning and feeling that you slowly discover, fit out, develop. As said earlier, intuitions, Eureka's can be thought of as centers since they provide a unifying principle. This also means that the center has to be constantly re-imagined. But what about when the center comes to fail oneself ? How about when we come to doubt that this imagining leads to the center ?

2- the doubt

Aline entered in the middle of the class one day, and she broke in the conversation without asking permission. She could not stop talking. She apologized, saying that she had just had an accident and that this made the 'click' in her head about her project. "I found it !" she was almost shouting. Her empathic tone was somewhat scary. Most of us felt very uneasy. A bit sceptic myself, for I had traversed many similar episodes in my life, and many of them had proved to be pure delirium. I asked her afterwards to give details. She could barely respond to my request. She was *in* the answer, she could not extract the answer out of herself. Not yet. Was she plainly and simply mad ? Or did she experienced a mild 'peak experience', to use Maslow's terminology (Wilber 1983) ?

Choreographer Sylvain Émard says he becomes more and more distrustful of those big Eureka moments. Indeed, imagination is double-sided and can be scary. Low

says that the same awareness in loop with itself accounts for both phenomena of 'religious extasis'(epiphany) and 'madness'. During my field, I witnessed in my own process many cases that could be labeled, in Low's term, 'Presence folded upon itself'. One instance is still fresh in my mind. This is the other side of the coin of the ecstasies I already described in my return to painting during the Christmas break :

"From heaven I went straight to hell. Five hours of nightmare where I could not leave the canvas, but for other reasons : I could not leave it *like that...*! Amazingly it might all have started up when I brought magazines to get photographs (and use them as models). That might have put me out of the canvas, so to speak. I wanted my lady to look like a model...The more I was working it, the more I was killing her. The nose was now like a wig on her face; a sort of earthquake , subterranean forces outside my will were sucking me underground. After four hours, I finally calmed down and only in calm could I realize what I had done. In wanting to fixate it, to make it so clear it would jump out of the canvas – to gain universality, I forgot that it is indeterminacy that makes for the life of an art work. Even photograph becomes interesting when your eyes and mind moves, in search of a resolution. [One could say that] the more promising and the more impossible the resolution, the more lively the work. So I covered her face with a coat of black – feathers of sorts, and let her sleep under a cloth."

-Field notes, January 2002

In the Butterfly's dream, Low (1992) presents five recounting of experiences of ecstasy. One of them is an experience of pure horror. Interestingly, Low includes this experience among the other, as he would probably make no distinction between St. Therèse of St. John of the Cross visions of paradise and their visions of hell. Corbin mentions Ibn 'Arabi's point of view on the "empty imagination". This happens when the self, consciousness, doubles itself in an endless reflection.

In the process of living night and day with my book project, at some point my mind went awry. At other occasions, I just could not stop it, like on the 21st of October, at 1:30 AM : "Lots of forms flying before my closed eyes. Like an intelligence wanting to show me something". I would pass through periods where a deluge of flashes would

come to me, and I wouldn't know what to do with them. 'Empty', in the sense of arbitrary, gratuitous, superficial and superfluous was often a word I was tempted to put on the invited critiques' endless interpretations. I felt they were just making this up, it had no foundation. It was empty imagination. How could I know if I was right ?

Indeed it was hard to know if I was not simply biased. However on one occasion, there seemed to be a certain level of consensus within the class. One student presented a project where she was marketing. Although the project stemmed from her personal life history, it seemed artificial. Her injection of theatre in visual arts seemed to come from the outside, from the 'other'. She was after creating an effect. The jury did not buy the project. On the same night, another student proposed a very similar project : a fake retail store of decoration material. But in his case, he seemed to have found the recipe to win the contest : he was real. Moreover he was alive. He was transparent. We could see the project transforming before our eyes as people asked question. He was open. He was reacting spontaneously to his own stuff ("well, that looks a bit too much like... doesn't it ?) He was looking at what he had prepared as if for the first time. Things were happening now, and it showed. There was no distance between him and the project. Him too integrated his life history, but in a way as to make it explode, not just to create an effect on the jury. Or was it that being more naïve, he was less prone to machinations ? All in all what was at stake was authenticity, integration (in one's life) and thus integrity. Strangely enough, it is the first student who came back later with her own example of the difference between true and empty imagination. She had just seen the latest Star War. It was empty : "always the same promise that will not be fulfilled". She compared it to film

by the Dogme groups (Lars Von Triers ?). Here we would leave the cinema with “something”.

Earlier on I presented field notes in which I had written that the project “starts to invade everything. It becomes a phantom with a life of its own”. In Zen, there is the notion of Makio : “...we are [then] swallowed in the maw of our own swallowing, like a snake that swallows its own tail. In Zen this is called *makyo*, and to practice one must neither flee from the fearful nor cling to the exalted” (Low 1995 : 221).

While attending a show of a rising choreographer in Montreal, I was astonished to see that the whole spectacle rested on a ‘cinematic imagination’. The recorded music, the lighting, the distance, everything concurred to make one feel as if in a movie, as if in a dream. I felt strongly that this type of imagination as ‘non-presence’. Later on I had the occasion of discussing the issue of ‘holding the spectator captive’ with an artist and former co-student. He did not agree that the criteria of ‘captivating’ the audience was valid for fine art. My director seemed to think the opposite, when he said that something in my piece had to hold him prisoner, otherwise the piece would not work. Does the fact expounded earlier that professional creator keep many simultaneous projects on the stove, does that point to an addictive aspect of creativity?

In interview, choreographer Sylvain Émard said : « *Du mouvement, j’peux en inventer plein de mouvement* ». Indeed he could easily make endless scrolls, endless montages of movements. But it would be empty. Choreographer Jean-Pierre Perreault too could invent a twenty minute sequence in one hour class with his students, and have fun doing it. But for him too that would be empty. To have ‘a piece’, one needed more than that. What was the magic ingredient that would give relevance to choreographic

inventions ? 'Content' was Émard's the answer, although specially in the case of dance, 'content' was a very tricky notion to define.

I commented earlier about my temptation to see many in-class interpretation by invitees as empty. Even in the case of teachers, it seemed sometime that in their observers-interpreters shoes, 'interpretation' was becoming a way to build content (a content that was not there prior to interpretation, not in the piece or in the artist's *démarche*); sometimes I thought that by constructing content, teachers were trying to save students (and save the class, i.e. themselves too) because it was so obvious that the students had worked so little. So this fabricated, arbitrary and empty 'content' was a way to manouver into complex power relations - intra and extra academic. But now I think the issue is far more complex than that. A richer and more open reading came to me while attending a class of the Séminaire de creation. Observing how we, students, used references to posit ourselves, I wrote :

“[In those classes], we get a mirror of ourselves. Seeing the others presenting their work/project, you get to situate yourself. You get a cosmology and your place in it. Moreover, you get the sense [that it is you who is] building the cosmos, the cosmology”... Totally different from an anthropology seminar ! [What different level of energy !]”

I was always surprised how exited we often could get after those Séminaires, and I wondered why. Was it just because presenting our 'own thing', reinforcing the identification with our project, we would simply get an ego boost ? Maybe. But I think there is more to it : ***We were finding a place in the world by imagining it.***

(sub- chapter : Imagination) 3.2.2.3 : Discourse versus non-discourses

“Words can be put together in so many ways !”

- Nisargadatta 1973 : 224

“How inadequate are words for understanding ! Without words, what is there to understand ? The need for understanding arises from misunderstanding.”

- Nisargadatta 1973 : 166

Some worldviews and/or states of consciousness, as the literature on consciousness has it, obviously call for a suspension of the internal dialogue. The fact that this evidence has been given so little attention in the academic discourse in general and in anthropology in particular speaks for itself : thinking is not inclined to conceive of its absence, or of situations that entails its annihilation...! In my view, there is a blatant need for more research on the question of thinking versus non-thinking. Taking ground on Maquet’s thesis (i.e. contemplative modes of consciousness are contradictory with a discursive mind), and given the growing emphasis on discourse in the field of contemporary art - an the consequent diminishing number of theoretical work devoted to the question in the field - I felt the need to devote a whole sub-chapter to the question (up to page 214).

3.2.2.3.1 : General context in the artistic milieu and in the school

Robert Lepage has a degree from the *Conservatoire d’art dramatique*, not even a BA (he got an honorary Doctorate from Concordia, though...); Internationally acclaimed choreographers Louise Bédart and Sylvain Émard did not finish High School; Filmmaker

Steven Spielberg just finished his BA this year, probably to send a message to drop outs. Many succeeding artist don't seem to need 'education' to make art. Many have their formation in private classes, or they pick it up '*sur le tas*'. Montreal artist Manon Labrecque says she saw many of her friend 'losing it' when they started getting degrees (personal conversation).

Artists are known for having a long time relation of love and hate with discourse. This might be a mere manifestation of the long standing dualism in the West between the rational and the intuitive.⁶⁷ Winkelman argues that rationalistic definitions of consciousness put aside the fact that "complex cultural communication rituals are enacted non-verbally and often outside of conscious awareness." (Winkelman 1994 : 17)

In the field, I found two basic paradigms to frame my observations : the artist as businessman/politician, and the artist as diviner/worshiper. For the now overruling power of discourse in art have certainly both promoters and debunkers (although the later are no longer in position to voice their opposition openly). The pro-discourse suffice themselves with pronouncing the verdicts of facts : artist and teacher-assistant Jean-Pierre Demers mentioned that there was more and more theoretical creation in art. Michel, a representative of conceptual art, said his work was impregnated with the notion of project. His' was one of resistance, of subversion, of "semiotic terrorism". When asked what was his main goal in art (and in life), Michel said that he was "*carriériste*" (career minded), he wanted to succeed...Michel's situation was complex. He had quit school at 16, on the recommendation of a teacher who told him : "If you want to make art, drop school". One day he realized he was an anarchist. All he wanted was to do the opposite. But anarchists often rely heavily on discourse to defend their anti-all stand. So Michel

seemingly found himself some role-models : L'Internationale Situationniste, Guy Debord, the Dada, Bruce Barber and his 'art crimes', the Neoists, the punk movement, and every movement that strove to become the avant-garde by criticizing the avant-garde (or vice-versa). In Montreal he had founded the Internationale Virologie Numismatic, and launched a career by rubber stamping dollar bills with agit-prop slogans. But he felt caught : what was it to be 'radical' today, now that everything had been done ? Was it even important still ?

The point of view of non-conceptual artists was harder to extract and to circumscribe, maybe because these artists precisely don't make a career out of a political program. Larry Tremblay could not write with a program or an agenda in mind. Larry criticized the "reading process" in conceptual art, i.e. the overruling role of interpretation and theory building. "These artists, they want us to understand their process. It's not the process we look at [in art], it's the work !" (personal conversation).

The tension between the intellect and intuition is affecting the whole of art history in the western world, giving it a pendulum movement (Friedman 1988). This pendulum movement is what now makes some practitioners coalesce Romanticism and modernism, and Classicism and Post-modernism (Lynn Hughes, in-class presentation). By the mid-70s, artists were looking for an alternative to the cold intellectual, conceptual and geometrical propositions of minimalists (Friedman : 9) Robert Lobe, commenting on a breakthrough in his work : "It was based on a disillusionment with rationality, with geometry, with the intellect. I realized that all the things that really are exiting about art, like accident, discovery and spontaneity, were simply not available to me, given my thinking at that time." (Boswell, Peter W & Hardkavy, Donna, in Friedman 1988 : 157).

⁶⁷ See Jacques Maritain : L'Intuition créatrice dans l'art et la poésie.

What might be at stake is the influence the Western bias in favor of rationality has upon non-rational endeavors. Montreal playwright Larry Tremblay says that Westerners have trouble with open ended works, and hesitate before plunging into the unconscious, the non-discursive, etc.. (personal conversation).

Graduate students at UQAM (and in many art schools I am told) are asked to concentrate on one single research project for the time of their master degree. This means that they either have to limit their production to an 'idea' or theme, or that they have to make sense of the diversity and relative incoherence of their production by building the right argumentation plot. The awkwardness of superimposing an academic mode of discourse onto what has often been essentially a form of resistance to intellectual modes of knowledge becomes blatant for example in the case of painters. How can you justify a line of spontaneous actions? Answer: by either building a discourse that justifies spontaneity, or by eliminating spontaneity. It is mostly the second option that seems to be privileged nowadays. Painters devise ways of painting that can fit with discourses, for they need to write grants, and need their work to be spoken of by critics. Anything that resists discourse is thus excluded from funding and dissemination.

But there is more to it. As said earlier: "Many artists still need a myth. The need to make sense of such a non-sense is so strong sometimes that the absence of a unifying myth can lead to madness." Visual art in the West, despite the recent tendency to invent practices that require collectives, is still a solitary endeavor for the most of it. In that context, discourse is key to link the individual to a community of intention, even if this link is virtual and tenuous.

As a sort of pre thesis defense, the faculty organizes each year a forum where the soon-to-be-finished students come to present their work. This first round of presentation⁶⁸ would be the opportunity for me to get a comparative standpoint (i.e. getting to know the work of the second year students), and would be a way to see end results of the type of articulation discourse-practice that is fostered by the faculty. It would also give me an opportunity to use my status (student) to get some answers by the mean of a direct intervention. Indeed, I used a the breach made by a teacher to inject a virus in the discussion, which virus forced the participants to address issues that would have been leveled out otherwise. The whole discussion would come to illustrate the wholly ambiguous relation of the discipline and practitioners to discourse, and the deep tension that artists must embody on that matter.

The students had made their presentation, which consisted of a 20 minutes presentation accompanied by slides or video. I was surprised to see the level of coherence of the verbal presentation, as well as the force of the artistic work. While drawing resources from non-artist theoreticians, in a very academic fashion, the theoretical presentation were nevertheless closely attached to concrete practices. Moreover, in each case, one could clearly feel the auto-biographical connection. Here were projects that originated from the belly, from life experience, and from life-long existential concerns.

When the question period came, a teacher, Pierre Gosselin⁶⁹ noted that essentially these were discourses to justify practices; he asked how these discourses had been

⁶⁸ The next week's presentations were quite different. They were more descriptive, like the conventional description of the inner mechanics of artworks and artistic processes. In this way they were even more closely linked to the practices and doing even more the economy of reference external to the field of art making. One presentation though stood clearly aside, by adopting an unambiguously poetic tone.

⁶⁹ The faculty is divided in two : a master in creation, and a master in art education. Pierre Gosselin comes from the education side, and had taught them the methodology class. This year, it is another teacher from art education who teaches the methodology class.

constructed. He then made the precision that what he meant was the question as to whether the obligation to theorize had nourished or inhibited these student's practice. A long discussion went on. The basic line of that discussion was that at the beginning, this obligation had been inhibiting, but then it had forced them to find their center and submit the theory to that intuitive center, (instead of the opposite : submitting the practice to the theory). All four students seemed to have found an organic relation between practice and words. I asked the question about the schizophrenia of looking for coherence in discourse, and maximum incoherence in artworks (*détournement de sens*). Students acknowledged that schizophrenia but seemed to be looking at a paradigm for integration. Then many teachers started, in my sense, to wrap up this tension by arguing how much progress had been made, how the texts were not theoretical finally, that they were closely attached to practices, that it was actually their practices that gave students the words to describe them, that in fact not much would remain of these texts, that they were like 'a little skin left behind, the skin of a serpent (*mue*)'. Unsatisfied of the flaky tone the answer had come to take, I charged again. I said that as a first year student I was not satisfied with the answers. I felt that the presentations were of the conference-lecture type, that they could very well stand besides any other academic discourses. I said that this did not clarify the relation between rational and sensible regions of consciousness. Then everything broke loose... It was like unpacking a bag of worms. Teachers and some students seemed upset (I had voiced my question very politely, in a the utmost decent academic tone). One second year student who was presenting the week after, Besnik (performance artist from Albania), seemed to add fuel on this air-tightness between theory and practice. He said that this was precisely this tension – between discourse and

work – that was generating the work. This distance between the two was necessary. You could not have a simple discourse placated on a simple work. *It was the fact that the discourse strove to go beyond the object (the work), that made for a strong work.* In fact the force of the work could be measured by its power to generate *a discourse that could not capture it* (hence a discourse that had to lose itself in epilogues). A teacher (Robert Saucier) said that looking for answers was a Master-degree-reflex. After getting the master degree, nobody would ask you anything. [!! : he was the one centering his whole class on presenting a fake project to an hypothetical gallery ! | He said he himself never read to answer questions, he read for the sheer pleasure, or simply because he had bought the book (!!]. He was seeing the two fields as separate. Then the moderator, Monique Régimbald, charged me in a very emotive tone. I had used the word ‘inspiration’ as a descriptor of processes of intuition. She said : “It’s very revealing that you use the word inspiration. When I do a lucky strike (in my studio), there’s *not a penny of inspiration in that* ! Years ago we threw that in the garbage, and for good...!” She went on saying that it is precisely the paradigm of ‘inspiration’ that fosters a division theory-practice. There was no doubling (*dédoublement*) in that, only a necessary distance (?). Mona (fellow student) asked if we were not confounding inspiration and intuition. She reminded us that Pierre D (student presenter) had clearly stated his self censorship. Monique came back by saying that it’s a matter of being available to intuitions, but this is not inspiration. Pierre Gosselin proposed that inspiration is the general form of intuitions (?!?). Monique said that the discourse of inspiration had castrated everybody in the past. If Bach had been *inspired*, then the work was done and there was nothing to add to it. That was it : a big thing, a big work by a big inspired man.

The tone slowly calmed down. Teacher Robert Saucier reminded that intuition was not exclusive to the production of 'culture' (he meant art). Einstein had had intuitions too. Anne Ramsden (program director) said that theory helped understand intuitions; it gave tools for interpretation, because it lead to *imagine what the audience will see, it helped one to imagine oneself in the place of an other*. It was not censorship, it was simply asking : 'Is it this really what I wanted to SAY ?' ⁷⁰ A theoretician and journalist then said that the work would continue to live without the discourse that was attached to them.⁷¹ Mona asked the panelists the question, very pertinent in my sense, as to whether they had been able to develop, toward writing, the same attitude they had developed toward their art work. If these were effectively two different worlds, was it possible to have pleasure in both of them ? The panelists were perplexed. Some expressed clearly that their main mode of expression was 'images' not text. One panelist though had found a real pleasure in writing.

Then suddenly I realized that this idea, of different modes of consciousness being airtight one to another, would be untenable in the long run. It was a bulk feeling, a capsule of meaning, and I knew I would need a lot of words to present even a snippet of that gut feeling. It was an example of an intuitive knowledge (i.e. from an all encompassing 'image' to the supporting justifications : from the whole to the parts), not of an analytical one (from the parts to the whole). I knew from that moment that

⁷⁰ Emphasis is mine. Anne seemed to be attached to this idea that artworks were 'saying something', that they bring forward 'issues'. (see her intervention in Jérôme Fortin's lecture, and Jérôme's answer as a manifestation of two different views on 'content'). And yet, she was the one to define art as 'that which is not instrumental to anything' (its use is to be useless).

⁷¹ I wanted to intervene on this, because this seemed to me the epitome of blindness in the actual context, since most works and trends seemed to be increasingly dependent on discourse to have a public life. But I stayed put not to steer the debate too much...

intuitions were not the exclusive province of non-discursive modes of consciousness; I knew that this duality was the manifestation of a more fundamental split.⁷²

The debate evanesced slowly. A presenter said that he could not be as loose in a text as in an artwork. The student who had insisted on the generative tension between the text and the work said that this specific presenter's work would not be as strong without the discourse around it. It would be a light work. Here the discourse was even going too far, creating more distance still. (Further discussions with fellow students seemed to oppose this position. They thought that it was not true that the video work would be diminished without the positioning discourse.)

After the forum was over, Pierre Gosselin, the teacher who had started this debate, came to see me. He had watched me from the corner of an eye throughout the debate. He wanted to be sure I understood the context of Monique Regimbald's explosion. She had been educated in the 70's, he said. This was the time when the art world was rejecting everything that smelled Romantic. In those times, if you ever pronounced the word 'inspiration', you were simply and boldly kicked out of school. It was a time where art had to become a science. But to Pierre Gosselin, there was now a return to the paradigm of inspiration. Himself had done a study that showed that most artists who were rejecting the notion of inspiration still acquiesced to Eureka(s), i.e. creative breaks. However, as I thought, scholars and practitioners were moving away from the Big Eureka Paradigm to the idea of a continuous chain of little eureka(s).

* * *

How can we make sense of such a mess ? Words fixate the real, something I could definitely testify in the writing of this ethnography : even in pure transcriptions of

⁷² See my description of this in my meeting with Richard Purdy, section 3.2.2.4.7

interviews, informants get to get their voice frozen in time. But we can't live without this freezing of time *in* time. As Low argues, Consciousness is bound to words because "consciousness always promises that the center will emerge as form" (Low 2000)

But there is discourse and discourse. Poetry is not prose (Leavitt 1997). What kind of discourse do artists need and why? Professor Régimbald, the same who rejected the paradigm of inspiration in the forum, said in class that the current predominance of discourse in art results from inclusion of art in academia. Is then discourse only a tool for power between factions? As I chose to examine the whole topic in terms of consciousness, this easy way out is forbidden to me: 'power' itself must be explained in term of consciousness (hence the question: is there something in consciousness that explains why people want to dominate others; this is not a return to biology, i.e. explaining 'power' in terms of survival of the organism and the species, other wise we . competitiveness, otherwise back to genes).

3.2.2.3.2 Discourse and non-discourse : problematic in terms of consciousness

It is now time to examine something I suggested earlier on, i.e. that there a 'moment', an instance where creativity is conflated with the aesthetic experience. They are conflated because they are both moments, instances of non-reflective awareness, something we are about to expound. But what do we mean by 'aesthetic experience'? Can there really be a generic content to experiences that are culturally so diverse? Anthropologist Jacques Maquet (1986) argues that there is. Maquet defines 'aesthetic experience' by the presence of 'contemplation'. But he does not intend contemplation exactly in the sense that we intend it usually in the West, following Kant's view for

example, i.e. as a philosophical concept. Maquet's contemplation is the result of an intercultural survey, based on his personal experience. Maquet conceives of contemplation in the same direction as Hinayana Buddhism does. Following his personal immersion in a monastery, and the consequence experience of meditation in that context, Maquet argues that contemplation in the context of a meditational practice can serve as a foundation for the redefinition of the term within the aesthetic experience. Contemplation, in Maquet, is a relation to an object, a relation that is free of 'Ego involvement'. In this he seems to join Kantian aestheticians like Osborne who see aesthetic perception as entailing detachment (emotional and social), disinterestedness, non-discursiveness, and the absence of stimulation of the imagination. Aesthetic means non-instrumental, self-contained, self-referential.⁷³ Contemplation in Therava meditational tradition can be translated as "bare attention". Modern translations include Charles Tart's "Observer" and Arthur Deikman's "Witness". It is a state of non-identity with emotions. But while Kantians lean towards detachment -something that brought them the thunder of sociologists – Maquet's contemplation is *not so much a distance than a participation* - only that it is at another level than what we usually call participation : i.e. ethical or conceptual identification and agreement. In Maquet, contemplation comes to mean a paradoxical distance-participation, or if we have problems with the ambiguity of his notion, an emotional distance that allows for a participation at a higher level, a level that is not conceptual. Now, that aesthetic experiences be contemplative does not mean for

⁷³ Although Maquet puts himself to work by overviewing past definitions of 'aesthetics' – as configuration of forms, composition, order, etc. – it is ultimately the discovery of this states of consciousness – contemplation – that allows him to include those in-house (circular) definitions into a greater anthropological whole.

Maquet that they are spiritual. But for him this is more a difference in degree than a difference of kind.

Now speaking from an experiential point of view, Maquet argues that *contemplation is antinomic with a discursive mind*. Relating his encounter with Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, Maquet says that at first he was lost in intellectual reveries stimulated by the title. Forcing himself to look, "there was a shift to a nonverbal contemplation : a quiet but intense vision of the painting. It was perceived as if seen for the first time, as if seen "as it is". Everything inside the frame was vividly present; beyond the frame, the wall and the world had a weakened existence. I was not aware of the passing time. After a few seconds, or a few minutes, or perhaps even many minutes, Mondrian's grid appeared as an intended order, an underlying scheme for life, on which the bright points of particular actions and emotions are arranged and located, classified and controlled. This thought was not the result of reasoning; it did not arise as a possible interpretation of a nonfigurative painting ... It appeared as an insight about life, an intuition about a certain manner of ordering one's life. This idea was made visible in the Mondrian painting." (Maquet 1986 : 80) What is described here in retrospect is later on verbalized and analytical. "When I was contemplating the painting, there was no verbal analysis, no distinction between order as a concept and as visually expressed by the painting. Order had the evidence and the presence of an experience in which one was involved." (idem)

Another experience with a canvas by Mark Tobey enlightens the disappearance of the subject: "my state of self-awareness receded and was replaced in the foreground of the mind by a visual absorption in the painting." (Maquet 1986 : 82) Maquet experienced

the canvas as “a visual equivalent of quiet illumination”. This was not experienced as the best possible interpretation of a nonfigurative painting, but as an “evidence”. (idem) The author uses cases of aesthetic experiences of nonfigurative works to bolster his idea that forms have meanings in themselves, aside from any referential value.

Maquet’s thesis is orientated towards providing anthropologists tools for inter-cultural examination. The thesis : Aesthetic vision stems from contemplation + contemplation is a basic mode of consciousness = aesthetic perception could be universal. Indeed there is evidence that many literate and non-literate societies have developed a vocabulary to identify aesthetic experiences (Ex. : at least a dozen African languages make the distinction between “good” and “beautiful”). But being an anthropologist, Maquet is well aware that each aesthetic experience is multi-faceted and culturally encoded, something he will articulate later as the relation between the symbolic and the aesthetic. We will come back to this later (section 3.2.2.4.6 -b-).

Discussion

In the West, Kant is a crucial moment where the air tightness of regions of consciousness is named in terms acceptable to modernity. Kant showed that the ‘true’ (logos) is of no use to deal with the ‘good’ (ethics) or the ‘beautiful’ (aesthetics). And so it is the other way round : you cannot make aesthetic judgements using ethics, or ethical judgments using the logos. The three regions of consciousness each have their own process of validation. Wilber emphasizes that paradigms are practices. Thus finding similes between the language of modern physic and the accounts of mystics can in no way be used to prove that both visions can be subsumed. Physicists and mystics do not

know the world the same way, because they share different practices. The physicists know the world discursively, the mystics non-discursively.

Maquet's aesthetic seems to be Kantian, and it probably is in the sense that Maquet is influenced by Kantian aestheticians such as Osborn. However, Maquet's aesthetics cannot be simply classified as Kantian, since he brings in the debate ethnographic data from non-Western sources. His aesthetic is experiential, not only philosophical.

But since Maquet brings in notions such as 'disinterestedness' and 'detachment', I think a survey of Bourdieu's critique of Kant might prove useful. Bourdieu (1984) offers a sociological critique of Kant's judgment of taste; in fact it is the whole of philosophy that he criticizes, a "philosophy that sociologists try today to dethrone", in the mode of 'Get out so I can be there' ('*Pousse-toi de là que je m'y mette*') (Heinich 1997 : 12). Bourdieu argues essentially that Kant is perpetuating a class ideology when he speaks of the necessary 'disinterestedness' and 'detachment' that is needed to have aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic experiences are never detached, Bourdieu counter-argues. He takes as a proof the correlation he found between the 'cultural capital' of beholders and their aesthetic judgments. What Bourdieu finds through a heavy sociological enquiry, we could have tell from our daily experience : low class prefer Elvis, high classes prefer Beethoven. Bourdieu concludes that judgments of taste are always socially posited. Judgments of taste become the recognition of values that are socially conditioned. There are basically two twists in Bourdieu's argument. First he equates aesthetic experience with aesthetic judgment. Bourdieu should read Maquet's distinction between the symbolic and the aesthetic (section 3.2.2.4.6 –b-). Bourdieu's

analysis concerns the symbolic segment only, that is the segment where there is value. Secondly and more importantly, Bourdieu's analysis is of no use if we try to see, to feel, to know what 'beauty' is. What is it to like Elvis ? Bourdieu's view amounts to killing aesthetics. Beauty does not exist, only pleasure. Bourdieu's view is very populist. Popular classes do not like formalism because it is detached from life, and we should never forget that life is a struggle. Bourdieu refuses that there be any possible access to non-divided regions of consciousness. In short, there is nothing outside his own sociological turf.

Maquet says Popular and academic culture in the West have neglected contemplative modes of consciousness. Cognitive, action-orientated and affective modes of consciousness all insist on the necessity to change the world. In contemplative consciousness, this need to change things is absent. It is the disinterestedness found in that state of consciousness that allows us to present definition of art as non-instrumental. But that does not mean that an emphasis on this type of consciousness withdraws us from being active citizen . On the contrary by giving us a larger picture these modes can foster the development of a better human, Maquet thinks, because they can show a way toward disinterested action, a form of action that is more a *participation* in the world that a will to act on it. Contemplation is a way to re-integrate the world, to re-integrate ourselves.

Without being explicit, Maquet points to an outside of 'culture' that is not biology nor matter. And by conceptualizing the distinction between the symbolic and contemplative segments of the aesthetic experience), he provides us with an articulation on how the cultural (consciousness) meets the ante-cultural (awareness).

3.2.2.3.3 Specific context in the school : program, reception by students

Through a year long process that lead them to write a thesis proposal, students are asked to identify with a project: this project is to lead to a double output of a thesis and an exhibit;

Discourse is central in the definition and orientation of this project. Students are seen as researchers – like other researchers in the academia - and are therefore presented with various research methods, as they are developed in the academia and are available to other academic researchers. Thus one student might decide that phenomenology is his method for doing research. The methodology class was one of the most popular classes. It undoubtedly responded to a vital need in students who, for the most part, did not have nor the theoretical background nor the affinities other students have with theoretical discourse.

In my opinion, at least two factors could explain this distance of art students from intellectual pursuits : 1) an 'exterior' factor : Many students seem to lean on the side of art when they fit nowhere else; but this is generally not the kind of students that can make it to the Graduate program. 2) art students have a disbelief in theory, in second hand apprehensions of the world. This separation of practice and theory is acknowledged in school. For example. I was surprised that in our 'Séminaire de création' class, there were no readings...!⁷⁴ The teacher argued that we had already enough work. Thus knowledge would be built orally. A dancer I had met many years ago and whom I met again on the floor of J.P. Perreault's new dance complex, told me that she had just completed her MA in kinanthropology. "It's good for the rigor", she said. "We artists we think we are rigorous. We are, but as for intellectual work...It gave me so much in terms

⁷⁴ There were in fact two classes where we discussed four little texts. But they totalled roughly 40 pages in total...The teacher even felt the need to excuse them, in saying : "It's not too much readings".

of making a line of thought, of being logic.” Dancers do not have a good reputation in terms of thinking...

So most students welcomed the methodology class probably for the same reasons this dancer found her MA useful. However, some students came to think that there was a confusion of genres and categories : one could obviously not make art with phenomenology... Art students' ambiguous relation to theory was enacted one day that I ran into Mona, obviously in a rush.

“ “I have a Capoeira class at noon, I have to photocopy this, and I have this damned text to read for 2 PM”. I was curious about the text. “It’s Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology de la perception*” (the introduction). I asked her what she thought of it. “I can’t, I drop after each sentence. It’s so... I hate theory like that. It’s so...” She did not like the style, the circumvolution of language, the flowers. When I told her that this work had been pivotal for me, she showed me the other text- phenomenology too - she had to copy. “This ! This is accessible !” a 100 pages, normal language”. The book was written in big letters like a children’s book... The fact is that she had an A+ in the creation class and can manage her way out without much hard thinking, at least in terms of normal academic criteria (we’re coming closer). The fact is that she does not need Merleau-Ponty to create (even closer).”

-Field notes

Murielle was wondering about the use of the methodology class. She questioned the idea of a “*sujet de recherche*” (research topic). She found the idea ambiguous. Could we say that an art work had ‘a subject’ ? Could we say that it was ‘about something’, something else than itself ? Still Murielle used her subject as an anchor : “It’s something you come back to when you’re lost”.

One ‘classical’ wording of the dichotomy discourse/non-discourse in the field was offered to me one day that I met a former co-student in art. We were talking about conceptual artists, as a designation of an ‘other’ (than ourselves) and I asked him how he would designate the non-conceptuals like us. He said that the non-conceptuals were

“those who are ‘loving materials’”. The dichotomy was thus pronounced to be :
working in your head versus working with matter.

Another traditional way to formulate the dichotomy is through the opposition
Conceptualism versus formalism. ‘Formalism’ has been a way for art theorists and artists
to designate artistic practices that do not repose on the use, exposition or demonstration
of concepts in art. But of course, calling someone ‘formalist’ is often a way to disqualify
practices that are culturally foreign. In the field I had an opportunity to witness the
relativity of those definitions. On the night that it was my turn to be a member of the jury,
an hour long debate over Murielle’s incapacity to defend her work in term of ‘content’
could not come to conclusion that she was a ‘formalist’. Michel’s work was the opposite.
All so clear, there was no mystery to it anymore. Michel was thus a conceptual.

“Thinking” is often seen as the criteria to distinguish ‘art’ from ‘craft’ or
‘commercial art’. When I asked Nadine what she had thought of visiting artist Jérôme
Fortin’s presentation, she said she could not understand why an artist of such renown
could have such difficulty explaining his work. The fact that he could not answer to many
questions was the sign that he was “unconscious”. For Nadine, reflectivity was a pre-
requisite to be a real artist. When I asked Claire what was for her the opposite of
conceptual, she said “Intuitive, spontaneous...” But many artists will refuse this dualist
trap (body-mind, rational-intuitive). Professor Régimbald is one of them : “My head is in
my belly and my belly is in my head !” On the other hand, some students use ‘the body’
as a conceptual unit to situate an outside to intellectual modes of knowledge. Janine is a
strong defender of “returning to the body” as a way to mark her anti-intellectual stance.

Mona also uses 'the body', this time more obliquely, as a way to designate an alternative to rationality in her work.

3.2.2.3.4 Typology of different uses of discourse in the field

a- Discourse as project

Discourse is now often taken as a locus for artistic intervention. Assistant professor Jean-Pierre Demers gave a presentation one night that in my opinion amounted to use discourse as non-discourse. It was not a poetic performance. I wrote about his presentation :

“Something I noted at one point is that I became dizzy, and I thought that it was because of my effort to make sense of what he was saying... I thought he had somehow hypnotized us, with contradictory concepts, with the ease with which he moved across such a mined terrain of gibberish... These people are just expert at disguising non-sense into a semi '*bon-sens*'... The class was numbed, not exactly spellbound, but as if under an active spell... In a way, he tricked us by using ideas against ideas, as if concepts would be turning against themselves.”

For many contemporary artists, art has become a way to 'say things', thus contradicting the view of art as non-instrumental. Art is under the spell of a new figuration : the depiction of 'issues'.

b- Discourse as tool for active imagination

One of my main discoveries in the field – a confirmation in fact – is the notion of *class critique as theatre of ideas*. The following was written in September and revised in January :

“My take on it now is that visual art moved toward literature and other mediums based on narrative. Not that the works themselves are necessarily based on narratives or should be, but they should instill it, a very special type of narrative that I should call “critique narratives”. What counts is more the ideas that works generate than the experience (aesthetic) they propose. We stand in front of the art work and very soon it moves into discussion. The contact with words is not only referential. Artworks are not even any longer the source of discussion but its pretext. They are the entrance door by which we are convened to a ritual making, a ritual of building a plot. The plot is not only – as in the case of assessing studies for future work – a plot of realization or even a scheme of communication with the potential audience – although this motive is central in itself. Plots serve a greater purpose, they serve the here and now of a ritual discussion about ideas. It is in this sense that I conceive of the readiness of the teacher – more than anyone else – to compare the work with other works and bring it onto an horizon of what has been done or being done by renown artists.

But what retains my attention here is the conversational and sometimes monological nature of that performance. The ‘work’, or rather the core of the experience is created by speaking, not so much by watching, a testimony of which is the rapidity with which the teacher switches from quiet observation to quoting references. “It makes me think of” seems to be the paradigmatic unit of that performance.

Students are more readily engaged into the “you could do this and that” than the teacher. The teacher takes it ‘as it is’. (To the extent that Gilbert’s museological display was taken as the ‘work’ not even as a display of his proposals.) The personal process, the “how did you get there”, or the “what’s next?” is not the main concern, if even a concern at all. What we assess, at least what the teacher leads us to, is an ‘as is’ of ideas, and this assessment is the point of departure for another construction, an ideational construction, a plot of unfolding ideas. The excitement comes when this plot is realized, when we successfully build a story of ideas.

This virtual exhibit that happens in the head of spectators, who pick up just the necessary cues to build their own narrative, this spectacle of plot making has consequences for the making of art (and needless to say for the whole field). One will remember works that fulfill this project of building narratives, and one will devise strategies that will successfully enhance the internal dialogue of visitors. The aesthetic experience proper is never far, even in works that are exclusively conceptual. But one thing seems sure : the “work” is done as much in talking (internally or externally) as in “watching” (in the broad sense).

Whether this is the product of the need for artists to use their work to *think* about things, or whether this is the result of the pressure exerted by art critics and curators – who are now satisfied because they finally repatriated art onto their own terrain : concepts – one could not say. But in both cases the effect is the same : art making is re-integrated into the global project of an essentially discursive society. In this sense, Weber’s notion that art and erotica replaced religion, that

notion seems partly outdated. Today, art and erotics are evolving toward discursiveness.”

-Field notes

Reading sociologist Leenhardt afterwards, I got the impression I was on the right track. Leenhardt argues that once what is shown in art is the “analytical and critical aspect of the artistic *‘mise en forme’*, the concept of the exhibition is altered” (Leenhardt 1992 : 30). Therefore what we have now is a dramaturgy, a spectacle of ideas, where curators act as directors. But if visual art borrows the code of the theatrical spectacle, it also borrows its concept of authenticity, that is the notion of acting. For in art the notion of authenticity is now displaced, if not reversed. Authenticity is now measured by the intensity of the artist’s claim to in-authenticity... The true artist is now the one who is authentically and publicly insincere... Works are now empty but it is the act of signing them and exhibiting them that operates “a procedure of essentialization at the second degree in a world without essence.” (idem : 34). Leenhardt in this way acquiesces to two of 20th century’s major turning points : Duchamps’ negation of the essence of art, and Magrite’s demonstration that the logic of representation is always contradictory.

But what Leenhardt does not enter into, is the fact that these ‘turning points’ have been granted value by critics, mainly because in pretending to reduce art to ideas about art, they precisely allowed critics to stabilize their social and symbolic position by asserting that now discourse could empty the meaning of art. By supposedly reducing art to discourse, Duchamp & cie granted discourse experts the right to pretend to do art. Long time excluded, these experts at language could now live on the illusion that there had never been anything worth of being excluded from. What a relief. In January, I

interviewed Professor Schofield on the subject. I asked him to give his opinion on my thesis of a 'theatre of ideas'. His answers are enlightening :

S : "I think you are right, off to a certain point. We get away from the work. We HAVE to get away from the work..."

Q : Why ?

S : I don't think we should stay aghast (spellbound, *béat*) in front of a work, out of visual blindness (visual glaring ? : *éblouissement visuel*). We get away from the work. Sometimes when we don't agree with someone, what do we do ? We come back to the evidence; we look for the body; we say : "Listen, look at what is before you !". So yes, we get away from the work, and when we do not agree we come back. It's like a dance. It's akin to seduction : you cannot seduce someone simply by targeting the person, by piercing her with your gaze, penetrating up to the other side of her head. No. You turn around [you look at your watch], you ask yourself if you're going to stay longer...It's not unidirectional...I take seduction as an example because there is still a part of seduction in a work. ...

Q : That being said, someone from another discipline, (or from another culture) might find it strange that we speak during the experience. This is what makes me ask if the experience would not be first located in speech (*la parole*) and in this theatre of idea, in an imaginary that is in the order of discourse. Because we go to the concert and we never speak; maybe we will do it, or inside ourselves we will do it, but never collectively. And we will judge the quality of the work [in regard to its capacity to] suspend this interior dialogue. Same thing in theatre.

S : Yeah, yeah. This is because we cannot bring theatre home. All in all, in visual arts we still have the impression that it is not a punctual experience. I come back to this idea of the object. It's very, very strong, despite all those interdisciplinary years : performances, installations, all things where we strove to reduce the accent put on the object. We still view visual arts as objects, potentially objects with which we would live eternally. So we can allow ourselves to speak around this object because we know, we BELIEVE in a certain way that the object is always there...That is not the case in theatre... That is why silence is needed.

...This is why I put a lot of emphasis on the idea of the object, the object in a broad sense, but still the object...So we talk about the work, not because we do't see it, but because we think that maybe we can see for ever...I ask you a question : Did you ever buy a work ?

Q : No.

S : This where I think you can answer that question yourself. Buy something. I's going to change a lot the parameter of your question. The day you put money on the table to buy something that is not very useful, aside from the fact that it is attractive, and you decide you want to live with that object, your relation [then] is stretched over a longer period of time... It's an act of faith. In a certain way, when we buy [this is when] we really participate, because now we've taken a risk. It's not only time that we lose now, its money. It becomes a choice between this object, and a chair, a good dinner, a good bottle of wine. And the day that you decide that the bottle can wait a little bit, that it is the work you want, I think it changes a bit the parameters. This is also a reproach that I do [to the situation in Canada]. I was raised in Canada and I left in 83. [I lived in Paris and New York.] ...And I was a bit surprised when I came back, the way art is taught. I realized that ... a lot is due to the fact that we don't have a market for art. So when we speak of art, we speak a lot of it in terms of an experience, as a poor cousin of cinema. And this is why we will always stay poor cousin if we put all our money on the "punctual experience" aspect. The moment you buy a work, its different. Ultimately you can buy the cassette of a film, but it's not the same thing."

- Transcription from videotape

Even if Professor Schofield brings very pertinent data to explain the phenomenon of this 'theatre of ideas', he seemed to be divided between questioning the location of art in 'the object', and reinforcing it. On one occasion I saw him talking for ten minutes before finally really looking at the piece he was commenting. Many justifications students brought for their piece were bluntly the import of plot making processes belonging to theatre and cinema. Some students agreed with my idea of a theatre of ideas.

Murielle and Janine both felt the pressure of cinema on visual art. They also thought that having a professional curator as assistant professor in the '*Atelier de création*' class was too early. It would inject discursive reflexes – and theatrical reflexes - in the early stages of the creative process.

Troubling as it may, it is through examining my ethnographic compulsion of 'getting it all down' that I could understand the endless chatter around art pieces... I felt that my collector mania was the mirror/symptom of another restlessness : wanting to say it all (see conclusion).

c- Discourse as manifesting the center-periphery dynamic of consciousness

We could interpret this predominance of discourse as the result of social pressure, the result of power struggles. But we could also interpret it as the pressure of one region of consciousness over the other.

Françoise was changing her painting project to have discourse. She was choosing to do what can be spoken of instead of what can't (ex : how can you speak about colors, and for how long : can you build a job on that ?). An invited critique in the evaluation critique saluted the fact that a student used color to do 'optic painting', because this was a '*pied de nez*' to 'aesthetic painting'. Schools enacted this pressure of discourse : In her first year, Françoise did not have time to paint. Too many classes... And the methodology class was very demanding for her. How can one not end into illustrating concepts, when one spends 75% of one's time thinking about them ?

Clearly, since in the program words would have come first, they would lead the ball. Would this contradict the specificity of art, a field where usually doing comes first,

explanations after ? Was this an unconscious fight against self-teaching, i.e. doing before learning to do ?

It was easy to think that there was a coveted fight 'out there', between agents. After three hours of discussion on the avant-gardes, Aline concluded : "It's all struggles for power anyway..." When I tried to verify my concept of a 'theatre of idea' with prof. Saucier, he said while looking in my eyes : "You are forgetting something. Power and money." To him, these discourses were intended as to secure positions, statuses, power... (I did not asked him if this was the way he saw his own discourse...) It was easy also to think that discourses (and projects) were shield for the self. I for one got caught into using a theoretical concern to defend my personal position as a sculptor. At some point, I wrote : "All these words to escape judgement !" The perfect double bind : judge others to make them stopping judging you. As was made clear in a discussion on Sociologist Heinich (1998) underlining of a double bind ("Be disobedient"), 'transgression' and 'resistance' were two edges paradigms : installing this logic was the best way to have one's head cut some day or the other.

The fact that the discourse of teachers seemed to be aimed at building content to save students who did not work reveals a more profound : the uncertainty must be gapped, the discomfort must be relieved; finding the locus of the 'work' thus becomes an imperative. *Art has to invent itself as 'work' while claiming to negate 'work'. Discourse is the perfect tool for that : it is dynamic while projecting an aura of permanency : "this is that"*. The way students learn to perform interpretation as a (compulsory) game was revealed one day with eloquence. In a final group critique (evaluation), Gilbert's human hair piece was being examined. It fascinated me how each teacher had put in the piece the

preoccupations of their own work. The piece was becoming a feminist statement, an ethnographic statement, a machist statement, etc..., including me, who had offered an ethnographic reading of the colored thread as hair braiding... And yet Gilbert had already given cues toward non-symbolism, by presenting the color threads as aesthetic only ("to make the eye travel more"). After the whole critique, I asked Gilbert if everything we had just said applied to his piece, or if it was not downright a case of intellectual masturbation : "Of course it is !" he said. He had not thought about one single of those line of interpretation. He had just done it...

When she visited my studio, N.Y. artist Martha Townsend said she used words as a way to deal with the interpretations others placated onto her . The work always had to come first, words after. In the making, words would become less important: problems would be solved by the work itself. Success did not depend of ourselves anyway, it was thus inutile to try to run after it. Her point of view seemed typically gendered. When I offered to take the boat of gender, she silently declined the invitation.

The pressure of curators on artists has become immense. They are more and more compared to theatre and movie directors (Heinich 1998, Leenhardt 1992). Prof. Schofield made it clear that in identifying our 'peers' (the artists with whom we had affinities) we had to examine "who curates them, who collect them"... The *vernissages* (opening night) I went to were clearly an instance of public relation : not too much time was spent looking at the works.

After classes, critiques, *vernissages*, often times my competitive drive would be boosted. I would go buy more books even if I had sworn no to anymore (my studio was already full). Interestingly, in painting, this phantom of the other disappeared. The other

was becoming the canvas. It would BE the other, not its incarnation. I had silent conversations with it. It would calm me. It would tell me everything I needed to know. As I write these lines, I realize that this is not possible with text. Even in poetry, the text always point outside itself. In dis-course, the other is always there, but never quite....

I witnessed several cases of relations of love-hate between artists and theoreticians-curators. Discourse and linguistic paradigms (art as 'language') becoming the norm, artists abandon the boat of communion for the plane of communication (Maquet, 1986 see later : 3.2.2.4.6 -b-). Gilbert for example made the participation of the audience a central point of his MA project. But the participation he sought was exclusively at the symbolic level : the spectator would be integrated because he/she would give his own hairs to Gilbert. He wanted to "communicate a message", because he refused, as many others, 'art for art's sake'

Why would artist accept to be ruled by the new priests ? Because priests provide the service of a *confessional*. Visual artists are accepting to be side-tracked, so to speak, by art historians because they are the main (and sometimes only) audience. In critiques, we students we were so happy that someone at last would consider our work ! We were happy to be taken care of. After months of working to perform a spectacle, we could now enjoy the spectacle of expertise. We desperately needed the cleverness of experts to be re-assured about our work. Thus discourse became a balm over our uncertainty and our solitude. At some point, I even wondered if we, students, artists, were not *fabricating solitude in order to be relieved of it...!* Maybe this way we were fabricating intensity?

3.2.2.3.5 : Non-Discourse

Montreal interdisciplinary artist Manon Labrecque seems to think that discourse is far from being an aid to the artistic creation :

January 17th, 2002

"I know nothing of art history. .. Ask me a question, if I answer you correctly, it's really going to be a big luck [laughter]. Sometimes I say to myself "I miss of that". But sometimes I watch [people]; I have some of my friends who did *too much studies* in art, and they're not able to DO anymore, because they have too much judgments coming from theory. **I met some of them, they are incapable of... [they say]: "oh no, this and this artist in 1940, according to history, did much better". Yeah, yeah, but then what? Me I know that it could affect me. It's not because of that that I don't read. I never read. I'm not a great reader."**

-Transcription from videotape

In the field I found implicit and sometimes explicit critiques by students about the use and overuse of discourse. Students were sometimes tired of interpreting, and refusing to theoreticize. Marcello, a photographer and former philosophy student, was one who was posing the question the more acutely (his project uses Wittengenstein to criticize the overuse of discourse...). On one occasion, during a round table, he made a sortie, quite emotionally, and asked if we could do art for art.s sake. In fact he was more than asking, he was begging a retreat from categorization. Professor Ramsden retorted that no it was not possible, that even when doing it for pleasure (that seemed to be her bottom line) we were doing it for something. I offered the word catharsis in order to get out of this 'depisting of issues' and Marcello said that was the word on his lips. Students often reproached the program and Seminar class to be redundant. We felt we were always asked to speak about our work, in an endless mirroring on the verge of narcissism. In the case of professor Ramsden, the fact was that she knew very little of our work (she did not see it in progress), and so her main recourse what to ask 'what is it about'. Thus to be

valid, the work had to point outside itself, to re-cognizable cognitive units. So one could have thought that her class was not really about art, it was about talking about art.

Students were sometimes criticizing intellectualism. For Janine it was important that her work be not only cerebral. She quoted works and artists who would involved the body (Yoshiro Suda, Ann Hamilton), and would comment "how much intellection separates us from the world". Mona wondered about the use of the MA. Marcello was becoming more and more provocative in his verbal presentations and performances. Professor Schofield said it was the university that forced us to make a dichotomy theory-practice. For him, to have an Atelier de creation separate from a Séminaire de creation was somewhat absurd.

Professor Tim Clark at Concordia's fine art faculty argues that since before the Renaissance, artists were always seen as stupid. (Schutze, in Laramée & al : 2002). In a world where 'thinking' is now not only valorized but mandatory, it is normal that artists would want to think. And it is normal that they would want to do it with the tools that are theirs. But what is an idea ? Do we need ideas to understand what are ideas ? Is there a world outside ideas? Do ideas can see outside ideas ? These are questions that Students like Marcello and me were asking, often time very theoretically ...And yet Marcello was caught into this thinking of non-thinking, since his work was very conceptual. "Every art is conceptual because there is always a concept behind", did he say in October. Later on, he changed his view a bit. His director asked him to bridge the gap between theory and practice from the end of practice. At the end, he thought that is was impossible to do good conceptual art. "Conceptual art doesn't work, because it doesn't think about the audience". Or if there was a way to make it work, it was through injecting pop art into

conceptual art. On one occasion I invited him to put on a helmet and enter into the sandblaster with me. He said later in front of the class that that day he had had an epiphany...

Visiting artist of international renown, Jana Sterback, did not believe in basing art on theory; for her there were no point in illustrating theories, since theories were already illustrations of something else. Visiting artist Martha Townsend believed words had to come after, not before the work. The most troubling thing was that *it was far from being black and white*. People you would have liked to see as conceptual, suddenly turned their heels and decried discourse : Prof Ramsden (a good portraitist of issues –feminism) said the text I offered to present my exhibit was superfluous. We did not want to know where the piece came from. Françoise would tell me in the afternoon that trying to explain painting makes no sense, and would spent half an hour at night explaining her work in a seminar... ⁷⁵

Michel (conceptual par excellence) often objected to over-theorization in art. In the correspondence that was requested in our summer Atelier de creation, I asked Michel if he really believed that one could make art with concepts. It took him six weeks to answer me, because the question had troubled him deeply, he wrote. Moreover he did not like to talk about art (!). He finally replied that “Yes, of course, didn’t you go to an art gallery lately ? One can make art with everything”. But he understand my point : him too

⁷⁵ However there were discourse and discourse. Surprisingly, it was often the discourse of the less articulated, more naïve students that made more sense, because we could *feel* the connection between the work and its discursive projection/representation. Students like some in the forum who had detached themselves too much from the work and exiled themselves into the cold land of philosophy (the main reference) were often time simply...boring.

did not like 'thesis art'. The important thing he thought was that 'it worked'.⁷⁶ Was not Michel – the ultra-conceptual and director of the artist run center Gallerie Clark – offering his help to boost the career of the ultra naïve Dan ? And when one thought about it, was not Dan him too a conceptual ? Did his pieces stood upon a framework of concepts, of ideas or of feelings ?

What I was getting from field work was a great confirmation of profound malaise. There seemed to be a tremendous confusion (my interpretation) around the notion of 'meaning'. Artists were inescapably looking for meaning. Looking for meaning they were finding words. Françoise wanted "to come to forms which made sense" ("arriver à des formes qui ont du sens") and thus she was taking refuge into words, building her whole project around problems of linguistic translation ("faux-amis").

3.2.2.3.6 Discourse versus non-discourse : analysis : objectivity of the schism

a- reflectivity versus non reflectivity

The case of 'naïve artists' might illustrate the ineptitude of linear thinking in art :

November 2001 :

"Dan is the one who poses the question of the ineptitude of words to convey artistic experiences. And he does so because his whole being is incapable of linearity. In his incapacity to follow the most simple line of thought, he reveals the freshness, - and 'natural' ? – of a discourse un-corrupted by linear logical thinking. But by revealing this naively, with authenticity, he also plays the drama of the primitive : won't he meet a toll both, someday, where he'll have to conform and pay his due to reason ? And this is quite disarming, because even Anne (teacher) who is in charge of the line, is taken aback and forced to laugh like all of us; forced to retreat and abandon herself...to art ? "What have we done to art" is the question Dan seems to ask unconsciously. And it is this very lack of consciousness that plays it, makes it, creates it. What "it" ?"

⁷⁶ Michel was at loss to explain this further. To me there was two way of interpreting his view : or it was possible to go from concepts to aestheticism; or the aesthetic experience was no longer a prerequisite for 'art'.

Visiting artist Jérôme Fortin was another case :

“After his lecture (basically the historiography of his own work), someone had asked him – obviously from the stand point of a deep existential doubt – what he thought about the pertinence of art; was it only a sort of auto-therapy, after all ? Jérôme answered by saying that there was a moment where things seemed futile. But there was another moment where another dimension appears, i.e. something else than therapy. I asked him if he could put words on this other dimension. There was an unbearable time of silence. “Words like what ?”, he asked. The whole theatre busted into laughter. “Thank you !”, I answered. (What a magnificent answer that was, I thought. ‘Words ?, What kind of words do you want ?’). Then a teacher asked a lengthy question about the parallels between his repetitious work and the chain work in the industry (*travail à la chaîne*). She asked if his work was a comment on that. The people by my side and I we looked at each other, speechless, incapable of believing that she could not get it, that she dared asking such a question. (Or was she probing him, to test his level of reflectivity in regards to his practice ? That might very well have been a test). Jérôme babbled : “For some pieces, I strained myself up to the point of getting a *tendinite* (inflation of tendons). My work is full of references. I really don’t know... It’s chain work, and it’s not.” It seemed so obvious, at least for the people around me. He was in a world, a world of making, a world where there are only practical problems to solve. She was in a world of reflection, of thinking. He was in the world of art making. She was in the world of thinking about art. (Or maybe ‘art’ has come to mean thinking more than doing, in which case there are not so many categories left for Jérôme : craft ?).

“Jérôme could not, would not solve the riddle, the mystery, the ‘why’ of art. But his stance was not defiant. He was simply incapable of doing so. Not that he did not have words. He was obviously well schooled.⁷⁷ He had not learned the jargon of art history, and consequently his only recourse was through his own life. The only way he seemed able to make sense of that ‘activity’ was through establishing the chain of events and meanings, as he had found them in his personal history. His life and his art interwoven in a personal myth.”

-Field notes

But as seen earlier, Jérôme ineptitude/unwillingness to enter the arena of academic discourse was enough for Nadine to disqualify him. Mona seemed to have the opposite reaction : what she liked in Jérôme was that it proved that “it is still possible to do it outside school”.

⁷⁷ He does not have a degree in art, but a degree in museology. However he did attend to some art classes at Concordia University.

In my own case, the drama was enacted poignantly. Some colleagues (outside school) did not understand why I was 'in anthropology now' why others approved readily : this is something they would have liked to do, and one of the reason was that the theory would then have been better than what they got in art school... In the grad program at UQAM, at various occasions I got the message that doing art and doing anthropology was antithetical. Visiting artist Townsend said politely : "Anthropology ? That must be a lot of reading..." Later in our meeting she found I was divided between two worlds. She enjoined me to come rejoin her in the world of art. Professor Régimbald was more direct. We were having a one to one conversation in my studio, as part of the evaluation. We discussed general issues and then she tried to word "my problem". She thought I had a "*rapport d'autorité*" over my material (relation of authority). If I had decided that the books would look like a volcano, then there would be no way out of that perception for me. She acknowledged that we '**make choice**', because we feel at ease in them, because we recreate our world, etc. But at some point the "object send you back orders and you either listen to them or not".

- "How do we fit this here ?" I asked, meaning that I was questioning the fact that we were asked to write a thesis proposal about what we intend to do.

- "At some point it is the project that leads you" she said.

Accidents were a part of 'the project'. She continued :

"You say it's a volcano, I say it's a skirt. You say stone, I say fabric. You say crater, I say waist. What distinguishes art and science is *the method*. In art, we don't have a method ("pas de méthode").

And then she slashed.

- "You have to turn your back to the anthropological method here. You have to relieve yourself from the authority of anthropology when you enter in the field of art. For the moment being, it is you who lead it [the project]. You are not taken over by it yet. It will come. For that you must admit that you turned your back to anthropology in what it has of predictable and literal. You must welcome the unpredictable. It is like when we have too much information; for example

sometime you see a painting and it doesn't work, because there are three, four paintings in one : it closes back onto itself instead of opening."

-Field notes (manual transcript of verbatim)

My dilemma (discursive-non-discursive) was coming from the outside, and therefore it expressed itself in terms of value. I was paradoxically coming to school to find the tools to defend what is outside language and discourse, but I was now being trapped into defending those theoretical tools. She compared the Master program to a birth. The baby was the work, the program (structure and teachers) was the "sage-femme", but there was the need to teach the baby to talk, otherwise it would be a dumb thing, it would be nothing. I retorted that the baby could do a lot of other things than speak : s/he could dance. Monique agreed, but still...the baby would have to talk some day, about himself and the world.

To me that was an easy way out of the problem. What was the proportion ? Would the baby, the work, be only about language, about 'saying things' ? Was there in her stance an acquiescence of the non-verbal (and maybe cognitive) aspect of art and art making ?

-“At some point, all this will merge into one thing.”

I felt she was trying to tell me that the distinction between discourse and non-discourse was relative, that it would vanish some day, that it was possible to stop cutting the world along those lines. She seemed to tell me that someday the work would include everything – its silent manifestations as well as the discourse that would be produced around it. Discourse, non-discourse, it did not matter in the last run. All these things were one, and it was this oneness that we were after. It was a relief, in a way. There was no need anymore to police reality and to put things into boxes. Yes there would still be

boxes and still people putting things into them. But there was a general principle, a unifying factor that made these actions all the same.

Even if I felt viscerally that she was right, it was hard for me to take this in. For wasn't she the one who had organized our summer Atelier de creation almost exclusively around writing? Here was the only course that was devoted exclusively to our studio work, and 75% of the evaluation was to be on our correspondence to other students. Only 25% would be on the actual production...! Some students did not even ask for a meeting with her, that meant that the teacher would not see the production at all... I know for sure that certain students took that as an excuse to stop completely their art production.

b- Symbolic versus aesthetic

I said earlier that I interpreted the malaise around discourse as partly resulting from a confusion of genres. Anthropologist Maquet makes a distinction between the symbolic and the purely aesthetic components of the aesthetic experience and his distinction was of a tremendous help for me in order to untangle the malaise around discourse. To test Maquet's model, I presented it in class and was surprised by the good reception it had among students. Maquet says that there are at least two incorrect assumptions that account for the "disillusionment with attempts at aesthetic evaluation". (Maquet :141). The first one is the idea that aesthetic Judgment are only aesthetic: we should not forget that symbolism⁷⁸ always intertwines with the aesthetic. Secondly, we

⁷⁸ "Symbols are signs which stand for their signified by having something important with the latter: Nature, essence, and identity." (Maquet 1986 :103) But this definition is not satisfying for Maquet, since it belongs "to the discourse regulated by the principle of identity, contradiction, and the excluded third; the relationship described here, on the contrary states that the symbol is both identical and not identical to its signified," (idem) Hence Maquet's use of 'participation' as a descriptive device. A symbol "participates in the nature of what it stands for." (idem) [Symbols are ambiguous.] In symbols, there is conaturality of signifier and signified. The light of the sun is the symbol of life, because it is life, yet at the same time it is not. How come ? Maquet explains his phenomenology : "What we call "physical" or "external" things in ordinary language are elaborate mental transpositions of stimuli originating from aggregates we have

have the wide spread assumption that preference is individual; we forget here that “value judgments are included in the tradition in which we have been enculturated.” (Maquet : 141). And here comes the surprise : *Preferences are not directly based upon aesthetic experience and aesthetic value, they are based on the concordance between the symbolic meaning of the object and the value system of the appraiser.* ‘Collective’ aesthetic Judgments are in fact the emanations of the art establishment. In its Judgment, the establishment blurs the distinction between the aesthetic quality (composition, expressivity and discontinuity) and preferences (concordance symbolic meaning-value system). What happens is that an object lacking in aesthetic quality cannot support symbolic meaning.

This distinction is fundamental. **In fact we could say that most of the emotion that is induced by aesthetic ‘objects’ (including performances) had nothing to do with the aesthetic experience per se...!** This distinction allows also to see that most of the contemporary art production is now geared on the symbolic, not the aesthetic. Thus in a way it makes sense that discourses would come to take so much importance. Could we really speak about the aesthetic portion of the experience anyway, if it is by definition outside language and judgment ? On the other hand, the irony of the situation is blatant : Universities are places where we speak, and since the only thing of art we can speak

isolated in the flux that surrounds us ... Consequently, for all practical purposes, we can forget the distance between the external aggregates, ultimately unknown “in themselves” (what we call ‘things’), and their mental equivalents, the only items we know.” (idem p.106) Thus in symbols we have a ‘mentation’ equating another ‘mentation’. “ ‘Marble’ is as mental as ‘eternity’... The conaturality of marble and eternity is made possible because each of them is in the mind.” (idem). So to have an experience of a symbol is to have the experience of what is symbolized. But the experience here is not an intellectual knowledge, even if it is always a mental process. It is an intuitive perception. We can have analytical explanation of symbolic experiences, but the meaning brought forward by such analysis should not be confounded with the experience itself, which is non-discursive.

about is its symbolic aspect, let's transform art into a symbolic gesture, point. In the field, I tried to come to an experiential definition of my aesthetic experiences :

“So one day, you realize it's not 'the thing' that makes it – objects, procedures, techniques, mediums – but your relation to them. From then on what you try to show are relations. But one day you realize you cannot show relations, for showing is already a relation. That day you come to a dead end. So you go back to 'objects' for there is no point in showing anything. But one day you realize it's a certain *state* [of being] you're after, and that this state has nothing to do with anything. In fact you could be doing anything and get into that state.”
-Field notes

While I was shopping for a thesis adviser, I invited professor Claude Mongrain to my studio. This was a nice spring board for me to start to test Maquet's hypothesis (about a division, in the aesthetic experience, between the symbolic level and the aesthetic level proper, which he links to the absence of *mentation*, of thinking). Repeatedly, I voiced my concerns about not using signs. I was not interested in a new language, visual this time, that I would use to “say things”. He understood perfectly my point and we had a nice exchange on the matter. He knew exactly what I meant by “the effect” a work had when it did not resort to semiotic or symbolic devices : it was a suspension – not only of judgment, as he corrected – but of thinking altogether. For him, the ‘effect’ that we sought was to leave the spectator ‘speechless’. It was reaching a point where things could no longer be explained, left alone justified.

However, I could not press him too much on the aspect of the vacuity of “creating for creating”. But when I gave the example of the Belgium sculptor Wim Delvoye, who essentially uses the mixing of heterogeneous symbolic domains as process, he agreed that this was not getting very far. “But it's very productive. You can produce a lot of pieces and gallery like that. It's very market orientated.”

Some students were critical of this sort of 'symbolist fundamentalism'. But I realized that the whole field was mutating in a probably irremediable way. Some students were resisting, like Marcello refusing to quit his performing stance (a TV. shell on the head) to join the teacher in the interpretation game. H  l  ne for example presented a video where she had some plants dancing, in a very abstract and beautiful way. Professor Schofield insisted that this piece was sexual. Students started to rally him and they started asking H  l  ne if she had realized how sexual her video was. H  l  ne resisted : "I just wanted to make them dance". I was on her side : I though I had felt the exact moment where the teacher's 'suggestion' had become 'reality'. Some others student-presenters seemed to transform extreme symbolism into aestheticism; they were playing on a high level of absurdity in conceptualism that resisted interpretation.

Following his distinction between the symbolic and the aesthetic level, Maquet makes the consequent distinction between communication and communion. As art is not concerned with signs but with symbols, and since symbols are polysemic, art makes for a weak tool for communication. Art operates through communion of/in the experience. Among professionals, 'Art as message' is often discouraged (or chastised) as 'pedagogical art'. In the field, I found that this was also true but on the theoretical level mostly. Many if not most students were still looking for communication (not communion), a direct consequence of negating the 'art for art's sake' stance. Many students were looking for participation at the symbolic level only. An organized meeting with students of Concordia confirmed the force of this trend that I would call semiotic art (art as code). Thus a growing portion of the field is transformed into a game of 'Clue',

finding the key to the enigma replacing contemplation. Contemplation becomes associated with 'the modernists', with 'non-ethical stances', with the bourgeoisie.

But should we not dispel some important categorical errors here ?

a- the notion of 'content'

Susan Sontag argued that the field of art was sick due to over-interpretation (Sontag 1966 : 3-14). She called for an erotic of interpretation that would replace hermeneutics. Her text, well known in the field, is a direct critique of the notion of 'content'. She quotes Willem DeKooning : "Content, it's a very little thing, content". As I said earlier, most of the alleged content is built through interpretation. Is there a 'content' in the aesthetic portion of the experience ? If we follow Maquet, no, at least not in the sense of being able to identify it discursively, since the experience is based on withdrawing from the discriminating mind. As student and artist, most of what external critiques said I found irrelevant to the practice itself. It was like discussing the possible use of a hammer in stage make-up... But most important, I felt that we, students, often sank into 'content' as a way to escape. Escape what ? The dread of realizing that there is nothing to say ?

b- the notion of 'meaning'

Correlate to the notion of 'content' is the notion of meaning. Sociologist Péquignot quotes R. Barthes for whom "To write is to shake the meaning of the world". (Péquignot 1992 : 14). If Péquignot uses this quote to push the idea of creation as rupture, he nevertheless forgets to define 'meaning' in Barthes' phrase, and how the term meaning can be applied to artistic productions. For in art, don't artists shake also the notion of

'meaning' itself, it's location in the palette of human experience ? Thus the question art poses, instead of being 'what meaning ?', could very well be 'what kind of meaning ?'.

Again in the field I encountered a confusion between poetry and allegory, meaning and concept, ideas and concepts; and this coming from assistant teachers mainly (candidates to the Doctorate). While this confusion might prove productive in many instances, in many others, like in Claire's case, this sometimes reduced art to linguistics. Students were trying to 'make points', 'say things' with images. 'Meaning' was becoming a substrate of discourse; in this view of 'meaning', 'configurations of forms' could hardly have any 'meaning'.

c- Implicit (observed) antinomies

In my experience as well as that which I observed from co-students, relying on *the discursive mind was impeding action*. Having worked a piece too much in your head, you would no longer need to do it. When after almost a month I jumped back into the actual making on January, I freaked out, because I realized my head schemes might just not work. The month of head work away from matter was 'lost time'. Professor Regimbald's injunction to liberate the studio work from inhibitions, prejudices, to gain a certain folly that would hereto be non-rational, all that was an invitation to think *in* the work, not outside of it. Or was it that she intuited that it would then be a 'non-thinking' ? I noticed that my anguish was always before and after my studio work, rarely during the work itself. Mona testified of a similar phenomenon : her questioning (about the purpose of art) vanished after 'doing art' in N.Y. She realized that things led one to another quite simply when 'doing it'. The negative counter part is that it is precisely the fact of not doing it that led you to think about it and to anguish about it. In my own experience, *discourse as*

inner dialogue was clearly impeding contemplation; this led to a reflexive looping with myself (in thinking) where creativity became more a re-enacting of past solutions than the freshness of things popping out of nowhere.

The sad thing is the less you do it the less you can do it. The more you come to rely on internal dialogue for creating, the more likely you are going to end up preferring verbal performance to watching. In my presentation of the end of fall semester, people preferred the verbal part to the sculpture. J.P. Demers thought the piece was in my story, not in the sculpture. He might be right that the former was stronger, but I question what we identify as 'force'. Do we seek narratives because we can no longer, as culture, access silent modes of being ? I had a confirmation that this might be the case. Claire was presenting her piece. Dozens of little soldier figurines were randomly placed on the floor, in front of a video screen. Claire's explanation of the very intricate and complex symbolism of the piece fired a deluge of interpretations. At one point I said quite naively that what I like in the piece was the "vibration entailed by the multiple". Many exemplars of the same were inducing a 'vibration', a shimmering, something that is used in psychedelic art. Nobody understood...! "Vibration ? What vibration ?" asked Mona. I tried to bring the people to the evidence, to me it was all so obvious. One just had to look. I understood that 'just looking' was not the game played at this moment. Did an extensive use of discourse triggered by an exclusive focus on symbolism succeeded in blinding us ?

Paradox :

The paradox is that at the same time, a preoccupation for a return to the aesthetic experience is never absent. When he printed his photograph with the 'Revolution'

graffiti, Michel, who leans toward the 'relational practices' ("the end of the object"), was concerned about "succeeding in doing an autonomous image". It is Aestheticians who are generally pro-autonomy, not symbolists nor conceptuels. Was Professor Saucier plea for time (taking one year to build a little boat when he could do it in a week) an oblique way to plead for contemplation, or was it that he wanted more time to think ? Maybe the former, since he stressed the fact that it had allowed him to go "somewhere else".

No words :

"Similarly, the contemplative traditions indicate that the experiences and development of human consciousness must move beyond linguistic references in their evolution." (Winkelman : 20)

This question of the inhibiting nature of discourse in creation has been preoccupying me for a couple of years now. One day of May, I finally got a deep intuition about my dilemma : *No words can solve the problems of creations. However hard I would strive to arrive at a final word on the question, this conclusion would not tell me how to create, what to create or why.*

I offered this insight to Prof. Régimbald, and she agreed. Indeed, whether she did or did not believe in inspiration, intuition, *creation ex-nihilo*, etc., at least she acquiesced to the void, the void you meet when nothing of the known applies any longer.

3.2.2.3.7 : Discourse and non-discourse : reframing the problem

And yet... Although I have always defended the air-tightness of different regions of consciousness, something that is in direct line with the protectionism anthropologists

manifest when they refuse to use one worldview to validate another, an event in the field showed me that this 'air-tightness' of regions of consciousness could be viewed under a new light :

November 11, *informal meeting with artist Richard Purdy, in the midst of an 'installaction' at the gallery of Chapelle Historique du Bon Pasteur (as part of his Doctoral thesis defense at UQAM).*⁷⁹

"I told him I saw his *performance/vernissage* on Thursday the first. I told him that Debora and I really enjoyed it, and it posed acutely the question of whether art can absorb religion (and vice-versa). Richard's position on this was straightforward : his recent trip in Asia confirmed for him that Asians do not make the distinctions Westerners make between art and religion. For them, these two domains are intermingled. In this sense, Richard does not see himself as a Westerner, since he does not acknowledge the separation between art and religion. But still his position is far from being devoid of paradoxes. He recognizes that for him, Stupas are first and foremost aesthetic objects. He's not a Buddhist practitioner anymore (he was monk for 18 months in the 70s), so he does not partake the 'drama' or grandeur of religious views.

"The paradox does not stop there. At the end, he acknowledged that "systems" (cultures, paradigms) and people were all different 'units' that could not be subsumed or reduced one to another. He gave the example of sex. When having sex, art is far away... For that reason, he thinks, he could never find an erotic art piece that could satisfy him. At this point, I told him of Kant, of the airtightness of different regions of consciousness, and then FLASH !

"Could it be that this feeling about the incommunicability between different 'systems', cultures, regions of consciousness, be but another aspect of the center-periphery paradox of consciousness ? Could it be that simple ? You feel something is impenetrable from a certain perspective – namely things cannot be grasped or understood from the 'outside'. In anthropology, this led to cultural relativism : you cannot grasp the 'value' of a culture from its outside, hence the prescribed respect of cultures. In psychology, this could be seen in behaviorism also: you cannot penetrate another mind. But to actually *know* this, you must generally rely on your memory of having been in different systems/states/cultures and recalling the gap between 'there' and 'here'. But what are you recalling exactly ? An in-between, or a view from the other side of the bridge ? Were you ever in between views ?

"What this means is that *memory does not found the un-communicability of different region of consciousness*, but it is rather the opposite. In other words still, what you had as a feeling of incommunicability on 'the other side of the bridge', you have it right here, on this side ! You don't have to cross the bridge [be into an other worldview] to have this feeling of separateness, because it is the feeling of separateness that creates the gap, and the bridge (between worldviews).

⁷⁹ Richard Purdy's doctoral thesis is about the inclusion of the Buddhist Stupa in the range of 'sculpture' instead of the usual ranking among architecture.

The feeling about the air-tightness of paradigms, worldviews, etc., is in fact the certitude of your own ex-stasis, the certitude that you are not what you are, that you are 'that which has to be what it is not' (Sartre : 1943). In Low's terms, you cannot experience conflict. Rather : it is conflict, the fact that you are split in your very core, that makes experience possible.

"So while Wilber is right to say that Zen is not quantum physics, i.e. that paradigms are actually practices (following Kuhn), and that consequently no physicist can claim to arrive to the same knowledge Zen master do, the feeling, the certitude that paradigms are incommensurables, that feeling does not need external proofs. *You need not go in each house to know that once you are in one, you are not in the other.* You know it from here, you know it from the start, you know it before knowing what a house is."

-Field notes

On another occasion, I had another insight regarding this issue, and I present it in its entirety since it also exposes the multi-facet-ness of insights :

March 15th :

"I then asked [Claire] what was for her the opposite of "conceptual". She said "spontaneity". Then I asked if concepts could emerge spontaneously. She said my problem was of the "chicken-egg" type : concepts and feeling were weaving one another in time.

"Then I suddenly realized that my quest was vain. *Trying to come to a description of creation as events in time, in order to "prove" that concepts come after ideas, which themselves come after feelings, that aiming at a generic timeline of creativity was impossible and futile. [Furthermore, it was part of the deterministic and linear models I criticized.] There was no need to explain creativity with causality.* Claire's subliminal message seemed to be : "things just happen". Looking for the "beginning", the "Eureka" was a bad question, a wrong framework. Opposing concepts to spontaneity was also a dubious angle to the problem. For me, the interview was finished. But it was also the end of a whole project of "trying to get it" from interviews. Claire's interview was but one more confirmation. I was fabricating the data I wanted to hear, and making my informants do the work for me... I could prove anything I wanted this way, for I would always be getting the right answer to a wrong question..."

Trying to identify categorical errors in a field that has as mandate to defy categories is a risky business, as testified by the following sets of interactions. March 22nd, meanwhile and after the forum :

"Then suddenly I realized that this idea, of different modes of consciousness being airtight one to another, would be untenable in the long run. It was a bulk feeling, a capsule of meaning. I knew from that moment on that

intuitions were not the exclusive province of non-discursive modes of consciousness; I knew that this duality [discourse/non-discourse] was the manifestation of a more fundamental split.

“In the ensuing wine and cheese, I had a mixed feeling about my previous insight. In fact my insight was not about the non-existence of this air-tightness between regions of consciousness; this incompatibility was a phenomenological evidence, something that was felt, a given in/of experience. For example, I brought forward to people that there were some phenomena of pollution that were dangerous (Douglas). They were dangerous because one could become mad. I brought forward the example of the INTER magazine. Here is, I argued, an example of a confusion between genres – poetry and prose, intuition and reason. In that specific case I argued, the injection of poetry in the logos, and vice versa, was leading to a mess. Everybody agreed (2 students-presenters and a teacher who had been an observer). We spoke at length of the necessity to maintain a border between rationality and...(what ?).

“So my insight was not about the melting of that incompatibility, and yet it was. It was more about perceiving the ‘place’ from where the feeling of that incompatibility originates. What I felt was the *constitution* of that oil-water feeling.”

-Field notes

I guess that what we have here is a deep paradox. Albert Low is criticizing the aversion to discourse that one finds in many Zen circles. After all, he says, it is through words that we know the limits of words. Did he not himself have his first *Kensho* (awakening) in the midst of an intense intellectual activity, while writing his first book ? Indeed words might be the new sirens. And yet we need words to know where words cannot go. Don't we ?

(Chapter) 3.2.3 : CENTER-PERIPHERY

3.2.3.0 : Forewords :

This third part is the place where we want to go as far upstream as we can. So far this ethnography could lead us to think that what we meet here is the traditional idiom of “power”. And from the onset we will reinforce this view. Creative acts are indeed a way to access “power”, but where is this ‘power’ ? Is it an unreachable project ? Is it only a power over ‘others’ ? Where are these ‘others’ ? Are they real or imagined ? And finally, aren’t creative acts addictive precisely because they promise to reveal the origin, the source of this power : an unfathomable ‘self’, divided and yet whole ? A couple of years ago, we could had satisfied ourselves with closed loop answers : “people want power over others because others want power over them...”

But sending our smoke signals and interpreting the ones of others from the standpoint of anthropology, in my opinion this kind of answers can no longer do. We need to plunge into the inferno of these power relations and see if they would not be, in Low’s term, the manifestation of a fundamental schism in existence. Indeed, what is, “power” ?

A way to get started in this descent is to examine what sociologist Heinich has called “the imperative of the new” (Heinich 1998) . Heinich’s text was presented in class, and I shall sum it up briefly. Heinich begins by examining the birth of the “modern tradition of the manifesto” from the first manifesto, that of symbolism in 1886. The then emerging notion of the avant-garde is not only an opposition to tradition – otherwise it could be subsumed to modernity – it is the passage from an ethic of the communal to an ethic of scarcity. The Genius must be rare to exist. Thus the valorization of the singular

leads to a deep feeling of isolation. The notion of avant-garde is the locus of a profound contradiction between the hyper-specialization required to appreciate the emerging works and the will to equate artistic innovation with social progress. But today, Heinrich argues, art is in a very different position, where all the opposing views have been integrated in the system of accepted contesting that art became. Thus by a paradoxical flip of the coin, “the avant-garde has become the art that is recognized in priority by public institutions – even if it means, to its detractors, that only these institutions will recognize it, according to a model referring to the academic structure of the 19th century.” (Heinich, 1998 : 96).

The role of specialized commentators is then to normalize the ‘outside-norm’.

“Everything happens as if as soon as an artist would succeed in transgressing a frontier, a commentator would come and fill with meaning the void thus opened”. (Heinich, 1998 : 97). The efforts of the artist are thus condemned to fail : it is when s/he is the most rebellious that s/he will be the more normalized, in the name of art. Thus the constitution of the avant-garde as an ever-dominated social unit, a permanent victim (of itself ?) something that pleased to Boudieu who saw in the artist the ever fighter, “struggling against all powers” (Heinich, 1998 : 99).

We then have a first paradox : “*the permissive paradox*” : an authority authorizes a transgression against itself (for example : a museum against the system of museums) and thus neutralizes the transgression, re-absorbs it. On the level of the artist, this translate into the double bind (Bateson): “*Be disobedient !*”. Entering into a gallery or a museum, one thus find the implicit sign over the door : “Here we astonish !” (idem : 102). But this self-proclaimed and foretold surprise cancels itself out : “The infinite regression of the frontiers of the artistic possible is doing exactly the opposite of what art

is trying to do..” And here is where we could find the source of artists’ give-up : what would “the Borduas of today have to reject, of a world of art that has integrated their refusal as a rule of the game – if not this world itself, and maybe also the desire to play ?” (Heinich, 1998 : 105).

In class, students were at loss to find and propose an alternative to this tumbling of avant-gardes upon themselves. I felt it generated a profound doubt and a sort of ‘No-future’ sediment. It was like if once this ‘being radical’ prescription had deflated itself, there would be nothing left to motivate art making. And no one could rub this dismissal in the student’s face, for there seems to be very few alternate motive proposed in class. In the seminar class we would study Heinich’s transparent but hopeless text, and back off a bit from the rat race.. In the other class (atelier), we would have to boost our competitive drives and jump back into the race :

Atelier de Création, January 2002 (first class)

“We did not talk to much about creation yesterday night, or even about art at all. Markets and community, these were the principal themes trumpeted by the teacher, and they were all linked to a phantom : the audience, itself a disguise of another phantom : the other. With all the insistence on finding one’s way in this jungle of people (“I don’t want to put too much pressure, but...”) I ended up, as many in the class, being anxious, getting the creeps, and not being able to sleep. It was again this whole complex of ‘finding (and proving that you have) a unique voice’. I had heard this message from the program director, between the lines of other teachers, and tonight it was black on white. This was the double bind or originality. On one hand the teacher insisted that we build social networks (“50% studio, 50% café”), that we find ‘sameness’; on the other hand, we would not be able to “make it”, teacher said (“all of you want to become professional artists, don’t you ?”) if we were not to find a “filon”, a unique vein to market.”

-Field notes

The back to the seminar class, the most radicals would try to argue for a strategy of resistance, but resistance to what ? Michel, the most political, thought we were all

'fous du roi' anyway. I brought the question of another possible aim for art practice – instead of resistance : gift (of oneself), gratuity. I put this in the context of the relative youth local aspect of the Western art system. People responded, but it was like throwing a rock in a pond of tar... Slow waves. Short waves. New waves. Later on I attended the Whitney biennale in N.Y. and the amplitude of the gap between the 'imperative of the new' model, and other non-Western models (as veneration, celebration, gift) nearly got me sick : it was pretty much like attending to an 'art fair', alike any fair –agriculture, automobile, etc.. I could feel in the air, in the pieces, the audience, the pressure theatre and cinema exerted on fine arts.

This pressure for the new, the innovative, the spectacular, is it only a 'social pressure' ? Where does it originate from ? Leenhardt thinks that "novelty contains in itself part of the reasons that constitute the imperative of the new" (Leenhardt 1992 : 27). This reason which is part of novelty itself is not a an a-historical universal, it is brought up by the fact that art is no longer a mimesis of the real, Leenhardt says. As long as art described the outer world in predictable, cogent terms, there was a feel of permanency attached to it. That is : art granted the world the stability it lacked, in a way. Today, artists do not content in representing according to tacit codes. Instead, say Leenhardt, they strive to expose these codes for what they are. Artists do not contend to play the game, they expose its various rules and change them. It is as proponent of a wanted and chosen partiality that the work now aspires to novelty.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ [So for Leenhardt, the imperative of the new is nothing but "the social objectivisation of the logic of the *autonomisation* of art in regard to the different mundane referents." (p. 30). Thus it is not something inherent to art, to the artist or consciousness that dictates this necessity to 'innovate', but the choice of changing rules of games instead of simply playing them. But Leenhardt simply displace the problem, for, we could ask, where does this need to change rules come from ? Is it not the same need with simply a different object ?]

According to sociologist of art Péquignot, there seems to be two caricatured ways to consider the 'imperative of the new' in art. It can be seen as a voluntary tactic of distinction in order to enhance one's economic and symbolic position; the 'new' can also be seen as coming out *ex nihilo* of the artist mind. This is basically the classical extern-intern approach. The author propounds to show that the imperative of novelty cannot be reduced to the economic and symbolic necessity to integrate a market. "Production" comes from the Latin '*producere*' which means "to lead forward, make one/something advance, to render apparent, to make one/something come out, to reveal, to show". (Péquignot 1992 : 11). In French, '*se produire*' (in a theatre) is said of the actor who plays. 'Producing', as revelation of what would otherwise remain hidden thus contains in itself the idea of the 'new', of novelty.

Péquignot feels the need to first distinguish the 'new' from the 'recent'. The recent is new only in the sense that it is close to us in time, but not necessarily qualitatively. In the qualitatively new, there is the idea of a rupture: "Thus there is in the idea of the new the idea of rupture, of a marking of difference, between what was and what appears, difference that is necessarily other than only temporal. The new is what comes to oppose itself to something, that the use itself of the word new will designate as ancient, bygone, outdated, outmoded, obsolete." (Péquignot 1992: 12). [The qualitative difference that Péquignot seems to be after is the difference between a new version of the same model, and a new model. This could be linked to Low's two sets of different complexities.]

In that sense, Péquignot notes the inversion in the meaning of 'modern'. It no longer means the opposite of 'ancient' or 'past', but has come to take the flavour of a new

classicism. 'Modern' is now the guarantor of "an eternal beauty, a value that escapes time". So hidden in the new is the fear of becoming ancient, but even more so the hope to become classic.

* * *

We could very well interpret this 'imperative of the new' in psychological terms, using Laing (*The Divided self, Knots*); or we could lean toward Bateson psychological anthropology and his notion of 'double bind'. That would already be good enough, but that would be forgetting the debt these authors have towards Eastern 'native epistemologies'. Bateson's double bind is a reduced model of the Zen koan, and we should not give up our ideas of getting as upstream as we can.

3.2.3.1 : The center is a project

We saw earlier that the project plays the role of a center for the artist and his/her community. But the center can also be seen as an eternal project. When asked to define the center, Low says he is trapped : "...I am totally unable to answer you and yet, before the question is asked, I know very well what it is. It is only when I have to speak about the dynamic center that the problem arises." (Low 1999 : 254-5) Low says that geometrical centers are easy to grasp. A center that could never be reached because it fleets away constantly, this is harder to conceive of. "Our difficulty to speak about the center is amplified from the fact that the idea itself of localization makes sense only in term of space-time which in its turn makes sense only in reference to a center, or to use a more familiar term, to an observator." (Low 1999 : 255). But the center is not a symbol. It is a force, a power, the power par excellence. "...To reduce the center to a symbol is to

reduce it to a creation of the mind, which it is not. The center is non-knowing/ non-Being.” (Low 1999 : 256) It is, in Eliade’s terms, “where all essential modes of being are gathered” (in Low 1999 : 256)

Unfortunately, the artistic project is that kind of center : dynamic, fleeting, ever promising. It is sometimes discouraging to realize how close we can come to find the center, and how fast we can lose it. My project was becoming a magnet because I was starting to feel the center. I wrote that the project was going well every time I felt that something was waiting for me. I went as far as messing a painting in order to keep working on it, because while working I could still believe in the promise, *the promise that ‘something’ would happen*. The promise was in the word ‘happen’, not in the word ‘something’. I kept painting in order not to have starting or continuing another project, because it felt so good to ‘do only one thing’. Theatre director Jean Frédérique Messier once confided me that his secret dream was exactly this : to be able to do ‘only one thing at a time’. An ever lasting thing, that is.

But even if the project ultimately becomes the entitlement to govern (one’s own life or even the life of others, if necessary), and although as Low says the desire to reach the center is the desire to *be* the center, there is a difference between being self-centered and being work-centered. Being self-centered was deleterious to the work, professor Régimbald alluded. It was the thing to avoid. Paradoxically, to be centered was to be centered in the work, not in oneself. At some point, the sign that the center is displaced outside oneself is when the piece becomes a person, an alter ego. I was not afraid to face the critiques at the end of the first semester. I had come to accept ‘my’ piece unconditionally, for I thought ‘she’ could only suffer the contradictions one finds in a

person : “The piece was in me as I was in her, nobody could anger me by talking badly about it. To me it had become a person, an other, and any mean comments would be received by me with compassion for the offender. S/he would simply be manifesting her/his ignorance of that person.”

When Marcello told me that he felt he had failed his piece, I told him what Sculptor Domingo Cisneros had told Sculptor Jean Fabre when she went to see him in tears : go back to your piece and ask her what went wrong. Marcello told me that this is what he had done. Indeed the piece could be consulted as a person. The piece could give advices as one could give advices to oneself.

The center needs to be interiorized as well as exteriorized. Exteriorized, it becomes a medium that one builds ties to; it becomes this mysterious compendium of past-present and future activities that one names ‘my practice’, ‘my work’. The center can also be exteriorized in definitions of art. And here the recent claims of artists to re-appropriate the discourses about art can be seen in that light.⁸¹ Many contextual definition of ‘art’ can also be seen as ways to exteriorize – constitute and reinforce – the center :Berangère’s use of reflectivity as a marker of authenticity, of the difference between ‘commercial art’ and ‘art’; Demers’ asking about “how long an art work remains an art work”, and his pitch about the end of the notion of art, in direct line with his own credo; his nomenclature of different aesthetics – cognitive, Kantian, relational, social, communicational, and his building (and tentative objectifying) of his own trademark (socio-aesthetician) as an historical ‘development’.

Demers’ definition of art as the only non-instrumental field left, in a world of utilities, was in my sense significant of a will to objectify the center in definitions of art.

Non-instrumentality kept art distinct from 'life' and it had to be preserved. Professor Ramsden too bolstered non-instrumentality as foundational to art. Artist Jana Sterback somewhat rejected new technologies because they were too instrumental. Thus Art and creativity could be said to intersect in this plea for creative freedom. But this non-instrumentality was an equivocal center. Murielle said she had a love-and-hate relationship with art, because it was useless. She was sometime thinking about switching to architecture, so that she could be to be useful to someone. H  l  ne too had hesitated between design/architecture and fine arts, and her comments about the lousy aspects of our program were ways to re-assert her lack of confidence in this new center. Paradoxically, it is by maintaining a distance and asserting her independence that she tried to maintain the center close home; but by the same token, by devaluating what she was involved into, she made the center more brittle.

In the field I could feel two different non-instrumentality : empty and "purposeful". As Prof Ramsden had it : "It is because it serves nothing that art is so useful". But then this could lead one to invent for the sake of inventing. And this was empty to me and to a couple of students. There still had to have a link to 'life', that is : to a bigger non-instrumentality. Art still had to maintain contact with Being, even if this Being was an endless and purposeless tumbling forwards. In other words : there had to be objectivity otherwise the work would be about oneself. The center had to be exteriorized. *To be real, the center had to be outside oneself, while being able to encompass oneself.* It had to be found, not invented, discovered, not only created.

Art was thus a project more than a realization, and a paradigm that expresses this very well is 'art as intention'. J.P. Demers was insisting on that. Professor Ramsden

⁸¹ See "Who Owns Art History ?" by Robert Linsley, in *Canadian Art*, summer 2002.

talked about the painting by elephants and chimpanzees; “What is the difference ?” was she asking. “What is it that makes us humans ?” Indeed the intention was what was defining humans as humans. But in that special case – art- the intention was to undo expectations. What expectations ? What was to be the face of the ‘unexpected’ in a world of permanent surprise ?

When the ‘Aesthetic of surprise’ failed in enacting the center, I witnessed in me and in others a recurrent turn to ethics. The controversy around the genetically modified and now phosphorescent rabbit led to a destabilizing polemic – something very comforting for that precise matter. Michel thought it was completely gadget art. Raising the question of the useless dilapidation of public funds, I was almost lapidated myself. Non-instrumentality prevented us from totally retreating into ethics to grasp the center of art, its definition. “There are many definitions out there. I collect them in a scrap book” said artist Demers, as a way to re-establish the center. Later in the year Professor Régimbald said that the recurring to the ‘child’ paradigm was pissing her off. Children had nothing to do with art. Art was a *conscious* return to the unconscious... Dan creamed her assertion by one of his usual lapsus : “When I was grown up...” At one point I thought that there would be one way in anthropology to tackle this issue of the center in art. Seeing a dance show one night, watching us all turned toward the stage as I in church, I wonderer if ‘Art as altar’ would not be a useful idiom. I wrote : “The similitude is striking, no ? We talk around them [art works], we make them the center of the world for the time of ceremonies. We lose ourselves in them, build them as representative of a new god : art. Artistic productions are relay symbols to participate in what they symbolize...” Had we found in art the perfect center, self contained and self-referential, a symbol

symbolizing itself, a god with no outside ? *Had we found immanence without transcendence ?*

Indeed to look for a center is to use transcendence to find immanence; but in the case of art, it is a complex business : to find objectivity in subjectivity – or intersubjectivity - is enticing precisely because it seems to be feasible. After all, on that jury night, was not the consensus around Murielle's work inevitable, given the 'intrinsic' force of her work ? Did not seven teachers come to a surprising agreement about the weaknesses in my work – and this without consulting each others ?⁸² But to stay on this level of the proof would not be enough. What we have to acquiesce to is the *feeling* of reaching the center. In fact, the center might be more into that feeling than anywhere else.

⁸² I had been shocked by Professor Schofield's evaluation of my work and had asked for comments. His main comment had been that my work was too "heavy" and that I should get it "lighter". So my first question was to ask him what he meant by "heavy". He said that the books seemed to resist the sand blaster. My caverns were too realistic, they were alluding to another culture. This was giving too much weight to my metaphor. Therefore the spectator could not enter. It was airtight (*étanche*). I was not ready to let go of one single thing. I would put my mark on everything. It was becoming a closed system. "For it to work, something has not to work".

Later on I had invited three teachers in my studio, as potential thesis advisers. I was surprised by the level of consensus of the three teachers. All three saw my work as too constrained (and in this they add their voice to Steven's; see later). All three consequently advocated a losing up of my grip on the project, on the work. Mongrain suggested that I might be caught by the material (books and cards). But he was lost as to what material might liberate the process. Goulet, was more practical. While not proposing that I get away from books, he suggested an outside element that would *re-contextualize* the whole thing. He suggested to add, not to eliminate. Rousseau seemed to think that it was a question of attitude. I had made strong decisions, and he feared that these choices might orient the project too soon. The question of a "loosing up of control" seemed to be a focal point for all three. How could this be "read" in an art work, and by independent observers ? Were there an objective basis to aesthetic judgments, after all ? Or was it only a matter of internal coherence of a specific "culture" that made for this consensus ?

Another point of focus was the necessity for a movement toward abstraction, towards idea. This was posing me a question, sideways : the Why of my practice. Their stance, without mentioning them, seemed to be founded on tacit premises : art making was not like building a business (success was not measured in public response); I had to take care of trapping myself in a too close association to fixed procedures and materials; and foremost, theirs' was a discourse of freedom. But who was to be free ? The "individual" ? Other major point of convergence : the need to make work that is culturally significant by using one's own existential preoccupation as material, while having confidence in their universality.

Finally, all three saw the 'nature-culture' stance of my work. This is not something that I had worded in those terms (I try not to inject anthropology everywhere I go...), but it was clear that this was an interpretation of my work that was self-evident : transforming books into landscapes... All three insisted that while I was having a movement of culture towards nature, the opposite movement would be interesting

When we were discussing Murielles's case on the jury, we could feel the borders of our individuality melting. This is what I expressed as 'an evidence'. The 'reality' of our assessment was not in us, it was ordered upon us. We were 'in the evidence'. Does the fact that this mysterious center is, more than anything else, a feeling, make it less real? Certainly not, if we consider that this feeling can lead people to war... That being said, to say that the center is a feeling is not saying much about the center (in fact it could become reductionist), but it tells a lot about how we constitute the evidence of the world. 'World' and 'feelings about the worlds' are not two different categories, ultimately. The constitution of feeling in the center and the constitution of the center in feelings are done in the same gesture.

All presentations by students aimed at objectifying one's problematic and one's work : issues were out there, the work had Being.

3.2.3.2 : The imagined other (the other as active/creative imagination)

If the center and the self are projects, the 'other' is also a project. The other is an active construction, something reminding us to hold in check naturalism (the other is out there in the world). Following Low, we could say that the 'naturalist other' is a construction used to exteriorize a fundamental tension in existence; thus in that view, the ethical stance ('it's someone else's fault') that we find nowadays in social sciences could be read as a mere manifestation of the need to exteriorize the tension. For this tension is painful. It is realizing that there exists an impossible center in the other; and by rebound,

in the future, if not plainly necessary. I would have to bring back my 'nature' onto the ground of representations, for this is what it is : a mere representation.

an impossible other in the center, our center, the center we are, the center we wish we become.

3.2.3.2.1 Inside : being part of

Situating oneself among others, like in a cosmology, tracing the genealogy of one's 'artist family', were ways to assert a membership to a community and to the world. We were made aware that there exists many micro communities, and that no one truth was able to govern the world anymore, and yet, all our efforts were aimed at reaching a level of explanation that would account for the disparity, and for our place in it.

For clearly there was an 'outside' to our little world, and even to our personal work. Trying to find a consensus was a way to diminish this tension self-other; it was a collective search for Being. Others had sometimes to be convinced. Professor Schofield said that in disagreement, the corpse, the piece, served as level zero of evidence, as if 'objects' could grant 'objectivity'. And objectivity was a way to make us feel membership. Likewise, I felt that the use of the Zeitgeist mediums (video) was a covert way to gain participation, membership in the world. Professor Saucier insisted that the MA was a rare chance for building a community, and so social contacts with future peers in school were important. Socialisation was even worth sacrificing creation in a course. Creation was transposed onto the realm of social ties. Therefore much of one's creativity had to be spent digging one's social trench and rallying a 'stable' : collectors, curators, audience.

3.2.3.2.2- Outside : excluding-(excluded)

So even if art making in general and the MA in particular aims at making one feel s/he is part of a whole, part of 'the world', if only the world of art, it becomes pretty clear that there is an inside and an outside to this world.

When I phone playwright Larry Tremblay this winter, he told me he had been repatriated from Central America on an emergency plane. He had experienced the symptoms of a heart attack. He attributed his condition to the pressure of his profession, and he felt this pressure was coming from 'outside', from the milieu. Larry was sick from having worked too much, and he had worked that much in order to keep membership : "In France, when you've attained a certain notoriety, they leave you in peace. But here, you have to keep producing otherwise you are quickly forgotten". Interestingly, when I asked artist Jana Sterback where she thought this 'pressure' was really coming from – and in visual arts the pressure for renewal is immense (Kahre in Laramée & al), she told us that at the beginning of her career she had thought it was coming 'from the outside' (the milieu, the galleries), but that now she was not sure anymore.

In the field, as a co-student and as an apprentice ethnographer, I found that the 'other' is most of the time a phantom. I would certainly spend more time thinking about it than really meeting it, for even in our meetings in the flesh, we were partly at a remove, hiding in representations. For example artists Jean-Pierre Demers, H  l  ne Doyon and me realized at a vernissage that the fact that we had all three endorsed multiple identities – as interdisciplinary artists – had been misleading to others and sometime not useful to ourselves, at least in term of the maintenance of social ties. Futhermore there might be a

problem more that is more important than identity making : not being able to 'show' our own aesthetic experience to others. The realization of that unbridgeable gap is frightening.

In art as elsewhere, The Other can take many faces. What kind of others do we find in the contemporary art milieu nowadays ?

1) There is the other from History, *the art historian*, who tells you the whats and hows of all your ancestors.

2) There is the other from the press, *the critic*. S/he is the one who makes the first distillation about the 'meaning' of your work; with further distillation, his/her work ends up in the hands of the art historian. His/her interpretation gives you and him/her access to social positioning (63)

3) There is *the curator*, who is now the gate keeper of galleries. Even artist-run center, although they diffuse and partly defuse this curatorship by making it collective, even them do not escape to this phenomena. Shows have to be curated, that is : interfaced with the audience. As unescapable intermediaries, curators are the object and the subject of a love-hate relationship with artists. They are the 'external eye' that grant objectivity, i.e. social intersubjectivity. They can make you rise, they can make you fall. Many times they are art historian who come to take an active role in exhibit-making. On one specific occasion I had the opportunity to feel that double bind more directly. A curator and gallery director who is also a teacher in art history at UQAM, was coming in class to give us some clues about applying to galleries. After her presentation, the assistant teacher - who is also an artist and had been an employee of a gallery - deversed his gall on me. He

commented on how her and curators in general could be aristocratic, pedantic and condescending to artists. Curators are now covertly claiming to be artists themselves, more like curators becoming artists, still more like movie producers than directors, in my sense. Yet they are in direct competition with their progenies. They have their themata, they have their agenda. My thesis director denied them artistry, because their entering into the realm of creators was interested : "they do that for themselves, not for art". I did not ask him if by 'art' he meant 'artists'. I think he did.

4) Climbing the stream up furthermore, one finds that the phantom of the Other as *Historian-Curator-(and sometimes)Critic* is but a mask for another bigger phantom : *the dissemination system*. 'A work that is not seen does not exist' did I hear at numerous occasions during the 18 years of my membership. Going upstream still further, one finds the devil of 'systems' as other. 'Systems', social, artistic are inclusive but mostly exclusive : "absolutist practices gathered around an 'ism'...these groups of artists and works present a formal coherence in exact proportion with the fact that they found their legitimacy on the exclusion of any other form." (Leenhardt 1992 : 29).

5) Trying to climb up the stream up to the source of the conflict, one would find that the other could become *art itself* ! The whole of the post-modern turn was interpreted by some – Demers being one – as the need to finish with art itself. Thus artists were becoming the ones who were burying art... How to make sense of such self-denial ? By working hard to mask the fact that what is denied is oneself...Being so creative, artists have no problems creating masks to their elusive 'other'.

6) But these very abstract entities are too fluffy and elusive to be confronted, and one certainly cannot delay this confrontation for ever. The other has to be given concrete

names and faces. Sliding downstream one finds *schools*, and how the self-other dichotomy is enacted in schools. I was surprised and not to hear teachers and students rejecting school. In order to comfort Michel, in rage and pain after a bad evaluation, a former student had advised him to do his degree without expecting to get anything from it...One way to read those critiques from the inside of the institution is to see that they all aim – through dis-tinction - at constituting an other. But the situation is tricky, because in distancing ourselves from the institution we are part of, we distancing ourselves from ourselves. Excluding the other was excluding ourselves.

7) Indeed, however devoted teachers and students might be, it would be hard to forget the potential competition *between teachers and students*. A shop technician told me of student to whom he had asked how he had found the Master program. The answer of the student was : “oh it’s a nice program for teachers; students grant them jobs”...On some level, critiques by teachers were obviously performances, specially when they were doing it in front of other teachers. Sometimes it seemed like in this situation of being observed (and evaluated ?) by their peers, teachers acted as if *they had to find something intelligent to say*. It was a semi conscious display and spectacle of expertise.

8) One did not have to go as far as teacher-students relationship to find a distancing ritual. The fact of being an artist seemed to entail that one would not be like any other artist. The other was then *the other artist*. Marketing originality – a necessary task of the contemporary artist – is always done against an ‘other’ and this time the other is the colleague, the peers. The first exercise given by Professor Schofield was given in order to enhance our capacity to sell ourselves quickly “ if you meet an important curator on the plane for example”. The hiring process of one adjunct teacher triggered a general

outcry among us student, because we realized that the norms of the union would mean that most of us would be discarded as teachers when we would come out of school. On one level, some of us felt as if the school would not recognize its progeny, and the persons responsible were not so much the people in place as the ones who *wanted* to be in place. We were realizing that we were competing with our dearest colleagues. Building one's identity against other's had sometimes bad consequences. It sometimes meant hating other's work. I got the comment from a student that the other student's work was "precisely the kind of work that makes normal people hate art". It was sometimes discouraging to see how individualistic we could become, in the negotiation for space in the gallery for example. Watching us pacing up and down to get the right spot for 'My Work', an external observer would have laughed – or cry – at the number of 'Me' per minutes.

The 'other' often seemed so real that it seemed ludicrous to consider it a part of ourselves. The way we can approach this paradox is first through the use in the field of *references*. References – other artists and theoreticians – were in my sense both centering and de-centering. Sometimes I wondered if teachers were aware of how much references could be offsetting, in placing the center out of ourselves. Professor Schofield was on who in my sense made an extensive use of references. When I asked him about it, he said:

"Me, I think that soon or later we're influenced by things that surround us, so I think the sooner we get to know these things, the better, to see how we can respond to them. Personally, I'm curious about the things that surround me, not only locally, in disciplinary term, or locally in matters of town. so in that sense, references go without saying (*va de soi*), I'm thirsty with knowledge (*assoiffé de savoir*), I like to watch (*regarder*), first I like very much to look at things".

-Transcript from tape

In this epistemological stance, the other is out there and has to be cognized.

It was hard to think that the other was not out there when one saw with how much zeal and sometimes desperation we would defend ourselves against 'him'. Michel entered school with his boots, anticipating a hard fight. At the beginning of the classes in September, we were discussing the drawing we were supposed to do during the summer :

“Michel was next and he was going to justify his “first graffiti” done in the gallery’s window, a very civilized graffiti about anarchy, indeed, done with masking tape... The teacher was pressing issues on him, issues of contradiction between politeness and revolution. Michel was aware of that but also very quick and clever with words. He would juggle with obscure concepts to defend his stance, a stance embodied into a rigid posture, booted legs apart, like a commander in front of the enemy. When in trouble, he would even recur to snapping formula such as “when I work on a project for nine years...” securing his position with a tripple card of know-how, social validation and self-confidence. For him, absurdity would be the norm, and other norms would be absurd. Doubly protected, but also doubly trapped in his ideological bunker, he would look like someone who invokes fragility to qualify as superman. A double bind we all shared in the class, it seemed.”

-Field notes

Indeed we did. Some students like André displayed a bigger concern about self protection than others, sometimes even choosing to bore us instead of having to affront our critique; André’s first real critique exposed the ever present concern about an ‘other’ :

“André felt forced to defend both the finitude and the un-finitude of the piece : “I like it rough like that, but it might be different”. The future was the insurance policy. Everything that did not please or work in the moment might be fixed subsequently. This way if you liked it, it was fine, if you didn’t, then you might later...[After I brought my concern with the audience, Michel entered in a sort of] plea for a non-concern about the reactions of the audience. In my sense, Michel enacted the double bind of conceptual artists, which in fact is the dilemma of all contemporary artists : think the piece with audience in mind (i.e. the piece as spectacle, demonstration, etc.), then when the piece is showed, claim back you freedom as creator by stating that their reaction does not matter. It is the reverse from Romanticism : you are communicator before, free-thinker after. This way you are shielded from both sides.”

-Field notes

At some point I realized that privacy in creation, a phenomenon that is epitomized in fields like fine arts and literature for example, was an attempt to get out of the tension center-periphery, self-other, by keeping a naturalized other at bay. When I asked Françoise why in the group critique and exhibit she was not showing everything, she said : "I don't want to give too much right now (all at once). That's not the purpose anyway (filling a whole wall, giving a good show). If I get into that, I won't be able to discover anymore." When came the moment to decide with whom we would share our studios, I experienced the same old fear again :

"...The desire to entrench in 'my own thing' because then I would not have to compete, compete for originality, praise and all that shit. The desire ...not to show it to anyone too soon, so I could get the chance to make it whole and unique, but the necessary moment where you have to show it otherwise it would not be recognized as unique. Why share a space with others ? Being influenced by them or having to block their influence, having to do it in front of them, avowing the anguish, the not knowing, getting it all known that you're not a genius ... The desire to letting go of this need to create ("it stands all very well in my head anyway" – J.P. Perreault) Getting sick just thinking that all these ideas are going to submerge you again".

-Field notes

In fact I was realizing again that this defending of one's identity was tiring. Coherence had to be invented. My first reaction when my work was about to be criticized was often that of the 'artiste incompris'. This 'they don't understand anyway' stance was a way to put the other outside in order to buffer myself from the incoming pain of the relative failure. Michel defending himself against Schofield's critique did likewise : "the teacher leads me to a place where I'm not going". Artist and assistant teacher Demers was angered that the teacher had chosen his own text as material for the class discussion, because that forced him to confront people he likes. He had to defend identity in a context that would otherwise allow for the expansion and ultimately exploding of that

persona. Of course privacy was a temporary shield. The divided self would have to be met someday under the guise of an existing other, there in the world. The current emphasis on team work might origin in a desire to root creation in a collective self, as a strategy to get rid of this protectionism through privacy. However, as will be shown in the section on solitude, collective work might also be but another way to cover up the schism. Artists will not stop to feel threatened by the success of others, simply because they become members of collectives. The success of others is threatening because identity – ours – has to be built as blindness, as belief in its absolute value. After rejoicing that Manon Labrecque was getting so much attention in the winter 2001, I inevitably shrank back on the defense mode, and asked myself if I was becoming a 'has been'.

Being evaluated in class is re-enacting the social drama of the constitution of a naturalist other. In the field, instances of this were numerous, but my first group evaluation is specially telling :

“Aware to be self-conscious, but too aware to escape it, I tried to defend the fact that I was not defending myself. The double and subtle construction of self lied exactly there : to show that all this (my drawings) was both “me” and not really me; that I was already at arm’s length of it all, as I always was, but not quite, since I had also to argue for a sinking into presence, a sinking into the making, into revelation, something that I could invoke for my defense later on, since the better the diviner, the less he is the thing that is actually revealed. Doubly protected, I was, but I was also doubly exposed. Selling these drawing of the book project as “everything that you were spared of”, or even more wisely as “technique to get rid of creative noise by acting it out”, all this was a masquerade and I knew it. Telescoping myself forward, in the crowd, I was distancing myself from myself. It was a hard moment. Specially when I had to avow that most of the drawings were spontaneous. The teacher was already qualifying them, not sarcastically but with the tone of a scientist, as “comic book” “young male adolescent esquisses”, and even “Kitch”, “Camp”, with a lengthy explanation – long as a torture - of what “Camp” really means (a self-reflexive kitsch). I was melting. Psychotherapy, obedience to the instructions, processual necessity, nothing could excuse that I was *also*, and maybe *only* THAT.

And I would talk abundantly, sort of preferring not to know, preferring to put my own blanket on this carpet of opinions, feeling more and more naked as every justification would reveal a little more who I really was : a fake, not even an apprentice, an amateur. My own words then were better than their silence. At least I could use them to re-assert the continuity of my self.

It was terrible. And enlightening too. For at the end came a sort of breakthrough. Helped by the sensitivity of a couple of women, I sort of spat it out : I was tired of projects. And there was no theoretical position that could counterweight that experiential pain of living in the future. This, the women understood it, it seemed, because at last I was coming out of the fog of tidy concepts. I was revealing the guts, paradoxically on a more un-reflective mode than in my previous speech. I was so "truly myself", so strongly identified with the pain due to the dislocation of my self, that I was no longer it. Did people recognized this new "me" in themselves, or was it that I had gained access to pure presence, which was melting the distance subject-object and that we were all becoming one single subject ?

The next day, I had an interesting discussion with Barbara, the secretary of the program. When I told her that the critique had affected me, she told me to brace myself: It would be like that for two years... "I don't know why they do that, she said, maybe they want you to stand solid, all by yourself". But stand in front of whom ?"

- Field notes

Professor Schofield's end evaluation was a particularly sensitive issue in the class. Half of the class either contested it, or asked for clarifications. Indeed, the grades ranged from A+ to...C !, something quite uncommon at the Graduate level. Stephen Schofield said his decision of not endorsing the "between A- and A+" standard graduate school model of evaluation was born out of conviction. He did not believed in this faking uniformity. Out there, in the world, things were not that uniform; people strongly diverged and the sooner students would realize it, the better. His evaluation was for him a way to send 'messages' about the reality of this 'other'. Two month later, students were still trying to heal the pain by creating local pouches of consensus : that student had been obviously overrated, that other one under-evaluated, etc..; I felt we all thought that a quantitative evaluation in that case was ridiculous. Marcello did not accept the teacher's "schizophrenic approach to evaluation" : a co-artist all year long, well informed of our

processes, an unknown critique descending the plane on the day of the evaluation, unaware of 'the work'. Clearly the school system promised an objectivity that in that case it could not deliver. Students themselves were asking for a rigorous evaluation. A dream of mine exposes the dread of the freedom from the other : "...I dreamed of a party with the art class people, a sort of lottery/poker played with my index cards. Nobody was observing the rules, I could cheat and get the prizes I wanted, but most important, I could pass unnoticed, I could manage my way as an observer – a sort of parasite – and finally, that was the most painful possibility there was..." Some students thought that professor Saucier's generous evaluation was too flaky. The silence of a deficient or absent evaluation could be worse than a bad one. People's silence on my painting was painful because very telling. Sometimes politeness hurts.

The fear is not so much about feeling the projection of other's feelings upon our work, but of getting *to internalize their diverging views as ours*. For example, obsolescence is the kind of feeling that can be very destructive when internalized to the point of self-projection. Feeling oneself to be outmoded is outcasting oneself, without the need of any 'real' other. Seeing so many students working on videos was enough for me to feel I was out of the race : I did not need their comment. Visiting the dinosaurs of fine arts – lithography, print making – mirrored my own obsolescence to me. Learning that the shop I've been working in – stone - would soon receive a new vocation, since stone was going to be abandoned as a specific technique, gave me the creeps. Janine felt the pressure of new media on her passion for physical environments : would the body still be a relevant subject and medium in a couple of years from now ? Professor Schofield's argument for pressing students to reflect upon their blind reverence for new technology

was telling : desuetude was very useful to artists; many creative breaks in the history of art had taken place when artists used things that were no longer useful for society; instrumentality lost to society was freedom gained to the artist. Even students like me, Éliot, Marlene, who seemed to feel with acuity this location of the self-other schism in obsolescence, even us had to make effort to believe Schofield's clever insight. For the more we realized there was 'A' world of art, out there, the more we felt lost. For the less competitive of us, our common and recurring reaction was to feel 'out of it all'; we would even feel out of the 'artist-run center culture'. During and after a presentation by two very enthusiastic and enthralling representative of artist run centers, most of us were numbed. Paradoxically, it is precisely because they succeeded in convincing us that "there no life for you (marginal artists) outside artist-run center" that we dropped out.

Those 'centers', be them run by artists, were no more centers than the one supplied in class by co-students and teachers. A Center supplied by others could work only provisionally. It was giving flesh to the belief that the other was real and outside oneself. What was then left was either rallying or quitting.

"Éliot obviously had not done much, and the teacher was sort of containing his impatience. Éliot did not have much to say, he babbled on nature, culture, etc. but people started to bash him because of his inconsistencies and obvious lack of work on his 'subject'. I noticed that when, in their presentation of their work, people did not provide strong enough a center, the remaining of the class tended to either bash them or supply the center. They make the work for the artist."

-Field notes

The same happened with Murielle and Dan : failing to present certitude, the justification for their work was made by others.

So going back to our question : can we avoid naturalizing the other and recurring to the dead tongue of the 'power relation' idiom ? When the assistant teacher told me

about how much the curator – his boss...! – had humiliated him, by giving him menial work to do in the gallery, by humiliating in front of other artists and curators, I then interpreted his aside as manifesting the love and hate of artists with discourse and the arrogance of erudite. When I witnessed the internal dissensions between teachers and students, and how we sometimes dismissed the institution of which we were members, I thought that students and teachers were realizing that they were future competitors on a limited market. But now I think that artists, like any humans, find ways to give flesh to this 'other' with whatever mean they have. The pain of being at the center and at the periphery of oneself is sometimes too big : the 'other' has to be kicked outside.

Artist Manon Labrecque seems to be well aware that at one level, a level that to me is the real 'upstream' of the self-other relationship, this external 'other' is but a manifestation of oneself:

M : As soon as it goes into the mind (*le mental*)... it's very bad for me...

Q : But you *see* (feel) it entering into the (thoughts, mind games), you feel it ?

M : Yes, when I'm in the *doing*, everything is all fine..

Q : How do you know ?

M : I start wanting to explain things...

Q : (Miming closing my notepad and leaving) Ok, bye...!

(Laughter)

M : It seems that then, I want to justify what I'm doing. And this is no good. And then my gaze starts to do that (*miming that her eye is coming out of her head to watch her*). "I do this because so and so..."...

Q : So what do you do as an antidote ?

M : (silence, thinking) ...When I'm lost I come back to the source : the first time I did a project, when I was in dance, what was it, my source, my starting point. So when it does that (exterior eye with hand), I take a coffee with myself : WHY do I do this: WHAT is important in that for me. And I put my clocks back on time

(m'remet les pendules à l'heure). And it works. And at the same time it's like if I would open myself the door of (onto) freedom, because judgment and the too much of inner dialogue ("*placotage*" while miming the going in round of thoughts in one's head), it (deprives me of) the freedom to *be* and *do*. [The source, to me, is] my pleasure to do, and to silence judgments... The pleasure of experimenting, without thinking, (thinking) that I am wrong... What helps me in silencing that is to think that for me the creation is spread over a whole life. For me the creation is not what I am doing but the way in between. This calms me (down)... Each project is not an end in itself. (*le boutte d'la marde*). It's one point in space, over a long path, until I('ll) stop to do that. What happen in between those points is more important to me. ...

Q : But it's hard to live with the gaze of others...

M : But I realized that when I take care of shutting off my own internal gaze (onto myself), the gaze of others disappears."

- Transcript from videotape

Indeed it is not hard to find data that sustains the idea that the 'other' is inside, not only outside. Affirming oneself is also exposing oneself, not only to others, but more troublingly to oneself. It is risking the discovery that one would not like oneself... Later on in the interview, Manon Labrecque says that *the problem is not 'the others', the problem is herself*. What is the Self, if we it is in constant re-definition, and if it is split at its core?

3.2.3.3 The Knot : the self with itself; the source of the center-periphery dynamic

While the vocational artist does not have to defend a position to survive as an artist, for the professional artist the problematic of identity are central. In a way, the professional artist is always in relation to a physical other, but identity in this case is

more complex than the relation to a pre-existing, naturalist other. What I want to examine here is Albert Low's notion that the other is already in oneself, and that major religions were meant to be buffers to avoid the direct contact with that formless other in oneself. Indeed, the other is given too many faces : aren't these multiple persona masking a fundamental principle ?

3.2.3.3.1 Compulsion/Imperative/Drive

As a reminder, I recall the reader here that this whole questioning about the source and nature of creativity in art started around the question of the compulsion to create. This questioning echoes the issue of the imperative of the new as it is analyzed by sociologists of art (Heinich 1997, 1998, Leedenhardt 1992), and as them it poses the question in term or origin; the difference here is that we are not looking for an historical or social origin. We are looking an origin-source, something inherent to consciousness.

Jean-Pierre Perreault says that "It has to wake you up at night" (Perreault, personal conversation). Commenting on one of his former student, who had answered Perreault's questions about her creation by : "Oh its just fine", Perreault doubted that this student would go very far. Torment, anguish, obsession were necessary component of the act of creation.

Creating in an artistic context can become quite addictive, and for very good reasons. 'Passion' is one traditional way of expressing this self-generating drive (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). In the field, I had numerous manifestation of this in my personal process. After a couple of weeks, my project and my studio were becoming magnets. I wanted to be there all the time. I would come to forget everything else, and I

would resent everything that would keep me away (anthropology included !). Several time I became frustrated and often angry of not being able to devote all my time to creation. For the feelings resulting from creating were enthralling, empowering and revealing of my self and my life. There was in general a tremendous euphoria, that would sometimes verge on defiance, insolence, and arrogance. I would feel a very high level of 'energy'. Commenting on the pre-cutting of books on a band saw, prior to the sand blasting, I wrote : "I would cut anything for the sheer pleasure of cutting (going to the wood shop with nothing in mind, just to be there)."

This autotelic drive (feeding of itself, the fact that creativity has its intrinsic rewards– Csikszentmihalyi 1986) is in direct and paradoxical relation with the constitution of the other as real and as competitor. One could think that lending oneself to an activity that is not exotelic, that does not depends on external rewards, would be the best way to dim the tensions self-other. But what happens is that once you meet this joy of creation, you might be ready to do anything to perpetuate it. Carrierism in art is certainly related to the compulsion to create. Like other areas of human activities that foster desire by contagion – eroticism, gastronomy, etc. - the creativity of others can trigger the creative drive as well as frustrations of not creating enough (Weiner 2000). Coming out of class, having got a foretaste of the others' production was all that was needed to tackle my competitiveness (i.e. buying more books). But was it really 'the others' that were tickling my creative urge and my competitiveness, or shouldn't we take artist Jana Sterback gaff and ponder if the imperative of the new is really coming from 'the outside' ?

The other side of this urge to create is its capacity to transform you in its prisoner. Being so captivated by the work, one could wonder if one was not simply captive of it. Mona believed that we had to take care on how much our projects could carry us away. Former co-student Éric thought that the criteria of seduction and captivation, as they are found in the performing and media art (time based) did not apply to fine arts. It was not being able to 'retain' the spectator that counted, but the capacity to touch, however shortly. Intensity had nothing to do with duration.

As this ethnography was launched with the desire to question this urge, many times in the field I experienced the need to shut it down. As of mid October, the obsession was already in full swing. Tons of ideas were crossing my mind. Having problems to sleep, I started wondering how much sleep I really needed ...(many important creators (ex. : Robert Lepage) are said to sleep 3-4 hours a night). I wondered if tiredness did not come from trying not to do the work. J.P. Perreault himself avowed that his dream was to stop creating. I shared with him this secret which : why did we having to invent new things all the time ? Weren't we caught in manifestation, as Buddhists argue ? Two episodes of mine illustrates very well the dilemma of the professional artist and how it paradoxically hinders creativity :

September 4th, after a Séminaire de creation :

"...Got home very excited. Tried to calm down but couldn't. All those ideas about ideas...Got to bed, out of bed, took a bath, started to improvise a melody and there it was again : "Should I write this one down ? It's good, good enough, but I can improvise tons of them. But how will I ever do something if I don't write them down." Then I was out of it. The fountain had stop to flow. I could still sing and compose, but I recognized the flavor : now it was mental elaboration, not inspiration. It had started to fix itself in patterns; in repetitions; in maps; in territories to be disclosed again, later; or half disclosed, so there would be room for further discoveries. I was back in concept-land. And it would not let me sleep."

January 12, 2001

“Yesterday, two events addressed very differently the question of “obsession”⁸³. In the afternoon, I went to pick up index cards at the Indexation Service of the Montreal Library. M. Ménard had already given me one complete index (55 feet of cards...); when I phoned to ask him if he had more, he called back to offer me another complete index.⁸⁴ But when I got there, I almost lost my legs. The index he had for giving was at least four times the size of the one he had given me...! And that was not all : he had another one... So well I started to get scared. Was I really sure I wanted to get into that ? Was I sure I wanted to spend four, maybe six years on that project, splitting my head to write it, fund it, rehearse it, then promote it ? There it was : I had to decide now. I could say “Bah, take the cards and you’ll see”. But I knew very well how it is : Buddhists call it Karma. All actions have their consequence. A simple gesture – taking these thousands of cards – and you throw a line of action for years. In one moment, I saw all the weight of my desires. I felt imprisoned in my own envy. And yet at the same time, was that not a sign of the Muses ? Was not this synchronicity closer to Being than Knowing, more objective than subjective ? Was that not clearly a “revelation” or “inspiration”, that is : a call to flow with the line of events?

“I packed half of the index cards in boxes and ran out without bringing anything. I babbled something about needing helpers and a van (half true) and said I would be back Tuesday. My feelings at the moment were that I had started locking myself in that sculpture project. That did not feel good at all.

“I ran to the atelier. Painting would be a breeze of fresh air. And it was. I knew I had to confront the problem of bad proportion in the face. Diagnosis : upper mandible too wide. Prescription : lower nose or raise lips. Major surgery. Foreseen consequences for the cheeks. Risk of permanent damage. Dreadful, I plunged. Lower nose. Nervously and with exhalation. Destroying my own work !

“I do not know much about epiphanies, but if I wanted to put some meat on the bone of that word, those four hours of painting would be it. That day, I felt I really learned what it is to paint. It’s not about making an image. It is the complete merging of oneself with the canvas. It is the destruction of all duality subject-object. It is the dynamic flow with the evolving shapes and forms. Painting was, that afternoon, the constant dialogue with a face that kept changing expression. Painting, there is nowhere to stop it, for it never started ! It is not a process, it is an eternal now, a dynamic re-perpetration and perpetuation of itself, an infinitesimally small point that, still, turns around itself.

“Towards the end, my only fear was that I could not come back, that I could no longer detach myself from the canvas. Three times I closed the tubes.

⁸³ At this point I use the same word, very connotated, to describe what I believe are two different states of being.

⁸⁴ I remember very well the state I was in when I decided to try to get more cards : ambitious, almost megalomaniac (“It’s going to be a “Big Project”).

washed my hands and cleaned the brushes. I finally left. My ears buzzed. Then I became aware of a side-effect phenomenon. I noticed that objects kept their undeterminacy for a longer time than usual. I would come by a pile of garbage and I would not be able to identify its content. In fact, my dive to identify object would be weaker than usual. Things remained what they are : patches of colors... I felt no need to draw lines between things – I now hypothesize – because I was not really totally there, not in my usual persona at least. I was lacking a reflective self (a subject).

“Comment (tentative phenomenological analysis) :

Fear, risk and obsession in both cases. But how different ! In one case I compare mental projections with mental projections (i.e. my guess about “my” future, with theories about causality , Karma, etc.) – hence the fear, felt on the depressive mode as the weight of personal history. In the other case, I am swallowed, subdued, and lose my usual recourses to intellection – a different fear, mixed with exhalation. In the case of the sculpture project, I bring more fuel to expectation – hence my feeling of entrapping myself in my project. In the painting, I lose contact with the future as mentation. However, in the first case I get a sense of destiny, fatality, ineluctability – all attributes of Being, of an objective reality outside myself and my will. So in this first case too, there is the potential for a experiential submission to events, provided one fully accepts his/her “fate” and use that faith to curtail doubt. This is how the “project” would then bring inceptors access to “energy” – as capacity of not feeling tired, or not seeing time passing, for example. While in the second case, the case of painting⁸⁵, the “outwordy” quality of the experience makes it harder for the practitioner to (re)integrate daily life.

“In the first case (long term project mode), the split/tension is between :

- Fear of the consequences of one’s acts (chaining oneself to a limiting destiny), and
- Confidence in “providence”, destiny, or whatever.

In the second case (short term project mode), the tension is between :

- Fear of madness (not being able to integrate the activity in daily life; and the resulting modification of self into a social setting), and
- Not confidence, but rather “selflessness”, that is : absence of doubt that does not result from intellection, belief or even faith.”

- Field notes

An in class discussion regarding the distinction between obsession, compulsion, passion, dedication ended up in a mess. Students and assistant teacher could barely find criterion to make this distinction. Maybe I can understand the reluctance of students to

psychologize or pathologize creativity using the example of my own despair when stuck : I would then do anything to get back on my tracks, obsession or not.⁸⁶ There was relief in doing and in doing only. The anguish was always experienced when not in the studio.

So what is the difference between nurturance and drug ? Are we becoming an artist when we become a creative junky ? Is this question even relevant, and from which standpoint does it originate ? Isn't it a typical 'outsider' question ? Seeing we were all tired from our first year of the program, Professor Régimbald started the summer creation atelier on the topic of fatigue, tiredness. She asked us the question whether there could be some levels or kinds of fatigue that could be creatively productive. She opened the atelier with a text by the German writer Peter Handke, in which he outlines four types of fatigues. The fourth type is very significant in the sense it is the distillation of an epiphanic moment in Handke's life. Handke's description of that moment makes it clear that his exhaustion led to a moment of non-reflective awareness. Handke *was* the things he was observing, he *was* the world. For students, 'fatigue' was expressing their ambiguous relation to work. Mona was noticing that "doing what I like, there is no fatigue"; Michel had not taken any vacation in 6 years, something he attributed both to his loving his work, and to how his work was dictating his life; for Gilbert, the 'habitus', not the work, was tiring : he talked about this "rest that kills"; Françoise replied that it was work, not rest that had killed her sister. For Éliot fatigue was symptomatic of a creative block; for Cécilia it indicated fear of being bored; André insisted on the fact that an intellectual fatigue is not a physical one. Clearly the idiom of 'fatigue' reveals the

⁸⁵ I use painting here because it is a temporal locus of experience for me, a kind of "spontaneity". I do not mean to qualify "painting" in itself.

notion of 'going beyond'. But beyond what (or whom)? Through tiring oneself, one could aspire to the releasing of the grip of the ego. One would become someone else, one would get out of oneself.

So are we getting closer to answering our question ? Why is creativity addictive ? Is it because it reveals, like nothing else, something of life - something about the dynamic nature of unity ? Through the state of creativity, are we contacting the perpetual tumbling of being into knowing and knowing into being ? Is the qualitative difference between the creative urge in long and short depending on how intimate our contact with this constant tumbling is ? Is this 'intimacy', this dissolution of our self, is this what Low calls 'non-reflective awareness, or more simply 'being one with' ? Is Low's difference between 'being identified with' (i.e. lost in the thing, no awareness) and 'being one with' of descriptive relevance here ?

As a way to start answering those questions, I bring here a small contribution, in the form of an insight that was verbalized during my own process :

“Not conviction : the absence of doubts.

“Not knowledge : the absence of ignorance

I realized that the assurance that allowed one to sink into creation and to abandon oneself to the flow of creation, this assurance came from the abolition of the distance between a subject and an object. In that bringing together, knowledge – as methodical doubt – became superfluous.

3.2.3.3.2 The self is one, the self is two (not two, not one)

⁸⁶ Deschamps (2002) underlines that it is the ardent desire to come out of the chaos – as period of stagnation – that motivates the creation. Therefore the chaos is not an unfortunate side-effect of creativity,

“Non pas le foyer immuablement fixé, mais le tourbillon qui s’approfondit en aspirant le fluide au sein duquel il est né. Le Je qui ne tient qu’en devenant toujours plus lui-même, dans la mesure où il fait tout le reste soi”. (Theillard de Chardin, in Low 1999 : 260).

Going entirely on the participant side, I could experience a movement : first locating the schism self-other outside myself, in the social milieu, I would then gradually come to see it in me. This allowed me to re-interpret many wide spread assumptions, the first one being the egocentrism of artists. This point is of special relevance here since it allows to penetrate the relation self-other from the point of view of the self.

a- as an observer :

Professor Régimbald made it clear that there was a difference between being self-centered and work centered. Many works by students enacted the stance of ‘art looking at itself’, and were thus in danger of displaying narcissism. On the other hand, many students were tired of narcissism, and were expressing this in saying that the program, in fostering endless presentations of ‘my work’, was becoming redundant. I already mentioned how saddening it was for me sometimes to hear all this ‘my work’ presentations. I came to think that we were all too egocentric. It made me sick to see how some of us were perpetually looking for an audience, like for example when we were asking for advices in the installation of our pieces in the gallery – merely another way to gain attention. Sometimes I felt we were on the mental age of children : always needing the others to confirm our center. J.P. Perreault mentioned that very early in his life he had realized that he was different. He had ideas and feelings about life that his surroundings

but its very substance and drive.

did not have. I found his statement both comforting ("me too !") and frightening (who else than a bunch of egomaniacs can invent themselves as being 'different' from the common mortal ?).

Once judgements suspended, this 'feeling different' was key to understanding how creativity enhances the centr-periphery dynamics in the self. Perreault's advice to me was "do only what you want. Never do any compromise". I interpreted his advice as meaning that one's own way had to become the center. Indeed when shaken by the critique, most students' reaction was not to absorb the critique, but to go back to their 'own way of doing things'. A retreat in one's own way was also a mean to tamper and avoid the hardships of sharing creation.

Perreault was perfectly aware of this artistic egocentrism. He saw egocentrism as Homeopathic : one used the ego to overcome the ego. It was a way to walk towards oneself. On that aspect the difference between the anthropology and art seminars was troubling. On the art side we had the opportunity to boost our ego, but also to put on the table things that really meant something to us. What one was doing what not as important as the fact that one was doing it by oneself.

b- as a participant

The Master degree was a thing we were doing for ourselves first, Professor Saucier said. Professor Régimbald said having known a moderate professional success, and having partly rejected it. I had understood that creation does not pass through the gaze of others : success is too improbable anyway. Martha Townsend and Manon Labrecque had both told me that 'success is so relative, it does not depend on you'. Their

comment was not a social comment on power relations, it was more an invitation to find the (true) Self (outside culture). But what is this 'Self'?

The injunctions and prescriptions found in the field were very contradictory in this regards. From the double bind of 'having to let go', coming from a teacher asserting her authority, to 'having to find a voice', everything pointed to a self at war with itself; making war to gain peace, indeed. *Finding comfort in distinction is a double bind of gigantic magnitude. As Low argues, this amounts to trying to find wholeness by cutting oneself from the whole.*

The self has to be found in 'identity with oneself', but by doing so, the self displaces a 'part' of itself outside itself, as an observed object. Finding identity with one's work versus the detachment towards the products of one's work is in line with this problematic. A contracted formator told us that showing our work in different places forced us to really look at the work, and detach ourselves from it. I found this worked from the other side too : to prolong and deepen the contact with the piece transformed it into an alter ego, a real 'other'. It was a paradoxical feeling, since I also found that the more intimate I would become with the work, the more the piece would become myself. something I expressed by saying the work and the studio were becoming irresistible magnets. Is this the reason why Ibn 'Arabi, like many other mystics, compared spirituality with eroticism ?

c- The unitary Self : an utopia ?

One could get the illusion of finding unity, a stable center, in oneself. But wasn't there a difference in finding unity through *integration* – i.e. by integrating parts, without

dissolving them as separate entities, and finding unity in *integrity*, a mysterious state where the distinction part-whole seems to vanish ? There was a very enticing confidence that was arising from the feeling/promise of reaching 'the true self'. For many of us students, it happened when we were meeting our potential advisor. In these one to one meetings with teachers, something of an ultimate intimacy would pierce out, an intimacy of oneself with oneself. It was a phenomena akin to confession. A confession that succeeds is one that breeds reconciliation of the self with itself.

As one was transformed into an observer of oneself, of one's own process, the pain of the divided self became visible. Aline's over-reflective attitude was painful probably for that reason : in showing, sometimes with complacency, the root of her creative block, she was reminding the pain to our own selves. Interestingly, students immediately linked Aline's concerns with Françoise's preoccupation with identity. On that matter, Hélène apparently said out loud what the class seemed to think about Aline : thinking too much about the 'Hows' of creation is destructive. We need to focus outside of ourselves, on a project. We need a shiny beacon in front of our eyes. Thus projects become a key strategy for the management of the pain, the pain of a self that is at the center and at the periphery of itself.

3.2.3.3.1: Solitude

a- post-modern critique of the modernist myth of the artist as loner : "The myth of the artist-as-loner is dead".

One standard myth about art – the artist as loner – is currently being revisited and contested. Artist Lynn Hughes, also professor at Concordia, argued in class that artists

don't work alone anymore: Hughes is at the center of a huge research project linking art and new technology (Hexagram, which recently received a \$22 millions subvention). Artist and assistant teacher J.P. Demers was a strong proponent of micro-communities. Mona said after her degree she did not want to work "alone in my studio". As a matter of fact, for five years Mona was the director of Dare-Dare, an artist-run center which adopted as a signature the development of '*hors-les-murs*' projects (done outside the gallery). The whole field of 'relational practices' seems to aim at making art with social relation, and vice-versa. Is the myth of the artist-loner dead ?

Firstly, one should note that there is a strong correspondence of this 'new' discourse with the pressure of media arts, cinema, and performing arts on fine arts. The proposal of 'art as event' is in fact the proposal of art as theatre. Secondly, there is a correlation between this collectivism the new myth of the artist as designer and entrepreneur (i.e. the opposite of craftsmen). Artists become 'ideators' and to secure their status, they have to drop any association with hand work. They have to become pure thinkers (as if these poles –body and intellect – would be the only patrimony accessible to humans). Thirdly, this enterprise model, with the artist as CEO, is in line with the ambitions of new technologies : dominating the field by reducing 'art' to 'media': a very paradoxical situation indeed : free the artist by allowing him/her to become pure thinking, but reduce his art to the handling of tools (media).

b-This critique is but a new myth.

First one has to notice that artists in fine arts, as most authors, still work alone. Secondly, many authors, among which Marguerite Duras ("*Écrire*") and Agnes Martin (1992), underlined the fundamental and foundational link of solitude to authorship. Even

in theatre and cinema, collective mediums par excellence, authorship is still pretty much pyramidal.

c- We need a cross-discipline, cross cultural approach to the phenomena of solitude in creative endeavors.

Agnes Martin wonders why artists, after locking them up in their studio all day long, will generally prefer the quietness of parks to the turmoil of social life. She finds that there is something fundamental in creative acts that can't be learned in group. ***It is not so much that creativity is inherently solitary. What is learned is being able to stand a face to face with oneself, that is : the dread of loneliness.*** Albert Low, drawing on Martin Buber, argues that 'you' is in 'me': thus he sees major religions (Sufism) as a way to avoid a direct encounter with 'You', for this encounter would be totally destructive. It would be meeting the fact that the one is two. Shostak (in Lavie 1994), in *The Creative Individual in the World of the !Kung San*, finds a correlation between solitude and the creative persona. Babcock (idem) observing a pueblo woman's daring creative provocations in pottery, and Narayan (idem) showing the didactic irreverence of a 'traditional' guru, both come to equate creativity with idiosyncrasy at the individual level.

d- Finds in the field :

But do we need to equate the self with the individual ? Are we trapped between those only two possibilities : the naturalized, biological self, and the socialized, cultural self ? Can solitude help us seeing through solitude ?

i- Solitude as protection of the self from actual and virtual others :

I am certainly not the only one to conceive of artistic creation as a secret garden. After an in-class critique, I wrote : "Finally recovered my center, so to speak. Calmed

down, got to the bench, bought some gold paint, went back to the wood shop to cut a valley in a bunch of cards, put a coat of gesso on the canvas, a coat of gold on the freshly cut extrusion. Easy to understand why people are reluctant to speak about their project in the early stages. What is it that is so fragile ?". Françoise was protecting 'it' through privacy : she refused to present everything she had done, and I saw this as a useful strategy for the presentation of the self. Becoming a remedy to explanations, solitude was sometimes a balm over the self-other dynamic. The announcement by Professor Saucier that there would not be any in-class group critique during the winter semester was first received with mixed feelings by students. We thought that it would be odd to see our colleagues' work only as end result – a premiere indeed for most of us. Then the news was received as a relief. Not only would this give us time to fully concentrate on our work, but I think we felt that the teacher was right when he said that *group-critiques more often divert us from important issues*. What were those 'issues' ? Were they topics among topics ? Was it not simply to be freed from the need to perform ? Was it not a covert way to acquiescing to the role of privacy in creative freedom ?

ii- 'Solitude' as a modality of the re-unification of the self

During the Christmas break, I experienced three weeks of complete solitude in the studio. I wrote the following lines about feeling as Robinson on his island :

**“It had been a heaven of self-less-ful-ness. Alone with the world.
Pissing in the sink. Standing naked in front of the mirror to check some
anatomical features [for the painting]. I had returned to nature, a Robinson
on an island of 20 feet by 20 feet. But it was all over. They had found me, sent**

the rescue boat, and I had to learn to speak again. Paradise was lost and I'd be jailed in longings”.

-Field notes

What a strange discovery, that in the absence of others the self too – as private and individual - would disappear...Geneviève Letarte confided to me the reasons why she was abandoning performance for writing : writing is 'invisible': it has the interiority of a spiritual quest, something very different from the exteriority of performing arts; an author does not write to be inserted in the social, but to find knowledge, of oneself, in oneself. Solitude, masked as a retreat from the fire of power relations between agents, could in fact be a way to exorcise the phantom of the other. It would be a way of seeing the other in the self, and thus come to a reconciliation which would be in fact transcending the duality self-other.

3.2.3.3.3 : Summary

An hypothesis will condense this section on solitude: *Could we not see 'Nature' as the expression of a contact with oneself? Is not 'Nature' the expression of a state of un-dividedness, that is : a modality of the self as being a-dividual, instead of individual,?*

(Section) 4- RE-GLUING (CREATIVE SYNTHESIS)

Abstract :

In this chapter, the author wants to show how the different cognitive units that I brought out can be seen to be mutually dependent. A first section presents a synthesis that is already available in the field in the form of attitudes and prescriptions; most of these prescriptions are implicit. Many of these injunctions are apparently contradictory, so a second section strives to dynamize these contradictions in the form of paradoxes and double binds; a final section operates the creative synthesis per se, by showing that the boundaries between my cognitive units were didactic and thus arbitrary.

4- RE-GLUING (CREATIVE SYNTHESIS)

4.1 Attitudes /prescriptions

It was often distressing for me to realize that we spoke so little in class about 'how to make art'. We discussed motivations, links with history, intentions, end result, but how to start, to keep a work going and how to end it, this was rarely discussed. Concrete problems (nuts and bolts) that contain so much of what art is about, these were left to private discussions with the thesis advisor. Since that person was not chosen before the end of the second semester, and since she, like others, is generally quite busy, these discussions were scarce. However, with closer scrutiny, I realized that advice was available in the form of implicit prescriptions.

4.1.1 Tentative grouping of injunctions/prescriptions in three categories

4.1.1.1 Action

- "Just do it" : which was a way to put studio work before conceptual planning.
- No doubt : Riopelle said "when I paint I do not doubt; when I doubt I do not paint". This can be seen as contradictory with Perreault's notion that 'doubt is important'; but there are different notion of doubt: for Perreault, doubt is positive uncertainty; here (in injunctions that are action-driven) doubt is unnecessary intellection.
- Gratuity : often voiced positively as 'craziness', this is a plea for non-rationality that aims at lifting inhibitions to actions that are not pre-justified.
- No compromise (choreographer Perreault) : this is an injunction to disregard critique and the point of view of others; it is a way to reduce inhibitions in action.

- 'Last minute.' as instrumental to the 'feel' of action : putting oneself under the pressure of impossible deadlines (by retarding execution), one can experience an unconditional dedication to action.

4.1.1.2 Positive uncertainty

- 'Doubt is important' (choreographers J.P. Pearreault and Sylvain Émard) : doubt allows one to keep an opening onto the creative outcome of one's actions.

- 'No program' (Larry Tremblay) : refusing to work along a blueprint, one accepts see uncertainty as a promise: one accepts uncertainty, not as a temporary condition to be dispelled when a solution will be found, but as the permanent ground for creation.

- 'Playing it by ear' : this is a way to bypass the rigidity of strict planning and to put oneself in a mood for accepting uncertainty as generative.

- 'Keeping it open as long as possible' : many students and myself displayed an unwillingness to end things too soon; this could be seen as a conviction that creativity is a dynamic state and that one risks contaminating that state by focusing too much on end products.

- RISK : to me this was a major prescription of the field, and one of the few ones that were explicit. Professor Schofield, in the first critique of my work, asked me : "Where is the risk in your project ?". The issues of losing control, and the question of the part of the work that must be left to random, or rather left to the forces of the system one puts in place, these issues were brought up. Aside from leaving room to the creative process, this loosening of one's grip on the piece was also a way to leave room for the audience's imagination. I felt it was also a way to protect the autonomy of the piece, its 'own life',

and thus to guarantee that the piece would have 'being'. If the piece did not become a being, then there would be many pieces in one and then "instead of opening, the piece is closed upon itself" (Régimbald, personal conversation).

- 'Daringness' was the pendant of risk. It was the willingness of working in spite of fear, or rather to use fear as a indication of authenticity. Meeting fear was a proof that one was meeting challenges that were 'real', because connected to one's personal inhibitions.

- 'Creation as acceptance' : this is the idiom of making do with whatever one finds in his/her plate. It is expecting the unexpected. It is as well the expression of a commitment, for example when I realize that Eureka's come in my acceptance of solitude.

4.1.1.3 "No work" :

A senior composer from Québec once surprised me by voicing out loud her quasi-contempt toward visual artists : "These people just don't work !" Coming from a background of performing arts, I then surprised myself thinking the same thing when I entered fine arts schools. At UQAM, the technician of the wood shop confirmed : art students don't work much, and mostly last minute. Another artist from Chicoutimi thought performance artists were sloppy : they worked their sketches on the corner of a table.

Personally, I tried to see if this was not a formidable opportunity to examine the concept of 'work' under the light of cultural relativism. For there are many ways to interpret the relative disproportion between idle time and production in many practicing or aspiring artists.

a- description

1) First there is certainly the question of fear, a direct outcome of standing in the midst of uncertainty. Art works often appear to be arbitrary constructs, and it is not easy to deal with such a level of subjectivity in a very objective and purpose minded world. 2) 'No work' can be seen also as a consequence of intellectualism, which fosters thinking more than actual physical realizations. 3) It can be a consequence of a depressive syndrome coming from solitude: one realizes that no one other than oneself can decide the outcome of the work. 4) There can be also the classical disinterest, which as the prefix indicates is a dissociation of oneself from the work. 5) Sheer laziness should not be discarded, of course. 6) Discouragement was also an endemic problem in many students, and I interpreted as a direct consequence of the solitary nature of the work. Since many students did not actually work in the space that were lent to us, those who were felt the dread of loneliness became ingrained in the walls of their studio, so to speak. Students who worked in team seemed less prone to bouts of creative depression. 7) Not working was of course often a guise for escapism. Collective work can also be seen in that light, as I had numerous occasion to observe : you work on the projects of others not to fulfill your commitments to your own projects.

The counterpart of the previous self-evident reasons is that 8) 'No work' is very often an open defiance to dominant notions of work (as discipline, continuity, adhesion to a consensual schedule, adhesion to linear paradigms, including paradigms that are goal orientated and geared toward productivity, end-result, etc). Most of the time the defiance was covert, manifesting in a polite negation of existing norms. Teachers seemed to see this polite defiance as part of what it means to make art, and thus the standard ratio work/result was not used in evaluations. 'Work' could not be evaluated in terms of

number of hours. Creativity/art as 'anti-all' meant that it was OK to challenge the teacher. A technician (who like many techs is also an artist) made France and I roll on the floor with laughter when he gave us his own personal advice on how to apply teachers' comments : "You say yes and you just do the opposite, exactly the opposite; then you come back to them saying : look, I've done what you said" and you ask for further comments..." 9) Playfulness is certainly one main and consecrated attribute of the creative attitude, as amply testified by the psychological literature. A willingness to question the status quo is better served by play than by open defiance. It is this ability to play with otherwise serious matters, and the willingness to play seriously that characterizes the creative attitude (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Play is also instrumental in unblocking the rigidity coming from anguish and fear. 10) Idle time can be seen as the mark of a naïve, fresh and open relation to life, contrasting sharply with the notion of work as constraint, responsibility, i.e. as prescription of an 'other'. Thus Naïveté becomes a trade mark of an attitude less prone to dividing time between 'work' and 'vacation'. At least two women in the group displayed this sort of 'naïveté' which made collide the distinction between competent and incompetent. Placing oneself outside the idiom of 'skill' seemed to be precisely the aim of their practice: I thought that in a way, they were feminists unknown to themselves. Prof. Saucier said in class that naïveté is sometimes better than good ideas, specially when one does not have the skills or the technical means to realize those ideas. 11) 'No work' is a way to acquiesce to the necessary idle time. Csikszentmihalyi (1997), as most psychological models of creativity, repatriates idle time in the land of work, when he says that idle time 'serves' as the time of incubation. In incubation, ideas are 'processed' at the subconscious level⁸⁷. But this model betrays its

⁸⁷ Low says that when humanity will realize that Freud 'unconscious' was a farce. it will roll on the floor

origins. A model that deals with non-reflectivity is in my sense much closer to the fact. Creativity seems to emanate from and foster an elastic time. Taking your time leads you somewhere else. It is more than an anti product stance; it is a concrete knowledge about the relation of awareness, and consciousness to time. Ultimately, one could say that the belief in a necessary idle time is an intuitive knowledge that time is not only a cultural construct (see Edward T. Hall : The Silent Language), but that time is closely linked to the divided nature of consciousness, and that in non-divided awareness, time disappears.

12) Procrastination was as a way to foster/provoke urgency. Mathieu was happy that Donald's installation was done at the last minute (and looked like it...). For him, this gave the whole thing a "*facture d'urgence*". 13) ***Of course we should not discard the fact that an important part of the discourse produced to justify new works aims at transforming incompetence into competence, and is thus bound to the cultural settings***

b- Synthesis :

As mean of intercultural comparison, we could invoke the notion of Wu Wei in Taoist China. Wu Wei is the doing of not doing. It is letting things be done instead of imposing one's will onto things (See Weiner 2000). My own experience of the 'no doubt' feeling contrasted with the fear I had towards action. Sometime I felt that too much work was worse than not enough, for I could get blind in action. However the fact that confidence was gained in action confirmed that art was a paradigm : it had to be practiced.⁸⁸ 'Practice' is also what allows one to escape reactivity towards activity; it allows to avoid the imperative of non-conformation. 'Gaining skill in loosing control',

with laughter (personal conversation).

⁸⁸ In regard of practice, I have to say that most students in my sense did not get a sense of the level of implication that is necessary to reach 'practicing' art. Most of them did not seem to dedicate enough time to

'losing one's grip over the project', 'letting go of the will to control', all these injunctions were ways of asserting another conception of 'work' and thus of agency. Prescriptions like Manon's 'not so big better', and prof Régimbald's 'plea for 'lightedness'' were ways to curtail obsession and to foster an openness to the world. I felt they were ways to (re)establish a dialogue with the world. In my last personal meeting with her, prof. Régimbald said to me that lightedness (i.e. not carrying the whole world upon your shoulders) was a responsibility of the artist. It was his/her way of caring to maintain health (and productivity) on the long term. She said this was not a plea for idiocy. An artist often entered regions of very deep concerns with things and people. One could not last as an artist if one stayed in those regions for too long.

4.2 Double binds / Paradoxes

In trying to make sense of the seemingly contradictory prescriptions encountered in the field, I strove to see how those could be organized into paradoxes, which at least have the advantage of using polarity productively.

1- Being different, being the same :

forward version: being where everybody is not (as artist, as avant-garde), while being where everybody is going anyway, in front of them all (avant-garde); foreseeing the future by making it happen.

backward version : in line with the past, against the past. This is notable in the use of references : even when denied, references are still references; even when denied, their knowledge confers authority to their user.

practice to gain participation. I make this evaluation in comparing the field with what I saw of artists in a professional context.

Low sums up the burden of innovation : 1) finding a target; 2) setting up to attain it
3) convincing everyone that this target is the only one valuable: convincing them to
compete to attain it; 4) beating them all.

2- Imperative of the new

“Be disobedient, this is an order”, which means “You have to obey me in being
disobedient”. Gontrand summed this up very pathetically when he told me, angrily : “It’s
defiance they want ? I’m gonna give them defiance !” This is a paradox that has value of
double bind, in Bateson’s sense (two contradictory injunctions with a third injunction
calling for the respect of both).

3- Mobile home : absence of home as home

Artists establish their home in homelessness. Discontinuity becomes their continuity.
They work hard to achieve the impossible : change becoming the only changeless-ness.
 (“A house is a good thing. You can lock it up and go and live anywhere you like.” –
Walter Pukatiwara, in Jackson 1995).

4- Having to find one’s own voice :

Artists *must* ‘find their voice’, but this unique voice cannot be too fabricated otherwise
they will be accused of cheating’, of being commercial or inauthentic. And yet it has to
be worked out. The self having to find the self : is the self (searching and to be searched)
a discovery or an invention ?

5- Gaining skill in losing control (becoming skillful in the idiom of ‘looseness’)

Artist must become skilful at lettings things emerge. And yet they must continue to claim
authorship. This is the kind of authorship one finds in mediumship. Even if mediums are
only channels, there are good and bad mediums.

6- Intending non-intention

This is a correlate of the precedent. What artists intend is a non-intention, both on the level of revelation, and on the level of disrupting the usual purposive-ness as it is found in society. Thus we have-

- a) planning spontaneity, on level of the emitter/doer;
- b) planning surprise, on the level of the receptor/spectator.
- c) the good project is an anti-project

This paradox is boosted to the level of the double bind in conceptual art, and this relatively consciously. Conceptual art uses the paradox of art as material to do art. For example, Bruce Nauman putting a neon at the window of his studio, like a beer sign : “The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths”, and thus causing perplexity in the viewer (Storr, Robert : Gerhard Richter, MOMA, New York 2002, p. 302)

7- To create is wanting to be where you are not

- a) Escaping your tail. This is the paradigm of ‘dépassement’, of going beyond oneself.
- b) Chasing tail : wanting to find yourself outside of yourself. Related to 4-.

8- Exposing (risking) oneself to reinforce the self

An artist who risks his/her self comes to have a stronger sense of self, this is at least the message the art world is sending to the artist. Thus the ‘self which risks the self’ becomes the self of the artist.

9- Looking for Being with Knowing

As it is still conceived in the milieu, generally speaking, the aesthetic judgement is intersubjective. It is looking for objectivity through a multitude of subjective appreciations; it reaching Being through consensus. At numerous occasion, I felt that the

search for consensus was a search for the Being (truth, objectivity, reality) of the piece, of art, and of the artist's *démarche*. (The fact that we all found Gontrand's studio more appealing than his exhibiting room granted enough objectivity to the 'artistry' of Gontrand's studio to have him changing his art work; he started developing installations-as-factories).

10- Feeling sovereign only in the company of an other (in this case : the work, the project)

It is paradoxically the work that makes one feel sovereign. It is because one feels one controls, dominates the work that one claims sovereignty over oneself.

11- Getting lost to be able to find one's way

As Deschamps (2000) emphasized, it is because creativity is necessarily a passage from darkness (unknowing) to light (knowing) that what she calls 'the chaos' is an intrinsic part of the creative process. Therefore, it is not an overstatement to say that artists put themselves into trouble to be forced to find a way out of trouble.

12- Using will to let go of will (willing to let go)

Artists, specially after John Cage, are often the organizers of indeterminacy. On the personal level, a process that is too willful is not granted Being. Thus the job of the artist becomes to use will to self-destroy will

b- Wishing the end of desire : a corollary of this is this special self-destructive desire. Nisargadatta (1973) says of this desire that it is the most special one, one the only one paradoxically that can summon all of the person's intention.

13- Egocentrism and Narcissism to overcome Egocentrism and narcissism

(homeopathy)

This might look as sheer absurdity, but what this paradox in fact says is that egocentrism is the *only* way to overcome egocentrism.

14- Having to use words to say/see where words cannot go : judgments to escape judgements; condemning judgments.

Artists are not exempted to use language only because they handle a non-verbal tool for the communion of experience, quite the contrary. It is *precisely because non-discursive cognition are so far away from discourse that such a big amount of discourse is necessary.*

b- Explaining non-explanation (justifying the refusal/impossibility to explain)

Again, as is demonstrated by the recent catalogue of the retrospective of Gerhard Richter at the MOMA (New York), explaining the un-explainable is an imperative of the artist, not a luxury.

15- Art to undo expectations built by art

This is the part b) of paradox 6-. It deserves a separate listing because it is the corollary, on from the spectator's side of the lense, of the imperative of the new. Art cannot undo art, but it *must* do it, otherwise there is not reason left for art. One could then say : "Well let us stop then". But in the optic of art, this would still be art. From the point of view of consciousness, 'Stopping' is like 'doing': it is still a doing. The corollary of this paradox, permissiveness, can be read as : 'stopping to stop'.

16- Instrumentalizing non-instrumentality (making the non-useful useful) : (i.e.

making a career of doing things that escape 'usefulness' as it is usually socially defined)

The full scope of this fundamental paradox can be grasped using the following quote of Albert Low (Low, 2001) : “*Le sens de l’existence est non sens, mais cela ne veut pas dire absence de sens. Cela veut dire que le sens de l’existence ne peut-être saisi à l’aide de la notion d’utilité*”. (Low 2001 : 23)⁸⁹

b- Love-hate of usefulness-less

Non-instrumentality is what makes art . But non-instrumentality is also what makes art so difficult, because one has then to transform beauty into a striving, love into a business, life into death, etc. It is this transformation of non-purposiveness into a purpose that risks destroying the non-instrumentality, and with it creativity. The paradox makes a full circle when we realize that it is only in transforming the non-purposiveness into a purpose that the artist is able to sustain the non-instrumentality. Low recounts the story of the Fathers of the Desert who, as a meditation practice, used to weave baskets, only to undo them when they were finished. Were these Fathers escaping the double bind by refusing to transform their non-sensical action into a social performance ?

17- References as center that offsets the center (eccentric center)

Recalling memories of artworks which helped oneself to create a center, one risks putting the center outside oneself.: This depending upon memory to create the center hinders actual aesthetic experiences, which are hopefully the real center. Thus this shows how the center is both fixed and dynamic, which is an unsolvable impossibility.

18- Involvement as detachment, detachment as involvement

The good project is the project that makes you forget about it, while not letting you go even for a second. The artist must learn a special type of engagement : an engagement in

⁸⁹ The sense (meaning) of life is non-sense, but that does not mean absence of sense (meaning). This means that the sense of life cannot be grasped with the notion of usefulness.”

non-engagement. While I was working with Robert Lepage, the casualness, the offhandedness of actors puzzled me. It seemed to threaten the quality of their work. The production manager explained to me that the world of actors was a very special one... the were actively and seriously playing, all the time. They had to.

19- Looking for causes of causes

This is more the paradox of the ethnographer and the art theorist than one of artists. It is the paradoxical 'looking for causes to creativity', 'creativity' being precisely and by definition that which causes things to happen (i.e. the generative principle).

20- Wanting to capture (in content, in form) what exists outside 'content' (identifiable form)

This is a paradox that is shared both by artists – because of the imperative to speak about the unspeakable, and ethnographers – because they take the unspeakable : life, as their subject. Low says this is the burden of consciousness, as reflective and divided awareness : 'consciousness always promises that the center will emerge in form'.

21- Pre-destined accident

This is a development of the paradoxes 6, 12, 15 and 16, i.e. the paradoxes that expounds the tension between will and non-will. In this version, 'accident' becomes meaningful, and its victim/inceptor passes from the role of agent to the role of destination. 'Accidents' become 'revelation', 'destiny'. That 'accidents were meant to be' expresses the tension between Knowing and Being, between an inside that acquiesces to an outside, while knowing that all there is is inside (Knowing).

23- Double bind of risk

Risk, as prescription coming from the outside (not risk as feeling of uncertainty), is a double bind. When one is asked to risk, one is asked to conform to predictions about uncertainty of results. One is asked to follow probabilities of failure. But the double bind of this prescription of risk is : you have to risk but you cannot fail. But risk is measured precisely by the possibility to fail. So in that logic, there are rules that should direct your work before the show (i.e. risk) but in the show they don't apply (the show must be a success). When it comes in the form of a social prescription, risk, like success, is assessed by end goals. Part of it is teleologic (failing provisions), part of it is simply a feeling, a feeling that can be quantified through statistics. It is an evaluation. Statistics of mortality do not tell you when you will die. It tells you nothing about the future. It tells something about the past, and something about your present expectations. Risk is a cultural construct, a reflective stance, and like other reflectivity, it can entrap the subject in an endless cycle of thoughts about thoughts.

25- Not to dilute it : do it full time; to do it full time, dilute it. This is the double bind of the professional artist. Finding realization in creativity, because it is an uncompromised relation to life, the persona decides to market it.

4.3 Panthematic articulations

We are now in position to see how the cognitive units we have extricated from the field can be glued back into a dynamic whole.

4.3.1 Project

The project, as center, gives flesh to the self. The self is nothing without projecting itself in the future, without projects. In the case of contemporary artists, this self is organized around the persona of the artist, which is defined by the artistic projects that it centralizes and organizes.

The project, as center of the world, accounts for the drive of the artist, what I have named the urge to create.

The project is a process of active imagination that induces revelations.

The fact that in the case of the artist, the project is most of the time individual explains superficially the resulting solitude. But at the core, *the feeling of solitude can also be seen as the result of the ecstatic nature of the conscious self.* The self feels estranged from itself, something that is manifested with acuity in the inevitable failure of project to have the self correspond with its projections. Thus the resulting mourning, at the end of projects, is not only a consequence of the loss of drive; the end of the project exacerbate the fallacious nature of the project's pretense : putting the subject at the center of the world by having him/her becoming this center.

The project as eternal promise is but a manifestation of the eternal promise of consciousness : the incarnation of the center as form. The center is real and unreal. It is real in the sense that it is a tangible force that pulls conscious being forward; it is unreal

in the sense that it can never be subsumed to anything in particular. It is dynamic and ever fleeting.

Thus the planning of the non-planning, something characteristic of artists, is linked to the center-periphery dynamics of the self. Intending non-intention becomes the specific refuge of artists, a specific management of the ecstatic nature of their selves, a specific form of the hiding in promises of projects.

The artist's themata makes the link between the paradoxical active imagination (it does not exist if you do not reinforce it, but it MUST exist outside of yourself) and the project (as eternal promise). It is this central life theme that provide enough drive to withstand the failure of the project. It makes this failure acceptable each time by presenting it as occasional (or local in anthropological parlance).

4.3.2 Active Imagination

Definitions of art are related to the center-periphery paradox of consciousness (being simultaneously at the center and at the periphery of oneself). 'Art' becomes a definition of the self. It becomes the specific project of a certain type of selves.

What I have called 'the critique as theatre of ideas', as a projection into discourse, is related to active imagination. This constant re-projection is what makes the piece 'happen'. It allows agent to be actively involved in its permanent reconstruction. This 'theatre of ideas' is also linked to the center-periphery paradox, because it is supplying the center. Through building discourse around a piece. agents get to get a sense that the center is exteriorized and made concrete. For a moment – the longer the better, if

this center is not threatening another center – the piece becomes the center of the world and thus alleviate the tension inherent to consciousness.

Creativity, as a positive escape (from the known, the old) is related to the eccentric/ek-static nature of the self. The Eureka is linked to the project : there is room for discovery at each stage. Therefore where is the project (as target) if the target moves and changes ? What is the identity of a project that is constantly re-defined –and the self is certainly one of those projects - ? Answer : the concept of 'identity' must be redefined outside the Aristotelician (A=A). 'Identity' is on the move, always. Therefore, where is the inhibiting nature of the project, if 'project' – as fixed entity - does not 'exist' ? Is it not in the paradox center-periphery itself ?

We see that *creativity must be linked to reflectivity, because it involves a relation self-self, and thus to awareness* : good projects (generating Eureka, or placing oneself in the eureka attitude/stance) make you forget about them (as project, as external to you).

What I describe as empty imagination, i.e. an imagination in loop with itself, that cut its ties to being, is related to the drive in creation, because this looping can in turn become self-generating. *Empty imagination is thus linked to the project, and to center-periphery dynamisms.* It is linked to the presentation of the self, and on two levels : 1) as a requirement of the center (what we usually call the self, or the agent), for example in the endlessness of selling oneself by oneself; 2) as a requirement of the periphery (what we usually call the other, culture, society, etc) for example when it is feeled that this selling of oneself is an imperative of the milieu and that it threatens 'authenticity'.

Interpretation, discourse, and the theatre of ideas are also related to empty imagination (as a wrapping of words by words, or closed looped thinking - 'reflectivity')

in the sense of social sciences), and to center-periphery dynamisms (i.e. hiding-creating the self in discourse).

In this sense, 'authenticity' (as a synonym of 'true imagination', or revelation) becomes a marker of non-division, of the unification of the self; this is the problematic of integration versus integrity that I discussed earlier: do we have integration of parts or dissolution of parts. 'Authenticity' is related to the center-periphery paradox : it marks the un-dividedness of the self, of awareness. 'Authenticity' could be said to mark the absence of reflectivity in awareness (i.e. no longer 'seeing oneself'), or it could be seen as a paramount reflectivity (i.e. being oneself).

4.3.3 Center-Periphery

On the topic of the Ego-centrism of artists, we can certainly observe that it is related to the project, and ultimately to one's life project. It is related to the center-periphery paradox of consciousness, notably in the coalescence self-work. It is related to the compulsive nature of/in creativity, and maybe seen as its result. Ego-centrism is also related to the imperative of novelty : the obligation to reach the new is the obligation to *be* the new. It forces one to focus on oneself as the ultimate product of creations. The imperative of the new, in the field of boosting the sense of self, is linked to center-periphery because, as Low argues, wanting to find wholeness in uniqueness (singularity of oneself) means cutting oneself off from the whole. In wanting to become the center of the world, as a way to reach the center and extinguish the pain of being at the center and at the periphery of oneself, the individual exacerbates the tension, because s/he creates her/himself as a part in a bigger whole.

On the topic of solitude : solitude, as retreat, defence or affirmation of the self, is related to fixating an ecstatic self. It is regulating the coalescence self-work, by either delineating frontiers (“this is me, and this is my work”), or by melting frontiers (“I am this : my work”). Solitude is related to the validation and authentication of Eureka, and of all the results of active imagination. Solitude becomes an instance of a private dialogue with the world, a conversation that becomes a reunification of the self. Or better said : solitude allows a penetration of the mystery of the one that is two. Thus solitude can be seen as a necessary and impossible expression of the nul point, the point where the paradox Being-Knowing would be solved (i.e. extinguished).

Seeking for consensus is linked to active imagination and to the center-periphery dynamic : it is looking for Being in/with Knowing. *The whole of double-binds / paradoxes can be seen as expression of the evolutionary and 'empty' (non-teleological) race toward the nul point, in Low's terms, itself an expression of the dynamic engendered by the paradox Being-Knowing*

4.4 Tentative anthropological Models

*People will tell you where they've gone
They'll tell you where to go
But 'till you get there, yourself
You'll never really know
Where some have found their paradise
Others just come to harm
- Joni Mitchell, Amelia*

Preamble :

My choice goes on the side of describing creativity as state (of consciousness, of being, of the self), not as product. I need to put a special emphasis on the modalities of its manifestation in subjects : even if insights are eventually discarded, this changes nothing to the nature of those insights. This a way to reassert my emphasis on process, not content. What is important is the way 'meaning' is presented, that is: the way insights store, encapsulate meaning, the way in which they are wholes. In short, *insights should be seen as a way of being-in-the-world, rather than a way of bringing more things into the world.*

The debate on inspiration during the Forum (section 3.2.2.4.1) shows that causal models still cause problems on the side of artists: many, if not most artists *do not want to know* how creativity works. As Ann Ramsden has it : "It would make me too self-conscious". Does this mean that to give justice to the notion itself, we should see creativity as the UNCAUSED ? In this section, I will present some suggestion for the design of truly anthropological models of creativity, and I will suggest 'creativity as the uncaused' as a way to rejoin Eastern epistemologies, which in passing have a couple centuries of advance on us on that question.

An anthropological model dealing with the notion of creativity must answer a fundamental question : what is 'creativity' ?. Corollary questions are : what/how is it to create ? How is creativity assessed, localized, measured ?

a- Creativity as voice of the self

- ***as mirror of self*** : When Andrew said that in his piece he meant to reveal his creative process, curator Marie Fraser replied : "every art work speaks about the creative process".

- ***as secret garden*** : the voice of the self is sometimes perceived as fragile; the self feels it has to find itself outside an existent other.

- ***as your own thing*** : creativity can be defined by the fact that it is yours. Creativity can be identified and measured by the degree to which the self recognizes itself in its creations. Again, if we admit the idea that the other is first a condition of the self – i.e. dividedness- then failing to see an other in one's productions means reaching a state of un-dividenedness.

- ***intimacy of produced images*** : Prof. Régimbald proposition of a 'small writing' (creative writing in the form of a correspondence to co-students) was exiting because it was calling on 'our own creativity': it promises to put ourselves in contact with ourselves in the most intimate way. We would get to know ourselves as that which we are, but also as that which we are not yet. *The self would get to contemplate itself as the other that it was to become.*

- ***as self in action*** : there was no problems as long as I was involved in studio work . For Nathalie it was the opposite : she dreaded the studio; for her there was no problem as

long as she could think and write about the work. What do these two situations have in common? Action. For the artistic self (as for the self in general, should we dare say?), 'action' seems to be the most efficient management of the tension center-periphery: it is throwing oneself in the tumbling forward.

-as self teaching : How do you know that you are creating? This is the simple and fundamental question that most linear views fail to answer. Do you need an expert committee to tell you that you are creating? How do you come to put the word 'new' on certain experiences and not others? My central hypothesis is that we turn in round if we consider creativity only in terms of social assessment: there must be something within the experience itself that tells you what it is. I argue that 'creativity' is first a modality of awareness, and that at least some of these modalities are self-evident, a view that is partaken with Eastern epistemologies.

b- Creativity as voice of an unspecified other (the work)

- as anti-expectation : the eureka is getting its definition precisely by the fact that it occurs when less expected.

-as non-self : thus, as voice from the outside, as emanation of Being, the creation can be defined as that which is not oneself. These would describe the paradigms that stay on the side of 'revelation' and strive to identify the source of creations.

- as (predestined) accident : an 'accident' can be meaningless. When meaning is attached to it, it is no longer an accident. It is a 'sign', a 'revelation, an 'intuition' etc.. The notion of 'will' is a cultural construct that strives to explain the mystery of the relation Knowing-Being.

- ***as being called from the outside*** : granting reality to the 'outside' of the knowing self – Being in other words – is not a luxury but a necessity.

- ***as awakening (non-reflection)*** : what is an 'to awaken' ? Without resorting to Eastern practices of awakening, of which most of us know nothing but bookish descriptions, we can rely on our own daily experience. What does it mean to 'wake up' in the morning ? This is the kind of question that does not necessarily call for an answer, but for a deepening of the questioning itself. Early in my field work, I wrote : "All this happens in flashes. It is like bubbles of awakening. You see something unrelated [to what you are doing at the moment] and the link is made. You 'use' it in a way, but it is non-instrumental. It is like a mirror : you just happen to pass in front of it".

c- As eccentric movement (generative ecstasy-ing, productive dividing)

- ***as unanswered , re-answered question*** : we judge of creative endeavours by their outcome, but creating is a movement. It is a question to the world that is constantly reformulated. A way to penetrate this endlessness of the questioning is to ask the following question : "What is a question ?" This is the ultimate question. For even in trying to answer it, one cannot the questioning process. To create can be seen as answering an endless questioning.

- ***as ek-stasis in attainment*** : to create is like wanting to be where you are not. It is looking for unity outside unity, looking for the self outside the self, in 'things'. Is there a possibility to see 'creation' outside this striving for the new ? If we were to find ethnographic data about people who live outside this striving, would we still be justified to apply the vocable 'create' to their endeavours ?

- *as escape, as 'not-wanting-to'* : to create is often a hiding away, a flight forward.

Saying this is not pejorative, and is not meant to psychologize agents by saying that creativity is something else than itself, something unavowed. Creativity can hardly be identified, it seems, without this desire, this push forward, outside of the past and present. In this sense, 'dis-course' (which means running in all directions) is the creative escape par excellence.

- *as foreseeing* : I already expounded on the fact that creative acts make 'solution' and 'problem' coalesce. This does not explain why, as one said, 'intelligence solves problems, creativity creates problems'. The energy spent in finding mental solutions to problems and problems to solve is obviously burning a tension. What tension is that ? In the field I found that I "try to seize and grasp non-reflective occurrences as if the state they put me in was *in* the surroundings in which I find myself at the moment." I try to maintain myself in a state of non-reflective awareness by clinging to it's presumed 'cause'. If I focus on the content of those non-reflective moments, I get a sense of Déjà-vu, of foreseeing, for this content seems of a special 'relevance' to my doings of the moments (in this 'relevance', not only the present adjust to what was, but the past is also made to fit to the present); on the other hand, if I focus on the fact of these non-reflective moments, I see the tension. I see the self in a constant ek-stasis. The context then becomes secondary, if not meaningless.

- *creativity as endlessness* : when I asked Vancouver artist Andreas Kahre if he was not tired of having to invent the world everyday, he said : "The endlessness is like the color of my hands. It is part of myself"

d- As concentric anti-movement (unification)

- ***Creativity as different knowledge*** : “not conviction, but absence of doubts; not knowledge, but absence of ignorance.” By coalescing solution and problem, subject and object, creative acts might propose a different relation to the world.

- ***Creativity as flow*** : we are indebted to Csikszentmihalyi (1996) for the notion of Flow in creativity. When performing my presentation of an invented etymology during an in-class group critique, I experienced a sense of flow, of continuous movement in creation. Likewise, creativity was addictive because at its best it would put me in this sense that ‘me’ and ‘life’ were a same flow.

- ***Creativity as magnet*** : to create is enticing because it generate a center that is dynamic. Could this account for the constant – and necessary - re-generation of cultures ?

- ***Creativity as different from a re-combination (not bricoleur)*** : to be able to identify creativity is also to be able to distinguish it from what it is not. Levi-Strauss’ model is not satisfying, not because there is no creativity in recombinations, but because it is a model that still tries to identify it through an ‘exterior gaze’. What is a re-combination ? Where does the prefix ‘re’ come from ? Are not all combinations, all ‘compositions’ genuine ? What allows us to decide that the elements that are re-combined remain intact ? What instance grants identity to things ? These are the question that invariably turn the mirror onto ourselves, as conscious beings. We just turn in round when we take ‘same’ and ‘different’ for granted.

- ***Creativity as state of discovery*** : more promising (creative ?) is the view of creativity as state of being. As I said, I could disregard the content to focus on the state of novelty. Flashes could eventually be discarded , this changed nothing to the ‘ambiance’ found in

revelations. I argue that it is this ambiance, this privileged contact of the self with itself that accounts for the addictive nature of creative acts.

- ***Creativity as not-knowing*** : knowledge, as it is conceived both in the West and in the East, is dichotomic by definition; it is always the knowledge of something by someone. In creativity, we get sometimes a chance of experimenting a partial retreat out of knowledge – as divided awareness. Jean-Pierre Perreault said he relies on ‘conscious oblivion’ to maintain his creative freshness. Forgetting what he has just done is the only way for him to keep producing the unknown.

- ***No doubt, no ignorance, no division*** : so the vocable ‘knowledge’ might not be the more precise term to indicate this state of non-division. At the same time, every term we choose or invent will always betray the divided nature of consciousness, for language is based on the relation predicate-predicated. No words can convey what is outside words.

- ***Creativity as unifying principle*** : By colliding subject and object, creative states may propose a re-unification of the subject/object.

e- Creativity as the uncaused

- ***“Creating is making something out of nothing”*** – Larry Tremblay. Artists have come to resist paradigms of creation ex-nihilo, and for good reasons. These paradigms were soiled by their cultural provenance : neo-platonism. What is ‘nothing’ ? Sartre says : ‘néant’ is consciousness itself, the void is negation, negation exists only through the ‘for oneself’ (le pour-soi); Man is the one who brings nothingness into the world. Eastern epistemologies seem to say that the void is not consciousness. It is a state of undividedness, the origin of everything. Man is in this void, not this void in Man.

'Causalism', or determinism, is another phenomena that is brought to the world by Man, seemingly. What is a 'cause' ? Is it a story, a myth, and in that sense is it linked to 'time' ? Or is it more than that, something outside ourselves, outside time ? If causality is necessarily linked to time, then it is easy to envision that it is relative, since time seems to be relative (to space, to states of consciousness, etc.).

(Section) 5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Questions of awareness : Return to Low's model and validation

Throughout this dissertation, I strove to see if the state of creativity would have something in common with states of non-reflective awareness, as they are described in Eastern epistemologies concerned with the phenomena of 'awakening'. I seem to present evidence that creative states are linked to non-reflectivity in awareness. But am I not getting too fast ? Is it not too quick a generalisation ? What allows us to go from a concrete situation in an art school, to the situation of 'contemporary artists in general', to 'creative states at large' ? Answer : it is our own definition of creativity that allows this criss-crossing. It is that which we strive to identify that allows us to see it – or not – in the things we examine. In other words, 'creativity' would not exist if we were not looking for it. There is not 'creativity', there in the world, and us trying to find it. We create the object we want to find with the mere act of searching it. Of course we are caught into an Hermeneutic circle : we don't truly know what we are looking for before having found it (Bateson & Bateson). And even then, there won't ever be any final word on this question, for if we stop searching, the thing vanishes. To perceive is to intend (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty). But at the same time this means that we know already what we are looking for, otherwise how could we recognize it when we find it ?

But there is a second and more pressing question. In equating the creative attitude with non-reflective awareness, I seem to forget an important part of the data : the addictive nature of creativity, the inclination to neurosis in professionals, the empty imagination. When I asked the question to Low, I voiced my question in the terms of

Buddhism : escaping the wheel of birth and death. There is a formidable area of research here, especially in the way non-Western epistemologies saw and see this problem. For example, in Buddhism there is the notion of Karma, or law of cause and effect. Karma is another name for the wheel of birth and death : the wheel is kept turning through the constant re-creation – because of desire – of forms in consciousness. A Zen koan tells of a Zen master that was ask a question : ‘Is it possible to escape Karma ?’ The master answered yes, and for having said yes, he was condemned to live 500 lives as a fox. After 500 lives as a fox he met another Zen master and beg him to ask him the same question so that he could redeem himself. The master asked the fox : ‘Is there an escape to Karma ?’. The Master/fox answered ‘no’ and was thus liberated from his fox-shell. The irony : Saying that it is possible to escape causes-and-effects, one get chained to causes-and-effects; saying it is impossible to escape causes-and effects, one is liberated from causes-and-effects. The irony does not stop there. Mumon, a commentator of this koan, added in his commentary : ‘He must have enjoyed his 500 lives as a fox’...(Low : 1995)

Low says that the problem illustrates the difference between the Hinayana and the Mayahana traditions in Buddhism, concerning ‘the wheel of birth and death’. The Hinayana claims that it is possible and desirable to escape the wheel of birth and death into a state of nirvana (i.e. attain personal salvation). The Mayahana says that this state is not the true liberation : it is neither possible nor desirable to escape the wheel of birth and death. It is only by being one with the suffering that one escapes suffering. The trick is that ‘being one with’ is not ‘being identified with’. When we go see a good movie, we are identified to it. When we claim identity with our personality, we are identified with it. What is it to be one with without being identified to ?

Reflectivity :

Throughout this paper, informants allude to 'accidents' as a corollary to 'creation'. Accidents are either what creates the new, or what awakens you to it. What is an 'accident'? Something outside predication ? Something outside reflective awareness ? What do we mean by 'reflectivity' ?

Throughout this study, I have taken the French translation of awareness- presence – as a guideline to evaluate my state and that of my colleague. What does it mean 'to be present ?'

There were instances where I felt clearly that the presence was folded onto itself. I felt trapped into a world which for that reason did not seem real. The case of my descent to hell while painting illustrate one of these instances. I also described instances when I had the impression that artistic events were meant to induce a dream. Only when coming out of them did I realize I was not 'awake'. Are such categorisation as 'awake' and 'dreaming' still useful ? Can we avoid them? Is a total relativism possible ?

The question of grading or even only mapping regions of consciousness brings forward a more pressing question : why do we want to do that ? Why do we want to map consciousness, if not to know if it is possible to know the world differently ? And what interest do we have in this 'difference' if not a belief in the possibility for a betterment of our lives ? When we see the billions that are now spent on creating films, and when we witness the mesmerizing of whole generations with the illusions of video games, aren't we justified to ask what is the purpose of all this ? We can ask the question on an ethical level : billions for entertainment versus billions to alleviate hunger and sickness. We can also ask the question on another level : why do we live for? What is this thing called 'life'

?In fact this question brings us back to the topic more readily than we could think : Is life the constant stumbling that we mundanely call 'the rat race'? Can we avoid running, and if not, aren't the creators in a better position to know what is 'life' ? Or is it that obnubilated by the products of their creation, creators are doomed to forget about the process, about the fact of life itself ?

When I asked the question to Low, I said that I was intrigued by the saying that Zen practioners are 'artists without an art' (Laramée : 1997). His reply was :

"In a certain way, creativity and meditation are the two faces of a same coin : when we are creating, we are in a highly meditative state. We penetrate into another space, and it is from there that we write, paint or meditate. There is however a fundamental difference between Zen and the creative process. In Zen, we work with what does not have form; in the creative process, you want your work to end up into a form. Even if [Zen and creativity] have the same root, they go into opposite directions... That we be Zen meditator or artist, we are tormented in the same way. We want to grasp, to understand, to know. But there are certain person who realize that, whatever the experience you are about to live, 'it's not going to be it', it won't be what we are looking for. And despite of this, we have to continue. I think that the artist stops where s/he can grasp : "Yes it is possible, I can lay this down on paper, I can say it, I can paint it". The person who meditate also has this sensation, but she knows she must go beyond. Stopping there would be a failure." (in Laramée : 1997)

5.2 Ethnography as Creation

« La musique et la peinture ont aussi perdu presque tout attrait pour moi...Mon esprit semble être devenu une sorte de machine qui broie des montagnes de faits pour en extraire des lois générales. Mais pour quelle raison cela devrait-il entraîner l'atrophie de cette partie de mon cerveau dont dépendaient les plaisirs les plus élevés ?...Si je devais refaire ma vie, je me ferais une règle de lire de la poésie et d'écouter de la musique une fois par semaine ». – Charles Darwin, in Muret : Les Arts thérapies

The last part of the conclusion is meant to fulfill my promise : making sense of doing anthropology, for a practitioner of non-discursive endeavors. Ethnographers, like artists, live of the hope to 'get it' one day. As an apprentice in cultural anthropology, I felt an urge to 'find it' and put it down on the paper, and this urge was the same as the one which has me making art works. I felt I was on a safari and I wanted to bring back a trophy. Otherwise, why would you leave home ?

Ethnography, as art, seems to be enmeshed in the net of active imagination. The ethnographer is a searcher, and nothing would be found if not of this search, if not of a specific question. This seems like stating the obvious, but it is of some consequence when the searcher claims exactness, science, objectivity, etc. **What is it then when you *have to find something to search* ?** Is not ethnography born of the same malaise that has the artist looking for God knows what, piece after piece ? Can ethnography be considered, as imagination, a malady ?

In dressing in the guises of the ethnologist for the third time,⁹⁰ this time with the special mandate of 'graphing' the 'ethny', I felt more than ever the perils of fixating informant's voices. What was dangerous was not so much the fixity – it would have to be read and read again anyway; what annoyed me was that I clearly perceived my role in this process of fixation. The focus was mine, the questions were mine, the resulting themes were mine. In short, the finds were...mine. Was I doing self portrait ?

In ethnography as in art, I am caught into identity processes. I am what I do, and I must find something that has never been found before, in order to find an identity. To be someone, I must be, in some way, like nobody else. This being said, this is only the surface of the problem. We cannot reduce ethnography and art to the social necessities of agents. For that would be turning in round : where those necessities come from ?

When we asked Professor Leblanc, in an anthropology class devoted to writing, what was the aim of the thesis proposal, since it was clear to everyone that the final result would have very little to do with the result, her answer was very revealing to me. She said that "the thesis proposal is to verify that you can dream". It is *to verify that you can create the categories that you will seek to find in the field*. If you don't embark with questions, you won't bring answers. But who needs answers ? What to do of answers when you have no longer any question ? Could you not leave empty minded, and be like a blank page on which the events would write ? Would that be ethnography ? But firstly, is it possible to be a blank page ? Is not life itself a question that finds in us, humans, the way of its expression ? Outside the specific form that this questioning comes to take depending on the era and people involved, is not life itself a question ?

⁹⁰ While being voluntary worker in Africa, I was in charge of the 'journal de bord' of our working team; as mentioned in the introduction, I did amateur field work in Peru from 1992 to 1995.

There are many entries in my field notes where I question the fact of *writing everything down*. At many occasions, I wonder if this is not *a kind of mania*. Sylvie Lacerte, a curator who was also a teacher assistant, mentioned a very interesting aspect of collecting. She said that for a collector, the compulsive obsession was to find the missing object. In a way, the collection could never be complete. **Is the anthropologist a collector, compulsive, obsessive ?** Collecting bits and pieces of peoples lives, putting these pieces in cabinets de curiosités, is not the anthropologist expressing a collective neurosis ?

I don't know if I am trying to make a point here, but if so, it is certainly not ethical. The question I bring forward is that although post-modern anthropology already familiarized us with the fact that the researcher is part of the research, it does not mean that we should – or can – abandon the quest for objectivity. My interviewing in this specific context led me to think that one could prove or disprove anything. There will always be ways to put words in the mouth of informants. But the fact that truths are constructed, imagined, does not mean that they they are not true; to say that would mean to be either naïve or dishonest. **Ethnographers are like artists : they fabricate worlds:** “True Hallucinations” as Terence McKenna had it. The power of art, as the power of fictions, of myths, is a mystery. To reduce the mystery to the world to ‘illusions’ would be self-deceiving. What is an ‘illusion’, if everything is an illusion ?

But to say that ethnographers are like artists is not to say that they are artists. The difference seems to be in *the kind of participation that each activity entails*. Intellectual knowledge is a Knowing at arms length, a communication; art is at its best a

communion. And then, what about ethnographers like Jackson, who seem to cross the border between literature and ethnography ?

One of the interesting findings of my field work is that ethnographers may envision the possibility in the future to use **Art as method** for doing ethnographical enquiry. Not only art as object of study, but art as a way to reach other levels of interaction with their hosts. I do not mean to ask informants to do art, in a sort of mimicking of the methods of art-therapy. I mean that ethnographers could study – and practice, why not- contemporary art making as a way to learn how they could use its methods as ‘culture openers’. If ethnography is a process of active imagination in which nothing can be found if not through an intense wishing – what in other realms is called ‘faith’ – then the ethnographer could learn of professional imaginers.

But that brings us back to the antinomy of discourse and non-discursive practices, doesn't it ? Can ethnographers jump outside their homeland of words ? Low says intellectuals have a hard time with the Zen practice (as with all non discursive practices, one could say) (Low 1995 : 60). *But Low says that while it is harder to practice Zen and to come to awakening in the West, when there is Kensho (satori), it is of far greater intensity.* So this specific hardship might be seen as everything else but an impossibility. Low himself got his first Kensho in the midst of an intense writing (his first book). After all, in Zen as in creativity, the pain is not the unfortunate outcome of the practice, it is its very fuel. A student of Zen writes : “It took a long time to realize that the pain (not Zen) is the tool. To put it another way, the pain or the difficulty or the question provides not only the exact point of entry, but also the energy to go deeper into the practice.”⁹¹

But I would be mischievous to let the reader on such an easy way out. No more than the artist was the student in anthropology free of paradoxes and conundrums. Just to name a few of these :

- Questioning the role of discourse in art, does that come from discourse or non-discourse ?
- Seeing creativity as manifestation of the continuity-change paradox, does that view come from the continuity or the change part of the equation ? (in other words : is studying creativity academically stemming from creativity or from routine ?)

So did I finally find answers to my query ? Yes and no. Yes, in a sense, and the answer is: there is no answer to the reasons for art outside the practice of art. And no, because there is no answers to the reasons for art outside the practice of art. And still, I know now that I will continue to look for these answers. It won't be possible to stop trying to put words on non-verbal endeavours. As Low says, and I leave him the last word :

“Words cannot touch it.

And yet,

What else do we have, but words ?”

⁹¹ Travers, Alan : « As Long as it Takes ». in Zen Gong 11-i, Zen Center of Montreal, July 2002.

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(Section) 7 APPENDICES

7.1 LOW'S CHART OF DUALISTIC THINKING

Low's model could be seen as plain old structuralism. In *The Butterfly's Dream*, Low presents an array of different forms of thinking and the various way in which they each deal with opposites, and I think this tableau is useful to see how the model goes beyond structuralism.

(0-) Un-reflective Awareness	Beyond the Yes and the No
1- Ambiguity	The Yes as a No
2- Creative thinking	Yes and No happily united
3- Dilemma	Yes and No at the same time, but neither Yes nor No
4- Inquietude	Can't resolve the Yes and No
5- Moral imperative	Affirm the Yes over the No and the No over the Yes
6- Graduated thinking	Affirm the Yes over the No and the No over the Yes
7- Alternate thinking	From Yes to No
8- Interior monologue	Neither Yes nor No
9- Dream	Interchangeable Yes and No
(10-) Sleep	Yes and No are absent

Ten stages go from total awareness to sleep. A brief description of each of these states follows. Un-reflective awareness is awareness without content. It is not an awareness of a 'thing'. It is awareness as its own thing, as its own being. In the Sleep, we

loose consciousness but we do not lose awareness. The fact that being called by our names can be enough to wake us up out of deep sleep is an indication of this. Certain persons who were declared clinically dead (heart and brain have ceased to function for a while) nevertheless report a complete and continual awareness of all the process.

Alternate thinking serves as a reference to evaluate all the remaining forms of thinking. Alternate thinking is akin to binary logic. The either/or logic states that a thing must be either black or white, not both at the same time. "Are you coming, yes or no?" is the type of thinking involved. Low comments that the fact that our civilization is literally re-creating itself through binary logic machines indicates how accustomed we are to this mode of thinking.

Graduate (gradual) thinking is like putting a dimmer instead of an on/off switch. The answer to "Are you coming" could be: "Maybe". Graduate thinking presents one with possibilities.

Moral imperative imposes a decision. It tells you that you should decide whether you come or not. It is an order, a command. It presents the choice between Yes and No not as a possibility, but as a necessity.

Inquietude comes with a feeling of incertitude, confusion and anxiety. The inquietude does not have the clarity of alternative thinking, nor the flexibility of gradual thinking. Rather, it has the rigidity of a 'either/or' and the uncertainty of a 'more or less'.

We are in a Dilemma when we have to chose between two good solutions. What distinguishes the dilemma from the ambiguity is that in a dilemma, a decision has to be made. Not to take a decision would be a decision. For example if you are pregnant, and you hesitate between aborting or keeping the baby, a decision will be made anyway.

Creative thinking cuts through problems. It imports a new element into the problem. It goes beyond the yes and no, because it brings in a third pole that makes the yes and no obsolete. Low gives the example of a problem : An elevator in a big building was so slow that people were starting to be angry at the management. Someone had the idea of taking care of the wait 'instead of fighting it. The solution was to put mirror in the elevator so that people would use the time of their travel to groom and admire themselves... ! [I heard somewhere that what distinguishes intelligence from creativity is that intelligence solves problems, while creativity creates problems to be solved].

Ambiguity is generally ignored, except in the art field. A poem refuses certitude and asks its reader to stand still in the middle of the tension. Ambiguity refuses resolution. It withstands contradictions without ignoring them. Low thinks that life is the impossible research of a solution to the ambiguity of life. Ambiguity is different from duality (where the yes is different from the no); it is different from polarity (where the yes battles with the no); but the most important and most difficult thing to grasp is that ambiguity is not complementarity. In complementarity, the two things are interdependent

(like the nut and the bolt). In the ambiguity, the yes is the no at the same time that the yes is not the no. Low asserts that ambiguity is the basic nature of consciousness, and to see why, he will put it in relation with the other forms of thinking. Thinking comes from the human need for unity, Low explains. Inquietude comes from the impossibility to Join the two view 'in a greater unity. Since the unity of the yes and no is not possible, experience becomes painful. Another word for unity is "identity". A teenager passes through hard time when he/she is no longer a child but not yet an adult. [Anthropologists, from Van Gennep to Victor Turner have a fascination for what they call 'liminal periods'. Most rites of passages are based on the reinforcement or the creation of periods where things and people are 'neither/nor' what they used to be and what they are to become]. "An apple is not an apple and that's why it's called an apple" is a Buddhist saying that expresses the fact that everything changes. Heraclite used to say that you never bathe twice in the same river. But yet a river is a river. Dilemmas are at the very basis of all our life, Low says. One way to overcome dilemmas is to transform them into problems. Solving the problem allows us to relax. Another solution is to use creativity.