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A Descriptive Study of Women
Using Video to Explore Self-Image

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ABSTRACT

A Descriptive Study of
Women Using Video to Explore Self-image

Louise Drouin

This thesis describes four video workshops during which I worked as facilitator with four women. The aim was to explore self-image through masks, objects, and gestures. After each workshop, problematic issues were identified. The main questions that recurred involved the nature of conflict for women. The discussion of these questions is organized into sections and discussed in relation to the literature about the socialization of women and women and art.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

VIDEOTAPE

Women and Self-image

Accompaning this thesis is a videotape which contains excerpts taken from the four workshops I conducted on the theme of self-image exploration through masks, objects and gestures.

Part one is an edited exploratory assemblage of image and sound excerpts taken from the workshops. Part two contains the "performance" segments of workshop 2 (Objects).

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since there are so few non-institutional support systems existing today for women it is important to provide this possibility through alternative means for women to interchange ideas and to give women the possibility and habit of being self-generative.

I see the art education field as an agent for cultural change. As June King McFee (1975) points out the biggest force for change is women's own changed self-images and the opportunity for them to reach their potential in a broader range of activities and to develop their potential in more ways than our stereotypes generally permit. Feminist art education involves the notion that art can be aesthetically and socially effective at the same time. (Lippard 1980) It also means actively working on developing an awakened female consciousness and changing the status of women world-wide.

I conducted a series of four, three-hour video workshops for women over a period of five consecutive weeks. The main objective was for the participants to investigate their self-image in the context of archetypal and stereotypic images of women. I used an exploratory, process-oriented method. My initial main role as facilitator of the workshops was to provide an open-ended structure in which all members could feel they were participating.

Attention was given to certain aspects such as the interaction between the subject, the object and the camera. The developmental sequence of session topics was projected as follows: Masks, Personal objects, Gesture.

The main sources of information used to document the workshops were my notes, and the video-tapes of the process and the performances. I observed and described the general group dynamics, individual and group interaction and the particular development of themes; and outlined the issues and questions that emerged.

The next four chapters provide and outline, objectives and descriptions of each of the four workshops. Following each description is included an identification of issues that emerged. The main questions that recurred involved the nature of conflict for women. The description of these questions is organized into sections and discussed in relation to the literature about the socialization of women and women and art.

CHAPTER II

WORKSHOP 1 - MASKS

Outlines and Aims

1. **Preparation** (90 minutes)

    Aims: to introduce the orientation of the workshops to the
    participants and the participants to each other

    to make masks from a variety of materials

    to create environments by making slides and overhead
    transparencies using markers and collage techniques and
    projecting them on bodies and backgrounds

2. **Performance** (90 minutes)

    Aims: to become familiar with, and explore the video camera,
    sound and lighting

    to give gesture and voice to characters emerging from the
    masks

    to create a video performance

3. **Reflection** (30 minutes)

    Aims: to look at the tape

    to discuss the reactions and obervations

Description of Session 1

The workshops were held in a small television studio. For the first one I arrived one hour early (mid afternoon) to set-up the video equipment and arrange the room. I wanted to create a stimulating environment. I emptied the contents of a suitcase and a bag full of art materials and junk collected over the years on a table: rolls of different colors of gel paper and plastic and fabric, netting, wool, lace, string, ribbon, buttons, shells, beads, cardboard, plaster of paris gauze, clear sheets of acetate and 35mm film, super 8 film, markers, scissors, glue, old frames for glasses, natural sheeps wool, etc.

When the participants arrived I introduced myself as a facilitator-observer-participant. I explained that my role was to provide the setting (time and place) and propose a plan (five consecutive workshops with five suggested themes) for us to openly explore; and that I would document this process which would form the basis for a thesis. As facilitator I asked them to introduce themselves and discuss their reasons for taking the workshops.

Ann was a third year fine arts student and a poet. She was seeking ways to combine her poetry and visual arts and performance. She was also

hoping that seeing herself and performing in front of a camera would help reduce the self-consciousness she felt when publicly reading poetry.

Ruth was a young unemployed waitress who was in the process of realizing her dream of being a blues and rock singer-guitarist. She had strong opinions about male-female stereotypes and relationships. She was interested in exploring video because she eventually wanted to create her own rock-video. Because of her lack of experience in performing, she felt self-conscious and awkward. She hoped to get some feedback on her body-image and become more comfortable with herself through the video workshops.

Lynn was an art teacher taking a year off to study at the graduate level. During this time she was also going through a period of self-examination, evaluating her academic accomplishments and personal needs. She saw the video workshops as an extentions of this process. She was also interested in using video as a medium in her art teaching.

Ava was a Communication Arts student. She saw these workshops as an extra opportunity to explore the medium in a group setting.

Lise was a professional actress. Through these workshops she was hoping to find the answer as to why she was not getting as many job offers as previously.

When the introductions were finished the workshop began. I then asked the participants to either make masks, choosing from the variety of materials displayed or to create environments by making slides and overhead transparencies or to explore the video camera. Three of the participants were attracted by the materials and were quickly busy making masks and slides and overhead transparencies. Ruth was interested in the camera and explored its possibilities. Lise did not want to make anything with any materials. She seemed restless (she was the only one who was not an art student). She walked around looking to see how and where she could fit in. She moved objects in front of a screen and played with light effects creating different patterns and textures. She was attracting the attention of the others. At this point everyone was making something commenting on each other's work. I was also participating involved in making a mask, and constantly being interrupted, checking the camera, providing a stapler or making sure the video equipment was operating.

I was feeling increasingly uncomfortable about Lise's restlessness and guilty for not attending to her needs. Soon after, while the camera was pointing at me, she walked up to me and aggressively smeared lipstick, eye make-up on my mask, added a plastecene nose, fake hair on my head and glasses on my eyes and said (her words are in past tense - after doing it) "you wanted a mask, you've got one now". I felt like I had become her puppet and the group's attention was focused on this impromptu

performance. I took off my mask to be the facilitator since I felt the need to make some suggestions. Lynn created a sunviser and sunglasses to wear as a mask and she said "I'm going to the beach". The slides were now being projected on a curtain background. Everyone was responding to the images; associations were emerging; some of the words to emerge were: beach, jungle, Club Med, breeze, water, wind, boardwalk.

Because Lynn and I were the only ones who made 3d masks, we were designated to be the performers. Ann assumed the role of director and spontaneously began to narrate the action that was taking place. She titled the opening scene; the birth of Venus and Neptune. Lynn lies down on the boardwalk which becomes a raft as she paddles the water with her hands. I went behind the curtain waiting for a cue or the right moment to come out. Suddenly I was pushed out from behind the curtain still uncertain about my role. Meanwhile the narrator was dictating our actions: "Primitive woman and women on the beach. Cave woman meets modern-day woman. One is emerging from a primitive life-form, and one is in repose on the beach". We responded like puppets acting out her commands. The director-narrator then stepped in front of the camera and gave a spontaneous critique referring to what had happened as "non-dramatic action that did not take place. There is not much to say except to talk about the atmospheric qualities of the presentation".

Finally, she interviewed passersby asking individuals to come forward. "Did you identify with the characters?" -Someone answered, "It was kind of personal". During the interviews the remaining members of the group became spectators.

We looked at the video and the first workshop ended at this point because we had run out of time.

Identification of Issues - Session 1

The main issue in this session for me was the conflict over my

multiple role as participant-facilitator-observer. This situation seemed

to create competition and power struggles with the group. For Lise the

position of director seemed to be vacant. Being an actress by profession

she probably expected to have a director tell her what to do. And perhaps

it was to fill this vacancy that she became director and aimed her

aggression at me.

Ann said that she always played the role of negotiator in family

conflict- situations and class leader in school situations, taking on

tasks that others did not want. Her response to the lack of leadership

was to jump in and come to the rescue.

Lynn felt manipulated and frustrated at having been told what to do.

During this first session I felt torn in many directions by the

multiple tasks of my three-fold role of participant-observer-facilitator.

As an observer I was recording, describing, analysing and evaluating group

dynamics, identifying emerging themes and processes; As facilitator I was

a time-keeper, provider of structure, getting input and feedback and

making sure everyone was participating. As a participant I was involved

in the process and performance.

It became clear that I could not maintain all three parts of the role without all of them suffering. I had to re-evaluate my role in the sessions. Since I was the initiator of the workshops I felt a responsibility towards the group to provide them with a framework that would facilitate the process through which the participants could increase their self-awareness. In giving up the facilitator role I might have jeopordized this potential. I could not dispense with my role as observer as it was providing me with the basis for my thesis. So very reluctantly, I felt that I was left with no choice but to give up my participant role; i.e., to avoid inside group involvement. This also meant changing my status from a more equal member as participant to a less equal (closer to the role of teacher) member as observer-facilitator only. I was also risking the possibility that the participants would be more likely to feel as if they were the objects of an experiment.

Having chosen to ensure that the participants receive maximum benefit from the workshops and partly out of fear of "total chaos"; and, in consideration of the time limitations, I decided to establish a structure for the following workshops to ensure full individual involvement.

CHAPTER III

WORKSHOP 2 - OBJECTS

Outline and Aims

1. **Exploration** (30 minutes)

   Aims (for each participant):

   to introduce each personal object

   to consider how each object relates to its owner

   to interact with the object as if it were a person

   to find out if the object is a separate entity

   to find out if the object has a life of its own

   to find out the personal meaning of the object

   to find out how the object changes in different contexts

2. **Performance** (90 minutes)

   Aims: to explore the findings about the object through video, using lighting and sound effects

   to consider the camera variables; i.e., zooming towards or away from, selecting close-ups or long shots and blurring or focusing

   to try different ways of staging the object; for example, lighting it from above and below

to experiment with sound effects, for example, by
manipulating the microphone, scratching, crunching paper,
shaking materials, blowing, banging, knocking and voice
modulating

to create a video performance
(each person is alloted 20 minutes to create a 5 minute
performance being the director and the rest of the other
participants as "crew")

3.   Reflection (30 minutes)

     Aims: to look at tape

             to discuss the reactions and the observations

Description of Session 2

The second workshop was being held in the evening from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. Everyone showed up except Lise, the actress. I started the workshop explaining my interpretation of the events of the previous workshop, and my decision to abandon the role of participator. No one objected. I stressed the importance of structuring the time so that everyone could benefit the most. Everyone agreed.

Ava arrived first and announced that she had to leave at 9:00 p.m. Ruth and Lynn arrived between 7:00 and 7:30 p.m. Ann could not arrive before 8:00 p.m. because of a class conflict. Ava brought two legs, a table leg and a doll's leg. Lynn brought a plaster gauze body cast of the front of her torso. Ruth brought her guitar and Ann brought slides of her paintings.

Ava started first because she said that she had to leave early. She said she had little attachment toward her chosen objects. She placed them on a table in front of a big screen (6 feet by 6 feet) that was in the studio; it looked like a trampoline on its side. She experimented with lighting from different angles. As she moved her doll and bed leg in many directions creating a dance, part of the group were behind the screen

creating sound effects with pieces of wood, bells and a variety of
percussion instruments. Someone else was improvising with the camera.
The twenty minutes passed very quickly. We viewed the 5 minute tape.

Lynn requested that she direct for the next 20 minutes. She brought
her objects in a large green garbage bag and she announced that it was to
be an unveiling. She created an intimate setting, giving special
attention to the lighting. She placed two chairs in front of the screen,
sat down and invited Ann to join her. The performance began as she
unveiled her object, a plaster of paris gauze body cast of the front of
her torso. She told Ann why and how she did this and what it represented
to her. She referred to it as an internal-external vessel contrasting the
difference in texture between the two, the outside being smooth and
superficial and the inside revealing every line and contour. She said she
was more interested in the inside, a metaphor for what was going on inside
her body as opposed to her external appearance. She completed her
five-minute tape and it was viewed by the group.

Ruth asked the participants to dance and asked me to be on camera.
She then created a simple setting, using the sliding curtain in the studio
as a background set and putting emphasis on lighting. She sang an old
rythm and blues song and played the guitar while the others danced behind
her.

Being on camera, I focused on the movements and shadows. They repeated the performance twice and Ruth was happy with the results.

Ann announced to the group that she brought slides of her art work and a piece of music for her performance. Because we started late, we were running behind schedule and we had to decide between Ann doing her performance and viewing and discussing the tapes of Ruth's, Ava's and Lynn's performances. Ann expressed that she did not mind missing her turn because she felt rewarded by her involvement in Lynn's performance. The tapes were viewed but there was no time for discussion.

Identification of Issues — Session 2

In contrast to workshop 1, workshop 2 was more structured to try to guarantee that everyone have a chance to engage in all aspects; i.e., as director, as actor and as a crew member.

Ava expressed that she felt "lukewarm" about her venture. She said that when given the opportunity to manipulate, interact and interpret these objects in such a limitless way that she felt frustrated. In spite of the freedom she did not feel excited with the results. It seems to me that the issue being raised here was one of having too many choices, one of having too short a time limit to investigate too many options and consequently not having enough time to work on any one of them in depth.

Lynn presented her plaster-of-paris-gauze body cast as a metaphor for her inner self and as a means to investigate the complexity of her self-image. She revealed this vulnerable inner self to the rest of the group in her authentic interaction with Ann; this seemed evident in the video feedback. Ann however seemed to be self-consciously aware of the camera; I felt that she was playing the role of an interviewer and that this was preventing an authentic response. In viewing the tape afterwards she was surprised at the verity of their interaction; her expectation had been that it would have appeared more theatrical. This raised another issue for me: is there a conflict between her role-image and self-image?

CHAPTER IV

WORKSHOP 3 — GESTURE

Outline and Aims

1. Exploration (30 minutes)

   Aims: to introduce the "language" of gesture

   to observe:

   hand movements when talking

   body postures when sitting and talking

   body movement when walking

   body movement in space

   facial expression, especially through the eyes

   to reflect on:

   the effect of these gestures

   the extent to which they are used consciously

   their meaning

2. Elaboration (60 minutes)

   Aims: to collect gestures that have personal meaning or identity and improvise with them

   to choose a partner, exchange gestures and link them together with your partner to discuss their use and choreograph a sequence

3. **Performance** (30 minutes.)

    Aims: to explore choreography in the context of video

             to create a video performance

4. **Reflection** (30 minutes)

    Aims: to look at tape

             to discuss the reactions and observations

DESCRIPTION OF SESSION 3

Having had limited experience in movement, improvisation and dance, I invited a dance student to share her expertese with us. I did not ask permission of or announce it to the group ahead of time as it was a spontaneous decision.

In preparation for the session I set up the camera facing the door to capture the participants as they came in. This was to provide them with one example of their body in a sequence of gestures. I set up the table and chairs so that everyone could sit down. After they all arrived I introduced Mia, the guest, to the group and presented them with the agenda. At this point I said to Mia "I will let you lead the workshop" and I went to camera. The session started with a spontaneous conversation at the table about saying 'no', about being more aggressive, about being willing and able to resist, and about being able to show anger.

The following is a transcription of a segment of this part of the workshop session.

Lynn: When you're really saying "no", you have to mean it.

Ann: It's so strange for kids. It's the only time you can
        say "no" to an older person. All the rest of your
        life you have to say "yes...yes...yes". It's a real
        double talk. I think they find it really confusing.

Lynn: Is that the whole thing behind women's groups -
        Martial arts - training on how to protect yourselves
        and defend....

Ann: Women aren't children!

Lynn: You have to also make all those noises - be more
        aggressive - less docile, it's a different kind of
        training as well - re-thinking!

Ruth: You have to be able to beat someone up. You have to
        be able and willing to resist.

Ava: I get so pissed off at taxi drivers. This guy went
        out of his way to go right in front of me and
        stopped. I was so mad I hit the car and yelled;
        "asshole" - the car just hit the brakes. As I was
        running home I was just terrified that I was going to
        see this taxi coming at me.

Mia: I get so angry!

(They moved the tables away and got ready to start)

Ruth: Let's try different things and compare the
        difference. Everybody, walk towards the camera; walk
        back and see the differences.

Ann: Just walk around in circles.

Ann: Maybe to start we should do something very basic -
                follow the leader.

Mia: Go and meet someone.

(They all pretended to meet and had a conversation shaking hands and
touching which led to spontaneously playing ring-around-the rosie and they
all fell to the floor together.)

Ava: (Ironically) Its been years!

Mia: How to fall gracefully, and safely.

Ruth: Who can do a cartwheel?

Lynn: I went to a Catholic school, we just did somersaults.

(Everyone laughs and Ruth does a somersault. Ann tries it and says
its too much like gym. They all try somersaults.)

Ruth: We can sort of wrestle.

Ann: Or we can dance or waltz or do ballroom dancing.

Ruth: Lets do an interesting walk and walk across the room

Ann   Come up with a walk. Why not each person do a
                      strange walk.

(They all simultaneously did a strange walk.)

Mia: In dance class you had to do it backwards - your
                      whole space is different. Just try walking backwards
                      without looking back and see how you can do it,
                      swinging your arms the opposite way.

(Then followed a discussion of different kinds of walks.)

Ann: Sitting

Lynn   (Looking towards camera at me) do you want to take
                      this one at a time or as a group?

(Everyone individually performed the way they normally sit adding a
spontaneous narration.)

Ruth: (sitting in three different ways) I usually sit like
               this properly - sometimes like this (crosslegged)
               next...

Ava: What do we do?

Ruth: We're practicing sitting, like we usually do.

Ann: I usually go like that (Slough). Then I remember my
               mother (sitting up and crossing legs). Then I think
               you should not cross your legs, its really female.
               (Uncrossing legs) Then I think my legs look really
               fat so I go this way. I'm most comfortable like
               this.

Lynn: When I'm tense I cross my legs. If I'm really tense
               I cross them several times. If it carries all the
               way through I cross my arms and my eyes. When I'm
               relaxed I tend to do this (relaxing her legs). I've
               been told I always lean on the little toe side and
               that's not compatible with my feet. I think that's
               basically it.

Ava: (Sitting backwards on the chair facing her back to
               the camera) I hate sitting - that's the first thing -
               so as you've noticed, I move around alot.

Ann: How about sleeping positions?

Ruth: This is how I sleep. (Lying down on her back),

Ava: Do you think that women were taught to cross their
               legs because it was a virtuous or hygienic to do?

Ruth: When I get on the bus I sit like this - lots of men
               sit open legged and I sit cross-legged.

Ava: Well, you have to give them your space you know.
               That's a two-people-space on the bus. Men don't
               worry about taking space.

At this point I asked Mia to introduce her ideas on choreographing a sequence using personal gesture while I continued to be behind the camera.

Mia presented the following sequence of directives orally to the participants (in each case the directive was followed by a practice session):

1. Select four personal gestures each

2. Articulate each one definitely

3. Express them to each other

4. Compose them so they work together

5. Do them smoothly to the count of twelve holding each one for two counts

Mia asked the group to create a dance, to each choose a partner, to select four gestures and to choreograph a sequence and to perform it in relationship to each other to the count of twelve. The group then paired off and Ava becomes partners with Ann and Ruth with Lynn.

Ruth and Lynn worked more closely under Mia's direction. Lynn said that she was not comfortable with two of her gestures (pointing her finger and shaking her hands above her head). She stated that she found them too aggressive.

Mia told Ruth and Lynn to concentrate on the move, to give it new meaning each time, to do it smoothly and to perform the poses more in relationship to each other. Ann and Ava worked on their choreography on their own. There was only enough time left for the pairs, each in turn, to perform them twice for video. As a result, no attention was given to camera movements, sound and lighting. We viewed the tapes and the group responded unenthusiastically. They thought the gestures were performed mechanically. I proposed to have another session on gestures and everyone agreed to continue on the same theme. I asked them to bring a sound idea (such as a record, tape or instrument) to work with in collaboration with gestures for the following session.

Identification of Issues - Session 3

It seems to me that there were several issues emerging in this session, centering around the use of the body as a medium and the guest instructor. The choreographed gestures were performed unenthusiastically and looked mechanical. Why?

First of all, it seems to me that the group perceived the guest as an intruder and resented her presence, especially since I had not consulted with them previously. Furthermore I abdicated my role as facilitator by asking her to lead the workshop while I went behind the camera. After having relinquished my role as participant at the previous session, the group may have perceived this occurrence as yet another disruption to the group spirit.

Secondly, it seems to me that another issue became apparent when they were asked to use the body as a medium. It is possible that inhibiting feelings of self-consciousness were provoked as their body-images were being revealed to them. It also seemed to me that the guest introduced the theme of gestures as an exercise in technique rather than concentrating on the expression and meaning of the gestures. Perhaps too much attention was given to this exercise approach to movement and not

enough to expression. Also the limited time frame did not allow for the potentialities of the exercises to be developed into expressive sequences. Perhaps if they had seen this as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself, they would have been less self-critical. This exercise also raised the question of the order of sequence between exercise - type experiences and expressive - type experiences. If the order had been reversed, i.e., if the expressive orientation had taken place first perhaps they would have been more motivated to continue.

CHAPTER V

WORKSHOP 4 - GESTURE

Outline and Aims

1. Reflection (30 minutes)

    Aims: to look at previous tape for free association and
           discussion

2. Exploration (40 minutes)

    Aims: to introduce individual sound ideas (record, tape or
           instrument)

           to explore the interaction of gestures and sounds

           to combine these with video considering lighting,
           background set and camera movements.

3. Performance (50 minutes)

    Aims: to create a 5 minute performance each

4. Reflection (30 minutes)

    Aims: to look at the tape

           to discuss the reactions and observations

Description of Session 4

We began this session by reviewing the gesture choreography tapes from session 3. During and after looking at the tapes the participants responded more freely than they did the previous week. They laughed saying they looked lethargic and were just mimicking the gestures. Ruth said "she's nagging at me" referring to Lynn's pointing finger gesture. Lynn said, "it's Mia's fault, she made me do that". They unanimously thought the exercise was "sort of boring" "stale" "dead", "we were not very excited about it". Lynn said "she was a nice girl but she was an outsider and I felt intruded upon. Lise did not come the second week and we get a new person the third week. I liked her idea but her presence ..." Ann said "I felt nervous when she first came, when she said to me 'create a dance'".

Ava said "I liked the idea of having someone in to provoke an idea and I don't think she necessarily did, it was superficial, maybe it was done too quickly". She then stated that "if we had worked backwards starting with an emotion rather than a gesture, we would have explored more rather than just look at the 'physicality'". Ann agreed by saying that "just to make movement and create design does'nt have much meaning". She also stated that she was more interested in contact gesture than in

gesture for developing gesture and expressed her personal position: "I don't know how to touch people asexually and it's really hard to understand how to be intimate with somebody if its not in a sexual situation". The choreography by Ruth and Lynn had more contact than the choreography by Ava and Ann which was more of a pure design probably because Mia was working with Ruth and Lynn and encouraged contact. Lynn said she was aware that her outward gestures were "aggressive, naggy and negative". Ava commented that it was interesting that Lynn's choreography was quite aggressive even though she was not comfortable with it. Ann said she was not aware of where Ava was and did not manage to have any contact except with the general space. The discussion ended with Ava suggesting that "rather than starting with gesture and seeing what that gesture expresses, to start instead with the expression like anger and see what the gestures are that are angry without necessarily trying to find all angry gestures". Ruth said that would be more fun and they all agreed.

When the discussion and response to last week's tape and workshop ended the participants proceeded to introduce their sound ideas to each other. Lynn announced that she had brought three records and said that music helped her to break down inhibitions. Ruth said that she did not have any idea and never thought about it. Ava and Ann brought some music on tape.

I asked the group who wanted to be first and Ann decided to start by letting us hear a tape of chant-word-sound-improvisations by a group of children which she had recorded. While listening to the tape the group proceeded to set up the screen and organize the lights in order to explore gesture and movement improvisation. To the sounds of the chants, a spontaneous dance erupted as each participant entered behind the shadow screen following each other, until all were involved, creating clusters of interesting interplays of moving shapes and greys as they filled the screen and circled around from behind the camera to behind the screen. Ann asked the group if they wanted to created their own word-sound chanting and everyone agreed.

The following directives were presented orally by Ann to the participants (accompanied by illustrations on the blackboard):

1. Take (select) a word

2. Extend it by making a list of sound and association words, obliterations, synonyms, antonyms starting with the same sound

3. Work with the rythm of the word

4. Work with just the mouth

5. Use the mouth as a metaphor for the rest of you and come up with gestures that do the same thing your mouth is doing.

As Ann was presenting these directives the participants practiced many variations on different words. Each one divised a chant which

emerged into a song of variations on the word "woman". This was combined with gestures and was performed spontaneously while each participant took turns recording it on camera.

We looked at the tape and laughed, and Ava said" Let's do another one!". Ruth said "Let's do anger!" and someone else said "(Let's do) saying no" which led to a chant of everyone saying in unison and at varying audio levels of assertion "NO!"

This was followed by many spontaneous but articulate exclamations of various sounds expressing anger combined with gestures expressing anger, such as stomping feet, piling up chairs, tapping and banging on the screen, laughing, yelling and wrestling on the floor. Ruth said, "We should start a wrestling class! I used to play like that when I was a kid with my sister".

Ann said "Ever since I've been with this guy, four years now, he never gets mad. My natural tendency is up and down; no I don't know how to get mad. I've been in stony silence for years! In my own family everybody yells; he can't yell".

Ann, Ruth and Lynn were so involved in physical play, they seem to be totally unaware of the camera while Lynn is on camera focusing on

close-ups and pans of their bodies. I am hovering around watching that nobody trips on a cable, worried that a light might fall amidst all the activity. I am reminded of my mother-teacher role and feel like I am watching children playing.

We looked at this section of the tape and the participants laughed and commented as they watched themselves. Ann finds it interesting having expressed contact without being sexual, like kids and asked, "How do you express contact if it's not sexual when you're an adult? Kids are touching each other all the time". This made me think of my own experience with my 15 year old son who is very ambivalent about touching. He fluctuates from being very affectionate to being repulsed by physical contact.

After having discussed this section of the tape the participants sat down while Lynn put her record on. She introduced it as <u>Sister Sledge</u>. I asked her if she wanted to create an environment for this, and she replied "a party".

Probably as an attempt to bridge the gap between listening and acting, Ava initiated the dialogue:

Ava: Do you have any ideas? Why did you put this one on?

Lynn: (After two or three minutes of silence) I put this music on because it's like a party.

Ann: This record reminds me of a single's bar!

Ruth: I don't like it, it reminds me of somebody coming on to you and touching!

Lynn: It's the theme song for the U.S. woman's volleyball theme
            which is about sisterhood.

At this time the response from the group to Lynn's music selection

came to me as a surprise. I explained that our association to music can

have a greater impact on us than the lyrics and melodies and that our

reactions can be very subjective. I was also surprised at their ability

to express themselves openly with out fearing that their disapproval might

offend her.

Ann commented on the contradiction that she saw between the

music being played in a bar and the actual scenario played out by the

people in the bar!

Ann: In a single's bar they put on this music for everybody to
          be happy and yet there's so much oppression, everybody's
          being hit on, everybody's running trying to avoid someone
          in those situations, 'leave me alone', 'I got to get
          away from that guy', 'what am I going to do'?

Lynn: What are we going to do? Role play? Pretend we're in a
          bar? is that the idea?

Ann: Not literally in a bar.

Ruth: Lets put it on and just react to it.

Ann: We can do something different with the camera and screen,
          I'm interested in eyes and close-ups.

Meanwhile, Ruth and Ava set up two chairs and a table in front of the

screen and arranged the lighting behind the screen to create the effect of

ballad. Ruth and Ava sat in the arranged bar setting, started
play-acting, pretending they are man and woman meeting in a bar. Then
they felt the need of outside help:

Ava: Who wants to direct?

Lynn: We're acting in this, it's not mine.

Ann: Yes it's yours (loudly).

Ruth and Ava became very involved in their improvised role-playing of
a single's bar scene:

Lynn: It's not my forte. I wanted to dance to this.

Ann: Then you can dance.

Then Lynn proceeded to go behind the screen and dance to the Sister
Sledge song while in front of the screen Ruth and Ava continued their
role-playing (gesture and dialogue) of a single's bar scene. Then there
was an interruption:

Ann: I think Lynn should have a go at this, she left, she was
             bored.

Lynn: No, the record skipped all the way to the end.

Ava: Let's try another - classical music.

Ann was interacting with the camera, shooting close-ups of head, eye
and hand movements panning from left to right. The song ended and Lynn

left from behind the screen and changed the music while the skit continues. The role-playing resumed soon after.

Ava put on classical music and everybody sat down to discuss what to do next.

Lynn: I'm not very good at role-playing, I'd rather know when we're supposed to be loud and soft and act stupid. If we had a script...

Ruth: (interrupting) Right now we don't have a script in these workshops, if you want a script, you have to write one. Today we have a sketch in mind.

I interrupted to say that these kinds of spontaneous improvised role-playing skits can form the basis for a script to get ideas from. They continued to discuss the issue of whether to start with a script or to improvise:

Ava: I'm not wild about it because it limits exploration.

Ruth: (impatiently) If you want a choreography, you bring a choreography. I didn't come with an idea today, I'm just going with the flow but I would not have anything against anybody coming up with an idea. Sitting around trying to work on something we do not have doesn't interest me that much.

Ann: I enjoyed working with the camera and I was ready to jump into something else. Now I feel cold and inhibited again. I think that the stuff that you say is not orchestrated is very orchestrated.

Lynn: There's alot of monkey-shines.

Ruth: That's what happens! I'm a bar maid.

Lynn: -   I don't know where to jump in.

Ruth: If you don't like something, if you want something
             orchestrated, you have to do it; talking about it killed
             us today; if she had come up with something, she might
             have won us all over.

Lynn: I feel bad when someone comes prepared with an idea and
             doesn't get a chance to do it. Everybody has a
             different reaction to the music I brought. Why do we
             have to explore only one connotation? We're here for
             five weeks, there's only so much we can come up with;
             it's all variety, but for some reason it's shallow and
             process-oriented.

Ruth: If you want things to be your way which you should want
             them to be it's your responsibility to come up with
             something. You can change the structure and .if you come
             up with some interesting idea we can do, we can change
             the direction anytime. Do you want us to be more
             specific?

Lynn: Not necessarily, some people follow the structure and
             some don't.

Ann: I'm not concerned with product here or in my day to day
             life. The possibilities of what we can do here are
             endless and if we're bored or frustrated I think it's
             because we're too inhibited to put energy into exploring
             everything we have here.

Ruth: I feel frustrated because I'm inhibited in movement, that
             is what it showed me, I appreciate it.

Lynn: You can't become un-uptight in three weeks. It's an
             artificial situation. I don't see anybody here outside
             this session and its not a sensitivity session. Maybe
             I'm blocked and I don't know exactly what, other than
             it's myself.

Ruth: Know what you want here.

Lynn: My reasons for being here are for my art teaching
          product. Process is clay and paint. I just see it as
          one medium of many mediums. I had the best feeling the
          second week.

Ruth: You have the product, you have twenty minutes, you can
          come up with directions for us, improvise, do what you
          want.

Ann: Four people to music. You didn't come up with any
          structure, you said you wanted to dance.

Lynn: I brought four records and you said, "single's bar".

Ruth: You cann't be too sensitive about this.

Lynn: I'm not, I brought something but I didn't know what I was
          meant to bring it for.

Ruth: You have to know what you meant to bring it for. How can
          structure work out if you don't know what you're doing it
          for.

Ava: You came with an idea and didn't know what to do with it
          so it reminded us of a singles bar.

Ann: To me singles bar clicked in terms of gesture. It was a
          particular situation that brought out particular kinds of
          gestures. It was an opportunity to be thinking about
          gesture. In orther words I was trying to abstract it.
          Whatever attachement you had to it I was thinking this is
          what you could do with it in terms of gesture. It worked
          well for me. I was interested in working with the
          camera. I was trying to achieve some kind of discourse
          about gesture between the two figures on the screen in
          space. It didn't matter what they were saying. They're
          not in a singles bar, they're not picking each other up.
          So to that extent I got alot of information out of it
          which I thought was really interesting.

Ruth: It's the same thing with you, you have to know what you
          want, she can't tell you what you want.

Lynn: For next week, am I to go home and bring a costume that I want to do something with?

Ruth: Don't ask the question, just bring what you want to do.

Lynn: Every week we have a little homework, bring in an object...

Ann: I think its more like a password, like next week, costume, whatever that could possibly mean to you than it might be an idea that we can elaborate on in our input. Gesture can be anything, personal contact, a particular situation.

I asked Lynn if she wanted to be in total control of what she wanted to do or did she want the interaction and feedback. She replied,

Lynn: If it's interaction, everyone should have brought music, if it's not interaction, everybody's dealing with our own music and we have an idea of what we want to do with music and what it means to us then it's an individual thing. If we're sharing, everybody should have done their homework. That was my idea.

Ruth: I find you're being a little stiff; if you can say what am I supposed to do this week; anytime you go to school, you don't say, what does the school want me to do, you say; what am I taking from school? what do I want from school? I'll just think of ideas and I'll do what I want, I'll experiment, maybe I'll bring lots of material and wrap everybody up.

Lynn: It's all degrees of investment. Is it the idea of group sharing or is it five individuals doing their own thing?

Ruth: The group is the place where individuals have a chance to stand on their own.

Lynn: I don't feel like I should get invested; some people come with objects, some don't, some will come overly prepared and be left out and not even get a chance to do their thing like Ann last week who came with her slides.

Ann: Fine, I thought, this is not my chance to make my video
and I made the decision to let that go. I still want to
do that...

I asked Lynn how she would see it differently. Lynn replied:

Lynn: It's too vague. Maybe we should be thinking of pictures,
costumes...

Ann: You make it more concrete. I'm very willing to be an
instrument and participate and if Ruth decides she wants
to explore and be spontaneous.....

Lynn: As a group we could sit down and think about what we want
to do.... I'm just not very good at thinking on the spot,
I'm better at thinking beforehand and if it falls flat,
too bad.

Ann: I'd rather you say "I don't like that idea. I brought
this music in and I would rather do this. Can we try
this." I feel like I'm speaking out and I know I'm
hurting your feelings. Today I knew you did not want to
do this bar thing but they fell right into it and so I
thought, lets go ahead and do it.

Lynn: Well the aspect I wanted to do, I did. I danced.

Ann: Good, because I didn't know if we should try it again or
do it a different way. Next week you could come more·
prepared.

Lynn: No to the contray, I will try to be as unprepared as
possible.

Ruth: What you are saying makes no sense.....

At that point Lynn got up and picked up her things, said it was time
for her to go and walked out the door (angry).

Identification of Issues Session 4

It seems to me that a central issue arising out of this workshop is the question of structure versus improvisation.

A conflict arose over an unexpected response to the music selection that Lynn brought. She brought in a piece of music which was the theme song for the U.S. woman's vollyball team which for her symbolized sisterhood and celebration. She brought this music to create a party and dance because for her music breaks down inhibitions. But the others did not perceive the music as happy. They had an opposing reaction. It reminded them of a singles bar which for them signified oppression of women, depression, repression, getting picked up, being chased, playing games etc...

The different reactions to the music was partly caused by a 10 to 15 year gap in age and experience between Lynn and the others. The question of what to do was raised and someone suggested role-playing a singles bar scene. The idea of role-playing made Lynn very uneasy as she stated. Never-the-less she went along with the idea, perhaps because she felt outnumbered and did not know what to do or she was afraid to assert herself and take the lead. She participated by dancing behind the screen while Ava and Ruth were role-playing their skit in front of the screen.

When the music ended they sat down and discussed their feelings about what had happened. Here the different views and preferences on improvisation and structure between Lynn and the others became more evident. Statements such as "I'd rather know when to be loud and soft and when to act stupid", "there's alot of monkey-shines", and "I don't know when to jump in" suggest that Lynn is very uneasy about improvisation and role-playing. It seemed to me that she perceived process as shallow and did not trust the possibility that something interesting, valid could happen if she tried it. She was afraid to jump in, take a chance, perhaps fearing she might waste her time or fail. She confirmed this by saying that it was an artificial situation, i.e., only five weeks and with too much variety to lose her inhibitions in. She then suggested that the group write a script. The conflict over structure versus improvisation emerged again because the others were opposed to writing a script themselves. Ava said that, for her, writing a script limits exploration. Ruth said that she liked to go with the flow and Ann said that she orchestrated instantaneously as she went along with the camera.

It seemed to me that Lynn needed to "play it safe". Having a structure meant being told what to do. The group told her they liked improvising and offered to go along with her if she wanted to write a script. She responded by saying that interaction and sharing meant everybody following the given structure i.e., obeying the rules. She was refering to Ava and Ruth who had not brought a sound idea, i.e., had not done their homework.

.It seemed to me that she was frustrated with me because I did not fulfill her expectations of being a teacher, i.e., an authority figure, whose role was to lead, direct, intervene, protect, spoon-feed and provide group sharing and cohesion. At the time, I was feeling that their conflict was my responsibility. This created a conflict for me as to whether I should help them or not, which is another central issue arising from this workshop. After Lynn left the workshop I was asking myself, will she come back? Will she utilize this situation to her advantage? Which direction will she choose? Should I try and persuade her to come back? I personally felt that even though there were many differences within the group, it was a supportive environment for the members. I felt that how they made use of the group situation and what they received from it, depended largely on their ability to "play" as a member.

I was hoping that Lynn would come back but I also felt that it was her decision, her choice to abandon the problem or confront it. It seemed there was a different interpretation of sharing. For Lynn sharing meant to follow the given structure and obey the rules (what does the school want from me?). For Ruth sharing meant playing together (what do I want from the school?). Ruth seemed to enjoy interacting with others in the play-fighting and the role-playing. She was especially eager to express anger and seemed to find an outlet for it. For her the process was therapeutic and self-reflective and therefore satisfying and valid.

Ruth seemed to be frustrated with Lynn's lack of assertiveness and
fear of taking the lead which revealed another issue emerging from the
workshops of woman's role-image conflict. Ruth's messages to her were to
take responsibility for what she wanted and change her direction if she
wanted to. Ruth perceived the group as a place where individuals can have
a chance to.

For Ava the lack of structure was not the problem; individual
inhibitions kept the group from making the best use of the endless
possibilities. The conflict between Lynn and Ruth made Ann feel very
uneasy. She seemed to feel responsible for resolving the conflict. She
tried to come to the rescue; she tried to deal with the dilemma while on
camera by aesthetically externalizing the conflict, i.e., "achieving some
kind of discourse between the two figures on screen".

Perhaps the diversity of needs and expectations within the group, the
short time given relative to the open-ended possibilities, made it
difficult for individuals to have enough focus, and prevented them from
exploring in more depth.

CHAPTER VI

THE GROUP CONFLICT IN CONTEXT

Introduction

Because of the issues that emerged from the workshops, and the realizations that I had, I thought I needed to expand my understanding of these conflicts. I decided to do this by looking at them in relation to women's situations in society and how these situations affect them psychologically.

I investigated the following general questions:

1. What is the nature of conflict for women?

   a) What are its sources?

   b) How does it affect women in their self-development?

2. How do women's artistic practices (especially in performance and video art) involve female conflict?

The discussion of these questions is organized into sections corresponding to and discussed in relation to the following four facets of conflict that occurred in the workshops.

1.   Lynn's alienation from the group

2.   The group splits

3.   The facilitator - participant conflict

4.   The self-image and role-image conflict

Lynn's Alienation from the Group

Women's alienation has been studied from economic, political, social, and psychological perspectives.

Flax (1981, p.54) states that being female in a man's world means being weak economically and politically. Men and women are not valued equally, men being socially more valued than women. This affects a woman's feelings about herself i.e., about being a woman and mother, which in turn affect her type of mothering.

Elwes (1985, p.15) states that women in this society do not love themselves. "How can they?" She asks, if their intrinsic value is placed "in negative opposition to men's cultural supremacy". She describes the damaging effects this has on women

> "Since the mother both in her response to her daughter and in her
> projected view of herself reflects patriarchy's low opinion of
> femininity, the ego that a girl develops is inadequate at its
> inception" (1984, p.15).

Miller (1976, p.3) describes woman's position in society as "subservient", "subordinate" and "powerless" and women as "the bearers of human necessities for the social group as a whole" (p.24). She states that this affects women by "diverting them from exploring and expressing their needs", and "encouraging them to transform their own needs as if they did not have needs of their own" (p.19).

Miller states that women face many conflicts on what she refers to as "their path towards authenticity". While exploring their thoughts and feelings they encounter many mixed feelings. This is not surprising, she states, "when we consider that a woman's whole conditioning is contrary to seriously finding out what she wants" (p. 109).

Women can encounter "a lack of definite desire", "feelings and thoughts that one cannot fit into an acceptable framework of concepts"; as well, "anger can be one of the first authentic reactions" (p. 110). She states that women are "on the cutting edge of a new and larger vision" (p. 113). She considers personal creativity" an absolute necessity in the attempt to find a way to live now" (p. 113). For women, she says, to act and react out of their own being requires a clear and direct risk. It is

> "to fly in the face of their appointed definition and their
> prescribed way of living; (this) involves creation, in an immediate
> and pressing personal way" (p. 114).

As they seek 'real power' (meaning for women" the capacity to implement") they face serious conflict (p. 124). Conflict has been a taboo area for women as they were supposed to be the accommodators, mediators, the adapters and soothers" (p. 125).

Yet Miller sees "conflict as a necessity if women are to build for the future" (p. 125). She posits that the "dominant group" has obscured the necessity for conflict by teaching us to see conflict as evil. But "conflict is inevitable and the source of all growth" (p. 125).

Women today face concrete conflicts economically, socially, and politically. Miller sees women's present ability to recognize the necessity for conflict if they are to pursue their "self-defined self-interests" to be "a first, great, primary source of strenth - a strength that women can take into their own hands and use" (p. 127). Another source of strength is the possibility that " the conduit of conflict does not have to be the way it has been" (p. 127). Looking at the events of the workshops in this new light helped me to better understand the dynamics which I had observed.

There seemed to be two levels of readiness in the workshops: one, consisting of Ann, Ruth and Ava, who were prepared to play, and a second one, consisting of Lynn alone that needed preparation before being able to play. The dynamics of the situation had not enabled Lynn to be pulled to the first level with the others; instead she had been increasingly locked out. Since there were no other members on her side of the fence she was left alone and isolated.

This raises questions about the character of the alienation of individuals from the power of group unity.

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One reason for Lynn's alienation from the group perhaps stemmed from
her own feelings of isolation which were reflected in her reluctance to
engage in certain activities with the other members.

According to Miller, many women find themselves in similar situations.
Lynn's need for more preparation before engaging in group activities,
could be an indication of what Miller refers to as a lack of "definite
desire" which she claims is very discouraging in itself for women. She
states that

> "it ultimately represents one kind of copout, although an
> understandable one. If you do not know what you want, you can avoid
> taking the risk to get it; for women this is a serious risk"
> (p. 109).

It seems to me that underlying Lynn's reluctance to "jump-in", her
uneasiness about improvisation and role-playing was an indication of her
fear of taking risks. Miller states that

> "these kinds of risks have some components that are common to most
> women".... Each woman had to risk focusing on her own desires and
> needs, even if it meant - as it so often can appear to mean -
> displeasing others" (p. 110).

Women, she says, have been led to feel that they can integrate and
use all their attributes if they use them for others but not for
themselves. They've been conditioned to attuning themselves to the
wishes, desires and needs of others and to deny their own needs.

> "Their main goal, central to their self-image is to serve others.
> Consequently many women cannot tolerate or allow themselves to feel
> that their life activities are for themselves....(For women, she
> says), the risk, in its psychic meaning and impact, becomes the risk
> of abandonment and condemnation".... Women, she says "must take the
> initial risk as a psychological step to begin the journey" (p. 110).

There seems to be a symbolic underlying meaning in Lynn's need to have structure and to follow a script. As Miller points out, "for women to act out of their own being is to fly in the face of their appointed definition and their prescribed roles. This involves creation in a immediate and pressing personal way" (p. 114). Because as Miller says "there are no certain guideposts" women in their move toward "authenticity" often find themselves improvising and not following the script they used to know. This experience calls for one kind of creativity.

> "a process of making and remaking of ways of thinking and stating a
> multitude of previously unacceptable and unthinkable things"
> (p. 109).

Lynn refers to this process in session three when she says: "You have to also make all those noises, be more aggressive, less docile, its a different kind of training as well, rethinking" (p. 20).

In that process, women struggle in fields such as economics and politics, attempting to re-define power and self-determination. "Power, for women has been an 'unmentionable' subject" (p. 115). She continues

> "Women's inexperience in using all their powers openly, combined with
> past fears of power is now taking on new forms. As women move into
> greater activity and scope, they face new kinds of power struggles
> and rivalries" (p. 116).

Along with facing the issues of conflict and of risk, women must face issues of power as well if they are to advance their own development. Women tend to avoid power struggles because they have perceived them as usually being destructive.

When considering that women's conditioning is contrary to finding out what they want, likely they will face feelings of discouragements (Miller 1976). This dilemma was reflected in the workshops by some members; Lynn expressed her frustration by saying: "We're here for five weeks, there's only so much we can come up with; its all variety" Ava said that she felt lukewarm and frustrated with the results of her venture. The dilemna was summed-up as one of having too many choices, too short a time limit to investigate too many options and consequently not having enough time to focus on any one of them in depth.

Women's conditioning is coupled with women's inexperience in using all their powers openly and of not having a history of believing that their power is necessary for the maintenance of self-image. Miller suggests that it is important for women to redefine 'power' and 'self-determination'. Even though they are not practiced in the same forms and conventions that men have been geared for since childhood, it is nevertheless important for them to go through the struggles because the need for 'effective' power seems essential for women's self-development.

Miller distinguishes the 'dominant' culture's definition of power as being false and far removed from women's "real nature". She states that, for men power means "to advance oneself and to control, limit and destroy the power of others" (p. 116), and for women, it is "the implementation of the abilities women have already and the new ones they are developing" (p. 116). She states that women fear their own power for good reasons.

Terms like "castrating wome" and "bitch", that we have all heard as
women, "have been enough to deter many a woman, not only from aggression
but even from mere straight forward assertion" (p. 119). Also "women's
direct use of their own powers in their own interests frequently brings a
severely negative reaction from a man" (p. 120). Because of these kinds
of experiences which have often dissuaded women from using their own power
they have also developed an inner equation: the effective use of their
own power means that they are wrong, even destructive. So for women
"acting for oneself is made to seem like depriving others or hurting them"
(p. 120).

I have elaborated on this issue because I think it directly relates
to Lynn's uneasiness when confronted with an unexpected group reaction
over the music she had selected. Her anxiety, and uneasiness at that
moment of confrontation leads me to believe that part of the underlying
conflict was her subconscious fear that asserting herself and pursuing her
needs would mean depriving the others of what they wanted to do. She was
also afraid of being isolated from the group; so perhaps she accommodated
herself to them, went along with their choice rather than facing
conflict. In so doing it seems to me she chose the position of the victim
in which society so firmly encourages women to remain. Miller refers to
this attitude as "feminine masochism".

" For even in a situation that is objectively destructive, the victim does not have to confront her own desires to change the situation her own power to do so, not the anger that has mounted and accumulated over her victimized position" (p. 122).

The Group Split

At this point I will investigate the <u>character</u> of the conflict with
the group. It seems to me that the underlying source of the split that
occurred in the group partly stemmed from conflicting gender
identifications.

According to Carol Gilligan (1982), the studies of sex-role
stereotypes reveal discrepancies between womanhood and adulthood. These
studies repeatedly show that,

> "the qualities deemed necessary for adulthood - the capacity for
> autonomous thinking, clear decision-making, and responsible
> action-are those associated with masculinity and considered
> undesirable as attributes of the feminine self. The stereotypes
> suggest a splitting of love and work that relegates expressive
> capacities to women while placing instrumental abilities in the
> masculine domain" (p. 17).

Flax (1981) states that women have a dual need for 'autonomy' and
'nurturance'. But in their lives they face the conflict of having to
choose between nurturance as represented by the mother and autonomy as
represented by the father. This conflict originates from the conflicts
and ambivalence of the mother-daughter bond (p. 52).

Miller explains, that a central feature of women's development is
that they,

> "stay with, build on, and develop in a context <u>of attachment</u> and
> affiliation with others. Indeed, women's sense of self becomes very
> much organized around being able to make and then to maintain
> affiliations and relationships" (p. 83).

Men have been conditioned to perceive "affiliations" as an
"impediment", "loss" or "danger", whereas by contrast affiliations are
supposed to make women feel "fulfilled" "successful". (Gilligan 1982)

To achieve "autonomy" carries the threat for women that they must be
able to pay the price of giving up affiliations in order to become a
self-directed individual. (Miller 1976, p. 94).

Miller affirms that:

"women are seeking something more complete than autonomy as it is
defined by men — to encompas relationships to others, simultaneously
with the fullest development of oneself" (p. 94).

Flax describes women as having a strong need to develop a fusion with
a caring, reliable person, as well as a sense of autonomy. But she feels
that if she attempts fusion, she will lose autonomy and if she exerts
autonomy, she will have to give up her need for fusion. Flax states that
"women's ambivalence about male values and the unwillingness to give up
the female identification of the self may lead to disabling conflicts
about their work" (p. 63). Success for women comes with the betrayal or
denial of their gender (Flax 1981).

Horner (1974), concluded in a paper on the negative effects of this
dilemma that women

"when faced with a conflict between their feminine image and
expressing their competences or developing their abilities and
interests, adjust their behaviors to their internalized sex-role
stereotypes. In order to feel or appear more feminine they disguise
their abilities and withdraw from the mainstream of thought,
activism, and achievement in our society" (p. 61).

Thus most women, Horner argues, have a motive to avoid success: they expect negative consequences such as social rejection and or feelings of being unfeminine as a result of succeeding. This conflict stems from the prevalent attitudes and perspectives found throughout history which have consistently re-enforced a stereotype of women as being unable to reconcile competence, ambition, intellectual accomplishments and success with femininity.

Gilligan (1982) explains masculinity as being defined through "separation" and femininity through "attachment". Therefore, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation. According to Flax the woman's liberation movement was unconsciously experienced as a chance to attain both nurturance and re-inforcement for autonomy. Miller (1976) contends that there are no social forms for simultaneous attainment of self-development and service to others.

Flax found that

"nonetheless, feelings of anxiety, of competition, and of unmet needs often arose within these groups and were both unexpected and difficult to resolve" (p. 65).

She describes consciousness-raising groups as being considered both political (rational) and personal (emotional). As a result of differences among the women in the women's movement a split occured; those who wished for a deepening of the "personal" aspect experienced the "political" women as differing from them and invalidating nurturance needs.

"Conversely, the 'political' women felt punished and rejected for exerting their autonomy, by being criticized for being too intellectual, that is, male." (p. 66).

This split between nurturance and autonomy is reinforced by social forces such as the organization of production and reproduction (Flax 1981).

One visible manifestation of this conflict is seen in the ambivalence between feminists and antifeminists. Feminists believe in the right to choose, to exert control over one's body and one's life, to move out of the infantile state, to reject the mother and any identification with that role. Antifeminists see femininism as an assault on gender identity and believe in the right to life, they see themselves as life givers and preservers.

Among members of the woman's liberation movement Flax finds ambivalence about motherhood and the traditional female condition. She considers this ambivalence unfortunate because it prevents the members of the movement from addressing what is progressive within antifeminism:

"an implicitly antipatriarchal stance, an assertion of the importance of care-taking and emotion that protect life, a refusal to accept equality if it means becoming like men" (p. 67).

Miller states that because of their unequal position, women today are seeking self-definition and searching for knowledge in a spirit of collective and cooperative efforts. As a result they face serious conflict. Conflict as identified in the women's literature has been

labelled as conflict between "autonomy and nurturance" (Flax), "autonomy and affilliations" (Miller) and "separation and attachment" (Gilligan).

This type of conflict seems to have been an underlying source of the split which occurred in the group. What caused the split? One factor was the difference that existed among the members reflecting different values and positions in life and expectations from the workshops. Specifically, there was a conflict between Lynn and Ruth; it was a clash of values and needs.

Perhaps Lynn, the oldest member of the group rejected autonomy (work and studies). She said she had spent so far most of her life pursuing working and studing at the expense of the experience of motherhood. Now she seems to be ready to reconnect with her nurturant role. She had revealed these inner feelings during her 'performance' and in conversation with the group in the workshops.

On the other hand, Ruth needed to express and celebrate her autonomy. She was rejecting the weak communication she had had in her relationships with men, and was going through a stage of chosen celibacy. This was her way of fighting the negative effects stereotypes have on communication between a man and a woman in a relationship. She had personal experiences with these negative effects. In her eagerness to flush out her anger, she was constantly looking for opportunities to engage the other members of the group in role-playing and play-fighting activities to help her mitigate these conflicts.

The other members in the group were probably empathising with both extremes but ended up being pulled over to Ruth's side because of her charismatic nature, enthusiasm, spontaneity and persistent need for group interaction. Consequently Lynn felt abandoned and isolated because she could not seem to identify with Ruth's personal celebration of autonomy. Ruth felt frustrated and angry at Lynn for not sympathizing with her position and identifying with the masculine side. She seemed to perceive Lynn within a masculine perspective and saw her as weak.

The Facilitator - Participant Conflict

This leads me into the issue of the conflict between my roles as participant-observer and facilitator-observer.

I found myself trying to resolve the conflict as it was occurring. I kept asking myself, at what point should I as facilitator intervene to ensure group productivity and individual reflection? Should I take the role of the researcher, i.e., avoid intervention so as to be able to observe what happens inside a group on its own? It became apparent to me that there was also a conflict between the roles of observer and facilitor, because one role required me to stay outside the group dynamics and the other one required me to intervene.

It occurred to me at a later point that a major issue underlying my role conflict may have been my own paralysis in the face of conflict. I realized that my unconscious avoidance of conflict may have been what was blocking me from intervening. The source of my sympathy with Lynn's dilemna was my own fear of conflict. This led me to investigate this question on a broader scale.

Miller states that we all grow via conflict but she points out that

"within a system of inequality the existence of conflict is denied
and the means to engage openly in conflict are excluded"
(p. 13).

Miller describes "paralysis" as a reaction to conflict "which is not
a thing or a static state of being but in motion and capable of change"

"As women seek 'self-definition' and 'self-determination' they will perforce, illuminate, on a broad new scale, the existence of conflict as a basic process of existence" (p. 126).

Because of women's subordinate position it is not practical for them to conduct open conflict. Therefore as a group they have been able to engage merely in indirect conflict until they could begin to act from a base of strength "in the real world".

Productive conflict can include a feeling of "change" "expansion", "joy" and can involve "anguish and pain" too as opposed to destructive or blocked conflict which calls forth the conviction that nothing can change. She says that adults have been well schooled in suppressing conflict but not in conducting constructive conflict. Because many adults do not seem to know how to enter into it with respect, integrity and confidence many conflicts turn out badly and leave them with a fear of conflict. She explains two strong deterrents against conflict: Firstly, conflict has a tendency to explode if its expression is suppressed.

"This tendency of conflict, when suppressed, to turn to violence acts as a massive deterrent to subordinates" (p. 130).

therefore making conflict look dangerous when in fact its

"the lack of recognition of the need for conflict and provision of appropriate forms that leads to danger" (p. 130).

Another powerful deterrent is the fact that the "dominants" have most of the real power.

Woman, she says, are unwilling to initiate conflict because, in their experience, for women even to feel conflict with men means there's something wrong with them.

Flax (1981) contends that there are major difficulties in women's relationships with other women which she says stem from the problematic mother-daughter relationship in our society. These difficulties are not easy to work through, and they are one of the reasons many women abandon intimate relations. Other reasons are that they are encouraged by men's jealousy and discomfort at strong female bonds as well as by the economic structure, requiring subordination of personal needs to the demands of the man's career. She sees the lack of female relations as weakening woman's position in many ways.

In the women's liberation movement, profound differences among women have been discovered, but Flax contends that women have not developed adequate methods of discussing and mediating these differences. Through the women's liberation movement, women have found it possible to establish strong one-to-one relationships, but they have not dealt adequately with the issue of motherhood.

Miller stresses the importance of "waging good conflict" in the process of "developing further" and "moving to the new" in opposition to the prevailing framework. For a woman to initiate conflict with others

she has to "initiate conflict with the old image of herself" which is equally as hard as handling conflict with others. She states some reasons it is necessary for women to continue to construct supportive environments in order to overcome the threat of isolation.

"It is difficult to see one's way all alone, to have a true vision about which aspects of conflict are appropriate or inappropriate, to know when we have the right to ask or assert and when we are making eggagerated or distorted demands...

She sees the hope for succesfully waging conflict in women 'creating an environment in which they can engage in respectful interaction and in real conflict'" (p. 133).

The Self-Image and Role-Image Conflict

The fourth problem was the conflict occurring in the workshop between role-image and self-image. I will investigate this conflict in relation to the widespread existence of stereotyped representations of femininity.

In her essay "Representation and Sexuality" (1983) Kate Linker states that the prevalent "patriarchal structure" depicts a woman within this structure as

> "unauthorized - illigitimate: she does not represent but is rather represented. Placed in a passive rather than active role as object rather than subject, she is the constant point of masculine appropriation in a society in which representation is empowered to construct identity" (p. 12).

She offers ample evidence of the use of visual materials to control feminine sexuality - through advertising on TV, or in "the deployment of the fashion model as an idealized image for the male gaze, or for woman's narcissistic identification" (p. 12). She states, the stars and stereotypes of cinema function in its narrative form as passive signs of masculine desire. Art historians are confronting the marginalization of women and the definition of creativity as male. Linker (1983) points out that the "apparatus of representation" works to constitute the subject as male, denying subjectivity to women, perpetuating

> ".... a masculing ideal that directs and reinforces behavior, one which, by posing as a norm, impels adaptation to a constructed situation" (p. 12).

In her article, "British Women Artists Working With Video" (1984),
Elwes shows how independent film has provided a substantial account of
the objectifying processes to which the camera subjects the female body
for the benefit of male voyeurism. Television sharing the ideology of
mainstream cinema positions women " in front of the camera, rarely behind
it"... "The eye of the beholder is perennially male" (p. 13). The
stereotyped representations of femininity dissimenated by broadcast
television for the last thirty years are associated with
"virgin/whore/mother/mother-in-law/" (p. 13). Women, she says,

> "experience life as a struggle for perfection under the constant
> surveillance of an internalized ideal of womanhood" (p. 14).

John Berger says;

> "From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey
> herself continually and so she came to consider the surveyor and
> surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct
> elements of her identity as a woman" (Berger 1973, p. 46).

Elwes sees women being split in three ways as:

1. the internalized patriarchal surveyor

2. the mask of femininity that the male demands

3. the unknown quantity which the feminine 'I' singularly fails to
   represent

Ann Kaplan (1983) exploring ways to understand the "unconscious
gender assymetries" in partiarchal culture in film, sees the male film,
male viewer, male camera and male actor as erasing femaleness. She refers

to women on the screen as: "male projections; men either idealize them or spy on them with hostility as they watch" (p. 309). She maintains that the medium "forces women to identify with this male viewer or to identify with the women as the object of his gaze - both essentially desexualizing mental processes" (p. 309).

McGee (1981) states that "feminine narcissism results from a basic mechanism of women's oppression: the emphasis placed on women's appearance" (p. 88). But as she points out, this vanity is nothing more than a survival tactic given the economic and social relations which require women to gain access to power via men.

Given women's position in society as "other", holding no intrinsic value, placed in negative opposition to men's cultural supremacy propagates what Elwes calls for women "a case of damaged narcissism" (p. 15).

This dilemma described by Berger as woman's constant surveillance of an internalized ideal of womanhood, is a probable source of the conflict that women experience between their self-image and their role-image.

It seems to me that this particular conflict occurred in the second workshop for Ann when she was chosen by Lynn as the recipient of her "unveiling" presentation. Ann was self-consciously aware of the camera

which she felt interfered with her authentic interaction with Lynn. The source of the conflict appears to be Ann's role-image as interviewer, portrayed in the socially prescribed "feminine position" as other, as passive, as the "surveyed" which was in conflict with her self-image, portrayed as surveyor and as subject, gesturing, looking and listening. Perhaps her "narcissistic over-identification with the object-of-the-look" hindered or distracted her from having an authentic response. It seems that her camera self-consciousness made her feel in a bind, i.e., caught between denying her own reality and re-enforcing the reality of her reflected appearance.

According to Miller "authenticity and subordination are totally incompatible" (p. 98). Gilligan clearly sums up this dilemma:

> "The difficulty women experience in finding or speaking publicly in their own voices emerges repeatedly in the form of qualification and self-doubt, but also in intimations of a divided judgement, a public assessment and private assessment which are fundamentally at odds" (p. 16).

According to Gilligan,

> "women's place in a man's life cycle has been that of nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate, the weaver of those networks of relationships on which she in turn relies" (p. 17).

Miller sees women's psychological characteristics to be closer to certain psychological essentials and therefore being both sources of strength and the basis of a more "satisfactory" form of living. She emphasizes the point that "womanly qualities" of "vulnerability",

"emotionality" and "cooperative nature" should be considered as strengths rather than being labeled "weaknesses".

Miller defines the terms, vulnerability, emotionality, cooperation and creativity. Whereas men have been encouraged to deny feeling weak or helpless, women are encouraged to cultivate this state of being. She considers women's ability to consciously admit and tolerate feelings of weakness and vulnerability, though a universal feeling for both men and women, as a positive strength "putting them in closer connection with this central human condition" (p. 37).

Women as "subordinates" have been trained to be attuned to the moods and pleasures of the dominant" group and believe that, ideally, all activity should lead to increased emotional connection with others. In contrast, our "dominant" tradition sees emotionality as an impediment, and an evil, and not as an aid to understanding and action.

While men perceive sharing "as losing something" or "giving something away", women have had more practice in and assumed the greater responsibility for providing cooperative living. Therfore women recognize that cooperation is an essential ingredient of human interaction.

Miller identifies a personal kind of creativity as the making of new visions that everyone has to go through to go on living. Women, she

contends, are today the ones who struggle to create for themselves a new concept of personhood as they are "attempting to restructure the central tenets of their lives" (p. 44).

Miller sees woman's place as being outside the ongoing action, i.e., her living in contact with the "unreal world" as a strengthening factor because she is "less wedded to the dangerous ways of the present". Men, she says, being inside the "real world" are unable to arrive at a sense of connection. Women, she argues, are in advance of the values of this society.

> "They have effected enough of a creative internal transformation of values to allow themselves to believe that caring for people and participating in others' development is enhancing to self-esteem" (p. 44).

Miller urges women to recognize their strengths and face the task of putting all their characteristics into operation toward a new transformation of their valuable qualities. She believes that women are on the cutting edge of a newer and larger vision to create 1. "a new vision of womanhood", 2. "new social institutions to support and enlarge that vision" and 3. "new forms of living attending to woman's needs, more mutuality, cooperation and affiliation on a personal and larger social scale" (p. 113).

Gilligan claims that women have a distinct moral language that emphasises concern for others, responsibility, care, and obligation, hence a moral language profoundly at odds with formal, abstract models of morality defined in terms of absolute principles.

In her research she finds women's inner lives more complex than men's and suggests that women have a greater ability to identify with others, to sustain a variety of relationships and to attain a genuine reciprocity in those relationships.

> "Women's deference is rooted not only in their social subordination but also in the substance of their moral concern, sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgements other points of view" (P. 16).

The dynamics that I found in the workshops reflected those that I found in the literature on and by women. Ann, Ruth and Ava saw interaction and sharing as a form of spontaneous play. They enjoyed it in the sense that it seemed to revive an aspect of their childhood, a sensation of regaining a lost freedom.

Lynn perceived interaction and sharing as everyone "cooperating" by following the given structure. The importance that she placed on interaction, was evident in her presentation, she set it up so as she would have someone to talk to; i.e., so she could reveal and share her personal story with Ann on an intimate level and speak to a broader public by making a video tape. Her presentation contained open talk about her body and was a frank expression of her feelings of vulnerability. In her struggle for authenticity, she was exercising her personal creativity. Expressing her emotions had a humanizing effect on the group making us feel connected.

As facilitator, my primary goal was to create a cooperative living environment where people were equals with mutual concerns. I wanted to achieve a non-hierarchical setting.

How to structure the time and how to share the chosen time structure to ensure full individual involvement was a central issue recurring in the workshops. This was apparent in the group's concern to incorporate everyone's needs along with their own individual development, i.e., "to build and develop in a context of attachment and affilliations with others" (Miller, 1976).

Questions such as 'who structures?' and ' how do we structure?' are important questions for women to ask in the context of developing their own visions based on their own experience. Gilligan's research suggests that differences in men and women's experiences lead to disparate visions. Women, she says, perceive life as a "network of connection", "a web of relationships" sustained by communication whereas men have a "hierarchical vision" of winning or losing.

> "... these images of hierarchy and web drawn from the tests of men's and women's fantasies and thoughts convey different ways of structuring relationships and are associated with different views of morality and self. But these images create a problem of understanding because each distorts the others representation" (p. 62).

Gilligan stresses the importance of a re-interpretation of women's experience in order to provide a "nonhierarchical vision of human connection."

Miller (1976) finds that psychology has no language to describe the structuring of women's sense of self. She calls not only for social equality but also for a new language in psychology that would separate the description of care and connection from the vocabulary of inequality and oppression, and she sees this new language as originating in women's experience of relationships.

Gilligan states

"In the absence of this language, the problem of interpretation that impedes psychologists' understanding of women's experience is mirrored by the problem created for women by the failure to represent their experience or by distortion in its representation" (p. 49).

The Woman Artist and Conflict

In this section I will examine how women artists have addressed conflict issues in their art practices.

The areas of conflict I describe are centered around:

1. the character of women's social subordination

2. the stereotypes of masculinity defined through "autonomy and separation" and femininity through "nurturance and attachment" creating a split between gender-identification and gender-aspiration.

3. women's dual identity between her self-image (internalized sense of real self) and her role-image (internalized ideal of womanhood) resulting from the stereotyped representations of femininity.

The conflict between masculine and femininine stereotypes is exemplified in the art world. Art has suffered a secondary status in this society because it has been identified as a feminine endeavour (Collins, 1979). Artists in America are not respected unless they are "stars", "mad" "rich" or "dead" (Lippard, 1984). Women and art have shared the same status. The values and roles assigned to art in this society match the values and roles assigned to women.

The explanations given for male dominance of art are first, that masculine values have dominated everything in society and second, that the art world is "a reactive phenomenon". Male artists, in order to escape the stigma of feminization, have set up value distinctions in the visual arts (for example, "major and minor" and "arts and crafts") and have asserted that the "high" arts belong to the male artist (Collins, 1979).

Lippard sees the art world as a microcosm of capitalist society evolved into its own class system. She describes the dilemma as a dichotomy between "high" (or fine) and "low" (or mass and popular) cultures. She describes the art world as "an incestous network of relationships between artists and art on the one hand and dealers, publishers and buyers on the other; the "masses" or "audience" is hardly considered.

To be "avant-garde" she says is to be on top, a member of the upper, middle-class, educated elite. Owning art is the ultimate step of "upward social mobility". "Making art is at the bottom", legitimatizing artists to see themselves as "workers".

At the same time, according to Lippard, artists feel misunderstood, and, as "creators", superior to buyers. This creates a conflict for artists, a "schizophrenia":

> "she/he is persistently working "up" to be accepted, not only by other artists, but also by the hierarchy that exhibits, writes about, and buys her/his work. At the same time she/he is often ideologically working "down" in an attempt to identify with the workers outside of the art context and to overthrow the rulers in the name of art" (p. 90).

In presenting this conflict as a vicious circle, she raises an important question: If the artist-producer is upper-middle-class and our standards of art as taught in schools are persistently upper-middle-class, how do we escape making art only for the upper-middle-class? (p. 93).

The gap between art and life is perpetuated because the standards set are hard to break. The avant-garde does not move out of the art context to attract a broad audience and the members of that broad audience have been trained to think of art as something that has nothing to do with life. Despite the real class obstacles, Lippard believes that

> "women are in a priviliged position to develop an art that would communicate the needs of all classes and sexes to each other, and get rid of the "we/they dichotomy" (p. 97).

Our female experience and oppression, our sharing of the majority of these experiences "offers access to all of us by these common threads" (1984, p. 97).

Lippard protests against the "neutral esthetic freedom" in art which emphasizes quality, objectivity and neutrality belonging to the art for arts sake establishment. In the art world, "clarity" as a taboo notion which has become "an implicit element of American art education" needs to be combatted. She contends that the only way to combat this "taken for granted propaganda" is to question "their" version of the truth as "publicly" and "clearly" as possible (p. 115).

Reaching, moving and educating an audience is all important for socially conscious artists. In their concern with communicating they work in or with community groups and try to disassociate themselves from the art world values. Art in a consumer society becomes a commodity rather than a life-enhancing experience.

Women's Art and Conflict

Lippard (1984) states that feminist and/or women's art is neither a style nor a movement but rather consists of many styles and individual expressions and at its best, questions all the precepts of art as we know it.

In their article "Textual Strategies" (1980), Flitterman and Barry trace the development of feminist art over the past 15 years and present four categories or types of artistic practice:

1. work which is the glorification of an essential female power - an inherent "feminine artistic essence" which needs to be liberated;

2. work which is the valorization of the 'hidden history' of women's handiwork; (these first two are essentialist-feminist positions). ·

3. work which uses mainstream strategies but implies difference or separate-ness because it is by a woman; and most recently,

4. work which regards artistic activity as a "textual practice", i.e., work which has the power to criticize and deconstruct existing social constructs.

However, Lippard (1984) states that within the feminist art movement in America since the nineteen-seventies, polarities exist between "radical" or "cultural" feminists and "social" feminists.

"'Cultural feminists' (with their connective concept of women and nature) work in the areas of autobiography, images of self, performance and traditional art forms..., tend to perceive 'socialist feminists' as male-identified, unfeeling intellectuals bound to an impersonal and finally anti-female economic overview; while 'socialist feminist' tend to perceive 'cultural feminists' as a woozy crowd of women in sheets taking refuge in a matriarchal "herstory: that is reactionary, escapist and possibly fascist in its suggestions of biological superiority" (p. 88).

Feminist values permeating the art of the nineteen-seventies include "collaboration, dialogue, a constant questioning of aesthetic and social assumptions, and a new respect for audience"... Women artists introduced "an element of real emotion and autobiographical content to performance, body art, video and artists books"... They have expanded women's traditional art forms and "have changed the face of central imagery and pattern painting, of layering, fragmentation, and collage" (p. 149). Women have also included what they learned from their own lived experience as women.

Lippard contends that women's social conditioning, as nurturers of "children, men, homes and customs", have increased their sensitivity to others, and that this accounts to some extent for the important roles that the audience and communication play in feminist art. She sees feminism as confirming the bonds between individual and social experience.

Lippard states a basic conflict is set up when an artist wants to integrate aesthetic and social activities. Art and life, she says always seem to be in competition.

"One of the feminist goals is to reintegrate the aesthetic self and the social self and to make it possible for both to function without guilt or frustration" (p. 151).

According to the socialist feminists, art is inseparable from the social structures that support and inspire it. These structures are grounded in the women's liberation movement's interaction techniques of consciousness raising (Lippard 1984). These models have become the models

of interaction that feminism offers to art. They consist of group or
public ritual; public consciousness-raising and interaction through visual
images, environments, and performance; and cooperative-collaborative-
collective or anonymous art making.

Characteristic of these three models is:

"an element of outreach, a need for connections beyond process or
product, an element of inclusiveness which also takes the form of
responsiveness and responsibility for ones own ideas and images-the
outward and inward facets of the same impulse" (p. 154).

Lippard refers to the "web" or "network" or "quilt", an image of
"connectiveness, inclusiveness and integration, as a feminist metaphor.
She submits the notion of connections as also "a metaphor for the
breakdown of race, class and gender barriers because it moves from its
center in every direction" (p. 156).

Flitterman and Barry place strong emphasis on "theory reflection",
i.e., on an understanding of how certain stereotypic representations of
women are perpetuated.

"A more theoretically informed art can contribute to enduring changes
by addressing itself to structural and deep-seated causes of women's
oppression rather than to its effects" (p. 36).

Kerri Kwinter and Joyce Mason speaking about recent feminist cultural
production in Toronto suggest that such an understanding must work with
activism and never be separated from it. They suggest this sort of
theoretical basis does not need to be elitist and is urgently needed
within feminist practice. They suggest the many ways to access
information and theory, such as study groups, workshops and writing.

CHAPTER VII

CONFLICT AND BEYOND

Women' Performance and Video Art

Performance art has emerged from visual arts schools and studios as well as from feminism, street theatre, community arts, liberation movements and media presentations by non-artists. It started in the nineteen-sixties as a political idea and was directly influenced by political events and activities such as the Vietnam War. In that context of mass demonstration, works were designed collectively. The idea was "anti-isolation and direct communication". Lippard describes it as "a form of outreach", a "real-time" art which ideally is a direct communication between "artist/self confronting audience/society". She describes "the word action was once used as a synonym for happenings and at performances" (p, 241).

Women artists find performance to be an art form that gives them immediate access to express their angers and anxieties. While demonstrating an active opposition to hierarchy and the "star" system on which the art world trives, collective work is also a useful way of sharing skills and materials, (MacRitchie, 1980). Lippard states that performance may also be "transitional for individuals, quite literally providing a way of acting out one's fears or awareness and reaching toward a supporting sense of unity with one's audience" (p. 315).

Lippard stipulates that the feminist influence on the art of the nineteen-seventies created a prevalence of art open to dialogue: performance, video, film, music, poetry reading, panels and meetings.

It suggested a merging of art and entertainment and operated on the premise that speaking is the best way to get a message across. "While offering at least the illusion of direct (i.e., live) content and dialogue" (Lippard, 1984, p. 117). The spoken word is considered "realer" than the written word and most easily absorbed"... "One's intake of spoken propaganda is the sum of daily communication." She refers to gossip as an "intimate kind of propaganda-relating a feminized style of communication" (p. 117).

Lippard contends that the first step in the political contribution of feminism to the visual arts was "the introduction of the notion of autobiography and narrative, ritual and performance, women's history and woman's work as ways to retrieve content without giving up form" (p. 116).

Feminists challenged assumptions such as the notion of genius and greatness; taboo subject matter such as racism, sexism, classism, unemployment, work and domesticity, budget cutbacks, militarism, rape, violence against women, incest, prostitution, agism and media distortion;

and the sense of "imagined superiority" that has separated high art from
crafts and artists from ordinary people. She contends that the taboo
against any art that might be "useful" or even "powerful" is the tenure of
western art education.

Lippard (1984) regards "collaborative" art work, "performance pieces"
and "site sculptures" as being the fusion of art with other functions
concerned with integrating the human creative process -art- with other
life forms. Performance has the advantage of breaking down object-
maker-spectator barriers and using that control democratically...

> "There is an increasing number of artists working all over the world
> who are devoting themselves to an ongoing, high structured art
> conceived not as an esthetic amenity but as a consciousness-raising
> or organizing tool, media manipulation or "life frame". Their work
> is a long term exchange with an active rather than passive audience.
> It concerns itself with systems critically, from within not just as
> reactive commentaries on them" (p. 318),

Potter (1980) defines performance as "doing" i.e. as participation
in an activity rather than in a part being played; "theatrical" time is
rejected in favour of "real time".

> "The performance artist is often concerned to alert the audience to
> the shifting constructions of the performance, to be both inside and
> outside commenting on it" (p. 5).

The female performer is in a contradictory position: she embodies both the representation of a woman and is a woman. Potter explains why the distinction is important:

".... it can illuminate why most women experience themselves in everyday life as a kind of living continuous performance, distanced by the constraints of feminity from themselves.... It is like a split, being both inside your body, unable to transcend gender identity, fixed as the 'other' to man's central position in patriarchy, and yet also outside of your body in the very act of thinking, of using language" (p. 6).

Potter proposes strategies "to dismantle feminine construction" and to raise "female subjectivity to the status of objective significance".

"For some it means using a feminist conception of subjectivity as the basis for the work as part of an overall strategy to reclaim on new terms what has been negatively caricatured as the realm of the feminine. An obsession with personal experience and relationships, an unwillingness to generalize, prioritising emotional over intellectual life: look differently at these characteristics and you find what has been designated trivia has in fact profound polictial significance" (p. 6).

She puts forward the following means: 1. building an imagery based on the female body; 2. reversing the gaze, breaking the silence of centuries and getting the female nude and muse to speak; and 3. to look at female stereotypes and how they function and to find and use modes that contradict them – ways out of the representation of women as passive and incompetent.

She emphasizes the development of skills, because, as she points out,

"femininity demands the appearance of lack of skill and emphasises nurturance and appreciation of the skills of men" (p. 6)

Women therefore have been denied access to skills they want and also had their own skills undervalued and denigraded. She expresses how the "performer" becomes a symbol of privilege, "specialness ascribed to individual performers and the performer/audience divide"...In protest as a strategy, she suggests "to break down the divide and emphasize audience participation as a way of saying 'anyone can do it'"... and "to differentiate skill defined as appropriateness of ability to meet a need, from the solidification of skill into a rigid system of technical excellence with its own insulated and self-fulfilling ways of measuring success"... "The woman's movement places an emphasis on skill sharing, on teaching other as a way of breaking down the mystiques of professionalism and working towards the realization of each persons 'genius'" (Potter, 1982, p. 6).

Since the role of the image has been instrumental in our exploitation (through advertising, pornography etc.), Lippard contends that "feminist artists have a particular responsibility to create a new image vocabulary that conforms us to our own interests" (p. 116).

Potter examines what an image is in performance and deffnes it as a compositional unit; a movement or sequence of movement; a combination of layers such as light, action and object functioning as an entity of meaning which is not absolute or fixed. She mentions the conventional definition of the process of producing an image as coming from myth, archetypal images, and symbolism suggestive of a collective unconscious,

outside verbal construct. But she proposes that a "more useful approach" for producing images would be

> "to understand the order behind the apparent disorder. To unlock the power of imagery, to decode its mystery, to make the impossible evocative also a movement of dissection and comprehension" (p. 7).

In performance, she says certain kinds of juxtaposition are uniquely possible:

> "Juxtaposition through time in space; visual and aural-the performer can simultaneously mobilise all the senses of the spectator. For a feminist, the fact of being able to work at the level of organization of the unconscious (images and music) and in juxtaposition to rational speech offers the possibility of entering and re-entering consciousness in order to change it" (p. 7).

Potter questions the mystiques attached to the creative working process. She sees performance as offering the possibility for people to work together with the desire that each person's ideas will transform the other's. She stresses the importance of finding an appropriate strategy "for finding or inventing ways of working that are effective here and now" .... She says

> "It means discovering what specific functions this work can have as part of a wider collective strategy to transform the structures and conditions under which we live" (p.7).

In her article, "Behind the Pretty Face-British Women Artists Working with Video", Elwes (1984), states that television is the major agency of the contemporary survival of female stereotypes. She discusses strategies

to challenge "male power" such as intervening in broadcast television as well as exploring alternative uses of video tape at a community level and in the context of art.

In working with video she finds that many women students find it necessary to overcome both a conditioned fear of all things mechanical and "the fierce territoriality of men left in charge of departmental treasures" (p. 13).

In the nineteen-seventies video art was concerned with issues of spectatorship as part of a critique of broadcast television. Artists used strategies "to return the gaze of the male spectator" where the spectatorship of a male audience becomes the subject of the work.

Feminist artists used video as a metaphor of femininity

"Women experienced life as a struggle for perfection under the constant surveillance of an internalized ideal of womanhood"... "The electronic surveillance of closed-circuit video locks the artist into an endless communication with the image of herself as the social, socialised, feminine female" (p. 14).

Video provides the "multiple viewpoints reinforcing a philosophical position opposed to the use of single, incontrovertable 'truth' in any explanation of gender difference" (p. 14).

As feminists set out to reveal the structures and strictures of patriarchy by exchanging and analysing individual experience in consciousness raising groups, their work was autobiographical and they

found the directness and intimacy which the video camera produced was ideal for the working and reworking of individual "herstories". One of the first projects of feminist art was to repair the human damage caused by a sexist society.

Starting with herself

"a 'flawed' woman speaking, taking action, valueing herself in the mirror built for stars, undermines the patrist law by which only those who conform to the ideal may be loved, may love themselves, may be truly narcissistic" (p. 15).

Elwes describes "time" as woman's greatest enemy in their compulsion to "twist themselves into an approximation of conventional beauty. A videotape is a witness to the process of time.

"It marks time, both the time it takes to record and the time it takes to view" (p. 15).

A video artist challenges the assumptions that a woman's body is her principal commodity

"by insisting on her authorship, by elaborating her perceptions, her skills and her desires, she is building a new value system as it were in the face of the old" (p. 15).

Video, like performance, straddles a number of disciplines from popular culture to fine art traditions allowing women a freedom of movement. Elwes claims that the image of woman is less "set" on video than in a painting in spite of broadcast television.

"The history of entertainment contains almost as many powerful female
figures as male. The well-publicized life of actresses reveal an
unconventional commitment to career and an active sexuality that works
against the roles they portray on the screen" (p. 16).

She sees as an important goal for feminists, the possibility of mass

communication, and of countering dominant representations of women with

alternatives in broadcast television.

"... video offers women an effective weapon for the propagation of a
'new' femininity, an emergent female consciousness in a political and
economic climate that seems set to reverse the advances made by the
women's movement over the last twenty years" (p. 16).

Lippard (1984) sees in performance art the potential "to evolve new

models for a truly public art, even lay the foundations of a real

revolutionary program, an authentic cultural democracy" (p. 323).

CONCLUSION

As a result of their position of alienation in society, women face many conflicts. I have explored these conflicts through the literature about the socialization of women and women and art.

Their findings offer important insights about women's conflicts and show how these affect women's self-development. Hopefully these investigations may illuminate the path that women are facing ahead of them.

Flax (1981) sees the roots of conflict for women as originating from the conflicts and ambivalence of the mother-daughter-bond. She describes the main conflict for women as the split between autonomy and nurturance. What women want, she says, is to explore both nurturance and autonomy within an intimate relationship. What makes this wish so strong and for many women so unattainable, is that psychological development occurs within the patriarchal-family — in which the mother is the primary nurturer and the father is the symbol of authority.

She argues that the investigation into the genesis of women's dual needs for autonomy and nurturance provides insights into feminist and antifeminist politics.

Flax states that gender, a central element of "a core identity"

established by the third year of life, is not neutral. She argues that a
child's psychological development occurs within a socioeconomic system
that also strongly affects the mother impinging on her ability to provide
emotional support needed by the child. Because of her own psychological
development occurring under patriarchy, it would have left an imprint upon
her feelings about herself, about being a woman and being a mother. These
feelings she says would in turn affect the type of mothering she would
provide a child. Therefore, Flax puts forth the argument that mothering
is not gender neutral, i.e. and that women relate differently to male and
female children. She is concerned with the consequences for women, both
as children and adults that result from this type of mothering.

Mothers, Flax explains, tend to indentify more strongly with their
girl children and therefore more internal conflict is likely to be
stimulated by their role as mother. She suggests different reasons such
as one, memories of unresolved wishes from their own infancy more likely
being evoked; two, unconscious conflict about closeness with their girl
children; and three, the conflicts resulting from being female in a man's
world where the mother might value a son more; wishing the daughter for
her own sake to be born a male and yet because of her identification with
a girl child, she wishes her to be just like her. As a result, of these
conflicts, Flax claims, it is more difficult for the mother to be as
emotionally available as her baby girl needs her to be.

The process of separation and individuation that follows is also more difficult for the female infant.. Because she is expected to be like the mother, both as a person and in terms of her adult roles, there is less need for her to differentiate and the mother will be more conflicted about her girl infant's move toward differentiation. In the third phase of separation-individuation the child learns that the mother is not all-powerful and becomes conscious of gender and some of its meanings, the girl will suffer a gender-specific lessening of self-esteem; because she feels her mother has failed to give her something important.

Flax describes the painful bind the girl is in. She must choose between nurturance and autonomy. Her needs for a sense of fusion with a caring, reliable person like the mother remain strong, on the one hand, and she may lack a sense of being rewarded for making moves towards autonomy. Autonomy Flax says, is experienced as a rejection of the mother rather than being experienced as a way of pleasing the mother.

Flax contends that only through relationships with other women where one is nurtured for being one's autonomous self can women "heal the hurts suffered during their psychological developments" (p. 60). To the extent that a woman devalues and mistrusts other women, that woman is isolated in her home she will not find female kinship networks. Our sense of self is bound up with other women in an intensity and depth simply not present

in relations with men. Feelings of intense rage, hurt and betrayal occur when female relations fail to nurture our autonomous self.

Success for women, Flax claims, comes as a denial of their gender. She says women who wish to succeed in non-traditional ways face a potentially paralising conflict.

> "Women's ambivalence about male values and the unwillingness to give up the female identification of the self may lead to disabling conflicts about their work" (p. 63).

To eliminate these conflicts, Flax calls for a transformation in the character of work itself, including integration of noncompetitive, nurturant ways of relating and recognized time and support for child care for both men and women.

Women's adult relationships, she claims, are filled with conflict and are difficult to work through because of their unconscious roots. Anti-feminism among women and our own anti-female behavior has left the feminist movement perplexed. The hostility toward women

> "who act upon one's wishes to escape the traditional female condition results in an alliance with and a subordination to patriarchal authority itself" (p. 67).

Women, she says, become the instruments of their own repression just as a mother unconsciously denies her daughter's moves toward autonomy. "The life giver becomes the life denier" (p. 67). The paradox within female development, Flax explains, is an overidentification with the

mother masking a deep rage toward her and, by extension, toward all women. Flax proposes that for women to become whole people, every social structure will have to be transformed.

> "The integration of work and play; new arrangements for human intimacy and child care; development of a technology that works with rather than exploits mother earth; the freeing of men from mastery and ourselves from participating in it; the integration of mind and body, feeling and thought all lie before us" (p. 68).

Gilligan (1982) describes attachment and separation as anchoring the cycle of human life, "describing the biology of human reproduction and the psychology of human development" (p. 151). There exists in our culture, states Gilligan, two distinct voices: two ways of speaking about moral problems, two modes of describing the relationship between other and self. Men tend to see morality in terms of a hierarchy of rights, whereas women see it in terms of a web of relationships. Men see the actors in a moral dilemma arrayed as opponents in a contest of rights, while women see them as members of a network of relationships on whose continuation they all depend.

Gilligan's study that suggests that the conflicts expressed by women over success might indicate a heightened perception of the 'other side' of competitive success; that is the great emotional costs at which success achieved through competition is often gained - an understanding which, though confused, indicates some underlying sense that something is rotten in the state in which success is defined as having better grades than eveyone else.

The "different voice" presented by Gilligan more than fulfills her hope of enabling women to see better its integrity and validity. She stresses the importance of a re-interpretation of women's experiences inorder to provide a "non-hierarchical vision of human connection".

Miller (1976) calls for "a new psychology of women" that recongizes the different starting points for women's development. She points to a psychology of adulthood which recognizes that development does not displace the value of ongoing attachment and the continuing importance of care in relationships. She identifies the distinctive psychology of women as arising from the combination of their positions in relationships of temporary and permanent inequality. Women are dominant in temporary relationships of nurturance and are subserviant in relationships of permanently unequal social status and power.

That women differ in their orientation to power is the theme of Miller's analysis. As they seek real power, she says, women face serious conflict. She states that we all grow via conflict and emphasizes the importance for women to engage openly in productive conflict in the process of self-definition and self-determination. To successfully wage conflict it is necessary for women to construct supportive environments in order to overcome the threat of isolation and to engage in respectful interaction and in real conflict.

Miller states that a community of purposeful and sympathetic women directed to their self-directed goals is a new sense of connection between knowledge work and personal life.

The need for women to work together and engage in constructive conflict has been pointed out in this discussion.

Performance and video offer the possibility for women to work together with the desire that each person's ideas will transform the ideas of the other's. Potter (1980) sees collaboration as part of a politic that:

"...questioned notions of individual ownership of ideas and of the pursuit of originality. Working with others made it possible to discuss the implications of the work, of its politics and realization at all stages; it forced one to be conscious of what one was doing. It was also a way of combining areas of relative expertise and the lessons brought from them; and on a practical level was a way of sharing tasks. One could try out ideas physically on each other having the opportunity to step outside the piece and look at it. Exercises would be borrowed from various sources, theatrical and otherwise, designed to focus on performance itself. To find not a right way or a wrong way of doing something, but a conscious way. It provided a way to strip vestiges of self-consciousness, to experiment with different kinds of voice, movement etc and above all to ldiscard, to work through the first stages of an idea towards its full realisation and, hopefully, towards a new imagery" (p. 7).

Video, like performance, allows women a freedom of movement to explore a number of disciplines from popular culture to fine art traditions. Video has unique potential as a medium. Its characteristics of instant replay and instant revision, encourages a greater degree of experimentation and allows for instant feedback. The video camera can be used as an extension of your eye movements and as a mirror; this reflection enables one seeing oneself in a framed context. These qualities lend themselves to various perceptions of self.

In reflecting on the workshops of women using video to explore self-image, I have concluded that it might be more appropriate for future

workshops to choose participants with more commonality of interests. This would perhaps facilitate the quality of the experience and dialogue being more immediate and focused.

In conclusion I have come to realize that the following goals are important.

One, is the importance for women to create environments where they can work together. These will enable each woman to engage in constructive and respectful conflict with confidence and hope; and will provide the possibility for her to experience the support needed from other women for developing her "autonomous self".

Working collaboratively offers the possibility for women both to reflect on a more theoretically informed art and to combine this with activism in order to address structural and deep-seated causes of women's oppression.

Working collaboratively provides a way for women artists of finding appropriate strategies to transform the structures and conditions under which we live.

EPILOGUE

Television is the major agency of the contemporary survival of female stereotypes. Because of its mass communications possibilities, I see it as an important goal for feminists of countering dominant representations of women with alternatives in broadcast televison. It offers an effective weapon for the propagation of an emergent female consciousness, "a different voice", and a "new image vocabulary".

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