

A Movement in Three Parts: Artist, Educator and Activist

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## **ABSTRACT**

A Movement in Three Parts: Artist, Educator and Activist

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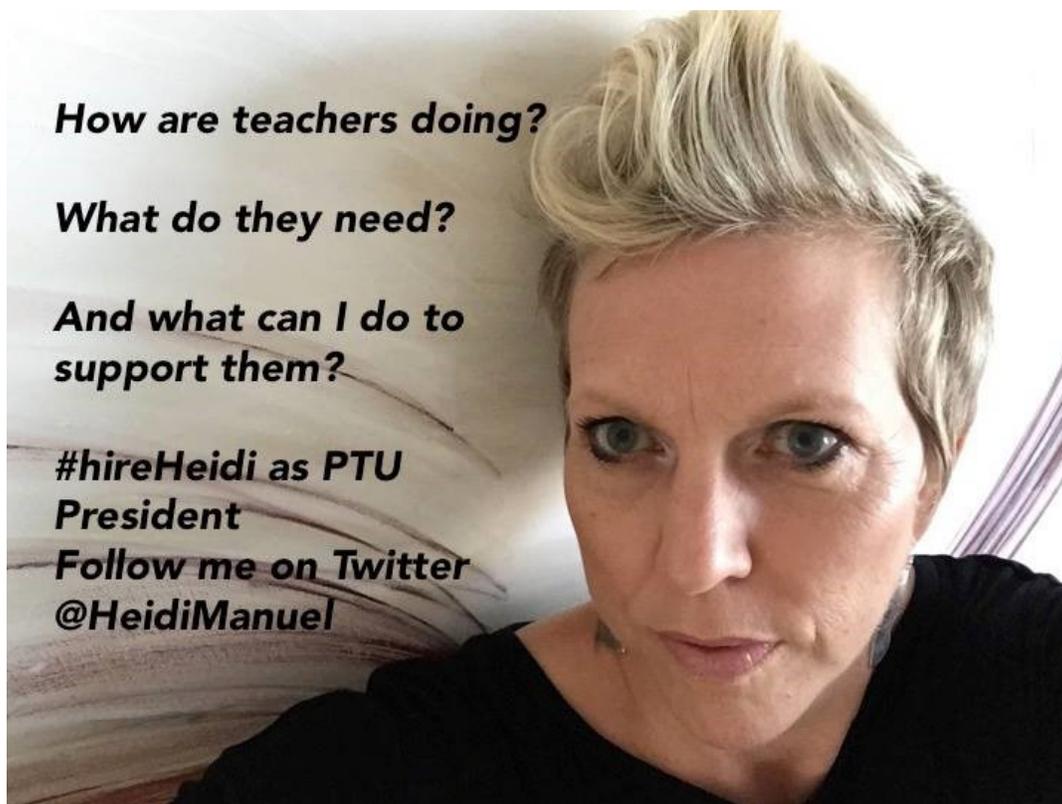
This thesis is the product of a heuristic methodology using creation as research. Walking back through the studio door, Yetman immerses herself in art making in the hopes of discovering the relationship between three identities: artist, educator, and activist. A series of work using the body and gestures become the catalyst to personal and professional growth. Gestures in drawing become the metaphor of action (movement) and the result is unexpected: a greater involvement in the politics of education and unionism. In the end, new knowledge was presented through a creative presentation, a live art performance.

Dedicated to  
my mother,  
Thelma,  
who devoted her life to her children.

A Movement in Three Parts:

Artist, Educator and Activist

How does the return to art practice open up new knowledge to discover the relationship between three identities: Artist, Educator and Activist?



*Figure 1:* This image was part of a social media campaign in the spring of 2016 when I was running for president of my local union, the Pearson Teachers Union.

I'm in my study. I lay out the three written sections on standard white paper, in long connecting rows on the floor: teacher, artist, and activist. I need to see it

visually. See how much I have written. Not in a pile, on top of each other but like a long road of laid out tiles. Six years, it has been since I started this work. A teacher, returning to art and performance, and becoming a union leader and a mentor; this is the journey of my graduate studies in Art Education at Concordia University.

I'm a little saddened that the smallest part of my three identities laid out on the floor is Teacher/Educator. I spent 22 years in the classroom and loved nearly every minute of that profession. It wasn't what I thought I would do, but after walking into the classroom for the first time in 1993, I knew it felt right. I became a teacher.

The second largest section is artist. I graduated with a Bachelor Degree in Fine Arts in 1992, so, when I returned to University initially as a mature student in 2012, my first graduate class was a studio class. I wanted to produce art, to create and to be surrounded by other artists. I wanted to immerse myself once again. It was like stepping back in time. I felt rejuvenated, excited and motivated.

However, after enrolling into the graduate studies in Art Education, it was another class, *Issues in the History, Theory and Practice of Art Education*<sup>1</sup>, that provoked me, changed me, and pushed me in another direction. I became an Activist. This part is the longest laid out on the floor. It is intense and yet incomplete. There is still much that needs to be accomplished here. Activism and the politics of education have surfaced to the top and I found my passion. Two years ago, I was elected as president of the Pearson Teachers Union, my local union, and I serve and represent the English teachers on the West Island of Montreal. I now have a seat on

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Anita Sinner who taught this course in the fall of 2013.

the Executive Committee of the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers<sup>2</sup> and recently I was elected by a pan-Canadian group of delegates as one of the Vice-Presidents of the Canadian Teachers Federation<sup>3</sup> in Ottawa. This six-year journey has completely changed my professional path.

Initially, the return to university in 2012 was a means to return to practice, to force myself back through the studio door. Incredibly, it became something else; I was introduced to critical pedagogy and democratic schools through the works of Paulo Freire and Michael Apple, and for the first time, I realized that I had a significant role to play in the politics of education. This knowledge shifted my role as an educator and transformed my classroom into a space of critical thinking and freedom. Teaching was already a strong part of my professional and personal identity and now activism and unionism has an equally important role to play.

Through the return to art practice, and in particular the gestures of drawing, I wanted to rediscover my identity as an artist. What are my roles as artist, teacher, and activist? How does the return to practice change these roles? How are these roles interrelated? How do these three parts, evolve, feed off each other and influence each other? Can new knowledge about these roles create a personal philosophy, which can be shared? By means of research-creation guided by a heuristic methodology I wish to answer these questions and hopefully reach others through these understandings.

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<sup>2</sup> The Quebec Provincial Teachers Association represents nine English school boards across Quebec and negotiates our provincial agreement.

<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Teachers Federation is a non-profit organization that represents 238,000 teachers across Canada and advocates for teachers, students and public education.

The thesis is broken into three main parts: artist, teacher and activist. However, initially, there will be a discussion on the methodology used and on two important aspects that are threaded throughout the work: narrative and performance. These two elements are an important part of the interrelationship between the three identities. They are the glue that holds the work together and builds personal connections.

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## **Part 1: Methodology**

By means of research-creation guided by heuristic methodology, my thesis addresses the following research question: How does the return to art practice open up new knowledge to discover the relationship between three identities: Artist, Educator and Activist? Through art practice, I will be able to become more intimate with these three personal identities and discover how they relate to my personal journey. How will an enhanced understanding of these relationships contribute to unfolding new areas of expertise, which can then be shared and used to create positive change? Can this knowledge construct change for others in addition to personal transformation?

In the initial stages of this research, I drew upon Moustakas' research-creation using a heuristic methodology. As the research progressed, I realized that a creation representation of research based on the initial experience of returning to the art studio was appropriate. In this section, I will describe the heuristic method according to Moustakas and follow with a brief account of how the inquiry evolved into the creation of a final art piece using performance art.

### **a) Research-Creation Guided by Heuristic Methodology**

Moustakas describes the heuristic approach as “aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences” (Moustakas, 1990, p.15). Moustakas explains that through the processes of self-dialogue, tacit knowledge, intuition, indwelling and focusing the researcher seeks to find the answer to a question or problem. Self-dialogue is the

inner conversations the researcher has with the phenomenon that is being investigated. It is by allowing these conversations to create a flow, a back and forth, that the researcher can discover new angles, link the thoughts with personal experience and connect the issue to the outside world. Tacit knowledge is that which we cannot put into words. It is knowledge that is understood or implied. The connection between tacit knowledge and explicit or describable knowledge is intuition. Intuition is important in research. It is in this gap that the researcher can make inferences, form relationships, see patterns, and therefore gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. "Intuition is an essential characteristic of seeking knowledge" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 23). Indwelling is the act of turning inward to find the deeper meanings of human experiences. Moustakas makes reference to our internal frame of reference, our self, as the foundation of heuristic research.

Heuristic research contains six phases or steps: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. In initial engagement the researcher finds a topic that is of intense interest. In this initial engagement the process of self-dialogue comes into play; the researcher remains open and receptive to all the possibilities around the topic. Initially, one must formulate the question in the hope that the answer will hold important social meanings and personal compelling implications. In my research, I asked how the return to art practice could alter my identity as an educator and an activist and how this transformation can impact the way I look at society as a whole. In the second phase, immersion, the researcher plunges deep into the subject. The researcher lives

and breathes the question. This is an intense time for the researcher. Immersion was a passionate return to an art practice that had been abandoned since my work as a teacher. Simultaneously, I was also immersed in activism, by attending more than a dozen demonstrations.

During incubation the researcher comes back to the surface and withdraws from the intense phase of immersion. Walking away from the research allows the inner tacit knowledge and intuition to incubate in hopes that the next phase will occur: illumination. In the illumination phase, new meanings surface to consciousness hence creating new knowledge. The next stage is to better understand this new knowledge. During the explication phase, the researcher uses indwelling and focusing to organize his or her thoughts, to fully understand these new meanings. At this stage, the researcher may have to return, to revise and refine their study. This is a very introspective stage that allows the researcher to dig deep and be aware of self, to evaluate their feelings and beliefs. The last phase is the creative synthesis of the new knowledge. The research data can be presented using a variety of methods including: individual depictions, composite depictions, portraits, literary expression, narrative and artwork.

Research-creation as defined by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) is

An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation.

The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms)."<sup>4</sup>

In the past two decades, research-creation has been becoming the new paradigm shift for qualitative research in the social sciences (Leavy, 2015). In her book *Method Meets Art: Arts Based Research Practice*, Leavy discusses some of the main reasons why this type of research is so powerful: reaching a larger audience, creating multiple meanings, illuminating aspects of the social world and allowing for a more holistic approach to research.

Using art as research, the researcher is not limited to the written language of a traditional academic thesis. Reaching a broad audience allows the research to have a larger impact on society. Sometimes critical articles contain too much theoretical jargon to be understood by the majority and it is less accessible. Therefore, arts-based-research can be a more democratic paradigm for social research.

Since a wider audience will appreciate the work, arts-based research can have a large number of interpretations depending on each individual's perspective and experience. Artwork can tap into the emotions of the viewer; this visceral connection can create a multiplicity of meanings. Engaging the audience in the artwork can create new knowledge for each individual and create new insights into learning. Artwork can generate new questions that can go beyond the scope of the project (Sullivan, 2014).

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<sup>4</sup> Retrieved August 1, 2018 from: <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx>

Arts-based research has the capacity to make social change, create critical consciousness and raise awareness (Leavy, 2015). Since it exposes people to new ideas, images, and narratives, it can have a tremendous impact on how we view the world. This type of research aligns itself well with social justice causes which is of great interest to me.

This approach to research is holistic, involving the whole, bridging the gaps between artistic practice and process, research, and theory. Research-creation is not a fixed methodology but a methodology that has many different possibilities (Chapman & Sawchuck, 2012). This openness allows the researcher to direct his or her research in a more informal way, allowing the research to guide the practice and also allowing for intuition and experimentation to play an important role. Through the production of art, knowledge is created by a back and forth between creation and investigation. “The practice of art research is dynamic, continuously ‘infolding’ and ‘unfolding’, opening up and drawing together possibilities, problems and provocations” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 278). Knowledge is created differently; “It’s a hands-on form of theoretical engagement” (Chapman & Sawchuck, 2012, p. 21). This can have an important impact in research and be equivalent to more traditional research methods. In other words, research-creation has an epistemological attribute, a way of exploring the production of knowledge, which is important in research.

Another interesting feature of arts-based research, according to Graeme Sullivan, is that the construction of meaning is found in an “in-between” space

instead of within a dichotomy. Sullivan writes about intersubjectivity; a space between the objective (scientific) and subjective (personal) division. The knowledge generated in this space is more inclusive and diverse. In other words, this “opens up possibilities whereby plural views, ambiguous notions, and uncertain outcomes become opportunities to help see things differently” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 40).

Using a heuristic methodology and research-creation, I was able to dive into the creation process without restraint. I discovered through the immersion of my art practice new knowledge that informed me about my beliefs and values. I understood that I could change the way people look at education, art and policymaking during a time of government austerity.

## **b) Creative Representation of Research**

Chapman and Sawchuck (2012) describe four different Research-Creation methodologies in their paper entitled *Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and “Family Resemblances.”* Creative presentation of research is self-explanatory. Research is presented in a different way other than through a written thesis: visual arts, dance, music, literary form, et cetera. Part of my new knowledge will be presented through a live performance. Since the “initial acceptance of the academic value of research-creation (had) already been achieved, we must now turn to the task of elaborating new academic paradigms of knowledge production and dissemination” (Chapman & Sawchuck, 2012, p.24). This allow for the researcher to disseminate the information in a new and exciting way.

## Part 2: Personal Narratives: The Connection to my Identities

*"I don't think works of art can be devoid of personal references. For me, it is a balance in which the autobiographical and sub-conscious link-up with the intellect to make something new. The amount of personal data an artist allows into his work will in the end determine how it is dealt with." (Goodwin, Bradley & Teitelbaum, 1998, p. 119)*

Teacher, Artist and Activist are the three identities that I am exploring in this research. Since they are selves that I carry within me, they are connected to the narratives or personal stories of my life. Throughout this work I will be using personal accounts to support my ideas and to connect to the reader.

Laurel Richardson, in her work *Writing: A Method of Inquiry*, argues that writing is also a way of "Knowing" (1994, p. 516). Richardson points out that qualitative research must be read because the meaning is in the text. She reluctantly calls most qualitative manuscripts dull and states that researchers are trained to "conceptualize writing as "writing up" the research rather than as a method of discovery" (p. 517). She describes different alternatives to writing qualitative research, which can enhance the reader's experience. Experimental writing can take many forms: narratives of the self, fiction, poetry, drama, performance, comedy and satire, visual presentation, et cetera.

My written thesis will be a combination of theoretical material ("writing-up"), personal narratives and descriptive text.

### **Part 3: Performance Art: The Connecting Force**

Performance is defined as “the execution of an action” or “a public presentation or exhibition” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2018). Art performance is art that is performed “live” and encompasses a wide range of characterizations and a very broad field of scholarship and practice that goes beyond the scope of this thesis<sup>5</sup>.

For the purpose of this work, I will discuss my personal connection to art performance, a brief description of women in art performance and their ties to social justice, a close look at two women artists who practice art performance and lastly how performance has become the nexus of the three identities: teacher, artist and activist.

#### **a) Performance in the Classroom**

I was lucky, I had my first experience in art performance when I was in grade eleven; I was sixteen years old. Marcel Gosselin, my art teacher, introduced the class to Performance Art. We all got the chance to create a performance piece for the class. The performances were incredible in my teenage mind. It was thrilling being in front of an audience and expressing emotions and ideas that were important to me at the time. This type of expression was new to me, and it was exciting. I don't

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<sup>5</sup> Phelan, P. (2017). *UNMARKED: The politics of performance*. S.l.: ROUTLEDGE. is a good reference on the relationship between women, politics, culture and performance art.

think this is the reason I became a teacher but it helped shape the way I teach art. I want my students to think outside the box.

I never thought teaching was something that I would enjoy but when I stepped into the classroom during my internship I knew I had made the right choice. I was fortunate to have done my internship at a private school in Quebec City in which the cooperating teacher gave me the freedom and space that I needed. I still remember the grade eleven students fondly even though it was twenty-six years ago. I wanted these students to experience art performance like I had at their age. To get them motivated for the experience I performed for them. They too had never seen anything like it before. They said it was thrilling and exciting but they were hesitant about the project. They were uncomfortable and apprehensive about performing in front of their peers. I exposed them to many performances on video that I had acquired from art centers and made them prepare a “performance kit” which I had created to help them brainstorm ideas, develop the main idea, create a time spread sheet of the piece, make a list of materials and practice. They blew me away! This was it; this was what I was supposed to do. I wanted and needed to inspire, push boundaries, and encourage kids to see the world differently.

*He approaches a podium adorning the swastika symbol. He wears a “Hitler” style mustache. There is a square piece of plexi-glass separating him from the audience. He puts his arm forward in a Nazi salute and begins to scream in German. He is looking at his speech, he is looking at the audience and he is pounding his fist on the podium. He does not waiver. His voice is aggressive, angry and terrifying. The audience is tense. Projected on a screen, in the background, are horrific images of war. As the speech goes forward, another student is slowly painting the plexi-glass in horizontal red strokes; simultaneously the performer’s voice is silencing. Eventually the red paint covers the performer entirely and he is quiet. Projected on the wall is an image of a mushroom cloud followed by a sunset. The theme music of Stanley*

*Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey, composed in 1896 by German composer Richard Strauss, plays as we look out to the projected sunset. (1992)*<sup>6</sup>

I had inspired this amazing performance by a seventeen year old. I had given this student the power to stir the emotions of an entire art class. I realized then, that being an educator was a powerful line of work and that I had been given a huge responsibility. With this power, I had no idea that I had entered a world of politics and duty.

In University, I have also had the chance to do Performance Art on several occasions. More recently, I performed at the Art Education Symposium at Concordia University in February of 2016. The theme of the symposium was *Inquire and Inspire*, with a focus on the latest research and art practices happening within the department.

## **b) Women in Performance and Social Justice**

Jane Wark's book, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Art Performance in North America*, looks at the history of feminism and the role of performance art as an outlet for female artists. One important finding was that women were forming groups and realizing that they were not alone. This provided opportunities to discuss personal issues. This sharing of narratives, which helped them understand their anger and frustrations, became political. This also allowed women to break out of isolation.

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<sup>6</sup> This is a description of a performance done by grade eleven students during my student teaching in 1992.

Female artists were expressing themselves using performance: demonstrating gender differences, telling autobiographical or personal narratives, questioning female roles, creating personas, physically transforming themselves, mimicking everyday experiences, using comedy or satire and using their bodies as places of exploration. They were provoking discussion among those in the art scenes. They were bringing up questions concerning race, gender, equality, power and politics to the mainstream public. “Feminist art since the early 1970s has had a major influence in shifting art away from its exclusive preoccupation with aesthetic concerns and towards a critical engagement with social and political contingencies of our times” (Wark, 2006, p. 204). ). I am particularly inspired by the performance practices of Margaret Dragu and Joan Jonas, two of whose projects I describe here.

Margaret Dragu, a Canadian artist and a recipient of the Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts in 2012<sup>7</sup>, merged her art with her political activism. She was concerned with women’s place in society. In the 1970s, she worked as a burlesque entertainer to support her artistic endeavors and eventually formed a union, the Canadian Association for Burlesque Entertainers (CABE). Unfortunately, the CABE was short-lived. As soon as she became a mother, she saw “the connection between the low-paid and unpaid work that women continue to do in society: As a mother, I am the lowest paid (and unpaid) worker in our society. Domestic work is invisible...my politics and art come from the kitchen” (Wark, 2006, p. 120). In her performance *Cleaning It and Loving It (2000)*, Dragu performed kitchen-cleaning tasks around Toronto; scrubbing the stairs of the Ontario Legislature building,

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<sup>7</sup> Margaret Dragu: 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLx98CmTfIE>

sweeping sidewalks, cleaning bus shelters, et cetera. The timing was especially interesting; a month prior to her performance there were violent confrontations between antipoverty activists and riot police. Artists in the community joined Dragu, and participated in the cleaning tasks. Margaret Dragu cheerfully admits that her art and life spill into each other, and that she draws heavily on her experiences as a working-class feminist, woman and mother. “My life is my palette. If I had goats outside my window, I’d make a video of goats – but I have laundry” (as cited in Ireland, 2013, p. 105).

Dragu continues, from her home in Vancouver, to honor women in her performances. As one of her many personas, Lady Liberty has performed wine and salt rituals to honor lost and murdered women, including commemorating the December 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the murder of fourteen women at L’École Polytechnique de Montréal in 1989. In the performance *Maker of Change (2012)*<sup>8</sup>, on a rainy day on December 6<sup>9</sup>, Lady Liberty and her Goddesses (participants) enter a Vancouver park to remember, mourn and ask for change in honor of women who have suffered violence. One of the participants is playing a small hand held drum in a monotone beat. All the participants are dressed in black and are holding black umbrellas. Wearing a red blindfold, a red rose held between her teeth and pulling a small case with wheels, Lady Justice leads the small procession past a park bench that resembles a small concrete tomb where a red rose has been carefully placed. They enter the park carrying a large black veil held high off the ground. They lay the

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<sup>8</sup> Description based on video retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/album/2357058/video/55400156>

<sup>9</sup> December 6<sup>th</sup> is Canada’s National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

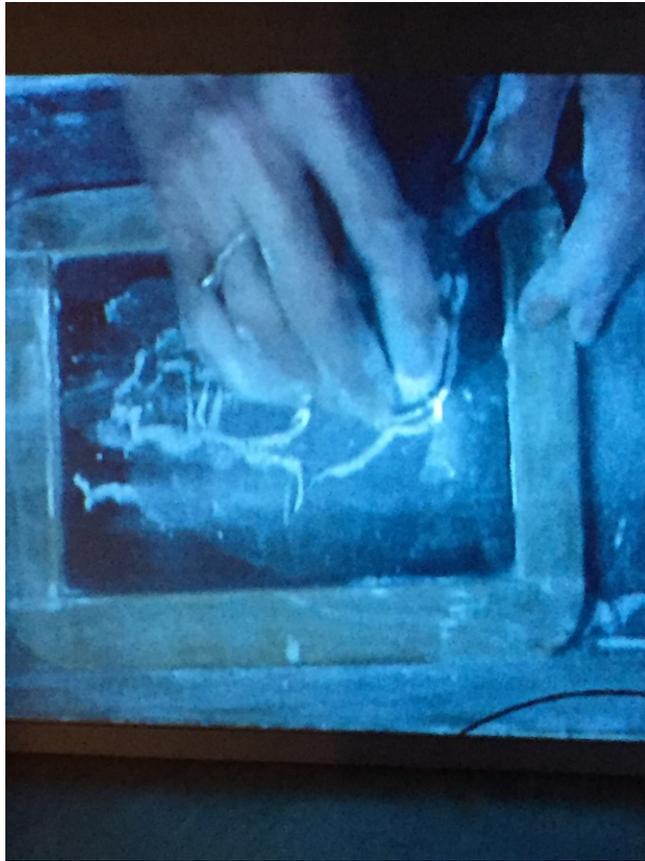
veil down carefully on the ground. Lady Justice kneels down on the veil, removes her blindfold, opens her small case and pulls out balance scales, a plate, salt and wine. She mixes the wine and salt in the plate and pours it over her head, wraps herself with the veil and leads the procession out of the park holding the balance scales in her hand. By the time the performance is finished a small crowd of spectators have gathered to watch. No words are spoken; the only sounds are the rhythms of the drum and the rain on the umbrellas. There's stillness about the piece. The participation of community members in Dragu's performances creates an intimacy in such a public space. There's a sense of hope, possibilities of change from the ground up. Dragu allows the audience to see that those possibilities exist or at the very least to ask questions about the world. She puts herself into uncomfortable, vulnerable situations to tell her stories of justice or injustice. Dragu's special dedication to women resonates with me personally and is connected to the work I wish to accomplish as an activist and leader in unionism in addressing women's issues.



*Figure 2: Margaret Dragu as Lady Justice (<http://margaretdragu.com/rose-2/>)*

I visited Joan Jonas' exhibit entitled *From Away* at the DHC Gallery (dhc-art.org) in Old Montreal on July 13, 2016. Jonas is a renowned American performance and installation artist that uses narratives from history, mythology, literature, and fairy tales, to create imagery. Using layers of video, everyday objects, and her own body or the bodies of others, she tells her stories. In her multimedia installation, *They Come to Us Without a Word (2015)*, which was originally commissioned for the U.S. Pavilion of the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2015), Jonas, through a narrative of a Cape Breton ghost story, speaks of how nature and the earth's creatures have been affected by the human race. The piece is divided into six spaces, each space depicting a particular animal, place or force. The room entitled, *Wind*, was particularly interesting for me; it contained two high definition videos, one crystal-shaped painted wood bench and 43 kites hanging from the ceiling. One of the video screen shows children playing with large pieces of paper in the wind, followed by two children drawing gestures on circular shaped chalkboards; they scribble gestures in multiple directions until the chalkboards are filled with white. These random gestures with chalk are similar to a video Jones created in 1976, named *Street Scene with Chalk*, which shows Jones drawing on a small rectangular chalkboard superimposed over an improvised dance on the streets of New York. The scribbled gestures on the chalkboard are used to emphasize the dancers on the street; drawn circles and frames focus the viewers' eyes on the movements of their bodies, followed by a filling in with chalk. Jones proceeds to erase her marks with the palm of her hand and begins again; draw, erase, draw, erase, et cetera. These

repeated gestures and layers of imagery combined with narratives have some resemblances of my own return to practice.



*Figure 3: Photograph at the Jonas Exhibit July 2016, Street Scene with Chalk, 1976*

### **c) Performance as the Nexus between artist, educator and activist**

The realization that performance had become the nexus between the three identities came during the illumination stage (new meanings surface to consciousness) of the heuristic research-creation approach and after immersing myself in unionism. Personally, performance symbolizes movement and action, both of which touch the identities of artist, educator and activist. Certainly my identity as a woman is also a connecting factor and this factor will surface throughout the text.

In the next parts, the three identities will be discussed separately. At the beginning of each section I will describe an art performance piece that I performed on August 21, 2018 at Concordia University. The descriptive text is in a distinct font to differentiate it from the rest of the written work. It is art performance, which has become the product of the research and the connecting component.

## PART 1

She stands before a small gold hard covered suitcase with the word 'artist' roughly painted on the open side facing the audience. On either side of the suitcase are two small piles of plaster of paris hands. Three large vertical drawings, of a standing nude female figure, are taped to the wall behind her. There are two pebble shaped ovals on either side of each figure. The drawing on the far left is more complete. The other two drawings are simple pencil outlines of the same figure.

She is wearing black leggings and a black t-shirt. She looks out at the audience and begins to talk.

*"I'm in my study. I lay out the three written sections on standard white paper, in long connecting rows on the floor: teacher, artist, and activist. I need to see it visually. See how much I have written. Not in a pile, on top of each other but like a long road of laid out tiles."*

She lays out some of her written thesis on the floor in a semi circle in front of her. She goes to the suitcase and applies a line of white makeup over the left side of her face.

She walks over to the large pencil drawing in the middle and begins to trace the figure of the nude woman and the two pebbles with charcoal. She places her hand over each pebble for a few seconds as if to steady herself. She repeats the same procedure with the pencil drawing on the far right using a red pastel.

Simultaneously, a video is projected on the wall. In the video, she covers her face with white make-up. After that, she is in a studio space creating an image using gestures. The song entitled "Quiet" by MILCK is playing.

### Part 4: Artist

*"Drawing is the simplest way of establishing a picture vocabulary because it is an instant, personal declaration of what is important and what is not. Drawing is the most unalienated medium. It is private; it practically doesn't have an audience in mind, just the artist's expression." (Goodwin & Morin, 1989, p.17)*

Art has always had a special place in my life. As a girl growing up, I always had art on my mind. I remember bringing a sketchbook in the car on road trips, asking for art supplies for birthdays and Christmas, and taking art in school as my option.

Where does art fit into this transformation? Art is the catalyst. Art is what brought me here. Walking back into the art studio was the impetus of change. Without art, I would not have seen the power of knowledge. Art allows one to think outside the realm of the mundane. Art opened my mind to possibilities. In addition, teaching visual arts has allowed me to explore, with a certain freedom, critical pedagogy and the possibilities of transformation.

### **a) A Return to the Body**

*"(The) Human figure becomes a concrete presence, but in a form anonymous and generic, evanescent and troubling...sketchy, diaphanous, naked and vulnerable."<sup>10</sup> (Belisle, 2009, p. 34)*

Walking back through the studio door after many years of neglect was a return to my first love, the body. I remember drawing the nude in my first year in Fine Arts at University in 1987. For me the human body was intimate, beautiful and organic. My entire three years in Fine Arts at University of Laval in Quebec City was dedicated to the human body and gestures. It is important to note that the body can have many different meanings and connotations. However, in this context I am referring to the physical body, the body as flesh. I felt that the human body was an immediate connection with an audience since we all have a physical body. If I could

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<sup>10</sup> Josee Belisle describes Betty Goodwin's *Swimmers* series

pull the audience into my work through the body, I could perhaps pull them even further into the work. By placing the body in a dreamy, abstract space, I could pull them towards their unconscious; that place inside their minds that is more difficult to access; the visceral.

In her artwork, the late Betty Goodwin (1923-2008) creates the intimate spaces that I craved to make. Her drawings of the human figure are dreamy and in spite of that, uncomfortable and tragic. Betty Goodwin was born in Montreal in 1923, an only child of Jewish Romanian immigrants, whose father owned a garment factory and died when Betty was only nine years old. She studied to be a commercial artist and worked in printmaking. Following a printmaking class taught by the famous printmaker Yves Gaucher at Sir George Williams University (now known as Concordia University), she made her entry into the Montreal art scene. In her forties, drawing became one of her media of choice. Goodwin's drawings are of special interest to me and in particular her series of large drawings entitled *Swimmers* (1982-1988) and the *Carbon Series* (1986-1987).

In *Swimmers*, transparent bodies, drawn with graphite and dry pastels on geofilm, seem to float on the surface of the translucent paper. Transparency seems to be important; it represents skin and water. There is a feeling of uneasiness and frailty, because it is hard to know if the figures are dead or alive. "In the *Swimmers*, there was always the dual side of swimming. How we can't do without water. Water is our life, but it can take you away also" (Goodwin et al., 1998, p.59). It is important to note, that Goodwin was a very private person, she lost her father when she was

very young and her only son died of an overdose at the age of thirty. She suffered from tremendous loss in her life. This pain is evident in her drawings.



Figure 4: Swimmer No. 3, 1983, retrieved from: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/betty-goodwin/swimmer-3-1983>

Betty Goodwin's *Carbon Series*, a series of drawings of distorted figures on geofilm, using graphite and shades of orange oil sticks were completed in the 1980s. Similar to her *Swimmers*, the figures seem uneasy, distorted and fragile.

The *Carbon Series* started with an actual trauma I went through, but then it became familiarized in reading of the traumas around the world. You take the news, or anything terrible that's going on and somehow or other at a

particular time these things, connect, and it seems strong enough to try and do something. (Goodwin et al., 1998, p.62)

Some of the figures are dense black drawings and some are light and airy, mere outlines. Also similar, is the repeated and erased lines that make up the figure. The medium allows Goodwin to show the audience her procedure; the drawing, the erasing, the re-drawing, and so on. The drawing takes on a movement; it is alive. “The attraction of drawing is precisely that it allows for erasure, for beginning over and over in an effort to push beyond the image’s capacity for description. There is no complete picture, no answer, only efforts to arrive at these” (Bradley & Goodwin, 1995, p.10). Bradley describes Goodwin’s drawings as her “desire to maintain instability” by “retracing her gestures over and over again” (Bradley & Goodwin, 1995, p. 10).



*Figure 5: Carbon (1987) retrieved from:*

<http://vanartgallery.bc.ca/80artworks/betty-goodwin/>

In my first attempt in the studio, I draw a standing female figure on paper, using graphite, dry pastels and oil sticks in shades of black, red and white (Figure 7). The figure is enclosed in repeated lines or gestures. I had just come from an ultrasound appointment. My breasts, similar to my mothers, are fibrocystic and need to be checked on a regular basis. The technician stepped out for a minute and I

took a photograph of the image that was on the screen. It fascinated me. These small cysts were like little black pebbles floating in a turbulent sea. Some of the cysts were measured by small yellow plus symbols. In my first drawing, I integrated these small symbols, one on each breast and one on the groin, using tape to block the medium. The result is almost grotesque. The body is slightly deformed or aged. The white untouched symbols resemble a surgeon's pen marks drawn on the body before surgery; the removal of her physical female parts. The large bright red flame-like gestures emulating from the body are aggressive and menacing.



*Figure 6: Photograph of ultrasound taken in January of 2016*

My second drawing of the figure is on Mylar, a translucent paper reminiscent of skin (Figure 8). She is also in a standing position with one arm raised above her head. In this drawing, the shape of a cyst or pebble is taped on the right side of her body and then when the drawing was completed, the shape was removed and placed on the left side, allowing a part of the drawing to be transported to a new

location. Gestures also play an important role in this drawing. They move with the shape of the figure instead of flaring away from the body. This drawing is less aggressive and has a feeling of calm.

Besides the subject of the human figure, my work is very different than that of Goodwin. However my repeated gestures are reminiscent of her retracing of the figure over and over: the creation of movement. The draw line is more important than the need to create realism. Drawing or producing the physical marks on paper, is the connection to my inner-self. Belisle beautifully describes Goodwin's drawing as gestural, immediate, cursive, diaphanous, naked and vulnerable (Belisle, 2009). This vulnerable quality is wonderful. I am interested in this direct, impulsive impression on paper and the power of the gesture as an emitter of emotion. This made me decide to explore in more detail pure gestures.



*Figure 7: 2016*



*Figure 8: 2016*

### c) The Gesture Becomes Dominant

*“Heidi, You have a nice rambling line in your contour drawings that adds a playful liveliness to your figures. When used in a more sketchy manner it seems as though it’s trying to grow itself into the object. On the whole your drawings are accurate, expressive and sensitive. With only varied weight in line you’ve managed to convey the volume of the forms. Your portraits are both a nice blend of accuracy and idiosyncrasy; erratic sketchiness in hair and clothes and careful rendering in features. They sit well in the page.”<sup>11</sup> (Ivan Eyre, 1987)*

Gestural is defined as a “significant movement of limb or body; use of such movements as expression of feeling or as rhetorical device; step or move calculated to evoke response from another or to convey intention” or “a movement of your body (especially of your hands and arms) that shows or emphasizes an idea or a feeling” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1982). The gestural repeated lines, which surround my drawings of the body generate a nest like quality and are usually made with a rhythmic beat. In studio, the procedure of creating these lines or gestures is meditative. The action of gesture is the feeling I crave when I draw. I love the movements of my hand, arm, shoulder and body and how magically these movements create an image, a trace of what is before me. I believe it is these movements that create emotions on paper.

According to an article entitled “The Social Semiotic Potential of Gestural Drawing”, authors Amanda Roberts<sup>12</sup> and Howard Riley<sup>13</sup>, suggest that in gestural drawings the relationship between the body, the mark and the audience creates a kind of social system. The quick and very physical drawings represent an

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<sup>11</sup> University of Manitoba, Fine Arts Professor in 1987

<sup>12</sup> In 2012, Amanda Roberts was a Ph.D. student in the theory and practice of drawing at Swansea Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom.

<sup>13</sup> In 2012, Howard Riley was a professor of Visual Communications at Swansea Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom. His area of interest is in the pedagogy of drawing.

immediate and spontaneous reaction in time by the artist, and the viewer captures this energy. In other words, “semiotically speaking, both artist and viewers, take up positions and adopt attitudes, points of view that are influenced by the positions within their set of social relations” (Roberts & Riley, 2012, p.67). I find this very intriguing, since I believe that my repeated gestures seem to emit a hypnotic force. I am hoping that the viewer sees this force and is captured by the image. I sometimes experience this feeling of hypnosis in the creation of repeated gesture. In essence, the artist is depositing a personal energy onto the surface of the drawing and the viewer can become acquainted with the artist by taking up this energy and making it their own.

While researching gestural drawing I discovered Sara Schneckloth (<http://www.saraschneckloth.com>), an artist working out of South Carolina, who uses gestural drawings to create an intimate relationship with the viewer. Her recent work, *Through Flesh and Stone* (2016) is an interactive drawing experience, which actually allows the audience to participate. By touching the drawings, which are projected on very large screens, the viewer can manipulate and change the image. The way the drawn gesture projects emotions through the artist’s body; the arm, the shoulder, the torso, the internal organs, et cetera fascinates Schneckloth. Here she describes her charcoal drawing series entitled *Working From the Reliquary* (2008):

It is a distillation of an experience both internal and external; it is a physical and psychological extension of the act of seeing, a somatically felt impulse to inscribe with a particular pressure, direction, duration and speed, the

nuances of each fueled by emotional states in perpetual flux. (Schneckloth, 2008, p.278)

Schneckloth, professor at University of South Carolina, is also interested in collaborative drawing, *drawing for all* workshops and performance drawing.

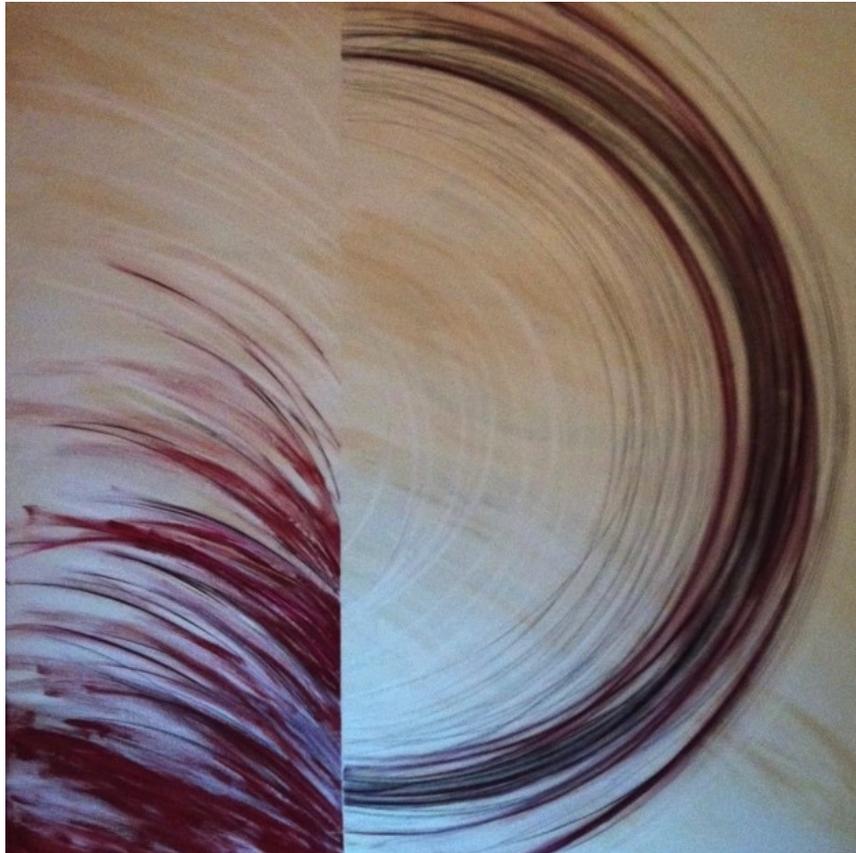


Figure 9: *Working From the Reliquary* (2008) retrieved from:

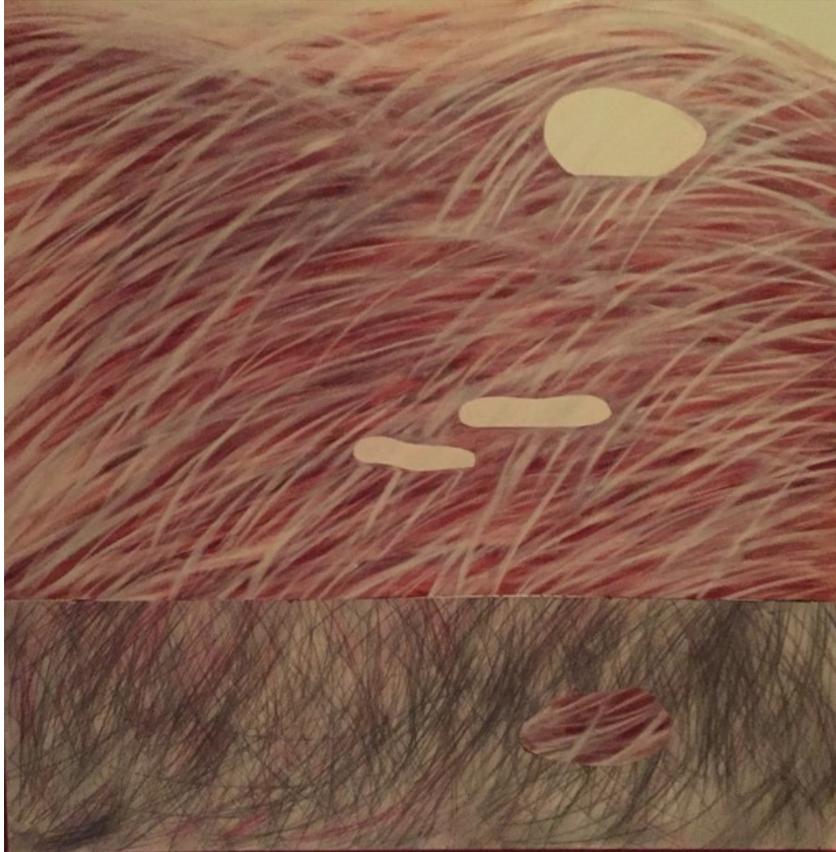
<http://www.saraschneckloth.com/reliquary/axzv42njtfqm9ad3hv3lu8mqz0uxft>

In my next series of works, the drawn body has been removed, but the physical body, my own, has remained transmitted through my gestures. The first two drawings are on large square canvases, using paint, oil sticks and graphite. The canvases are divided unevenly in two, and masking tape allows me to work each

side separately. The gestures are large and repetitive. In *Physics* (Figure 10), large circular gestures were created using my arm as a compass, suggestive of mathematics and physics classes. In *Mass* (Figure 11), the cyst has returned, removed and displaced. In a third drawing, entitled *26 Gestures* (Figure 12), each medium is used twenty-six times using the same movement.



*Figure 10: Physics, 2016*



*Figure 11: Mass, 2016*



*Figure 12: 26 Gestures, 2016*

In a way, these works became research into finding unusual ways of creating drawn gestures: long sinuous gestures created by swinging my arm in a waving motion, short frantic gestures by twisting my wrist, circular waves by swinging my arm straight, wild scribbles that intersect and run in all directions, connected scrawls that move parallel to one another, small controlled marks, et cetera. Some gestures were lightly sketched and others were drawn using the force of my muscles. Each gesture had its own personality. In the beginning, I wanted to go deep inside my psyche and rely solely on instinct and unpredictability. Incredibly, my drawn gestures began to reflect my personality and I had some difficulty being impulsive.

I was born under an earth sign. I have my two feet well planted on this earth. I am practical, organized, responsible, unromantic, and I love to make lists. According to my astrological sign, I analyze things in detail, I am devoted to my work, I am usually serving others and I do not express my feelings easily.<sup>14</sup> This may sound irrational to believe in such nonsense, however these traits describe me seamlessly. Even though I wanted to release myself from self-control, my drawn gestures are reminiscent of my personality: controlled, regulated, practical and thought through. I was constantly in flux between two states of mind, on the one hand, standing back and making decisions based on aesthetic grounds and on the other, lost in thought. Are there enough marks in that space? I wonder what I should make for supper? Should I put one more drawn line here? I can't forget to call Mom. Back and forth, back in forth. Some of the drawn gestures were involuntary and

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<sup>14</sup> Collins Gem Zodiac Types (1993), p.120

some were controlled and explicitly placed on the surface. Similar to Schneckloth's work, the traces on the surface of the canvas are the embodiment of my internal experiences; memory, psyche and emotion.

In *26 Gestures*, the surface is divided into three horizontal spaces. I used masking tape to work on each space separately. As an art student, I had experimented with dividing the pictorial space into three parts. I was intrigued with Mark Rothko's ([www.markrothko.org](http://www.markrothko.org)) soft edge paintings. These large vertical paintings contained ambiguous rectangular forms, painted in contrasting and complementary colours, floating on top of each other; resting together. The result is mesmerizing. In Rothko's work the size of the painting is important. He wants the viewer to be enveloped by the colours of his canvas, to actually experience emotion through colour. In this series, I want the viewer to experience colour in addition to gesture.

The colour red is dominant in all of these works. Possibly subconsciously it represents blood, more specifically female menstruation or the womb. "Red the colour of Fire and Blood and regarded universally as the basic symbol of the life-principle. Dark red is nocturnal, female, secret and ultimately, centripetal and stands not for manifestation, but for the mystery of life" (Dictionary of Symbols, 1996).

This series of drawings, using gestures as the subject matter, has become an important somatic experience; using the body to produce imagery. In the next series of drawings, fragments of the women's body return.

### **c) The Return of the Body Through Gesture**

The body has always been a part of my work, either through the figurative form or through the movement of the physical body creating abstract configurations. These drawing contain parts of the body very close up which were taken from a previous work I did in 2012 in my first studio class upon returning to University. The first drawing, *Nest* (Figure 13), is divided into three vertical parts, again by using masking tape to work on each segment separately. On the far left side is a woman's groin, on the far right side is the curved edge of a women's torso, the narrow middle section is also a fragment; the line that divides this space is the edge of a body.

In the second drawing, *Depth* (Figure 14), the body fragments have disappeared under the many layers of repeated gestures. Once again the canvas is divided in three parts. Beneath the layers of gestures are two close up drawings of feet.



*Figure 13: Nest, 2016*

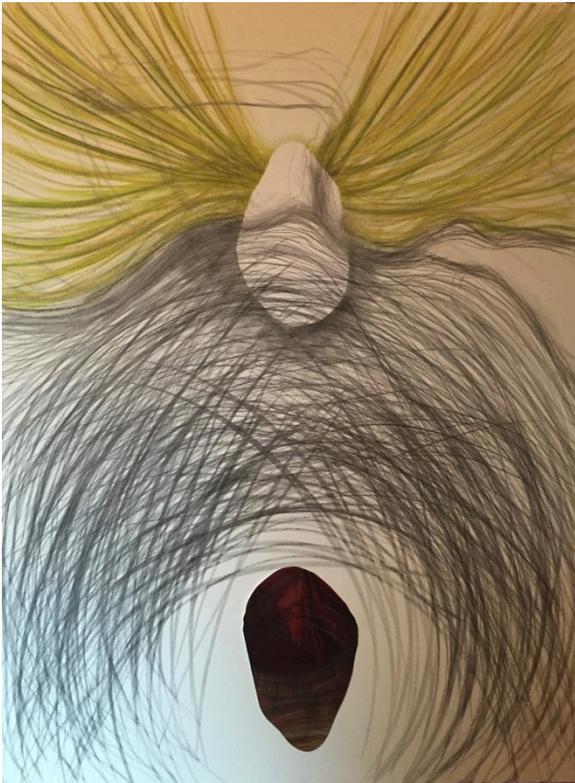


*Figure 14: Depth, 2016*

#### **d) The Cyst Returns Series**

A series of four drawings (Figure 15) were done for a small exhibit that was installed in the Concordia Art Education office space (September, 2016). All of these drawings contain layered gestures and the shape of a large cyst. In addition, collage and wax have been used on some of the pieces. The collaged pieces were made by tracing the cyst shape on some old lithograph prints that I did during my Fine Arts degree. The lithograph pieces are a deep red, rich in colour. I added gestures on the fragments using pastels and oil sticks in order to visually connect them to the drawings. On the surface of the drawings these pieces become deep cavities, suggestive of the female body. On one drawing, encaustic wax was layered with a brush on a stencil of the cyst to create a hazy transparent effect. In this particular drawing, the cyst is not a cavity but an object floating on the surface, reminiscent of a pebble or rock, similar to the original imagery of the ultra-sound.

This series of drawings are particularly personal. The insertion of the cyst, which floats inside me, represents literally my own physical body and its imperfections. These drawings are the intersection between the physical body, the action of the body and the psyche. My vulnerabilities are laying on the surface of the canvas.



*Figure 15: Series of four drawings, 2016*

## e) Answering the Question

How does the return to art practice open up new knowledge to discover the relationship between three identities: Artist, Educator and Activist?

The first drawings of women's bodies are the initiation of my return to the studio; a return to my first love. They represent women and vulnerability. When I realize that gestures should be the subject of my drawings, my work shifts. The repeated natural gesticulations become the basis of the work. Even when we communicate with others we use gestures to articulate meaning and this allows us to be aware of ourselves through movement (Noland, 2008). Personally, when I am drawing I fall into a meditative feeling which permits me to get in touch with my inner being, think about myself as a woman, an individual and bond with my identity as an artist: female, visceral, connected and intimate. The return to drawing satisfies this craving I have to connect with my own body, to connect to my innermost self.

This identity is related to all other aspects of my life. I've used vulnerability to access the students in my classroom, to evoke a response, to share experiences and to develop relationships. When I teach drawing, I use Betty Edwards' (1999) *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. Edwards goes through five basic perceptual skills in drawing: lines, space, perspective, values and the whole or gestalt. The fifth skill is "neither taught nor learned but instead seems to emerge as a result of acquiring the other four skills" (Edwards, 1999, p. XIX). The whole is described as the sum of the parts with the addition of the artist's expression or individuality. A "drawing can reveal much about you or yourself, some facets of you that might be

obscured” (Edwards, 1999, p. 248). I always told my students that in addition to the lines and shapes that create the drawing, every drawing has a piece of their personality, their inner being woven within it. I use gesture in an exercise to allow my students to explore their inner emotional state and body movement. In groups of four or five, they draw gestures on large sheets of paper with charcoal and conté. Music helps them release their emotions onto the surface of the paper as their arms and bodies move around the edge of the piece. Students have told me they feel a sense of freedom and release. Gestures create a sort of social system (Robert & Riley, 2012) or a relationship (Schneckloth, 2012), a connection between the body, the trace and the spectator.



*Figure 16: Group gesture drawings, 2015*

Movement is an important aspect of my studio work. When I am in full production in the studio there is action; the engagement of my body to mark the surface of the canvas or paper. In *Miming Signing: Henri Michaux and the Writing Body*, Carrie Noland takes a close look at the theme of gesture in the work of

Michaux and in particular his gestural drawings suggestive of symbols of a sort of primitive alphabet. She describes how “he approached writing as a performance, a ‘display’ or presentation... and engaging a body alive with proprioceptive and kinesthetic sensations” (Noland, 2008, p. 136). Gesture is evocative of performance and performance is connected to activism<sup>15</sup>.

But more importantly, working in my studio is also the space where tacit knowledge, unwritten and unspoken knowledge, is produced. It is created deep inside me. I cannot express it completely with words. It is a place where my mind shifts, flutters and glances down the different routes on its journey through the nerve cells of my brain. Perhaps, my mind wanders off the path completely and stumbles into an unknown place, a place that only I can see but cannot name. It is this tacit knowledge, the things that I am unable to write or explain, that is the most thought-provoking.

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<sup>15</sup> Activism and the connection to performance will be discussed later in part 3.

## PART 2

She returns to standing in front of the open suitcase on the floor. She walks over to one of the piles plaster of paris hands and begins to place them on top of the laid out thesis on the floor. She places 12 hands in the semi-circle. She goes to the suitcase and applies a line of red makeup over the right side of her face.

Simultaneously, a video is projected on the wall. In the video, she covers her face with red make-up. After that, she is in a studio space creating an image using gestures. The song entitled "What About Us" by PINK is playing.

She walks into the audience and with a smile she asks a young woman to join her. She takes her by the hand and brings her to one of the drawings. She demonstrates long gestural lines using the charcoal running down the left side of the drawn figure. She hands the charcoal to the participant and she begins to continue the gestured lines. She walks back to the audience and asks a young man to participate. He is instructed to make large semi-circles that encase one of the figures on the left side.

She goes into the audience for a third time. She finds a young woman to create short horizontal lines that radiate out of the figure. A fourth member of the audience is asked to join the team. She is shown to draw sporadic gestures on the right side of a figure.

Four participants are engaged in gestures that are filling the spaces surrounding the two figures.

She returns to the audience for a fifth time. She pulls a woman from the audience and directs her to assist in laying out the remaining plaster hands into the semi-circle in front of the golden suitcase. Once all the hands have been placed she directs the fifth participant to return to her seat.

One at a time, each participant is asked to return to his or her seats.

### Part 5: Educator

*"I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you for making art a part of my life. Without you and your classes, my mind would probably not think the same...you have indeed given me the tools necessary to succeed in this life. Not only the skill to appreciate the work of others, but also to appreciate my own capabilities. To have confidence that even though it's something new, a new experience, if you tackle it with an open mind, there is no possibility of failure.*

*You have redefined my world, and for that I'm forever grateful. I'll miss you. Your student forever and always."*<sup>16</sup>

I never wanted to become a teacher. In 1984, I graduated from high school and received a scholarship to attend University in science. It was the practical route to take; I was planning to work in a laboratory doing research and earn a good living. I finished my science degree in 1987 and took a year off to work and travel. I worked in a laboratory testing water for a private company, which manufactured chemicals to treat water towers. I hated my job. I was bored and unmotivated. I decided to go back to school in Fine Arts. I was still young and felt I should follow my passion, be daring, and try to see where art could take me. Following my Bachelor in Fine Arts, I volunteered at an art center in Quebec City but unfortunately found no employment in the field. I applied for a Masters in Fine Arts at three different schools across Canada but was not accepted as a candidate; my experience as an artist wasn't sufficient. The year was 1992 and University of Laval was offering a one-year program in education at the high school level. One more year of University was feasible, so I enrolled. Little did I know that walking into the classroom would change my path and bring me to where I am today.

### **a) In the Beginning: Discipline-Based Art Education**

I entered into teaching art from a disciplined-based<sup>17</sup> philosophy of art education. At the time, the Quebec curriculum<sup>18</sup>, which was written in the 1980s,

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<sup>16</sup> Testimonial written by a graduating student in 2012

was the guidebook for art instruction. I was taught to develop objectives and evaluate using those objectives. Art Education was divided into four elements; theme, art history/art appreciation, language and technique and each project that I developed for the classroom was derived from these four basic features. For example, I may show the students landscapes (theme) done by Claude Monet (art history), talk about colour theory (language) and demonstrate a painting technique. In the high school curriculum, specific objectives for each element of art were outlined for each level. The curriculum provided me with enough information to guide my beginnings as an art teacher. As a young teacher, I wasn't only concerned with curriculum, I remember how my first five years in teaching were really difficult; preparing classes, creating assessments, evaluating, learning how to manage and organize my classes, dealing with parents and administrators, attending meetings and feeling pretty insecure. Although the curriculum was disciplined-based, it provided me with a great starting point in art education.

A criticism of this approach is that the studio results tend to be carbon copies and only a handful of students break free of the pre-described formula. Unfortunately, many art programs in elementary and high school seem to produce series of artworks that look alike with slight variations. This controlled way of creating curriculum can sometimes suppress a student's ability to produce innovative work (Gude, 2007).

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<sup>17</sup> Discipline-based art education (DBAE) was developed by the Getty Centre in the 1980's and was based on four art disciplines: art production, art history, art criticism and aesthetics. (S.M. Dobbs, 1992)

<sup>18</sup> Gouvernement du Québec. (1981). *Programme d'études: Primaire* — Art. Quebec: Ministère de l'Éducation.

Nonetheless, I continue to use this method for my grade seven and eight classes. It sets boundaries, gives my students a good base in art language, art history and technique. It is important to harness the student's skills and resources and allow them to experience aesthetic achievement (Pariser, 2009). This disciplinary approach sets the stage for students remaining in the art program. The students know that the visual art class is serious and that one must work hard to obtain good results. I had very few behavioral issues in my classes. This sounds strict and static but there are always moments of laughter wonder and joy.

#### **b) The Return to University and the Discovery of Critical Theory in Education**

Critical education is a commitment towards social transformation; it's a repositioning of the way to look at education (Apple, Au & Gandin, 2009). According to the *The Routledge International Handbook of Critical Education*, there are eight duties that an educator must perform to follow a critical approach: bear witness to how educational policies and practices are related to exploitation and domination, find possible spaces for action, act as "secretaries" for those engaged in action, engage in mutual pedagogic dialogue without being over intellectual, keep traditions of radical work alive but remain critical, develop and use a variety of new skills (journalistic, media, academic, popular, ability to speak), act in concert with progressive social movements and use the privilege as scholar to open spaces. This is a great deal to consider and an enormous challenge for teachers who wish to become critical educators.

It is through the work of Paulo Freire, and the many critical educators that followed him, that my eyes were opened to the way education can be a gateway to social justice and equality. Freire, born and raised in Brazil during the 1930's depression, had lived through poverty as a child and intimately understood what it meant to be hungry and how hardship affected his education. He understood that if workers could learn to read and write they could fight for their rights and demand better working conditions and salaries, which in turn would allow their children to have a better education and a better life. I believe that the essence of critical education is learning to be critical of the political and economical policies that affect us and to stand up for equality and justice. Naturally, this means providing services to those in need and reducing the profits of the private corporations. In 1964, a military coup took over the socialist government of Brazil and implemented a capitalist agenda under the watch of the United States. Freire was imprisoned, along with many other leftist thinkers, for over three months. Freire fled Brazil and eventually moved to Chile where he wrote his most famous work on critical education *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire criticizes education that is merely the teacher filling the vessel or the brain of the student. He names this the "banking" concept of education and argues that teachers become oppressors, since they have the power of knowledge and that students are the oppressed since they simply consume the knowledge without questioning its contents. "The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the student's creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world

revealed nor to see it transformed” (Freire, 1993, p. 54). The more educators rely on this approach to delivering curriculum, the less the learner will be free to transform the world around them.

### **c) Practice and Experience**

It wasn't until I had years of experience teaching art that I discovered different ways of approaching curriculum, a way of integrating my artistic method and inquiry into the classroom. I could allow my students to experiment, discover and discuss their own approach to art. Option classes in grade eleven are permitted in the Basic School Regulations (BSR)<sup>19</sup> in Quebec and are usually created by teachers who have a specific interest, which they want to share. About 10 years ago, I created a grade eleven class entitled “Studio Art”, which allows students to expand their creativity and really push the boundaries of producing art. Here, there is no language, no medium and no technique. I provide a theme, which is expansive and open, and allow my students to explore within their means and their comfort, a heuristic approach. In addition, discussions are led after each project to delve deeper into their concepts and into the way they approached the projects. Students use an art journal to reflect on current visual culture, contemporary artists and current events.

In a project entitled “Art can Protest, Propose or Provoke”, students research and investigate a current event or story that they find important and create a two dimensional piece of art using any material they find suitable. As a catalyst, I show

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/showdoc/cr/I-13.3,%20r.%208>

them *Guernica* (Figure 17), a famous painting by Pablo Picasso, depicting the bombing of Guernica, Spain by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italian warplanes, during the Spanish civil war, which began in 1936. Picasso created the mural-sized oil painting for the 1937 World Fair in Paris. Placing the painting in historical context allows the meaning to become more apparent and the students begin to understand the powerful images that Picasso has painted; the mother crying with her dead child in her arms, the soldier being trampled by a fierce horse, the ghost-like figure emerging from a window holding an oil lamp and the light bulb hanging overhead as a symbol of hope or interrogation. A target due to its strategic role as a communications centre behind the frontlines, Guernica was bombed when most men were gone to war. Innocent women and children were massacred. Through questioning and discussion I allow the students to discover the many interpretations of the famous painting. This in-depth examination of *Guernica* allows the students to appreciate a work of art that protests and provokes and helps them in their production. After the creation of their projects, the students run discussions and critiques. They feel empowered by the messages that they are able to tell through their art. Miller and Sellar discuss three curriculum positions or ways of delivering content in their book entitled *Curriculum Perspectives and Practices* (1990). This project is a wonderful example of the transformation position of curriculum where students experience personal and social change and reflect on these changes. The teacher, as well as the student, become learners. This position involves more than just transmitting information to the learner.



Figure 17: *Guernica* by Picasso retrieved from:

<https://artsintherightplace.wordpress.com/2011/02/13/massacre-in-korea-picasso-part-3-versus-guernica/>

Without even realizing, I had already begun to teach using a critical thinking approach. The opening up of my curriculum allows my students to explore their own narrations and concerns and how they fit into today's society. I have discovered that the art class is the place where critical thought can occur if we the art teachers are willing to become anarchists, push the boundaries, go beyond technique and artistic language and allow students to create art "that challenges rules and expectations and disturbs the social order to promote social transformation and 'reconstruction'" (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2008, p. 244). It is the classroom of choice. The curriculum is open and the possibilities are endless. We, the art teachers must break through the limitations and let the students discover the social and political ideologies that surround them. Through imagination and creativity students can learn about the world around them, they can open themselves up to critically judge the way they see the world. Students can look beyond test scores and evaluations

and really gain a strong social based knowledge. “Imagination and its possibilities have to be nurtured through collective work, amidst the impending requirements of a society that is obsessed with standardization and accountability” (De Leon, 2011, p. 200).

In 2015, I was approached by the Art Consultant of my school board to do a project with Tina Carlisi, a Montreal artist who uses the written language to make social and political images. I couldn’t think of a better way to continue the work I was doing to create a transformative space within the walls of my classroom.

#### **d) Libre Comme L’Art Project 2015-2016**

Tina Carlisi ([tinacarlisi.com](http://tinacarlisi.com)) was invited to my grade eleven classroom to facilitate a silkscreen project for the *Libre Comme L’Art*<sup>20</sup> program. Carlisi introduced the Guerilla Girls ([www.guerrillagirls.com](http://www.guerrillagirls.com)) and Barbara Kruger (<http://www.barbarakruger.com>) to start the discussion on art that uses posters to engage the public in political and social debates.

Students were put into teams and were led in round table discussions surrounding issues that impacted them and how they could use words to create posters to campaign their concerns. They were asked to create an image with words to “Proclaim what makes you angry and what occupies you!” Seven teams created seven slogans: Beliefs Shouldn’t Define Love, Erase the Gender Binary, We Can’t Wait 185 Years, Global Warming Makes Us Heated, LovEvolves, Broken Crayons Still

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<sup>20</sup> Libre Comme L’Art ([www.artsmontreal.org/fr/programmes/libres](http://www.artsmontreal.org/fr/programmes/libres)) is a program that brings artists and students together and is funded by the Conseil des Arts de Montréal, the Conférence Régionale des Élus de Montréal and the Ministry of Education in Québec.

Colour and Same Anatomy/Same Censorship. The students then created silkscreen acetates of their slogans and printed a series of posters that were eventually displayed and sold at the school's art exhibit. The students also had a chance to carry their work outside in a pseudo-protest activity on the school property, followed by an in-class discussion about the experience. Students felt uncomfortable bringing their work outside. This action part of the project, removing the artwork from the classroom or the gallery, was unfamiliar to them; they felt vulnerable and self-conscious. Sheng Kuan Chung<sup>21</sup> and Christy Ortiz<sup>22</sup> (2011) describe the value of bringing their students out on to the street to participate in a street painting festival in Houston, Texas:

By providing learning experiences beyond the classroom walls, both students and educators have an opportunity to venture outside their comfort zone and to engage in projects of possibility. The experience of putting art education in action on the street benefits both people in the community and the in the classroom. (p. 52)

I believe that as educators, we must to push the boundaries and use action to promote critical thought.

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<sup>21</sup> In 2011, Shen Kuan Chung was an associate professor at the University of Houston.

<sup>22</sup> In 2011, Christy Ortiz was an instructor at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia.



*Figure 18:* Photo taken on April 5, 2016 with my students carrying their work outside.

### **e) Art Education: The Opening of Possibilities**

As a teacher, I frequently have parents that are concerned about their child going into the art field after high school. They often say that they are apprehensive about employment. In response, I always tell them the story of one of my former students. He took art as his option all the way through high school, studied fine arts in college and then moved to Toronto to study fine arts at University of Toronto. Ever since college, his artwork spoke about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I remember a series of paintings in particular, in which he painted dilapidated teddy bears laying in war zones. Because of this intense interest, he decided to go into middle-eastern studies. He now has his doctorate from the prestigious London

School of Economics and Political Science and recently received a position as associate professor at the University of Cairo in Egypt. I have kept in touch with him over the years and a few years ago I asked him how art has helped him.

I tell my colleagues (and my students) that my degree in art helped me in indescribable ways. Art school really taught me how to think critically about everything and anything, forced me to accept criticism (and divorce myself from my work), and to never accept failure as the end of a journey – all of which my colleagues in the PhD are still trying to process and overcome, especially when it comes to publishing, presenting and challenging more established academics. (personal communications, Former Student, 2015)

Art brought him where he is today. I tell parents to let their children follow their own path. Art may be the stepping-stone to something completely unexpected.

#### **f) Influencing a Generation: A Mural Dedication**

Since beginning my graduate studies six years ago, I have come to realize that being a teacher is not only an incredible privilege but it also carries a great deal of responsibility. Teachers must be open-minded, be critical of the curriculum and believe in equality (Freire, 1998).

In grade 10, my students create murals, which are hung in the hallway of the schools in the following year. In their last year of high school, art students can enjoy seeing their work displayed. These murals are usually done in groups and the students have the freedom of choosing their theme for this exciting project. Most students tend to use popular trends as their theme. Two years ago a group of three

girls decided to use the theme of powerful and influential women for their painting. They painted a girl surrounded by four large hands of different skin colours. For them, the hands represent how society can influence and manipulate women's lives. As well, encircled around the girl, are the names of women the students believed were significant, from the past and present, and from all walks of life: Michelle Obama, Aretha Franklin, Betty White, Malala Yousafzai, Rosa Parks, Marie Curie, et cetera. On the last day of the project they asked me to come see the final result and to my surprise they had included my name. I was so touched. In their eyes, I had also been someone influential in their lives. All year, I had spoken to them about the teacher's negotiations and our fight for quality education. I had spoken about the rallies and demonstrations. I reminded them on the International Day of the Woman that there were still hurdles to jump for women in Canada<sup>23</sup> and that they were the ones that were going to live in a more equal society. I told them about the union election and that I had decided to run to become president of the Pearson Teachers Union. When I won the election they were happy for me, but sad that I was leaving them. They gave me an amazing gift, a dedication to women. They had also demonstrated that they understood it was important that they become strong, independent, confident women; so that they can change the world we live in. The greatest gift for me was that I had a part in this realization. The mural is hung close to the art room in my school. I was leaving the following year to pursue my work as union president.

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<sup>23</sup> Canadian Female workers take home 72 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2015. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/wage-gap-oxfam-1.3478938?cmp=rss>



*Figure 19: Mural created by Grade 10 student in May of 2016.*

### **g) Answering the Question**

How does the return to art practice open up new knowledge to discover the relationship between three identities: Artist, Educator and Activist?

Walking back through the studio door, allowed me to rediscover how it feels to create: the development stage, the process, the phases of production, the times you need to take a step back, the layers of work, the decisions you make along the way, the mistakes, determining when the work is complete, et cetera. It is important as an art teacher to remember our own artistic process. This allows one to empathize with your students and help them in their creation process. Returning to practice has transformed my classroom. I became more relaxed because I allowed my students to take their own approaches to art making. Their independence

allowed me to step back. They began to disseminate knowledge to each other and to me. I was learning with them.

I have since favored a critical approach for my older students since I want them to question the world around them. By opening up the curriculum I've allowed for more experimentation and freedom. Getting students outside the classroom allows them to get outside their comfort zone and try out new things.

In my last year of teaching, before embarking on my new career as union president, I often joined the students in art making. My principal commissioned a painting for her office, so I made a space inside the classroom to work on the piece. The project created an interesting learning space where students could gather, watch the process, ask questions and discuss. The painting still hangs in her office today and when I visit I am reminded of this transformation of curriculum.

Lastly, teaching is a form of performance/action. The students become the participants/audience in my daily live performances in my classroom. But more importantly, the classroom had become my political theatre. Teaching is a political and ethical act (Freire, 1993).

### PART 3

She returns to the open suitcase. She proceeds to lay out the remaining sheets of her printed thesis in a semi-circle on the floor. She must move quickly to finish the task. She goes to the suitcase and applies a line of black makeup down the middle of her face.

Simultaneously, a video is playing on a large screen: images of people protesting, people marching in the street, people gathered at rallies. The sounds of horns, drums, noisemakers, people humming and plastic flags rippling in the wind can be heard. The sound stops.

She reads a short excerpt of the lyrics of “Man In Black” by Johnny Cash.

The sound of the video returns. The song entitled “Raise Your Glass” by PINK is playing.

She returns to the drawings on the wall. She begins to paint gestures around the figures. She fills the pebble like shapes with black paint.

*On the video a quote appears:*

*“Drawing is a distillation of an experience both internal and external; it is a physical and psychological extension of the act of seeing, a somatically felt impulse to inscribe with a particular pressure, direction, duration and speed, the nuances of each fueled by emotional states in perpetual flux.”*

*Sara Schneckloth, 2008*

She returns to the opened suitcase on the floor. She removes a small stack of little drawings from the suitcase. She walks into the audience and hands the drawings out to each member.

She returns to the suitcase. She reads five short narratives: her experience as a child listening to the songs of Johnny Cash, a letter written to her in 1987 by a former professor describing her drawings, a letter written in 2017 from a former student, a story about calling the labour board at the age of 16 and a meeting with a female leader that resulted in running for president of the local teachers union.

She says, “A movement in three parts.”

### Part 6: Activist

Fifteen years ago, a teacher approached me and asked me to become the union delegate at my school. I had no idea what a union delegate was and he said, "It's easy, you attend one meeting a month and distribute information to the teachers." Through this work as a delegate, I discovered that as a teacher in the public sector, I have rights and there is a collective agreement signed between the provincial government, the teachers unions and the school boards, which outlines those rights. This was something that I had believed in all along; that workers need to be protected, to gain a decent wage and to have good working conditions.

It was with the return to University six years ago, that my involvement in the union began to escalate. My first compulsory course entitled *Issues in the History, Theory and Practice of Art Education* was my first taste of the philosophy of education and it is through this class that I discovered Michael Apple, an educational theorist specialized in critical teaching, education and power, and democratic schools. He grew up poor in Paterson, New Jersey, a textile town, where his parents, immigrant working class, were deeply involved in leftist-politics (Peters, 2015). Apple became a teacher and president of his teachers union in the 1970s and is now a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison specializing in curriculum theory. He is concerned that democracy has been transformed or recontextualized to correspond to our consumerist society. He labels this as "thin democracy" and argues that this is no longer the "thick democracy" that is participatory in nature (Apple, 2008). Schools and education have been commoditized, and students and parents have become customers. "The idea of the paying "consumer" is crucial...the world in essence is a vast supermarket. "Consumer choice" is the guarantor of

(market) democracy. In effect, education is seen as simply one more product like bread, cars and television.” (Apple, 2005, p. 215)

Apple’s work resonated with me as a teacher and I was able to use his words to debate important issues. The Educational Policies Committee (EPC) at my school board is a committee that discusses evaluation, curriculum, special school programs, technology and professional development. As a union delegate, I had the privilege of being a member of EPC, which also included members from management, human resources, administration, and the union executive. One particular issue that had arisen was that of the insertion of Google Apps for Education (GAPE) to replace Microsoft in all the schools. This decision was made without any consultation with the teachers or the union. At the time, I was reading and listening to Michael Apple and his thoughts on democratic schools. So, I brought forward at the EPC table a story that Michael Apple had told in one of his interviews<sup>24</sup>. Apple was travelling in India with his wife, Rima, who is also an educator. They met the minister of education in a particular province of India who proclaimed proudly that all of his students in all of his schools had electronic tablets. Apple was impressed and he insisted on visiting one of these amazing schools. He was alarmed to see that the school did not have bathrooms. This prevented many girls to attend schools. In India, it is socially acceptable for boys to urinate outside. This is not the case for girls. The girls that did attend school did not drink water in fear of having to use the bathroom, and this in turn made them dehydrated and unable to concentrate. In my mind, the electronic tablets had indirectly created inequality. Funds were being used

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<sup>24</sup> This interview was accessible on YouTube in the spring of 2015 and seems to be no longer available. I was unable to trace it.

to purchase technology, however money needed to be invested in infrastructure. This is exactly how I felt about technology in our schools. It's great to include technology, but at what cost? The EPC table was silent as I spoke of inequality and the school board's decisions to change the way teachers work without consultation or even thinking of the consequences. This is when I understood the power of higher education and the power I had in the room. Knowledge certainly is power. It was time to get more involved, to pay forward this power of learning, to be a voice for teachers and public education. This involvement started in 2014 when I attended my first anti-austerity demonstration in downtown Montreal.

### **a) Activism**

Activism is defined as a doctrine, a set of beliefs, or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue (merriam-webster.com, 2018) or to bring about political or social change (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1987).

The teacher's provincial contract ended in March of 2015. The government's demands were put on the table in January of the same year. In the sectorial (teachers negotiations) demands, the government wanted to increase class sizes, remove class size limits on option classes (visual arts is an option class), remove codes from special needs students that allowed for smaller class sizes, reduce spending for special needs and at-risk students, increase the number of hours that

teachers must be present in the school, assign teachers as mentors<sup>25</sup> without compensation, et cetera. In the inter-sectorial (public sector negotiations) demands, the government wanted to dismantle the pension by increasing the age for retirement from 60 to 62, increase the penalty for early retirement, increase the number of best years that calculates pension, remove contributions of the employer during a sabbatical, and allow for changes without consultation depending on the indexation rate at any one given time. In addition, the public sector workers would receive a pathetic 3% increase in salary over five years. We, the teachers, had a lot to fight against. We needed to fight to maintain our working conditions, we needed to safeguard the pension that we had invested in and we needed to end our diminishing purchasing power. For teachers the 2015-2016 school year was a time of activism.

The Liberal Government of Quebec under Philippe Couillard was in full austerity mode. Austerity, which is characterized by cuts to public services, became popular worldwide after the financial crisis of 2008 (Thomas & Tuffs, 2015; Ross & Savage, 2013). The liberal government was elected in 2014 and their first adopted budget with aims of decreasing the deficit was an indication of what was to come. The government was going to cut spending on public services<sup>26</sup>, reduce money given to school boards, introduce a sliding income scale for the childcare system,

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<sup>25</sup> Teachers volunteer to become mentors to help new teachers. This would mean that they would be appointed to new teachers. In order for mentorship to be successful, time is required. Teachers have very little time in their schedule to do this. When I first began teaching in 1992, department heads were released from part of their workload to help run the department. Mentorship was part of this work. Today there are no department heads in my school board.

<sup>26</sup> <https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/quebec-politics-in-2014-the-road-to-austerity>

decrease medical specialists, reform pension, decrease money transfers to municipalities, et cetera. This provoked an anti-austerity movement and on Saturday November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014, there was a massive demonstration that would be the first of many that I would attend.

I was one of an estimated one hundred thousand people gathered at Place du Canada in downtown Montreal. Members of unions, feminist associations, student associations, public sector workers, and ordinary citizens took to the streets to protest against the Premier Couillard's Liberal government and their austerity measures. It was the largest protest I had ever attended. The resonances of protest seem to transport us through the streets; horns, drums, noisemakers, people humming and plastic flags rippling in the cold Montreal wind created an atmosphere that was electric. The energy was incredible, almost palpable. I was overwhelmed with a sense of pride and excitement. I felt energized, purposeful, determined, and powerful; this is how solidarity feels. United with a common interest. As we slowly walked through the downtown streets of Montreal, I was struck at the familiarity of the people walking by my side. They were ordinary citizens like me, middle class, young and old, hard working, fighting against a government that was using their hard earned money to pay off the deficit that they had not created. On the way home, on the metro platform, I was one of a dozen people travelling west who had been at the protest. On the other side of the track the platform was crammed with people still demonstrating. They were travelling east; an electric runway divided us. I had never seen anything like it in my life.



*Figure 20: Four photographs taken using my cell phone on November 29, 2014.*

Over the next two years, I attended twelve more demonstrations, marches and rallies. I came to the realization, that even among so many protesters, sometimes you felt alone but you always had that incredible sensation of making change. Unexpectedly, it was the small marches with teachers in front of our local

schools that became more endearing and significant. These were the people that you worked with everyday and many strong bonds were developed over the course of the year. It was this solidarity that convinced me to run as president of my local union in May of 2016.



*Figure 21: Handing out information pamphlets to parent in school parking lot, photograph taken on June 14, 2015*



*Figure 22: Photograph taken in Quebec City, December 9, 2015*



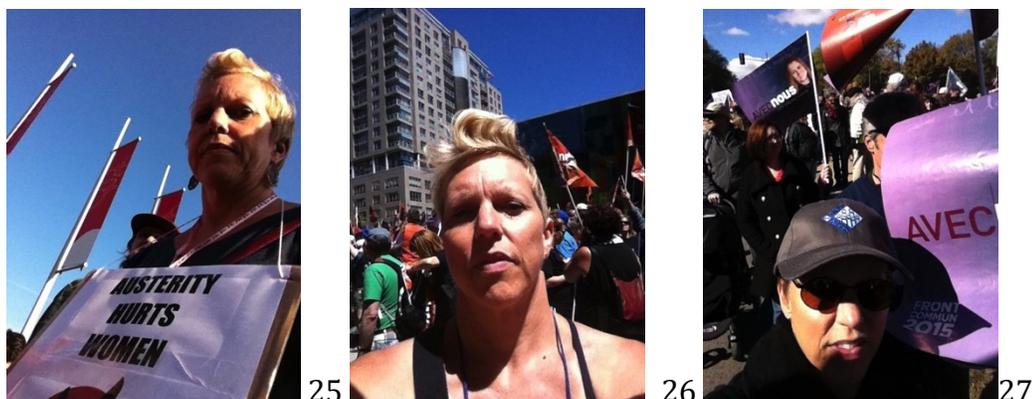
23



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*Figure 23: Pearson Teachers Union March in Pointe-Claire, Quebec, photograph taken on May 15, 2015*

*Figure 24: March in front of local school in the West Island of Montreal, photograph taken on November 17, 2015*



Figures 25/26/27: (left to right) (Photographs taken using cellphone) Austerity March, November 5, 2015; rally at Montreal Convention Centre, Liberal Party Convention, June 14, 2015; Austerity March, October 3, 2015  
 (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/tens-of-thousands-of-public-sector-workers-demonstrate-against-austerity-wage-freezes>)

## **b) Issues in Education**

*The ascendancy of neoliberal corporate culture into every aspect of American life both consolidates economic power in the hands of the few and aggressively attempts to break the power of unions, decouple income from productivity, subordinate the needs of society to the market, and deem public services and goods an unconscionable luxury. But it does more. It thrives on a culture of cynicism, insecurity and despair... In short, private interests trump social needs, and economic growth becomes more important than social justice. (Giroux, 2011, p.133)*

To begin the discussion and set the stage, I will describe "Neoliberalism", the political term used to describe the new approach to the global economy, and its effects on education. Neoliberalism has been the trend for the past four decades. Beginning in the 1980's, under Ronald Reagan in the United States, a new sort of "liberalism" is born. Individualism and freedom supersedes the welfare of the public or the collective. Capitalism is valued through condemning unions, deregulating

industry and financial institutions, and opening up global trade. Since profit is good and public is bad, reforms are also applied in education (Robertson, 2008). The neoliberal agenda has turned education into a commodity, increased privatization, created the illusion of choice for parents, implemented performance-related pay and inserted national testing; public education is under attack. It's important to recognize that neoliberalism is the ruling paradigm in education today and in particular in Western society. The impacts of this overriding paradigm are increased working hours, competition between teachers and schools, amplified paperwork, increased evaluation and highly controlled curriculum (Evers & Kneyber, 2016).

Over the past few years as a teacher, there have been some issues in education that have stood out for me. The neoliberal shift has definitely created problems here at home: privatization, expanding choices for parents, insertion of corporations, big data and special magnet programs<sup>27</sup>, increased workload and evaluation. In addition, gender inequality and the role of women in education needs to be examined under this philosophy. It is important to note that there are many other important issues in education in Quebec and Canada (Indigenous education, psychological and physical violence in the workplace, lack of resources for special needs, mental health of teachers and students, racism, gender equality, increased use of technology, et cetera) that are equally important, but I have had to narrow the scope of my research.

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<sup>27</sup> These programs are used to attract parents and students to a school. Examples will be discussed later.

## i) Privatization and Expanding Choices for Parents

*If you want to privatize something, destroy it. It's the standard method. First, defund it so that it doesn't work. That's what's happening in schools. Public schools are being defunded so that they don't work very well. (Chomsky, 2016)*

In Quebec, private schools, which agree to follow the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement Supérieur (MEES)<sup>28</sup> educational program, receive a 60% per-pupil government operating grant of that granted to the publicly funded schools. Across Canada, privatization is also a big concern: in Saskatchewan<sup>29</sup> and Manitoba<sup>30</sup> qualified private schools receive 50% government funding, in Alberta<sup>31</sup> private schools can receive up to 70% and charter schools<sup>32</sup> can receive 100% funding, and in British Columbia<sup>33</sup> private schools can obtain up to 50% grant per-pupil. The Atlantic Provinces and Ontario do not subsidize private schools (Milke, 2014). In my opinion, subsidizing private schools is a way for the government to wash their hands from their public responsibilities when it comes to education.

Since private schools are subsidized, the tuition fees are relatively inexpensive for parents with middle to high incomes. Villa Maria, a subsidized private school in the West end of Montreal, will cost parents about \$5,700<sup>34</sup> per year. Students who wish to attend must write an entrance exam that will test their

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.saskatchewan.ca/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/schools/ind/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://education.alberta.ca/private-schools/private-schools-in-alberta/?searchMode=3>

<sup>32</sup> Charter schools are a special type of public school that has a greater amount of autonomy and report directly to the Minister of Education. Charter schools have been allowed in Alberta since 1995.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/independent-schools/grants-to-independent-schools>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.villamaria.qc.ca/en/admissions/fee-structure>

academic skills. Private schools select their students and can turn away students with learning difficulties or with special needs. Consequently, in the West Island of Montreal, many parents have numerous choices for their children: the subsidized private schools, the French public schools and since there are no borders<sup>35</sup> or community schools in the English<sup>36</sup> sector, they can select any public school, providing many different academic programs. Andy Hargreaves (2016), adviser in education to the premier of Ontario (2016-2018), says that “Unbridled freedom leads to incoherence in systems, inconsistency in provision and inequality of educational opportunity as the privileged have more choices as well as a greater capacity to act upon them compared to the poor” (p.121). All these choices in education are creating a two-tier system and placing a lot of stress and anxiety on parents. Barry Schwartz, an American psychologist and author, argues (as cited in Hargreaves, 2016, p. 121) that:

Complete or infinite choice is as much a tyranny as no choice at all, as people are overwhelmed by the plethora of alternatives and endure anxiety and suffering as they have to choose one option against endless others, including ones that might conceivably have been better. A restaurant menu that reads more like a book, a jean shop with countless styles and cuts, and a selection

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<sup>35</sup> The French School Boards have school zones or borders. Students must attend their community school, which is based on where they live, unless they are in a special program.

<sup>36</sup> The Lester B. Pearson School Board services the English Community in the West Island of Montreal. It has 39 elementary schools (k-6) and 13 high schools (7-11). It is also important to note that the Charter of the French Language also known as Bill 101 (<http://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/showdoc/cs/C-11>) does not allow immigrants to attend English schools.

of schools so wide that parents are terrified of making an inferior choice for their child – all these things characterize the tyranny of choice.

## ii) Insertion of Corporations, Big Data and Special Programs

*I think that we must continue the never-ending attempts to keep alive the visions and the practices of a truly public school. In an age of privatization and marketization, such a school is one of the last remaining public institutions. Defending it is an essential part of the defense of the public in general. (Apple, 2015)*

As well as the privatization of public education through per-pupil grants, there are forms of privatization through the opening up of public education services to the private sector on a for-profit basis (Foese-Germain, 2016). According to the Canadian Teachers Federation's (CTF) report on privatization in Canada, some examples include public-private partnerships (P3), student information systems, online learning and contracting out educational services. Companies like Pearson Canada ([www.pearson.com](http://www.pearson.com)) provide textbooks, online resources, standardized tests, test preparation resources, and student information systems that collect data on students' grades.

At my school board, we have now been using Google Apps For Education (GAFE)<sup>37</sup> for four years. Teachers are invited to Google Summits, through their professional development funds provided by the Ministry of Education and they attend weekend long training sessions where they learn to use Google tools (Gmail, Forms, Sheets, Calendar, Classroom, Contacts, Drive, Slides, et cetera). Teachers can also become "Google Certified" by registering online and writing proficiency exams

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<sup>37</sup> [teachercenter.withgoogle.com](http://teachercenter.withgoogle.com)

in the use of these tools. Google puts on a good show and has convinced most of the teachers who have attended these workshops that this is the future.

What Google fails to mention is that when someone does a Google search, uses Gmail, has a Google+ account, uses free Google Apps, looks at YouTube, et cetera this allows Google to collect personal data, and this data is then used to help large corporations sell products. Google has discovered the power in collecting data; knowledge. Google assures school boards that this type of collection is not occurring with GAFE. This might be true; nevertheless, Google has secured clients for the future<sup>38</sup>. Siva Vaidhyanathan<sup>39</sup> (2011) describes Google as a “system of almost universal surveillance” (p. 84). Recently, Facebook was accused and fined for breaching the Data Protection Act in the United States<sup>40</sup>. Facebook was also collecting personal data that was harvested by Cambridge Analytica, a British political consulting firm, to influence voters on behalf of politicians. As educators we need to stay critical when it comes to technology and using Google or any other search engine in our classrooms. Students and parents need to be educated in digital citizenship and be aware of how information can and will be used.

Another way our school board collects data on our students is through an information system entitled *Tell Them From Me* (OursSCHOOL/TTFM) that is bought from *The Learning Bar Inc.* (TLB), a research-based education company

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<sup>38</sup> In the fall of 2017, the Lester B. Pearson School Board reported a student population of 19,727. (<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/west-island-gazette/lester-b-pearson-school-board-overall-numbers-continue-to-decline>)

<sup>39</sup> Siva Vaidhyanathan is a cultural historian and media scholar and is a professor of Media Studies at the University of Virginia.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jul/11/facebook-fined-for-data-breaches-in-cambridge-analytica-scandal>

(<http://thelearningbar.com/>). TTFM is a survey that measures students' health and well-being and according to TLB it is the largest national school survey in Canada. There seems to be nothing wrong with finding out how students are feeling, however, schools and school boards are using this information to create policy. I was speaking with a teacher from Saskatchewan, at the CTF Forum in 2016. He said that after analyzing the results from the TTFM survey, teachers were told to spend the last ten minutes of their school schedule talking to students about their day. The survey had indicated that only 10% of students talked to their teachers about personal problems. The survey did not ask if the students talk to other people in their surroundings: parents, relatives, friends, et cetera. The fact that students don't speak to teachers is not a bad thing. Teachers are trained to teach, they are not therapists or psychologists, and yet this school believes that there is a lack of compassion on the part of their teachers. Standardized interviews or surveys have limitations: they assume the respondent understands the questions and that the answer selection is adequate (van den Hoonaard, 2015, p. 100). In addition to paying a private company for a student information system, schools and school boards are using the data to decide on important policies and create strategic plans.

To entice parents to select our schools, numerous special programs have slowly taken over the basic education curriculums: International Baccalaureate Program, S.T.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) Education and Future Ready Schools. All of these programs are profit-making programs. There are costs for required professional development to certify teachers

and annual fees required to qualify for the programs in schools. These expenses are afforded by government grants and by school fees paid by the parents.

### **iii) Increase in Workload and Increased Evaluation**

After more than two decades under my belt, you would think my job, as a teacher would have become easier. However, it did not. Today, teachers are feeling the pressure. They are asked to do more and more each year: to participate in new committees (School Success Plan Committee, Anti-Bullying Committee, Special Needs Committee, Open House Committee, Digital Citizen Program Committee, Exam Committee, Professional Development Committee, etcetera), to promote our public schools and to compete against government funded private schools (through open houses, websites, special events, special programs, special outings, pamphlets and promoting our classes), to raise money (through fundraisers and grant applications), to be up on the latest technology (creating websites, using programs to network and collaborate with our students, learning to use apps for education, attending weekend technology workshops), to evaluate progressively more (several competencies per subject area, general competencies, written commentaries, school board wide exams and provincial wide exams), and to work with more and more special needs students, one in five students have an individualized educational plan in our schools (create individualized programs and tests, write individualized educational programs, deal with behavior and learning issues, extend our hours for remediation at lunch, before and after school, allow students more time to finish

work and write tests). Teachers need flexibility to cope with this increase of stress and job demands.

#### **iv) Gender Inequality and the Roles of Women in Education**

*“The fact that most elementary-school teachers then and now are women provides us with a key element in understanding why there have often been attempts by state bureaucrats, industry and (a largely male body of) Academics to control the curricular and teaching practices in classrooms.” (Apple, 1984, p.456)*

To illustrate the number of women in education, all you need to do is fill an auditorium with elementary teachers. The first general union assemblies in 2015 were called in September to secure a mandate to strike. The strike vote was called on two separate nights: the first night was for the elementary school teachers and the second was for the high school teachers. The first night, I was walking in the parking lot towards the large auditorium, I noticed the number of women walking side by side with me and for the first time, I recognized that teachers are primarily women<sup>41</sup>. In education, there are specific issues related to gender: government austerity targets women, women require flexibility, and women do more un-paid working hours than men. In addition and consequently, there are insufficient women in leadership roles.

Women did not always dominate teaching. Before the 1870s in the United States and in England men dominated the teaching field (Apple, 1984). At that time,

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<sup>41</sup> According to Statistics Canada, 74% of full time public educators were women in 2011 with 84% at the elementary level and 59% at the secondary level.

teaching was a supplement job for men. It is the growth of compulsory schooling and the shift of teaching being “women’s work” that made the number of women supersede men. It was also convenient that women were much cheaper to hire. Women were paid half the salary of men in the United States in the late nineteenth century. Since the teaching job required certification and the hours and length of school years were extended, for men, the salaries were no longer adequate to raise a family. Men who remained in the educational field tended to take administrative or managerial positions. Interestingly, this is still true today.

Since education is a public service and it is dominated by women, when governments decide to cut back spending, women are hurt. According to Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)<sup>42</sup> in a research document entitled *Making Women Count* (2016), investing in good public services benefits everyone. Not only would it provide good paying jobs for women, it benefits the economy. One of the CCPA’s recommendations to create a more gender equal Canada is to invest money into the public sectors. Unfortunately, in the past few years in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, most recently in Manitoba and Nova Scotia, austerity has been the dominant force in government tactics. If governments invest in the highly women dominated fields, like education, homecare services, nursing and childcare, the economy would do much better. A great example of this inequality is in Alberta. Most high paid jobs in the oil sector are male dominated, and when oil prices fell

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<sup>42</sup> The CCPA is an independent, non-partisan research institute concerned with issues of social, economic and environmental justice. Founded in 1980, the CCPA is one of Canada’s leading progressive voices in public policy debates.

families had to rely on women who were in comparatively low waged jobs (Lambert & McInturff, 2016).

A new study coming out of Cornell University, in Ithaca New York, has found it is the different occupations between men and women, that is the main cause of the gender pay gap. In fact, another study in the same article, suggests that as soon as women enter a field the pay drops. An example is when a large number of women entered the designer field, the salaries dropped by 34 percentage points. "It may come down to this troubling reality: work done by women simply isn't valued highly" (Miller, 2016).

#### **v) Flexibility and Un-Paid Work**

Flexibility and work-life balance have been topics of conversation since the federal liberal government has taken power in Canada, under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. On his campaign trail, Trudeau promised to amend the Canadian Labour Code to allow workers to ask their employers for flexible working hours and to increase parental leaves (Puxley, 2015). In 2016, on a trip to Japan, for the Group of Seven Summit, Trudeau took a day off to celebrate his wedding anniversary with his wife Sophie. "This is the kind of work-life balance that I've often talked about as being essential in order to be able to be in service of the country with all one's very best and that's certainly something I'm going to continue to make sure we do," the Prime Minister said (quoted in Gollum, 2016).

In a 2012 Canadian national study on balancing work and caregiving, researchers at Carleton and Western University found that work demands have

risen and flexibility in the workplace has dropped. Since work related-stress has increased, there is higher absenteeism and lower productivity among workers. In addition, women in Canada today still do on average one-and-a-half times more domestic work or unpaid work than men (Kramer, 2013).

I remember my mother visiting me from Winnipeg during the school year when I was newly married and working as a young inexperienced teacher. Every evening, after dinner, I would sit down at the computer and begin preparing for the following day. My mother declared, after seeing me work evenings for a week, “This is a crazy job. You have no life!” After teaching for five years, I became pregnant with my first son. Returning to the work pace that I was accustomed to, now as a young mother, was not practical. I returned to work, after a year of maternity leave, at half time. This part time status was crucial for my survival: I was a better teacher and more importantly a better mother.

I believe that one of the main reasons for women becoming teachers is job flexibility. Teachers’ schedules are parallel with those of their children, allowing them to have the same holidays and spend summers together. There is no need as a teacher to search for summer and spring break youth camps for their children. It seems as if more and more teachers are asking for part time positions<sup>43</sup>, so that they can juggle work with their home life or to have a better quality of life. Unfortunately,

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<sup>43</sup> According to Stats Canada, in 2017, 75.8% of part-time workers were women. 67.2 % voluntarily work part time. Chief among all reasons for women choosing part-time work was for caring for children. (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm>)

I have discovered that managers at my school board, who are mainly men, dislike giving part time work.

#### **vi) Leadership Roles**

In March of 2016, I attended the Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF) Women's symposium in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where I got the chance to have a conversation with Dianne Woloschuck<sup>44</sup>. I had met her the previous year at our Pearson Teacher's Union delegate training weekend where she had spoken about neoliberalism and its effects on education. I was quite pleased to see her in Winnipeg, so I went out of my way to sit with her during a lunch break. I told her that I was contemplating running for president of my local teacher's union. I also told her that I wasn't sure that I was qualified for the job; I was hesitant. She said, "You must run." She then went on to tell me that women have a tendency to talk themselves out of leadership roles. Women look carefully at the long list of qualifications needed for a job and painstakingly check them off one by one. Men on the other hand don't bother; they just apply for the position. She also said that women need to be convinced, usually by other women, before taking the plunge into leadership. Dianne had convinced me and I am now president of my local union.

In May of 2016, during the annual Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT) general assembly, the union presidents of the nine English school boards in Quebec were asked to step forward. In this field of predominantly women, only one

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<sup>44</sup> Dianne Woloschuck is on the Board of Directors for CTF, Education International Board Member, a former CTF President and a former president of the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation.

of the nine presidents was a woman. This is unacceptable. Today, I am happy to report that there are 4 female presidents.

In November of 2015, after Justin Trudeau was elected as Canada's 23<sup>rd</sup> Prime Minister of Canada, he appointed 15 women to the 31 cabinet ministers positions<sup>45</sup>. It was Canada's first gender balanced cabinet. Women represent 50% of the population, and in spite of that in the House of Commons only 27%<sup>46</sup> of the members are women. We still have a lot of work to accomplish. If women are in positions of power their voices will be heard through policymaking and decision-making. In addition, they become powerful role models for other women. We need women in leadership roles to influence other women.

## **v) The Road to Leadership**

*"Many of the leaders of feminist groups were originally teachers who traced their growing awareness of the importance of the conflict over patriarchal dominance to the experience they had as teachers. Their resentment over salary differentials, over interference in their decisions, over the very ways they were so tightly controlled often led in large part to their growing interest in feminist ideas." (Apple, 1984, p. 469)*

On April 20, 2016, I stood before a small crowd of union delegates and teachers, in the auditorium of an English High School in the west island of Montreal, to persuade them that I should be their next union president. I felt confident and yet alone. The members had been disengaged with the union since the turmoil of the provincial negotiations that began in the spring of 2015. Four unpaid strike days,

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-trudeau-liberal-government-cabinet-1.3304590>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>

many demonstrations and rallies fighting for better working conditions, in exchange for a status quo collective agreement. No gains were achieved in the teacher's workload<sup>47</sup>. We did achieve a salary increase<sup>48</sup> and the government managed to only apply a small amount of damage on our pensions<sup>49</sup>. Of the 1900 teachers that pay union dues, only about 50 members attended this general assembly. How can I persuade the members that the union is important and necessary in this time of austerity?

*Hi everyone,*

*My name is Heidi Yetman, I've been teaching for over 20 years, a union delegate for twelve and I've been on the union executive for the last 2 years.*

*When I was 16 years old, I worked in a hotdog stand at the local mall. The entire staff was required to attend a meeting on a Saturday morning. I didn't work on that particular Saturday and I was angry that I had to go in for this meeting. So, I called the labor board, and they told me that by law they were required to pay me for a minimum of 3 hours of work. I informed my employer and I was told "We'll pay you but keep quiet and don't tell the others." I wish I could say that I told the others, but I was 16 and pretty happy to get paid that day and more importantly to discover that I had rights and that employers did not always follow the rules. This was the beginning of a long road of standing up for my rights and the rights of others.*

*This past year has been difficult and a tremendous learning experience. For any union leader, going through a difficult negotiation is challenging. So, I would like to thank the entire executive for their work and dedication during this challenging period.*

*The small turnout at the last two general assemblies really demonstrated how angry and disengaged teachers are with their union. How could the teachers believe that the union was against them? How could the members be so angry that they are willing to turn their backs on the one organization that is there to protect their rights? This was the turning point for me. I understood that I had*

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<sup>47</sup> One exception, kindergarten class size went from 20 to 19 students.

<sup>48</sup> Salary increases: 2014-2015 – 0%, 2015-2016 - 1.5%, 2016-2017 – 1.75%, 2017-2018 – 2% and 2018-2019 – to be determined based on a new salary scale.

<sup>49</sup> Pension penalties increased from 4% to 5%, the age for pension will increase in 2019 to 61 and pension is not accumulated in sabbatical years.

*to do something. I really believe that the union has an important place in public education; the union is the voice that will defend teachers and their students in a positive way. It is through the union that we can act collectively to change public education for the better, to fight inequality and the dismantling of our public services. I truly believe, it is through unions that great change can happen.*

*C'était une année particulièrement difficile. Maintenant, on a besoin d'un changement ; une façon renouvelée de voir les choses au niveau du syndicat. Maintenant, plus que jamais, le syndicalisme est essentiel dans la lutte vers l'égalité et la justice sociale. C'est ensemble, avec solidarité, que nous pouvons apporter des changements importants.*<sup>50</sup>

*So here I am, I am asking you to allow me to be your voice, and, to rebuild your trust in your union.*

*With provincial negotiations behind us, and local negotiations ahead of us, it is time to take a closer look at ourselves. What are our needs as teachers? What do we need to do to improve our day-to-day in the classroom? How can we help each other to facilitate our jobs? How can we help new teachers remain in the teaching profession?*

*We are the experts in education, it's time that we had a say.*

*I believe it's time to bring the union back to the teachers. Allow teachers to have a bigger impact. Allow teachers to make more decisions about local evaluation, professional development, and specialized programs in their schools.*

*J'ai une passion pour l'éducation, la justice et l'égalité. Les enseignants sont malheureux. En tant que présidente, je vous représenterai fièrement et je me lutterai avec vous pour de meilleures conditions de travail. Les enseignants ont besoin d'être valorisés.*<sup>51</sup>

*I do not have all the answers, I will make mistakes, it will be a big learning curve, but I am willing to work hard, listen and try to make positive changes.*

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<sup>50</sup> Translation: This year has been particularly difficult. We need change; a renewed vision of unionism. Now, more than ever, unionism is essential in the fight for equality and social justice. In solidarity, we can make a difference.

<sup>51</sup> Translation: I am passionate about education, justice and equality. Teachers are unhappy. As your president, I will be your voice and I will fight with you for better working conditions. Teachers need to be respected.

*In the end this is your union, you pay union dues, you should have a say. In fact “you are the union”, I hope you will allow me to collaborate with you in the coming years and to be your voice for promoting public education and endorsing the amazing teachers in this school board. It’s time for teachers to have pride in their collective identity.*

*Thank you*

*(Read on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016, during a PTU general assembly)*

In May of 2016, I was elected president of my local union. I had run against two male counterparts and had won with a strong majority of the votes. I was humbled but proud and excited to represent the teachers of my school board.

### **c) Answering the Question**

How does the return to art practice open up new knowledge to discover the relationship between three identities: Artist, Educator and Activist?

Activism is the unexpected outcome of the return to art practice. My gestural drawings may seem far-removed from the politics of education, but the action of gesture has evolved into the action of change. My activism was also a time of immersion, similar to the return to practice, where I threw myself deep into the subject. In fact, I immersed myself almost simultaneously into the practice of art and activism. Walking away from that intense time of activism, in a time of austerity and negotiations, was parallel to the illumination phase of heuristic research–creation (Moustakas, 1990). Activism and artmaking have brought social justice and politics to the forefront.

The emotions that are generated at demonstrations are actually quite similar to those when performing or speaking in front of an audience: exhilaration,

determination, and a trace of unrest. In addition, there is this wonderful feeling of actually making a difference and affecting change. This past July, I spoke in front of a delegation of over a hundred teacher union leaders at the CTF general assembly in Edmonton, Alberta. This is where I thrive, I love the feeling of being heard and I will continue to fight for quality public education.



*Figure 28:* The CTF General Assembly on July 12, 2018. Photograph retrieved from <https://www.ctf-fce.ca>.

Throughout my campaign for the CTF Vice Presidency, I advocated for women in particular. During the question period that took place after the candidates' speeches, a woman of colour rose and said, "Take a look at me. How am I represented here? How are you going to help someone like me?" My answer was simple, "We need more women in leadership roles, dedicated positions on the Executive for women and minorities, and we need to make these positions

accessible for women by creating flexibility.” Even in a room of over one hundred delegates representing teachers across the country, only about 40% of these delegates were women and only a handful were of a visible minority.

And even though our negotiations are over, I intend to continue my participation in protest. In January 2017, I brought a friend to her first protest rally. It took place at Place des Arts in downtown Montreal. I made two small signs that we wore around our necks and we went to show our solidarity with the worldwide Women’s March event<sup>52</sup>.



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*Figures 29: Place des Arts on January 21, 2017. (Photograph taken using cellphone)*

*Figure 30: Signs made for the protest of January 21, 2017. (Photograph taken using cellphone)*

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/live/2017/jan/21/womens-march-on-washington-and-other-anti-trump-protests-around-the-world-live-coverage>

## Part 7: Conclusion

### Man in Black (1971)

Well, you wonder why I always dress in black,  
Why you never see bright colors on my back,  
And why does my appearance always have a somber tone.  
Well, there's a reason for the things that I have on.  
I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down,  
Livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town,  
I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime,  
But still is there because he's a victim of the times.  
I wear the black for those who've never read,  
Or listened to the words that Jesus said,  
About the road to happiness through love and charity,  
Why, you'd think He's talking straight to you and me.  
Well, we're doin' mighty fine, I do suppose,  
In our streak of lightnin' cars and fancy clothes,  
But just so we're reminded of the ones who are held back,  
Up front there ought 'a be a Man In Black.  
I wear it for the sick and lonely old,  
For the reckless ones whose bad trip left them cold,  
I wear the black in mournin' for the lives that could have been,  
Each week we lose a hundred fine young men.  
And, yes I wear it for the thousands who have died,  
Believen' that the Lord was on their side,  
And I wear it for another hundred thousand who have died,  
Believen' that we all were on their side.  
Well, there's things that never will be right I know,  
And things need changin' everywhere you go,  
But 'til we start to make a move to make a few things right,  
You'll never see me wear a suit of white.  
Ah, I'd love to wear a rainbow every day,  
And tell the world that everything's OK,  
But I can carry off a little darkness on my back,  
'Till things are brighter, I'm the Man In Black

Johnny R. Cash

I remember as a child visiting my Father's parents' home in a suburb of St-John's Newfoundland. They lived in a bungalow, which had a basement apartment.

When my father was young, the apartment was used as a boarding home. When we visited, we stayed in the basement, and in the living room there was a wooden record player cabinet, which opened up to display a turntable and the shelf below held a collection of records. My father used to put the records on and my younger brother and I would dance. It was only many years later, as an adult, that I realized I had a sentimental attachment to the songs of Johnny Cash, an American singer songwriter popular for his blend of country, rock and roll, blues, folk and gospel. His song *Man in Black*, written in 1971, resonates in particular for me, “Up front there ought to be a Man in Black”; someone to stand up for those that do not have a voice.

In *Artist, Researcher, Teacher: A Study of Professional Identity in Art and Education (2013)*, Thornton explores the multitudes of identities in relation to the arts. In particular he takes a close look at three identities and their relationship with one another: artist, researcher and teacher. This is how he describes his own personal experience:

I realized at an early stage of my doctoral studies that commitment to the research culture would profoundly affect my understanding of the world of art and education. Also I felt it important to allow my identities as artist, researcher and teacher to flow back and forth as I worked and engaged with each as intuition and circumstances indicated. I have also found my ideas and concerns expanding and being influenced by other areas of knowledge. (p. 132)

This “back and forth” is comparable to Sullivan’s description of art’s based research as a continuous “infolding” and “unfolding” to uncover new possibilities. Thorton describes thoroughly the artist-teacher, the researcher-artist and the teacher-researcher to support their correlation. In some research, the outcome may be the creation of an art piece. In my case, the knowledge that was produced through research had a profound effect on my professional career, which was pushed towards the politics of education and unionism. Thorton describes this shift in identity, “In the spirit of synergy, this reformulation of professional identity can manifest as creative desire to participate in the shaping of the future, or the construction of our being in relationship to the changing world” (p.131).

Arts-Based research allows an artist to open up to possibilities and discover unexpected places. Research in Art Education can benefit enormously using this road towards creating new knowledge. Educators in the arts can immerse themselves in their craft and become not only better at what they do in the classroom but also discover new and exciting opportunities and challenges. As artists we are “quick to invent, adopt and adapt...that might be useful in searching out the improbable and the impossible...outside the limits of language” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 280).

In Thorton’s (2013) description of the roles of artist, educator and researcher, he illustrates how these different identities cross over into each other. That the boundaries that surround these different selves dissolve and there is a blurring of the edges. This pushing of the boundaries is the space where one develops as a person and expands their knowledge.

This accurately describes where I am in my professional and personal growth. I have pushed the boundaries, I have taken risks, I have expanded my knowledge and I have grown as a person. This has been an amazing personal and intellectual journey. The return to practice through gesture has positively influenced my teaching practice by opening up my curriculum and allowing for a transformative position, encouraging social change. It has made me realize that by means of action I can make a difference through unionism. It has brought me to unexpected places and unexpected outcomes. Performance has become the metaphor for gestures through artmaking, for collective exchanges in the classroom and for action on the streets and in meeting rooms. I am hoping with this new obtained knowledge I will be able to put education on the forefront and make positive change.

In order to transform society and fight the neoliberal agenda, we need to work together in solidarity (Apple, 2013; Klein, 2014; Reich, 2012) and groups from all walks of life must be involved: unionized and non-unionized workers, public and non-public workers, women's groups, student groups, environmental groups, human rights groups, et cetera. Klein's book entitled *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus Climate* (2014) addresses the effects of neoliberalism on the environment. She also believes that working together can advance change, "building a mass movement that has a chance...will require the broadest possible spectrum of allies" (p.157). Since the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, hundreds of thousands of citizens have taken to the streets all over the world to

protest and express their views on a wide range of important issues. This is the kind of movement that Apple, Klein and Reich have described.

Since being elected as Vice President of CTF, I have become the chairman of the Status of Women Committee. My dedication to equity, social justice and in particular to women's issues has only just begun. When women surround me, I experience power. I feel power surrounded by my women friends. I feel power at the gym. I feel power in the schools. I feel power at my union's Executive Committee<sup>53</sup>. I felt power in May, when I attended the CTF Women's Forum in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. There were only women in attendance; one hundred female educators from all over Canada. It was three days of incredible discussion and sharing. All these highly knowledgeable women in positions of power are making a difference in education and in the lives of teachers. They are role models for other young women. It was here that the president of the Prince Edward Island Teachers Federation convinced me to run for the position of Vice President of CTF, to ensure women were represented at the Executive table. This was achieved.

Let the work begin!

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<sup>53</sup> My executive committee is 80% women. A true representation of teachers.



Figure 31: CTF Executive Committee for 2018-2019. Photograph retrieved from <https://www.ctf-fce.ca>.

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