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Social Reconstruction in the Collaborative Creation Workshop

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Abstract

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This research paper relates my professional experience as visual art educator at École de langue française de Trois-Pistoles. In the summer of 1998, I conducted a project intended to demonstrate how the process of social reconstruction. associated with multicultural education pedagogical strategies. could be introduced in art education by means of workshops focussed on group creation. The emphasis is placed on the review of my teaching strategies and my approach to group creation which allow students of different backgrounds to broaden their sense of historical perspective and cultural relativity. Two different workshops were held. Students followed a multi-step group creation process which culminated in the realization of two installations. These reflect the understanding by the students of reconstructionist principles. The feasibility and efficiency of my teaching strategies and approach to group creation are illustrated. The long-term objective is to encourage other art educators to explore group creation as a potential pedagogical tool to promote the development of multicultural art education.

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I have always believed that creation should emerge from a dialogue, an exchange of ideas between individuals. In 1997, I organized a number of workshops centered on group creations at École de langue française de Trois-Pistoles. I envisioned group creation as a single artistic production accomplished by a group of individuals. My intent was to engage students in a dialogue that would widen their views on social and aesthetic issues of concern to them.

Following the first group creation workshop I held at École de langue française de Trois-Pistoles, I sensed strongly that my approach could be used to achieve even more and could have some impact not only on the participants of the workshop, but also on the community where the project took place. Furthermore, I realized that my teaching experience in the context of group workshops could very well be the object of a research project in the field of multicultural art education.

With that in mind, I started reviewing selected articles on multicultural education and on the process of social reconstruction. According to Hicks (1994), in the broadest sense of the word, social reconstruction is the constant "redefinition and reconstitution of societies in response to internal and external influences" (p. 149). Through my readings, I have been able to identify a close connection between the process of social reconstruction and multicultural education. Hicks (1994), states : "The process of social reconstruction advances, in part, through pedagogical strategies which increase students' capacity for reflectivity in their decision making and actions" (p. 150).

The multicultural and social reconstructionist approach which Sleeter and Grant (1993) identified as the fifth approach to multicultural education, is one of these pedagogical strategies. Two pedagogic principles, historical perspective and cultural relativity, along with Sleeter and Grant's (1993) fifth approach guided me through the realization of my thesis project.

This paper will review the project which I conducted as educator of visual arts at École de langue française in the summer of 1998. The goal of this project was to demonstrate how the process of social reconstruction, associated with multicultural education pedagogical strategies, could be introduced in art education by the means of structured workshops focussed on group creation. To demonstrate this, I intend to present and analyze my teaching experience of group creation which allowed the integration of some aspects of the multicultural and social reconstructionist approach to multicultural education in the teaching of visual arts.

The principal aspects of that approach, which I focussed on in my workshops of the summer of 1998, were those which led my students towards a keener awareness of historical perspective and cultural relativity. The intent of this project and the terminology used here will be explained at greater length in the Research Question section. I will first describe the professional and personal reasons that brought me to get involved in such a project.

Professional and Personal Reasons for the Research Topic

The reasons which led me to become interested in group creation and multicultural education are many. Firstly, over the past five years, I have had the opportunity to work in teaching institutions where cultural diversity was very well established. In addition, working in institutions which were second language immersion schools gave me the opportunity to interact with individuals coming from various backgrounds and countries. The necessity for all the students to learn a second or common language brought them together, transforming the learning environment into an arena of cultural exchange. My encounter with cultural diversity led to a growing desire to increase my knowledge of the communications and interactions that exist between different cultural groups. Having both a training in visual arts and education, I have always seen the arts as a dynamic and stimulating means of studying intercultural relations.

Secondly, I began to realize that group creations have played an important role in my artistic evolution. Since my first involvement in the artistic creation process, I have believed that interaction between individuals can be used as a creative tool. The art work should reveal the essence of the interaction occurring between those individuals. The conception and realization of an art work by a group of individuals became for me the most powerful mode of communication. Therefore, the majority of my art works have originated from artistic collaboration.

My teaching experience also helped to develop the interest I acquired for collective creations. In fact, my approach to art education has very much relied on the elaboration of artistic projects that have centered on group creations. My classes and workshops have been structured in such a way that each student became a learner-teacher. The skills and particular abilities of each student have been stressed and used in order to benefit the entire group. Whether working with young children or with adults, I have adopted a fully interactive teaching style, engaging students in a dialogue not only with each other but also with members of their community. One of my goals in teaching has been to bring students to develop their ability to represent in visual terms their critical analysis of issues of concern to them or to their community. Brainstorming, comparisons of perceptions, exchanges of ideas and other teaching strategies described in the Review of the Project section of this paper have facilitated this critical analysis of issues.

Thirdly, in the context of a French language immersion program two years ago, I took charge of a project of group creation with university students from Mexico, the United States, Canada and England. Students who worked in group creation projects in the workshops that I led, became aware of their own cultural value system and community membership. It was then that I decided to study this phenomenon. My readings and the papers produced in the context of Elizabeth J. Saccá's course Contemporary Art, and Collaboration and Social Change and in Robert Parker's course Critical Analysis, helped me develop my ideas and proved most useful in the elaboration of my project. Thus, I am proposing an analysis of my personal approach to teaching group creation which I believe, facilitates the process of social reconstruction in art education. I will first review

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the history of the French immersion school to situate the context in which my project was realized.

History of École de Langue Française

An institution well established in the heart of Trois-Pistoles. École de langue française. has been affiliated with the University of Western Ontario since 1933. It has been one of the first Canadian institutions to offer intensive French courses to an anglophone clientele.

The Setting

Situated in the Bas Saint-Laurent region on the shore of the St Lawrence River and set in a rural environment. Trois-Pistoles city is inhabited by a very homogeneous French Canadian population of four thousand. Over the past thirty years. the socioeconomic picture of the city has changed considerably with the deterioration of its former economic wealth. The wood industry. which was critical to the local economy up to the seventies. has completely disappeared. The fishing industry can support no more than five to six families. The milk transformation factory has closed its doors in the mid-eighties. The lack of employment led to the exodus of almost half of the population. The city is now trying to rekindle its economy through tourism. The natural beauty of the St Lawrence River shore and the proximity of whale observation sites make Trois-Pistoles an inviting holiday resort.

Nevertheless, summer is very short, so the city needed more cultural structures to attract tourists. The rich historical heritage of Trois-Pistoles served to promote it as the cultural capital of the Bas St-Laurent region. Over the past few years, a museum on the history of the Basque fishermen was built, a storytelling festival was organized and a theater also opened its doors along with other cultural activities. These institutions improved the local economy somewhat but did not change the social situation of Trois-Pistoles. These activities might have prolonged the summer season to some extent, but insufficiently to encourage the younger generation to remain in the region. The Trois-Pistoles population is ageing and there is no sign of regeneration.

The Creation

In this context, the École de langue française of the University of Western Ontario with its 400 hundred students invading the city from May to mid-August every year, is a most welcomed institution. The activities of the school bring over a million dollars into the local economy each year. It was Dr. William Sherwood Fox who, at the beginning of the thirties, had the idea to establish a French immersion school in Trois-Pistoles. Having French Canadian ancestors, Fox dreamt of establishing summer classes in a totally francophone environment that would allow young anglophones to learn French and to discover the French Canadian culture. Funding was a problem, but Fox spared no efforts in obtaining support and on July 3, 1933, the University of Western Ontario opened its French summer school in Trois-Pistoles. Twenty-six students from all provinces of Canada registered for the first eight week session.

The Total Immersion Approach

Beginning with the first session, French conversation has been the priority in the teaching methods. To reinforce this pedagogical approach, the students are lodged by local families during their entire stay. This experience of living as part of a Quebec family is often quite special for some students. The majority of the students come from large cities and from well-to-do families. They are abruptly immersed in a rural environment, in working-class families. The whole cultural environment is very different from their own.

Many students have very little knowledge of the French language which is the only one spoken by the family members where they are lodged. Most of them are not used to living in large households and to sharing limited living quarters with other students and members of the families, all strangers to them. The very different eating habits create great distress. Students experience frustration not to be able, at first, to express the most basic needs or to verbalise their apprehension of the whole situation, at the same time as being closely monitored so they do not revert to their mother tongue. Having to conform night and day to a strict schedule of courses, workshops and social activities imposed by the school in order to make sure the immersion is total, makes them yearn for their lost independence. Although enriching, this total immersion experience can be quite disturbing and even create anguish in some students. The changes to which they are exposed are challenging for all, and even more so for the younger ones who leave home for the first time.

Activities

The school offers French language courses and courses in French Canadian civilization and in political science. Additionally, a complete sociocultural program was implemented in the French immersion school. This program reflects French Canadian culture as well as French culture in general. It encompasses French songs, music, theatre, cinema, art exhibits and cultural outings to Quebec City, Charlevoix and the Gaspe Peninsula. Numerous vocal artists have been coming to Trois-Pistoles to present their repertoire. Well known and important artists such as Gilles Vigneault, Richard Desjardins, Pauline Julien and many more performed in Trois-Pistoles. Sculptors have been invited for the past five years to come and work on the University grounds.

In addition to the many excursions and sociocultural activities, the school now also offers workshops which introduce the students to the culture and history of the Province of Quebec. The workshops promote learning and self-expression in a non-classroom environment. Those workshops are held for two hours in the afternoon, five days a week. Most workshops are oriented towards the arts. My workshop on visual arts was held in the context of these afternoon workshops.

Research Question

My research question was to verify whether my visual arts teaching strategy and my approach to group creation allowed students of different backgrounds to broaden their

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sense of historical perspective and cultural relativity. By doing so, I was hoping to highlight some pedagogical tools which could allow students to engage in the process of "reflective decision making and personal and civic action" (Banks 1991, p. 131), that are linked to the process of social reconstruction. Hicks (1994) states that :

> The societies are not stagnant entities and that they constantly redefine and reconstitute themselves in response to internal and external influences and that this state of redefinition and reconstitution is a state of social reconstruction. (p. 149)

If we accept this, we can define social reconstruction as an ongoing process of evolution of social structures, of patterns of behavior and identities. In the field of education, reconstructive multiculturalist curricula focus on structural inequalities within western society. Clark (1996) suggests that :

> Students from marginalized groups are encouraged to deconstruct sociocultural phenomena to discover how contemporary society works to their disadvantage; similarly, students from the dominant culture are asked to deconstruct such phenomena to find how society works to their advantage. Subsequently, all students are invited to construct new, most likely interdisciplinary, school curricula which respond to their individual and collective lived experiences. (p. 56)

The heavy emphasis placed on political activism in reconstructionist art curricula is often perceived as a radical departure from traditional art education. To some reformists such as Elliot Eisner, it seems inappropriate to include in curricula aimed at young children the reconstructionist themes about gender, racial and ethnic marginalisation. The lack of attention paid by reconstructionists to studio and intuitive aesthetic response activities has also been criticised. Reformists express the concern that experiencing a work of art can be meaningful without necessarily placing that work of art in an economic, political and historical context. The reformists also question the professional preparation of art educators to attempt to reconstruct society, and wonder if it should not be left to the social study fields.

Sleeter and Grant (1989) state that an art education program that is social reconstructionist in orientation should adopt four practices :

Democracy must be actively practiced in the school ...... students learn how to analyze their own situation ..... students learn social action skills that help them practice democracy and to analyze their own situations ..... students and groups are taught to coalesce and work together across the lines of race, gender, class, and disability in order to strengthen and energize their fight against oppression. (p. 55)

I developed the curriculum of my workshop in visual arts in Trois-Pistoles in collaboration with the students, and it was totally dependent on the social, political and

economic conditions of the community. The main aspects of the multicultural and social reconstructionist approach on which I focussed in my workshop were historical perspective and cultural relativity.

According to Clark (1996), cultural relativity is "the recognition and the comparison by a group of individuals of their own cultural assumptions and values with those of diverse cultural groups" (p. 80). He continues, "historical perspective is the examination of historical forces which molded contemporary values. Historical perspective allows the students to see themselves and others as part of a larger tradition" (Clark, 1996, p. 80). Those two aspects of the multicultural and social reconstructionist approach appeared to me to be the most appropriate to explore in order to engage students in a group creation project where they could take part in the process of social reconstruction.

The structure and the goals of the French immersion school have significantly influenced the orientation of my research on multicultural art education. To be able to pursue my research on multicultural art education and realize part of it in the field, I had to conform to some criteria imposed by the institution where the project took place.

As the person responsible for the visual arts workshop, I not only had to encourage the students to get acquainted with the Quebec language and culture but also with various concepts and technical aspects related to artistic creation. It is important to emphasize that only a few of the students participating in the workshop had any type of training in art. Generally, in a group of twelve to twenty students, there are rarely more than three

students who do possess some kind of art training. This factor influenced my teaching strategy. A group creation project seemed the appropriate choice to meet the objectives of the school and of the workshop.

Creation being generally perceived as a personal activity, it does not easily lead to oral communication activities and because of this, the lack of oral communication had been one of the major problems in the visual arts workshops in the previous years. However, opting for a group creation. I therefore ensured that the students communicated with each other during the creative process.

Collaborative creation appears to be an interesting approach to the discovery of a new culture, which is also a key objective of the school. The students and the teacher form a small community where information on the hosting community is gathered. The more the group of students is able to view the pluralistic character of the hosting community, the more likely it is that its representation of that community will be congruent.

Literature Review

At first, my intention was to lead students to create a mural inspired by the storytelling of the inhabitants of Trois-Pistoles. That idea came to me after reading the book on mural painting *Le pied du mur*, written by Marco Elliot (1990). This technical work on mural painting was to me a source of inspiration, a practical guide as well as a subject of reflection.

The effectiveness of this book comes from the well-balanced sensibility which Elliot integrates in his work. While transmitting practical information on the development of a mural project. the author takes into consideration the human aspect related to this type of project :

Il est clair que la peinture murale. en contact quotidien avec les habitants d'un quartier. d'une cité. ou d'une région contribue à l'évolution sociale et culturelle d'une communauté humaine. C'est à cette condition que la peinture devrait accéder au «forum» d'un mur public. (Elliot. 1990. p. 21).

The chapters dealing with the research of a theme. with various approaches to the treatment of a theme. with the working team and the role of the team leader. set forth the equilibrium reached by the author between technique and ethic.

The group creation of the students of Trois-Pistoles is more an installation than a mural painting. Nevertheless. I am convinced that I have been able to develop and realize this project because of the reflection Elliot inspired me.

It was following the reading of the article entitled *The threefold Curriculum and the Arts* by Arthur Efland (1996) that I decided to give my project a social direction. In his article. Efland asks : "Can art educators take the lead in shaping a vision of education that will serve the whole human person as an economic. social. cultural and spiritual being ?" (p. 56) In my opinion. the answer is "yes", that is. art educators are capable of playing an

active role in the students' personal and social development. Efland demonstrates the importance art education can have in the social and intellectual development of individuals. Currently, because of economic preoccupations on the part of parents and the government, education is mostly guided by economic factors. Art educators must stress that art education should have a place in the education system primarily because art education allows students to develop many learning strategies and to acquire a better grasp of the social, political and economic dimensions of their lives. Efland (1996) states that :

> We can enable students to become mindful of their lived experience by learning to think about what they see in works of art and in the mass media, by enabling them to ask whether the images are true representations of the social world, and, if not, why not? (p. 54)

Additionally, my research led me to Harold Pearse and his model of cognitive style in art education. The world view represented by his " critical-theory-paradigm" focussed on forms of critical thinking which encompassed both reflection and action. The fundamental interest of the critical-theoretical orientation is the emancipation and improvement of the human condition :

> The root activity in the critical orientation is reflection, or the relating of man to his self and his social world. Its fundamental interest is emancipation and improvements of the human condition by rendering transparent tacit and

hidden assumptions and by initiating a process of transformation designed to liberate man. (Pearse, 1992, p. 245).

This notion of empowerment was a main preoccupation all along my research. Reading more about Pearse, I developed a growing interest in what appeared to be the new paradigm : postmodernism.

The book entitled. *Art Education : Issues in Postmodernist Pedagogy* by Roger Clark (1996), introduced me to postmodernist pedagogy. Clark reviews in depth the concepts of reconstruction, gives a historical review and curricular approaches to multiculturalism and discusses the nature of reconstructionist pedagogy. He reviews the debates and the questions related to postmodernist pedagogy and offers a list of references on the subject which allowed me to expand my knowledge on the theories of postmodernism pedagogy.

One of the readings that had a major impact on the development of my project, but even more so on my conception of art education, was *Multicultural Education : What Does it Mean to Infuse it into a Discipline* by Grant and Sleeter (1993). This document discusses five approaches to multicultural education : a) teaching the culturally different. b) the human relation approach, c) single group studies, d) multicultural education and e) education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist. Grant and Sleeter claim that the social reconstruction approach prepares students to challenge social and structural inequality and promote the goal of social and cultural diversity. I was eager to

find my own way to apply the multicultural and social reconstructionist approach to the field of art education.

This desire led me to read authors such as Patricia L. Stuhr and Laurie E. Hicks. In both articles. *Curriculum Guidelines for the Multicultural Art Classroom* (1992). and *Multicultural Art Education and Social Reconstruction* (1994), the authors directly address the problems linked to the integration of the process of social reconstruction in art education. Stuhr and Hicks go beyond the analysis and study of the different avenues leading to multiculturalism in art education. They propose teaching strategies and methods. curriculum designs and objectives to accomplish social reconstruction through the means of art education.

Among the authors who most influenced my work is John Greyson (1990) with his article *Strategic Compromises. AIDS and Alternative Video Practices*. Although dealing with the themes of AIDS and video productions. Greyson's article raises fascinating questions on public art production. He discusses issues related to artistic decisions and compromises which artists are compelled to deal with when working for certain organizations or communities. Greyson's article also examines the artist's responsibility towards the accessibility of the transmitted message. towards the efficiency of this message in relation to its objectives and the target population. All these preoccupations. in my opinion. are relevant to all forms of public art. Greyson's article was a great tool to initiate discussions among the students on the social responsibilities of artists.

Constraints imposed by working for a community with which these artists collaborate were also debated.

Theoretical Framework

Methodology

The goal of this project was the integration in art education of multicultural education pedagogical strategies associated with the process of social reconstruction. To achieve this, I chose an action-based research approach, where the specifics of the project were being defined in an interactive way with the student participants.

I did not expose the participants to any multicultural education principles or theory. I also did not share with them the theoretical definitions of the process of social reconstruction prior to engaging in the collaborative creation. In order to prompt the students to work on their collaborative creation, I facilitated a reflection on the social and economic status of the participants' own community and on the community in which they were now working in. I assisted them in comparing the two communities, taking into consideration social beliefs, behaviors and values. Because of this reflection and cross-cultural analysis, the students progressively gained some insight of the process of social reconstruction. While leading the project, I played the critical role of observer and I documented all the details of the execution of the project, to create data that I could analyse afterwards.

Procedures

My collaborative creation project was developed in the context of the visual arts workshops at École de langue française de Trois-Pistoles. Eight activities were designed as steps leading to the realization of the collaborative creation itself : pilot group creation. list of contacts. investigation and interview, sharing information. visualisation of the chosen themes. gathering material, collaborative creation and vernissage.

Seventeen students enrolled in this workshop and took part in the project. They were students from Mexican and Canadian universities. Their stay in Trois-Pistoles as students in the French immersion program lasted five weeks. During these five weeks, two hours a day were dedicated to the collective creation. Although these students actually formed two groups. (nine were in the five week spring session and eight were in the five week summer session). I will not distinguish between the two groups until I discuss the group creations. In fact. the methodology and the steps leading to the creations themselves were the same for the spring and summer groups.

Method of Analysis

The data from this research were obtained during each of the eight steps mentioned in the Procedures section. The data were collected by written notes accompanied by photos. A questionnaire that I constructed was completed by the students who participated in the project and was the last component of the documentation.

The first phase of the analysis of the data is to establish a report of the activities that were part of the project. The materials utilised, the final output of the students, and the details of their exchanges and discussions with the community members were documented. The analysis of these data allows for the identification of the teaching methods and work assignments used in the project and the way in which they permit the integration of reconstructionist principles in art education.

The second phase of the analysis examines the success of the assimilation by students of two reconstructionist principles : historical perspective and cultural relativity. This success should be demonstrated by the collective work itself which should reflect their understanding of the community and their awareness of its complexity and uniqueness. These elements were to be found in the collective work as long as the participants succeeded in the previous steps of the project in deconstructing the sociocultural realities of the community they were immersed in and reshaping it into a visual form.

The third phase of the analysis reviews the answers of the students to the questionnaire. The analysis of these answers determines how the students subjectively experienced their involvement in the process of social reconstruction via their participation in the collective artistic creation.

Description

This section of the paper is a report of the activities that were part of this project.

Students' Profile

Seventeen students participated in the collaborative creation project. The average age of the students was twenty-two. The participants in the project over the spring and summer sessions can be divided into three subgroups for identification purposes. Twelve came from the Province of Ontario : five of them from Toronto and the others from London. Cornwall. Hamilton and the Toronto suburbs. The majority of these Ontarians had completed at least one year of university. The others had just graduated from high school and were earning university credits prior to their official admission to university.

Three students. from other provinces of Canada formed the second subgroup. One came from Alberta. one from Nova Scotia and the third. from British Colombia. None of these three students had studied art in university before. but all of them were registered in university programs.

Finally. two students from Mexico city were classified in the foreign country subgroup. Both were university level students.

Among the seventeen students who registered in the visual arts workshops. only three of them had studied visual arts at the university level. The majority of them were studying in literature and language faculties. The majority came from an urban environment. and from upper-class milieux. Two main reasons brought the students to pick Trois-Pistoles as a location for French immersion. The first one was that the Trois-Pistoles school was the only one to include in the program the living accomodations with host families. The other influencing factor was the positive comments of former students on the quality of the program. As for the choice of the visual arts workshop. it was motivated by their common interest for the field of art and the history of the Maison ancrée where the visual arts workshops took place.

Choice of the Site

The Maison ancrée is a century old house which had been abandoned for a number of years (Fig. A-1. A-2). It was destined for demolition until some local artists protested and successfully prevented its destruction.

The Maison ancrée was afterwards bought and moved by the Musée d'interprétation de l'histoire basque de Trois-Pistoles. I negotiated with the people in charge of the museum the possibility for École de langue française to realize a collaborative creation in the Maison ancrée. This historical house situated on the banks of the St-Lawrence River enthralled the students. They saw in that house the opportunity to create a work of art in

an enchanting environment. Compared to the dark and gloomy classes of most high schools built in the sixties, the students found this environment very stimulating.

Pilot Group Creation

The first step of this project was to make the students understand that the creative work in which they would participate had to be the visual representation of their immersion experience. Their artistic creation would have to be a direct extension of their learning in a foreign environment. It was important for the students to understand that the group creation would allow them to transform their perception of the hosting community through creating imagery, as well as the perception the community had of itself. To create such images, it was necessary that the students meet and mix in the hosting population to understand its socioeconomic, cultural and historic reality.

To bring about a group discussion on the artist's responsibility when involved in public art production, I designed a pilot creation activity. The group of students was divided into three subgroups. Each of these subgroups had to create a mural model intended for the enjoyment and the benefit of the local community. They were to imagine that their mural would be painted on the arena wall in the center of Trois-Pistoles. Without any other information, the students had twenty minutes to create their mural model with three scissors, one cardboard, magazines on various subjects found in recycling bins and a tube of glue per group. It was clear to the students that they would not produce the mural itself and that the assignment was simply a preparatory step for the

group creation project. Once the mural models were done, each group had to present its work to the rest of the class. The class had to identify the theme of the work and comment on it.

List of Contacts

The second step consisted in setting up a list of individuals who could help the students with their project. Before sending the students out in the community, I asked them to identify the members of the community who would be more likely to give them information on the socioeconomic realities of Trois-Pistoles. To do so, I had the students look over lists of all the municipal and cultural organizations, corporations and business associations which exist in Trois-Pistoles. On these lists were found the names of the people in charge of the major organizations in Trois-Pistoles The encounters and the meetings that the students had with different members of the hosting community on an ongoing basis completed the list of resource persons for the project. The salespersons, the butcher, the priest, the garage owner, each member of the community contributed with their story telling, comments and conversation in general, to the students' representation and understanding of that community. Because of the time frame and in order to start working on the creation, the students had to do most of their interviews in French within the first week of the session.

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Investigation and Interviews

The group was subdivided into small teams of interviewers to allow the students whose French was more basic to benefit from the help of others to manage their interviews. As École de langue française has been established in Trois-Pistoles for more than sixty-five years. the population is generally quite receptive to the demands of interviews by the students.

Sharing Information

A list of recurring themes was elaborated from the various information. storytelling and other data collected by the students during their interviews. This list allowed the students to select the themes on which they would work and that would best represent the community of Trois-Pistoles. The major themes that were selected were : the exodus of the youth. the ageing of the population. the history of the region and the environment. A short film *Crac* (Frederic Bach) was then presented to show how an object. the rocking chair. could explore or represent a variety of themes in a single production.

Visualization of the Chosen Themes

Firstly. the students and I went to observe and analyse the space (the Maison ancrée) in which the group creation was to be realized. The time spent in the Maison ancrée gave the students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the house and its ambiance.

The second exercise consisted in having the students describe and explain previously seen art works and exhibitions that had touched them mostly because of the themes treated. Students also shared their appreciation for the use of certain materials in relation to the art works they enjoyed most.

As a third exercise. the students were asked to do library research in order to find various artistic productions with the themes selected for their collaborative creation.

Finally. by sharing all the information gathered in the three previous exercises. the students had a brainstorming session to find the techniques and type of representation they would use in their collaborative creation.

Gathering Material

The students appealed to the community for the material they needed for their group creation. This material drive also allowed the students to inform the population about their project. The rest of the material was bought in garage sales and at the local stores or was found in the environment. forest and on the seashore.

Collaborative Creation

Both groups from the spring and the summer sessions opted for installations. Before starting the actual setting up of the installation, the students and I reviewed the themes selected and their representation techniques. Small groups were formed and assigned specific tasks. Sketches were made for each part of the installation. Technical and aesthetic problems were discussed and solved. The students worked for two weeks on the actual realization of the works of art.

Description of the Group Creations

Spring group creation.

It's on the second floor of the Maison ancrée in a small room facing the St-Lawrence River that the students of the spring session created their installation. A rocking chair made out of a mix of driftwood and industrial wood is standing on a carpet (Fig. A-3. A-4). This carpet is hand made. woven with newspaper strips (Fig. A-5. A-6). The carpet looked very much like a traditional *courte-pointe* (quilt) or *catalogne* (rag rug). Beside the chair is a bottle of Trois-Pistoles beer (Unibroue brewer created a beer named Trois-Pistoles on the occasion of the city's 300th anniversary). On the beer label is painted the legend of the black horse related to the building of the Trois-Pistoles church (Fig. A-7). Two meters away from the chair. is a television floating between the ceiling and the floor. No specific image appears on the screen of the television but only the blue

light of an "in-between channel" producing a scorching sound. Three golden pistoles. (French coins after which the city of Trois-Pistoles was named) made out of slices from a tree that used to stand where the cycling path now runs. float around the television (Fig. A-8). The entire room is cut in a spiral made out of a rope similar to the one used to tie boats to the wharf (Fig. A-9). The only window of the room that faces the chair has been blocked with newspapers. preventing the viewer to see the St-Lawrence River. The room is lighted by a single lamp hanging from the ceiling and projecting its bright light onto the chair (Fig. A-10. A-11).

Summer group creation.

The summer group used two rooms to realize their collaborative creation. Room number one : as the viewer enters the room. he is instantly propelled into the bowels of an enormous animal. The viewer is imprisoned by a huge three-dimensional white skeleton contrasting with the dark surrounding space. A small rowboat sits in the middle of the giant stomach. Instinctively. the viewer understands that he is inside a whale. The stained-glass window at the far end of the skeleton diffuses a mystical kind of light (Fig. B-1. B-2).

Room number two : in a corner of the room. a man sits in an old chair. Nature surrounds him. trees are growing from the floor. imprisoning him in the dark snowy night. On his left, a light shines in the darkness. diffusing shadows of the legendary black horse used to build the church (Fig. B3-, B-4). On the right side of the imprisoned

man. a small door opens up into the St-Lawrence River. Among the fish floats a package of fish and chips from a well-known food supplier (Fig. B-6). On the wall facing the river installation. a small mural painting represents students from various ethnic backgrounds dancing in front of Trois-Pistoles (Fig. B-5).

Vernissage

Once the group creation was completed. the class was asked to clarify the significance of the project in order to give a public presentation. The vernissage took place and the students accompanied the visitors along the exhibition to answer questions or interpret their work of art.

Analysis

First Phase of the Analysis : Activities

The activities are analysed following the same order in which they have been presented in the section Review of the Project.

Pilot group creation.

The mural model assignment was designed to initiate the students to the concepts of cultural relativity and historical perspective. Having the students. immediately upon their

arrival. work in small groups with team-mates unknown to them. from different countries. who speak different languages and have a hard time communicating amongst themselves. rendered the exercise challenging. Additionally. there were serious material limitations that forced the students to collaborate. The students, as described by Grant and Sleeter. had "to coalesce and work together across the lines of race. gender. class and disabilities." (Grant and Sleeter. 1989, p. 55)

Each of the three subgroups of the class chose the environment as the major theme of their mural model. As a secondary theme. religion was chosen. Trois-Pistoles is a rural town facing the St-Lawrence River and surrounded by fields and wooded areas. For students coming from a large city. the country-like setting in Trois-Pistoles appears. at first sight. to be of great importance. Not yet familiar with the town and its social aspects. the students might have chosen the environment as the theme of their mural because it was what impressed them most at first. The choice of religion as the secondary theme was consistent with the timing of their arrival in Trois-Pistoles. The students arrived in Trois-Pistoles on a Friday night and had two days to explore the town before class started. The first thing anyone sees in Trois-Pistoles is the church. It is really oversized and it is still quite frequented on Sundays.

While discussing the theme of the mural model. the students. with my assistance, became conscious of the fact that their mural represented an outsider's point of view. To illustrate. the three groups wanted to depict on their mural a sunset in a romantic setting of forests and river. This does not correspond to any real preoccupation of the local

community because Trois-Pistoles offers an impressive sunset on a daily basis. The sunset theme for a mural would have been more appealing to tourists than to the local population. As a part-time member of the community for over twenty years, I was able to inform them of various political, social, historical and economic aspects of Trois-Pistoles. The students soon realized that the environment in a romantic representation might not be a major concern to the community of Trois-Pistoles and that a better understanding of Trois-Pistoles' socioeconomic reality was needed to produce a meaningful mural for the community. I presided over the discussion focussing on the artist's responsibility and on the decisions and compromises artists must make when working for certain organizations or communities.

We also discussed the artist's responsibility as regards to the accessibility of the transmitted message as well as the effectiveness of this message in relation to its goals and to the target population. Based on the critical review of the images produced for the pilot mural. I then led the students to identify five themes (social, economic, political, historic and environmental) on which they could work base their interviews with the local population. To ensure a meaningful selection, the group had to eliminate themes based on prejudices or on a misunderstanding of the new realities to which they were confronted. The students then began analyzing their own situation and comparing it with that of the hosting community.

List of contacts.

The second assignment consisted in building a list of individuals who could help us with the project. A survey of all municipal and cultural organisms, corporations and business associations in Trois-Pistoles was really helpful in giving students a sense of cultural relativity and historical perspective. Even though Trois-Pistoles is a small rural town. the students realized how essential economic. social and political structures are to the functioning of the city and to the well-being of the community. They also realized that the infrastructures of the city were more sophisticated and developed than they had initially anticipated. By examining the role that each organization and corporation played and still plays in the community. the students developed a better understanding of the historical forces that molded the contemporary values of the community.

The elaboration of the list of helpful individuals and associations reinforced the students' belief in the need to understand the socioeconomic reality of the town before engaging in creating some form of public art. At that point in the project. I also asked the students to explain the nature of their project to the people they were to interview. I explained that this would allow them to clarify and challenge any perception of the community they currently had.

Investigation and interviews.

In small groups. students explored and investigated the new environment in which they were to live in for five weeks. In itself. the visual observation of the environment led them to the actual practice of cultural relativity. Nonetheless. it is more the interaction and interviews with the local population that allowed them to recognize and compare their own cultural assumptions and values with those of another cultural group. The students. by addressing various issues with members of the local community. had to negotiate and adjust their point of view. Politics and history always triggered passionate discussions between the students and the members of the community. The political position of the Province of Quebec in Canada is an endless source of debate and exchange. Along with their political concerns. the students exchanged ideas and viewpoints on subject matters of concern to them. By gathering historical facts on the development of the community. and by addressing those issues of development with various generations of community members. the students were able to grasp the historical forces which shaped the values of the community over time. The survey of historical forces helped the students to situate themselves in the community and to begin to reflect on possible decisions and modes of action as well as aesthetic choices regarding their group creation.

Sharing information.

Returning to the classroom after their interviews, the students classified the information they collected under the themes previously agreed upon : economic, political, historical, social and environmental. The students then evaluated and clarified the reasons for the recurrence of certain themes. The students analysed the themes, discussed their feelings and attitudes towards them. By examining their views, the students had to determine whether their recurrent themes emerged from their personal views and preconceptions or originated from the views and preoccupations of the local community, or from a mix of both. This exercise permitted the group to eliminate themes based on prejudices or misunderstandings of the new realities they were immersed in. While passionately debating under which theme to classify the information, students were experiencing historical perspectives. Historical forces were used as arguments to determine whether a theme was economic or environmental, etc. For instance, a discussion took place on the real cause of the disappearance of the lumber industry. For some, it was due to purely economic factors of increased competition while for others it was due to environmental deterioration caused by the overexploitation of natural resources. While the students were selecting themes to work on that would best represent their perception of the Trois-Pistoles community, as well as the perception the community had of itself, the students were actively practising social reconstruction. The students were making thoughtful decisions on actions that would promote the goal of social and cultural diversity. They were engaging in democratic action, and in the process giving voice to the community's departing youth and to the elderly.

Visualization of the chosen themes.

By sharing their previous aesthetic experiences and by exploring various artistic productions and art forms, the students raised, to use Clark's (1996) expression, their "intra- and inter-personal social consciousness". They developed sensibility and understanding for a variety of approaches to representation, artefacts and the meaning that they convey. By widening their views on art productions and their meaning, the students made decisions on the type of representation and techniques they would use in their collaborative creation. As art producers researching various artistic productions that dealt with themes they had themselves selected, they could situate themselves and others as part of a larger tradition. Once again, the students were experiencing historical perspective.

Once the project was launched, my role was to provide technical support to the students in the realization of their ideas. Furthermore, I reminded them of formal concepts such as unity, balance, perspective so that they would not forget the aesthetic aspect of their work. Nevertheless, I made sure never to impose my own vision of the work.

Gathering material.

Political activism is an essential part of reconstructionist curricula. The students were informed of the low budget available for materials, so I asked them to think about

alternative ways of gathering material. The reflection about alternative ways of gathering material such as recycling. fund raising and collecting material in the community was initiated to prompt students toward political activism. This reflection paid off. Environmental issues were a concern to most of the students participating in the project. While searching for ways of gathering material, students saw recycling as a political statement which could be transmitted by the means of the material used in their collaborative creation. In this phase of the project. the students acted concretely by collecting used paint. recycling cardboard and wood to implement their decision to heighten public awareness to environmental issues. For example. all the wood used for the project was either found on the beach or in the scrapyard of a woodshop. The paper and the cardboard were found at the recycling center. Paint being the most expensive material needed. students collected left-over paint from the population.

Collaborative creation.

This is the part of the project where the students gave a visual form to their critical analysis of the community and their perception of that community. They worked together to transform their sketches into an artistic collective installation. The pictures in appendix A show the work as it progressed. At that phase of the project. the students were participating in a social action which could influence how students, teachers and communities look at. discuss and produce art.

Vernissage.

Just before the vernissage, the students speculated on the interpretations of their creation by outside viewers. This exercise was meant to evaluate how their sense of cultural relativity had shifted during their stay in Trois-Pistoles. The students realized how much they had come to better understand the values of the community they tried to represent in their art. The exercise also allowed them to reposition and resituate themselves and recognize the shift in their own cultural assumptions and values. Although the environment was still one of the themes represented in the final pieces, it was no longer depicted in a romantic way, and was rather used to make a political statement. Also, religion was not retained as a theme in either installation.

Second Phase of the Analysis : the Creations

The second phase of this analysis examines the success of the assimilation of reconstructionist principles by the students. This is achieved by reviewing the understanding that the students themselves had of their collaborative work, and by demonstrating that their artistic creation was reflective of an understanding of the community as well as an awareness of its complexity and uniqueness.

Spring group creation.

The themes selected by the students of the spring session were the exodus of the youth, the ageing of the population, the history of the region and the natural environment. To a large extent, those four themes represent the social and economic shift experienced by the Trois-Pistoles community.

By using a mix of driftwood and industial wood to make the rocking chair and by using woven newspaper strips to make the carpet, the students told me that they were referring to the extinction of the wood industry. Because they learned that it was the overexploitation of the natural resources of Trois-Pistoles that led to the disappearance of the wood industry, the students decided to use recycled paper. They also chose the carpet to represent a tradition which is slowly vanishing, by alluding to *courte-pointe* (quilt) and *catalogne* (rag rug) making. The single lamp projecting its light onto the rocking chair symbolized, in their minds, the solitude in which the ageing population is plunged. The windows covered with newspapers and the television set tuned to a blank screen were deliberately designed by the group to accentuate this feeling of isolation and the fear of becoming a ghost town. The Trois-Pistoles beer and the three *pistoles* hanging from the ceiling were chosen to reflect the community's attachment to its history and its legends. The rope spiral symbolizes the continuing changes in the social aspects of life in Trois-Pistoles. All the symbols and references found in the creation were carefully chosen and reflected upon by the students. The choice of the materials that the students used, the way they assembled and disposed them in space and the symbolic meaning they

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attributed to their installation suggested that they were able to grasp the complexity of the economic and social situation of the city. (See photos in Appendix A)

Summer group creation.

The themes chosen by the summer students were the history of the region, the environment and the new economic realities. In room number one, the summer students decided to use the whale bowel to create an effect of time distortion where the viewers travel back and forth in Trois-Pistoles history. The rowboat, which is a reproduction of a sculpture exposed on the property of the Musée d'interprétation de l'histoire basque, was meant to bring the viewer back to the time when Basque fishermen were precariously and daringly hunting whales in small and flimsy boats. Being in the bowels of a whale, only a few hundred meters from the St Lawrence River, makes the viewer realize, in the opinion of the students, how meaningful and present in everyday life whales still are for the economy of the region.

In room number two, the summer students wanted to demonstrate how the two main natural resources of the region, the forest and the river, had been transformed by urbanization and modernization. For hundreds of years, fishing and access to fish and seafood was the rule in Trois-Pistoles. Today, only one family still sells its catch to the local population. The other fishermen sell their products to big companies. By juxtaposing fish and a fish and chips package, the intention of the students was to

illustrate the significant impact that the modern fishing industry has on the community of Trois-Pistoles.

The installation of the man trapped in the trees was meant as a memorial to lumberjacks. Trois-Pistoles was once a land where man had to battle daily and fiercely to secure from the forest territory that would become habitable. The forest later became a tool for developing the local economy. Now that the lumber industry has vanished, the economy of Trois-Pistoles is based on services. École de langue française is one of the services that generates considerable income for the city, and the representation of the students in the mural symbolizes the importance of the school for the local community. (See photos in Appendix B)

Clearly, the immersion of the students in a francophone community and each step of the process of the collaborative creation encouraged them to apprehend some historical forces which shaped the contemporary values of the Trois-Pistoles community and to represent these in their collaborative work.

Third Phase of Analysis : Review of Answers to the Questionnaire

After the completion of the project, students were asked to respond to thirteen questions on how they lived their experience of collective creation. The intent was to determine how and to what extent they actually got involved in the process of social reconstruction. I will only review here the answers to five of the thirteen questions, those

that are most pertinent to this thesis, specifically those related to the concept of cultural relativity. (See questionnaire in Appendix C)

To question number two, "Which of these stages has been the most helpful in your understanding of the community of Trois-Pistoles ? " the students' answers were remarkably consistent. All of them highlighted the step where they were interviewing the local members of the community and intensely interacting with the people of the town in preparation for the definition of their theme. One student (A. B.) wrote : "In talking with people – asking them questions and listening – I really got a better understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, outlooks and values of the people here."

Question number five was : "Has your experience in Trois-Pistoles given you a different perspective on your own community ?" In general, answers pointed to the fact that the students could now better appreciate the advantages of the large cities they live in, such as the greater range of leisure activities, educational and employment opportunities and the greater wealth in urban areas. Many also realized however that their own communities lacked the proximity to nature that Trois-Pistoles offered, that large cities were more "mechanized" and that their inhabitants did not have the same sense of solidarity as the people of Trois-Pistoles. One student (C. D.) wrote : "I now see that there is also a lot of beauty in a community with a strongly homogeneous culture, with a base of legends, history and religion that everyone shares. My community lacks this."

Question number six asked how the process of creation helped the students deepen their analysis of the community of Trois-Pistoles and of their own community. In summary, the students found that the process of having to transform the information they gathered into a concrete work of art forced them to actually "articulate their impressions", as one student (E. F.) put it. C. D. wrote : "...one must therefore be conscious of the link between the nuance of the medium and the element of the community that one is trying to represent."

The next question of this analysis was : " Do you believe your project will have an impact on the community's own perception of itself ?" The answers were mixed. Some thought the local community would simply view the collective creation as an outsider's work of art and that it would not alter its own perception. A few thought that the collective creation would reinforce the community's sense of self worth. Yet others thought that the collective creation would not so much lead the local community to perceive itself differently but would rather give them an idea of how outsiders, tourists even, actually perceive them.

Finally, question number twelve asked : "What can come of such projects for the community and yourself ?" There was general agreement that mutual benefits were derived from the experience : a greater understanding, a sharing, a communion even, between the local community and visiting student artists. One student (G. H.) described well the benefits she individually drew from the project : "For us, as artists, we were able to analyze, brainstorm, use our minds....and that is something that any true artist lives for. The ability to make known your thoughts and perceptions through your art."

In short. there was general agreement that the experience was fun. enriching. opened their minds to new realities. taught them how to work as a group and left them with a feeling of pride. One student (I. J.) wrote : "For myself. this project has helped me discover and appreciate a new society." I will close this section with a quotation from a student (M. N.) who. in response to question number twelve. stated that the project allowed her "....to consider that there are many ways to enjoy life. and the community can enjoy the perceptions of others."

Students did not know that they were participating in an experience aimed at social reconstruction. Their answers to the questionnaire suggest that they developed a keen sense and a meaningful understanding of the values. history and socioeconomic fabric of the community of Trois-Pistoles. It is also clear that this new reality helped them contrast it to their own previous life experiences. In a less demonstrable but nonetheless real way. the project also had an impact on how the people of Trois-Pistoles view themselves following the integration of young outsiders who left behind a work of art which represents their community.

Conclusion

As I look back at my objectives and goals for this research project. I realize how they were deeply rooted in my personal experience as part-time member of the Trois-Pistoles community and as a novice art educator. The undertaking of this project was a significant experience in my own life. I am profoundly attached to the community where the project took place and close to the students I worked with, because I am in the same age group as they are, and also a student myself.

My first objective was to engage students in a dialogue that would widen their views on social and aesthetic issues of concern to them. I am convinced that this objective was met. I witnessed and took part in so many passionate debates in the Maison ancrée about politics, modes of communication and belief systems to affirm that a dialogue was established between students and also between the students and the community, as shown in the reports of the interviews and by the answers to the questionnaire.

The second objective was for the project to have some impact, not only on the participants, but also on the community where it took place. Informal meetings with members of the community of Trois-Pistoles who were interviewed, revealed that they found their experience of great value. The people of the community appreciated the in-depth exchanges about issues of concern to them with young outsiders who were sharing their town and their lives for a time.

The main objective of this project was to demonstrate that the process of social reconstruction associated with multicultural education pedagogical strategies could be used in art education by the means of structured workshops on group creation. I believe this objective was also met. The multi-step process which I elaborated clearly succeeded in having the students broaden their sense of historical perspective and cultural relativity as reflected in the group creations. Guided by this multi-step process and based on an intense and rapid integration within the community, the students came to express on their own their desire to integrate in their installation symbolic references to current and historical social and economic forces inherent to life in Trois-Pistoles. At every step of the project, they had to evaluate the social structure of their own community as well as that of the hosting community, compare their own pattern of behaviors with those of the citizens of Trois-Pistoles and reflect upon various forms of identity structures. These cogitations and evaluations led the students to reflective decision making and then to action in the form of public art. Their group creations provide evidence that the historical forces that gave birth to some contemporary values of the community as well as those of the students were well assimilated.

The answers to the questionnaire further support the fact that the students had recognized and compared their own cultural assumptions and values with those of the community in which they were immersed.

I believe that the students who took part in the group creation workshops actively participated in the process of social reconstruction. Based on the success of these workshops. I conclude that collective artistic creations are valuable pedagogical tools that can be used advantageously in the development of multicultural art education.

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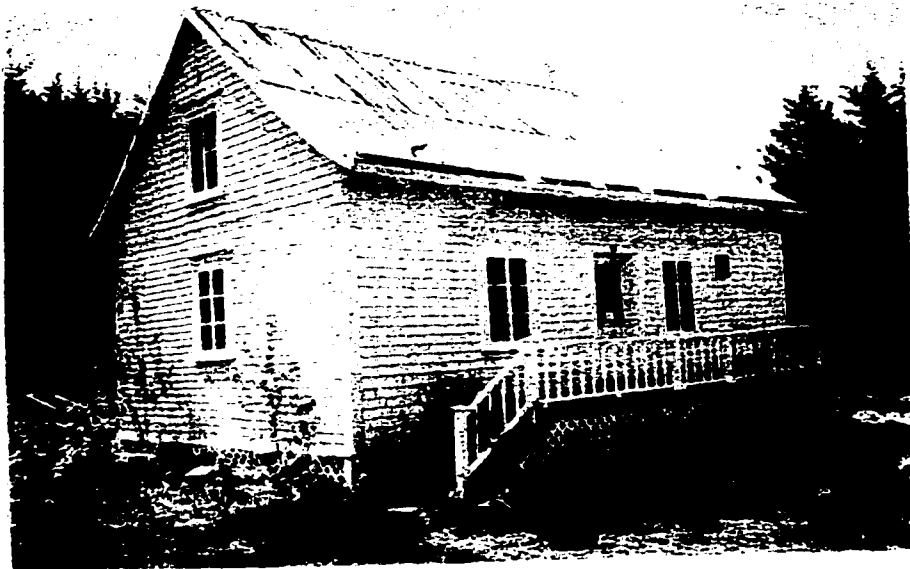
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Appendix A

(Fig. A-1)

(Fig. A-2)
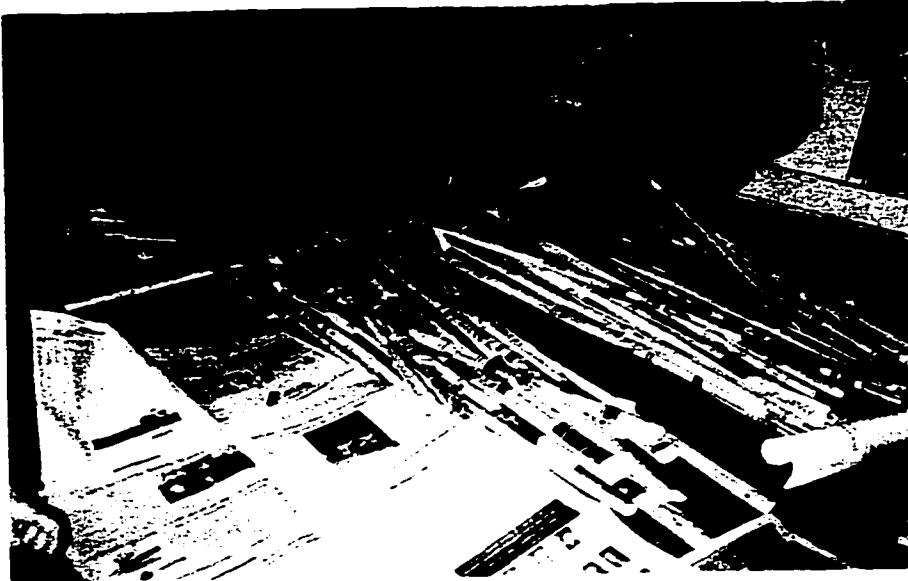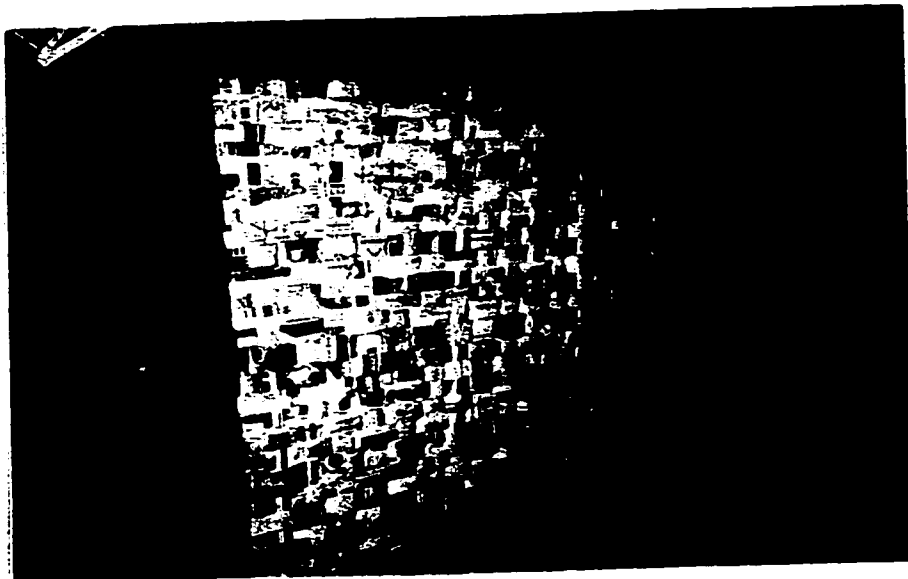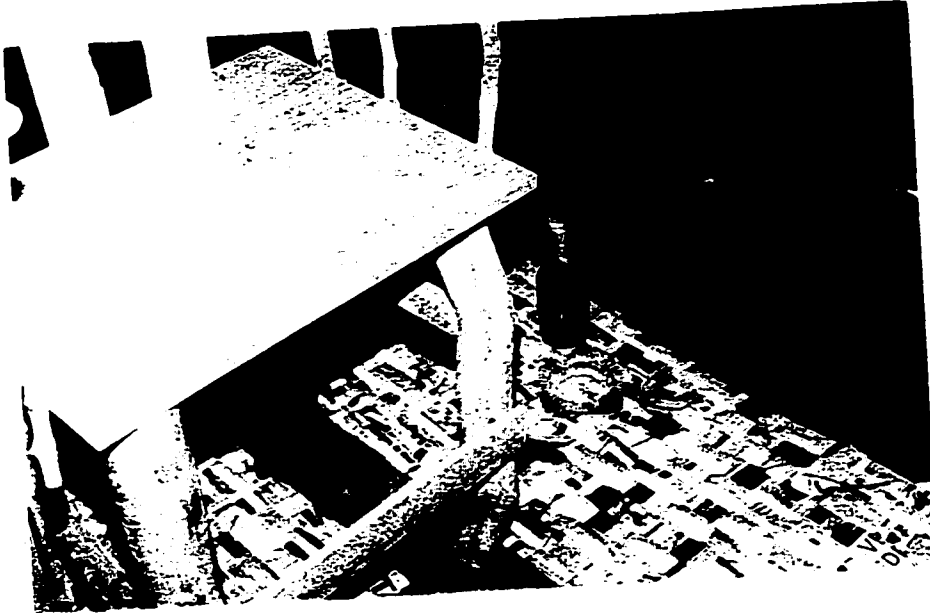
(Fig. A-3)

(Fig. A-4)

(Fig. A-5)

(Fig. A-6)

(Fig. A-7)
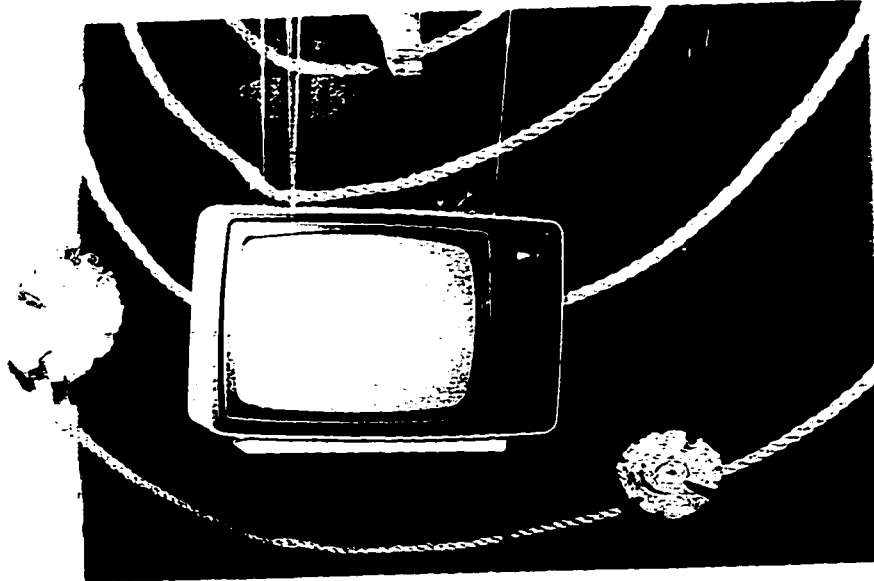
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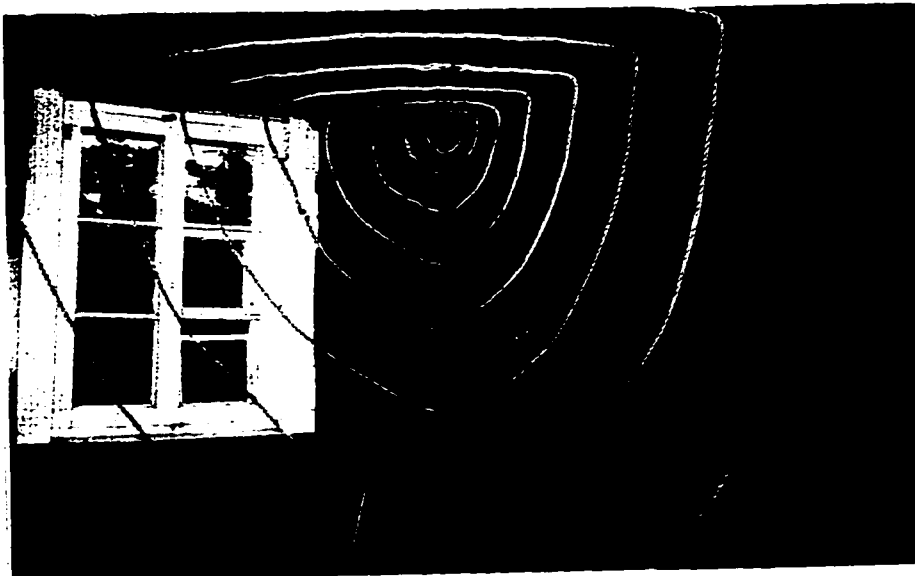
(Fig. A-9)

(Fig. A-10)

(Fig. A-11)

(Fig. B-1)

(Fig. B-2)

(Fig. B-3)

(Fig. B-4)

(Fig. B-5)

(Fig. B-6)

Appendix C

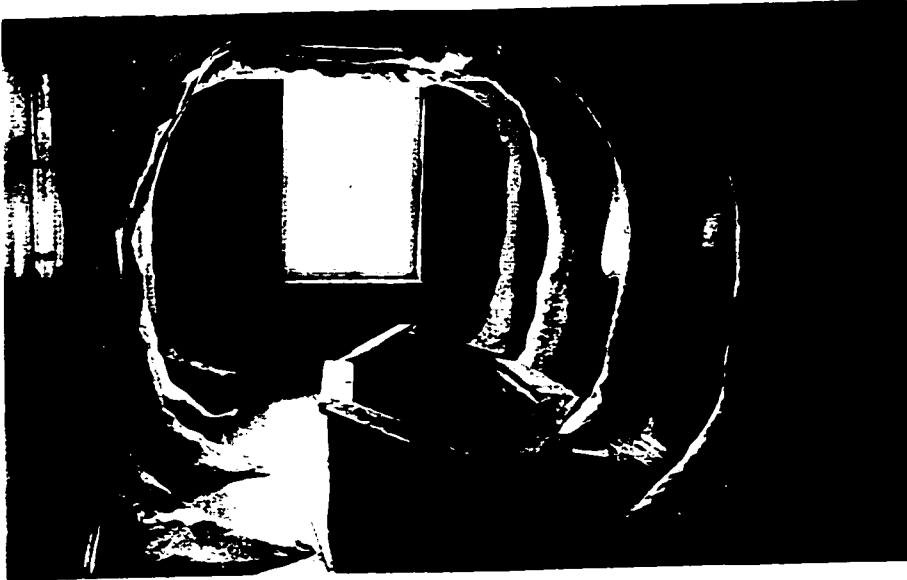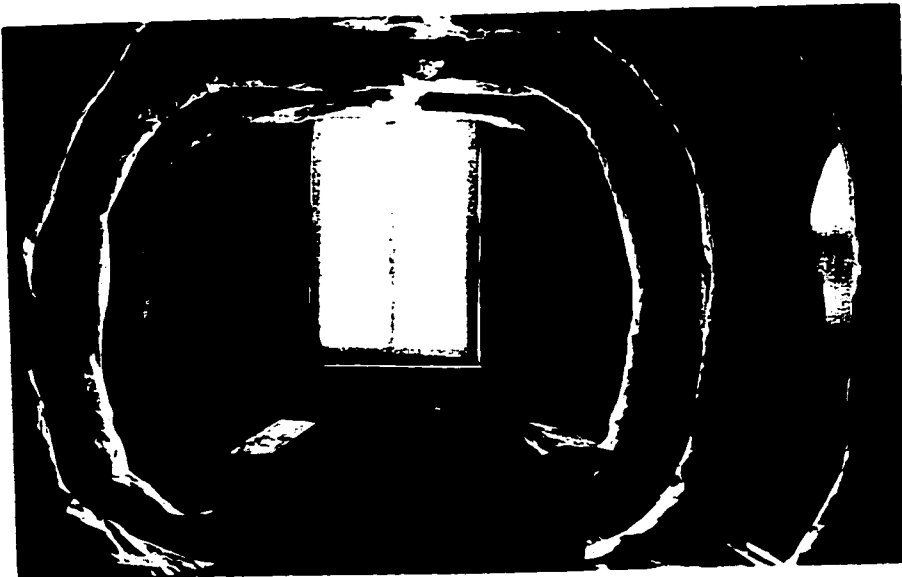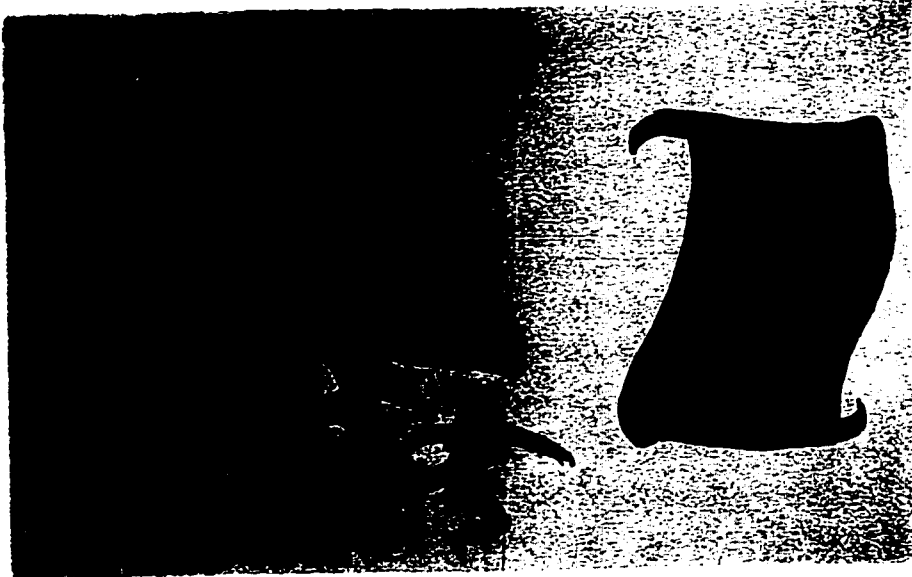**Questionnaire**

Identify and describe the different stages of this project ?

Which of these stages has been the most helpful in your understanding of the community of Trois-Pistoles ? Explain.

What are the social economic aspects of the community that this project has enabled you to discover ?

What are the similarities and differences between the community of Trois-Pistoles and your own that you have been able to identify through this project ?

Has your experience in Trois-Pistoles given you a different perspective on your own community ? If so, explain.

How did the process of creation help you deepen your analysis of the community of Trois-Pistoles as well as the analysis of your own community ?

Have you been able to observe different social statuses in the community of Trois-Pistoles ?

Has this observation led to the evaluation of your own social status ?

If so. is this status-consciousness reflected in your group creation ?

What do you think this project has brought to the community of Trois-Pistoles ?

In what way do you believe your project will have an impact on the community's own perception of itself ?

What can come out of such projects for the community and for yourself ?

What impact will your group creation have on people who will see it ?