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**Emergence of an Art Education Philosophy
Through a Personal Narrative Inquiry**

Piera Palucci

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art Education

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

Emergence of an Art Education Philosophy Through a Personal Narrative Inquiry

Piera Palucci

This thesis examines the links between who I am, the art I make, and my personal art teaching philosophy. In using personal narrative inquiry as my research method, I have constructed an account of my lived experience as a person of ethnicity. The narrative is the result of the compilation of memory fragments. The fragments were edited and sequenced in such a way that allowed each to retain its own meaning while contributing to a larger story that emerges from the whole.

This phenomenological research, grounded in a postmodern approach, uses as its data, my constructed personal narrative. In the second and third parts of the thesis, this data is grounded in theory, and then is further interpreted, ultimately becoming the foundation for my pluralistic, community-oriented, needs assessment approach to art education.

This thesis not only illustrates the value of researching personal lived experience, but it also demonstrates the importance for art educators to explore how their lived experience informs their teaching practice.

*A Marianna Spinelli -
nostra madre coraggiosa*

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INTRODUCTION

The Question

This thesis examines the links between who I am, the art I make, and my approach to teaching art. My research question is: How does my ethnic identity inform my artistic process and my personal art education philosophy?

The thesis unfolds in three parts. The first part consists of a narrative that is an account of my personal history. This narrative is constructed from a collection of memory fragments that describes my sense of ethnicity and gives insight to my artistic process within this context, and through the use of visual reproductions. The second part of the thesis acts as a bridge between the first part and third part. Switching to an academic voice, in this part, I focus on the interpretation of meaning that emerges in my personal narrative, with particular attention given to how my sense of identity informs my teaching philosophy. A synthesis between the first and third parts of the thesis is established here, grounding my narrative in a theoretical framework. In the third part of the thesis, my art education teaching philosophy is described.

Rationale for this Research

It is difficult to separate my personal reasons from my professional ones in having undertaken this research. Since my topic revolves around issues of ethnic identity, artistic process and my art education philosophy, the reasons, just due to the nature of what I am investigating, are at once both personal and professional. In making two distinct categories, I would say that my personal reason for doing this research is to create for myself a holistic understanding of how what I do is directly informed by who I am. My professional reasons for doing this research are two-fold.

Firstly, of importance to me is to ground my personal experience in theory, so as to show the value of the personal in terms of how it can address a larger, common experience. I want to bring attention to the value of my cultural hybrid perspective. As a member of a minority group in North America, I am sensitized to the nature of the experience of other minority groups, and the need for voice and representation. As well, there is a need for interaction across all groups in order to create enriching experiences. My personal experience has provided me with a first hand experience regarding the potential benefits of a multicultural or pluralist pedagogy.

Secondly, I want to demonstrate not only the value, but the necessity of understanding that who we are and what we do, affects the way we teach. In order to become better teachers or facilitators, we must try to understand what motivates us and what shapes our experiences. The personal is of tremendous value. It feeds into the professional and shapes one's teaching style whether one is aware of it or not. Our lived experience acts as a filter to all the information we receive and interpret.

Literature Review

My strongest inspiration for this thesis has been the wealth of literature I have read on the Italian-North American experience. It was through reading material that employed a first person perspective of the Italian-North American experience that helped me establish my identity as a "cultural hybrid". The stories I have read, be they fictional or non-fictional, have contributed to validating and giving presence to my cultural position.

Among the most influential were those writers, who through expressing what appear to be the most ordinary details, have captured the very essence of the hybrid experience in their writing. Of particular resonance, were the

following works: *Italian women and other tragedies* and *Daughters for sale*, both by Gianna Patriarca (1996, 1997), *Vertigo* by Louise DeSalvo (1996), *Curaggia: Writing by women of Italian descent*, edited by Nzula Angelina Ciatu, Domenica Dileo and Gabriella Micallef (1998) and *Looking through my mother's eyes: Life stories of nine Italian immigrant women in Canada* by Giovanna Del Negro (1996). All have contributed to validating my previously private cultural experience, by giving it public cultural presence.

Periodicals that include essays on the Italian-North American experience have also contributed to my literature review. *The Canadian Journal of Italian Studies*, *Canadian Literature* and *The Journal of Canadian Studies* have all published essays dealing with issues of Italian identity within the North American context. Of particular significance to me were essays that focus on the writing of Italian-Canadian authors. They helped establish a deeper understanding of this writing genre and contributed to the formation of a theoretical groundwork for it. Essays such as "The place of Italian-Canadian writing" by E. Padolsky (1986-87) in *The Journal of Canadian Studies*, "Italo-Canadian poetry & ethnic semiosis in the postmodern context" by W. Boelhower (1988) in *Canadian Literature* and "Nino Ricci's narrative and the search for the collective unconsciousness of the Italian-American" by S. Cro (1996) in *The Canadian Journal of Italian Studies*, reflect not only the state of the Italian immigrant condition, but also, demonstrate the growing need for writers of this particular ethnic group to give voice to their experiences.

Perhaps on the polar opposite end of these scholarly journals was a magazine entitled *The Eytalian*, (now defunct). While a far cry from the world of academia, it proved to be a valuable resource into current Italian-Canadian trends and culture, providing a sense of community to second generation Italian-Canadians. Depending on the contributors, the subject matter of any

article was treated with varying degrees of parody, respect and critical thought.

I also reviewed material on the Italian-North American immigration experience. Numerous texts describe the conditions that past generations of immigrants faced, both those that prompted them to leave Italy and those that existed upon their arrival in North America. *La storia: Five centuries of the Italian-American experience* by J. Mangione and B. Morreale (1992) and *Blood of my blood: The dilemma of the Italian-Americans* by R. Gambino (1974) were particularly useful in establishing a sense of the world of the immigrant; how they perceived North American society and vice versa. Generally, Italian immigrants came to North America from Southern Italy, had very little education and were from peasant stock. Upon arriving in North America, they felt maladjusted to urban life, had a basic distrust of the education system and tended to stay in their own community. Due to their lack of education and impoverished rural roots, Italians were considered to be among the least desirable of immigrants in North America. This material provided me with the history and a sense of the commonalities that exist in the Italian immigration experience.

Still within the realm of Italian identity, I reviewed material of a more political and postcolonial nature. Books such as *In italics: In defense of ethnicity* by A. D'Alfonso (1996), which focusses on, among other issues, the author's own experience of self-conceptualizing and self-positioning as a person of Italian descent living in Montreal, Quebec. In some of the many articles that comprise his book, D'Alfonso, (who is the founder of Guernica Press), argues for a sense of identity that is not geographically determined, but instead that comes from a sense of simply belonging to a given community. This book deals with ethnicity as identity, and its social and sometimes political

implications.

Parts of both of the following books: *Revisioning Italy: National identity and global culture* edited by B. Allen and M. Russo (1997), and *Bound by distance: Rethinking nationalism through the Italian diaspora* by P. Verdicchio (1997), have provided insight into contemporary issues facing Italy in matters of national identity, the Italian Northern/Southern question, immigration and emigration issues, and the Italian immigrant identity. This material provided further insight into the causes of Italian emigration, and into what is referred to as the Italian diaspora. As well, it addressed the sense of communal identity among emigrants/immigrants that is a result of exodus. These two books, in conjunction with other material reviewed on postcolonial theory, have been useful in establishing how, and if, postcolonial theory accommodates the Italian immigration experience. I will briefly discuss what I concluded to be the case on the next page, following my general review of postcolonial theory.

Bound by distance: Rethinking nationalism through the Italian diaspora (Verdicchio, 1997) introduced me to Antonio Gramsci's and Pier Paolo Pasolini's theories on culture, power and pedagogy. This book, along with another text entitled, *Wild garden: Art, education and the culture of resistance* by Dian Marino (1997), in which the author directly connects issues of culture, power and pedagogy to the world of art and education, brought to the forefront Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Gramsci's hegemony can be described as a process whereby a dominant class creates a state of consensus regarding the social reality among all classes of a given society. This so-called consensus, which affects all members of a society is essentially disempowering for all those other than the dominant class. The effects these conditions have on culture and education are powerful. Both Gramsci and Pasolini strove towards empowerment through the recognition of difference in the face of cultural

hegemony. These notions have proven to be significant for the foundational aspects of my own pedagogic approach.

In discussing the postcolonial literature I have reviewed, I must begin by mentioning that the *Crossings* exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada and its accompanying catalogue (Nemiroff, 1998), proved to be influential resources. This exhibition prompted me to revise and expand my scope of the discourse surrounding identity, leading me beyond my own cultural history and experience, and causing me to explore the larger theme of global cultural transitions in all its forms. The exhibition and the catalogue embody aspects of contemporary thought on immigration, dislocation and diaspora. The catalogue essays point out the commonalities that exist in human cultural experience, and underline the transitory nature of culture.

My experience with this exhibition led me to a more general investigation of postcolonial theory. A collection of essays entitled, *Contemporary postcolonial theory: A reader*, edited by P. Mongia (1997) familiarized me with a cross-section of different postcolonial perspectives. Other books I reviewed on the subject include: *Communication and identity across cultures*, edited by D. V. Tanno and A. González (1998), *Identity: Community, culture, difference*, edited by J. Rutherford (1990), *Orientalism* by E. Said (1979) and *The location of culture* by H.K. Bhabha (1994).

This overview of postcolonialism demonstrated the variations and problematics that exist within postcolonial theory, and allowed me to identify what I use the term to mean in the context of this thesis. I concluded that postcolonialism, in a broad sense of term, and as used in this research, refers to the diasporic cultural realities experienced by a people from a particular place and in a particular time, and that this condition is usually due to the imposition of circumstances, such as poverty or politics. Postcolonialism, as used in this

thesis, also addresses the power differential that exists between different members of society, such as between immigrants and hegemonic culture. It demonstrates the importance of giving voice and representation to those groups that perhaps until now, have been silent through having subscribed to the cultural hegemony.

Since the actual structure of the first part of my thesis is as important as its content, (they are really one and the same), I believe it is important to mention those sources that have contributed to its development. My approach to my narrative was inspired by such literary works as: *Bone black: Memories of girlhood* by bell hooks (1996), *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987), and Kathy Acker's (1978) *Blood and guts in high school*. I cite these three works because they all deal with autobiography and memory. To different extents, they also all break away from traditional storytelling by manipulating the linear sense of the chronology of a story and/or by playing with the point of view from which the story is being told. These texts demonstrate to me that by carefully selecting what one wants to recount, and by telling a story in a non-chronological fashion, a very deliberate overall message can be attained. I employ these techniques in the construction of my own personal narrative.

Everything discussed thus far serves in having contributed to the construction of my personal narrative, as well as to my overall perspective and theoretical position in this thesis. The rest of this literature review will focus upon material that contributed to the development of my teaching philosophy.

My literature review for my art education teaching philosophy was based on the fundamental components that constitute my teaching philosophy. I reviewed material on multicultural/pluralist education, on postmodernism as it is related to art and art education, as well as on the political in (art) education. In order to clarify what the nature of art and art

making means to me, I also reviewed material on art and anthropology.

In researching an anthropological perspective on the nature of art and art making I referred to E. Dissanayake's (1988) book, *What is art for?*, F.G. Chalmers' (1996) *Celebrating pluralism: Art, education, and cultural diversity*, as well as to an article by F.G. Chalmers (1984) entitled, "Art education as ethnology". These sources provided the necessary insight for establishing the foundation for a pluralistic approach towards art education, based on the perspective that art making is a transcultural activity in which all humankind participates.

F.G. Chalmers' (1996) book, *Celebrating pluralism: Art, education, and cultural diversity* was also useful in its discussion of pluralist art education pedagogy. Another key text for me in the field of multicultural or pluralist education was *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*, edited by J.A. Banks and C.A. McGee Banks (1989). It was useful in its discussion of the basic concepts and elaboration of issues involved in multicultural education. R. Ghosh's (1996) *Redefining multicultural education* was another excellent source on pluralist education, and one that is situated very much in a Canadian context. This author's approach to pluralist education emphasizes the power and political issues involved in a multicultural approach, as well as issues of empowerment and positive self-conceptualization. Along the lines of empowerment through education, my most influential source was perhaps P. Freire's (1999) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, in which he addresses how "authentic education", leads to empowerment and liberation.

In grounding my teaching philosophy in the postmodern, *Art education: Issues in postmodern pedagogy* by R. Clark (1996), as well as an article entitled, "Beyond paradigms: Art education theory and practice in a postparadigmatic world" by H. Pearse (1992) have been pivotal. Both contributed to the

identification and reformulation of my vision of contemporary art education in terms of postmodernism and pluralism. Both helped clarify the educational context for the type of learning experience I strive to create.

On a political note, a book entitled, *Class warfare: The assault on Canada's schools* by M. Barlow and H.J. Robertson (1994), was informative in its discussion of the existence of political agendas within the education system. This book, along with *Cultural pedagogy: Art/education/politics* by D. Trend (1992), served as reminders of the importance of having to continually maintain a critical conscious. Both contributed to my broader personal belief that in order to foster a positive learning experience one must, above all else, be aware of, and respond to the needs of the students.

Research Method and Procedure

As previously described, the basic structure of my thesis consists of three parts. The first part is comprised of a narrative that is a construction based on the recollection of my personal experiences. The second and third parts of my thesis essentially work in conjunction with the first part, and establish the links between who I am and how I teach. These last two parts of the thesis rely greatly upon my personal narrative, as it is only through this narrative that further inquiry can be made.

Since my thesis relies on the construction of my own personal narrative, personal narrative inquiry, as framed within postmodernity, served as my research method. My data gathering consisted of a process of self-inquiry that allowed me to collect those memories with which I constructed my narrative. I had to identify exactly what it was about my experience as a cultural hybrid that I wanted to describe, and then locate those memory fragments that best captured this. This method suits the nature of my research, as it focusses on

the search for meaning in the autobiographical.

This method also allows for an emergence process to occur. My investigation is phenomenological in nature, and because of its evocative and symbiotic nature, the overall meaning of my data could not emerge until all the parts of the whole were in place. I worked with what I refer to as “memory fragments”, each of which was carefully selected based on how effectively it captured the essence of the experience I wanted to describe. The fragments were then edited together to form one narrative, which in turn had to effectively describe the overall essence of my experience. Since the meaning of the entire narrative only surfaced upon editing the fragments together, a large degree of fine tuning took place throughout this process. As a research method, personal narrative inquiry respected this natural evolution that is an intrinsic part of the research process.

A description of this research method can be found in *Researching lived experience* by M. van Manen (1997). In his book, van Manen addresses the nature and value of phenomenological research. He provides the reader with suggestions on how to undertake this type of research and gives a sense of what constitutes quality research of this genre.

A text that can be used as an example of a finished version of this kind of research is *Bone black: Memories of girlhood* by bell hooks (1996). In her book, hooks tells us about her childhood in what can be described as a stream-of-consciousness way. Her own words in the foreword of this book best capture what she is doing:

Laying out the groundwork of my early life like a crazy quilt, *Bone black* brings together fragments to make a whole. Bits and pieces connect in a random and playfully irrational way. And there is always the persistence of

repetition, for that is what the mind does - goes over and over the same things looking at them in different ways. The prevailing perspective is always that of the intuitive and critically thinking child mind Examining life retrospectively we are there and not there, watching and watched. Evoking the mood and sensibility of moments, this is an autobiography of perceptions and ideas. The events described are always less significant than the impressions they leave on the mind and heart. (p. xiv)

hooks' work serves as an excellent model for personal narrative inquiry research. Not only do I relate to hooks in terms of her identity as a female who is a member of a minority group, but also because her sense of identity plays a crucial role in her writing. She deliberately speaks to us from her experience as a black feminist, grounding her lived experience in theory. Furthermore, hooks has successfully taken the subjective and made it a part of the world of critical theory. She has referred to this way of working as "theorizing through autobiography" (hooks, 1994, p. 209). This is precisely what I hope to accomplish in this thesis.

My data gathering procedure consisted of the searching for, the identification of, and the recording of any relevant personal experiences, (memory fragments), in terms of my ethnic identity and art making process. I tape recorded all relevant material, which in turn I transcribed, edited and refined. By bringing together my memory fragments, my goal was to provide an evocative description of what it's been like to have had a certain life experience.

Nature and Treatment of the Data

The nature of my data is highly subjective and open to interpretation. In order to treat the data, I had to further interpret it. I say further, because although the data appeared to be in a raw state, it had actually already undergone a process of interpretation; that of simply being remembered and retold for the purposes of this research. What follows is a description of how I continued to treat the data, followed by a brief discussion on key concepts related to the construction of my narrative.

My goal in treating the data was to edit together my memory fragments in such a way so that they could best describe the essence of my lived experience as a cultural hybrid. I focussed on the interpretation of each memory fragment so as to allow it to continue to be true to itself, while at the same time making sure it contributed in the best way possible to the overall message of my narrative.

I began by transcribing all my collected memory fragments. Throughout the transcription process, as the fragments were being transformed from spoken word to the written word, a certain amount of refining took place.

The next stage in the data treatment consisted of a selection process. I looked for memory fragments that best worked together in creating a sense of my whole experience, and not necessarily for those that were just strong descriptive fragments in and of themselves. Special attention was given both to the content of each of the memory fragments and to the role each would play in the larger narrative.

Once I had selected those fragments that were going to be used to make up my narrative, I reworked and refined the writing of each, ensuring that the essence of my lived experience was described as best as could be. I

intentionally tried to maintain the natural qualities of the original tape recorded fragments. This is important as I believe the tape recorded account to be a truer, less filtered account of my original experiences.

The selection process of the data and the sequencing of the memory fragments occurred in a simultaneous fashion. The sequencing of the chosen fragments ultimately resulted in my narrative. Just as bell hooks states in *Bone black: Memories of girlhood* with regards to recounting her own childhood memories, I too was “laying out the groundwork of my ... life like a crazy quilt” (hooks, 1996, p.xiv). I had to determine how my patches looked best before stitching together my quilt.

I identified both memory and time as being key guiding factors in the sequencing of the fragments. In order to construct a narrative that would imitate the way memory works, I experimented with the ordering of the fragments. I sequenced my memory fragments according to content rather than according to the chronological order in which the experiences had originally occurred. One memory usually triggers another for reasons that may be conscious or subconscious. We do not always remember things in the same way or for the same reason, and because of this, the meanings we attribute to our memories are mutable. I wanted to imitate this stream-of-consciousness characteristic of memory in the structure of my narrative in order to reflect the actual process of remembering.

The notion of time, or the temporal, plays a key role in the construction of my narrative. It is through the temporal that narratives acquire a sense of story or plot. When dealing with the autobiographical, most events in a person's life occur in relation to linear time; one thing happens after another and this usually constitutes the plot of a story. With the intention of having an overall description of my life experience emerge from my personal narrative,

rather than a play-by-play of my experiences, I dislodged my narrative from the linearity of time. I accomplished this through the non-chronological sequencing of my memory fragments.

In editing the fragments in this way, I believe a subjective narrative with a very specific meaning has emerged; a narrative that is based in my experience, retold in such a way that only hindsight can capture. Constructing a narrative in this fashion draws attention to not only the memory process, by reflecting it within the very structure of the narrative itself, but also captures the transitional nature of the relativity and subjectivity of the interpretation of personal experience.

The overall treatment of this data, as well as my application of my research method reflect a postmodern perspective. By bringing attention to the ever-changing nature of memories, attention is also brought to the idea of there being more than one version, or interpretation of a story. In my narrative I am attempting to capture one version of my life experience based on this time in my life, and in relation to my research question. My narrative is about my ethnicity and reflects my art making. This implicitly takes into consideration who I am and relays a sense of my life experience. This amount of contextualization, along with the fact that this research project is giving voice to what can be considered a marginal experience, is in itself postmodern. Both the research method I have chosen and the way I have chosen to treat the data reflect the nature of the content of this research project. This is why in identifying my method as personal narrative inquiry, I specify that it is understood within a postmodern context.

Now that I have described both my research method and the treatment of the data, I would like to once again summarize the basic structure of my thesis. My memory fragments serve as the data with which to construct my

personal narrative. This narrative undergoes further interpretation in the second and third parts of the thesis. It is theoretically grounded in the second part, and then interpreted once again, serving as the basis for the establishment of my personal teaching philosophy. My teaching philosophy is outlined in the third part, making clear the links between who I am, what I do, and how I do what I do. When viewing my art education teaching philosophy as an outcome of this entire exercise, one should be able to easily trace the natural course of its development vis à vis my personal narrative.

PART ONE

Emergence: Personal Narrative



Figure 1. Detail from *La Donna De Cecco*

Finger Painting

I'm sitting at a little table. It's low and big and round. I have a large sheet of white paper in front of me. It has a wet, luminous quality to it. I stick my hand into the paint that is

in front of me. It's sort of squooshy. At first I'm hesitant about getting it all over my hands, but then I decide that I like the way it feels. I smear the paint onto the paper, focussing on its wet texture. I am using a lot of paint. I like the way it feels and not just the marks it makes. I'm making a red heart. It starts off small and then gets bigger and bigger, like it's getting out of control. A massive heart. The wetness of the paint reminds me of the slick surface of the paper. There is a certain stickiness to the paint that causes it to make smacking sounds as I move it around the paper. I keep smearing it around. I see the white of the paper coming through where the paint goes on too thin. I keep using the paint this way even though it feels like I am doing something forbidden. I am afraid that the teacher may tell me to use less paint. I continue anyhow. I feel like I am holding back. I start using both my hands. I am massaging the paint into the paper. I'm going further than I ever have before. My heart is becoming bigger and bigger ...

Wedding

The waiters have come and gone with all the food. They brought us prosciutto and melon, and then, they brought soup, cannelloni, breaded cutlets, salad and focaccia. Everybody's drinking wine. People keep clinking their knives against their glasses and the bride and groom keep getting up to kiss each other. The band is playing and people are dancing wonderful dances. They know all the secret

steps. My mom knows the names of the dances and she tells me what they are. When it's a tarantella, the couples seem to need a lot of extra room. Waltzes need a lot of room too, but they don't seem as dangerous. My dad lets me put my feet on his for some of the dances so that as he does the right steps, I can follow along, and get to glide effortlessly across the room. I am floating when we dance like this. It's the only way I can move around the entire dance floor without having to run.

Art History

Role call: Johnson, Stewart; Kelly, Grant; MacDonald, Janet; Palucci, Piera. Everyone turns around. They all want a look at the person with the weird name. I feel uncomfortable as I realize how different my name sounds from the rest of the class. I stand out. Everyone finally stops turning their heads in my direction. The lecture on Renaissance Art starts. The professor is having trouble pronouncing some of the artists' names. Too many syllables. I am proud of my heritage. Look at me all you want.

Polenta

It's a sunny winter Sunday and Tele Domenica is on T.V. . My mother is standing by the stove in her flat, worn out slippers, wearing a kerchief in her dark, thick, wavy hair. She is laughing and complaining at the same time about how tired her arm is from stirring the polenta, so my dad takes over. In another pot, the tomato sauce gurgles away.

When the polenta is ready to be served, my dad holds the pot over a wooden board that covers the kitchen table. He tips the pot, so that the polenta edges out and falls onto the board. At the same time, my mom spreads the polenta out before it begins to harden. She dresses it with tomato sauce, pushing the back side of her spoon into it so that pockets form and fill up with sauce. She makes little piles of sausages on the polenta for each of us. We sit around the board in our usual places. As we eat, the polenta takes on new and different shapes. We carve away at it, playing our usual game of trying to carve out a boot shape - the shape of Italy. My dad always gets to make Sicily because of where he sits. As we eat our lunch, we try to figure out how we can improve our masterpiece.



Figure 2. Detail from *La Donna De Cecco*

Matching Dresses

My mother made us matching dresses when I was about five years old. She made one for herself, one for my sister and one for me. She made them out of a black fabric that was covered with a flower and golden lace design. The top part of my dress was very fitted, and had little gold buttons sewn

down the front. The bottom part was very full and came down to my knees. I loved wearing that dress. It made me feel grown up, mostly because of its intense colours. I got to wear it to school one day, the same day that my mom did my hair up special. She pulled all my hair up to the top of my head, tied it into a tight ponytail, and added a big bow. Smile for the camera! There I am wearing my drama-dress, with my pineapple head. I wonder what that photographer must have thought. In my kindergarten picture, I'm sitting there, with a little smile on my face, baby teeth and all, looking no doubt like the princess of all immigrant children.

Nonna's Funeral

I see the glowing halos of candles all around me. Everyone is taller than me. They are all facing forward, towards the coffin. Someone gently pushes me out of the crowd of people dressed in black. I am afraid. I understand that they want me to kiss my grandmother. I don't want to. Her stillness scares me. They persist, but so do I. In the end, I am told that I do not have to kiss her. People console me for not being able to do such an important thing. I feel very, very, very small among all these grown-ups. They are all putting out their candles. It's getting so dark that I can barely make out all the legs that surround me. I blow at my candle, but the flame does not go out. A familiar old woman, whose face is draped by black lace, licks her fingers, and as she laughs tenderly, in one gesture, she pinches the wick of my candle,

putting it out. This fascinates and scares me. I think she has supernatural powers.

Hems

My mother pays me two dollars for every dress I hem. She sews for people she knows. When the hems turn out okay, nothing is said, but when they don't, my mother pulls the stitches out and gives me back the garment so that I can redo the hem. She isn't being mean when she does this, she is just being practical. She is teaching me to take pride in my work. I usually try to get the hems done perfectly, striving for a crisp fold with neat and perfectly spaced stitching. Other times I rush through, going more with the momentum and enjoying the feeling of sewing, rather than paying close attention to details. My mother won't give one of her customer-friends anything that is less than perfect. When I begin to understand the value of a dollar, I question whether my mother charged enough for her dresses. Having such quality custom-made clothes is, after all, a luxury in North America.

Summer Vegetables

I do my rounds in the garden each morning. My dad has planted cherry tomatoes and carrots this year. I'm torn between which of these is my favourite. The carrots are like a buried treasure - you never know what you're going to dig up - but the cherry tomatoes, you get to watch turn redder

and redder each day, until finally, they're ripe for the picking. I don't really have to be careful about eating too many of the carrots or the tomatoes because I know my father has planted them especially for us kids. The cucumbers, on the other hand, I can only sneak when I see there are a lot of them. They're the best when they're small - that's when they're sweet and crispy. I know from paying attention to the tomatoes that there should be one or two ready today. I poke around the plants. I find one. I polish it off on my t-shirt and I pop it into my mouth. As I bite into it, I can taste the sweet and tangy flavour of sunshine.

Rose Tree

The rose tree, not the rose bush, is my father's glory. As much as I wonder why my parents don't plant more flowers and only really plant lots of vegetables, the ten foot tall rose tree, packed with its deep pink, raspberry scented roses, satisfies my longing for flowers. People stop and try to talk to my father about his rose tree, but his English isn't very good. They want to know how my father manages to grow these roses in this climate. I guess his trick is that he buries the tree for the winter each fall. Somehow, he manages to gently bend the rose tree's viney trunk so that he can bury it across the front yard. He covers it up with leaves and then wraps all of this up with big plastic sheets. He tries to explain this to people who stop and ask, but either they don't understand his broken English, or they simply just can't believe that it

can be done.

Picnic Blanket Toss

We've brought the usual picnic blanket - an old thing that is brownish-red in colour. It always smells like outside. It looks beautiful spread out on the grass - as if it were made only for picnics. I tip-toe over to it. I throw myself down, back first, and I lay there looking up at the sky. The trees look so big. The sun's spilling through their leaves, filling them with every possible shade of green and even yellow. When the wind blows through the leaves, bits of blue sky shine through. Suddenly, I am being cocooned by the blanket. My brother and my father have come over and have grabbed the ends of the blanket, lifting me off the ground. I am enveloped by the blanket. The blanket opens up like a blossoming flower, and I feel like I am flying. They are tossing me up into the air. My mother and my sister have also grabbed onto ends of the blanket. I am being propelled towards the sky, and then I'm landing back in the blanket, as if it were a trampoline. Tired out, they put the blanket down, with me bunched up in it. I unravel myself. Everyone throws themselves down onto the ground. The grass smells really green.

The Ocean

My mom and I walk along the shoreline. My grandfather sits on a small stone wall further up along the beach. He sits

with his back very straight. His jacket is draped on his shoulders, and he's wearing a hat. He is looking out across the ocean and seems sad. My mom keeps warning me about being too close to the water because she is afraid that I'll get my blue suede shoes wet, but I know she trusts that I'm smart enough not to. I'm picking through rocks and shells on the beach, collecting some of them. Every now and then, she hands me something she's found. My mom points across the ocean and says, "This is the Adriatic Sea. Way over there, across the water, is a place called Yugoslavia. That's where your friend Mikey comes from." I'm delighted by this. Somehow, my friend Mikey, from way back home, has something to do with this place. She tells me that his family comes from a place across the water that I can't see from here, but that's really there. I like this because it means that Mikey and I were meant to be friends. We both come from somewhere else. This must be the magical place from where all things come .

Breakfast, Tea and "S" Biscuits

It's still dark outside when I get up. I go into the kitchen. My mother is rushing around getting ready for work. I sit down at the kitchen table, feeling a bit of a chill. There's a pot of tea ready and, as usual, my mother tells me to have some of it with milk in it. She tells me what there is for breakfast: toast, cereal or "S" biscuits. "S" biscuits are in the shape of the letter "S", and are the type of cookie that you want to dip

into something before eating. When I bite into one after having dipped it into my cup, milky tea fills my mouth as if I had used a spoon. In the dim morning light, I cherish the taste of my lukewarm milky tea mixing with the sugary sweetness of the biscuits.

La Donna De Cecco

I am working on a wall-hanging for my studio class. The De Cecco woman, a well-known Italian food label icon is the central figure of my piece. I have sewn images of flowers and tomatoes, that I have transferred onto colourful pieces of fabric, all around her. I wonder what my mother makes of this. We don't talk about the piece, other than to point out the labour that's gone into it. She can't believe the lengths I've gone to. She's curious about the image transferring procedure. I suspect she thinks that I've wasted my time on the imagery though - that it would have been much nicer if I had skipped the tomatoes and just stuck to the flowers. I feel self-conscious as I meticulously stitch away, and she watches. She's impressed with the quality of the sewing. I've even put a backing on the wall-hanging in order to strengthen and stiffen it, so that it is able to support all the things I've sewn onto it. She wants to know if I need help with the end seams. I tell her to go ahead and do one. As we are sewing together, I think about how she used to work in a garment factory, and about how she taught me to sew and embroider when I was a kid. Look what I've gone and done

with those skills.

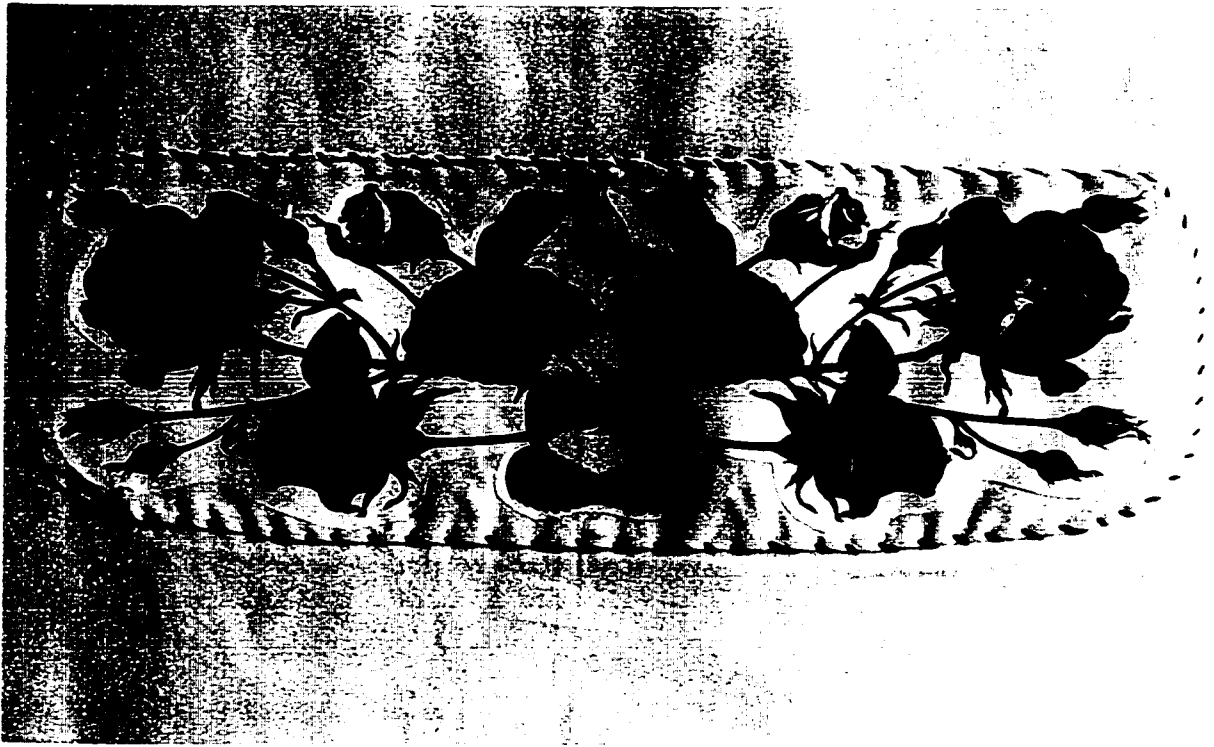


Figure 3. Detail from *La Donna De Cecco*

Smell of Soup

My mother makes really good soup. It's nothing fancy - just vegetable soup. Its scent fills the air just outside the back door. There's an old fan built into the brick wall by the back door that sucks the steam right out of the kitchen. On cool September days, I go through the back door on my way in from school, and I notice the smell. It makes me happy and sad all at the same time. The smell of the soup, hitting the crisp autumn air, fills my stomach with warm comfort.

Earrings Part I

My next door neighbour's mother has passed a sewing needle through a flame several times and rubbed it with a cotton ball. She threads the needle and instructs me to sit very still. I don't understand what she's going to do. I feel a popping sensation in my earlobe, followed by what feels like wind brushing against my ear. I realize that she's pushed the threaded needle through my earlobe and dragged the thread through with it. It doesn't hurt very much. I'm not worried about the pain, I'm just wondering what she's doing with the thread. My earlobes begin to throb. When she's finished the piercing, my mother thanks her profusely and we go home. The pulsating changes and becomes sharper. I wonder if my earlobes are bleeding. My mother and I look in the mirror. I see what my neighbour has done. The thread has been knotted and left hanging in little loops in my earlobes. My mother tells me that it's really important not to touch them too much. She takes a close look at my ears. I keep looking in the mirror and think that I look weird with these thread loops in my ears. I wonder how long they'll have to stay in my earlobes for, and whether or not I can go swimming with them there ...

Z-28

My brother has a cool car. He's got a glistening, royal blue, Z-28 Camaro with a Corvette engine. He treats his car like a baby. He's always washing it and talking about how special

it is. I like the inside of the car. It has a velvety blue ceiling, and the dashboard is covered with tons of fuzzy magnet toys that have googly eyes. He collects them with his girlfriend. Sometimes when I sit in my brother's car, he'll play music really loud. We listen to the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd. If I'm lucky, I get to go for a ride, and we zoom along the road with the windows rolled down listening to music. When I'm especially lucky, we go for ice cream too.

Purina Cat Chow

The water is fresh - crystal blue with some shades of green in it. I can smell the chlorine and the scent of coconut suntan lotion. My mouth tastes like Grape Bazooka. After spending at least ten minutes by the edge of the pool, dabbing the cold water onto my wrists and the back of my neck, I jump in. I feel the cold drip of the water running off of my hair and onto my shoulders. My orange bathing suit is blurry and oddly shaped as I look down at myself through the water. I bob my head under the water, open my eyes and feel the slight sting of chlorine. As I resurface, in the distance I hear, "Purina Cat Chow! Look what happened to Chow, Chow, Chow!!!" I panic. I know this is for me. Someone's found a way to make fun of my name. I feel sick inside because I know that this is just the beginning of the teasing.

Earrings Part II

They are a little crusty around the edges, but the holes have healed. One of the thread loops has come undone, and after gently tugging at it, my mother decides that it's time to remove the loops from my earlobes. After getting the thread out, she leaves the bathroom and comes back with earrings for me. The earrings she shows me are made of gold, and look like flowers. Each one has a big stone in it, and is surrounded by fancy gold work and smaller stones. They are beautiful, but they are also very big, and I don't know if I want to wear them. They aren't easy to get through the new holes in my earlobes, but my mother finally manages to get them on me. The earrings are heavy and I can feel their weight when I turn my head fast. I look in the mirror and I think that they look funny on me, like they're too grown-up, or something. I'm not convinced this is going to work. Later, I realize that other girls are dying to get their ears pierced, but their parents won't let them. It's funny because most Italian girls have their ears pierced when they are still babies, but I got mine done really late. I can't figure out whether this means I'm lucky, or not.

Becoming a Photographer

In the eleventh grade, when it came time to pick what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, after much deliberation, I stated that I wanted to be a photographer. I liked the idea of doing, what seemed to me, a really tangible thing. My

guidance counselor didn't, and asked me if I had considered becoming a doctor. I had to take a career test and went to the lengths of rigging my answers so that the outcome of the test would include photographer as a career choice ... and it did ... along with farmer, actress, and radio announcer. Oddly, my family was okay with my non-traditional choice. My mom was one of the people who had suggested it in the first place.

Italian School

I have to get up early on Saturday mornings, not to watch cartoons, but to go to Italian school. Everyone's talking about Scooby-Doo, but I only get to watch ten minutes of it before having to go to Italian school. I spend most of my time in Italian class being confused. What kind of Italian is this? It doesn't sound like the Italian I speak. I know that I'm Italian, and I'm told that I speak Italian, but it's only later that I figure out that what I speak at home is a dialect. In class, we all live in fear of "Dettato", (dictation), or even worse, of being called upon to answer questions. Sometimes I think I can see how frustrated the teacher is with us. When I am back at regular school on Monday and people talk about cartoons, I'm only ever able to say that I saw the first ten minutes of Scooby-Doo.

Black Hair, Black Clothes

I dress in black. I want black hair - the kind of hair that's so black, it's blue. My hair is cut in a 1960's style, and I like to wear 1960's clothes, like charming, little sweaters, tapered pants, and perfect shoes to match ... even though it's 1985. I don't listen to pop music. I listen to ska, garage, punk and rock n' roll, I ride around on my little scooter, and I go out to see my friends play in their bands. With five dollars in my pocket, I manage to see a live show and buy a beer. All I really want to do is dance. All of this scares my parents. My mother yells at me and harasses me. She's even physically tried to block my way out of the house. She's torn between telling me that by dressing in black, I am wearing the colour of mourning and wasting my youth, or telling me that she thinks the way I dress is strange and maybe even looks cheap. Both my parents think that I must be up to no good. It's all very simple to me though; the prospect of hanging out and dancing and laughing is for me a place of comfort for my soul, that so much wants to free itself from the confines of my home life.

Le Sorelle Bandiere

I'm not too sure what "sorelle bandiere" means. I think my parents were away in Italy that summer. My sister and I would leave the house together to go down to Somerled to pick up some groceries. We felt free as birds, anticipating walking up and down the aisles of the grocery store, being

able to pick out whatever we felt like eating. One of our neighbours, known for her "surveillance", must have seen us going to the store. When our parents were back from their trip, and this neighbour was over having coffee, her face lit up and she laughed, almost as if to slap her knee, when she told my mother about how she kept seeing the "sorelle bandiere". "Bandiere" like flags, because we were side by side? Or "bandiere" because somehow, she thought we were attracting too much attention to ourselves? I can't even figure out if she meant it in a nice way or a mean way.

Tomatoes

The skin on my hands still feels soft and kind of rubbery. If I look really hard I can make out my nails by the firelight. They are stained an orangey colour from having had them in tomatoes all day. We made our preserves today. It's a long process that started last night with washing the tomatoes, and then continued first thing this morning, when we cut them up, ground them into a purée and funnelled them into bottles and jars. A small pit fire was started in the backyard, and as usual my parents worry that a neighbour might call the police. My father has shielded the fire with a large piece of thin metal on three of its sides, so that sparks can't escape. This also helps to contain the heat, and not to mention, helps hide the fire from the neighbours. The big metal drum, filled with bottles and jars, has been boiling for hours. It's dark now and I am tired. My brother, my sister

and I are sitting by the fire with a bag of marshmallows. This is my favourite part of "Tomato-Making Day". We get to sit around the fire toasting marshmallows, hidden, like a secret in the night. Our neighbours might wonder what we are doing with our fire and our big metal drum, but all we're thinking about is how good the marshmallows taste.



Figure 4. Detail from *La Donna* De Cecco

Scooter

I wanted a scooter. I knew it wasn't a Vespa or a Lambretta, but it didn't matter. I just wanted a scooter. I took all my savings, and after kind of, sort of, telling my parents what I was intent on doing, I got on a bus, rode across town, with my money in hand, walked into the motorcycle shop and

bought my scooter. The trip back was a cautious, but fun ride. When I was rounding the last block before pulling into the driveway at home, I noticed my father's car in my rearview mirror. I wondered how long he had been driving behind me. I pulled the scooter into the driveway and braced myself. He pulled up behind me and looked at the scooter, and then looked at me, and then without even asking me what the hell I thought I was doing, or how I had paid for the scooter he said, "Oh you got a scooter. Can I ride it around the block?" I insisted that he should wear the helmet. Now I only had my mother to contend with.

Italian Community Dance

Word on the street is that everyone is going to show up because they want this dance to be bigger and better than the Greek Community Dance. I'm at the Italian Community Centre in Halifax, where I've been working on a photo documentary project since the beginning of the semester. My visits here now include more than just taking pictures: I help prepare and serve food, I wash dishes, or clear tables, all the while, still trying to take my pictures. Sometimes I even get to go upstairs, where the old men play cards. It's Saturday night and the big dance is on. I've been asked to chaperone, which means I have to spend some time keeping my eyes on the dance floor, and the rest of my time stationed at a table by the entrance, stamping peoples' hands and giving them their pop tickets. The line between chaperoning and

photographing has become blurred. It's become a lot more difficult to objectify my subjects as I spend time talking to them. These teenagers are genuinely curious about the pictures I am taking, and are even trying to make a good impression. I begin to feel a sense of unanticipated warmth from them, and towards them.

Dowry

"Take these now. I've gone through some of this stuff and I want to give these to you and your sister."

"Ma, you can't give us these now, these were supposed to be for when we got married."

"It doesn't matter, I want you to have them now."

I look through the handmade towels one by one and I tell her how beautiful I think they are. They seem to be filled with magic. The kind of magic that grows strong with the passing of time. Even though the towels are really only being passed down from one generation to the next, I am struck by the contrast between the world in which they were made, and world in which they are now; the difference between my mom's life then, in a hilltop town in Italy, and my life now, in a North American city. It's as if these towels had come to me through a time machine.

Super Friends

Okay, everything's set up. We've all decided who we are going to be, and it's not any different from the usual picks. I am

Wonder Woman. I always try to get to be Wonder Woman - there's an instant connection between us because we both have dark hair. Once the game starts, we run from backyard to backyard setting up crazy missions filled with danger and excitement. Our spaceships, (really a swing set), are in Mauro's backyard. When you are in your spaceship, you are untouchable. We try to get from "here" to "there" without really knowing what it is we are doing. We all have special powers and run around with secret missions in our heads. Somehow it all works out okay.

The De Cecco Crit

My piece is called "La Donna De Cecco". A large image of the De Cecco pasta woman is sewn onto the centre of the wall-hanging. She looks happy, and under one arm, she is carrying a bunch of wheat. At her feet are three roses. She's wearing a kerchief in her hair, and has on big earrings. I have sewn images of Roma tomatoes and flowers all around her. The whole thing looks pretty joyful at first, but after spending more time with it, it might remind you of a mausoleum, (if you know what one looks like in the first place). Celebration, commemoration, death. I am very pleased with it ... until I bring it into Studio class. This doesn't seem to be the right place for it. Not much is being said about it, until I hear, "All I can think of is food when I look at this!". Then, after a brief silence, someone else says, "Yeah, it's almost like I can hear the music: Ta-ta-ra-ta-ra-

ta-ra ... (humming a traditional Italian song)". More of the same follows. The very thing I am trying to reclaim with this piece is being used against it. Rather than discussing stereotypes, people have resorted to stereotyping. Have I missed the mark, causing more damage than good?

Vegetable Story

I made it to the store minutes before closing time, and with just enough change in my pockets to buy what I need: a potato, a couple of carrots, and maybe a parsnip. I quickly find these things, and then take them to the cash, grabbing a tomato along the way. As the woman at the cash register is punching up my order, she calls out to her husband, who is standing at the deli counter, "Ma che razza di gente compra soltanto due carote, due patate ..." She doesn't realize that I'm Italian and have understood every word of what she has just said about me. According to her, I guess I should be buying everything in ten pound bags to feed the Italian family a woman my age should have, otherwise, why would she want to know exactly, what "kind of people" come into a store to buy such few things? I don't say anything to her. I pay, put my stuff into a bag and walk out, her words sticking inside me. I'm torn between the misguided shame I feel for not living the life of a good Italian girl, and the stinging humiliation of not fully living my own life, and barking back at her in Italian and putting her in her place.

Dancing on the Table

I'm addicted to 1960's Italian pop music. My favourite is Bobby Solo. Sometimes I go to where my father keeps his 45's and I look through them. The Bobby Solo single has his picture on the sleeve. I think he's cute - like an Italian Elvis Presley. There's a picture of me in the photo album, taken when I was small. I'm still wearing a diaper in it. I'm sitting on a table next to the record player. My arms are up in the air, at waist level. It looks as if I'm doing the twist. My mother tells me that that's what I always used to do whenever I heard music. I think I can remember doing that.

Art College

"What am I doing in Art College?" The question demands from me an answer, which is, "I don't really know what I'm doing in Art College". My plan was to study photography. Seemed like the perfect choice. Now I'm here, at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, surrounded by a bunch of people who want to be "artists". Well all I want to do is be a photographer. I just want to document. As I walk around the college and the city with my camera perpetually strapped around my neck, looking for the perfect shot, I wonder what I'm doing here.

Do you Have Italian Every Night?

Arugula, carpaccio, marscapone, gorgonzola, anything alla Bolognese and sundried tomatoes. "Do you eat Italian every

night?”, “No, I eat food made by an Italian”. Every time an Italian dish comes up, I turn into a reference book for whoever wants to know. Sometimes I have to explain that I just don’t know. I didn’t grow up on things that, even by Italian standards, are delicacies. My parents’ cooking is based on rural life. They used what they grew and what was easily available around them, and there wasn’t much around during the war. The confusion that comes across some peoples’ faces when I say, “I don’t know”, used to be enough to make me feel like I had to justify my heritage to them, now I just think that they are stereotyping. Not all Italians eat the same things.

Cemetery

Even though it's mid-day, the town is still covered with fog. Every now and then, it gets brighter, as if the sun were trying to poke through. We’ve walked through the town’s narrow streets to get to the cemetery, and to my ears, the streets are filled with the noise of decades gone by. This place is haunted to me because of all the stories my mom has told me about her hometown. We’ve come here to pay our respects to my grandfather. I locate his crypt. I stare at it for while, and then start looking at all the crypts around his. They are piled high, each with a name, dates and a photograph. I start noticing resemblances between the faces in the photographs, and through the names I start tracing lineage. It's all here, the connections and the ruptures - not only

blood, but friendship too. The invisible way that people are connected through time and space becomes visible to me for an instant. I stand there with my camera, raising it to the wall of tombs. Looking through the viewfinder, I see time; life, death, ancestry, genetics, beauty, sadness, loss and mystery all before me. I focus my lens and take a picture. My moment of realization is frozen in time.

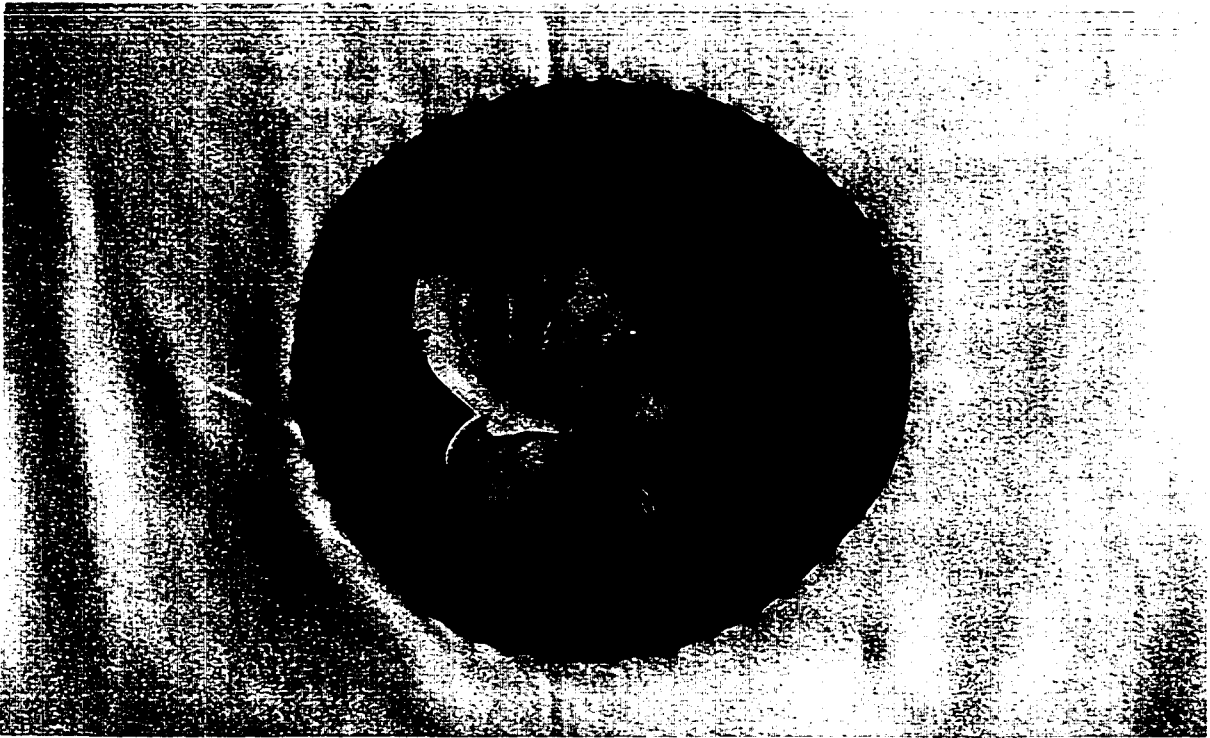


Figure 5. Detail from *La Donna De Cecco*

Schmata Factory

My teacher is talking about why documenting something that is close to you is interesting. He's asking us things like, "Is there anything in your personal life that you can photograph? Something that has an insider perspective, that

only you have access to?" He asks us about what we do outside of school, what our parents do for a living ... - brainstorming stuff. He suggests photographing work places. I tell him that my mother works as a seamstress in a factory. His ears perk up. He says in excited disbelief, "Your mother works in a factory ... a schmata factory?" I'm not too sure what the word "schmata" means, but I know that it doesn't exactly sound elegant. Once the word is clarified for me, and I say, "Yeah, that's right. She works in a factory where she makes clothes." He becomes even more excited, and I become very uncomfortable. I am proud of my mother and I feel that he has just disrespected her. He has reduced her to an anonymous stereotype. Her hard work is not anonymous though; my mother heads up the union, my mother complains about being cold in the winter because the windows are in such poor condition, and my mother tells me about how women are doing their piece work so fast that they are accidentally sewing through their own fingertips. This is all very real to me. My teacher can't believe that he's come this close to what he keeps calling the "real thing", and I can't conceive of how his life has managed to stay so far away from it.

Christmas Present

My teacher is sitting by the little Christmas tree we have in our classroom. Everybody has brought her a present. Every time she reaches into the pile, I dread that she's going to pull

out the present I brought. She keeps opening up packages containing things like bubble bath, perfume and candy. All I want to do is get up and run out of the room. Thinking I've come up with the perfect plan, I ask her if I can go to the bathroom, figuring that if I take my sweet time, she'll open the present I brought while I'm not there. So, I take my time in the bathroom, playing extra long with the sprinkler sink. When I get back to the classroom, she's finished opening the presents - all except one. She says, "I waited for you. I didn't want you to miss it." My heart sinks all the way down to my feet, and then straight through the floor. I crouch back down to my spot. She tears the package open and then looks at me with a big beautiful smile. She carefully unfolds the tablecloth my mother has given her. She really seems to like it, but it looks dopey to me.

Downtown Bus

I'm sitting on the back seat of the 104, still feeling deliciously abuzz from a night of dancing. I am woozy from beer and I smell like tobacco. I'm wearing my favourite dancing clothes and the pointiest shoes I have ever found in a secondhand clothes store. I look through the window, focussing on the difference between the reflections and what's really outside. I see a group of women exiting the metro station and heading towards the bus. I recognize them. They're women that my mother knows from when she used to work nights cleaning the Bell Canada building. They all

grab seats at the front of the bus, most of them looking down as they get on the bus, but a couple looking straight to the back of the bus and catching my eye. I don't think that they will recognize me because the way I look has changed so much. I feel that I have managed to escape their gossipy reality. Being recognized wouldn't mean that I was bringing shame upon myself, but that the shame would be on my parents, "... that the daughter of so-and-so was seen on a bus late at night by herself dressed like such-and-such, and God-only-knows what she's been doing." Of course what I've been doing doesn't really matter. Just being there is enough, and can disgrace my entire family.

Santa Cabrini

"Will you look at that camera? It's bigger than you are." I'm trying to prepare everyone for a group portrait: telephone operators, receptionists and other administrator types. This is the last picture I have to take for the day at Santa Cabrini Hospital. There's a strong sense of community here and I'm not convinced that I belong. They think it's cute that I am the photographer. As I am setting them up for the photograph, we chit-chat. It bothers me that they don't take me seriously. Rather than encourage me, I can tell a lot of the people here think it's not suitable for a young Italian woman to be running around taking pictures. In their opinion, it lacks everything that a job should offer, and worst of all, it's not even feminine type of work. If I am a part of

this community, it is only because they worry about the life that I'm leading.

Bubble-WOP

I am a "Bubble-WOP" I am told by a neighbour who lives downstairs from us. He grew up in St-Leonard, and when he finds out that I'm Italian, he is surprised.

"Where did you grow up?" he asked me.

"N.D.G.", I told him.

To which he replied, "Oh, you're one of those "Bubble-WOPs"."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you're Italian on the inside, but you can't really tell from the outside."

The Neighbourhood

There was Villia, Stephanie Judge, Mikey, Joey and Steven; the Hozijan brothers, Shaun, Billy Webber, Sheila and Howard Grant, Imma and Maria and their brother Johnny Di Iorio, and the crazy kids who had the the black and white dog named Bootsy who always barked whenever you walked by their house. There was Carol and Gary Stetina; Carol liked "Happy Days", and so did I. We were both members of the Fonzie Fan Club. There was Luciano, Tony and Johnny Ricciardi, Maria and Jimmy Melones, and Kali, who didn't really live on our street, but whose backyard was attached to our neighbour's, the Di Iorios. Then there was the big house

on the corner where Mauro Parissi and his cousin Sandra, and her kid brother lived. Dennis-the-Menace lived around that corner and down the road a bit. Across the street from us, in the house with the white door, lived Nick Ranellucci and his brother Carlo. Upstairs from us, for the longest time, lived Eva, Linda and Solange, or "Sally", as we called her. There was Brandy the cat next door - she belonged to Billy Webber's grandparents. There was Poncho the dog, who belonged to the Hozijan's, a beautiful orangey coloured dog, who didn't scare me the way Bootsy did. We ran through backyards, rode our bikes, played with yo-yo's, bought our candy at Blakley's, got our milk at Steinberg's - after the milkman stopped coming by with the glass bottles -, and some of us had our bread delivered to our doors by Mr. Bavota. We went to Kensington Pool because we were cool, - and everybody knew Benny Pool was for sucks. We listened to CKGM's summer songs and CHOM's rock songs. We played crazy eights on the front steps at night. The older kids told jokes that made us all laugh and ghost stories that freaked us out. We freaked each other out, especially over the house down the street that had bats that flew over its backyard at night. We played hopscotch, tag, T.V. tag, hide-and-go-seek and elastic, and some of the older kids could double-dutch. Memories of summer evenings are filled with voices of kids laughing, screaming and whispering. We were probably as different from one another as we were the same, but it didn't matter because we had so much fun together.

On a Bus in Rome

I am sweating on a bus in Rome. The bus is sitting in a big asphalt parking lot, which, with the sun beating down on it, feels like a great big frying pan. I pull the shade across the window, and even the slightest sliver of sunshine that continues to beam through causes me discomfort. When we finally start backing out of the lot, the driver turns on the air conditioning and turns up his radio. Like in a dream, Fred Buscaglione comes on the radio. It's "Guarda che luna ...". My mother immediately comes to mind. I think about how she had once asked me to find her a copy of this song. I'm glad that I managed too, because the song makes her smile as if she were a teenager in love. I remember listening to this song on road trips with Steve to the States, and then also on the beach at night in Cape Cod, while gazing at the stars and listening to the ocean. I think about how this song from the fifties has been so present in my life. I think about how beautiful it is that it is playing right now. My eyes are closed, my body is sweaty and tired, and the bus is moving through the busy streets of Rome, heading for the highway. I believe that I could be anywhere right now. I move the curtain aside and peak out the window. In the hot summer light, I watch as suburban Rome goes by, and because of what fills my heart right now, I feel like I am home.

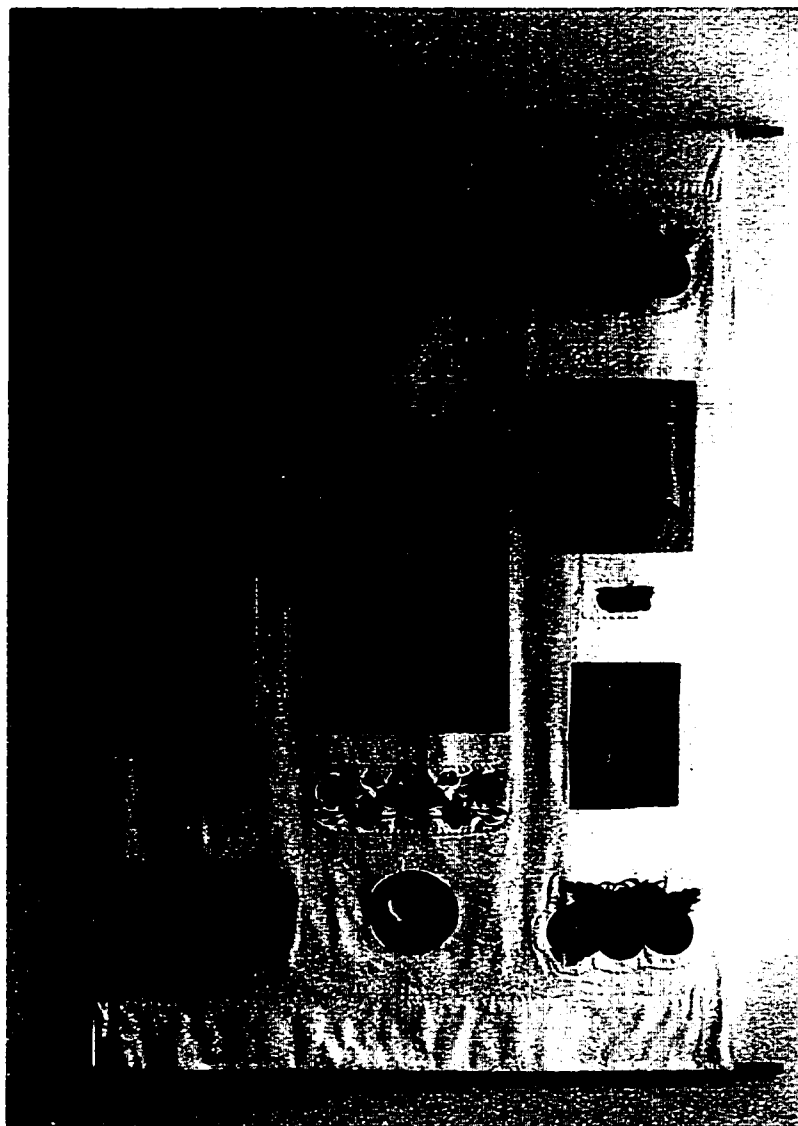


Figure 6. *La Donna De Cecco*, 1997.

Various fabrics, transfer medium and embroidery floss.

163 X 103 cm

PART TWO

Synthesis: The Bridge

My narrative is a constructed version of my lived experience. The story it tells is one of the evolution of self-awareness and self-identification of a person of ethnicity within a larger dominant culture. By having structured the fragments that comprise my narrative in a non-chronological way, I have simultaneously presented different stages of my personal evolution in terms of self-conceptualization; some of the fragments describe happy and naive childhood moments, others focus on a sense of dissonance or malaise as the realization is made that I am the “other” in society, while others still, describe a coming to terms, and integration of ethnicity versus dominant cultural hegemony.

The non-chronological structure of the narrative reflects the way memory works and allows the reader to bounce back and forth between the various stages of my self-conceptualization, while still reading the text straight through from beginning to end. Because of this structure, the reader experiences a kind of first-hand insight into my lived experience, due to both the natural voice that is employed, and to the non-chronological structure, creating room for free association in the reader’s mind.

The narrative is postmodern in that it is simply one version of a personal narrative based on a particular point of view, presented in a fragmentary, non-chronological way, pointing to the fact that more than one point of view, or truth exists. It is postcolonial, (in the broadest sense of the term, and under the larger umbrella of postmodernism), in that the narrative gives voice and representation to minority experience, thus recognizing the validity and importance of diversity, and subtly addressing the power differentials that exist between minority and majority cultural groups.

The overall message of the narrative is achieved through the sequencing of the fragments and describes a journey towards the development and acceptance of a positive self-concept as cultural hybrid. The narrative ultimately serves to demonstrate how cultural difference should be seen as advantageous and not disadvantageous (Ghosh, 1996). Issues that emerge, from specific fragments, and from the whole narrative, have to do with difference, diversity, inclusivity, multiculturalism, pluralism, community, self-empowerment, self-concept and identity.

Before embarking on how these issues manifest themselves in my teaching philosophy, I will first expand on the meaning of the term “cultural hybrid”, as this concept forms an essential part of the basic perspective of my teaching. Secondly, I will discuss my artistic process in relation to the meaning extrapolated from the narrative.

I use the designation of “cultural hybrid”, to signify that I believe that my cultural identity is comprised of two cultures: Canadian and Italian, and to suggest that it is possible for me to shift between the two cultures and to simultaneously exist in both of them. Both are an essential part of me, and together they form one whole new identity, giving birth to the hybrid condition.

To further expand on what this means, I borrow Martin Heidegger’s (1951) image of a bridge that he employs in his essay, “Building dwelling thinking”. Heidegger describes how the appearance or construction of a bridge gives birth to a new site or locale that previously did not exist. If one conceptualizes the locale as a point along a river, the presence of a bridge gives this point of crossing importance.

In terms of my own ethnic identity, as the Canadian born daughter of Italian immigrants, the bridge comes to represent a point of intersection. I situate both myself and my parents on this bridge. We are the intersection of

cultures. We are standing on the bridge and can see both sides of the river bank; the Old World and the New World, (each of us perhaps seeing one side more vividly than the other). It is this sense of cultural simultaneity that gives birth to the bridge and in essence creates a new place to exist; the bridge of cultural hybridity.

There exists a community of Italian-Canadians, one with its own creole of fading Italian dialect and anglicized traditions, that understands this place of existence. This is my community. It is neither simply Canadian nor simply Italian. Nor is it just a combination of the two, resulting in a face value reading of the term, "Italian-Canadian". In an essay entitled, "From the edges of exile to the limits of translation" Nikos Papastergiadis (1998) summarizes the complexities of this state of cultural hybridity:

To say, for instance, that my identity is Greek-Australian is not a declaration of the two constitutive parts. The most telling feature may be neither the Greek addition upon a prior Australian identity, nor even the conflict between them, but rather the energy that comes from conjunctions and juxtapositions. From this perspective, the identity of the hybrid is not found in the sum of its parts but in the power of the hyphen. It is neither the negative result of partial definition, nor the triumphal synthesis of opposites. It is an energy that tends towards identity, taking leftovers and the collision between languages [cultures] as the source for its own construction. (p. 65)

This hybridity, which is in fact the resolution of self-conceptualization reached in the narrative, sets the tone for my teaching philosophy, which I describe as pluralist, community-oriented and needs-assessment based.

When examining my artwork and process, within the context of the narrative, more specifically the *La Donna De Cecco* piece and photography projects I refer to in the narrative, I can easily recognize how what I make reflects who I am, both in content and, more generally, in approach and personal perspective. To state that all the art I have ever made has to do with the theme of ethnic identity would be inaccurate. Rather, to suggest that my identity has influenced the way I perceive the world in which I live, shaping my experience, and in so doing giving me a certain perspective which is present in my artwork is more accurate. The connection between my ethnic identity and the art I make is a natural one, since my identity and artwork are intrinsically connected. My self-expression through visual art describes who I am and my experience being that person. My experience in being who I am makes me sensitive to issues of difference and inclusion.

Throughout the narrative part of this thesis I have described memories of experiences that capture the essence of what it was like growing up as an Italian-Canadian. This creates a culturally contextualized image of who I am, describes some of my artistic concerns, and traces how I have come to identify myself as a cultural hybrid. Through examining the narrative for meaning, the stuff of which my philosophy is made, has emerged.

How does my lived experience, now having been further interpreted and grounded in theory, manifest itself in a teaching philosophy that professes to be pluralist, community-oriented, needs-assessment based, and postmodern? The simple answer to this question is that this perspective is my personal world view, so it is unavoidably present in how I teach. My experience as an ethnic minority has made me aware of the importance of a pluralism, where everyone is represented, and the message transmitted is one of celebrating differences rather than striving for acculturation.

In outlining my personal art education philosophy, I will not be providing a model for an approach for teaching art. Instead, what I am describing is an introspective investigation of who I am, in relation to how I teach and vice versa. It is in effect a reworking of my personal narrative using academic art education language to say what the narrative already describes, only in a different context. If the narrative leads a reader to ask: How would this person teach? It should also answer: This person teaches the way they do because of who they are. (and who they have come to be). This is also reflected in why and how they make art.

My experience as an ethnic minority has given me first-hand experience with multiculturalism and pluralism. I feel I am in a position to be able to comment on how pluralism can shape an approach to teaching. Plurality should be embraced as a way towards fostering a sense of self-empowerment and as nourishment for a richer and healthier learning experience, rather than being considered a problem to be overcome within an already existing curriculum or educational approach.

I call my teaching philosophy a pluralist, community-oriented and needs-assessment based approach to art education. All of these components stem from my personal experience of cultural hybridity, and all are based on a foundation of flexibility. Part Three of this thesis discusses the nature and structure of my philosophy, contextualizes art and art making, and describes the basic components of which my philosophy is comprised.

PART THREE

Transformation: Teaching Philosophy

Nature and Structure

The nature and structure of my philosophy is such that the framework, of my philosophy should be suited to what I recognize as being characteristic of the nature of the field of art education. My framework can be viewed as a kind of building that houses the basic components of my teaching philosophy. The relationship between the house and its inhabitant should be such that they work together, without posing limitations on each other. Ultimately this should be a symbiotic relationship, one that fosters the natural evolution of both the framework and my personal teaching philosophy.

A cross-sectional review of art education journals (*Canadian Review of Art Education*, *Studies in Art Education*, *The Journal / Canadian Society for Education Through Art*, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*) revealed to me that at different times in its history, art educational theory and practice has been susceptible to changes in social, economic and political climates. This susceptibility not only resulted in affecting the shaping of art educational goals, but at times also caused the field to have to rejustify its very existence.

In my view, this kind of evolution across the decades very much characterizes an important aspect of the nature of art education. It indicates that art education has had to constantly redefine itself, but yet, cannot be perceived as working towards an end-all definition of itself. Art education is constantly changing, and our responses to it and understanding of it should change alongside it. Given this ever-metamorphosizing nature of the field, the foundational characteristic of the framework for my philosophy is then, flexibility.

Art education, in theory and practice, as well as in the emergence of a

personal teaching philosophy, not only requires flexibility, but is in essence about the ability to be flexible. In terms of my framework, this means that it should be able to be maintained through a reciprocal investigation of how it handles current issues and themes, and how these issues and themes affect it. They must inform each other and continue to evolve.

Why Make Art?

Essential to any teaching philosophy that is specific to a subject area is a discussion of the subject itself. In this case, I would like to address art making, and why it is that we, as humans, make art. This discussion provides further insight to my art teaching approach.

In her book entitled, *What is art for?*, Ellen Dissanayake (1988) discusses her views on why she believes it is that we make art. She sees art making as a biologically driven human behaviour. Her basic argument is that human beings have a natural propensity for art making because it is part of our biological and behavioural make-up. Dissanayake (1988) believes that human nature and culture are not exclusive of each other, but instead, a propensity towards art making requires a culture in which it can be expressed. Her view is very much an anthropological one, likening art to ritual and play, and exploring what she calls “making special” as the root to this kind of activity, where the intent is to “place the activity or artifact in a ‘realm’ different from everyday life” (p. 92). She sees this bio-behaviour as having had an evolutionary and selective value throughout the course of humankind, meaning that those people who demonstrated a greater degree of it survived better in some ways.

Graeme Chalmers (1984, 1996) expresses similar notions towards the importance of viewing art from an anthropological perspective. He advocates

that the study of art should actually be approached as the study of “cultural artifact” and that the “cultural anthropologist” (Chalmers, 1984, p. 103), should serve as the model for art teacher and art student alike. In his book entitled *Celebrating pluralism: Art, education, and cultural diversity*, Chalmers (1996) asks the questions: Why do we make art? How do we use art? What is art for? He believes that in attempting to answer these questions we can find the “unity in pluralism” (p. 26). Although art may serve different functions, it exists in all cultures, and although its more specific meanings and functions may be culture-bound, the fact remains that all humans engage in some form of art making. We are united in this diversity.

This anthropological perspective lends itself to my belief that the ability to express oneself through art exists in each of us, and it is this transcultural human propensity that I wish to help my participants discover and represent when I teach art. I advocate making art accessible to all, and using it as a form of self-expression, and thus, self-empowerment. I feel that it is necessary to re-understand art and see it as a basic part of human nature, and in turn that it be recognized as valuable for this very reason. “If we accept that we only need one reason to justify the teaching of art ... namely that art is an important part of our culture, then we need to rethink the what and how of our teaching” (Chalmers, 1984, p. 103). If one follows this anthropological line of thought, art then, is a basic human need that has an evolutionary history. In comparison to its original place in our evolutionary history, its meanings and purposes have undoubtedly changed. Nevertheless, we are still drawn to art because of our human nature, and for this reason, it continues to be important. This anthropological perspective provides a line of reasoning for the existence of something we call “art” and for why we still engage in the making of it; it is simply part of who we all are.

Postmodern Framing

I view art making as a natural human tendency, and consider it to be a reflection of its maker and of the culture in which it is, or was produced. If art making is a human tendency, and culture is something that humans are predisposed towards, then art and culture cannot exist apart from each other.

In understanding art in this way, the ideas developed around it in the Western world, and what is normally held true by the modernist notion of art history, begins to take on far less authority and becomes only one singular perspective among the many cultural perspectives of art that really exist. It is my interest in this plurality of perspectives, based on cultural differences, that leads me to an exploration of art education in a postmodern and postcolonial context.

In his book *Art education: Issues in postmodern pedagogy*, Roger Clark (1996) states that developing a postmodern perspective requires “inculcat[ing] the postmodernist ‘community of difference’ concept as the basis for a more culturally pluralist and democratic society” (p. 80). The modernist voice of authority that once promoted notions of the male artist as isolated genius along with the traditional art historical canon of masterpieces is no longer assumed to be the official truth. It is as if a sense of perspective has been infused into our perception and has led to a shift in paradigms. The way of understanding the world has changed.

The sense of meaning within art has moved away from the modern emphasis upon form toward issues of content, issues which frequently involve the concept of power - its source, exercise, and consequence. Artistic meaning is seen as a socially constructed entity, requiring the viewer to look beyond the formalist compositional qualities of a

work, decode its symbolic imagery, and expose its embedded cultural assumptions. Meaning is also seen as fluid and contextual; a disparate array of interpretations can be derived from any given work since meaning is subject to the varied perspectives of artists and viewers. (Clark, 1996, p. 2)

This quote provides us with a description of the type of shift that has occurred in the nature of our reading of art. Postmodernism is concerned with issues of representation; and postcolonialism, with issues of power differentials within the context of cultural representation. The interpretation of representation is dependent on, and relative to cultural perceptions.

Since art and culture are intrinsically linked, the idea of understanding art as cultural production, rather than how we have traditionally been set up to see it in an Eurocentric modernist perspective, becomes a viable way to begin to reinterpret what art is in a postmodern perspective. Reconstructionist Harold Pearce, sees this renaming as essential. He believes that the “first step is to see art as a social process and to rename it ‘cultural production’” (Pearce, 1992, p. 250). Furthermore, as David Trend describes in his book *Cultural pedagogy: Art/education/politics* (1992), teachers of art can then be understood as belonging to a group called “cultural workers”. This perspective towards art sets a foundation for my pluralist approach to art education.

Components of My Teaching Philosophy

Pluralism

There is no such thing as a neutral education process.
(Freire, 1999, p. 16)

Since the concept of culture is a recurrent one in this research, and is a concept that can be interpreted and used in a variety of ways, I feel it is important to define its usage within the context of my teaching philosophy. In *Multicultural education; Issues and perspectives* (Banks, 1993), Brian Bullivan discusses the nature and meaning of culture for educators. Among the different perspectives that are described, his description of culture “as a group’s program for survival in and adaptation to its environment” (p. 8) is the most appropriate for my purposes. He further elaborates:

Most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another ... ; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meanings of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or similar ways. (p. 8)

In her book *Redefining multicultural education* (1996), Ratna Ghosh suggests that in order to be able to understand what multicultural means, one must first understand that to which culture refers. She explains that “... culture refers to the way in which a group of people responds to the environment. Culture is a way of seeing the world in terms of cognition, emotion, and behaviour. *It is a concept that is constantly changing* [italics added]” (p. 4). Using this definition as a point of departure, she describes what the term “multicultural” means:

Multicultural means many cultures. Multicultural-ism is an ideology, a system of beliefs determined by the existence of many cultures. ... The concept of multiculturalism has implied ethnic cultures. ... the notion of multiculturalism must include the dominant group that defines the norm, as well as the groups considered different from that norm because of social concepts of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, lifestyles. It is these differences that are the basis of problems for students and others. These differences are socially created and serve to separate groups of people and form boundaries. (p. 4)

In my philosophy, I tend towards the use of the word “pluralism” instead of “multiculturalism”. I choose the word “pluralism” over “multiculturalism” to avoid the confusion that can arise when multicultural education is taken to mean outdated or misguided versions of a true multicultural approach, (such as teaching about a variety of specific cultures, or using a dominant culture educational approach and adding in examples of things that come from other cultures). What the term has come to mean is an approach to education that fully adopts a multicultural or pluralist perspective from the outset. The terms, once clarified, are interchangeable.

James Banks (1993), states that “multicultural education is at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process” (p. 3). He explains that “multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students - regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics - should have an equal opportunity to learn in school” (p. 3). A key notion in pluralist education is that it is not something that one sets out to complete, but that it is an ongoing process. It is a

pedagogic orientation as opposed to information to be relayed (Clark, 1996).

Multicultural or pluralist education is about more than just acknowledging cultural differences. It addresses the diversity present in society. Pluralist societies are made up of many subgroups. These groups differ from one another in ways that are based in social class, ethnicity, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation and lifestyle (Banks 1993; Chalmers 1996). A multicultural or pluralist society is one that reflects this diversity and respects it by fostering equal representation and rights for all members.

A pluralist approach to education is founded on the belief “that all students, regardless of the groups to which they belong, such as those related to gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion, or exceptionality should experience educational equality in the schools” (Banks, 1993, p. 25). This kind of educational approach has grown from a real need to provide positive and empowering educational experiences for all members of society. It is an approach that fosters inclusivity and equality based on diversity.

Although my personal narrative presented in the first part of my thesis is the impetus for my pluralist approach to art education, the notion of cultural diversity, as we have seen, is by no means limited to issues of ethnicity. My narrative is based on my experience as an ethnic minority, and it is this experience that has led me to advocate a pluralist art education.

A major goal for a pluralist education is to create an educational experience that allows students to not only function effectively within the larger cultural hegemony, but also to be able to function in their own cultural subgroups or microcultures, as well as in other microcultures (Banks, 1993). Banks states that:

The societal goals of this approach are to reduce prejudice and discrimination against oppressed groups, to work

toward equal opportunity and social justice for all groups, and to effect an equitable distribution of power among members of the different cultural groups. The multicultural education approach attempts to reform the total schooling process for all children, regardless of whether the school is an all-White suburban school or a multiracial urban school. (p. 55)

Pluralist education is not just for cultural minorities, but for all students. It implies adopting a perspective and a whole global view of equality. In the following statement, Banks points to the damaging effects of what he calls a mainstream-centric curriculum:

A mainstream-centric curriculum has negative consequences for mainstream students because it reinforces their false sense of superiority, gives them a misleading conception of their relationship with other racial and ethnic groups, and denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspectives, and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups. (Banks, 1993, p. 195)

Furthermore, it also denies them the chance to view their own culture from other perspectives, which could provide students with a different or fuller understanding of their own culture (Banks, 1993).

Pluralist education should be approached in such a way that it becomes *the* educational approach, anything less than this is not true multicultural education. The challenge in attempting to achieve this kind of educational process is in the redesigning or restructuring of the educational system. This

requires total restructuring to avoid falling into ineffective or less effective ways of employing a pluralist approach. The true goal of pluralist education is about transformation; transformation of the educational system and of the students' perspective of themselves, of society and of the world.

A pluralistic art education does not simply involve including the art of other cultures in the curriculum. Through adhering to a postmodern perspective on art and art making, pluralistic art education should strive towards an inclusionary representation of diversity within the art world, and aim to understand art production within the context it was produced. We need to keep in mind that:

Art education takes place within cultural contexts. In a pluralist society, we need to be concerned with the meaning of art for a great variety of people for whom the honored aesthetic exemplars of European male-dominated high art culture may have little meaning. ... There is unity in art's functions across cultures and diversity in its forms. As Katter (1991) notes, "A broad-based art curriculum integrating the universal, cultural, and individual features of the art experience would hopefully contribute toward ... the realization that nothing human need be foreign in a multicultural society". (Chalmers, 1996, p. 7)

What initially brought me to pluralism was my personal experience growing up as an ethnic minority. As demonstrated through my narrative, I underwent a transformation of self-conceptualization in relation to my ethnic identity. I reconciled what my identity meant in terms of hegemonic culture, and reached a resolution that is contained in the term "cultural hybrid". This was and continues to be an experience of empowerment. Due to my lived

experience, I believe that a pluralist education can help foster a sense of empowerment through a positive contextualization of identity. In my specific case I found empowerment in embracing the difference, i.e. ethnicity, of my own identity.

Empowerment in pluralist education can mean several things, but it is not something that we can give to students, instead, it is something that students have to come into on their own (Freire, 1999). As teachers or facilitators what we can do is create an educational experience that promotes and fosters empowerment.

In *Redefining multicultural education*, Ghosh (1996) sees identity and empowerment as two of the fundamental facets of multicultural education. Ghosh's version of multicultural education emphasizes the political in that she is concerned with redressing the power imbalances in society, and believes that this can be accomplished through redesigning multicultural education. Ghosh's idea of total redefinition of education "involves an understanding of how differences and inequalities are constructed - by people - around ideas of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. The operative concepts here are identity and empowerment" (p. 3). Furthermore, Ghosh states that:

A significant aim of multicultural education is the development of a positive self-concept and identity in students. ... Identity is based on several elements such as race, gender, nationality and sexual preference. It emerges at the individual level, but each person also has several social identities (for example, gender, ethnic, class affiliations) that have implications at the political (such as being seen as a minority) and social/cultural levels. (p. 7)

A sense of empowerment can be promoted in students when their

cultural differences are seen as valuable and as making an important contribution to society. Through demonstrating that diversity is something to be respected and celebrated, an atmosphere of not only inclusion, but of worthiness is created. Identity that is based on difference can be seen as a positive thing.

In a multicultural approach empowerment comes about through demonstrating the importance of plurality. By showing students positive representations of themselves and by providing them with the tools needed to become critical thinkers, decision-makers and communicators, the students will begin to become empowered (Ghosh, 1996). In synthesizing J.P. MacDonald's and bell hooks' notions on empowerment and education with her own, Ghosh (1996) states:

To be educated is to have a *voice*, which implies knowledge as well as power (McDonald, 1988, p. 472). To be educated is to have the ability to influence one's personal and social environment. That is empowerment. ... Teachers cannot give voice to students; being educated means claiming a voice for oneself. This is not so much a struggle to speak but being able to alter the nature and direction of that speech (hooks, 1989). (p. 42)

This kind of empowerment will only come to exist through a pedagogy that reinforces a positive self-concept as part of a pluralist society, and provides the tools with which to express oneself.

Finally, I would like to consider the application of "critical sense" to the idea of pluralism. Although pluralism is by nature inclusionary, I nevertheless feel it's important not to disregard our ability to be critical. By this I mean that we cannot turn pluralism into a kind of sterile political correctness.

Hal Foster (1985) describes a kind of pluralism where a state of “others among others ... leads not to a sharpened awareness of differences”, but instead, to a “stagnant condition of indiscrimination” (p. 31). Not everything we expose ourselves to, or to which we are exposed, will necessarily be well-meaning or even ethically correct simply because it is seen through a pluralist perspective.

A final word on the notion of pluralism is that it is important to keep in mind, that the concept of pluralism itself, is essentially a culture-bound one. While we aim to create a healthy global perspective, we must remind ourselves that the forum our experience witnesses as having this approach is a North American one. To not recognize this as the structure that allows for pluralism, is to not recognize that part of what characterizes North American culture is pluralism.

Community Orientation

Allowing for pluralist dialogue to exist is an essential part of my teaching philosophy of art education. My focus rests on a community orientation because I believe it best captures the importance of knowing and respecting any group of people.

This orientation is about more than an art education that takes place in an alternative space, (i.e. outside of the school environment), or than the use of a specific geographic area as location. Instead, I use this term to give presence and emphasis to a way of approaching the teaching of art in a manner that recognizes pluralism and allows for dialoguing, so that art education can occur with and in response to the needs of the participants.

Community orientation and needs assessment are concepts that go hand-in-hand. I separate them in my teaching philosophy in order to more easily focus on each component, and to establish how they are inter-related.

I use the term “community orientation” to refer to a way of creating a learning environment; in particular one that sets the conditions for a needs assessment to occur. This orientation refers to familiarizing oneself with the students as individuals and then with the group as a whole, in order to come to an understanding of the group’s profile and their interactive dynamic. As individuals, each member of the group has an identity, but as a group, the interaction takes on another identity.

An atmosphere of trust has to be fostered in order to create a learning environment where a teacher and students can both contribute to the educational experience. Teachers and students must know and trust each other for true dialogue and authentic learning (Freire, 1999) and art making to occur. Simultaneity of student-teacher positioning, where it is understood that both parties teach and learn from each other, fosters this kind of two-way communication (Freire).

By knowing the population that one is teaching, one can create an educational environment within which to operate. Dialogue-based communication sets up a situation that is conducive to assessing the needs of students. This assessment is crucial for the development of course content that is relevant to the students. If aspects of course content are not determined with the students, as opposed to for them, the students will not really be engaging in a learning process that brings about empowerment (Freire, 1999). By employing a community-oriented approach that involves getting to know students through dialoguing, the pedagogy that results will be reflective of the students that make up the group.

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is an essential part of pluralist education. It is a

process that is based on dialogue between teacher and students, and is performed in order to determine what is important to the group and how to best accomplish the teaching of those things. A needs assessment can be viewed as a sort of diagnostic tool. Only by assessing and responding to the needs of any population, can empowering education occur.

The crucial part of this approach rests in the dialoguing. In his book, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1999), Freire stresses the importance of dialoguing with students in order to determine what is important to them. He also discusses the difference between two teaching approaches, one which he refers to as “banking” and the other which he calls “problem-posing”. The first involves the students’ passive storing of knowledge which has been prepared for them and without their input; the second, the problem-posing method, involves dialoguing and question-asking in which both the students and teacher are actively involved. The second approach allows students to develop critical thinking skills and decision-making skills, leading to empowering education.

The needs assessment component of my philosophy functions in a similar way, and has similar outcomes as the problem-posing teaching method. Since course content is determined and developed through dialoguing with students, a sense of equality is established between the teacher and the students, allowing for each to learn from the other (Freire, 1999). The authority usually associated with the teacher position disappears, leaving the teacher able to make contributions to the discussion in much the same way as the students do. The emphasis of the teacher’s contribution to the dialoguing rests perhaps, on creating challenges based on the needs assessment.

Because students feel that their learning is related to their lives, this approach leads to authentic learning (Freire, 1999). Students feel empowered because they have helped determine the content of the course and are reflected

in it. “Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (Freire, p. 73-74). Through dialoguing, needs assessment gives diversity a voice with which to express itself.

Self-Positioning

My lived experience has taught me to appreciate the contributions I make as an empowered person of ethnicity; be they contributions based in knowledge, opinion, perspective or simply through sheer presence as a person of Italian descent, or cultural hybridity.

My self-conceptualized identity as a person of cultural hybridity has allowed me to view and use my difference in enriching ways. My perspective celebrates the contribution difference makes, and allows me to position myself as a sort of role model representing the advantages of cultural diversity. Due to this, I believe that I am in an ideal position to address pluralist education in the way I have in this thesis.

As educators, we must realize that we are an important variable in the educational process. Ghosh (1996) points to the importance of teacher training in order to accomplish a real transformation in educational approach. She believes that teachers should be trained in a multicultural approach. “Multicultural education is a state of mind; it is an attitude, an ideology that permeates every discipline” (p. 85).

As educators we must responsibly investigate what motivates us in our teaching and what we recognize as being our educational goals. We must participate in self-investigation in order to glean from our personal narratives that which contributes to our teaching, and in the true spirit of multiculturalism, contributes to difference and diversity. We should be living

examples of what we advocate, through how and why we teach.

A New Perspective

When advocating a pluralist art education I am striving to teach art in an inclusionary way that uses difference and diversity to its advantage rather than to its disadvantage. This kind of education is a global one, preparing students for the differences they will encounter throughout their lives and fostering in them an attitude towards difference that is enriching. They will be empowered by their own sense of difference, of belonging, of equality and by the valuable contributions they can make.

Plurality should become the assumed point of view not only in cultural production, or art making, but in all areas of study and life. The ultimate goal of a pluralist education is to transform society. If we make art because it is part of our nature as humans to do so, as it is within our nature to operate within cultures, then working towards the concept of art and culture as being all inclusive should just be an extension of our natural human tendencies and capabilities. It is through celebrating diversity that we will develop a sense of unity (Chalmers, 1996).

CONCLUSION

Value of this Research

The value of this research lies in its exploration of personal experience. This research not only points to the value of grounding personal experience in theory, but more specifically demonstrates its value as it pertains to pluralist art education.

This thesis shows the links between who I am, the art I make and how I teach. It demonstrates how my pluralist approach to teaching is due to my life experience as a cultural hybrid. In my life, this state of hybridity has become a form of empowerment. In writing about my sense of identity and the role it plays in my teaching, I hope to draw attention to the positive aspects that can be a result of this kind of experience.

Above all, this research explores the territory of how who we are informs how we teach. I believe it is of crucial importance to understand what informs what we do, so that we can continue to move forward in fruitful directions. It is necessary for teachers or facilitators of art, to explore what it is that guides us in our lives and our art processes in order to be able to provide enriching art experiences and encourage authentic art making. It is in this way that art education can participate in the transformative powers of a pluralistic pedagogy.

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