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**Understanding Disease
Through A Post-Modern Art Practice
(A Collaboration of Artistic and Educational Practice)**

Sandy Neim

A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Art Education

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Art Education at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

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ABSTRACT

Understanding Disease Through A Post-Modern Art Practice (A Collaboration of Artistic and Educational Practice)

Sandy Neim

*“the post-modern imagination
can explore possibilities of another kind of
poesies- alternative modes of inventing
alternative modes of existence.”*
(Kearney, 1988, p. 33)

The focus of this thesis is to reflect on my artistic practice from a post-modern way of thinking and seeing the world. This research examines the educational potential of my art production. I propose definitions for three phases of learning, which emerge from my artistic practice: self-learning, self-healing and collaborative learning. These experiences are discussed in relation to an analysis of five works of art. This learning process leads to the articulation of a philosophy for Art Education that emphasizes my two roles as artist and art educator.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

I have begun to view my artistic production as a seductive and effective means of facilitating education. This perspective is the result of an ongoing investigation of the post-modern influences on my art production. I have become aware that the elements of my art practice —process, content, exploration of art mediums, the final product and the educational potential of my work-- illustrates aspects of post-modern art. Post-Modern art focuses more on the concepts involved in making art rather than on the medium being used. Post-Modern artists push the “boundaries of content and form ...reinventing the relationship between viewers and art” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 75). Exploring the educational characteristics, which emerge from my art practice, will be the focus of my thesis research.

Although the basic concepts of my studio work have followed a linear progression, parallel explorations of educational theory have changed the way I view and have come to create my art. Articulating a personal philosophy within our post-modern age has allowed me to reinterpret and analyze my artistic practice, its viability, and its purpose. In relation to my recent art practice, my role as an educator has emerged as a theme explored in my art.

In examining my art practice in the context of an educational practice, I will demonstrate how my art production has become a personal educational journey punctuated with conscious attempts to offer educational content to my audience via my art process and the display of my artwork. Ultimately, my research will depict how post-modernism has influenced my understanding of pedagogy, allowing a personal investigation of different types of learning to emerge as a concept in my art practice. The content

of my artwork has emerged directly from personal attachments and phenomenological concerns about disease. This is a concept, which, I propose, touches everyone at a certain level. My personal exploration and educational development in this regard has led me to an active attempt to educate my audience by stimulating their thoughts and sentiments about this socially stigmatized topic.

This thesis will reveal all the different areas of investigation, which have merged together strengthening my investigation of my pedagogical journey. In this thesis, I will discuss the implications of my own artistic training and how this has shaped my artistic practice. I will also define postmodernism and how its characteristic qualities can be witnessed in my art content and art production. Furthermore, I will illustrate how postmodernism has supported my investigation into the educational potential of my artwork; this, in turn, has led me to define three learning phases that are relevant to my art practice. This thesis will outline the self-learning, self-healing and collaborative learning processes that take place as a result of my pedagogical inquiry in relation to my art production. These three phases will be used to descriptively write about five works of art depicting the learning that takes place during artistic production. My aim is to demonstrate the importance of simultaneously developing an artistic practice with an educational practice in order to strengthen my teaching philosophy. This inquiry will depict that the way I think about and create art emphasizes a post-modern teaching philosophy. I will also discuss postmodernism in relation to art education. In conclusion, I will define my personal philosophy for art education and I will also address the need for a post-modern approach to teaching and making art.

Evolution of an Artistic Inquiry

Artists produce art for many different reasons. Over time, my own art practice demonstrates vast changes in art philosophies, artistic concerns, art mediums and artistic intentions. My art production parallels my academic studio experiences, and my training as an art educator. My art practice has become an important element in my life tracing the path of both my art and educational training based upon my academic and personal experiences. This path has become increasingly apparent in relation to my present art practice and concerns. Only recently have I become aware of the relevance of educational theory and its influence in respect to the ways I produce art: the process, the chosen materials, the artistic medium, the display and presentation, and the final product of my art.

Initially, my intentions in making art was to explore different art materials with the aim of finding what I enjoyed working with the most. During this phase, my primary concern with art was to experiment with the chosen material and to produce art that was aesthetically pleasing. This premise lost importance at the very start of my academic training. Formal attributes began to take precedence in my art making. Composition, line, depth, tension, contrast, etc., were the new words and concepts which challenged my art making. My artist peers and professors began to scrutinize the artistic talent I thought I possessed. My challenge at this point was to acquire artistic skills and adapt these new skills to correspond to a more intellectualized discourse. It was no longer enough to produce art that was pretty. If the art was pretty, then its purpose was to be pretty.

My university art courses initiated the transitions in my art practice, ultimately shaping an art discourse that I continue to use today. The first few years of my undergraduate art training evolved around the idea of creating art that fulfilled a purpose. My art production began to mimic what my art professors appreciated. I remember how

the student art production within certain courses all attempted to attain a certain mood, genre and/or social relevance. It seemed as if the work of the better students, singled out by the course professor during class critiques, set the precedence for each class' production. Furthermore, those who defied the norm suggested by the professor's comments during class critiques were often deemed to be the inferior art students. My studio art courses were extremely competitive. I recall how many of my studio art teachers voiced their biases about the production capabilities of students majoring in Art Education. For myself, art making was no longer about having fun; I needed to establish a new relationship with my art making.

Constantly informed and influenced by my peers and my professors, my art philosophy and production began, as a consequence, to define itself. I began to incorporate all the skills I had learned from the formal training I had received in my studio classes into producing art that was personal and had social implications. At that point in my artistic development, I was beginning a self-journey, creating art for new reasons. I was feeling passionate about my work and about the fact that I was able to express myself with the skills that I had acquired in various mediums. This realization developed in response to a course entitled, "Women in the Fine Arts," that I had been taking at the time. This course challenged me profoundly as an art student by presenting me with a look at Feminist issues and discourse in art, political art and contemporary art in general. This course, which was a half-seminar half-studio course, offered me the space to critically think about art and my art practice in a new way. I learned to develop my critiquing skills and to articulately discuss my art making. It was at this point in my life that I began to produce a new type of art. My art attempted to become self-expressive, serious, and articulate.

This new way of thinking about art and the purpose it could serve developed into a large body of work, making up my present art practice. I am now looking at my work, consisting mainly of my art production during graduate studies, in terms of its viability in facilitating an educational potential. Art can be used as an effective means of encouraging learning. Using this notion as the basis of my research, I am attempting to establish that my own artwork demonstrates didactic qualities stimulating different levels and types of learning.

CHAPTER 2

Educational Experiences

Traditional forms of research limit the nature of research inquiry, interpretation and representation. In contrast what would educational research look like if the rigours and sensibilities of artistic practice were valued and visible? (Jongeward, 1997, p. 1)

After years of creating an elaborate and cohesive body of work, I have come to the realization that my artistic development has paralleled my interests in educational theory and practice. In regards to my art production, it is quite obvious that my subject matter is one of a very personal and almost introverted nature; it functions for me as a positive source of inspiration. The content of my artwork, the media I choose to express my art, and the final displays of my artwork are influenced by a contemporary teaching approach. “The twentieth century has witnessed a revolution in aesthetic theory and artistic intention....Contemporary artists have explicitly sought to connect their works to the social, political, and historical contexts in which they live. Art educators need to develop methods of interpretation which can address postmodern art” (Wolcott, 1996, p. 78). In the upcoming chapter, where I define some of my art work, there will be evidence of a contemporary experimental art practice. For instance, an artistic concept explored throughout my art is revealed in the way I choose to express personal and emotional information to other individuals with the intention of creating opportunities for a communal type of learning. My artwork became a way to communicate with other people and have others share their own personal experiences. The experience was no longer solely about the art on display. The art now began to provide a means of facilitating dialogue, getting myself and others to speak intimately about their own experiences related to disease and illness. This is now my prime motivation for creating art. I

learn from the process of art making, the contemplation of the final artwork, and the discussion that stems from the presentation of my art.

In reassessing my art practice in response to its educational attributes, I have concluded that there are three types of learning that I experience through each work of art. In the upcoming section, I will define and discuss my experiences in regards to the self-learning, self-healing and collaborative learning that take place in relation to my artwork.

Self-Learning

**To appreciate how artistic experience can inform educational research requires an understanding of how making art is both a process of inquiry and a process of creating meaningful forms. Artistic practice is a distinctive activity of research and appreciation.
(Jongeward, 1997, p. 1)**

Watrin (1999) states, “Art seizes the fullness of lived experience by describing, interpreting, creating, reconstituting, and revealing meaning – the same tasks of qualitative research” (p. 93). My own art practice has become an ongoing qualitative investigation and learning process. The learning in relation to my art production has taken many different forms. My art practice is an exploration of art mediums and materials, content in relation to disease, and a self-directed investigation on the type of responses that my work evokes from my viewers.

My art practice has motivated me to conduct an elaborate exploration of different art mediums. The body of my artwork incorporates two-dimensionality, three-dimensionality, installation and performance works. In executing these works, I have experimented with papermaking, text, voice, collage, photography, and video. Many of these art medi-

ums have been used in an explorative, experimental manner. The notion of repetition, significant to my work's content and physicality, allowed exploration and experimentation to continue and evolve into a final work of art. The elaborate nature of my artwork allowed me to reexamine my work in an attempt to understand the way I work and think. The process of the art making became a very important aspect in my artistic thinking. It is during this phase that my work revealed its personality and identity. Each work plays off of each other and is positively influenced by the dialogue with previous work and with viewers' responses. The time that I spend reflecting on and negotiating the comments generated by my viewers is an intimate moment. It is also a process of learning that ultimately takes place between myself, the materials, and considerations in regard to the art medium. The process of creating art, recreating art, and continuing to create art is an evolving learning process in itself. I invest knowledge and emotion into a cyclical nature of construction and deconstruction with the overall objective of satisfying my own need for continual educational growth.

Self Healing

I resisted the notion of my art as a form of self-healing at the very onset of undertaking this type of artwork. I believed that, if I accepted this commentary in relation to my work, my art would then lose its credibility as an intellectualized body of work. I also did not want the idea of self-healing to monopolize the discussion about my art and impose limitations in regard to my work's artistic relevance. I wanted my work to engage viewers in a dialogue about disease on a more general level rather than acting as a sympathy seeking retelling of my own experiences. Although this is in fact much of the content that stimulates discussion, I wanted my work to stand on its own as art and to be critiqued in that context. However, years later as I reconsider my work's evolution as a facilitator for learning, I am actually discovering that self-healing is a vital compo-

ment of my ongoing self-learning. I now see that making art is a form of self-healing. However, I still maintain that making art that deals directly with disease is an educational exploration that provides me with the possibility of conducting research in order to understand and properly represent and express issues in respect to disease.

At the time that I had begun my work on the “Cancer Series”, which will be discussed in a later section, I was actually living through the experience of having to cope and understand cancer in respect to my mother’s condition. By making art that responded to what I was experiencing at the time, I was visually expressing and assimilating all the new information and experiences that I was being subjected to. By educating myself through the making of my art, I was able to understand the course and the implications of the disease, and ultimately I was learning to cope.

Art can be viewed as a medicine so powerful that it can ultimately help one forget the pain and fear in one’s life. Dr. Dickstein, a pioneer in the field of art and healing, suggests that, “creating art gives people a sense of control, whereas in medicine you don’t have a sense of control” (cited in Longman, 1994, p. 74). This is true in the case of my own art making. The experimental nature of my artwork is more acceptable to me than the experimental nature of medicine and treatments. At least when I am creating my art, I am accountable for the end product. With disease, we do not have any control.

In considering the self-healing process in relation to my present art practice. I have come to realize that this type of learning has always been apparent in my art. Having grown up in a family stricken by disease, art has allowed me to deal with my pain and fear in an expressive manner. As a child I had often been unable to appropriately articulate my thoughts and concerns about illness. The art I engaged in, although not disease oriented at that time, was fun, and gave me a sense of freedom. It also provided

a needed means of expression. Art played a restorative role in my life at the time when I was diagnosed with diabetes, by boosting mental healing, self-esteem, and spiritual renewal. My art practice today functions in a similar fashion where I try to deal with my own illnesses and the matrilineal illnesses in my family history which, have influenced a part of my own identity. As suggested by Dr. Peter Mehler, one of the reasons why people investigate the notion of illness and disease through art making is because “sometimes people can’t verbalize their stories but are able to tell them through an art form” (cited in Longman, 1994, p. 66). The rationality of medicine and science has always seemed completely abstract to me. I have found that I can make better sense of disease when it is explored and represented visually. When I produce art, I can actually forget about illness: I can mentally situate it outside of the corporeal being. This allows me to speak about it and address it more objectively. By expressing notions about disease into an art form, I find that I can simultaneously control the disease and attain a sense of empowerment.

Collaborative Learning

Much of the learning attained from my art practice is derived from a collaborative learning process. As mentioned throughout this paper, my artwork facilitates and emphasizes learning. I believe that I have something to say, and I have chosen to use my art making as the means to investigate and facilitate this expression. I am not a scholar in the area of disease, but I believe that the knowledge that is accessible to me —through medical journals, personal experience, societal and cultural attitudes— also contribute to the realization of my art practice.

Bolton, a supporter for the claim of art’s educational potential suggests that, “the art world is well suited to join in this attempt to create more complicated forms of public education and interaction” (1993, p. 16). The notion of disease is not easily discussed due to its subjective

nature. From personal experience, I have found it much more difficult to address issues around disease when I do not place it within an artistic context. By placing issues of disease within an artistic framework, I feel that I am at liberty and more comfortable to discuss disease.

When I choose to view my art practice as a potential collaborative learning process, my art becomes secondary in importance to the dialogue I am attempting to initiate with my viewers. Although the art process and art product facilitate different types of learning, the role of the art product at this stage is to serve a different purpose. My art is not the exclusive embodiment of meaning. I demand response and reflection from my viewers. Many of my artworks actually invite the viewers to interact with the piece, thus placing my viewers as subjects within my work. My art takes on a didactic quality during this type of learning. I intentionally take on the role of educator when I present my work to an audience. It is unlikely that I would feel comfortable to have my work viewed without some form of intervention on my part and, consequently, on the part of my viewers. This has come to be an important aspect of my work.

Watrin (1999) states that “Art is also hermeneutic in the sense that the creator and viewer are held in a space where meaning occurs” (p. 97). Presenting my work to be viewed is an essential part of my art production. It is at this point that the meaning of my artwork evolves the most. My future artwork usually arises from the discussion that takes place during art critiques. It is also at this time that a communal learning takes place between myself, my art, and my viewers. I also believe that a shared discussion among these elements clarifies the viability of my art practice. This type of learning, which I have labelled as collaborative learning, defines the cyclical nature of my art practice and its educational implications.

The three types of learning –self-learning, self-healing and collaborative learning– merge together creating a constant cycle of sharing and learning. External to this cyclical path of learning is an ongoing learning that is carried out by the viewers of my work. I

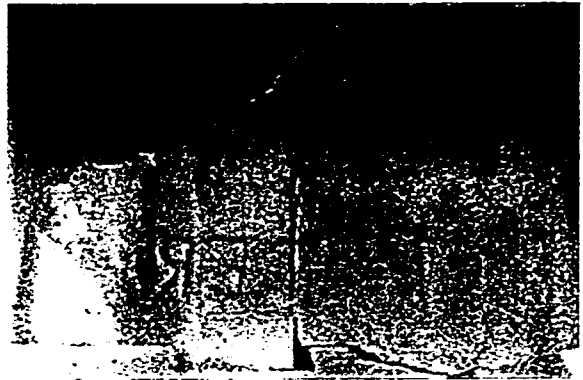
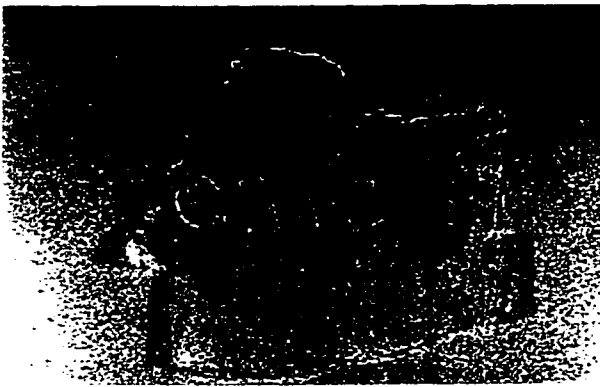
propose that the learning experience that goes on during the viewers' dialogue with my artwork remains embedded in their memory. The experience that results from our shared viewing reveals itself and surfaces later in other forms at other moments. This is my art's ultimate objective in relation to my viewers. As for myself, the three learning environments –self-learning, self-healing, and collaborative learning– are cyclical in nature, they resurface and are revealed in my future artistic endeavours.

CHAPTER 3

Analysis of Five Works of Art

I have chosen to discuss in depth five works of art that support my proposition that my art portrays and reveals the content of a learning process. The artwork created during my graduate studies developed in conjunction with my investigation of learning theories. An exploration of my artistic and educational philosophy led me to pursue research in the area of post-modern theory. Although my artwork can stand on its own according to artistic criteria, as a future art educator, I am presently intrigued by the notion that my art can serve an educational purpose. I believe that art can be used as an effective tool in facilitating education. Post-modern theory has offered me a framework for situating both my educational and artistic endeavours. The role of art educator has emerged as a prominent theme in my art production. Postmodernist ideas about education, art and art education theory and practice, has made it possible for me to conceptualize my experimentation with my art practice. Throughout this chapter I will illustrate how my work is post-modern in its very essence: in the way I create my work, in the way I present my work, in the way I implicate my viewers as active subjects in my work and in the way my work affects the learning of those who engage with it.

In this section, I will describe five art works with the intention of depicting the learning process that results from each of these works. These works were selected in accordance with their usefulness in describing the evolution of learning taking place specific to each work. This selection will also demonstrate that learning has taken place as a result of each work's influence on the others. The discussion of these works will bring out the cyclical evolution of learning taking place in my work that was influenced by each of my three proposed categories of learning: self-learning, self-healing and collaborative learning experiences.



Cancer Internal/External

“Cancer Internal/External”
Diptych from **Cancer Series**, 1996.
cotton pulp

Self-learning

The Cancer Series includes nine separate works of art. This diptych consists of two individual works within the series. The idea of putting these two works together was a decision that I have made only recently as I was reinvestigating my work for my thesis research. At the time that I was working on the cancer series, I perceived these works as sketches or references leading up to a final performance piece. The intent of these sketches was to offer my audience material and information so that they would be prepared as subjects for my final, interactive performance. The idea of a performance work emerging from the cancer series was not clear to me when I first began making artwork in response to my mother's cancer.

In “*Cancer Internal/External*” the word cancer is subtly embossed into the cotton pulp. It is so subtle that it is difficult to see and can even go unseen. The handmade paper is symbolic of the skin. The paper, a bas-relief, is crinkled with marks that look like wrinkles of the skin and in some areas give the impression of veins. This notion attempts to portray the internal and external characteristics of the body. The embossing of the word cancer implies that the illness is within the body. The shape of the paper resembles a map with visible borders suggested by the trimming of the separate sheets of paper. This map functions as the host body of the disease with the word cancer contaminating an entire section of the map. The image on the right of the diptych is an embossing of the word cancer that is then displayed inside out. To the viewer the word cancer is seen backwards. This emphasizes the idea of the map, society, and the world by the representation of this foreign looking word, which we have no trouble making out except for the fact that its subtlety can almost make it undetectable.

The paper is clean, crisp and white. Shadows are created from the wrinkled paper and the embossed words. The mood is stale and clinical. The notion of the map like quality and the surface of the skin are extended beyond the artwork as the paper merges with the whiteness of the walls. This alludes to the grandeur and perhaps the fear relevant to the cancer disease.

The evolution of the cancer series stems from the emotions that I was experiencing with the cancer diagnosis of my mother. The cancer series is a reflection on the information I was hearing from the doctors, the treatment that my mother was going through, the emotions that my mother was experiencing, my family's anxiety and my own struggle in trying to deal with the challenges of such a disease.

The main focus of my work over the entire semester has dealt with this issue of exploring different ways in which to represent the word "cancer". In my research, I have been more curious about the word itself than about the actual disease and its implications. This investigation has provided me with the opportunity of stepping back from my personal involvement with the disease. It has allowed me to construct a more global relationship making cancer exist outside of my own imagination and situating it more into the real world. In the process of writing the word over and over again, I attempt to place the viewer in a confrontational situation. The viewer cannot escape the word and is forced to read it. The viewer will perhaps, silently read the word in his or her head, loudly say the word in their head, whisper the word out loud, or read the word in the same voice as their speaking voice. The viewer will say, in some form, the word that I don't want to say, that I have trouble saying, that I can no longer say.

By finding minimal ways of writing and addressing the word, scratches, imprints, and script included throughout the works that constitute the Cancer Series, I am trying to leave enough space for the viewer to interpret and bring their own meaning to the word. This interaction between the art piece, the word, the illness, the viewer and the viewers' feelings and interpretations, makes the work speak and simultaneously gives the word meaning. The medium, handmade paper made from thousands of pieces of pulp, represents the people (patients, family, friends, doctors, researchers, etc.) and the thousands of interpretations and connections that the people express about this disease.

Self-Healing

Cancer was a difficult word for my family to say. The word was never mentioned up until the day my mother was diagnosed with cancer. My mother had pseudonyms for cancer. "La Mauvaise Maladie" my mother would say; she'd have a really sad, sympathetic look in her eyes as she referred to people with the illness. My Jewish family heritage teaches us to not talk about disease so that it does not affect the family. This superstition is a difficult concept for me to grasp having been greatly influenced by my Canadian upbringing. Sickness was already in our household before my mother got cancer. But, this time, the illness was really different. I understood that. The word, possibly the biggest word in my life at that time was held silent amongst my family members. It was a long time before I actually heard my mother say the word.

At the beginning of my mother's illness, the cancer was almost undetectable. At this stage I recall how my mother was disturbed by the fact that her chemotherapy treatments would make her lose her hair. This would make her illness visible to others. My mother was an extremely proud and private person. The idea of other people being able to observe her hair loss meant that they would be able to know that she was a cancer patient.

Collaborative Learning

I had always looked forward to class critiques as a time of exchanging thoughts about my work and my ideas. I remember having my first class critique in my graduate studio class where I presented the left half of the diptych. My professor had established a protocol for our class discussion, asking that the class comment on the art before the artist talked about their work. I remember how the discussion among my peers was extremely limited and that it did not lead into the area of discussion that I was hoping for. This made me nervous, and I wanted to dive right in and defend my work. My professor had to redirect me from doing this several times until it was my turn to discuss my work. So I took the platform and began an emotional, humorous, sometimes serious and overloaded discussion aimed at almost dismissing any discussion on the formal qualities of the work on display. I had lots to say and I used my work of art to create a context for my verbal discourse. In the end, through this intervention, I was able to set up a framework for a discussion that involved evoking the experiences of my viewers.

What was extremely interesting about the comments I received in reference to this work was the fact that most of my peers confronted me outside of the classroom setting. Was a discussion on disease unsuitable for the classroom environment? Was this topic so personal that people did not want to publicly share their stories? These were the questions that I was asking myself at the time. A few individuals addressed some formal aspects of my work suggesting that I push the idea of the map further if I intended to make this work more general than personal. Most of the other individuals who gave me some feedback commented on the fact that I was brave to bring up such personal material. It was this commentary that affected me the most and lead me to explore ways of making this subject matter less personal, less about my mother's condition, and more about a socially stigmatized topic. This was a topic which, in my opinion, needed a platform for discussion. I was certain that the intention of my work was not to demand sympathy from my viewers.



Blood/Cell/Red



Blood/Cell/Red (detail)

“Blood/Cell/Red”
Cancer Series, 1997
cotton pulp, acrylic varnish, red ink

Self-Learning

“Blood/Cell/Red” represents the sixth chronological piece in my Cancer Series. At this time my work was still referring to the idea of a map but more like a topographical map. It looked like a topographical map with references to volume and land formations. The land formations were not as subtle as in the earlier works. The transparent surface area could be perceived as a glacier or water surface when viewed from a distance. There were also crevices where pulp was literally torn out of sections and used to build surface areas in other sections.

The word “cancer” was still a theme in my work. This time the text was small. However, the word was more visible in its redness. The symbolism of the repeated word used and exhausted in previous works in the Cancer Series, began to lose its significance. I now was exploring a different way of presenting this idea. The word cancer was now repeated symbolically through the red spot visible in the image. The message was no longer about speaking the word. My previous work had said it so much, that the word lost its real meaning. Although this was an element that I exploited in previous works, I now wanted to explore, through the use of repetition, the characteristics of the disease. The red spot presented this challenge and introduced new meaning to the word “cancer”: the blood of a cancer patient; the cells of a cancerous person; the spread of cancer.

Self-Healing

At this point I was accepting that the disease was extremely powerful and capable of great damage to the body. My mother was no longer bothered by the fact that she had lost her hair. The family was no longer traumatized by the word “cancer”. There were too many other realities going on in my life that were much more significant to my mother’s well being. I was getting used to the idea and at the stage where I was able to understand my mother’s treatment and the implications of the disease on her body. At this point, my mother was suffering from an advanced stage of lymphoma. Her lymph nodes were growing and they were disrupting the normal course of her inner and outer body.

My work was becoming less and less subtle. I began to intentionally contaminate the pure whites that I had been trying to attain in my previous works. The work was becoming stained and I began to introduce “foreign” elements into the sheets of skin-like paper. I began to physically tear the cotton sheets and build sections up with the excess pulp. My artistic mannerisms were beginning to mimic the course that the cancer was taking on my mother. By physically carrying out these actions, I was able to cope with and express what was going on with my mother and consequently articulate what I was feeling.

Collaborative Learning

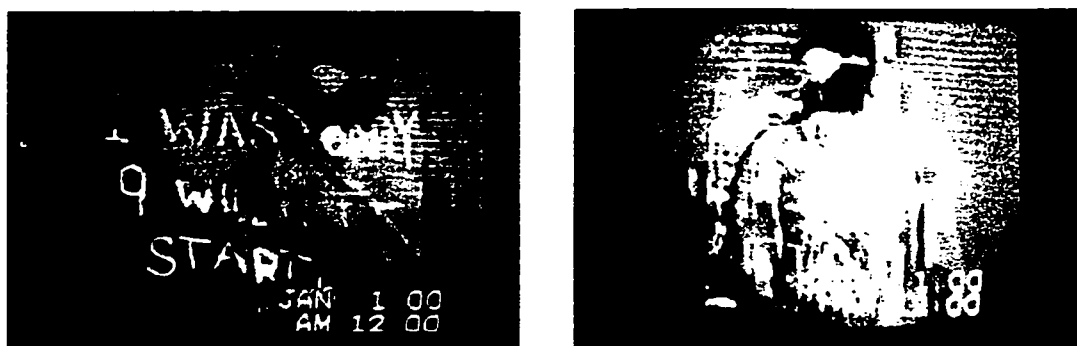
I was showing my work consecutively to the same group of people. My viewers began to recognize the repetition of signs, symbols, imprints, scratches, and an evolving vocabulary. My classmates were getting accustomed to my imagery and my content.

The dialogue among myself, the art and my viewers began to develop similarly to the content of the work. I began to sense that people were getting a little more comfortable with the work. When it was my turn to discuss my work, I would state the new developments in my art practice and I would then ask my viewers to comment on my

reflections. This would often lead to individuals sharing their own knowledge in relation to experiences that they have lived or learned about from outside sources. In contrast to this reaction, some of my peers remained really uncomfortable in regards to my work and/or in the way I openly discussed issues pertaining to cancer. My work sought to get people to discuss issues related to disease. The reality of people being insulted or uncomfortable made the experience that more real and valuable to me.



Diseased Landscape (photographic installation)



Diseased Landscape (performance/video)

“Diseased Landscape”
Video and Photographic Installation, 1997

“Diseased Landscape” consists of photographic stills taken from a performance work. In this performance, I attempted to demonstrate a fusion between the body and disease in a way that defies our perceived notions of this subject. The performance work was an exploration on the absurdity of disease in relation to our environmental landscape. I was interested in trying to depict diseases and the diseased organs in relation to the body, and created molds of the pancreas, the heart, the thyroid and the eye. These organs represented four diseases, which have affected my life and played a big role in my mother’s illnesses. The molded paper organs, exaggerated in size, were placed on the outside of my body. I stood in front of a slide projector. Slides representing a mixture of abstract images (representative of emotions), text, and medical imagery were projected onto my body as I began a slow walk that progressively went into a jog and then into a run. The body movement, struggle, and transition was further emphasized in contrast to the steady rhythmic break of the changing slides.

Self Learning

From this performance, I pursued my artistic development and began to explore photographic documentation. This medium imposed the notion of two-dimensionality and the idea of posing that contrasted the very movement oriented approach of my performance. Photography brought an added element to my investigation. I began thinking of ways in which medium and environment constructs boundaries. Whereas my past artwork had been involved in exploring the various ways in which the diseased body (usually absent) had contributed to the shaping of the landscape, this work concentrated on exploring the ways in which the landscape (environment) defines the presence of the diseased body.

Choosing to document the initial performance, with the intention of creating a new artwork, was a new development in my work. This transition enabled me to make a big leap in my creative process. Whereas I remained consistent in the formal presentation of the Cancer Series, I was now changing the medium of my work which implied changes in presentation and in content as well. Going from performance to photography was a conceptual transition. I was placing the reality of my body into a two-dimensional format. This resulted in an added layer to the projections and to the notion of representation. Photography in itself is representational.

These photographs became an installation piece when I decided that I was not comfortable with simply presenting these images as photographs. This installation consisted of twelve photographic works. These photographs belonged to four different portrayed diseases. Each section had three images each. The reality that I was representing, although real to me, was a constructed reality of different layers representing different facets of disease. I then attempted to find a way to explore the physicality of these photographs. I decided to wedge each photograph between two sheets of hand made paper with the intention of creating objects instead of simple photographs. I then pulled away the pulp of the top layer to reveal the image of the photograph. The excess pulp was used to build up the surface formation around the image. The paper was successful in serving two functions. First, it functioned as a frame for mounting the image. Secondly, the wet pulp warped the images in its drying phase giving the images more character.

Self Healing

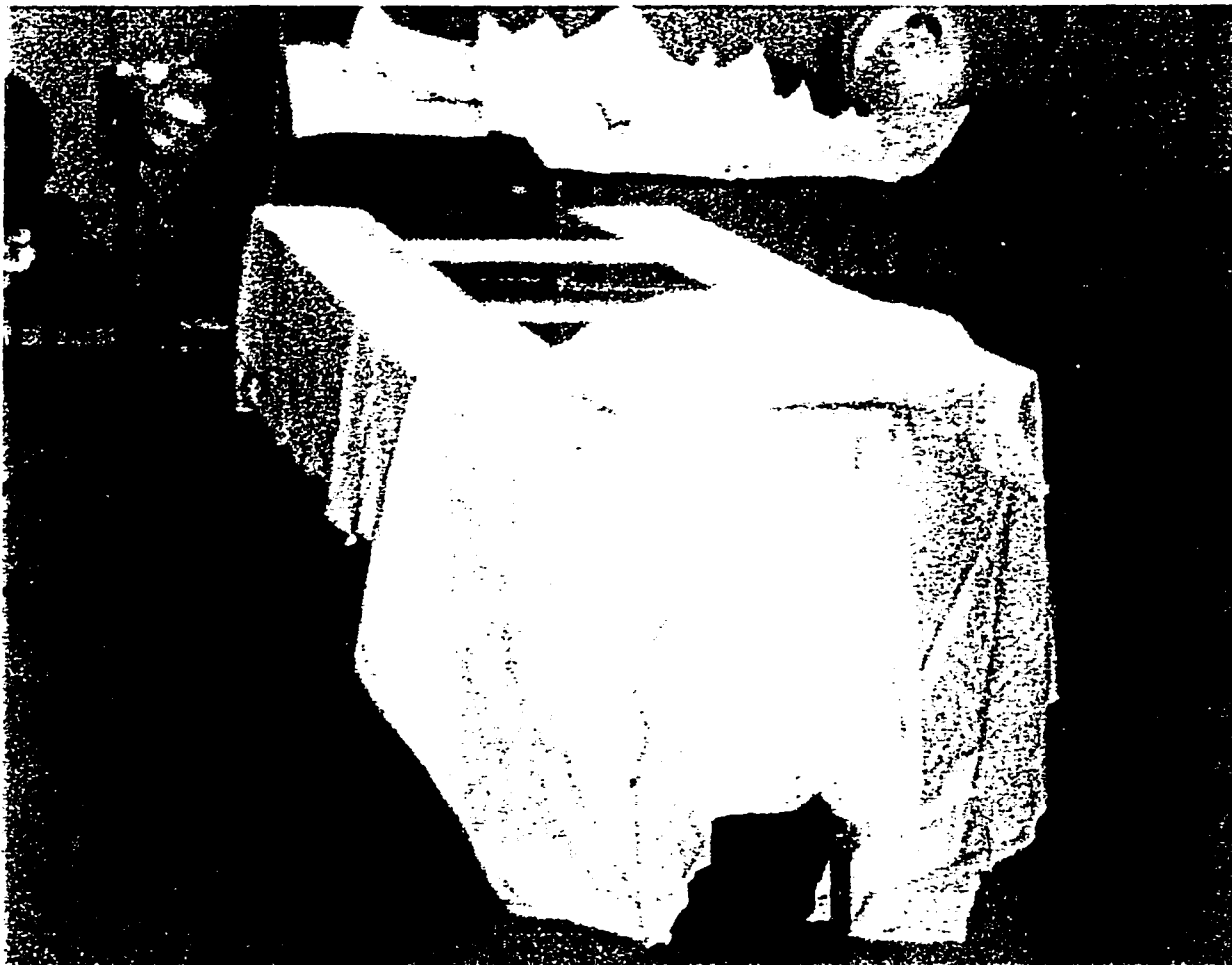
Can something be outrageously visible and silently transparent at the same time? The actual act of placing my diseased organs on the outside of my body in an absurd manner proved very rewarding. I have always been told that I don't look sick. I guess I am fortunate for that. The act of making my organs visible made it more acceptable to discuss my diseases within a context.

The reality is that my diseases are extremely visible to me. My diseases have defined the way I live my life. There is never a moment that I can rid myself of my diseases. My diseases have shaped my identity and have consequently altered my environment. The way I relate to the world and my landscape is extremely subjective. My photographic installation attempts to explore my vision of my landscape through disease; diabetes, hyperthyroidism, glaucoma and heart disease. By spending time photographing, printing, and creating imagery about the implications of these diseases on my life, I am objectifying and therefore learning to accept, adapt and reflect on my condition. The last stage of the process, the hand made paper frames, objectified the reality of my condition thus de-emphasizing the true reality of the diseases in my life. This proved to be extremely spiritual in the art making stage.

Collaborative Learning

This work received a lot of constructive criticism in response to its formal qualities and in its evasive content. As mentioned, this work demonstrated a big transition in its medium. Viewers commented that this transformation from performance into photography actually lost the theatrical and the absurd quality that enriched my performance. The images were powerful aesthetically but the conceptual aspect often attached to my work was no longer evident and/or hard to follow. My viewers suggested that my attempt to create objects out of these photographs should

have been further developed and emphasized. This may have made the work more evocative. These comments motivated me into creating the next work, which will now be discussed.



Suspended Organs/Floating Body



Suspended Organs/Floating Body (details)

“Suspended Organs/ Floating Body”

Installation, 1998

cotton pulp, photographic transfers, operating table,
mirrors, spotlights and stands.

Self-Learning

“Suspended Organs/Floating Body” was inspired by the group critique, which followed the previously discussed artwork. Since I was excited about exploring the medium of photography I decided that I would like to continue developing this area. I also decided that this work would be an attempt to incorporate my photographic imagery into objects. This idea proved difficult and frustrating from the start. I fell into technical difficulties throughout the entire creation of this installation work. The creative process was an educational experience in itself, and the process of creating the work was a more valuable learning experience than the actual final product.

I began this installation by creating organ molds of the four diseases that I had begun to work with in the previously discussed performance and photographic installation. I then attempted to print photographic images onto the paper molds. The images I selected to print were medical diagrams of each specific organ. I choose not to print the images before making molds of the organs because I wanted the images to be obstructed and influenced, during the printing stage, by the shape of the organ. Printing the images on the surfaces of the molds proved very difficult. This process involved applying liquid light --a photosensitive emulsion-- onto the surfaces where I was going to print the images. The shapes of the molds ended up distorting the images excessively. The images became extremely difficult to decipher. Not being able to visually attain what I was after forced me to rethink the entire process and the final presentation of the work. The actual imprint of the image was reduced in importance. I redirected my focus. I began to pay more attention to the actual objects; the molded hand-made sheets of paper.

My work underwent another big transition at this point. I decided to use these molded paper sheets as part of an installation work. I began to question the relationships of the molds in regards to the body. I decided that I would use these sheets of paper to suggest the idea of an “absent body”. The questions that I now needed to answer were: How do I maintain the notion that these sheets of paper allude to a representation of the body? How can I make sure that the viewer reads these paper molds as representing organs without including a representation of the human body? Due to the printing process and, more specifically, the use of liquid light, the sheets of paper became extremely tarnished. The liquid light physically stained areas of the sheets of paper with a purple, bloody-red, colour. The sheets of paper began to look diseased. This aesthetic quality persuaded me to rethink the idea of the body. I decided to place these sheets in a manner that would allude to the body without actually representing it. It was at this phase in the art making process that the imagery of an operating table began to emerge.

Self-Healing

After the death of my mother, the content of my art switched away from cancer. In the final stages of her life, her cancer had created so many other problems that her cancerous condition was camouflaged within her body because of all her other diseases. Her cancer continually emphasized the notion that her body was already quite diseased, and therefore it did not make her struggle any easier.

Finding it too emotional to directly deal with the issue of cancer, I turned instead to myself and began to explore my own diseases as discussed in the previous work. The fact that the photographs I attempted to produce weren't effective as figurative representations of organs, helped me to redirect my energy to create a work which allowed me to visually express the death of my mother. My mother had remained absent in my artwork for about a year after her death. Since my mother and I shared some of the same illness-

es, I was able to use my molds of organs in relation to the diseased organs that had ultimately contributed to taking my mother's life. This experience of "sharing" my organs with my mothers proved extremely therapeutic. My mother and I had always had a close bond due to our shared experiences of disease.

The installation symbolically represented the absence of my mother's body. The suspension of the organs alluded to the concept of the floating absent body. This installation depicted ritualistic qualities embedded in my cultural beliefs implicit to grievance.

Collaborative Learning

This installation piece was set up in a manner to motivate individuals to physically interact with the art. Mirrors were placed on the operating table to provide a reflection of the organs so that the printed images on the inner surfaces of the molds and the tarnished bloody stains could be apparent. The suspended images were placed at a height that would force those who like to interact to really get close to the operating table and consequently close to the mirrors. The mirrors would catch the reflection of the viewers creating a tense moment as viewers became aware that they were part of the content of the work. The reflection in the mirror allows the viewer to get a sense that they are observers in an operation. The reflection creates the sensation that the organs are on the table, within the body and not therefore just suspended in the air. The fact remains that when the observer moves in close to get a better view of the diseased organs, their own reflection blocks out what is taking place. My intention here is to have my viewers reflect on their own experiences with disease and therefore making disease a more acceptable and universal subject. Through the capturing of my viewers reflection, I am also insinuating that it is impossible to not be touched by disease within society.

The experience of watching people interact with my work is always a learning experience. I have learned that some individuals feel uncomfortable when I try to impose my subject matter upon them, and therefore would rather not comment or not take part in actively engaging with the work. Another reality is that there will always be some individuals hanging around the displayed work but discussing other things. I believe that this is part of the reception of art that artists deal with all the time. The viewer's response, whether passive or active, demonstrates that disease is a reality in our environment. Viewer interaction with my work enforces the notion of the need for sensitization to disease, which is an ongoing theme in my art practice.



Diabetic Stories (part 1)



Diabetic Stories (part 2)

“Diabetic Stories”
Performance, 1998

Self-Learning

My art production corresponds to an ongoing investigation that has evolved from the concept of the *“Body as Landscape.”* Whereas my past work has been involved with exploring the various ways in which the body has contributed to the shaping of my perception of our landscape, my art performance concentrates on exploring the ways in which the landscape (environment) defines the presence of the body (disease). For instance, can disease afflict the body without altering the physicality of the landscape? And/or, can disease exist in our environment detached from the physicality of the body?

The exchange and communication I share with my environment was manifested into an art performance. The performance involved monologues, which were created from different situations, which have evolved out of my experience as a diabetic. The monologues were reinforced with visual, physical performances of my routine as a diabetic. In Part 1, I carried out my usual treatment by taking a blood test and then giving myself an insulin injection. In Part 2, I ate an apple, as required by my diabetes. These are rituals that have often been done in front of other people, but never in a truly conscience performance manner. The monologue in Part 1, reinforced the idea of personal ritual by demonstrating how my diabetic routine exists on the same level as, for example, getting dressed in the morning. My monologue in Part 2 was developed from the many questions, expressed by people within my environment. It demonstrates how eating an apple is a significant and essential part of the treatment of my diabetic condition. Each part of the performance illustrates within itself contrasting visual and oral realities. However, the contrasts between Part 1 and Part 2, depict the reality of the diabetic condition.

By executing acts, which are essential to my own livelihood, I created complex dialogues between fiction and reality. I believe it is this type of notion that allows me to justify my performance as art and not just as theatre or a simple demonstration of a routine treatment. The idea of ritual, embedded within my performance, is less about the actual treatment and more significantly related to the monologues which place the treatments in new contexts. My pursuit of a new language is supported in this performance by the combination of the visual gestures and the oral monologues, which occur simultaneously. Although the treatment of my diabetes is a normal part of my existence, the gestures of the treatment seem theatrical when accompanied by the monologues. The gestures become a lot more apparent. There are parts throughout the performance where a gesture continues without the accompaniment of words. How does this colour the gesture that is going on at that moment? Is the viewer response different at that point? What happens when the treatment is over and my monologues continue? Do the monologues continue to exist at the same intensity when not accompanied by the visual aspect of the diabetic treatment? This performance emphasized the idea of language by creating a vocabulary common to both the visual and oral elements.

There is not one way to speak about and formally discuss disease that would be comprehensible to all individuals. The discourse surrounding medicine, treatments and disease is not accessible to everyone. I believe that much of the medical information and discourse excludes the emotional realm that informs disease. Who cares about scientific reasoning when a nine-year-old diabetic child cries because she is not allowed to have ice cream? I have found that while some medical information helps clarify the diabetic condition, it more often gets people confused about the disease and/or intimidates people from wanting to learn about it. In Part 1 of the performance, I have decided to comment on this medical discourse through a purely visual demonstration of a medical treatment. By doing so, I offer medical information about diabetes in a more accessible

fashion. The monologues in my performance questioned these types of issues. The style of the monologue, seen in Part 2, interlaces different stories from the medical and emotional, which have defined my experiences. By doing so, I am disrupting the rationality of thoughts and challenging the credibility often associated with medical discourse. The combination of these two different discourses initiates a discussion, which I believe to be more comprehensible and educational.

The performance defies the conventional modes of a stage, set design and props. My performance can take place in any given environment with no special interventions needed, except for my medical supplies and food, (which I almost always have with me). I believe that every individual assumes a presence within society and consequently engages in defining the social landscape. My definition of landscape incorporates nature, architecture, humankind and evidently the characteristics attributed to each of these components. My diabetes assumes a major part of my existence and has altered the way I am perceived within society and consequently the way I interact within society. My diabetes controls what I do and how I schedule my life. People have many misconceptions of what diabetes is. For example, many people have told me that they thought diabetes was a result of eating too much sugar. Also, many people believe that diabetes is a fatal disease. I openly discuss my diabetes in order to educate people about the disease.

Self-Healing

My diabetes over the last 16 years has defined the way I live my life and has altered the lives of those people who come into contact with me on a more intimate level. Reactions from these individuals have consequently shaped the way I live and I deal with my disease on a daily basis. Over the past 16 years I have developed repetitive ways of dealing and explaining my illness. This has lead me to objectify diabetes and to explore the disease in a variety of ways; medically, spiritually and emotionally.

My involvement with this disease has become extremely ritualized, in doing my daily treatments. The repetitive explanations of my treatment and the conditions of diabetes seem to be a ritual, which enforces the reality of the diseases existence. There are occasions where the response of people in my environment to my illness makes me feel ashamed, self conscious, and/or at times rebellious. In contrast, my artwork allows me to disrupt, shock, and/or educate my environment through my illness.

Collaborative Learning

I was extremely fortunate to receive a lot of feedback from my classmates after this performance. Furthermore, as requested by the professor of this course, my classmates give me a written reflection on the performance, as did the professor. What I learned from reading the commentaries was that these reflections were a lot more in depth than the comments that I have received verbally immediately after my presentation. The learning process evolves with time and I was able to detect that in the written comments that I received. It is for this reason that I choose to share some of these touching comments that I received in order to demonstrate the educational exchange that takes place between the artist, the art, and the viewer. These quotes emphasize my idea about the cyclical nature of internalized learning. It also illustrates the notion of the external learning experience: the experience that I have defined as lingering in the minds of my viewers after the end of the performance and discussion of my work. The identity of those, whose comments are presented here, will remain confidential.

“It was really weird watching you video tape yourself as part of a presentation as opposed to showing us the final version. I’ve never experienced anything like it. We were all, in a sense part of your performance without knowing our ‘script’. It had a mysterious edge. I feel that the sharing of your personal life has a lot of potential to

help others who have trouble coping or just to inform the lay person as to how you are able to cope with your daily routine. Nobody said that art couldn't teach."

"The contrast between public and private (Part 1 and Part 2) also worked in creating a sort of dialogue about the trials faced in an individual's life, in a private way that shapes that particular individual's life, and the idea of educating about the disease....Getting people to make art about their illnesses could work wonders for the peace of mind of a person who is ill and ultimately serves in educating and sensitizing the public about the given disease or illness."

"I realize that part of the healing of wounds might involve some surgery. And right now, this 'in your face' approach is probably pretty effective in terms of educating people with the added bonus of exorcising our (different) demons."

"My sister, the psychologist, says the more a person talks about a trauma (which I think you consider adjusting to diabetes) the more it helps deal with it. I think doing art on it would have the same function....Also, my favourite aunt died a couple of years ago (way before 'her time'). She was diabetic and could (would) not give up smoking. So I was thinking of her and her struggles to maintain herself and how difficult such restrictions are (physically, psychologically and socially)."

CHAPTER 4

A Post-Modern Art Practice

The body of work that I have reexamined in the previous chapter for my thesis research has evolved from a post-modern way of seeing and thinking about art. It was produced during the last four years as part of my graduate studies. Simultaneously with developing a concise and articulate body of artwork, my involvement and interests in articulating a personal philosophy for my role as an art educator began to emerge. In actively trying to define my role as a contemporary art educator, I immersed myself into post-modern literature. Postmodernism provided me with an opportunity to develop a personal philosophy and understanding of contemporary educational theory. This exploration soon began to challenge my notions in respect to my role as an artist and as an educator. This influenced the purpose and the way I chose to make my art. Postmodernism reflects an attitude and thinking that similarly describes my art practice. Reevaluating my work from an educational context has allowed me to examine the many characteristics that are shared between my art practice and my educational practice. Many of the key concepts, issues, and characteristics which define my art practice parallel characteristics that have defined post-modern education and post-modern art. Having acknowledged the similarities of both areas of my practice --art and education-- I was able to make these areas of interest converge in order to create art that implied educational opportunities.

In the upcoming text, I will first define postmodernism and, secondly, I will discuss post-modern attributes that I feel resemble some of the major concerns and concepts being dealt with in my artistic practice. To better reflect on the

shared commonalities that I have found between postmodernism and my art practice, I will intertwine text that I have selected from both of these areas. To make this style of writing more legible, I will italicize the text that I have selected from my writing on my art.

Definition of postmodernism

A skeptic might say that what is being called postmodernism is a cluster of varied and unstable tendencies and conditions that are too unstable to be called a paradigm. A postmodernist would say that this state of flux is not something transitional- it is exactly the point. Postmodernism's stance of being oppositional, being radically unsettling, and making problematic captures of a kind of truth, albeit a paradoxal truth which denies claims to certainty and totality. (Pearse, 1992, p. 249)

Post-modernity exists as a spiritual state gaining its energy from constructive criticism. Post-modern thinkers are presently on a quest of openness, flexibility and constant transition bringing new significance to the concept of interpretation. Their objective, questionably problematic in nature, is to construct while simultaneously deconstructing.

Postmodernism is not a system of ideas or of conventional concepts. It is complex in its multidimensional nature and resists being reduced to a specific idea, as to not be limited by these parameters. It is difficult to define postmodernism. "The concept of postmodernism is not widely accepted or even understood today" (Jameson, 1995, p. 111). Postmodernism is not only a way of thinking or theorising, but a concern that has been gaining momentum in different areas of study such as, architecture, art and literature. Its meaning is continually displaced in relation to its context and to its subjective interpreters. Authors who have accepted the challenge of defining postmodernism have advised us that they do not have the intention to

construct a discourse developing concepts, which would in turn impose obstacles slowing down the evolution of post-modern thinking.

Postmodernism is not necessarily a continuity of modernity. Linker (1985) suggests, "Postmodernism is not a style succeeding the dissolution of Modernism, but rather a cultural condition resulting from the erosion of Modern period ideals..." (cited in Clark 1996, p. 7). For some thinkers, it is more of a rupture with modernism and, for others, postmodernism is the continuity of modern characteristics. It is impossible to precisely determine the links between postmodernism and modernism, but it is obvious that postmodernism defines itself in relationship to modernism. In reflection to the literature on post-modern thought, it is quite evident that modernist principles exist and continue to evolve as a result of post-modern influence and pretence. Modernist ideology is still the underlining component in most post-modern literature.

Post-modern/Art Commonalities

This new post-modern way of thinking and working poses a big challenge in response to the structure of language, a tool for transmitting thought which requires precise definitions of words in order to construct universal understanding. "The central message of post-modern philosophers (especially Foucault, Derrida, Lacan) is the denial of the very idea of "origin." In their work, language consists of an open-ended play of "signifiers" [,] and "meaning" is deconstructed into an endless play of linguistic signs, each one of which relates to the other in a parodic circle" (cited in Pearse, 1992, p. 248). The foundations of language, both symbolic and formal, are embedded in the constructs of its laws and a structure of rules. Language, a communication system of meaning which, provides for an exploration of discourse and of multiple interpretations in literature, functions as a paradox. One of the characteristics of postmodernism is to accept paradoxes and contradictions on equal fronts. "A paradox of postmodernism –and

perhaps its primary virtue— is that its ambivalence is deliberate” (Fehr, 1994, p. 209).
Nothing can be independent or homogeneous.

My art has come to exist as a method of articulating thoughts, sometimes complicated and often interlaced streams of thought that cannot be rationally positioned. Conceptual art allows me to place different thoughts, issues, emotions, mediums, symbols, text, etc... at equal levels. I believe that the oral and written construct of language sets up a hierarchical system, in which our understanding of things has a specific order of importance. I investigate the ways in which visual language can deconstruct this hierarchy and allow the viewer to engage into the different levels of the artwork in no defined order. Also, I am interested in the contrast between the languages of visual art opposed to the traditional textual language. The undefined/informal structure of “post-modern art” allows me the space to voice an issue without prioritizing any given point, which is evident and unavoidable in the constructs of written and oral language.

I have been investigating different means of articulation. By exploring a variety of mediums composed of traditional and many non-traditional modes, I have attempted to build a vocabulary, which functions beyond our initial understanding of visual language. This investigation and creation of my own vocabulary has shaped the way I view and continue to create art today. My own vocabulary stimulated by the use of symbols has provided me with a voice that has empowered my thinking. This voice, emphasized by the use of repetition seen throughout my work, has offered me the space to articulate concerns in response to an active dialogue between my viewers, the art, and myself. The social criticism and commentary of my viewers allows my art and the learning equated through the art experience to continuously develop.

By exercising my voice as an individual, I have become aware of the powers that the voice can possess. I have simultaneously become aware of the significance that my

voice and therefore my body have in given environments. For this reason the physical presence of my body, often representational of the body/bodies, has become a dominant part of my work. The metaphor of "Body as Landscape" has become extremely loaded in its significance and is viewed in a variety of forms throughout my work. The physical presence of my own body has begun to appear in my work over the last years in the form of performance/installation art.

The difficulty in defining postmodernism can be associated with its desire not to find an end; the last thing a postmodernist would adhere to would be an end in itself. Postmodernism constitutes the idea of a science of the moment. Its final intent or purpose is continually replaced or multiplied in concept. This strategy allows postmodernism to continually accumulate different states and layers of meaning, reinforcing its transcendent nature. Clark (1996) states that "The elasticity of postmodernism, can be traced to its transitory, transcendent, and transitional characteristics..." (p. 2). All postmodern construction is an accumulation of entry and exit points where each point is an open door onto the world.¹ Presently, postmodernism functions as a framework supporting and shaping our way of thinking. This multiplicity of openings obliges us to attempt to discard the fundamental notions cherished in modernism. Post-modernity would propose that a line in drawing be defined as a juxtaposition of points comparable to a construction, where each point covers a specific surface. This post-modern interpretation transforms this bi-dimensional surface (the point) into a whole, where endless possibilities and interpretations can exist. The line lives as a completely defined entity; its definition exudes multiple openings to interpretation. This deconstruction can also apply to the post-modern individual, who is a symbol of the times, defined as a complete being but fragmented by their multiple identities.

¹ This idea stems from Roger Clark's Art Education: Issues in Postmodernist pedagogy. In Chapter 3 entitled "Doors and Mirrors" he quotes Paul Duncan. "Art opens doors; equally, it establishes the door-frame. Art mirrors but only what is selected in the mirror" (p. 65).

The central theme of my work, over the last four years in my graduate studies, has evolved around the notion of the body and its presence in society. I have found myself preoccupied with the ideas of disease/decay/medical theory/emotions that have defined and literally shaped the identity of my existence. The inspiration for the creation of my art corresponds to what is going on presently in my life. New issues within my personal life are added to the already existing issues depicted in my art. My art continuously grows, adding new layers of meaning from work to work.

My production remains tied to the metaphor of “Body as Landscape”. However, I have now begun exploring ways of broadening my personal definitions of both the body and the landscape and questioning their relationship in respect to one another. My interests are directed towards questioning the ways in which the environment affects and manipulates the presence and the physicality of the body. The execution of some of my performance type works, at times extremely subtle and at times quite vulgar, directly confronts this notion. My performance work aims at altering and contaminating given environments. I have consciously challenged individuals to think about disease and respond externally or react internally. Whatever the case, my presence has altered the state of the environment. I believe that this concept very much reflects the characteristics of disease, which have been socially and culturally defined.

My work plays off of the vulnerability of the viewers that engage with my work. Often people are not willing to comment on my work. Often, viewers are made uncomfortable by my work. Due to its personal nature, people do not want to offend me, even though my work is offensive to them. There are so many issues that come fourth from my production. I believe that these issues parallel the emotional implications that are tied to the notion of disease. Having personally experienced moments of shock, despair, sadness, hope, and triumph in relation to coping with disease, I intentionally offer my audience an

entire baggage of information that I unload on them through my art. I use my work as a facilitator to encourage my viewers to engage in dialogue with me that is emotional, intellectual, gestural, and non verbal, in an effort to provide a learning and educational environment for discussion. This type of engagement opens an indefinite type of dialogue between my art and myself, my art and my viewers, myself and my viewers and ultimately motivates an ongoing critical thinking and investment from all the relationships.

The moment we engage in a post-modern approach for observing and describing our environment, the task seems unrealistic and even surrealistic due to a double movement of opening and closing, which are traditionally viewed as oppositions. These movements, comparative to the notion of “zooming in” and “zooming out” can now coexist in an effort to produce meaning. This perpetual renewing of positions, definitions, and the emergence of interpretations has replaced the scientific values which embedded modernity. What seemed, in my research, to be the strength of post-modern thinking is its flexibility in meaning. This desire for flexibility and openness is crucial to the postmodernists’ concerns to avoid adopting a scientific discourse.

My work often evokes the notion of shock in the sense that it often engages the viewers in issues which can be uncomfortable and often not discussed. I attempt to use the notion of shock as a tool to force awareness of social and global concerns in relation to my work. This concept functions as a way of extending our perception of the environment. The notion of shock is very subjective, not measurable in any given manner.

The depth of my artwork could be found in its layering of meaning and in the concepts that it dealt with. My art, reflecting notions and implications of disease within society, began and evolved from a personal investigation on the illnesses of my mother. The body, my mother’s body, and my body represent a variety of concepts in my work.

My exploration of performance, installation and two-dimensional works of art provide me with the space to speak, voice, and scream with no limitations. My art allows me to intimidate, influence, and manipulate. As my artwork invokes these types of sentiments, my work, with its representation of the body in given forms, is doing to others what disease does to the landscape, population and environment. Disease does not exist beyond the realm of our landscape and we are aware of its presence due to the existence of life.

Postmodernism proposes a pluralistic vision of the world. This positioning explores the concept of the loss of “truth” which therefore, enhances the notion of a plurality of “truths”. This refusal of the notions of oneness, homogeneity, and of totalitarianism is replaced by the desire to formulate links, which results in creating multiple meanings. One of the characteristics of these links is the concept that nothing is stable and that everything is mobile and can be undone and redone, by adding, by extracting or by displacing, within infinite possibilities. Pearce (1992) explains, “Truth is replaced by endless parody with imitations reflecting imitations” (p. 249). These infinite possibilities offer the individual a playful dimension in acquiring access to knowledge. The act of integrating knowledge destabilises the notion of a fundamental truth and allows us to contemplate the idea that everything is in a state of construction. The development of the individual is dependent on the flexibility and sophistication of these links that function in creating varied viewpoints, which are all credible.

I project disease so it is no longer mine. I project it over and over again so that I forget what it means. Or rather, I forget what disease negates. For me, disease does not have a true presence. For me, disease functions as a symbol, on many different levels and in many various ways. Disease touches too many people. Disease becomes a metaphor; decay, pain, body, people, growth, hope, life, emotion and nature.

My performance and installation art works often emerge after a series of work has been created in other mediums. These simpler works have at times functioned as sketches in relation to the more finalized products, which have come to materialize into art performance and installation pieces. These sketches also existed as completed works in themselves. However, I believe that my artwork progresses from one piece to the next. I often have difficulty presenting a piece of work separate from the historical and emotional ties to the previous art pieces. This attitude reflects the personal self-learning process that is taking place from one art piece to the next. My art practice is dependent upon a continual cycle of artistic production. The sharing of experiences between my artwork and my audience evolves in accordance with my viewers' previous engagement with my art. In my experience, individuals who have followed my artistic development often have an easier time at responding to the artwork and at furthering and expanding the dialogue with the given piece. This dialogue defines the research, which eventually transforms into the new concepts for the ongoing artwork.

As previously mentioned, the unified modernist individual is now fragmented, his or her identity is no longer stable. The individual has multiple identities. The observer, the object observed, and the context are the elements, which make up the system of creating meaning. All changes in the context or in the observer will consequently modify the identity of the observed object. Postmodernism is a celebration of multiplicity, pluralism, tolerance, and difference. This proliferation of multiple realities and identities favours the acceptance of the individual and openness to other individuals.

My art aims to depict different realities of disease, using emotional, scientific, personal, societal, biological and humanistic perspectives, in relation to the body. My use of the body has become apparent in a variety of forms in my artistic practice. At times the body is visually representational and at times there is only a symbolic refer-

ence to the body. I have explored the concepts of projecting, collaging, embossing, printing, and acting in an attempt to represent notions of disease in an experiential manner. The process of my work has gone through different stages through the years, reflecting my ongoing relationship with diseases that have inflicted family members as well as myself. My art practice portrays issues and thoughts that are simultaneously going on in my life. My art development reflects a personal development through self-learning and self-healing, and my art is also used to stimulate learning from my viewers.

My mother became the subject of my art production. As a result of my research a bond between my mother and I grew rapidly. I was able to detect matrilineal commonalities in shared illnesses between my grandmother, my mother and myself. These similarities became my new interest and the focus of my research. I was sensitive to my mother's illness stories and sentiments. Through our discussions I acquired a sense of what she was living through and how that affected her role as a mother and as a woman. I was intrigued by her stories and I began to manifest the material into my art. At that time, my art took on the role of encouraging me to develop a new type of relationship with my mother. My art began to express sensitivity to my mother's diseases. My artwork was shy and private as it proved difficult for me to produce works of such personal subject matter that were going to be viewed by others.

I've been exploring issues related to the ideas of representing disease separate from its function to the human body. Can a human disease exist independently of the body? How do various methods of body representation alter the concept of the diseased organ and condition? What does it mean when an organ has been divorced in its representation from its function to the whole of the body? I have found that, by excluding the human body from the disease, my interaction with the characteristics, symptoms, and personality of the illness in question becomes clini-

cal and stale. This notion proved essential in regards to my work production when I felt the credibility of my art production was being jeopardized due to my emotional involvement with the work

CHAPTER 5

Post-modern Implications for Art Education

In the previous chapter, I have made a connection between postmodernism and my art production. In this chapter, I will explore the connections between postmodernism and my practice as an art educator.

The place of postmodern art education lies outside reified modernist conventions. As the values that heretofore authenticated art are questioned, so the role of the art educator is redefined....The modern art educator ignored the art world and produced a visually illiterate generation. Today's art educators can learn from this lesson. Postmodern art education must be more than a chronological term. It cannot reject the oppressive notions of the past unless it understands them. (Fehr, 1994, p. 214)

Post-modern concerns are increasingly apparent in art education literature. The majority of art educators dealing with post-modern issues have primarily remained theory based in their research. An ongoing struggle within the field of art education has to do with implementing theory into practice. There has traditionally been a ten-year gap between the emergence of theories and their implementation in art education practice.² Although this may be the case, there have been some attempts by art educators to acknowledge post-modern issues and bring forth these ideas as part of their teaching philosophy. I have chosen to address post-modern issues within my art practice in order to keep my teaching philosophy current and active.

Is post-modernist thought more easily attainable in art education pedagogy than in educational pedagogy? Although post-modern ideas about general education exist, postmodernism seems more acceptable and suitable to the field of art education. The issues being raised by contemporary thinkers can be seen as parallels to the concerns and trends that have been

² Prof. Parker makes reference to this idea on March 3, 1998 in his Critical Analysis course at Concordia University.

specific to art education throughout much of its history. Much of the theory and practice of education parallels modernist concepts. I propose that art education, especially art education in the schools, can prove to be an ideal environment for the implementation of post-modern principles. I believe that my philosophy and definition of art education derives from my investigation of post-modernist thought. I also think that the field of art education is post-modern in itself!

Justifying art education as a discipline in the 60's was critical in order to acknowledge the value of this field and to keep art education as part of the educational curriculum. Art educator, Manual Barkan, "struggled with the problem of finding in art the structural equivalent of the knowledge forms that exist in science. Though he knew that they were not the same, he assumed that something akin to the structure of concepts in science could be found that would serve as the rational underpinning for curriculum in art" (cited in Efland, 1988, p. 263). Today, the threat imposed on the fine arts curriculum remains a constant reality and struggle for art educators. I am not proposing that there is not a purpose or place for art in the schools. I believe that it is the right of all individuals to experience and engage in art. I also, strongly believe that the arts have just as much significance as any other subject does in an effective developmental curriculum. However, the reality is that art education is progressing and expanding both within and beyond the confines of the school.

Community-based art programs have broadened the role and field of art education. Clark (1996), tells us, "Ironically, many students today receive a more valid form of art education outside of school" (p. 65). Community-based art settings welcome many notions equated to post-modern thinking. Although art within the school curriculum has the potential and is well suited to explore and implement post-modern ideals, the problem lies in the structure imposed by the educational institutions. As well, if we are going

to foster a post-modern approach to art education, the most adaptable solution is to turn to community art programs. Community-based settings provide the opportunity for individuals not within the educational system to have access to art education.

The notion of dehierarchization, as implied by a post-modern vision, is a lay construct in the post-modern context. In an art environment, where the process of art making, the art experience, and the dialogues between the artist and viewer take place, the art educator serves as a facilitator for communication. Even the action of critiquing works of art has come to be termed as “constructive criticism,” implying a more open-ended structure where there is space for the deconstruction and the reconstruction of ideas.

The post-modern art environment welcomes and nurtures pluralism as a concept. The idea of “truth” so implicit to scientific discourse contradicts art education principles. Art has no truths, in the same way that there is no, good versus bad art. Even the concept of the artist’s intent is of no crucial concern within a post-modern discourse. Postmodernist thinkers would argue that even the initial meaning of the work of art, conceptualized by the artist is not constant. There is no essential truth. This can become problematic when the art educator in a school setting is required to evaluate his or her students.

Social meaning and multicultural celebration is embedded in the roots of post-modern thinking. With the notion of multiple meanings and interpretations in art comes the notion of multiple viewpoints. Multiple viewpoints imply a heterogeneous outlook. Postmodernists concern themselves with acknowledging and celebrating the existence of the other. “Critical theory related to multiculturalism has contributed considerably to the body of postmodernist literature within art education” (Clark, 1996, p. 46). Art educators, Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, and Wasson advocate the challenge of multiculturalism

be met within the art classroom. They suggest, “It is important that teachers and students begin to choose curriculum content... that is both culturally relevant and has the potential to provoke social and critical inquiry” (cited in Clark, 1995, p. 46).

Art within postmodernism is fragmented by the different interpretations imposed by the viewer. In the same way that the post-modern individual has ideas that are fragmented and identities that are multi-dimensional, now artwork represents multiple layers of meaning. Changes in context and changes in viewers’ responses support the notion of a modification of the identity of art. Art is no longer homogeneous. Art cannot exist independent of its environment.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Postmodernism has effectively provided me with a space to structure my philosophical concerns in regards to art education. Postmodernism as a theoretical framework for my philosophy has offered me the possibility to ground my beliefs and concerns as an art educator. In questioning how I have come to hold certain principles, I was forced to consider the environment that is shaping the content of my knowledge. Living in a post-modern era, I have become aware of how much postmodernism has influenced and defined my way of seeing the world. As a consequence, the post-modern vision is embedded in my philosophy as an individual and therefore, as an art educator and an artist. It is for these reasons that I found it pertinent to research postmodernism and decipher its educational character. This character has had an impact on art education.

My role as art educator once seemed extremely difficult to define. For a long time I was burdened with finding my place within art education. Most literature and course discussions involved the art teacher, art curriculum and the art classroom. Although I have had some experience in the teaching of art, my experience and my interest in this area is minimal. I found myself marginalized in the field of art education. Ironically, the framework that I have constructed in order to define my position in art education remains very much attached to pedagogical issues. Today however, education perhaps more than ever, has surpassed the boundaries once imposed by the school. The post-modern influence has offered me a space within the margins of art education allowing me to understand my role as an artist and my connection to art education.

The post-modern notions of dehierarchization, relative truths, equal levels of knowledge, and multiplicity of meaning has broadened the role of art education within society. Art education is no longer synonymous with school art. Art education's integration into the community has taken many forms. Art education is now an essential part of the activity of museums, galleries and alternative community settings. As a consequence art educators now have more career options. What is an art educator? Is this change in the art educator's role a response to our post-modern era?

In the same way that postmodernists discuss the interconnectedness of various knowledge, art education as a field of study reflects this thinking. When defining the term art education, there is evidence of two poles that need to be equally addressed: a point of giving and a point of receiving. In fact, my understandings of art education have positioned me to say that neither one of these points is a beginning or an end point. The relationship between Art and Education functions as a cycle and is comprised of actors who are artists, researchers and teachers. The receiver consists of the students and viewers. I feel the need to stress the notion that these roles are, without a doubt, interchangeable. The field of art education is dependent upon the exchange of knowledge from these various contributors. The art educator, as researcher, teacher and/or artist, is the facilitator and interpreter within this exchange. Art education, in whatever context, is the result of the integration of these components.

Art education is post-modern in its very essence. It's cyclical nature responds to the cyclical nature inherent in postmodernism. The field of art education has been in transition from its very beginning. Theory and practice have gone through construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. Art education has evolved in this manner and will continue to do so.

Art education has a tradition of representing a myriad of attitudes. This has perhaps been the reason for its instability and the constant scrutiny it receives from practitioners who continue to struggle at defining the field. I am not convinced however, that art education would benefit from having a single specific philosophy. Similarly, art education and postmodernism would not adhere to the idea of having a specific aim or end, which would only impose limitations. Kearney (1988) suggests that, “the post-modern imagination can explore possibilities of another kind of poesis- alternative modes of inventing alternative modes of existence” (p. 33). How can the field of art education not be flexible, open, and reflect Kearney’s insight on the post-modern imagination? To suggest that it is not, would be contradictory to the essence of art and to the evolution of education.

“Proposing a philosophy for art education reflects my own concerns and interests in this area of study. The challenge of defining a philosophy simultaneously defines my role as an art educator and the implications towards my art practice and teaching. Most importantly, the challenge has encouraged me to assess the different variables that have influenced my understanding of my artwork and art education. The future holds a challenge of change, both in my artistic concerns and in the evolution of art education” (Neim, 1998, p. 21).

Artistic Philosophy within Art Education

“Postmodernism demands self-reflexivity and a constant questioning of where one is, where one came from, and where one is going” (Keith, 1995, p. 48).

“How does one define a philosophy for an area of study that symbolizes diversity, creativity, and openness? Would a philosophy impose limitations or would a definition open up possibilities for an exploration on more focused areas? What does defining a personal philosophy mean and what are its implications? What do we do with a philos-

ophy? Where does a philosophy come from? How does our philosophy come into practice? Do we need a philosophy? What is a philosophy?” (Neim, 1998, p.2).

The challenge to define a personal philosophy for art education and more specifically my role as an artist and the purpose of my art production, has become a complicated and passionate endeavour. Questions such as those outlined above have shadowed my every move and every thought in regards, to my personal being, my academic interests, my role as an educator, and consequently, towards my overall ambitions in the area of art education. The quest to define my artistic practice and its purpose within an art educational context has become a challenge in assessing my existence and my belief vis-a-vis life and my passion in respect to art education concerns.

I believe that the magnitude of my exploration is symbolic of the field of art education in itself. If art education were a discipline with one central objective, then perhaps my need to define a personal philosophy for my artistic and educational concerns would not be so complicated. I am not implying that personal definitions stemming from the existing realities that surround the field of art education would not be valuable. On the contrary, I believe that it is the juxtaposition of multiple views and issues that have contributed in making art education so rich. Furthermore, I believe that it is necessary for practitioners in this field, be it in theory and/or practice, to develop a personal definition for art education that enhances their own philosophy of art education. I believe that my ongoing research into both my artistic development and my interests in educational practices demonstrates a personal need to attain a philosophy that I feel comfortable and inspired by.

Could I construct a philosophy independent of everything that has shaped the way I think and of all the experiences that have brought me to this very precise moment?

The answer is an assertive no! Could I state things that would be part of my philosophy without taking into consideration the grounding for my ideas? The answer would again be no. So how do I begin defining my philosophy for art education? Crucial and perhaps more important than my philosophical beliefs, would be a framework that supports my theoretical and practical thinking. In my attempt to articulate a personal philosophy for art education, I have as proposed by Harold Pearce (1983), described and/or formulated, “a theoretical framework that I found useful for sorting out conflicting and highly value-laden approaches to regarding the world and, more specifically, theory and practice in art education” (cited in Pearce, 1992, p. 244).

I have chosen, as a process, to discuss aspects and issues within postmodernist discourse, which mimic personal beliefs in response to my art and educational practices. Although I am not an authority in this area, I have been able to site references in accordance to my values and ideas on life and hence, my art and art teaching objectives. Within my proposed framework, I have attempted to depict issues within post-modern thought that pertain to my theories and practice in regards to my artistic inquiries. In this paper, I have provided links between the characteristics of postmodernism and its implication for my artistic and educational concerns within art education.

Postmodernist thinking has shaped much of my understanding and ideas of what I think art education is, what I think art education can offer, and what my interests within this field are. Any perceived ambivalence in art education’s nature can now be viewed as an enriching quality from the perspective of post-modern thought. Post-modernity is in itself ambivalent and has opened up the path for such thinking and acceptance. The need to define art education originated as the result of modernist concerns. Postmodernists advocating for flexibility and openness support the claim that a universal philosophy of art education would be next to impossible.

“The notion that there exists no universal philosophy for art education has strengthened my idea that philosophies are the product of independent inquiries. I feel confident in further arguing that philosophies are not constant and, therefore, are subject to and perhaps dependent upon change. My personal philosophy of art education is the proposition that art education should have many philosophies as necessary to meet the needs of educators, researchers, artists, students, and the environment. I have come to the understanding that my own philosophy for art education has evolved in response to the acknowledgement that my art possessed educational qualities reflecting my investigation of post-modern educational discourse and my attempt to define my role as an art educator. My philosophy for art education advocates the notion of flexibility and openness. My philosophy supports the claim that art education, in theory and practice, can be defined as a flexible structure. I do maintain however, that the basic principles and personal beliefs that influence personal philosophies need to have a certain enduring quality. The notion of a flexible philosophy is in agreement with postmodernist discourse” (Neim, 1998, p. 4).

In researching postmodernism and its characteristics, my own philosophical concerns related to art education theories and practices have become more credible and viable. My underlining premise that my art encourages three types of learning --self-learning, self-healing and collaborative learning-- has developed from my research on post-modern educational discourse. By continually exploring my artistic practice in light of educational teaching objectives, I am evolving in my role as an art educator. I believe that my art practice is post-modern and that my art facilitates education through a post-modern teaching approach.

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