CROSS CULTURAL COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY ART PRACTICE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EXAMINATION

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Abstract

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by Amirali Alibhai

A thesis is presented that utilizes phenomenological and hermeneutic methodology to explore the notion of cross-cultural collaboration and community art practice. I examine Witness, a substantive cross-cultural collaboration with First Nations, and my own practice as a cultural worker in describing defining elements of successful cross-cultural collaboration. In a final "meta-chapter", Community art practice is characterized as a contemporary cultural phenomenon, located at the forefront of cultural practice.
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I dedicate this thesis to the Squamish Nation and to all my fellow cultural workers, who try to make a difference.
A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION: DESCRIBING MY PRACTICE

I've struggled with the notion and task of completing my Master's thesis; it has been a long process; I didn't know where to begin and I was not absolutely clear on what I was seeking to accomplish. All I have been able to do is think, reflect, and write, using that very act of writing as a means or method to reflect on the experiences I've had, the research I've done, the texts I've encountered, and the essays I've written, to weave together this thesis. This is *bricolage*. I've asked many questions in the last five years; they are all connected; they're essentially the same question. *How, in light of what I've encountered and explored theoretically, particularly phenomenology and hermeneutics, can I enact theory in my practice?*

What is my practice?

Prior to my entry into Graduate studies in Curriculum Studies at U.B.C., I was in-the-world, variously as an interdisciplinary artist, a curator, writer and gallery educator. As I've continued my studies, I've been able to continue this work. It seems strange perhaps, and even a little non-committal, but I see an emerging pattern - connections that make my practice the result of recent shifts
in thinking across disciplines and discourses and the manifestation of a constantly emerging self and an evolving and enacted epistemology and ontology, responding to encountering diverse texts (visual and literary) and collaborative experiences. I've always remained, I think, an artist. The definition of artist, for me, has enlarged itself to include my roles as educator, curator, researcher, and facilitator. Art is life. It also includes my roles as parent and spouse.

I'm not an artist in the modernist, “artist as detached observer”, or “isolated genius”, or somehow “heroic”. But more in the post-modern sense of artist as person, as worker - as someone who lives a life and has a role in society. I have developed what I consider to be a “community art practice”. In this thesis, I hope to define community art practice and some of its principles.

Professionally, my interest in curating and research emerged out of my work as an artist. Working through drawing and on aesthetic and conceptual ideas from an 'other' culture (South Asian), I found myself increasingly put in the daunting position of researcher and pedagogue. As an artist I explored my sense of self, engaging in the Identity Politics discourse developing around artists of colour in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But to deal with the issues of systemic racism and cultural hegemonies, I also found myself in the position of having to create my own research and discourse with others around me with similar
objectives. I had to develop the skills to organize. I began to curate exhibitions dealing with issues of race and difference, spirituality, transformation, empowerment, and cultural hybridity. A group of my friends and I founded the Rungh Cultural Society with the publication of *Rungh Magazine* which continues to be published, but with new leadership and staff.

My connection and interest with First Nations began in 1991 when I first met Cree/Scottish artist, George Littlechild in the course of curating an exhibition, *Kaleidoscope: Fragments of Self*, at the Richmond Art Gallery, Richmond, B.C.. It was through the friendship that developed with George from our initial encounter that my long journey of learning about the history and the perspectives of First Nations history - the version that we don't get in school. I learned of George's own personal story and perspective and found myself wanting to know more. John Powell, George's close friend, also influenced me a great deal through his stories and knowledge of his own Kwagiulth Nation. So a major component of this thesis began when I first met George Littlechild. George is an individual with a particular story to tell and, by no means, able to represent, by himself, the scope of experience of First Nations people in Canada. But it was through this personal connection that my interest and commitment to working with First Nations artists began.
I remember when I was eight years old and attended an American International school in Kampala, Uganda, called Abraham Lincoln School. The school was situated in an old colonial mansion, with large gardens and lawns in front of it. This was where I first remember enacting my identification with native North Americans. Most of my classmates were American or Canadian and I maintained, out of a genuine but mis-guided belief, that I was an "Indian" - the type that fought with cowboys, depicted in the countless Western films I saw as a child at the drive-in with my parents. I recall feeling so proud of this imagined heritage. I still feel exhilarated as I recall my improvised "rain dance" as part of an epic "play" my class enacted for the school faculty on a sultry hot afternoon on the front lawns. I remember a group of teachers pointing to me, praising my "authentic" performance. It was a moment I will never forget - I was infinite - embedded in the here-and-now. I always maintained a romantic identification with Indians until we surprisingly and suddenly found ourselves refugees living in Canada. There were no Indians here - at least I thought that, experienced that, and learned that.

Years later when I told George this story he reacted with laughter and understanding. By that point in my life I had learned that native North Americans existed and I also knew I was not one of them. But I also felt a
kinship through my growing historical knowledge and interest in colonialism - my ancestors were also indigenous to some place - they were also colonized and subjugated to the full brunt of eurocentric racism, with profound results for self-esteem and cultural values. No, my ancestors were not put into residential schools - but mass migrations and transplantation of people did occur - the systematic and sometimes even subtle racism of the British colonizers of both India and East Africa damaged our sense of wholeness and self worth. My great-great grandfather was an indentured railway worker, brought from Gujerat to East Africa in the 19th Century.

We internalized our inferiority and yearned to become like the colonizers - these links in experience, which are historical, connected George and me in quiet ways. But I think our shared experience of being the "fat, brown, ugly kid" in the class, and of course our mutual love of painting - drew us together. To commemorate our links, George presented me with the original painting, *Warriors*, a gesture that returned me to that time when I was a mighty warrior dancing in the sun twenty-seven years ago in Africa.

In Chapter 3, which deals with the history and justification for working with First Nations to develop dialogue and understanding, I describe the
exhibition of Littlechild's work, curated at the Surrey Art Gallery in 1997 - seven years after I first met him.

Our paths have crossed in other ways, besides our ongoing personal relationship, I also had the opportunity to co-curate an exhibition that emerged out of a series of video-conferences that were part of the research of Dr.'s Rita Irwin and Tony Rogers. These video-conferences took place across continents between Australia and Canada, and facilitated dialogue between indigenous artists, researchers and cultural workers, including myself. Rita and George invited me to participate and eventually to co-curate an exhibition, *Four Circles: Soaring Visions*, which opened in Australia in 1998. The title of the exhibition emerged out of conversations between the artists about the importance of the circle and the sky - eagles - to each of them in their work, and cultural perspectives.

At the same time as working on this project and conducting research and course work at U.B.C., I continued working in a public art gallery as a gallery educator, interested in developing critical as well as art making skills with children and adults; in this capacity I increasingly became interested in art criticism as well as the role of museums and galleries in art education taking place in the schools.
My proposals for my Masters thesis followed this somewhat convoluted but connected evolution of questions and ideas. Initially, I wanted to focus specifically on the *œuvre* of Littlechild as a contemporary artist - exploring the notion of collaborating closely with an artist to curate and research an exhibition. This interest and strategy was a result of my research, experience and personal commitment to the projects of post modernism and post colonialism in my work as an artist and curator. It then shifted to explore the notion of collaboration, particularly as I shifted my practice from the context of art galleries to the world of community centres, community art practice and community cultural development. It was in this context where I was developing strategies and ways to work with diverse cultural groups, working with artists from different disciplines that were trying to develop community art practices. My readings included historical texts, first-person accounts by First Nations individuals of their experiences in residential schools, works by Merleau-Ponty (1962), David Abram (1996), Paulo Freire (1985), F. Capra (1996), bell hooks (1990, 1994), and even the *Tao Te Ching* (Wing, 1986).

I was primed and predisposed to seeking projects and partnerships with First Nations communities and to acknowledge their history and perspective in the birth of the new Roundhouse Community Centre. The project in Australia
was also an important experience and was to be a significant part of this thesis. I had proposed, and in fact did conduct interviews for information that would serve as the data from which I would build my thesis about the nature of collaborating across cultures with indigenous artists. I also intended to explore the *Witness* project (described below), also conducting several interviews to this end. I completed all the interviews but felt, in the end, that they were not going to be useful to me in the manner that I had anticipated. My interests and questions began shifting in light of my readings and emerging life-experiences.

I've turned more squarely to autobiography and personal, subjective experience and writing as the methods of my qualitative research. The multiple perspectives that I had hoped to make evident have been voiced variously through the *Witness* project itself.¹ I cannot honestly present them for a reader in textual form. This is something I've learned. In the end, I cannot deny the influence of all these other experiences (including all my work with communities which are not First Nations), especially my work at the Roundhouse with other First Nations groups, including United Native Nations, individual artists such as Shirley Bear, Margot Kane, Kamala Todd, Byron Chief-Moon, Cease Wyss, and

¹ The accompanying video, *A Call to Witness* (2000) accompanies this manuscript as part of Appendix A. I assisted the director/producer, Hali Tsui, with this video, which provides an interesting mix of perspectives.
Theresa Marshall, as well as ad-hoc groups like *Aboriginal Women in the Arts*. All this work informs my writing. I've settled on dealing with *Witness* as a complex project which really brings all this experience to bear and can serve as a "case study" for my thesis. My reflections can help me answer what community art practice is and what collaboration across cultures means.

I feel that the project *Witness* (and other projects as well), which I've had the opportunity to shape and facilitate at the Roundhouse Community Centre, is a manifestation of my readings and research; it is the data and findings for my thesis rolled into one. What I'm interested in laying open for the reader is the connection between theory and practice - not to develop some sort of grounded theory - but to discover the phenomenological underpinnings of successful practice.

*Witness* has been successful as a complex, long-evolving collaborative project with educational, political, and cultural objectives, which are inseparable from one another. This "multipurposeness" is key; it describes, in my mind, what community art practice is all about.

My professional career as an artist/curator, community cultural worker has always made education part of my work and has always led me to situations where the politics of power and control are at play within and outside of the cultural field - I now speak of "culture" not "art" - and this includes almost all...
human activity and for me, even that which we refer to as Nature - normally a separate concept from culture in the western literate mind; I want to deal with the world in total - all that we inhere to. Readings in complexity theory, cognitive science, and phenomenology have profoundly affected my perspective to see everything as connected and the earth as a living entity - we are but witnesses for the Earth.

The artist in me learned very early on to see in a particular way, especially when faced with the challenge of drawing or painting forms that I encountered in my sighted, directly-experienced world. When one draws and is interested in being visually accurate or naturalistic - there is a need to suspend the constant activity of that part of the brain which judges and conceptualizes - the artist must rely on "pre-conceptual sight" to actually draw so that the three-dimensional experienced world can be depicted on a flat surface. I found the aims and "ways of seeing" proposed by phenomenologists such as Van Manen (1990), Merleau-Ponty (1962), Abram (1996), and indirectly Husserl and Heidigger uncannily similar to this act of drawing; that is the search for essence or eidos as well as the goal of trusting pre-conceptual experience above all else - the gestalt of being-in-the-world; this is lived experience as research.
In this thesis I return to that lived experience, which includes my reading and thinking, to explore specifically how that theoretical and conceptual world integrates with lived experience. Theory that is enacted, not only imagined. So I choose to explore the lived experience of being a Community Arts facilitator, relying on interviews, my own notes, and my ongoing conversations with other partners. I hope to answer, through this exploration and writing, the question of the essence of collaborating across cultures, specifically with First Nations. But I also hope to explore my own motives - my own community art practice - spurred on by my ontological and epistemological perspectives.

This study, then, is idiosyncratic and subjective, not meant to be entirely solipsistic, but not at all approaching a positivist research project. Its usefulness to the reader lays precisely in its specificity and qualitativeness. We cannot hope to develop “rules” for collaboration or universal step-by-step instructions. But we can learn a mode-of-being that allows us to work with diverse communities that is respectful and has integrity. We can see how space and time and social context are all factors that make each potential collaboration or partner unique - with its own specific needs, desires, and perspectives. If my call for increased collaborative projects to further the goals and objectives of Education and Art is heard, then educators as well as cultural workers and researchers can benefit from
this work as they respond to their own situations and contexts. I make a basic assumption; I profess that the Arts, broadly conceived, have an important and integral role to play in our contemporary lives.

Having practiced as an artist, curator, and gallery educator, I found it remarkably eye-opening to be introduced to the concepts and ideas of Chaos Theory, Enactivism, and particularly Hermeneutic Phenomenology, during the course of one of my first graduate seminars with Dr.'s Karen Meyer and Brent Davis. The theories they introduced seemed to connect to my own practice - my own being-in-the-world. Since that time I've continued my interest in these practices and approaches to research. My orientation to the cultural work I do has been profoundly affected by the ideas of Varela, Thompson, & Rosch (1993), Abram (1996), Capra (1996), Merleau-Ponty (1962), and Max van Manen (1990). In their writings and ideas, I've recognized a complex, interconnected field in which my own orientation and practice is located.

I feel that I have enacted their theories through the work I've done and continue to do in my role as a cultural worker. I have tried to bring to bear, their ideas and theoretical perspectives in the collaborations I have sought out with others, in my definitions of community, of art, of community art practice, and of community cultural development. I constantly reflect on my practice in the role
of an arts programmer, which (being a "pilot" position with the Vancouver Park Board) I've been allowed to define and characterize as that of cultural facilitator and essentially collaborator with diverse communities.

At the time that I began my work at the Roundhouse in 1997, I was extremely excited about working with a fresh group of accomplished and experienced cultural workers in the context of a new and as-yet-undefined, arts focused community centre. Here was an opportunity to explore what community could mean in the context of an urban contemporary space. It was the chance to be part of emerging communities. It was also an opportunity to develop partnerships and collaborations with various communities, especially First Nations, that were substantive and pedagogic in nature. The 'escape' from the world of "high" art to the ostensibly less rigorous world of community art really stemmed from a desire to move away from a largely formalist and eurocentric tradition into a context that sought to enlarge its own perspective of what was cultural and what wasn't. My own personal evolution has echoed changes and evolution in the Art world and across other disciplines. This work I put before myself could be achieved primarily through the crossing of boundaries between disciplines within the arts and from diverse cultural traditions, as well as between
traditional notions of recreation (sports, fitness) and the arts. So an experiment began where art people were thrown together with recreation people.

Only through constant dialogue and conversations, which sometimes seems almost pointless, have we begun to understand one another. We are able to listen to one another because of the familiarity that we have developed; our personal connections. It is through these ongoing conversations (sometimes formal, but mostly anecdotal and dependant on our serendipitous meetings in the hallways, photocopy room, or at the fax machine), that we are able to develop and work with "new" and emerging definitions of key ideas and concepts such as "community", "collaboration", and "community art practice", words which, because of their flippant and ubiquitous use in current discourses across disciplines, lose their lived meaning for us unless we continuously define, redefine and enact them. The joy of working at the Roundhouse is that these conversations, at least for me, take place with everyone who works at the community centre, including partnering artists, cultural groups, building supervisors, clerks, cashiers, youth workers, gym supervisors, and administrators.

The Roundhouse Community Centre is unique; it is a community centre that is focused on the arts, not just traditional physical recreation that the notion of a community centre conjures up for many people. It has a purpose-
A. Alibhai: Cross cultural collaboration and community art practice: An autobiographical examination

built performance centre (theatre), exhibition space/facilities, as well as dance, arts and music studios. It is also a centre built and operated prior to established communities in its immediate geographical area. It inhabits a spectacularly re-developed roundhouse, built by the CPR in 1886/87, an historical site within a larger development of luxury apartments and condominiums of unprecedented density for Vancouver. Needless to say the centre has, and is experiencing many birthing and growing pains; so have I.

The position, Community Arts Programmer, was created specifically for the opening of this centre, on May 1st, 1997. Both “Community Arts Programmer” positions are currently filled by individuals with considerable experience and knowledge about the visual arts. Elizabeth Kidd is a well respected curator with over twenty years of experience across this country. I have worked as an artist, curator, gallery educator, and now Community Arts Programmer. We're able to shape and imagine what this position, in the context of a community centre might be, particularly in the absence of a previous model to follow. In many ways this thesis is an attempt to describe an emerging practice.

I draw from my experiences in other capacities, but here I have the opportunity to integrate my interests and skills; in the past three years I have
worked with staff and Board to develop a vision and mission for this nascent community centre. Thus far I can report a simple mission statement, which is "to celebrate diversity of people, ideas, values, and activities" (Roundhouse Community Centre, Winter 1998, Brochure for Classes). There is also an ongoing commitment to being a site of connection - a nexus of people, ideas, values and activities, especially across cultural difference. This emphasis on collaboration drives my work as an arts programmer at the Roundhouse. It binds my various roles as educator, artist, and curator into one bundle as I become a facilitator. You can see now why the process of collaboration is so important to me, and is the focus of my current research and interest.

A most influential work, *The Tao of Power* (Wing, 1986), was a nightly read for me when I began work at the Roundhouse. It affected my relationship to community, to collaboration, and most importantly, to the actual lived space of the institution where I worked. I began to look to the natural context of the Roundhouse, the Creek that once was thick with sturgeon and salmon, the birds that nested here, the elk that fed along the shores of the "creek", the numerous streams that beckoned to the salmon as they returned from their adventures at sea, the people that lived, hunted and fished there. I turned to the concepts derived from the "ecological thinking" contained in the Tao - the call to remain

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low "as a valley", to take the time to listen and look - discerning the emerging patterns, to ignore one's ego, recognizing our interconnectedness, conceiving of an organization, including a community centre, as a natural ecosystem. What has resulted is a practice developed around the skills of listening and observing.

This thesis is not laid out in a conventional manner. You won't find a neat little section that is "the analysis" or "the data". These areas are sprinkled throughout the text - like everyday experience.
Chapter II

DEFINING COLLABORATION THROUGH PRACTICE AND CASE STUDY: RESEARCH AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

2.1 Orientation

I must emphasize that one of my professional and personal priorities regarding the projects I'm interested in and wish to participate in is working with First Nations and other “subaltern subjectivities” (Bhabha, 1994). Through my personal relationships with First Nations individuals and through my reading and research, I have come to learn of a history and perspective of this land that our settler culture is largely in denial of, particularly in B.C. The collaborative project that I have chosen to study for this thesis is with individuals from the Squamish Nation, as well as environmentalists, artists, and the general public. In the desire to work cross-culturally, educators, curators, programmers, and community-based artists, I believe, should seek first to address local and indigenous cultures/histories and community needs.

The Roundhouse, for instance, sits on traditional Squamish land, and yet most people are unaware of this history. The Witness project has, among other things, been an attempt to address this lack of knowledge, particularly those
people from diverse cultures that are forming a culturally complex
neighbourhood around this community centre.

The Roundhouse is a community centre that is unique, but it joins other
public venues, like galleries and museums, as sites for informal education, and
even critical pedagogy. In that respect it has a role to fill that overlaps with the
mandates of galleries and museums, even schools. I bring this bias to my own
role in this project. In the context of a community centre there are opportunities
to actually blur the boundaries between art and craft, between professional and
non-professional, between audience and performer, children's and adult's art,
traditional and contemporary. This freedom allows me to be a facilitator,
developing projects that are flexible enough to be sensitive to many different
cultural perspectives. This is a task that curators/programmers in more
established arts-only institutions have been talking about, but not necessarily been
able to accomplish within the confines of their own disciplinary territories and
traditions and bureaucracies. Being part of an experiment, such as the
Roundhouse, allows my colleagues and I to remove (or re-create) many of the
obstacles, in the form of policies and bureaucracy, faced in more traditional
milieux.
2.2 Intent of Research

Through this research I hope to develop insights and principles for educational/cultural partnerships through the process of collaboration. I'm interested in developing guiding principles for collaboration, based on the lived experience of facilitating community art practice in a community centre. One project, *Witness*, which involves working across cultures with the Squamish Nation and other communities, including artists and environmentalists, has been "successful" in this regard. Telling the story of this collaboration and my recent practice as an "arts programmer" will significantly add to the literature and help those in different disciplines to effectively develop meaningful partnerships. I have created an autobiographical/narrative "case study" in order to document and analyze cross-cultural collaboration. Through my theoretical research, I have developed a set of criteria, which I use to analyze the *Witness* project. I believe that these "principles of collaboration" may be useful in different situations as a means to develop cultural collaborations and empower communities.

This research is useful to professionals from diverse disciplines, particularly art educators, curators, community-based artists, art programmers, and arts administrators. Several different disciplines have come to see collaboration as a means by which to meet objectives and goals in practice.
These include artists, educators, community workers, and the cultural institutions, which represent them.

2.3 Review of Literature

The literature sources for this research are varied and cross disciplines; for the most part, appropriate references are cited throughout this thesis rather than being isolated. Museum journals, Education journals, and Art journals were some materials I've explored, but sources as varied as the *Tao* (Wing, 1986) to Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's *The Embodied Mind* (1993) have influenced and informed this research. As I negotiate an emerging identity as a cultural worker, currently situated within a community centre context, I draw on my experience and knowledge of issues important in other disciplines.

I began my literature search in this area of interest in cultural collaboration (five years ago) through reading an article by Blandy and Congdon, *A Theoretical Structure for Educational Partnerships and Curatorial Practices* (1993). This article discusses a specific curatorial project undertaken by the authors that is based on the idea of partnership with the community. The resulting exhibition *Boats, Bait, and Fishing Paraphernalia: A Local Folk Aesthetic*, serves as their model. Blandy and Congdon advocate a methodology to be used by curators, which
"facilitates a democracy of expression and a new kind of critical inquiry" (p.61). Their approach seems quite post modern to me, fitting into my own ontological and epistemological perspective, in that their methodology inherently questions the notion of there being "experts" in any given field, blurring the boundaries between the roles that various professionals and non-professionals traditionally play in the curatorial processes of galleries and museums, and for me now, community centres. Their take on "critical inquiry" emphasizes a deeply reflective approach that seeks to continuously question established ways of thinking and doing things.

Expanding my own ontological and epistemological stance, I would have to agree with these authors. I cannot accept that an objective and "frozen" reality or truth exists. My readings, including Merleau-Ponty's, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) and David Abram's, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) have certainly shaken me of any faith in "objectivity". If unity and absolute truth exist then they do so in a realm that cannot be described solely through texts, language, or even art. But in our mortal and material world, we rely on texts, language, and art in order to communicate, to make sense of our world, and get things done. But whose texts, language and art are we going to engage with? Can we really claim
knowledge without understanding several different perspectives of any given issue?

I don't think so. *Witness* exemplifies this honouring of multiple perspectives through the Coast Salish ceremony of witnessing itself. In my curatorial/arts programmer practice the high priority I place on multi-voiced texts is evident, and most of the time I'm interested in presenting those perspectives and voices that have been systematically silenced through cultural, sexual, racial, ethnic, and class-based hegemonies (Alibhai, 1996). As someone who is South Asian, and definitely identified as "other" in several contexts of my social and professional life, I speak from personal experience. Like Blandy and Congdon, I question authority and established ways of doing things. This questioning is a means to ameliorate circumstances in the real world.

Blandy and Congdon's sentiments, as well as mine, are shared by many other researchers and professionals from various fields. These sources include Harper (1993), hooks (1994), Hurtig (1995), Paley (1995) and Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Wasson (1992). My own experience has borne this out, as curatorial practice becomes more socially responsive and responsible, seeking to present multi-voiced texts/exhibitions and to present a plurality of perspectives. Contemporary curatorial practice, more and more, involves collaboration with
those outside of our field such as artists, teachers, gallery educators, programmers, and community groups (Blandy & Congdon, 1993; Hurtig, 1995; Lewis, 1994; Nason & Wright, 1994; Philips, 1995). It is great to see that educational research has also experienced a shift, and that post-modernism, feminism, cultural theory and the like have been interpreted and assimilated into the field and its methodologies. Current notions of the role of galleries and museums have been profoundly affected by recent paradigm shifts, which have occurred across several disciplines (Hurtig, 1995; Paley, 1995; Pearse, 1983, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

Central to this important shift are several related recognitions that have been theorized across a complex cultural, pedagogical, and epistemological field. These recognitions include the acknowledgment that the inclusion of multiple voices affirming the multiple realities and experiences of individuals is fundamental to the construction of meaning and to the process of representation (Paley, 1995, p. 10).

Paley (1995) continues to clarify his position by criticizing "conventional analytic perspectives" which result in simple and misleading understandings of human experience. No one person can assume the responsibility for "knowing it all". As Paley so clearly puts it, "...no one particular vocality can assure itself an absolutely authoritative status to the exclusion of others" (p. 10).
With this assumption about the nature of knowledge, new, ecological and complex ways of thinking are slowly replacing positivist and rigid notions about the sanctity and distinctiveness of various disciplines and institutions (Abram, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Mitchell, 1992; Pearse, 1992). These "new" modes of thinking may lead to authentic collaborations between and within diverse communities and social institutions, as traditional boundaries and relationships are discarded or modified. These "new" modes of thinking may lead to authentic collaborations between and within diverse communities and social institutions, as traditional boundaries and relationships are discarded or modified. There has been much discussion in the museum/gallery world, which focuses on the roles and possible collaborations between curators and educators in museum and gallery settings (Lamarche, 1989; Stephen, 1989). Part of this shift in thinking has had to do with the continued and evolving definitions of the roles that the museum and gallery (and perhaps

2 I question some of the innovation claimed by current trends in post modernism, post colonialism, and cognitive science. From my own readings, theories of complexity, multiple ways of knowing, ecological orientations to the world, definitions of self as being-in-the-world have been ideas present in many ancient philosophies such as Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism and many oral and indigenous cultures. The innovativeness of these ideas in western discourse is only so from an ethnocentric perspective.

3 I assume that an arts focused-community centre has much in common with museums, galleries and civic theatres.
now, even community centres) play in our society (Harper, 1993; Hurtig, 1995, Soren, 1993). There have been profound changes in the goals and objectives of these institutions in recent years, with increased attention focused on outreach, education, and public responsibility (Cheff, 1989; Harper 1993). The Roundhouse, for instance is the only community centre in Vancouver with a paid position for a communications and outreach coordinator, and the communications and outreach committee is a significant subcommittee of its Board.

Blandy and Congdon's example focuses on curatorial practice and the possibilities for partnerships and collaborations within this type of activity. I feel that they have distilled from their experience, useful set ideas that maybe applied to a variety of situations, and are valuable starting points from which to begin building. For me, however, their research seems a little incomplete; they do not directly address the idea of collaboration in cases where cultural differences are vast and where the common ground is thin and probably infertile. A more challenging notion is that of working with difference, where language and meanings for the lived world are not necessarily common denominators - what happens then? Witness provided this challenge as the project tried to bring in participants and partners from not only the environmentalists, but also the
Squamish Nation, logging community, forest companies, government and the general public. Collaboration in this case meant opening and sustaining multiple conversations between all these partners, including a ritualized and culturally performed way of facilitating speaking through the traditional Coast Salish witness ceremony. This was our solution in the case of *Witness* and its value to you doesn't necessarily lay in the idiosyncratic form of the witness ceremony, but in its essence.

2.4 Defining Community

To define community I return to Blandy and Congdon (1993), who suggest a definition that is dynamic and changing and is similar to my own evolving conception. They define a "properly functioning" (p. 61) community as one that recognizes individual and group strengths, weaknesses and talents. There should be a sense of shared responsibility and a common sense of history and conception of the future. Finally, there should be the ability to "enjoy a capacity for mutual celebration" (p. 61). The authors offer other contributing factors important to the formation and maintenance of community, including language, belief systems, and homes. To this list I would add rituals, values,
families and sexuality. It is through association with communities that individuals define who they are and what/who they desire and need.

In my three years at the Roundhouse, community - defining and working with it – has been a preoccupation of my colleagues and myself. Is community defined by geography (neighbourhoods)? Interests? Religion? Sexuality? Nationality? Class? Politics? In three years of work pondering these notions I feel confident in stating that it is all of these, and the challenge at the Roundhouse is to transcend the largely neighbourhood notions of community which the Vancouver Park Board model is based on, without eradicating our identity as a community centre located in an emerging urban "community". I use parentheses around the word community in this context because I know through experience that communities are not formed by virtue of close living arrangements. I've lived next to strangers most of my life in the city. I've not partied directly with them, nor have I cause to celebrate anything with them. I don't think my situation is unusual for most people living in urban areas. So what makes community cannot and should not be limited to the notion that community can only be formed through locating points of commonality. Pluralism - the condition of the 21st century - will require us to recognize, face (without fear), understand, accept, and value difference. Can community be invoked amongst
those with real differences? Can people who ostensibly belong to a diversity of communities be brought together through cultural activity? Are there ways of "asserting and celebrating difference?" (Hawkin, 1993, p. 15). As a community cultural development project, Witness was conceived with this objective in mind.

Community must be enacted.

Geographic meanings of community as suburb, locality or region jostled with qualitative meanings of community as a particular set of social relations or expressions of diversity. Problems of distance were too easily confused with problems of difference (Hawkins, 1993, p. 15).

If one accepts the above definition of community, then it should become apparent that schools, public galleries, and community centres are distinct communities. By the same definition, however, and through their broader connections and shared functions, schools, art galleries, and community arts organizations also form a community (Blandy & Congdon, 1993; Burke, 1988; Soren, 1993). But this community exists only when the distinct communities, which comprise it, are engaged with one another in relationship.

Since the contemporary artist (and art) is made publicly visible through art galleries and other public arts organizations, the artist may also be added to this loosely defined community. Together they form a powerful resource base
for art education (and community cultural development) in our society (Carter, 1995; Dobbs, 1986; Hughes, 1986; Hurtig, 1995).

Add to this the multiple cultural perspectives embodied by these communities and the table is set for substantive partnerships across cultures to learn, as it were, from within those communities, about their own ontological and epistemological orientation to cultural production or cultural performance (Irwin, Rogers & Wan; 1998). Cultural performance is an extremely useful way to think of the enactment or embodiment of culture or community. Irwin, Rogers, and Wan invoke the notion of cultural performance to more accurately describe and "translate" the concept of art, in western terms, to aboriginal communities in North America, Taiwan, and Australia.

In their research they have found that "art" is an idea or word not found in many (if not all) indigenous societies - at least not as the separated-from-everyday-life fine art object/performance concept of art that has flourished in western thought. Art (community art) as cultural performance allows us to take up the post modern, and post colonial challenge to formalism and to acknowledge as integral to its meaning and significance, the environmental and social contexts in which art is made and the degree of participation of the community (makers and viewers).
I feel this concept is not only useful for working with indigenous and oral non-european cultures but for looking at western art itself; we must understand that the specialization of art in our society leads to a false sense of its autonomy and even authority - it is a construct of our culture itself and cannot be removed from its context and social role. Cultural performance is a synonym for community.

Beginning with Blandy and Congdon, against the backdrop of recent research and professional experience, I've provided a perspective on community that seeks to be inclusive of the many ways in which this term in invoked and manifested in my lived experience as a community arts programmer. I would like to also share this quote from *Nimbin to Mardi Gras* (Hawkins, 1993, p. 20) with you:

Community is not something to be magically recovered but a goal to be struggled for. It is not something to be manufactured by outside professionals, but emerges out of collaboration and shared commitment and expression. Cultural work is an effective tool in the formation of community, it is a tool for activism. This definition does not see community in purely regional or geographic terms, it allows for the idea of communities of interest. It is also dynamic and accounts for the possibility of cultural practice being one of the processes whereby alliances form and cohere (p. 20 - my emphasis).
This speaks of community as an action - a process, and not an objectively fixed entity. It allows us to define cultural performance as a process whose objective is to enact community. Cultural activity is posited here as activism or enaction. The question, then, of (community) art's (cultural production/performance) role in the creation of communities - essentially what I see as the goal of "community cultural development", is moot.

2.5 Art and Community

Blandy and Congdon (1993) emphasize the idea of utilizing partnership processes. According to their perspective, they see these processes as "utilizing the space between the state and private existence" (p. 63). This space "include(s) neighbourhoods, public schools, and other cultural institutions receiving support from national (federal), state (provincial), and local governments"(p. 63). Community Centres, a relatively recent arrival on the scene, as well as "community art" are significant sites in this "space between"; they are important spaces for collaboration and education. This collaboration ideally results in community, particularly if community is characterized as a process - an ecosystem of connections, interdependencies and relationships. This has certainly been my experience with a project like Witness, which has organically developed and
emerged over a period of five years before becoming a substantial project, creating a community around itself as it has evolved. Projects like *Witness* take a long time to develop; many connections must become established and reinforced first.

The community art movement in the industrialized world gained its momentum and major development in the late 1960s and through the 1970s. Chapter 5 expands some more on this development. This movement, that was at its heart, anti-elitist and seeking a democratic society of empowered individuals, has a great deal to teach us about the notion of collaboration and indeed that of "community" itself. This movement was also anti-nationalistic as it attempted to focus on local and sustainable notions of culture and art. Instead of seeking to construct little ghettos of constructed differences (a top-down process) this movement aimed to facilitate the self-construction of diverse groups. The focus has changed and teetered between the desire to empower communities that are disadvantaged and communities of cultural difference - while these communities have been often one-and-the-same, the community art movement, or community cultural development, has tended to keep these notions separate; it is time to stop splitting hairs and to deal with pluralism in all its richness of manifestations (Hawkins, 1993).
The different (but overlapping) aims, values, and constituencies of community art and "high" art have created a distinct host of non-aesthetic criteria for success. Aesthetic standards or formal comparisons lose their "high" art value as criteria for success in the world of community cultural development; the criteria of participation, process, public involvement, amelioration of social conditions or relationships, and community need become elevated. In short, "how effective community arts projects were in expressing 'community'." (Hawkins, 1993, p. 24) It has been suggested that this lack of aesthetic values in the field of community art is a result of a "fear of art"; this fear has left a potentized space, out of which can emerge a discourse which aims to clearly articulate other "languages of critical evaluation in which the aesthetic was
situated in its (culturally diverse) social conditions of production and reception” (Hawkins, 1993, p. 163; parentheses are mine).  

Projects like *Witness*, with its many aesthetic manifestations provide the opportunity to deal with aesthetics (from “other” perspectives) and to fearlessly explore the question whether aesthetics can become part of the criteria for successful community art. This can be achieved only through working with communities in a manner suggested by Irwin, Rogers and Wan (1998) as cultural translators, that is shifting the notion of teaching art to that of the "pedagogy of cultural performance through the act(s) of cultural translation" (p. 23), which is ultimately about "researching *with* people" (p. 24). Is there not the need at least for this type of art to be aesthetically communicative and comprehensible by the public which creates and experiences it?

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Note:

4 The use of the word ‘aesthetic’ should be considered in this context. I'm supposing that it refers to the formal qualities of culturally defined beauty (i.e. philosophy), usually as expressed in the Fine Arts. Going back to the roots of this word, however, is most enlightening, particularly in light of the science of phenomenology, which is the science of perception.

The root of the word aesthetic, according to *Funk and Wagnalls Canadian College Dictionary* (1989, p. 454) is the Greek word *aisthetikos*, meaning "perceptive", bringing us back to "being-in-the-world" and acknowledging that aesthetics is not solely interested in formal qualities but also in the meaning-making carried out through such qualities, which are always situated in the world of experience (i.e. social, environmental, historical and other contexts).
2.6 Collaboration

It is my own belief that through authentic collaboration, those of us who work as artists, gallery educators, curators, arts programmers and art teachers can work together to meet the challenges of our evolving professions and communities. More recently, my involvement with community development issues and processes at the Roundhouse Community Centre have caused me to explore and reflect on notions of community more deeply.

What is it that I mean by collaboration? Various people have interpreted this issue in different ways (Alibhai, 1995; Bernard, 1989; Carter, 1995; Dicosimo, 1989; Dreezen, 1992; Dobbs, 1986). Although these conceptions differ slightly, they hold a great deal in common, and I believe that their "message" is the same; collaboration is not a frill. It is necessary to improve the quality, the means of sharing information, and the general perception of the work that we all do; we, as teachers, artists, curators, arts programmers and researchers (among others, of course) are being asked to participate socially beyond the boundaries of our disciplines.

Blandy and Congdon (1993), for instance, present a "methodology of partnership" (p. 64) that I've summarized as having four crucial features. These
ideas sound a lot like some of the discussions of Action Research that I've encountered, an approach to research that stresses collaboration (Bresler, 1993; May, 1993; Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993). Their (Blandy & Congdon, 1993) methodology may be presented as follows:

1. Non-hierarchical - the normal professional areas of expertise are not strict. Although there may be coordinators or facilitators involved, no one is seen as the "expert" in the process.

2. Critical Inquiry - the continual questioning of and reflection on the process as it evolves. Clarifying the roles of the participants and their goals and objectives.

3. Communication - the development of a "common language" in order to break down the barriers of jargon and self-serving discourse. Finding commonalities in experience and expression between participants, and with the "public". Coordinating action.

4. Flexibility - the conception of culture that participants hold may differ or be similar. It is important that this conception be dynamic and one which accommodates the perspectives of and participation by all. There must be sensitivity to social issues and acceptance that all participants, including children and 'amateurs', bring their own valid experience to school and to the gallery or any other social situation. This experience is not only valid, but also relevant to the discourse that may arise.

My interpretation of Blandy and Congdon (1993), presented here, may be
expanded upon; it has focused on important, but not nearly all, aspects of the complex phenomena of "collaboration" and "partnership". The research that I propose to carry out will allow me to build upon this work, offering specific examples of collaborations. The ideas of Blandy and Congdon are an initial framework for analyzing Witness, but what is lacking in their model and example is the case where partnership and collaboration are taking place across significant cultural and ontological differences, as is the case with Witness, which is a collaboration between a community centre and the Squamish Nation (unofficially at first and more formally as the project develops). I was pondering Blandy and Congdon's model for collaboration when the proposal for Witness first landed on my desk at the Roundhouse. Boats took place across hegemonies of class and education - the partners were brought together by their shared interest,

5 These authors, by the way, owe a lot of their ideas to the work of Paulo Freire (p.64), a significant and influential thinker and educator who has profoundly affected the work of other important writers such as bell hooks (1994). Many of the sources that I found (Blandy & Congdon, 1993; Bunch, 1995; hooks, 1994; Paley, 1995) cited Freire in their texts and references. I feel that his work seems to have been most useful to processes of partnership and collaboration through recommendations for "building non hierarchical relationships among people" (Blandy & Congdon, 1993, p. 64). Freire's conception that "critical consciousness" (Bunch, 1995, p. 59) is the major goal that education must strive toward, is an idea that can be shared across formal and informal teaching contexts, crossing previously perceived boundaries and limitations.
knowledge, and skill with fishing. Whether these partners included local First Nations traditions (which may approach fishing very differently) and experts or cultural perspectives that were non-European in origin (do recent immigrants fish?) was not made clear in Blandy and Congdon's 1993 article. I wondered if their model required modification to be useful in cross-cultural collaborations. Could the experience of *Witness* be drawn upon to do so?

I turned to my readings and experience working with First Nations artists and projects. Patrick Johnston (1983) offered some useful advice to help me build on the ideas presented in Blandy and Congdon. His conditions or cultural beliefs for colonialism create situations of power relations that must be avoided working across cultures (See Chapter 3).

There are many others also interested in collaboration, often from different disciplines and for different reasons. Several people who work in local cultural organizations have voiced their opinions on this matter (Alibhai, 1995).

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6 In most of the contexts where I've worked on behalf of "mainstream" and dominant culture institutions with artists of colour, First Nations, issues of race and sexuality etc. I've always been involved in uneven power relationships; I've, indeed, been "on both sides of the fence". The institution I represent is usually much more established, moneyed, and socially powerful than the partners, who are often characterized, explicitly or not, as somehow being oppressed, minoritized, or disadvantaged.
They all seem to agree that notions of collaboration between their organizations and community are the **hot topics** for the next several years, and they claim that present hierarchies and ways of doing things are not conducive to forming partnerships and engaging in collaborations with various sectors and institutions.

There are several motivators, usually financial in nature, for this "new" desire to collaborate. For many, the idea of sharing resources is less about producing quality programming and more about surviving in hard economic times; it seems to be a last resort. Some, however, do see the great potential in collaboration: for developing relationships, sharing knowledge, skills, and perspectives (within and) between various individuals, groups, and institutions (Alibhai 1995, Furber, 1986; Dicosimo, 1989; Dobbs, 1986; Hurtig, 1995).

Amongst the several cultural workers I spoken to in an earlier study (Alibhai, 1995), there was consensus that "true" collaboration is a difficult process. "Listening" is a skill that was described as quite important. All the people I spoke to agreed that before effective collaboration and partnerships could occur with the **outside** they had to happen on the **inside**. The traditional hierarchical structure of most publicly run arts organizations (artist-run centres, for the most part, are excluded from this characterization) has resulted in situations where power and responsibility are not equally distributed. Many of
these institutions are tied up with civic management, bureaucracies, agendas and politics. The Roundhouse Community Centre certainly has begun to become stuck in this bog of issues. Individuals often find themselves in situations that confer on them a great deal of responsibility and public accountability without also granting the necessary power and authority to function optimally or even effectively. In order to feel secure and trusting enough to take risks and collaborate with external partners, individuals and groups need to feel empowered and safe. So far, my experience at the Roundhouse has been secure in this sense. I've had the opportunity to facilitate many risky and new partnerships - some of them more successful than others - yet Witness stands out above the rest as substantial and long-term.

According to Dicosimo (1989), in order to collaborate, there are certain principles which need to be followed. First, the parties involved must share some things in common. Gallery educators and art teachers, for instance, share a belief that we can learn from cultural products, and that art has an important role(s) in our society. In my experience, however, differences between people can be the loci for learning and understanding. This relates to Blandy and Congdon's model and their call for a common language. In the case of Witness, it is a vested interest in connecting urban populations with "the land" that connects us all. The means
of communication varies and can be ecological, cultural, biological, recreational, financial; it is ultimately in the experience of the land - the actual place known variously as Sims Creek, Tree Fall License 38, Randy Stoltmann Wilderness, or Elahu that participants find "the message" being conveyed. The very multiple naming of the land in question reveals the diverse stakeholders in this project, and the varying ways to enter the discourse of the project.

Secondly, there must be a shared "fundamental belief that what you can produce together is always superior to what you can produce separately" (p. 42). This depends, of course, on the willingness and ability of those involved to share their specialized knowledge without being selfish (by withholding) or dominating. This fits into Blandy and Congdon's perception under point four. In the Witness project this has been a guiding principle for the work that has taken place. The program has become a volunteer run activist program. Decisions are voted upon by a group of dedicated volunteers, led by Gregory Byrne (Roundhouse Volunteer Coordinator), and all partners are invited to share their views and plans; overall coordination is facilitated by chief Bill Williams, Nancy Bleck, John Clarke, and myself, in our different areas of experience, connection, and expertise. There has been a sustained belief that by working together in this
manner we can together affect /effect the thinking and attitudes of the most individuals and access the most resources.

Thirdly, related to Blandy and Congdon's "non hierarchical" process, Dicosimo sees all participants as "equal partners" (p. 43). Working against the nature of collaboration are behaviours such as "power-plays, pulling rank, and short-circuiting" (p. 43). In agreement with most of the people I've spoken to, the author notes recent efforts to question and restructure the way in which hierarchies function in arts and other organizations. She refers to this as "current efforts to flatten organizations and to get work done through groups organized on a project basis rather than using the traditional pyramid structure" (p. 43). I agree with her, except that the danger of project-based activities is in losing sight of the long-term planning and building of an infrastructure that can support and provide incentive for collaborative work. Project-based organizations need to document, reflect upon, and share their work. This documentation should be multi-perspectival, allowing others to access the process and specific outcomes of a given project. That is another goal of this proposed research.7 (The project is the research).

7 The opportunity to work in the 'birthing' of the Roundhouse may prove invaluable to this research, since the current coordinator is dedicated to the idea of flattening out the hierarchies, at least within the community centre and its daily operation. This has been a difficult task to achieve within the larger civic and community bureaucracy.
In her fourth point, Dicosimo stresses that parties should not only participate through sharing their knowledge and expertise, but that they are obligated to do so. This, unlike Blandy and Congdon does imply that particular expertise does lay in specific individuals that make up any team.

As her fifth principle, the author elaborates an idea about "creative conflict" and "synergy" of a group. Related to the obligation to share knowledge and perspectives and the idea of non-hierarchical organization, she asks participants to relinquish their natural tendencies to be territorial and competitive. "The best collaboration occurs when all perspectives are fully articulated, fully understood and fully considered" (p. 43).

Finally, Dicosimo speaks about the importance of being able to celebrate together, but she warns us not to get complacent or start to make grand generalizations about all future projects based on the one being celebrated. We need to move on and avoid "entrenched biases and assumptions" (p. 43).

A third, and important source of information about collaboration in this which forms the context for the operation of the community centre. A reflection on this process will become important when discussing the Witness project, and defining community art practice.
thesis comes from the *Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society* in which Craig Dreezen (1992) presents a report on Community Arts and Education collaborations. If nothing else, this article provides strong support for the notion of community arts partnerships in the schools and their role in the curriculum. This article is the result of an Action Research project and synthesizes and elaborates on the findings of two projects of the Arts in Education Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, which in-turn explored community arts and education partnerships across the United States. The information it yields is useful for this study insofar as the perspective being offered comes from a decidedly institutional stance.

Dreezen characterizes collaboration as a phenomenon which is grown and which evolves. In my reflection of my experience at the Roundhouse, I particularly understand his notion that collaboration takes place on a continuum, from small "simple transactions" (p. 215), through "joint venture" to "information networks", and finally, "institutionalized collaborations", which are the most complex. Collaboration between organizations is the final goal and the ideal in Dreezen's report, and this is also the situation when collaborations are the most complex. I cannot help but feel, however, that collaborations ultimately are about the relationships between individual people, even at their most complex. If
we don’t apply more value to one end of Dreezen’s continuum than another, his conception becomes more useful in the real world. I do not believe, as he seems to, that partnerships evolve into collaborations, with the inherent implication that collaborations are somehow more valuable, more evolved. The real-life situation is much more complex, with projects like *Witness* moving along the continuum in any direction, at any point. In fairness to Dreezen, he does see this whole notion of ‘collaboration’ as a process - fluid and unpredictable. He lists nine different “critical success factors” (p. 221) deemed essential to sustaining arts and community partnerships, and these, along with the “conditions” summarized from Blandy and Congdon as well as Dicosimo and Johnson, are useful in my analysis of *Witness* and my general community art practice. Dreezen’s list overlaps with the other sources (described above), but distinguishes itself by describing the sort of organizational structure required to carry out complex collaborations, and is useful in that regard. Also Dreezen emphasizes the role of “experts” in these endeavours, rather than denying their contribution to the overall process of collaboration. I have facilitated many different types of community art practice in the last few years and clearly support the notion that “expertise” is necessary for success.

Dreezen’s (1992) “Critical Success Factors” for successful arts

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and community partnerships:
1. Leadership and Vision
2. Effective Planning
3. Broad-based community representation
4. Teacher participation (in the context of school/community partnerships)
5. Artist participation (in the context of community art practice)
6. Public awareness and Communication
7. Awareness of program catalyst (common purpose or goal)
8. Site-specific program design
9. Ongoing assessment of the partnership

I've underlined those factors which distinguish Dreezen's model, and which, in my opinion, are useful to consider in cross-cultural partnerships. I reintroduce these ideas in Chapter 4 of this thesis, Writing Witness.

In addition to my readings in Education and Museum/Gallery discourse, the ideas presented here, are also influenced by other areas of research, including Cognitive Science, Philosophy, Phenomenology, Identity Politics, and Cultural Studies.

A source I have often turned to in my life has been a translation of the Tao Te Ching by R.L. Wing (1986) entitled The Tao of Power, which offers an ecologically-based system of management and leadership. Also influential has been a book by David Abram (1996), The Spell of The Sensuous, which is a masterfully written work about phenomenology, language and orality, that for me, raises many questions about the nature of knowledge and positivist approaches to research. Most important, Abram's book prepared me to be receptive to the idea
and necessity of a program like *Witness*. Abram's theme is contemporary western (urban) humanity's loss of contact with the "more-than-human world". His elaborate thesis about the role of phonetic writing in the loss of contact with the sensuous world - the ability to read/write out of context of lived time and space is intriguing and extremely well written, profoundly affected my thinking about our connection to "nature". He describes oral cultures as preserving these connections to the sensuous world - to being attentive to pre-conceptual knowledge and intuition, and of attaching themselves intricately with the complexity of place - with the land. Oral peoples are great phenomenologists.

It was natural that when Nancy Bleck and Chief Bill Williams approached me with the idea for *Witness*, although other staff thought it was too ambitious and vague, I jumped right into it. My readings and experiences in a variety of disciplines seemed to be potentially brought together through *Witness*, which I approached as a phenomenologist and a facilitator.

While completing my course work for my M.A. degree, I encountered a particularly compelling book, *The Embodied Mind* (1993), which has had a somewhat transforming effect on me. Using the ideas of Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993), I can see the processes of curating or being an arts programmer as part of self-organizing networks, as emergent processes that result from the
interactions of many agents and agencies. The artists in our communities, their lived lives and histories, their contexts of location, their genders and sexualities, the facilitator/programmer/curator and his/her experiences and history, the public institution, the community where it is situated, and all the other many individuals and communities that collaborate on projects could be considered as agents in a complex network. The interactions within this network, which is both open and closed, will determine its own forms and its own assumptions. I can only strive to engage this research project in a mindful manner that will open up the "possibility of working with our everyday experience in a way that is liberating and transformative" (p.235). If I take as my guiding metaphor, like Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993), that "a path exists only in the walking" (p. 241), then I become freed from postulating an absolute ground or acting solely out of self-interest. I have found these ideas extremely useful in my work as a community arts programmer (facilitator for collaboration).

Reading The Embodied Mind was a joy. On one hand, I was excited to see an academic context for the discussion of Buddhist meditative and reflective traditions, but more importantly, I was apprehended, unnerved, left dangling, but ultimately given a way out of inevitable intellectual and moral nihilism. The
theme of transformation becomes important in this book, as self is seen as emergent and impending.

The Buddhist traditions from which the authors draw their ideas make transformation the pragmatic cause/effect (emergent process) of mindfulness/awareness; the ideal transformation that is sought is release from the Wheel of Karma, by eventually dealing with the root ignorance (attachment to an actual Self) and to "enable the mind to be fully present in the world...to be fully present in one's actions, so that one's behaviour becomes progressively more responsive and aware" (p.122). One needs to be free of the ego/self in order to act in the present without being "conditioned by grasping and egoistic volitions" (p. 123). These are the "selfless minds" that the authors refer to in Chapter six of their book. Varela's, Thompson's, and Rosch's description of transformation becomes a dominant theme for me, especially when groundlessness (sunyata) and lack of ego-self are viewed, not as unfortunate conditions, but as the very conditions that make transformation and creativity inevitable.

These are all actually very "freeing" concepts. The possibilities for one to enact a world seem endless from this perspective. I am left, however, with the task of "working with our everyday experience in a way that is liberating and transformative" (p. 235).
Capra's summary of Maturana's and Varela's Santiago theory of cognition is to the point: "It is cognition, the process of knowing that is identified with the process of life itself" (Capra, 1996, p.264). Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993) give us a description of cognition as "enaction" or "a history of structural coupling that brings forth a world", which works through "a network consisting of multiple levels of interconnected, sensorimotor sub networks (our embodied minds)". We know it is working "when it becomes part of an ongoing existing world (as the young of every species do) or shapes a new one (as happens in evolutionary history)" (pp. 206-7). How do I connect this knowledge back to Blandy and Congdon and collaboration? I do not see it as far-fetched to apply ideas and concepts such as autopoiesis, connectivity, and histories of structural coupling to my role as cultural worker. I seek to transform my practice so that it becomes fluid, acknowledging its own co-dependent arising with the lives and practices of the people that I collaborate/live with.

I think that the notions of mindfulness/awareness, groundlessness, selfless minds and compassion, bring to the fore the notion of 'knowledge as emergent', as the process that binds and defines all the agents that are involved in the collaboration - self and environment co-evolve. It makes the structural coupling of agents through collaborative process absolutely necessary for
authenticity and credibility, as they (agents) are co-dependently arisen. The notion of groundlessness opens up human experience to our "scientific culture".

The authors suggest that "...the imaginative geography of "West" [self] and "East" [other] is no longer appropriate for the tasks we face today...we need no longer proceed in ignorance of other traditions..." (my parentheses) (p. 240). Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993) draw on Buddhist tradition and the concept of sunyata, mentioned already above as groundlessness. The authors also define sunyata as "emptiness" which is "full of compassion (karuna)" (p. 248). My own understanding of the concept of sunyata centres around the notion of potentiality; it is not a void, but a groundlessness that speaks of immanent manifestations and of inexhaustible potential.

My research centres upon conversation, or dialogue - the "essence" of collaboration in my mind. I cannot allow myself to bend the process or end product to fit absolute theories; the "rules" must be seen as dispensible, if I can act out of genuine compassion. To quote Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993):

Within this existential context, we can be said to realize groundlessness not only in the sense of understanding but also in the sense of actualization: human life or existence turns into a question, doubt, or uncertainty (pp. 242-3).
The experience of groundlessness in everyday life can therefore be said to be full of possibilities, full of creativity. But what of compassion? How do we make room for compassion in collaboration?

I agree with the authors that compassion can spontaneously arise, "when action is done without the business-deal mentality" and "there can be relaxation" (p. 249). I hope that I can "become embodied out of compassion for the world" (p. 252), as Varela, Thompson, and Rosch suggest. Their book forced me to examine my motivations and desires - to check my own grasping. After all, here I am in the context of a community centre after identifying myself so closely with the roles of artist, curator, educator. Moving from the professional world of art to the community centre - I've had to deal with letting go of the grasping of my own ego.

For the longest time in reading The Embodied Mind I struggled with, on the one hand, the notion of there being no unified, stable self, and on the other, the post modern, post colonial emphasis on identity and Identity Politics. In the conclusion of the book, I was set thinking by the following sentences:

Grasping can be expressed not only individually as fixation on ego-self but also collectively as fixation on racial or tribal self-identity, as well as grasping for a ground as the territory that separates one group of people from another or that one group would appropriate as its own...
realization of groundlessness as non-egocentric responsiveness, however, requires that we acknowledge the other with whom we dependently co-originate (p. 254). 8

At first I thought that the authors were saying that the contemporary discourses around identity, in which I am embedded as a cultural worker, are ultimately about grasping for Self, of egoism. And what about Lave and Wenger's (1991) assertion in *Situated Learning*, that "learning involves the construction of identities" (p. 53); surely the obsession with 'identity' in most current discourses is valid and not just motivated by purely selfish concerns. I had to do some re-reading in post colonial cultural theory and contemporary art to finally understand that this was not what the authors of *The Embodied Mind* were trying to say; they were, however, making a strong case against the ugly spectres of communalism and essentialism that are destructive social forces. They are disruptive without offering new possibilities, or allowing the freedom for transformation.

8 Karen Meyer, when reading the first draft of this thesis asked an interesting question regarding the bringing together of concepts of "groundlessness" and "the land". The latter is a major theme of the *Witness* project. At first, as Karen pointed out, these ideas seem contradictory, but in light of Abram's (1993) book and my experience with *Witness*, she is right in pointing out their relatedness. In seeing the land itself as co-evolving with our selves, we are offered the chance to connect to the living earth herself. Upon reflection, I understand that many of the rituals and prayers that the Coast Salish practice "in the land" are about connecting sensually with the rhythms and cycles of Gaia. Co-origination is acknowledged and enacted through such ritual.
I am committed, as a post-colonial cultural worker, to exploring subjectivity as an aesthetic process, in the historically located and specifically contextualized subject. This makes room for the other to enter the conversation. I don't think that Varela, Thompson, and Rosch are really saying that we don't construct identities, but that these identities are not stable, not absolute or even unified, and that grasping for this Self (capital “S”) is futile. The authors posit that self is constructed by its relationship to the other, and that the egotism that is maintained by postulating a boundary between self and non-self can be transformed, ultimately into spontaneous compassion. We need compassion to blur the boundaries of normative behaviour.

But what has all this to do with art and curating and being community arts programmer, or, as I find myself now thinking, a cultural translator (Irwin, Rogers & Wan, 1998)?

In her catalogue essay for Mistaken Identities (1993), an exhibition of contemporary American artists originated at The University Art Gallery in Santa Barbara, Abigail Solomon-Godeau speaks eloquently of the issues of identity in the work of the (mostly of colour) artists represented. She states the central curatorial thesis of the exhibition as the desire to:
...assemble works that are variously engaged with what could be termed the problematics of identity. We were interested in art practices that are either concerned to demonstrate the psychic and/or social components by which diverse identities are attributed or fantasmatically projected; that suggested the provisional, bricolage-like formation of identity; or those that dismantled or deconstructed the putative fixities of race and racialism.

The identities collectively explored in this exhibition are thus 'mistaken" insofar as they have ever been imagined or conceived as one thing, whether that thing was identified as race, gender, or ethnicity. This range of artists and diversity of practices demonstrate that the multiple and shifting field of identity in its subjective and experiential reality is embedded in history, in discourse, in context, and is thus never a simple and unproblematic given (p.30).

The curator/author points to the complexity and instability of identity as a construct, and of its historic and social contingencies. Her essay also attempts to bring these diverse artists' work under the aegis of post modernism, while acknowledging their political potency, and post modernism's initial lack of reference to "artists of color, to non-western cultural production, or to subaltern identities" (p. 24). She sees post modernism as announcing the "demise of the universal artist and the birth of a specific and historical one" (p. 24).

Solomon-Godeau (1993) begins her catalogue essay for Mistaken Identities with a highly compelling quote about identity from the text in one of the works in the show, which in turn cites James Baldwin in, The Devil Finds Work, (1976) :
Identity would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self (the groundlessness of self): in which case, it is best that the garment be loose, a little like the robes of the desert, through which robes one's nakedness can always be felt, and sometimes discerned. This trust in one's nakedness (groundlessness) is all that gives one the power to change one's robes (transformation) (p. 19; my parentheses).

This resonates with Varela's, Thompson's, and Rosch's (1993) assertion that we are "selfless minds" (p. 123), that self, and thus identity, are contingent on their histories of "structural coupling". Self is contingent on other; they co-evolve. From a post colonial perspective, Homi Bhabha's (1994) heavy and complex, (at least for me), writing reveals a similar notion in his re-conceptualizing of culture:

My shift from the cultural as an epistemological object to culture as an enactive, enunciatory site opens up possibilities for other 'times' of cultural meaning (retroactive, prefigurative) and other narrative spaces (fantasmic, metaphorical). My purpose in specifying the enunciative present in the articulation of culture is to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience...

What is striking about...the enunciatory present...is its proposal that emergent cultural identifications are articulated at the liminal edge of identity...The contingent and the liminal become the times and the spaces of cultural difference in a post colonial criticism (pp. 178-179).
Bhabha seems to be saying something similar to Varela et al, but regarding culture and literary theory instead of cognition. Speaking of identity, Bannerji (1995) adds:

Resting on the core of a recognition of the self and its individuation with regards to others, the concept of identity in the context of capitalist development and international division of labour and power takes on a particular convolution in this basic self-other relation (my emphasis) (p. 26).

Read this next to Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993):

...this so-called self occurs only in relation to the other...self is always codependent with other...the force of self-interest is always other-directed in the very same respect with which it is self-directed (pp. 246-7).

Bhabha and Bannerji would use the terms 'exteriority' (other) and 'interiority' (self) to describe the post-colonial subject in this same situation, but in the language of post colonial literary criticism.

Finally, I quote psychoanalyst and revolutionary, Fanon, as cited in Bhabha (1994), who the latter admires deeply and draws upon regularly in his own practice as a post colonial critic:
I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate my cycle of freedom (my emphasis) (p. 8).

Which brings me back to Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993), who also speak of freedom - not as the ability to do whatever one wants out of a sense of ego, but rather "to be sensitive to the conditions and genuine possibilities of some present situation and to able to act in an open manner that is not conditioned by grasping and egoistic volitions. (p. 123). These ideas not only guide my research and approach to collaboration - indeed my approach to Witness, but the nature of the research - this thesis itself, which I see as emerging and complex - unending.

2.7 The Research Question(s)

Given my ontological location, I do not come to this research with very specific questions; I hope that these emerge from the dialogues at the heart of this inquiry - the proposed conversations - and my own subjective reflection and narrative of projects that I have worked with directly and significantly. At this point I can only address the following broad question:
What emerges as defining elements/principles in substantive educational collaborations, and in particular, those formed across cultural and disciplinary perspectives?

Collaborating across cultures; cultural translator as educator; curators, educators, artists, and institutions as facilitators. These are all notions that will guide this research and the questions which emerge from it.

2.8 Methodology

I've undertaken a qualitative study that incorporates several different methods to form a methodology that is personal, and which relies on the notion of researcher as research instrument. Narrative and anecdote is pervasive throughout this thesis as I engaged each partner in conversations that were formal (interviews, professional meetings) as well as informally (in our social encounters and relationships.) During the course of the Witness project, I formed closer and more informal relationships with some individuals than with others. This is natural; what is important, however, is that I felt trust and personal warmth with at least some of my partners - inserting myself in a web of connections. Notes, meeting minutes, journal entries - all part of my personal and professional
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documentation of this project, are also a source of information/data for this thesis as well.

This thesis is largely autobiographical. It has to be, I feel, because of my intimate involvement in the *Witness* project and my overall work as a cultural worker. There is also a growing body of literature in the field of education that explores autobiographical writing as a research tool (Aoki, 1992; Bresler, 1993; Eisner, 1991; Grumet, 1991; hooks, 1994; Mühlberger, 1985).

As a research method, autobiographical exploration draws its justification and foundation from humanist philosophy, phenomenology, and existentialism (Grumet, 1992). Madeleine Grumet and William Pinar, amongst others (e.g. Aoki, Huebner, vanManen) have been extremely important to the study of autobiography and phenomenology within an educational context, beginning this work in the early 1970s (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992). *It is precisely the subjective idiosyncrasies of such context-bound work that makes it valuable for understanding of experience and for the construction of meaning- and hence knowledge* (Aoki, 1992; Grumet, 1991, 1992 Pinar, 1992).

In my conversations with co-researchers I'm interested in focusing on the inter-personal relationships, which, for me, seem to be at the essence of collaborative processes. Within a phenomenological framework, the everyday,
lived reality of teaching (art) is interpreted and confronted (Bresler, 1993). Madeleine Grumet succinctly put it: "Thus, for the phenomenologist, knowledge of the world requires knowledge of self-as-knower-of-the-world" (1991, p. 30).

Through my growing understanding of phenomenology, I've embarked on an exploration, using the tools of narrative and autobiography, as well as metaphor, to reflect on my practice as a gallery educator/curator/programmer and for focus, a particular project called *Witness*. What I'm trying to achieve through this writing, is getting at the essence of specific lived experiences. I want to find the essence of collaboration. This searching for the essence corresponds to Husserl's conception of *eidos*, which can be described as the "essential idea or ideal unity of a phenomenon" (Streb, 1984, p. 161). In order to get to the *eidos*, according to Husserl, one must employ what he calls the *epoche* or reduction-the purpose of which is to free ourselves of our presumptions and beliefs about the everyday, ordinary world- or normative thinking. The soul of a phenomenological approach seems, to me, to be reflection- a process that not only finds the meaning in experienced phenomena (such as the act of collaborating) but also constructs it. This is why I feel that conversation, listening, and reflection are phenomenological tools for this study.
An important reference for me in reflecting on the methodology and methods for this research is Max van Manen's (1990) pragmatic book, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science For An Action Sensitive Pedagogy.* This book explains, in very clear language, how van Manen interprets and practices phenomenology in his work and life. The book is easy to read and offers, unlike most phenomenological writing I've encountered, a set of methods and procedures for phenomenologically exploring lived experience. I've found this work invaluable for my own research — a veritable bible.

In his book, van Manen (1990), introduces an approach to human science research, which he calls Hermeneutic Phenomenological Science. He argues that this approach is particularly suited to the study of Pedagogy because it "requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience (children's realities and lifeworlds)" (p.2). He adds that Pedagogy also "requires a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld..." (p.2). For van Manen "Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experiences, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts' of life, and semiotics is used here to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Why do I turn to a research approach that is particularly well suited for the study of Pedagogy in my research into a
community cultural development project? It is because I feel that my work as a cultural facilitator is essentially pedagogic in nature; my own practice has been geared to facilitating understanding and knowledge of cultures across differences; I imagine myself facilitating empowerment through projects like *Witness*, where "empowerment" is seen in the same manner as a critical pedagogue such as Freire would conceive of it.

Even more importantly I think that van Manen's Hermeneutic Phenomenological Science, a way to deal with lived experience, offers me a way to deal with *Witness* in a realistic and truthful manner. It is an approach that is in harmony with my research question. *Witness*, for me is a lived experience as much as it is a project "out there". My close involvement in it's development, implementation and evolution, make it a messy business for me to attempt any sort of "objective" study of this project; it is almost impossible to completely extricate myself from this project. Yet it is this particular life experience that has taught me the most about many of the issues of community, difference, First Nations, ecology, environment, history, and cultural development, than any other recent life experience. Instead of seeing my personal involvement as a weakness (which a more positivist type of inquiry would), van Manen's approach allows me to embrace my involvement and living of *Witness*. My interpretation of van
Manen's (1990) definition of his approach follows; it is what I've used as a guide in this research:

Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience. It is the explication of phenomena as they "present themselves to consciousness", whether "... real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt" (p. 9). Phenomenology aims at studying essences. The essence "may only be intuited or grasped through a study of the particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experience" (p. 10).

Phenomenology's goal of getting to the essences can't help but find an analogy in my life as an artist, where I'm also operating in a mode where I'm seeking the essence of an object, experience, person or idea. It is what I'm after when I play music or paint or draw. Van Manen (1990) stresses the importance of writing and language in phenomenological research, but I see connections to other idioms of communication including, film, video, painting, drawing, theatre, music, literature, and dance, which, at least according to Tolstoy, share a similar if not identical goal - inducing an emotion through 'essentials' communicated through art - music/literature) as does van Manen's phenomenological goal of seeking the essence of a phenomenon. Compare the following two ideas:
The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner (van Manen, 1990, p.10).

I find this strikingly close to Tolstoy's statement in What is Art? (1986, originally printed in 1896), when he offers a definition for art:

To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced, and having evoked it in oneself, then, by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling - this is the activity of art.

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man (sic) consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them (Tolstoy, 1986, p. 51).

I first encountered Tolstoy's (1986) short book on aesthetics as an undergraduate art student; this definition has stayed with me since that time over a decade ago, and is also similar to the South Asian perspective on art expounded by the medieval Hindu aesthetician, Bharata. I was very excited in hearing a similar conception from a phenomenologist doing pedagogical research (i.e. van Manen).

Van Manen (1990) explains that Phenomenology is interested in the existential meanings of experience in our "lifeworld", of lived experience. It is the
"human scientific study of phenomena (p. 11). It is about thoughtfulness, or listening, reflecting - above all, caring. He translates these ideas into a rational methodology that understands the notion of essence as a "linguistic construction" (p. 39) and which understands its own limitations - phenomenological writing is about constructing a possible interpretation of experience and certainly not the only one.

Van Manen (1990) very insightfully states that the "problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon . . . but that we know too much" (p. 46). He presents the idea of "bracketing", in order to reach a pre-conceptual description of experience (similar to Husserl's "reduction"). This process involves writing without analyzing, as well as asking of any given phenomenon, "Without such and such notion or condition is this phenomenon still this phenomenon?" This way we can bracket out that which is not essential to a given experience of a specific phenomenon.

In this research I have used writing itself as my method, a way to describe lived experience in order to reflect on that experience. It is the result of five years of sustained writing about different aspects of theory and real-life projects in different contexts, as a student, curator, arts programmer, and educator. Some of the methods utilized here are described in more detail in van Manen's (1990)
book and include strategies such as drawing on personal experience, tracing etymological sources, using metaphor, narrative, protocol writing (lived-experience descriptions), interviewing, anecdote and assisting with the editing and making of a video documenting the Witness project, *A Call to Witness* (see Appendix A). I have also invited others to write their perspectives as well as including photographs by Nancy Bleck (Appendix D), which visually represent the experience of Witness.

Since *Witness* is on going it is also possible for me to use observation techniques, such as video and audio recordings to document them. I also have access to documentation that describes the evolution and emergence of this collaboration, including over a hundred hours of raw video footage documenting several of the *Witness* weekends, workshops, art projects, social gatherings, meetings, performance, and even interviews, formal and informal, with participants over the span of three years.

2.9 *Witness*: A case-study

The *Witness* project is a multidisciplinary collaboration between the
Squamish Nation, the Roundhouse Community Centre, individual artists and wilderness educators. As an Arts programmer at the new Roundhouse Arts and Recreation Community Centre, which is unique and experimental as the city's first Arts-focused community centre, I have the opportunity to draw on experiences there. The Roundhouse's vision is rooted in the notion of collaboration, and is guided in its policies and processes by the desire to connect and work with diverse communities. I believe that it has been for these reasons that a project like *Witness* has even been possible. The resulting collaboration continues, seeming to transform itself and re-emerge in various manifestations along the way.

There have been almost 2000 participants over the last three years in a program that takes people to old-growth coastal rainforest, three hours from Vancouver, traveling through traditional Squamish territory. The Squamish Nation was the unofficial host at these weekends, jointly with a group of dedicated volunteers committed to environmental cultural issues. Participants were invited to take part in a traditional Coast Salish witnessing ceremony, go on guided hikes, and take advantage of free workshops ranging in subjects from forest ecology and healing plants, to drum-making. (See Appendix B for specific workshops and facilitators). A canoe, carved at an urban site that once saw many
canoes along its shores, has also emerged from the collaboration between parties and individuals. A community art exhibition featuring the work of artists at all levels has taken place in December/January, 1997/98 at the Roundhouse. Public actions, naming ceremonies, gifting ceremonies have also emerged from this project. I have been the coordinator of *Witness* from the perspective of the Roundhouse Community Centre and have developed many insights about the nature of collaboration across cultures, particularly with the Squamish Nation.

### 2.10 An Autobiographical Thesis

This thesis, as already mentioned, is largely autobiographical - so why did I need interviews? I spent many hours interviewing several of the key participants in *Witness*, including Nancy Bleck, John Clarke, Chief Bill Williams, and Irwin Oostindie. First of all, I hoped that these interviews would be more like informal conversations. Their purpose in this research is to allow access to the perspectives of key agents in the projects described above. Although I did complete these interviews and have consulted them in the writing of this thesis, their usefulness has proven to be more peripheral to my question and the direction of my methodology. Instead, I have opted to involve the “self”, mine and others’, in seeking to elicit a personal, embodied story. I was unaware, at the
time I initially proposed this research, that I would be following the path I now tread.

I believe that by focusing on the inter-personal relationships and individual stories of these different people (including myself), a more complete, organic knowing is possible - for myself and for those wishing to learn from this research. Who will learn from this research? Hopefully those seeking to embark on cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary collaborations, particularly those who are seeking to develop a process for collaborating with First Nations communities in arts-focused projects. Those who are interested and would benefit from this work, I imagine, would share a belief that significant cross-cultural dialogue and understanding can be facilitated through the arts. If, as I believe, knowledge comes through personal, embodied experience, and through paying attention to the idiosyncrasies of that experience, then it makes sense that an autobiographical approach to this research will be an appropriate way to present it.

Others may use this research to develop similar types of collaborations in their own communities and contexts, or to extract relevant principles and ideas for developing entirely new types of collaborations. I don't believe that a positivist account of this research, or one that isn't grounded in specific experience and personal perspective, would be very useful. The world of
experience and practice is too diverse - situations are too idiosyncratic for a strict model to be useful. The idea is to grow one's own specific model out of principles that can guide process, rather than presume structure.9

2.11 Relevance to Art Education

Barbara Soren (1993) posits galleries and museums as "non-formal educational institutions that 'casual' visitors and audiences choose to attend" (p.150). She contrasts this with the formal educational setting of schools (that our children are obliged to encounter). Soren makes a strong case for the view that arts organizations (museums, galleries, performing arts organizations etc.)

9 While the Witness Exhibition (1997) was up at the Roundhouse in December, 1997, a man I hadn't ever seen before approached me in my office. He introduced himself to me as David McKane, of the Northside Arts and Cultural Centre, in Dublin, Ireland. He was visiting Vancouver for the weekend and had happened to chance an encounter with the Roundhouse Community Centre and the Witness project. He was very impressed and excited by the connections and possibilities that he had discovered between his context as a cultural worker in Dublin and the situation of the Roundhouse as an arts-focused community centre, and a project that sought to address history, the land, and indigenous culture.

He felt that the oral witness ceremony and the cross-cultural dialogue facilitated through the project could be ideas used to develop programming at this community centre that sought collaboration with the marginalized working class in Dublin. He, for instance, would benefit from this study, even though his specific situation would be very different. By focusing on the specific and personal, without attempting to create grand theories, this research can be useful in diverse situations - because process rather than final product becomes the focus for the reader.
join schools as public sites that contribute to life-long learning processes. She also urges art educators and teachers to "explore innovative ways" (p. 149) in which they may collaborate on education, and recognizes the need for more training and professional development for teachers and gallery educators in this regard. Soren acknowledges the differences and strengths of each of the educational milieus that she describes and sees the possibility for sharing resources and expertise between them.

The arts in education have faced similar challenges of public accountability (Davis, 1993) as art organizations. Art Education (and Education in general) is being asked to account for its stance in the areas of teaching, student learning and specific programs. These challenges have been eloquently answered, in theory, by eminent scholars like Arnheim (1989) and Eisner (1988). These individuals have been influential voices in the recent attempts to justify and legitimize the Arts in Education. Their arguments have ranged from the economic to the developmental, to the aesthetic. Although they represent a certain conservatism and a particular cultural agenda, their work has been very important to the field (Hicks, 1990).

I am continually suspicious of perspectives that are poised to perpetuate
particular social inequalities. Classic Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE), for instance, has talked too much about "standards" and "taste" and has referred to an almost exclusively western, and (heterosexual) patriarchal conception of art history. My own position is one that questions these aspects of all content taught in schools, for I believe that it is a primary role of education to empower students to learn and to participate socially in the culture where they live. Part of this empowerment happens through creating safe spaces where students feel free to voice their perspectives and where they are encouraged to not only be personally empowered (through their unique combinations of ethnicity, race, religion, social class, sexuality and gender) but also politically and socially empowered - this is a major goal for community art practice and connects to the values and goals of education. A current trend in public schools is that in their struggle to teach the "basics", schools are also asked to involve their resources in combating racism, ———

10 A valuable and practical recent monograph that deals with cultural pluralism and art curricula is Chalmers (1996), Celebrating Pluralism: Art Education and Cultural Diversity, which encourages educators to address the context and role of various art objects and traditions across cultures, rather than relying on traditional, formal ways of looking at art from other cultures; there is also a sound rationale for cross-cultural study of art as a means to understanding and survival in a pluralistic society.
homophobia, drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies etcetera; this makes the work of educators hugely complex and demanding. Students are not there simply to absorb and regurgitate what has been said by teachers. And teachers should not think of themselves as the only source of information or limit themselves by relying on the rhetoric of those who have in their heart the preservation of the status quo. We all bring our own valid experiences and knowledge into every situation.

Who, therefore, shall "teach" the arts? The answer needs clearly to be everyone, including generalist, specialist, and visiting artist.... But the fact is that one cannot accomplish this without the involvement of the other and a team effort is required if arts education is to succeed in the schools [and our communities]. (Ross, 1986).
WHY SEEK CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH FIRST NATIONS? A PERSONAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

I want to explain - why First Nations? In my work at the Roundhouse, and indeed when I first applied for the position as Arts Programmer, I made it clear that I would make it a priority to develop relationships and collaborations with local First Nations Communities; this stems from what I have learned recently (over the last five years) about the history and experience of First Nations people, not only through reading but through the conversations I've had and personal relationships I've developed. As an Arts Programmer at the Roundhouse my work has led to the necessity to develop relationships with the Squamish Nation as well as individual First Nations artists, and urban organizations like United Native Nations. In the last two-and-a-half years these relationships have developed into projects and special events such as a conference and exhibition of Aboriginal Women in the Arts (October 1998), a Residency dealing with healing through the arts and cultural practice (Summer 1998), as well as an annual partnership with United Native Nations to celebrate National Aboriginal Day (June 21st). In addition to these projects and relations, I
have actively sought out individual First Nations artists to contribute to festivals, such as the *Winter Solstice Lantern Procession*, and Exhibitions, such as the *Gathering Threads* (October 1999) project. These interests and commitments have been formed by my research and experiences, as explained below.

Five years ago I began a journey, which has led to places I had no intention of going; like all of life - "laying down a Path in walking" (Varela et al., 1993).\(^{11}\) It was then that I began the period of reflection and work, which, in many ways, culminates in a substantive manner through the writing of this thesis. In addition to beginning my Masters degree in Art Education, my life has moved and developed in many ways. My embeddedness in the world has provided the ground of experience that informs this research and the ideas contained herein - at least as much as the many diverse texts and articles I’ve pored over in that same period of time. Since I began my work at the University of British Columbia my family has grown to include three children - an experience that affects one's orientation to the world in profound ways.

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\(^{11}\) This chapter is itself like a journey through my readings and research of the history of residential schools and the Sixties Scoop. It is personal. I think of it as a work in progress, as I search for the implications of this research in my own practice as an art educator, curator, and artist.
Professionally, I've practiced as an artist, educator, writer, curator, and community cultural worker. I began my recent educational career while working as a curator at the Surrey Art Gallery, and currently am an Arts Programmer at an arts focused community centre, the Roundhouse Community Centre. This shift is not insignificant and has been affected by the research I have been doing and the life I've been living. It was, for instance, during my brief tenure at the Surrey Art Gallery, when I first had an opportunity to curate a retrospective exhibition of work by a contemporary First Nations artist, that I began this work. I embarked on a collaborative process with Cree artist George Littlechild to curate a show of his work. I say collaborative because every decision, regarding not only what work would be shown, but also how these works would be accessed, researched, and presented was made through discussion with and input from the artist. This was not the typical manner in which contemporary art exhibitions were curated in public galleries and museums. But as I had already begun my post modern, post colonial, and phenomenological and hermeneutic research - I needed to find a new and respectful way in which to work, particularly with the "other".

I should also add that my being curator for this exhibition was a choice made by the artist and the gallery. I mention this in light of the issues of
representation, which are at the heart of many debates surrounding the power structures, which define euro-western colonialism and the privileged position and authority of "western eyes" (Haig-Brown, C. & Archibald, J., 1996). Not being First Nations, who was I to represent, to speak for the work of a Cree artist? In the end, George and I found common ground in our experiences with both having been colonized, urbanized...sharing experiences with racism, with art practices ... a mutual respect; in short, we got along. (As I write this, I reflect on the fact that I've been developing a friendship and understanding with George that is reaching its ten-year mark this year.)

The Surrey Art Gallery accepted my proposal for this exhibition, part of their own agenda being met through the potential for drawing a First Nations audience into the gallery. The fact that an estimated 20,000 aboriginal people live in Surrey (Surrey Aboriginal Cultural Society, 1996 - informal discussion), and that a contemporary First Nations artist had never been featured in a major solo show there, may also have urged the gallery to accept the proposal.

I learned a great deal through curating this show, through the work that Littlechild has made over the years, and especially through the new and, for George, experimental multi media installation, *The Sixties Scoop*. I had never
heard the term “Sixties Scoop” before, and although I was aware that Littlechild had grown up in a foster home, I had no idea of the widespread frequency with which his situation was paralleled in the lives of thousands of other First Nations children across this country (Johnston, 1983; York, 1990; Appendix C of this thesis). I worked closely with Littlechild in collecting, editing, formatting and presenting the text that became the focus of his installation. These were stories of several different people from different regions of Canada, different Nations, who were apprehended by various Provincial social service agencies and placed in non-native families. The narratives were solicited blindly, in that George had no idea whether he would receive positive or negative recollections. Most accounts contained a few good, but mostly bitter memories. Memories of dislocation, isolation, racism, and abuse - emotional, mental, physical (sexual), and spiritual, were repeated in the different narratives. Loss of cultural identity was a major theme that ran through these accounts and which I later noticed, was also a major theme that ran through almost all the first person accounts of the residential school system and in fact through almost all the accounts from aboriginal sources that I read (Riley, 1993; Shorten, 1991). The loss of family and cultural ties for most of the victims of the Sixties Scoop has had devastating effects on their lives. In all the cases adult authors (they all requested
anonymity) are presently healing themselves through a reconnection to their birth family and/or birth culture, a re-discovery of their own cultural traditions and beliefs.\footnote{These are strategies that I've noticed are part of the healing that is taking place in native-run schools, urban Friendship Centres, and many First Nations communities.} I am personally aware that several people have begun their own healing, having viewed this particular artwork, and through reading the text in the installation, realizing that they aren't alone.

In my readings, the first-person account of artist Jane Ash Poitras (Shorten, 1991) held many similarities to Littlechild's own account, and those of the anonymous voices presented in his show. Other first person accounts in Shorten's compilation of *Stories from Urban Natives* helped inform and develop my interpretation of the effects of colonialism on the lives of specific individuals. For me it added to a new understanding of the history of aboriginal
people in this country. As a recent "visible minority" Indo-Canadian with a colonial and colonized past, it gave me a better understanding of the common strategies and attitudes of recent colonizers of this globe, and the astounding arrogance and racism of the British, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese colonizers in places like India, Africa, Southeast Asia, Australia, South America, and North America.

The Sixties Scoop, like the residential schools, was ultimately motivated by colonial attitudes, not by concern with child welfare or education; it was also motivated by the desire to "deal with the Native problem" as cheaply as possible. My interest in the issues raised in Littlechild's work, including the residential school experience, led me, eventually, to take a graduate level course which explored the history of First Nations Education in this country. I wanted to know why the residential schools were such an important influence in

13 In his introduction for The Dispossessed, Geoffrey York states: "Strangely, most Canadians are better acquainted with the history of native people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than they are with the unsavory realities of recent years...And so the ugly events of recent history are buried behind a wall of illusion - the illusion that progressive thinking and improved attitudes have brought fair treatment to Canada's native people" (1990, p. xiii). This was certainly my own case before I began working with Littlechild. What I've found out since then confirms my belief in the importance of exhibitions like the recent one by George (whose own work is based on research and history), if for no other reason than to inform and educate people about the issues of colonialism raised in the work and practice of First Nations artists.
Littlechild's life and indeed the lives of countless other First Nations individuals who either attended them or were deeply affected by the impact of this form of cultural genocide. What were some of the effects of residential schools, and was the Sixties Scoop a continuation of the motives that drove the entire residential school endeavour to begin with? Was it part of a systemic cultural genocide?\footnote{14}

Miller's book, *Shingwauk's Vision* (1996), has been a major source of information about residential schooling for me; it promises to be a major text in this area and formally acknowledges, in academia at least, the complex history and profound effects of residential schools. There is a lot of information here, much of it interesting and relevant to understanding the reasons and motivations for residential schools.\footnote{15}

\footnote{14} I've been criticized by one of my professors when I suggested, in a paper, that the First Nations people of this country have been the victims of cultural genocide. I was told that this was too harsh; I've since been able to convince him otherwise.

\footnote{15} Littlechild's exhibition and catalogue, from the feedback I've received in the form of comments in the gallery, conversations, and media response, has served an important educational purpose by making many people aware of the more unsavoury history of white/native relations in Canada.
I never had a sense of Miller's motives until the very end of the book. I feel that he was a bit too generous in his descriptions, painting a rosier picture of the Church and State than is warranted by the devastating effects of their joint experiment in schooling. The suggestion that native people were equal partners or partially responsible in what became the residential school system, seems preposterous given the complete inequality of the power relations between the Church, State and aboriginal people; what choices were actually given to native people? Although Miller is critical, and the first to admit the failure of this system of schooling, he never comes right out and says that residential schools were conceptually flawed from the beginning - that self-determination and self-government were the missing factors in this complex experiment in native education - that racism was what fueled colonial attitudes. He never says that it was morally wrong to separate children from their families in the name of civilizing and transforming them, or that it was wrong to abuse them, to denigrate their cultures, to evangelize them, to assume a eurocentric superiority. Instead, in the name of science and objectivity, this largely positivist account tries to define a stable ground in what, in reality, is a groundless and complex world (Varela et al, 1993). Miller's intention is to present the whole picture, to not overtly editorialize, and to provide the facts -
to not seem to judge. The author's voice and subjective gaze are not interrogated to my satisfaction. This is not to say that the book is not useful or worth reading.\footnote{Graeme Chalmers, in defense of Miller, has reminded me that Miller is an historian enculturated to believe that we “understand” the past best when we don’t attempt to overlay the “concerns” of the present. I think that this is indeed important to keep in mind, but it underscores a fundamental polemic regarding “History” which I have encountered many times over; history is never objective and cannot possibly be written without the concerns of the present seeping in. There is no such thing as “objective” history.}

The book is very informative; Miller's arguments that the federal government eschewed its full responsibility for native education, and that the Church self-righteously abused and judged aboriginal people are strongly supported and justified. His sources are extensive, including government and Church documents, as well as historical and first-person accounts of the residential schools.

It was important that other sources, particularly first-person accounts were also part of my reading, including Basil Johnston's account of life at the residential school located in Spanish (1988), which gave me a personal, emotionally moving, almost phenomenological account of life in a particular residential school, in a specific place and time - from the perspective of someone who lived it. Although Johnston does not allude to sexual abuse in his book, and almost fondly and nostalgically recalls his experiences, there is a
sense of loss in this telling; with today's eyes the residential school seems brutal, more like a prison than a school.

Johnston's voice is that of a colonized subject; his own personal aspirations seem to favour integration or assimilation, to become "true citizens of Canada" (p. 6). He feels that there is a place for the residential school in native education but he sees this possibility only under "vastly different terms, conditions, and formats..." (p. 6). (By this I think he means self-government). The cultural dislocation and loss of identity that many students experienced is evident in this work. All the criticisms and issues covered in Miller's huge tome are dealt with in this much shorter, and more accessible account by Johnston. The poor sanitation and crowding, lack of education, poor food, excessive punishment, regimented schedule, excessive evangelization, overwork and child-labour, racism, resistance of students and parents, and cultural genocide are all described in some manner through Johnston's narrative. Miller's book legitimizes all that in some way, through its larger, more scholarly treatment of residential school history, and through the privileged academic status and voice of the author.17

17 Johnston is also an academic, one of the residential school survivors, able to continue his education - for the most part, an exception for survivors.
The term “Sixties Scoop” was first used by Patrick Johnston in his 1983 publication, *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*. Johnston was director of the Canadian Council on Social Development when he produced this report, which is a harsh indictment of the policies of governments that led to the high and disproportionate presence of native children in the child welfare systems across this country. This phenomenon clearly coincided with the closing of residential schools, which were the very places that children from broken homes, orphans, those with behavioral problems, and those who were very poor ended up prior to the dismantling of the system which began in the late Fifties and through the Sixties. In 1982, Manitoba, a family court judge, Edwin Kimelman reviewed 93 cases of native children who had been "adopted out" (York, 1990, p. 214) in 1981. He stated after his review that "cultural genocide has been taking place in systematic, routine manner" (p. 214).

Kimelman continues:

When the Indian residential schools were operating, children were forcibly removed from their homes for the duration of the academic year, Kimelman said. The children were punished if they used their own language, sang their own songs or told their own stories. But at least under that system the children knew who their parents were and they returned home for the summer months. With the closing of the residential schools, rather than providing the resources on reserves to build economic security and providing the resources on reserves to support responsible parenting, society found it easier and cheaper to
remove children from their homes and apparently fill the market demand for children in Eastern Canada and the United States” (Kimelman quoted in York, 1990, p. 215).

If thousands of children had been taken from their parents, families and communities to be assimilated in residential schools operating throughout Canada, then thousands more, at the very time that residential schooling was being criticized as a failure by government, aboriginal leaders, and even a few Church bodies, were apprehended with assimilation in mind. In Manitoba alone an estimated three thousand native children were removed from their homes between the mid-1960s and early 1980s (York, 1990, p. 206).

According to Patrick Johnston (1983), "...the percentage of native children in care (child welfare services) is much higher than their proportion of the total child population" (p. 24). This increase occurred dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s, when residential schools were being dismantled (Miller, 1996). Johnston also states,

Gradually, as education ceased to function as the institutional agent of colonization, the child welfare system took its place. It could continue to remove Native children from their parents, devalue Native custom and traditions in the process, but still act 'in the best interest of the child'...the Sixties Scoop was not coincidental; it was a consequence of fewer Indian children being sent to the residential schools and the child welfare system emerging as the new method of colonization (Johnston, 1983, p. 24).
Miller corroborates by stating that, "...this attack on Aboriginal populations through the child protection and adoption system" was a "continuation of the residential school campaign against retention of Native identity" (p. 427). Miller also concludes in his book that the residential schools failed as pedagogical institutions because the federal government and the missionary bodies that ran the schools, two of the three partners that he identifies in the residential school project, were not really interested in educating aboriginal children. Instead the government's intentions were colonial and assimilative, "The federal government looked to its Native educational policy to bring about Aboriginal economic self-sufficiency, principally through cultural assimilation and vocational instruction...as inexpensively as possible" (p. 414).

About the Church bodies that actually ran the schools, Miller concludes that: "For most of the twentieth century...the missionary objectives for residential schools were conversion and assimilation" (p. 416). Colonial attitudes are at the root of assimilative motives.

In order to understand the colonial intentions or motives of the Church and State I refer to a source by John McLean (1889), Indians of Canada: Their manners and customs, originally published in Toronto. Colonial attitudes, which persisted well into this century, and which many would argue still
operate, are explicit in this personal and "scientific" book. This is a surprisingly "sensitive" account of Aboriginal life and societies in Canada. The author lived for nine years among the:

...Blood Indians of the Canadian North-West...I hope that the readers of these pages will have their ideas changed, as mine have been, by coming in to closer contact with the Red Men, through their languages, literature, native religion, folk-lore, and later Christian life (pp. vii - viii).

Although McLean has a certain respect for indigenous cultures in Canada, he doesn't view their study as important for preserving cultural practices for indigenous people, but rather as a means to benefit western knowledge to aid the goals of conversion and assimilation. "We are preserving the past in written form and supplanting it with a nobler present...Whilst we mourn, in the interests of science, that much is being lost in the interest relating to history, we rejoice in the progress of the race" (p.303). When "respect" is invoked in this context it suggests an element of judgement; respect has strings attached and connotes that it (respect) is extended on eurocentric terms. The tone of the book suggests that the author firmly believed that the First Nations of Canada would inevitably disappear and become extinct; “survival of the
fittest" would see to that; the fittest, according to the author, were those who were white and English-speaking. It was only natural.

Aboriginal people were viewed, at this time, as having the potential to become civilized and Christian (one and the same thing according to McLean). Even this belief was abandoned during the residential school saga. In 1889, Christian missionaries were, according to the author, the instrument through which the "elevation of the red race" (McLean, 1889, p. 303) would be achieved. Civilizing, and assimilation, the primary motives of both the federal government, and the Church (who also counted 'conversion to Christianity' as a primary aim), in the residential school account by Miller, are also McLean's ideals in dealing with the problem of the "Red Man".

In his book, McLean identifies the "Indian Problem" which he later summarizes in the statement, "They stand in the way of advancing civilization" (p. 338). The attitudes of the day, which I think have remained essentially unchanged until quite recently are explicitly laid out in Chapter VIII, *The Indian Problem*. McLean's telling subheadings in this chapter summarize his thoughts

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18 This belief waned for both the clergy and federal government by 1910, after the apparent dismal pedagogical failure of the residential schools (Miller, 1996).
about native people and, I believe, those of most European Canadians of his day: *The Civilizing of the Indian, Move On, Bible and Plough, Red and White, Among the Lodges*, and *The lazy Indian*. He concedes, however, that indigenous people were wrongfully accused of “being lazy” and that responsibility lay largely with the white colonizers who through disease, dislocation, introduction of alcohol and gambling, and destruction of natural resources such as the buffalo created the despairing and poverty-stricken situation of most aboriginal settlements at the time. Still, McLean’s anglo-centricity gets the better of him, as he is convinced of British Manifest Destiny and the superiority of English culture:

> It is not by determined opposition that we must win our way, but by continued labor, undermining the customs of the Indians by giving them a superior religion, grander and purer customs, and a nobler civilization than they enjoy (pp. 301-303).19

It has not been unusual for me to encounter many of these attitudes, even today.

It is interesting and useful to examine the parallels between the motivations behind residential schools and the Scoop. In Patrick Johnston’s account of the child welfare system he identifies basic motivations and

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19 Graeme Chalmers (2000) has written an insightful and telling article that examines Art Education in residential schools. His findings support the notion presented here that even when art and craft were taught they were seen as a means to reinforce European values and aid assimilation.
circumstances, which sound very familiar while reading through Miller's account of residential education. In both cases the authors suggest that the federal government ignored its responsibility, financially and morally, to indigenous communities. These were the obligations of providing education and social services to the native population, particularly on reservations. The government seems to have been trying to get out of these responsibilities since the time of confederation in 1867 (Johnston, 1983; Miller, 1996). The Indian Act of that time clearly made aboriginal people responsibilities of the federal government (and, through the missions, wards of the Church as well). The responsibility for education of aboriginal people clearly lay within the jurisdiction and responsibility of the federal government, but what of social services and child welfare? It seems that since social services for non-native Canadians are the responsibility of provincial agencies, the federal government refused to become financially or morally responsible for health and welfare of indigenous people.

The provinces, of course, saw native people as falling under the sole jurisdiction of the federal government, and therefore reluctantly served First Nations; in BC, one hundred percent of the cost for a native child in the system was charged to the federal government (in 1981). The situation varied throughout the Provinces and Territories (Johnston, 1983). This situation
parallels the history of native education where education is a provincial responsibility, except in the case of First Nations people. Another important connection to be made here is the fact that the residential schools were places where the poor, orphans, and the abused would often end up, serving as a means to deal with the "welfare of children" in the absence of any policy or government institution that would deal with serving the needs of families on reservations. As with education, the federal government ignored their responsibility to aboriginal people, relying on the residential schools, or in other words, their missionary partners, to take in children who required care. The Caldwell report, mentioned below, was partly inspired by the "awareness that most children in residential schools were there because of 'welfare' considerations rather than academic policy reasons" (Miller, 1996, p. 400).

It is interesting that two federally sponsored reports, the Hawthorn report and Caldwell report of the 1960s (1966-7) resulted in recommendations

29 Another, as yet undeveloped parallel can be found in the per-capita funding system for residential schools, introduced early this century, which led to quotas for the schools, coercive techniques to secure enrolment, and forced apprehensions of children. Child welfare agencies also seem to claim their expenses to the federal government on a per capita basis.
that integration, both with respect to education and child and family welfare, be
adopted with responsibility for both being transferred to the provinces. George
Caldwell, of the Canadian Welfare Council, was commissioned by Indian
Affairs to study nine Saskatchewan residential schools; he found the residential
schools to be pedagogical and social failures and recommended that the
government and church move away from reliance on these schools. The
Hawthorn report favoured integration as a solution to the problem faced in
residential schooling. Similarly, the welfare of children was seen as being best
served by existing provincial child welfare agencies, most of which eventually
did so in a half-hearted manner (Johnston, 1983).

An important factor, which led to the failure of residential schools and
provincial child welfare agencies to meet the needs of First Nations
communities, lay in their colonial relationship with Churches, governments and
their institutions. Johnston describes this colonial relationship as one where
three conditions exist:

1) power and decision-making ability are vested in the dominant group;

2) the cultural practices and beliefs of the subordinate group are de-
valued and denigrated

95
3) the interaction between colonizer and colonized results in conditioning for both to behave in a particular manner.²¹

From all three accounts by Miller, York and Johnston, it is easy to see that all these conditions of the colonial relationship are fulfilled in the complex histories of residential schools and the Sixties Scoop. Ultimately, it is racism that lies at the heart of colonialism. The post-colonial project of much current academic discourse, which cuts across disciplines, must deal directly with racism. I can easily conclude from my journey that government and Church policy toward aboriginal people viewed them as infantile, primitive, and culturally inferior. It devalued aboriginal language, religion, values, and traditions, including the traditional pedagogical and child rearing practices of indigenous communities. These assumptions operated during the residential school experiment and further through the Sixties Scoop. I'm not sure this attitude has changed for many Canadians and a key to addressing this issue is to

²¹ For instance the removal of children from a dysfunctional family may only serve to exacerbate the dysfunctional behaviour that led to apprehension - i.e. alcohol abuse.
understand, respect, and honour First Nations culture, as opposed to fearing, devaluing, or *anthro-apologizing* differences.

Both residential schools and the Scoop led to the creation of lost generations of aboriginal people - people whose cultural identities had been assaulted through their interaction with the colonial intentions of Church and government. This happened first through the residential schools and later continued in the practices of child welfare agencies.

In Appendix C to this thesis I've included the text from Littlechild's installation piece, *Dis-Placed Indians: the Sixties Scoop*. Reading this testimony is moving and emotional; it made me, at least, search for answers to questions, which arose as I was working with George on his show. I'm appalled at the systemic racism and abuse that these and other colonial survivors have been subject to. The residential schools played a large role in creating the dysfunctional families that perpetuate themselves in First Nations communities and led to large scale apprehension of aboriginal children by child welfare agencies beginning in the 1960s and continuing into the 1980s, and even the present. These histories are steeped and unfold in the largely eurocentric and racist assumptions of a dominant society (Johnston, 1983; York, 1990).
Since the exhibition of *Displaced Indians* in the 1997 exhibition at the Surrey Art Gallery, the piece has traveled to several different venues across Australia and Canada. It returned to Canada after touring Australia in an exhibition, *Four Circles: Soaring Visions* which opened at the Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Adelaide, as part of the 1998 Adelaide Festival. I had the opportunity of curating part of this show in an interesting cross-cultural and cross-continental collaboration with Doreen Mellor. This exhibition emerged out of a series of video-conferences between artists and researchers as part of the work of Dr. Rita Irwin and Tony Rogers. This experience was incredibly interesting for me as I learned of the parallels of cultural genocide and history shared by the First Nations artists here and the aboriginal artists in Australia. I had the wonderful experience of eventually meeting the artists, researchers and curators from the Australian continent, when given the opportunity to travel there for the installation of the exhibition in 1998. I had the chance to get to know and become friends with the artists in Australia during this visit and had a chance to renew our ties again, when they visited Canada in 1999. I saw in Australia a situation that so closely resembled that in Canada that it was uncanny. The colonial attitudes, which prevailed here, were
also operating there, with similar devastating results for the indigenous people and their cultures.

There is hope for a better future for First Nations education and child welfare, although improvement in both areas relies, to a large extent, on the willingness of government and Canadian society to work with native people to develop and administer their own knowledge, skills, institutions and agencies, and to question, dismantle and unlearn colonial and racist attitudes. It also requires the federal government (and people of Canada) to face up to their moral and economic responsibilities to First Nations. We must learn our history from other sources, especially first-person accounts and from the perspectives of indigenous people. In the face of the massive cultural genocide that has indeed taken place, this requires some work to be done within aboriginal communities - a project of cultural reclamation and re-creation.

Aboriginal people are taking control of schools and education; First Nations groups have criticized the practice of child welfare agencies in apprehending native children and placing them in non-native environments. Re-working and re-conceptualizing traditional euro-western conceptions of education and a valuing of aboriginal culture by First Nations educators and administrators, have provided models that are useful, not only for First Nations
education, but also for education in dominant society. Social and educational
problems being addressed by recent educators and curriculum specialists, many
of whom are First Nations (Battiste, 1996; Calliou, 1996; Collier, 1988;
Hampton, 1996; Regnier, 1996), are not confined solely to First Nations
students and their needs, but cut across communal, racial and cultural
boundaries.

In their 1991 book, Situated Learning, Lave and Wenger assert that
"learning involves the construction of identities" (p. 53). Construction of
identity occurs not only through formal education in schools, but also through
our socialization in families, communities, and even institutions such as,
churches, sweat lodges, mosques, temples, synagogues, gurdwaras... All this
experience, or informal education, is what leads to and aids the construction of
self - of identity. This process of self-construction, is essentially what residential schooling
and the Scoop interfered with for many countless First Nations children. Too few survived
to pick up the pieces, to heal and remake themselves.

So what have I learned and how will this knowledge be enacted? As
an art educator/curator/programmer I am more acutely aware than ever of the cultural
sensitivity and respect required in order to meet the needs of culturally diverse communities. I
must value the perspectives and beliefs of those who differ in these respects from me and from
dominant society. I must check the ethnocentric assumptions in my practice - in my lived life. Ultimately I must learn to respond with compassion towards everyone I come into contact with and to deal with my own and other's racism and ethnocentricity. Hopefully, this new understanding will lead to useful and exciting transformations in my life and a new understanding and respect for the right of First Nations people to self-government. I cannot forget whose land this truly is and the shameful colonial history that attempted, but thankfully failed, to destroy them. This is the background and justification for a collaboration such as Witness - the enactment of my knowledge.

In light of history and the reality of cultural pluralism in our communities and schools we are obliged to work with First Nations to build new relationships of exchange and trust so we can learn from and with one another, and truly create something better than what we can achieve on our own. In the massive project to understand our history and society we need to connect with First Nations to understand their perspectives and concerns. I cannot see how we can hope to build a society that is democratic and safeguards and honours identity, difference and equality among all members of society unless we address our own colonial history and legacy. How can we celebrate the cultures of immigrants, arguably anyone who is not native, and
"others" without first attending to this land and its indigenous people? And what does that mean for art education?

In his monograph for the Getty Centre entitled *Celebrating Pluralism* (1996), Chalmers provides a convincing argument for art as a uniquely well-suited subject area through which to "teach" cultural diversity, preparing them (students) for contemporary life. This is a response to the reality of a culturally diverse society and the contemporary need for a "curriculum that respects pluralism" (p. 1). The book does not restrict itself to pluralism only in terms of ethnicity, but also includes gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status; its scope is broad and inclusive. There is a strong argument for the use of a sequential, discipline-based approach in a cross-cultural art education, approaching *all* art from the different art disciplines.

This is because multicultural art education is not seen merely as the adding on of "units" that discuss one or two works from other cultures, or a studio activity that consists in reproducing the "artifacts" of different traditions; it is ultimately about learning to shift one's own perspective and to give up habitual, culturally conditioned ways of seeing and being - of relinquishing a Eurocentric perspective. (I'm not sure educators will be able to take up this challenge without, working with those that have a perspective from within the
culture. The main "thesis" of Chalmers' monograph is that by asking the "why?" of art and its functions and roles across cultures, commonalities, and therefore starting points for discovery and understanding are uncovered. I would also suggest that differences are also sites to begin a journey of conversations, discovery and understanding. This makes it possible to begin to value and respect art and cultural perspectives that are non-European. These are skills necessary for children to live effectively, perhaps even peacefully, in a complex pluralistic society.

What I found most valuable in Celebrating Pluralism was the idea that in looking across cultures at art, we need to look at the "whys?" of art practice. Art's roles and meaning in various cultural contexts, although specifically different, are accessible in meaningful ways through Chalmer's approach; he does not believe in making only formal comparisons based on a single value system, but condones the use of "many lenses" in dealing with cultural diversity and art education. The art object cannot be understood, removed from its cultural context anymore that we can claim knowing the nature of being human through an analysis of DNA sequences. In our work, art educators, curators, cultural workers need to engage with the art of other cultures without appropriation, tokenism, or disrespect. I don't feel that this is possible, except
through close and substantive collaboration with these cultures in order to
develop and form these "lenses". The "lens" needs to be focused from within
the culture being encountered, most effectively and ultimately through the
perspective of an individual with whom, one can form a relationship of trust
and mutual respect.

I also strongly support the idea that local, community differences need
to be addressed through the curriculum of any school, community centre, art
gallery, museum, etcetera, and that local First Nations should also be
represented in the curriculum. If, for instance, there are many students in the
class who are Vietnamese in origin, then this suggests the need to orient the
curriculum to that fact. Collaborations with students, their parents, and other
local resources would be an ideal place to start. On the other hand, I agree with
Chalmers that in ostensibly culturally homogeneous classrooms and
communities it is even more important to "celebrate pluralism". But I also must
stress that, like Rita Irwin (Irwin, Rogers, & Wan, 1998, 1999; Irwin, 1998), I
feel that aboriginal culture and history needs to be at the top of the list in the
pursuit of dismantling the eurocentric master narrative of art and art history.
In an article by Peter O.Neil and Rick Mofina, beginning on the front page of the October 6th, 1999 issue of the Vancouver Sun, the authors cite Supreme Court of Canada Justice Antonio Lamer, as stating that "aboriginal and treaty rights will be among the most pressing matters facing the court in the 21st century. This statement is embedded in an article that otherwise suggests that righting the wrongs of the past, reduced to treaty and hunting and fishing rights in this case, is causing great upset in the rest of society and is an academic problem for the courts. This betrays a general misunderstanding of our colonial history and responsibility to First Nations. It is paramount that if we are to move forward in the next century to ameliorate the lives of native people in Canada and to develop partnerships and relationships of trust between our many communities, that we turn to and address the colonial legacy left us by past generations."
Chapter IV

WRITING WITNESS

4.1 Witness and Metaphor

Witness is a complex project that seems to be successful as a model for community cultural development and for cross-cultural collaboration. Because every community art/cultural development project is different in terms of objectives, communities, issues, activities, and major players, it is more important to find those aspects of a project (i.e. Witness) that may be useful in other, similar situations. I think that this can be best achieved through an examination of the process and the metaphors that a closer study of Witness can provide. These metaphors can serve as a guide for collaboration in general, collaboration across cultures, and finally across cultures with First Nations (Squamish Nation). So if Witness can serve as a model - it is not with the goal of exactly replicating the project but discovering those attitudes and ways of being that have been conducive to its apparent success.

How it all began reads like a series of coincidences and fortuitously serendipitous incidents. This bears out Dreezen's (1992) observation that few partnerships emerge in “clearly defined steps” and that a “successful partnership
may be initiated in a chance encounter" (p. 227). The meeting of photographer/artist/activist Nancy Bleck and legendary mountaineer, John Clarke, through their involvement with Randy Stoltmann and his work in the "Stoltmann" wilderness, led eventually to their collaboration to bring people and awareness to this threatened and unique environment. Their ad-hoc grassroots approach created a small group of dedicated individuals committed to educating the public about the threat to Sims Creek as well as the Environment in general. Two years of taking groups of people up to this valley, camping on the sandbar, and monitoring the activities of logging companies, led eventually to the fateful meeting between Nancy and Chief Bill Williams, Talalsamkein Siyam of the Squamish Nation.

Witness, in fact, has resulted from one of the first proposals we received at the Roundhouse. It came from Nancy Bleck, together with Chief Bill Williams and John Clarke. With time it has developed into a residency and the complex community art project it is today. It is this story, I believe, that can teach us about collaboration - and about community art practice.

Through the personal contributions of many individuals and organizations this substantive multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural project has developed and unfolded into a complex and diverse series of opportunities to
connect to Nature, the Squamish Nation, art-making, recreation, history and individuals.

The vision of the Roundhouse is truly met, as this project, *Witness*, is an oasis in an urban context and also an opportunity for connection to diverse perspectives. It celebrates the diversity of people, ideas, values and activities and blurs the boundary between Recreation and Art. Why did we decide to pursue developing this proposal instead of others? Obviously the proposal met our general criteria and vision, but there is more to tell; there are other connections that emerge from the specific sites (Roundhouse and Sims Creek) and their histories.

The Roundhouse is one of the oldest buildings in this city; it sits on land, which has historical significance that predates the arrival of the CPR in Vancouver. This project, as one of its objectives, seeks to acknowledge that history, which includes the story of First Nations (including the current Squamish Nation) and the recognition that the Roundhouse sits on territory which was lived on by people indigenous to this land. Try and imagine, if you can, the False Creek area, indeed all of Greater Vancouver as inhabited wilderness. Old growth forest covers most of the land, False Creek is an important living, fishing and hunting site for First People, particularly the
Squamish Nation. Sturgeon are plentiful, as are other types of marine animals. False Creek extends to the present-day Clark Drive and is a reservoir for several creeks, many of which are salmon runs. Granville Island is a sandbar, not unlike Sims Creek, where the \textit{Witness} project takes place each weekend in the summer. Under the present-day Burrard Street Bridge there is an important and long-standing village called \textit{Snaw̓kel}. Perhaps through the experience of going to a place like Sims Creek we can become more aware of the environmental impact our city has had in the short while since non-native settlers arrived and indigenous people were displaced from traditional villages, settlements, and seasonal camps along our shores. Maybe we can imagine what it must have been like here . . .

The indigenous people that lived, hunted, and fished along the coastline of British Columbia got around primarily through the many waterways by canoe; the canoe was an important mode of transportation and held great cultural significance for many of the Nations that lived, fished and hunted here.

With the arrival of another mode of transport, the steam engine, that situation began to change rapidly as settlers arrived, displaced indigenous people, and altered the way the land was used.
A hundred and eleven years since the Roundhouse was built, as part of the *Witness* project, a canoe arrived to be carved by a Squamish Nation/Kwagiulth (Kwa Kwa Ka’ Wakw Nation) artist, Xwa Lac Tun, and his family as part of the *Witness* project, along the body of water that once witnessed many canoes in its waters. This was not the first time that canoes were significant for those who work and live at or near the Roundhouse:

During the Great Fire of 1886, the men clearing the C.P.R. Roundhouse site were driven by the fire into the waters of False Creek, and were rescued by Indians (sic) in canoes from the direction of Aun-mayt-sut; they were in camp on the shore opposite the fire; about Cambie or Ash Street (J.S. Matthews, 1955, *Conversations with Khahts ablone: 1932-1954*, p.401).

For thousands of years the first inhabitants of this land were able to make use of its resources to survive and flourish without depleting the land; yet like Vancouver today, they made use of its resources for shelter, food, medicine, water, transportation, and recreation. At the beginning of the new Millennium, we are experiencing unprecedented destruction of our natural resources and environment . . . It is time that we look to other models for living in this land. The original inhabitants have important lessons for us; they have witnessed and lived with the cycles of this land for millennia.
The Roundhouse has been able to connect and help shape *Witness* within a context that is not directed at any particular community or interest group. What we have attempted to bring to this project is a way of facilitating a process that remains flexible and timely, and able to collect the energy required for a project like *Witness*. This project has actually facilitated the creation of a community.

The principal motif or metaphor that has guided this project comes from the witness ceremony itself, described by Chief Williams as a “sacred honour”, and a “responsibility” and even “duty” (Alibhai (editor), 1997). I would like to examine the notion of being a witness and how it relates to collaboration and this project in particular.

*Witness*, the word, according to *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (2nd Edition, 1978, p 2101), can be a noun or a transitive verb; it comes from the Anglo Saxon words *witan* - to know, and *witnes* - testimony. It’s interesting to me that witness can signify a person, place, or thing, or the acting-upon or being-in-the-world of a person place or thing. Whether the word *witness* is used as a noun or verb it retains certain conceptual and semiotic qualities. For instance, it suggests that someone or something who is a witness has first hand testimony to give i.e. someone or something that gives or bears testimony,
based on experience. In this way the Sims Valley is a witness, the facilitators, volunteers, and participants are witnesses, so too are the writings, video, photographs, performances, ceremonies, and artwork that have been generated through the *Witness* project. What separates the act of witnessing in a formal context from the living of everyday experience, where we are arguably always present, is perhaps the degree to which we are present - the extent to which we pay attention. When witnessing is formalized, as in a ceremony or in a courtroom, it becomes careful and attentive; it becomes a record; it becomes evidence. *Witness*, the project, can be looked at as a communal amassing of evidence, the result of multiple *witnessings*, and the growth of the project through *word-of-mouth* or oral tradition.

What is a Squamish perspective of the notion of witness/ing? After all, the form and concept as manifested through the *Witness* project is based on a Coast Salish tradition. I asked Peter Jacobs of the Squamish Nation for his perspective on the Squamish conception of this ceremony and the notion of being a witness or witnessing. It seems that, like in English, a witness gives testimony of *personal* experience. In the context of the ceremony (as I know it) those who serve as witnesses are obliged to remember a significant event, gifting, or declaration. They may be asked to recount their experience at a later
date, giving testimony, much like the western notion of a witness in a court situation. But they are also given the responsibility to tell others of their experience - in their own communities. According to Jacobs there are different phrases to describe a witness, but not a single word, suggesting an active role for the witness. Again the concept encompasses, like in English, a noun as well as verb.

The most common phrase to describe a witness is ta na wa ns?eyxnit, loosely translated as “those who are looking after what is going on” and “those responsible to remember”. The phrase can also mean “people who are babysitting” or it can also refer to “those who will be addressed” (as in a gathering). So the phrase is inclusive of all participants in the ceremony and emphasizes care, attention, memory, and nurturing. Again, in the context of a formalized ceremony the act of witnessing is a careful attention of the world; it speaks of an orientation to a world or reality that makes us complicit in its making. It also honours personal as well as multiple perspectives of the world. The essence of being a witness or of witnessing is that which separates it from hearsay and gossip. This difference is first-hand experience. One cannot witness or be a witness without having “been there”.

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What we learn about collaboration through this ceremony is that we must experience that which we are trying to accomplish on a personal and direct level and that a multiplicity of perspectives is the ideal rather than an "objective" master narrative. We are trusted, and must in return trust. We are asked to give our being, our attention and care to the process. We must go beyond our institutional and organizational facades to be people - individuals working with other individuals.

In the witness ceremonies that take place at Sims Creek and throughout this project, several people are invited to be witnesses to the "work" that is to be officiated over by a Witness Speaker, who is qualified to conduct such a ceremony, and is invited by the individual(s) who desires to hold the ceremony. Each witness is invited to speak about what they've experienced, always resulting in a multi-perspectival recollection of the event/action/work that has been carried out. This "work" can be an announcement, a ceremony (i.e. naming ceremony), gifting, or other significant event that one wishes to be remembered by the community, and to be relayed to other communities. This cultural practice has become a major metaphor and the motif of the Witness project in that the general objective has been to invite participation and collaboration between as many different perspectives as possible.
The resulting dialogue across cultural and other differences (political, socioeconomic etc.), has been most easily and effectively achieved through cultural/artistic production and exchange. This is key to the spirit of the project, an approach and belief shared by all the key participants. It has been a way of working that allows different and new perspectives to enter the dialogue and allows Witness to deal with difficult and divisive issues in a non-confrontational and respectful way.

Even the popular media has caught on to the strategy for including more “partners” and perspectives. In a March 16th article in the Vancouver Sun, Detmar Schwichtenberg describes how environmental groups in B.C. have become resilient and adaptable due to their increasing diversity. “The growing diversity of individuals from all income groups and occupations is what gives the movement its resilience and resourcefulness in dealing with constantly changing conditions” (A13, 1999). The article goes on to mention the increasing sophistication of “the movement” as it seeks to develop market-based strategies and relationships with government. The author ends the piece with the important observation that “While the diversity of the movement has created new opportunities...environmentalists need to maintain the grassroots support that is still at the movement’s heart”.

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What sets *Witness* apart is that its strategy is not only market-based, as described in Schwichtenberg’s article, but that it is oriented to cultural dialogue and includes First Nations as an important and crucial partner in the process. The witness ceremony as an act and a metaphor has allowed for a diversity of perspectives to enter the project and created a situation of greater bio-diversity in an ecosystem, allowing for greater adaptability and chances for survival.

Another metaphor that can guide collaboration, already hinted at, is Nature itself. More specifically, a valley, like the Sims valley, that in its declivity, collects the energy and resources for life and culture. The low spot is a nexus for the exchange of information, knowledge, and power. A valley in the wilderness is receiving, simple, and subtle. *The Tao Te Ching*, itself based on the metaphor of Nature, 2500 years old and still relevant, inspired this approach to collaboration.

Know the glory,
   Hold to the obscurity;
   Become the world's valley.
By being the world's valley,
   The Power will be sufficient.
   This is returning to Simplicity.

When Simplicity is broken up,
It is made into instruments.
Evolved Individuals who employ them,
Are made into leaders.
In this way the Great System is united
(Chapter 28, excerpt from Wing, 1986, Chapter 28).
The leaders in *Witness* have been an essential component and inspiration to this collaborative effort. Experience has taught me that, at this level, there must be a connection that is personal between the individuals involved; trust and respect are cornerstones to these relationships and come only from experience and action - they evolve slowly with time. It has taken *Witness* five years to form into the current project. The calm and wise Chief Williams, the passionate and experienced John Clarke, the incorrigibly convincing Nancy Bleck have all been committed to a collaborative approach toward *Witness*, transcending differences by seeing their own perspectives as part of a complex and significant whole. They have served as nurturing valleys to bring many different people and skills to the project, without smothering or stifling their individual visions or agendas.

A dedicated group of volunteers has emerged from this project that essentially has become the driving force behind *Witness*. As Gregory Byrne, volunteer coordinator at the Roundhouse says, “*Witness* is a volunteer program.” The exhibition in 1997, the rest of this publication and the *Witness* Video are testimony to many of the individuals given voice through this environmental/recreational program, which is also, of all things, a community art project.
The thing is, that although this project is entering its fifth year as a summer program and its third as *Witness*, it has never remained still long enough to be glimpsed in its complex, multifaceted entirety. But maybe *that* is essentially its beauty - that it remains part-of-the-world, defying attempts to be categorized or arrested in some ideal, fixed form - constantly emerging and transforming. At present its different incarnations have included weekend camping trips, recreational and arts workshops/activities, environmental and cultural education, visual art, music, dance, performance, political activism/advocacy, sacred ceremonies, an art exhibition, and a video. It has been what it needed to be for its organizers and participants; *Witness* has as much formed its own community as having been formed by one. To me, this is a hallmark of successful community development through the arts.

Another measure of success as a collaborative project has been its ability to adapt to and meet evolving and emerging community needs. For example when the exhibition planned in 1997 grew to include many professional artists in the community, becoming a very large and significant event. Or when a Naming Ceremony for John Clarke was integrated into the program, and Chief Williams was honored with regalia made by an artist and friend - formally, and with witnesses present. The project has managed to
facilitate the participation of many often socially marginalized individuals, such as homeless people, urban youth, and physically disabled, as well as more "mainstream" people.

I believe that the most important overall guiding metaphor for the project is the notion of improvisation. This is not necessarily a new way of conceptualizing community art practice (which is, by nature, collaborative practice), but it remains important and relevant for Witness. In Art Activism & Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage (1998), editor Grant Kester argues that in order to work with and through traditionally marginalized perspectives and communities:

...the current political moment demands an activist art aesthetic based on performativity and localism, rather than on immanence and universality that are the hallmarks of traditional aesthetics. Performativity is a concept that has emerged in a number of areas in recent cultural criticism to describe a practice that is adaptive and improvisational rather than originary or fixed. (p. 15).

In the area of cognitive science and education, others have similarly spoken of enactivism, which seems to have direct parallels with the idea of performativity. If we enact or perform our world, it is possible to affect
change. In the process, we should remember that we are made by our world and, in turn, can actually create it (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993).

Kersti Krug (1996) and others (Kester, 1998) have used the metaphor of improvisation in conceptualizing their own experiences and practices, with Krug using jazz as a more specific metaphor.

My specific metaphor is South Asian Classical music. In the structure of a South Asian raga, which is an improvised melodic mode, one creates music that is attuned to the environment and its minutiae. The idea is to play in harmony with time, audience, ambiance, and light, while also creating the perception of this environmental context in the listener. When playing with other musicians, each brings their own expertise and skills, perhaps even personal tastes and habits to the collaborative concert. Each musician is respected for their uniqueness, and is allowed to express herself or himself within a structure that gives the given raga a complex form that returns to familiar rhythmic and melodic themes. As Krug states: “Jazz is about spontaneity, unpredictability, and rule-breaking; jazz shifts power from composer to musician (often one in the same re: south Asian traditions), and from musician to audience” (p.2). Similarly, in classical South Asian aesthetics,
the informed audience member is as much part of the mood and essence of the music as the musician.

Now what has all of this to do with Witness? I believe that this project has indeed been successful as collaboration, because it has been spontaneous, unpredictable, and ground-breaking as it seeks to empower participants, to contribute in their own particular way. Important lessons have been learned about collaborating by developing dialogue across cultural/social differences with First Nations, environmentalists, artists, cultural producers, scientists, and logging companies and their employees. We are trying to address issues and history that affect our lives in the world.

I have learned a great deal about many things as a coordinator of this project on behalf of the Roundhouse. Most important has been the insight and understanding that collaboration or partnership does not happen between organizations and institutions, but between people, and that the strength of these personal relationships is built on respect and trust. This "safe" environment creates a stability and confidence that allows ongoing dialogue from different perspectives. This environment is like a valley- nurturing, or a fully developed raga- improvised, but ultimately around a common theme. This may mean, often, shifting the power and responsibility for different aspects of a
project/process as needs and goals emerge. We live in a time and world where inter-relationships nurtured amongst colleagues, different social/cultural communities and individuals, and institutions and organizations will be crucial to our survival as a healthy society.

One of the most important issues facing our survival as a species is the vast and profound environmental degradation and destruction that threatens our planet and our communities. Gaia is dying. At the turn of this Millennium we must constantly seek ways to address these global issues, in performative and enactive ways that face the future, in light of the mistakes and events of history. A post-colonial world has many wounds to tend; we must address our entwined histories to create a healthier future.

I still can't fully describe, in mere words, what *Witness* or the special types of knowledge it represents. All knowledge originates in direct experience. And for this reason also, one cannot truly know *Witness* without participating in it - that's what it's about - being a witness. There are, again, many points of entry - and we continue to invite participation.

Marta Vega, founder of the Caribbean Cultural Center/African Diaspora Institute in New York, on September 25th, 1997 ended the first
evening of *The Vital Links Conference - Enriching Communities through Art and Art through Communities*, at Toronto’s Harbourfront Centre with these ideas:

How would we, as a group, recreate the world? It seems to me, going into the third millennium, that *that* is the thinking that we have to bring to forums like this. Because it is only when we envision “difference”, when we understand that we are developing a future for our children, our youth, and our grandchildren, that we can think differently. This speaks to the preciousness, and the sacredness and the spirituality that we bring as a people.

Isolationism will not work; neither will it work that we think we bring to others something that they don’t have (i.e. culture). We have to understand that everyone brings culture; everyone has creative experiences, and that some of us have the skill to translate those creative experiences into sacred objects that can be touched, that can be felt, that can be seen.

And that is the artist’s role - to be part of community; to help that community articulate its sacredness, not only for its particular group, but to share with others (Lee, 1998, p.28).

I think that these ideas are relevant and applicable to *Witness*, and I would like to make sure that at the end of this thesis, I return to this concept of the project as community art and acknowledge the special role that Nancy Bleck has played as an artist, committed to working with and developing community, and that of Chief Bill Williams, as a leader with vision, patience, and political astuteness, and of course, that of John Clarke, whose passion and first-hand knowledge of the land, the ultimate witness, bring *Witness* its credibility and accessibility.
Witness continues to be improvised by its increasing number of players, the mode is complex, and the underlying theme is collaboration, which, as we have seen, can result in innovation and, ultimately, social change.

Van Manen characterizes phenomenological inquiry as extremely difficult, which is where its challenge and intrigue lie. To do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. That is why many different methods are used in this bricolage of a thesis.

Where this study is useful is not, ultimately, in the realm of practical reason; there is no formula to be devised for collaboration or community art; there is nothing to “be done” with this knowledge, but it can cause a change in us - in our orientation to our work and life as educators, artists, cultural workers. A phenomenological attitude means that we are always asking ourselves what it means to be such-and-such in the world. It is a reflective attitude of caring, of compassion, of hope and nurturing. We can understand pedagogy, collaboration, cross-cultural communication as modes of being in the world that require a phenomenological attitude.
4.2 *Witness* and lived experience

In order to get to an understanding of the phenomenological attitude required to come together in *Witness* I turn to van Manen (1990) and the practice of anecdotal writing to analyze the experience. I specifically focus on the core of the project - the major motif of the witness ceremony itself. According to van Manen, anecdote is a “methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (p. 116). It is about everyday life, making the phenomenon of “conversational relation” (van Manen, 1990, p. 116) understandable. This, in phenomenology refers to the notion that each human being stands in a particular conversational relation to the world - in fact this relation is what comprises each human being.

Anecdotes begin in oral form and are social products that are usually unpublished and describe an aspect of the life-world (usually biographical in nature) that is “being in itself interesting or striking” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 216). In this thesis I have sprinkled anecdotal writing throughout, but here I focus on two particularly important experiences for me - that have led to much reflection and even personal transformation - these stories have ultimately been expressed by different participants (both professional and non-professional) through art - music, visual art, video, performance, and photography. I tell these stories to
demonstrate the transformational power of *Witness* - the power of art and ceremony (i.e. culture).

4.3 *Witness* Weekend

It's a clear sunny Saturday morning in July, 1997. My wife and two children and I have been up exceptionally early this morning to make it to the Roundhouse Community Centre. We are about to embark on a three-hour journey to old-growth forest in an area we have only ever merely driven through. We are excited about camping in the area, which is stunningly beautiful and wild. We are surprised by the number of other people who are gathering this early in the morning in Vancouver; we are greeted by friendly and welcoming volunteers. They give us maps, describe the trip and register us. We sign our liability waivers and engage in informal banter with some of the other gathered participants. There are many other families with children going this weekend, which provides some relief for us and excites the children. We notice that many of the families are recent immigrants to Canada - some of them, we later discover, are leaving the urban centre for the first time to experience the "wilderness". There are also many young people - students who are interested in environmental issues as well as First Nations culture. A significant number of participants are tourists:
Japanese, German, and Dutch. At 8 a.m. we begin our convoy to Squamish, about an hour and a half from Vancouver.

We enjoy the scenic drive along the coast and through mountain passes. The weather is fabulous; the children are asleep; the traffic is light. We leave the urban landscape and enter into a more rural one, and finally enter the small town of Squamish, named after the First Nations that traditionally live in this area. We meet at a mall to do a check-in and count - several other groups of people have joined us. Along with everyone else, we load up on some munchies, gas and water and then begin our journey down the logging roads to Sims Creek.

We are provided safe passage through the, sometimes dangerous logging roads, by the Squamish Nation Peace keepers, in their clearly marked vehicles and uniforms. We travel in a long convoy, needing to leave considerable distance between vehicles so we can see the road; the dust is thick in the air - we have to keep our windows closed and it gets stiflingly hot in our car - the children, thankfully, are asleep. Along the way the scenery has changed considerably; we first pass through serene birch forests and are initially shaded as we follow the Squamish river. Once we hit the unpaved road - this protective zone transforms into a hot dusty drive through the Squamish Valley - the vegetation is quite different in this previously clear-cut area. We feel exposed. The brush is thick
and golden, contrasting with the lush greens that protected and sheltered us earlier. We imagine bears feeding in the brush and keep a look out with the children for these amazing creatures. The roads are rough and pot-holed; we must drive slowly and carefully.

Up ahead, Nancy has a flat tire and I stop to see if I can help. When I get out of my car - I notice the difference (from downtown Vancouver) right away. The air is sweet-smelling, and filled with the loud cacophony of buzzing insects and crickets. It is hot and the swallows are stooping low. The blackflies and mosquitoes begin their weekend-long feast on my body as others join us to help Nancy out. She’s exhausted, having been up all night preparing herself and volunteers for the weekend. A logging truck, filled with large trees, goes by - we eat dust for several minutes after it goes by. The kids are waking and fussing – it’s so hot! So, we go on ahead while some other people help Nancy out.

Finally we reach a spot on the way where a waterfall exists, an oasis in an otherwise clearcut area, and everyone stops to cool off. The forest immediately around the falls is intact and lush; there is a constant mist from the force of the fall; we can barely hear one another over the roar of the water; but mostly, we sit in silent relief as the moist coolness refreshes us. Further down - we collect fresh water - glacial melt; it’s safe to drink and we gulp the incredibly sweet and
refreshing liquid in large quantities. After filling our water bottles, we continue
our journey for a few more miles, until we reach mile 52 on the logging road.

There are cars parked on one side of the road, we join them and begin
the arduous task of unloading and setting up camp. It is so hot that I’m drenched
in sweat and my head is pounding; I take off my clothes and practically dive into
a side-pool of the Sims river, to cool off and to get away from the relentless
insects. And cool off I did! The glacial melt is practically frozen, and the shock
of the cold is initially excruciating - leading to complete numbness in a matter of
seconds. Alternatively, the sandbar sand is like hot coals.

I return to our tent and tend to the children and help prepare lunch.
Others are doing the same thing with their families and friends. People are
happy. After we eat we gather under a tarp erected by the volunteers and learn
where the toilets are (buckets behind blinds - also erected by the volunteers), and
the principles of “zero-impact” camping: all our garbage is to be taken back home
with us. We are to use the designated toilets (and that too is taken back to the
city), not wash our dishes in the river, and respect the local vegetation and natural
life. When we go, the land is to be returned, intact and unspoiled, to the wildlife
and spirits. We are told that grizzly and moose tracks have been found in the
morning in the sandbar's fine iridescent sand; we are excited at the prospect of seeing such wildlife, but are warned about safety issues.

There is to be a witness ceremony in a few minutes on the sandbar down river and we are all invited to participate; most of us do. We follow the sound of the drumming that we can hear in the distance, muffled by the ceaseless roaring of the river; it sounds like a busy freeway. Out of the sudden metropolis of tents, people start to emerge, following the sound of the drumming and gathering around the drummer and Squamish speaker, who have been asked to officiate the ceremony by Chief Williams. We gather in a large circle beside the river, which almost seems to speak as the waters rush by. There are some children playing in a side arm of the river on the logs - we can hear their laughter in the distance. My four-year old daughter, Aaliya, has made a friend, a girl named Miracle - they play nearby - coming in closer to listen when there is singing or dancing or laughter - but mostly chasing insects, discovering tadpoles, and playing in the sand. My two-year old son, Naveed, sits blissfully among the moss-covered rocks that are embedded in the sand - he plays quietly and happily as Barbara and I participate in the ceremony. It begins with words.

Nancy, on behalf of Chief Williams, presents gifts of blankets and cash to each of the speakers, as a token of respect and honour. Songs of thanks and
welcome are offered by the drummer and speaker. Chief Williams welcomes the
gathered crowd to Squamish territory and describes the land as sacred site - a
place that is part of the Squamish cultural heritage, where ceremony and cultural
activity have been taking place for millennia. He conducts the “work” at hand -
which is to witness the clear cut devastation, the old growth forest, witness the
cultural heritage being rapidly lost - not because the people are disappearing, but
their cultural heritage - the old-growth forest is rapidly dwindling. He distributes
written information about Squamish history and land-title. In fact, we learn, this
valley is one of the last old-growth forest areas left within the traditional territory
of the Squamish; it is the northern limit of their traditional land and for millennia,
flourished under their stewardship. From the assembled crowd four people (in
this truncated version) are called forward to be witnesses by the officiating
speaker; my heart starts to pound as I hear my name called.

We are each presented with a symbolic gesture of two quarters by the
drummer. The speaker introduces himself (Bill Nehanee) and the drummer (Rick
Harry - who is also an accomplished carver and artist), and explains the
witness ceremony. He explains that this ceremony is, traditionally, conducted as a
means to record significant events in the context of an orally transmitted culture.
In the traditional ceremony - all those present are welcomed as witnesses - and all
speak. The ceremony can take several hours, if not days, to complete. Being called to witness is sacred, and confers responsibility on those present. As witnesses we are all asked to remember and reflect on the “work” that takes place - and to take accounts of that event(s) back to our families and communities - spreading the news, as it were. I feel the responsibility bear down on me as my name is called to speak. What will I say?

As I speak, I have the strange sensation that I’m listening to someone else speak - words leave my mouth that I haven’t prepared. I’m “in the moment”:

My name is Amir Alibhai and I’m very honoured to be called as a witness today. I thank the Squamish people, to whom this land traditionally belongs, for inviting me to this territory.

I also work at the Roundhouse Community Centre and on behalf of this organization, which is a partner in this project, I wish to thank Chief Williams, Nancy Bleck, John Clarke, and all the other volunteers who make this program possible.

This is my first witness ceremony and the first time I have been to this site. As I stand here on the river bank in the wilderness, participating in this gathering, I understand, perhaps truly for the first time, that this place - the old growth forest - is not just an endangered ecological resource, for wildlife - for recreation - but that it is also, or even instead, a cultural site. I feel that the trees, river, wind, birds, and insects speak a language that is old and sacred, and that without honouring and learning this language there is no sustaining humanity and the rest of the life on this planet into the future.

These forests are like cathedrals in their cultural significance, in their role as a place for spiritual renewal, ceremony, contemplation, refuge, healing, and history. Earlier, from John Clarke, we learned how ten-thousand years of history may be deciphered from a patch of soil, or moss; we must learn to read the land - to listen to it - and through this attentiveness we can understand more about ourselves and our interconnectedness with all life on earth.

This is a special place and I hope that it can remain a sacred place for many generations to come. I watch my son playing in the rocks - I see how happy and content he is to sit by a river, playing with stones and moss. I wish him to be able to return to places like this
Each witness sincerely speaks from their heart.

One witness speaks of her sadness at seeing the old growth disappear so quickly, and with such deadly efficiency and precision. She has witnessed the logging road grow longer for several seasons. Giants are felled - the soil is poor, exposing bare granite - it will take thousands of years for the current biological complexity to redevelop - if ever.

Another witness speaks of his connection to First Nations, made through participating in this project - of his recent awareness of a culture and people he was previously ignorant of.

Another witness, a logger, speaks of his life-work in the forest - of how generations of his family have made their living from the forest. He speaks of how he loves the forest, being in it, working in it. He wonders how long this lifestyle can be maintained by his community of loggers. The forest is disappearing fast; we have destroyed more forest in the world in the last 20 years than in all humanity's previous efforts to clear land. We need to assess the way in which we log and how we use our resources. It is surprising for many, especially
some of the “hard-core” environmentalists that are present, to hear such a perspective come forth.

The organizers chose the witnesses purposefully. The ceremony concludes with a song of thanks. We are free to partake (or not) in the photography workshop or wilderness hike being offered. We choose to stay on the sandbar with the kids. Tomorrow there will be a drum-making workshop. We decide that it’s too hard to participate with the children - but we watch and we talk with others; the children find new playmates. By Sunday afternoon we are repacked - feeling that we could spend more time here - we almost don’t want to leave - but as the sandbar empties of people we feel vulnerable targets for the biting insects and other possibly more dangerous wildlife that is everywhere. There is little shade and it begins to get very hot again. It’s time to go.

Not every weekend is like this one. The workshops are different, the participants are different, the weather is different, the speakers are different as well. Some weekends, blockades by loggers have had to be crossed; sometimes the campsite is moved onto the Squamish Reserve, because the logging activity is intense, or the situation too volatile.

One weekend, the bridge washes out and children and families are airlifted to safety. All the while, in the city, volunteers are writing, making art,
preparing media releases and spreading the news about *Witness*. Over the several years of its development the *Witness* project has created a community of individuals that return and give their time to facilitate the participation of others. In 2000, this group of ad-hoc volunteers has formed a non-profit society to further the goals of the project, which include using the arts/culture as a means to facilitate dialogue and change for this valley and the Squamish people. Another major goal is to take urban people into the land to see and experience, for themselves, this place and condition referred to as wilderness; let them judge its value for themselves. As a formal organization *Witness* has the chance to act politically and in collaboration with other organizations. The Roundhouse is more of an equal partner, and the project's reliance on programming decisions made by the community centre is less than most other programs.

How does art figure in all this? Each year, the focus changes. Initially, we had planned to facilitate writing and drawing and photo classes on each weekend, hoping to collect the public's work toward an exhibition. We found that this strategy was only of interest to those interested in art or those who were already artists - too narrow an audience. For that reason - we did invite everyone to participate in hands-on creative workshops, but also programmed geology talks, language classes, guided herbal hikes, and storytelling workshops and
discussion sessions. Participants have usually brought their musical instrument to make music in the evenings around the fire. When we did finally announce our plans to produce an exhibition about *Witness* we were overwhelmed by over 200 works submitted by professional artists in the community and non-artists who had participated in the weekends. The exhibition was a huge success with the public and with the participants.

Some of the original environmentalist volunteers, however, felt that the art show was not related to the purposes of environmental action, that they supported, and removed themselves from the project, tainted, as it were, by art. Eventually some of these wounds have healed and we have agreed to disagree. Whenever a community defines itself (just like an individual), it does so by relating to the other - by distinguishing itself so that there is inclusion - but also exclusion. Those that did participate in the exhibition had a chance to express themselves publicly and there is one powerful story that needs to be told to illustrate this.

During the course of the first year that *Witness* took place, a special denning tree had been found in the old growth, close to where we camped. It took fourteen people, clasping hands, to encompass the tree and the same number of people could simultaneously enter the hollow that the tree formed!
This tree became a site where prayers were offered to the forest, where ceremonies were performed and where weekend participants often began their tour of the old growth forest, where sound-tracks were recorded. The area was slated for logging, and there was concern about this tree being destroyed. The organizers of the weekends were aware that denning trees are protected from logging, as well as a specified zone of forest around them, and plans to inform the ministry about the tree’s existence were underway. In the meantime, a well-intentioned weekend witness decided to write Interfor a letter about the tree, pleading to spare it. Interfor responded by coming in the very next day and felling the tree, leaving all around it intact. “What denning tree?”

This was a devastating blow to the project and its organizers but the event became a major theme for the work created for the Witness exhibition later in the year. One group effort, made by a group of non-professional visual artists, involved an installation, including a soundscape, text, and recycled materials. The installation recreated the cedar tree in a tent-like structure made from hundreds of used tea-bags, sewn together. The colour was rich and reddish brown like the cedar tree itself. Inside the structure, one entered a calm serene space, and could listen to a soundscape consisting of ceremonies, songs and the actual felling of the tree, captured by Sylvie Mckormick, a musician involved in the project (see
Appendix A — CD ROM). Nearby, text told of the felling of this tree and the pettiness and meanness of the logging company. The piece was powerful and moving; many people were brought to tears by the story of this tree. There were many other similar types of work in the show and a significant amount of art submitted by well-established First Nations artists, who saw in this project, a political cause for which they would donate their work for exhibition. Artists included Lawrence Paul Yuxwelupton, Sandra Semchuk, George Littlechild, and Theresa Marshall.

In the second year of Witness, our efforts went into pulling together to make a small publication and begin making a video. The third year saw the on-site carving of a welcome-figure, carved in public by a Squamish artist, Aaron Nelson Moody. In our fourth summer we planned to communally build a traditional long house, right in this contested territory. So over the years, there is a real presence of Witness in this land and place.

The government and logging company have found it hard to know what to make of Witness. At first they seemed a little wary of communicating. Bill Williams’ authority, however, helped to open the dialogue eventually. But because Witness has not looked like a bunch of the usual environmental groups
that the ministry of forests and logging company have dealt with, they may have taken notice and responded.

We have held events where gift-baskets, consisting of art works, messages, and other gifts have been presented to both the ministry and Interfor - as a way to honour and invite them into dialogue. We’ve never blocked roads, spiked trees, or interfered with logging operations. We have taken “everyday” people, families and youth, out to the woods to see what is happening, and perhaps, that is more threatening in the end for the logging companies and the government than an easily recognizable group of activists. When the mainstream public seems to have a will to participate in a public debate, rather than the usual suspects with whom the logging companies and government are abundantly familiar, it seems, to corporate and government offices, that their propaganda have not been effective. Time will tell if Witness can make a real difference in the debate, or whether it can hope to save one of the few remaining coastal old-growth forest left in the area. I think it has effectively captured the imagination of segments of the public and the attention of the logging companies and government.

Witness also has a very personal and human dimension to it; it has changed people’s individual lives to be involved in the project. Landsea Tours
has, each year, donated a bus and driver, to take groups up to the Sims valley. We have taken street people, urban native youth, seniors, and Squamish Nation youth to this area.

When I reflect on the experiences that I've had and that others have recounted to me, I see a great power in this project. On one of the weekend trips with urban youth, one of the youth (17 years old) expressed that he had never been out of the urban centre in his entire life. He had always thought of the world as an ugly place - this trip had opened his eyes and brought him much joy. Another weekend, several homeless people and those living in subsidized hotel rooms downtown, were taken up to Sims Creek. I'll never forget the comment made by one of the other participants (a young male) along for the weekend as this group of “street people” disembarked from the tour bus. “Oh, they must be artists; they're dressed so strangely!” These are people normally overlooked or not even encountered in the day-to-day experience of the person who uttered those words. I saw then how this project could transcend differences of social class as well as culture. Everyone was equal in the face of the “wilderness”.

I cannot be more emphatic about the important role that individuals have in making Witness a transformational and pedagogical experience for many participants. These incredibly committed individuals have volunteered to
facilitate dialogue as a means to understanding. Through working over several years, *Witness* has attracted more and more dedicated people, usually young, looking for a way “to make a difference”, to meet like-minded others, to learn about themselves as well as other people and cultures. There are several Squamish individuals who have become part of this community.

One long-time volunteer was an exchange student from Japan who gave her time for two years of the project, while her visa was valid. She made many friends, becoming part of the community being created through the *Witness* project. It is these volunteers and community organizers, defined by their involvement and not through their credentials, that have formed a community as a result of this project. This is a major sign of “true” community development and cross-cultural pedagogy.

Important for these individuals, as well as weekend participants, are the many opportunities for expression - for eventually enacting their perspective in-the-world. Each weekend is brought to a close by gathering in talking-circles. This is an opportunity for participants and volunteers to debrief about their experience and about the issues that have come up for each of them. Often discussed, are strategies through which individuals can make political statements and actions. For some, it has awakened a new understanding of nature and “the
land”; for others it has provided access to people and ideas from the Squamish Nation; and still others, have had their eyes opened to the complex issues encompassed by the environmental, economic, historical, and cultural perspectives, all with stakes in this specific geographic area.

Much video footage was made (with permission) on the weekends over the past three years. I worked with Hali Tsui to view and log over 100 hours of raw footage, which we edited into a 30 minute video. (See Appendix A – Video). In the course of viewing the video footage, we were able to relive many moments from Witness, which included interviews with weekend participants and volunteers, as well as documentation of witness ceremonies, the Witness Exhibition, campfire music, story-telling, drum-making workshops, and herbal medicine workshops. This was an invaluable aid to my “research into lived experience”. It was particularly interesting to see events where I participated, viewed through the eyes of another person (the videographer) in the footage - bringing home the notion that nothing is “objective” regarding even seemingly detached media like video and photography.

From all this footage a most significant narrative emerged (not obvious in the 30 minute piece), involving one particular individual known as “Ricky”. Ricky is a guy that became involved in Witness as a member of a literacy group, at the
Carnegie Centre in the downtown East side of Vancouver. One of the Landsea Bus weekends was used to take interested people from this economically poor neighbourhood to Sims Creek. Many of the people who came on this particular trip to Sims, were recently on the streets, or currently there, or living in single occupancy hotel rooms.

Ricky has been homeless, he’s been a drug addict and alcoholic. He’s had a pretty tough life. His ancestors are Plains Cree. He was initially a bit aloof. But as the video footage shows, he finds the site (Sims Creek) exciting, beautiful, and ultimately empowering. As he began to know and trust Nancy, the videographer/interviewer - he opened up more to the camera - almost seeming to “perform” for it and its imagined audience. During the course of his first weekend there, being in a place where others couldn’t judge him easily, where many perspectives were honoured - he seemed to feel safe.

Ricky is a natural performer and an extremely interesting person. It is often difficult, however, to make out whether he’s kidding around or telling the “truth”. He is a fabulous storyteller and a wonderful singer and musician. All of these aspects of his self were not evident to many who had known him previously at the Carnegie Centre; they became evident at Sims creek. He played guitar and sang rock and roll at Carnegie, but during his first weekend at Sims, he “came
out” as a First Nations person. He shared stories and songs, and by the evening campfire, was entertaining and choreographing communal dancing around the fire. I found the change in him, evident in the video footage, astounding. He became empowered. He also seemed to transform his own attitudes as he explained that this was not something he shared with “white folk”, normally; he found his experience to be joyful. After that weekend, staff at Carnegie described a new Ricky, who seemed to be cleaning his act up and was more and more involved in programs at the community centre - keeping out of “trouble”.

At Carnegie Centre, participants in the literacy group held a special event where they shared stories and poetry, and music that expressed their experience at Sims. Many of the Witness volunteers, including Nancy, were present. The video-footage of this event revealed how moved and affected many of the participants were. One woman beautifully expressed her horror at the devastation caused by clear-cutting practices and the permanent loss of places she knew as a child in a personal piece of narrative. She described her reaction to a fallen giant cedar as “regarding a proud and fallen king”, laid waste by those with no regard for life.”

Ricky returned several times to Sims creek and participated in other “actions” that Witness organized, back in Vancouver, including a gift-giving ceremony and National Aboriginal Day celebrations. I think that Ricky was not
only empowered by having a safe space and community to express himself within, but that his special relationship with Nancy Bleck, who befriended him and continued a relationship with him outside the weekend trips, was a key to his transformation. Nancy accepted Ricky for who he was and showed him compassion and friendship. This again, underscores the fact that successful pedagogy, especially if pedagogy is viewed as “transformation”, relies very much on the way the “teacher” is, as a person in the world, and with others in the world. Compassion is key in this mode of being.

4.4 Successful Collaboration

There is now the necessity for me to return to Blandy and Congdon (1993), Dicosimo (1989), Johnston (1983), and Dreezen (1992), all previously introduced with their own relevant “partnership models”, or in the case of Johnston, “conditions for colonialism”. As expected, there are many overlaps between these models and some gaps. At this point, I would like to review and compare their criteria for successful community collaborations (and signs of “colonialism”) and to see the relevance of these criteria with respect to \textit{Witness} - so that research and practice may be drawn upon to distill a set of principles of
collaboration - those aspects that emerge as being crucial in substantive cross-cultural collaborations.

I hope to use these “principles” as a way to characterize and analyze the successes of Witness, bringing them to an essence that may be transferable to other situations. The four “models’, of Blandy and Congdon (1993) are amalgamated and summarized by me in the list that follows. I’ve omitted overlaps between models and incorporated my own ideas based on experience. Please note that the order in which these concepts appear in the following list does not reflect a “step-by-step” arrangement, nor does it imply a descending value as the list progresses.

Successful Partnerships are characterized by the following:
1. Non-hierarchical
2. Leadership and expertise
3. Respect for cultural difference
   Sensitivity to cultural difference and positions of power in society
   Not speaking for others
4. Effective planning
5. Site and situation-specific programming
6. Common goals and shared beliefs (particularly the benefits of partnership for each)
7. Critical Inquiry (reflection and questioning, particularly internal assumptions and conditioned modes of behaviour)
8. Communication (sharing information with one another as well as public)
9. Flexibility
10. Broad-based community support and participation
This considered list of mine has ostensibly been the ultimate purpose of this research and writing. It emerges out of my stated research question. What follows is a consideration and explanation of each of the listed conditions above, relating each back to *Witness*. This is a means to further analyze and describe the project.

1. Non-hierarchical

This concept relates to many different types of relationships that must form in partnership processes. In a cross-cultural context this issue is complex, particularly since self-proclaimed experts of "other" cultures abound. In essence this idea refers to equality among partners and equal opportunities to express and state personal perspectives and goals. Such a "safe" space is required to develop other conditions in the process of developing collaborative projects. In the case of *Witness* there were initially several issues around roles within the project. The Roundhouse was perceived as a way to finance a project, which was already planned, and as representing "the establishment" and a large organization (City Park Board). Nancy and John were individual artist and environmentalist and Chief Williams was acting independently of open and official Squamish Nation support.
The political aspects and aspirations for the project were thus initially down-played. By meeting regularly and getting to know each other personally we were able to develop a situation of trust, where participants' "true" intentions regarding the project became known. A key strategy for creating this condition of non-hierarchy is to ensure that all perspectives are safely voiced and considered. This, facilitated the process of developing a common language, common goals, and being flexible.

Everyone speaks for oneself in this process. Maintaining a non-hierarchical perspective requires on-going attention, and is practically impossible as a project becomes more complex, when an effective and accountable leadership must be entrusted to make decisions.

2. Leadership and expertise

Following postmodern thought, which can be very cynical, it is easy to decry that there are any true "experts" out there. Blandy and Congdon (1993) in particular question the concept of expertise in their model. But Dicosimo and Dreezen both acknowledge that leadership and expertise are required to make the process of collaboration work. If art is part of the project, then professional artists are invaluable. Leadership and team-members should include those with experience and expertise in working with others, who are expert listeners, who
have skills in communication, who can provide appropriate technical and practical skills and information. In short, partners must have something to contribute to the group, eventually playing a significant and defined role in the project. Perhaps because Blandy and Congdon were working within the defined and organized infrastructure of a museum gallery, they neglected to consider the need for an organizational structure.

_Witness_ has benefited from the participation of many leaders and experts; artists, healers, storytellers, poets, scientists, environmentalists, social workers, and community centre bureaucrats. Its success has relied on the emergence of a strong and committed leadership that includes volunteers with organizational skills. They have shaped and created _Witness_ through their collective efforts. In particular, John Clarke has brought credibility to the project through his reputation as a wilderness expert. Nancy Bleck has brought her compassion and connections to artists and activists in the community to this project. Chief Williams has been an important connection to the Squamish Nation, including its artists and leadership. He has ensured that proper and respectful protocols are observed during ceremonies and dealings with First Nations.

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22 For an enlightening and thorough work that explores and characterizes qualities of leadership see Rita Irwin (1995), _A Circle of Empowerment_. Irwin offers a personal, anecdotal and careful example/definition of leadership and power that challenges more traditional, hierarchical models.
Collaborating teams are often comprised of leaders, and operate on the notion of consensus (Dreezen, 1992, p. 221). Because of the need for consensus, it is important that partners are themselves empowered to make decisions on behalf of the organizations or communities that they represent.

3. Respect for cultural difference

All too often, celebrating commonalities becomes the mantra for cross-cultural work, and although this is an important way in which cross-cultural partnerships manifest themselves, it would be a mistake to think that the process of collaboration is merely about celebrating commonalities. My experience with Witness, and other partnerships I have facilitated and participated in, has taught me that the route to discovering these “commonalities” comes out of facing up to real differences - and respecting and honouring them. Alcohol, for instance, is not part of any of the public events associated with Witness - it is not obviously consumed on the weekends, if at all. We begin all our events ceremonially, and offer prayers of thanks and welcome to participants. Traditional Squamish protocols of speaking order are followed as well as other protocols, such as symbolic gift-giving and ceremonial harvesting from nature. This has not always been easy to follow.
At the opening of the *Witness Exhibition* in 1997, the project's first major public event was marred by a breach of traditional Squamish protocol. The president of the Roundhouse Association refused to allow Chief Bill Williams to speak first, and welcome the gathered public. He felt that traditional city protocol suggested that he, as representing the site of the exhibition and the Roundhouse, should be first to welcome the public. I was caught in the middle. Chief Williams was visibly upset at this last-minute change to an agenda we had jointly devised. I attempted to explain the “sensitivity” of the matter to the association president, but was not successful. In my mind, I saw the alteration of our “city protocol” to accommodate the traditional First Nations protocol, as a “real way” to publicly respect and honour our Squamish partners and acknowledge their difference and distinction as the original inhabitants of the very land on which our community centre stood. And all the while, jointly celebrating the accomplishments of the artists and community participants within the exhibition. This same gesture was viewed, by the president, as somehow “giving in”, or symbolically ceding land title to the Squamish by acknowledging history and protocol. I was powerless in the situation and had to inform Chief Williams about it. Chief Williams graciously accepted the president’s changes to the evening’s agenda, but was obviously not happy.
With time, the wound inflicted by this incident on the relationship between the Squamish Nation and Roundhouse healed, but not without a lot of discussion and work to make traditional protocol part of all the programs Witness developed in the future, and to rebuild the trust of the organization I represented.

Later in the year, at the Roundhouse, the Squamish Nation hosted a feast and gathering to conduct a naming ceremony for John Clarke - who was named “mountain goat” (referring to his over 200 first ascents in this province!) and honoured for his special “knowledge of the land”, which he freely shared with the Nation, helping them in their own preparation for land claims. This event, by contrast to the exhibition opening, was completely controlled by the Squamish Nation and was open to the general public. The mutual honour and respect between the hosts and participants was especially palpable during this event, which was completely unfamiliar to most of the guests - a celebration of difference. It was the first time that the general public had been invited to such an event by the Squamish Nation.

3a. Sensitivity to cultural difference and positions of power in society

This concept is very important to the process of working cross-culturally. It is, perhaps, “taken care of” by the notion of non-hierarchy, but I feel it
warrants special attention when working across cultures. "Sensitivity" is a vague term at best, but it describes the personal attitude that must be cultivated to work cross-culturally. Working with oppressed, marginalized, and minority groups requires that, as partners, we are aware of the history and power relations that a particular group has experienced (and experiences) outside the "safety" of a partnership. Very often the resources available to different partners varies. Individuals, for instance, have less access to resources and are in a lesser position of power than organizations. In Witness, Nancy and John acted as individuals, and even Chief Williams, initially acted on his own behalf, not on behalf of the Squamish Nation. Some organizations are more powerful, economically, and in terms of human resources than others.

This implies that the total responsibility and roles of various partners in the process of collaborating will be different and unequal. Even when Chief Williams gained the support of the Nation, we realized that the Squamish have historically been oppressed and displaced and that their resources are limited.

The Roundhouse initially provided more economic and organizational support, and the other partners provided human resources and communication with a diverse public; this has changed and become "moze equal" as the project has developed. Sensitivity to this fact means that the group must face up to the
inherent inequalities in partnerships and avoid grand mis-guided notions of “equality among partners”.

3b. Not speaking for others

It is tempting to make assumptions, not only about the position, needs, and circumstance of partners, but about one’s own authority and expertise in relationship with these partners. When Blandy and Congdon (1993) refer to there being “no experts” in successful partnerships I think this notion of “not speaking for others” is what they are actually referring to.

Most minority groups have been anthropologized extensively. First Nations people, in particular have been “studied” - giving some academics a self-proclaimed expertise. It is extremely important that these notions are left behind in cross-cultural partnerships and that partners are not found speaking or apologizing for other partners; sometimes we must sacrifice our own specialized knowledge and beliefs to make room for others to speak.

One of the most insidious forms of racism, is paternalistic and patronizing attitudes - assuming that a group of people don’t have the expertise or knowledge to act on their own behalf, and overcompensating or “babying” them. Honouring the knowledge and perspective that others bring to a partnership is important as is allowing them to fail on their own terms.
In the case of *Witness*, a process of checking in with one another became important to avoid making such assumptions. Chief Williams played the role of a "cultural translator" and was constantly relied upon to check our public communications for accuracy and language, and our behaviour during ceremonies and when around elders. This empowered our Squamish partners to set their own agenda without compromising the greater goals of the project. Members of the Squamish Nation were invited to participate as educators, artists, and workshop leaders whenever possible and especially when the topic of such events had anything to do with Squamish culture, ceremony, or history.

Chief Williams, working with Nancy and myself devised the programming for each summer of the project. One example where this joint programming resulted in innovative public programming, was the development of Squamish Language workshops, which proved popular for Squamish Nation members as well as non-native members of the public. This particular program could not have been offered without an atmosphere of "safety" and mutual respect being developed first, nor unless initiated by the Squamish partners themselves.

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21 Usually, as an Arts Programmer at the Roundhouse I would be the one solely responsible for designing and administrating the program. This would not have been possible to justify within the *Witness* project.
4. Effective planning

This principle may seem self-evident as a partnership “success factor,” but it implicates several of the ideas previously listed, such as respect, developing shared values, leadership, critical inquiry and communication. It underscores, again, the need for organizational structure in maintaining complex collaborations. This structure should develop organically, and the planning process should involve formal opportunities to identify and clarify partners’ unique and shared intentions and desires.

In the case of Witness, and I believe that for all successful collaborations - it takes time for trust to build, for a structure to develop, and for participants to reach a place where effective planning can take place. Witness began as an ad-hoc group of artists and environmentalists, eventually including First Nations partners, and city community workers. An organizational structure emerged out of regular meetings, outside socializing, joint ventures, and co-sponsored events. The development of an extensive volunteer program (recruiting, training, and organizing) was required in order to develop and effectively plan Witness. “Sub-committees” of volunteers developed to take care of organizing other events and actions, reporting back to the greater group.
Over time, the original group of ad-hoc organizers has found it necessary to formalize their emerging organization into a registered non-profit society. They have recently reflected on the last six years of development to identify the group’s mission, goals, and objectives. This “new” group has more societal and political (and economic) clout than it has had previously as an ad-hoc group, allowing it to continue its work independently of the Roundhouse Community Centre and becoming a more “equal” partner.

It is important to note that effective planning is a matter of also identifying needs and directing available resources to accomplish tasks that meet these needs. It takes constant and respectful dialogue to achieve this end. Effective planning requires that partners clarify and check assumptions and expectations of each other (Dreezen, 1992).

Finally, effective planning is often “emergent” out of a sense of community and purpose. In the case of Witness I’ve been able discern that the community that grew around the project helped develop an organizational structure; that they co-evolved in a dependent manner.

5. Site and situation-specific programming

In projects that involve local communities, that work across cultures, and which involve community art practice, it is crucial that local histories, issues, sites,
and situations are seen as opportunities to create interest and relevancy in a project. Each weekend in Sims developed differently, depending on many factors, including the nature of participants present, the types of workshops being offered, or even the weather conditions.

During the course of Witness, over the last four years, there have been decisions made by Interfor regarding its logging practices, changes to government policy, and Supreme Court decisions (Delgamukh), all of which have given rise to specific programming, including public letter writing, artwork, media releases, ceremonies, and non-violent protest. This has allowed Witness to remain topical and relevant to the everyday lives of participants and organizers, dealing with issues that affect them directly.

A major strength and appeal of Witness, is that the majority of programming takes place away from the city in a pristine piece of “wilderness.” This, of-course, limits the scope of the programming offered, but also helps in deciding what to program. Over the years, we have even been able to respond to requests from the public for particular types of workshops as well as connect other local projects with Witness. For instance, the traditional slahal bone-game was a request from Squamish youth, and has become a regular weekend program, as is the herbal medicine workshop; recently, Karen Jamieson, a contemporary
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dancer and choreographer who's been working at the Roundhouse, has agreed to work with Squamish dancers and storytellers to do "movement" workshops at Sims creek.

The witness ceremony itself is often an opportunity to deal and talk about current events, like having to negotiate logger's roadblocks, and distinguishing Witness as a cultural program of education and ceremony, rather than an environmental protest group. The latter notion is key to Witness' success as a "political movement". It has seemed "harmless" to many, while significantly affecting public perception through dialogue and cross-cultural sharing and affecting change.

6. Common goals and shared beliefs

Previously mentioned, it is paramount that partners identify and state their goals and beliefs (values) openly. Partnerships must be "bought into." It is only with the understanding that by acting together, rather than alone, there is some common purpose that can be attained more easily and effectively, that collaborations may occur. Some collaborations are a response to a need expressed by a community, and others arise from a problem or opportunity that concerns separate, essentially self-interested groups or individuals. The catalyst
for the partnership may be that these diverse partners have complementary and synergistic interests. Ultimately, each partner must “get something out of it”.

I’ve already mentioned, that Witness has essentially been about connecting urban people to “the land”. But the reasons that each of the partners has wanted to accomplish this end varies. John Clarke, for instance, has dedicated most of his life to exploring and learning about the wilderness; he has readily shared his experience with schoolchildren, adults, other environmentalists, and activists. He has a personal agenda to save some of these remaining old growth forests, and believes that by providing the public with an opportunity to experience the Sims valley for themselves, they too will love, value, and want to preserve the land - for future generations and for the “non-two-leggeds”. He has also responded, to what he perceives, as the inherent curiosity and desire to learn in people, especially children. For this reason scientists (geologists, biologists, forestry experts, etc.) have been brought into the project as workshop facilitators and volunteers.

Nancy Bleck, an artist and activist, has seen the connection with nature, facilitated through Witness, as a means for people to reflect on their relationship to “the land” from a spiritual and artistic perspective. Her interest has been in encouraging in facilitating “creative documentation” and cultural responses to
Sims creek, and her role in the project, initially one of being everything, has
developed into one of “artist-in-residence”. Nancy has initiated many different
projects with participants in the program, including poetry, video, photography,
and performance. Her interest is in community art practice as political activism.

Chief Bill Williams’ interest in taking people up to the northern limits of
his people’s traditional territory is tied to his role as a leader in the Squamish
Nation. Besides creating bridges with non-Squamish members, he has wanted to
speak about history, land claims, logging practices, and environmental issues - all
topics of current relevance to members of his Nation and the public, particularly
in B.C., where the treaty process is very active. From interviews and
conversations with Chief Williams, I have learned that his primary interest has
been in saving, for his Nation, the last piece of old growth forest left intact - a site
for ceremony, cultural activity, celebration, prayer, gathering, and harvesting. For
Chief Williams, raising awareness about the Sims and Elaho valleys, and
ultimately saving them, arises not only out of an ecological problem, but a
concern about cultural survival and sustenance for his community.

Through Witness, I feel that he has come to include non-Squamish
individuals and groups as allies and friends in this process and goal. By
reclaiming and sharing cultural traditions of the Squamish he hopes that self-esteem, pride, and power can be brought to members of his Nation.

There are many other individuals involved in this project - each with their own particular interest in the project. They are all, however, bound by a belief in fostering dialogue/listening to further understanding of complex issues through partnership processes. They are also all bound together by their common goal to “save” the Sims Valley from total destruction, albeit for different reasons. Another important shared value is that it is through “cultural performance” that cross-cultural and politicization of the participants in Witness occurs most effectively. It is through cultural activity, including ceremony and art-making, that respect and understanding between those with differences can ultimately be built and achieved.

7. Critical Inquiry

This is another crucial notion, that essentially makes cross-cultural collaboration a phenomenon similar to action research. Critical inquiry means constant questioning, assessment, and change-to-action as understanding develops; the progress is circular, alternating between periods of critical inquiry and action. It means a process of reflection that is on-going and which, as a
group, the partners engage in as part of planning and implementing programming activities.

Working across cultures has meant that this process of critical inquiry has necessarily involved the questioning of each of our internal assumptions about the others and our behaviour as a result. We have been constantly reminded of our internalized conditioning to behave in roles of colonizer and colonized, environmentalist and consumer, artist and cultural worker.

After one of these initial cycles of inquiry, the group had decided that the participation of loggers and their families was important to facilitate. After all it is their livelihood that is at stake in the issue of changing logging practices. This has always remained a challenge, but we've had some successes. We began promoting the *Witness* project, which is ostensibly an “outdoor recreation” program in Squamish, a town with many families dependent on the logging industry. We did manage to gain the participation of some of these families and because of the many choices of activities available, once at Sims, were able to make them feel welcome and safe. There were some incidents where it seems a transformation occurred for these participants. One young woman spoke of her usual indifference to the “rantings of environmentalists”, but after her experience did not feel so alienated from their perspectives; meeting individual people who
were prepared to listen and welcome them in spite of ideological differences made her feel that at least dialogue was possible.

Another individual, Alwin Stewart, who is a logger by trade, became a "regular" on weekends. His perspective as a logger was given space and time, and ultimately, he found common ground with the rest of us in his belief that the forest was worth much more intact, than clear-cut. Current logging practices may be too nearsighted and motivated by the promise of quick profit. He provided several hours of video footage of logging practices, for us to have an opportunity to see what he faced in his work everyday. We learned from Alwin as well. His inclusion and safety within this project would not have been possible without a constant commitment to critical inquiry in the process of collaborating to produce *Witness*.

8. Communication

Although communication is implicit in many of the other concepts or principles listed here, it warrants special attention because all else depends on it being open and clear. One of the common struggles for collaborations which involve multi-disciplinary or multicultural partners, is the need to develop a "common language". Often, words which carry a particular meaning within the
world of one partner, have a slightly different signification in the world of another partner. These assumed meanings can remain hidden until partners begin to share values and meanings with one another.

Coming to the world of community art from the "gallery world", for example, I experienced the "slipperiness" of language constantly. The word "professional", for instance, is one that suggests a reflective and knowledgeable praxis in the world of galleries; in the community centre context, I found that the same word suggested elitism, high art, and academicism.

During the development of Witness, we struggled around the meaning of words like "political" and "art." "Political" meant a certain type of activism of oppositionality and challenge for some partners - especially those with roots in the environmentalist movement; they felt that Witness, with its strategy of cultural programming, was too celebratory and ultimately ineffective in making change, unless more traditional forms of action such as public protest, roadblocks, and tampering with logging machinery were utilized. Through discussion and reflection it was decided not to pursue these means of political activism. Instead, public events, ceremony, dance, storytelling, and other forms of art - by professionals and non-professionals would be the means to raise awareness
among the public, providing non-threatening or intimidating ways to access political action.

Installing a permanent welcome figure or a sacred longhouse within contested land is much more powerful than spiking trees. "Political" can be more subtle, and in the end, more effective, when we communicate and work together.

_Witness_ had to always remain true in its intention to bring "everyday" people, including children and families to the wilderness. We were all aware that most people were probably not interested in being "political" or becoming activists when they decided to participate. In fact, most families that have participated have done so purely out of a desire for a recreational/cultural opportunity in nature. These motivations have to be respected, but ultimately, _Witness_ has hoped to actually make a difference, and save the Sims. So the goal of politicizing the participants and showing them that "political action" was possible without joining a protest, became part of the shared values and meaning around the word "political".

Through their participation in _Witness_, many people have ended up offering their time and skills to raise public awareness as well as attempting to draw the logging company and government into the discussion; there were also
many opportunities for public expression of individual perspectives, through witness ceremonies, talking circles, letter-writing, and art-making - all forms of communication.

What we discovered from Witness is that most people who participated indeed had their personal “politics” regarding logging practices and First Nations land claims; the truth is, that these people had also felt helpless to express their beliefs and values, and were humbled into silence by the enormity and complexity of the issues at hand. I think Witness showed these people that political change begins on a personal level and that if each of us did our part, spoke our piece, reflected on our lifestyles and made appropriate personal choices - we could collectively, make a difference.

“Art” was also a term that, at times, was intimidating particularly in the western conception as a separate field of value and activity, removed from everyday life. It also became evident that in a traditional Squamish world-view - there is no separate activity such as “art”. In fact, the equivalent word in Squamish does not exist. So we stopped using the word in our discussions and spoke of cultural activity, cultural performance, ceremony, and ritual instead. This broadened the scope of Witness’ programming - so that herb gathering, cob-building, drum-making, and story-telling became “art”.

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Beyond the need for communication among partners in a community collaboration (internal), it is also very important that effective communication be maintained with the public and participants (external). This is important to develop broad-based community support and participation as well as being aware of site and situation-specific opportunities for programming.

Witness has put a significant amount of its resources into producing written and visual documentation, which has been delivered to the public in the form of brochures, slide-shows, presentations, and media articles. A publicist position has been filled by a volunteer or group of volunteers since the project began; when a major event like the Witness Exhibition was developed, a professional publicist was actually hired. A public that is constantly subject to sophisticated marketing strategies by corporations with huge resources must be reached; an effective way is to utilize some of the same sorts of strategies and approaches used by marketing firms - hence video, posters etcetera.

Of course, communication is not one-way. The talking circles and informal campfire discussions were a very real way for participants, including the many children who came, to voice and express themselves. What was said at each of these circles percolated through the volunteers and organizers, affecting programming and topics of informal conversation. Outside of the weekends,
volunteers met formally and informally to debrief on their experiences and many stories were told at these meetings. Anecdotes became an important medium of communication and helped us all understand the power and breadth of the project from each others' perspectives; through sharing anecdotes, the idiosyncrasies, chance events, and inspirational moments in *Witness*, for each of us, became known and owned by us all.

9. Flexibility

This is another one of those principles that is hinted at in the descriptions above, but which warrants its own discussion. Flexibility is a quality that facilitates the realization of most of the other "principles" discussed here. Developing a sensitivity to different cultural protocols and showing respect for diverse perspectives requires an attitude of flexibility. Being able to develop site-specific and situation-specific programming requires much flexibility.

By flexibility, I mean the ability to adjust and shift one's own perspective and actions in order to honour and respect another's. The key is not to forget the shared goals that create inclusion, and be prepared to face and discuss the differences. Connecting with and valuing "the land," in *Witness*, was the common goal that bound everyone; drawing on First Nations culture, with permission and guidance, to facilitate respectful dialogue, was another.
Flexibility, entwined with other concepts, mentioned here, suggests that as partners and collaborators, we sometimes have to relinquish the control and power we normally have in our professional roles. With Witness, I had to often stand back and give up decision-control over programming, budget, and direction; I had to trust my partners and the emerging community to make appropriate and relevant decisions. What I found from this experience is that partnership and collaboration are not necessarily about “sharing power” but about “passing the power around”, as necessary. For instance, having experience and contacts in the visual art field, Nancy and I took a much more responsible and controlling roles in the process of developing the Witness Exhibition than when John Clarke’s naming ceremony took place. The latter event was entirely controlled by Chief Bill Williams. So we didn’t ever say that, so-and-so, should always be event coordinator from this team - but rather that “in this particular case, so-and-so, would make the best coordinator”. This leads back to the idea that expertise must be recognized and utilized effectively, while also maintaining that “there are no experts”, and “we are equal”.

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10. Broad-based community support and participation

If nobody came to the weekends, or if there wasn’t international interest in the _Witness_ project, or if nobody cared - _Witness_ could not occur. The same may be said about any community based project; if there isn’t support or interest in the partnering communities, for the issues dealt with by a given project, especially working across cultures, then successful and substantive collaboration or programming cannot take place. The themes, issues, content, and process of such projects, must be supported by and participated in, by the “community.”

I’ve used parentheses here because “community” can mean a particular, defined group, such as youth or seniors, or it can mean a cultural group, such as urban First Nations, or the Squamish Nation, or it can mean an interest group, like environmentalists, or “greens,” as I’ve recently heard them referred to, or loggers.

I feel that cross-cultural collaborations offer a unique chance to build new communities - or a sense of community.

Based on the original proposal, _Witness_ was to be a summer project – end of story. The funding was limited, and the program was administered and run by volunteers who were already stretched to their limits. However, the project captured the interest and imagination of a diverse public that eventually developed into a community movement. New volunteers, official recognition,
new partners, participation of the media and local artists, and official endorsement from First Nations organizations all helped give credibility and clout to the project. Chief Williams, as a member of the Squamish Nation Council, is respected in his community and has, through volunteering his time and energy, brought in many new participants and facilitators from his own community. His position and authority are also respected by logging company representatives as well as government representatives.

Ultimately, projects like Witness have the ability to “enact community”. My experience is that “community” is not a static notion or entity - it is only through being and acting in the world that we manifest community. As a refugee who migrated to Canada with my birth community, and after almost 30 years of growth and survival here, I understand the importance of celebrations, festivals, the arts, eating-together, and sharing experiences, to our continued survival and development. We would not be a community without these constant opportunities to enact our ties.

4.5 Conclusions

The principles that have emerged during my research must not be understood as a step-by-step “how-to” model for developing substantive
educational cross-cultural partnerships. They have to be understood as intertwined and co-dependent. They refer to an attitude or way of being in-the-world and have been distilled from personal experience, examination of the Witness project, and review of relevant literature. What must be remembered, is that collaboration is, in fact, crucial for cross-cultural exchange and understanding, and that it is a phenomenon that is characterized through partnership processes. There are degrees to which partnerships succeed in becoming true collaborations. Collaborations develop in stages, and complex ones are often the result of many different levels and types of partnership, from simple co-sponsored events, to joint programs and major projects.

My research question was stated as:

What emerges as defining elements/principles in substantive educational collaborations, and in particular, those formed across cultural and disciplinary perspectives?

An interesting experience, for me, was that I probably could have intuitively produced a list similar to the one I’ve ended up with, before my process of reflection and writing - my research. The process of doing this work (and living my life), however, has given me a better understanding of the collaborative process and its importance to working across cultures.
I also have learned that "community," in the context of contemporary western society, is above all, a "...unit of solution in society. It is a process through which people take initiative and act collectively"(Checkoway, 1995, p.3). Community is indeed enacted, and I would suggest it is a notion to be evoked in successful cross-cultural partnerships and collaborations. The implications for art education are that multicultural curriculum goals must involve the community of students, and those beyond the school, to seek partners in exploring site and situation-specific issues faced by the students in the context of their society. School culture must collaborate cross-culturally to build communities of interest; these are built around activity or specific programs.

As Stuart Hall has stated regarding communities of interest...

It may be true that the self is always, in a sense, a fiction, just as the kind of "closures" which are required to create communities of identification - nation, ethnic group, families, sexualities, etc. - are arbitrary closures. . .It is an immensely important gain when one recognizes that all identity is constructed across difference. (Giroux, H.A. and McLaren, P. (editors), 1994, p.190).

So, "community" is a condition or process of group identity-construction, and as suggested by Witness, co-evolves with working across difference, or cross-culturally.
In the case of Witness, a cross-cultural, arts-focused, activist project, with a pedagogical agenda, it has been strongly evident that communication through art (or cultural performance) is key to its success, especially with respect to enacting or developing a community. The arts-focused nature of the project has allowed it to be both subversive and effective as a forum for diverse ideas and people to come together “safely”.

Below, I have attempted to visually represent what I’ve been able to determine to be defining qualities of substantive cross-cultural collaborations.

Please note that the diagram represents a process - not a static entity. It is also an idealization and theorization of collaboration - not a “snapshot”. It should be viewed as a fluid structure where connections exist between all the ideas shown; there is fundamental dependence between all the principles. The energy at any given point in a collaborative project may be focused more in one notion than others. For instance, a given project, like Witness, may place most of its attention and energy in developing “Respect for Difference” over “Non-hierarchical” organization, although the two concepts are related. The tension and balance between “Non-hierarchical” and “Leadership and Expertise” is always a challenge and requires constant attention. The notions of “Non-hierarchical”, “Leadership and Expertise”, and “Respect for Difference” are all
connected through “Shared Goals”, and “Critical Inquiry”, “Effective Planning”, and “Site and Situation-specific Programs” require an atmosphere of “Flexibility”. “Community Support and Participation” forms as these principles are engaged, and based on the positive experience of Witness, are dependent on the orientation that the project takes to these concepts. Community shapes the collaboration while also being dependent on it. Which is why I believe that programs such as Witness can “create community” as readily as the other way around.

The figure, which follows, is intuitive and is based on the basic principle of “the four directions”; I borrow here from the First Nations Medicine Wheel or healing circle. This compass-like, directional metaphor is appropriate for a process that I wish, ultimately, to characterize as a mode of being-in-the-world—an orientation or location, not a chart or guide for method or process.

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24 Although I acknowledge the First Nations Medicine Wheel, I must note that the four (or 8) directions, North, South, East and West, are sacred and important in many cultures. The swastika, for instance is a symbol which refers to the cardinal points of a compass and is an ancient image found in many different ancient cultures. It is still used as a auspicious symbol in parts of Asia and is associated with Buddhism and Hinduism.
Figure 1: Defining elements of substantive cross cultural collaboration as emerging from a study of Witness

There are two important factors that hold this process, or these principles together. Both are pragmatic and essential to successful community projects and
both are intertwined. The first is “time”. Substantive partnerships and projects are the result of much time invested in the processes described above; they do not happen in 3 weeks or even 3 months - sometimes the time it takes is measured in years - like in the case of \textit{Witness}. The time factor is often tied to funding; artists’ and facilitators’ fees, materials, supplies, and administrative expenses must all be budgeted and paid for.

I have seen many projects fail because the partnering individuals or organizations, based on funding resources, try to “do it all” in an unreasonable amount of time; often the failure is not that no reasonable “product” resulted from the process, but rather that community and collaboration were not fully evoked in the process. There is no chance to engage in the intense dialogue that is required to build trust, define shared goals, plan effectively, and to proceed within a framework of critical inquiry. For this reason it is usually prudent to divide complex community partnerships and projects into phases, committing the needed resources (time and money) in smaller amounts and proceeding carefully - always thinking long term.

\textit{Witness} came to the Roundhouse at a time in its development when considerable dialogue and the process of collaboration with the Squamish Nation had already begun within the project. There were two years of experience already
available to draw on. The Roundhouse provided substantial funding for the first year of programming. Since then, fundraising efforts, user fees, involving more partners, and establishing a non-profit society have been strategies to keep the project going.
IMAGES OF THE WITNESS EXHIBITION 1997/98 AT THE ROUNDHOUSE COMMUNITY CENTRE.

FIGURE 2:
WITNESS, 1997 BY LISA BAILE

Particle board cut outs, splinters from the 'hollow tree'

Background (left). The Hollow Tree, 1997 by sylvi maCormac. Tamara Unroe, and Andrea Zimmer

collaborative 'tea-bag' tree with soundscape, installation sylvi maCormac

FIGURE 3:

Detail, WITNESS, 1997 by Lisa Baile
A. Alibhai: Cross cultural collaboration and community art practice: An autobiographical examination

FIGURE 4:
Foreground (left) *Post-colonial Ties*, 1997 by Theresa Marshall
Stuffed and sewn men’s ties with tongues to make them look like snakes.

Mid-ground (centre-right) *Untitled*, 1995 by Theresa Marshall
Cedar spool, braided tobacco, marble needles.

FIGURE 5: Detail of *Post-colonial Ties*, 1997 by Theresa Marshall
FIGURE 6:
*Untitled*, 1997 by Peter Schmidt, former tree-faller, carved from the burls of 'unwanted' cedar.
Background. *Engine 374*, first passenger train into Vancouver via CPR.

FIGURE 7:
*On Sacred Ground*, 1996 by George Littlechild, mixed media on canvas.
A. Alibhai: Cross cultural collaboration and community art practice: An autobiographical examination

IMAGES FROM WITNESS

FIGURE 8: Clear-cutting in the Squamish, Elaho, and Sims Valleys, 2000

FIGURE 9: What's left of the Sims Valley, 2000
FIGURE 10: Arriving at Mile 57, Sims Valley Sandbar, parking on the logging road, 1999

FIGURE 11: Setting up camp on the sandbar, 1999
FIGURE 12: A workshop by the river

FIGURE 13: A Witness Ceremony on the sandbar, conducted by Chief Bill Williams, 1999
FIGURE 14: A hiking party poses in the old growth with the remains of a fallen giant, 1999

FIGURE 15: Aaron Nelson-Moody (artist) and Chief Bill Williams at the raising and dedication of carving, *Cedar Woman*, 2000 by Aaron Nelson-Moody
Chapter V: A Meta-chapter

LOCATING COMMUNITY ART PRACTICE

The previous and final conventional and logical chapter in this thesis culminated in a list and diagram representing essential principles of cross-cultural collaboration; I've engaged with another important question during this research, which has manifested itself through the process of writing and reflecting. This question encompasses my own autobiographical examination and comes out of the realization of what I've actually been striving to accomplish through this process. That transcending question/task is to locate my own practice as an artist/curator/cultural worker/educator in society and academic discourse. Is what I do pedagogy? Is it social work? Is it art? The question is rhetorical, of course, and is evidently all these things. But I've learned that community art practice is where my own praxis rests, and in this discovery, a terrain or territory has defined itself. This is where I want to go in this relevant “meta-chapter”; I want to define and map out community art practice, art historically, socially and politically. I believe that

25 I resisted calling this meta-chapter an epilogue, for it is not an “add-on”. The question it poses and the task it attempts are companions to the previous four chapters – a “meta-thesis”, if you like. What may strike you, however, is that the tone of this last chapter differs in its more “art-world” focused approach, as it seeks to describe and legitimize community art practice, in terms of western cultural discourse.
by doing so, I will have achieved the over-riding purpose of this research; to examine the role of art in contemporary society as pedagogy and transformation. In this chapter, I move from the purely specific and autobiographical, into a more general, perhaps even western academic purview, that is nonetheless based on my specific experience and perspective.  

In this thesis I have claimed a phenomenological/hermeneutic approach - so it makes sense that this “lived experience” is given its own essence in this last chapter - making sense of my life and praxis over the last decade.

5.1 Community Art Practice

Community Arts was not recreation, cultural welfare or a tool for increasing art appreciation. It was communities making their own art (Hawkins, 1993, p.157).

It is precisely in the areas of ambitious and responsible artistic community involvement where you are now likely to find art and artists with the kind of mission and responsibility that has driven so much of the work that has made twentieth-century art a vital human and spiritual matter (Michael Brenson in Jacob, 1995, p. 20).

26 One alternative to the current approach of this meta-chapter, would be to try and determine a definition of art and artist, community and art, based on the perspectives of another culture, i.e. First Nations. This alternative would require me to posit myself as an “expert” and to ultimately become a cultural translator for a culture and perspective that is not mine. I can only speak from my own perspective, which is admittedly western. I also feel that the main message of this thesis – that collaboration with those from another culture, in a manner that respects contexts and individuals is key to understanding of difference – would be ignored. For those seeking easy “step-by-step” solutions, I feel that they would be misguided in believing that such a possibility even exists. Each situation is unique.
The task of this final chapter is to locate community art practice (or “community cultural practice”) in a broader cultural context.

This thesis looks at community art practice as a contemporary phenomenon in the arts, a territory that is broad and cross-disciplinary, and which is described and analyzed with respect to a variety of contexts, including art history, cultural theory, education, multiculturalism, and community development.

The community art movement has not suddenly or spontaneously appeared, nor has it been simply derived within a discreet discipline or discourse; it is complex, emerging after the Second World War, and it continues to develop. Community art practice has emerged as a “legitimate” form of contemporary art; its emergence has been recognized in this country by the recent honouring of its accomplishments by public galleries and other arts and non-arts organizations. The forces that have shaped and formed this practice

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27 As suggested by Hawkins (1993). This term clearly distinguishes the field within which community art practice operates as beyond the autonomous institution of the arts. It acknowledges the context for this art practice, not only as the gallery or museum or concert hall and theatre, but as the “public sphere” where we interact with one another in contemporary society.

28 A Space Gallery, in Toronto, launched the first Community Arts Biennale in Canada in May 2000; information about the many projects and the biennale please see <www.aspacegallery.org/cab2000>. Also, the Surrey Art Gallery is celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2000, by commissioning four community art projects in Surrey, B.C.. In
span different disciplines and reflect paradigm shifts that question modernist assumptions. In the context of the arts, however, not only is community art practice contemporary art, but it occupies the space previously claimed by the historical avant-garde. It is the cutting edge.

5.2 Modernism, the Avant Garde, and Community Art

Until the onset of modernity and the Cartesian revolution, the notion that art was autonomous and separate from other aspects of life, was never central to human culture, society, and politics (A. Debeljak, 1998). Indeed this can be said of other cultural spheres such as science and morality. With the institution of “Art” in modernity, it, along with other disciplines (Science, Law, etc.), became a specialized sphere of knowledge, developing its own inner logic and inherent laws, which held true only within its own realm (Abram, 1996, Braden, S., 1977; Brenson, 1995; A. Debeljak, 1998; Gablik, 1991; Jacob, 1995; Paley, 1995).
The extent to which the institution of art viewed itself as autonomous within “high” Modernism - a world unto itself- may be illustrated by the following quote by Clive Bell (1913):

To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions, because it held within itself ‘a world with emotions all its own’. The ‘significant form’ contained in the work of art was sufficient to initiate the aesthetic experience (Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Robinson, R, 1990, p.139).

The history of community art practice is very much the struggle to reconnect Art with Life; notions of accessibility, education, empowerment, Art for social change, identity, expression, and community have been tropes of this struggle (Braden, S., 1977; Brenson, 1995; Jacob, 1995).

Although community art practice is often posited as “an historically recent official invention” (Hawkins, 1993), it is possible to see its evolution from the historical avant-garde. Insomuch as the latter was marked by an “effort to transcend the institution of autonomous art and integrate art into everyday life in the name of utopian social change” (Debeljak, A., 1998. p. 128). The historical avant-garde has shared a similar purpose but this project of

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29 By the ‘historical avant-garde’ for this discussion, I refer to Cezanne, Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Russian Constructivism, Italian Futurism, French Surrealism, Dadaism, Vienna Secession, Jugendstil, and Bauhaus.
bringing together art and life was never completed within “high” modernity (Debeljak, 1998; Habermas, 1980 in Foster, H. (ed.), 1983; Lynton, N., 1980).

As Debeljak (1998) argues in Reluctant Modernity,

The translation of autonomous art into everyday life did indeed take place, albeit only in a diluted version; that is, it unfolded through the prevalence of commodity aesthetics, which by and large gives shape to the products of the contemporary culture industry. What was absent was the corresponding idea, much less the reality, of social change (p. 129).

Indeed, we live in a time and place where mass culture visually competes for our life-attention at ever-dizzying frequency and volume, positing us as perpetually needful consumers. I suggest that community art practice has taken up where the historical avant-garde failed and that it has extended beyond the gallery and museum (or extended with them) and has located itself in the civil or public sphere. It has been argued that the public sphere - the space for critical debate - has shrunk in late capitalism; it has been crushed between mass culture/consumerism and state/bureaucraticism (Debeljak, 1998; Habermas, 1980 in Foster, H. (ed.), 1983; Hawkins, 1993).

In terms of theory, Walter Benjamin’s work may be seen as an example of work (written between the world wars) that critiques the “aura” of the art object in bourgeois culture, and points to a belief in radical aesthetic
innovation as a means for social revolution (Benjamin, W., 1934; 1936 in Frascina, F. & Harrison, C. (ed.), 1986). The mass reproduction of art, according to Benjamin, could help art realize its role as a means of communication, and as a means to dismantle the notion of art as sacred-ritual-cultural object and to find, in “universal accessibility”, a moment of emancipation. He enlisted mechanically reproduced works of art as tools in the service of communism - a politicization of art (and a response to events in Nazi Germany).

Ultimately, Benjamin’s ideas and belief in the emancipatory opportunities afforded by technology seemed utopian, if not naive. But his call for art to serve a social and political purpose has inspired or irked many artists, academics, theorists, and mass culture theorists since. Some of these theorists, like Adorno and Habermas seem to be in direct opposition to Benjamin and foresaw the culture industry’s consumer-driven nature in conflict with any emancipatory potential (Debeljak, 1998; Adorno, 1980 in During, S. (ed.), 1994).

The Pop Art of the 1960s, for instance, was ostensibly about “making art about everyday experience” (especially the experience of popular mass culture). The quintessential Campbell’s Soup Cans of Andy Warhol exemplify this
in his representation of a familiar everyday mass produced and mundane object - the reproduction of a reproduction - and called it art. But Warhol was very cynical in engaging the aims/processes of the historical avant-garde, especially the Dadaists and their use of mundane objects. Warhol’s response, alternatively, was to embrace the culture industry and mass culture that had long assimilated Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism, Bauhaus and their kin. It has been argued that post-auratic art has just shifted the aura to the artist, who becomes part of the culture industry’s “star system”. Pop Art may be viewed as the predecessor of the deconstructionist/cynical mode of post modernism, described below (Debeljak, 1998; Gablik, 1991; Lynton, 1980).

Also developing in the late 1950s and the 1960s was a counterculture that resulted from a general refusal to participate in the values inherent in the “work ethic”, in the commodification of art, and the elitism of the established art world. Artists challenged the notion of a “national culture” that addressed and included a “single public able to agree on what constituted the arts. Such claims have been increasingly under attack since the late 1960s” (Hawkins, 194).
In a Canadian context, much of this type of art practice occurred in a growing network of artist-run centers and smaller civic galleries; local examples of the latter include venues such as the Surrey Art Gallery, Burnaby Art Gallery and Richmond Art Gallery.

In Canada, from the early 1970s on until the 1980s, the emergence of artist-run centres and civic galleries across country was a significant phenomenon (with a concomitant growth in the number of community centres in urban contexts). These new organizations reflected changing policies and funding structures as well as resources made available by civic, provincial and federal governments and agencies, including the Canada Council to the arts. The artist-run centers and civic galleries also reflected a dissatisfaction with the established “high” art institutions and a desire to be “community-based”.

“Community” has been a rather ambiguous concept, often viewed as “in need of culture” - as determined by civic bureaucracies, artists and arts professionals - who would save the masses from the terrible clutches of mass culture and materialism and the undemocratic cultural elitism of bourgeois art. Since then, we have seen the notion of “community” expand to include a great deal more.
Artist-run centres, like the Western Front (established 1973) and A Space (established 1971) and a host of other venues, including the Surrey Art Gallery (established 1975) have served as alternative sites for cultural production and experimentation.

The artist-run centres and civic galleries have been important sites for exploring electronic media, photography, print, video, and computer technology in contemporary art practice and have been incubation sites for many of the strategies and practices developed by artists to work within and with communities (Alteen, 1995). What is significant to note is that a site, safe from commercial pressure and the “high” art establishment, is required in order for these explorations to happen - it is where the avant garde is and has been located in the Canadian context. From this location it has influenced the larger institutions.

The late 1950s and 1960s saw the concomitant development of Cultural Studies, a discourse of critiques of contemporary mass culture; artists turned to life and the idioms of mass culture and advertising were explored in their roles/influences on contemporary culture (During, 1994). Relevant for community art practice, was the contestation of the sanctity and privileged position of “high” art in defining “culture”. Opposition was set up between
concepts like “high” art and mass culture and between notions of excellence
and notions of access and participation (Hawkins, 1993). What the latter
dualism resulted in was ultimately a mistrust of the “community” for “experts”
and professionals, a legacy felt to this day and probably a spectre of the
modernist elitism of specialist knowledge.

Somehow excellence and professionalism became the enemy of
community access and participation, perpetuating stereotypical notions of
community art as the “ugly step-sister” (along with mass culture) of “high” art’s
“Cinderella”. Ultimately, the negotiation of the tension between these
perceived polarities is what has been a strong force in forming the current
practice of community art (Hawkins, 1993).31

Happenings, Conceptual art, Earth art and Performance art developed
in the post-war historical period, (often considered part of the Fluxus
movement) developed in the 1960s continuing through the 1970s and to the

31 My own experience at the Roundhouse, working with Parks Board and a Community Association to develop
programming policy, was very uneasy at times. Coming from the ‘art world’ into a community centre, I experienced
the collision of different jargons and values, namely professional arts versus community service ‘worlds’. It was
necessary to demonstrate that community and excellence could work together before we found our common
ground and a basis to build a common language and discourse.
In their deliberate anti-heroic, anti-monumental ethos these art "movements" are essentially anti-art in nature, dissatisfied with autonomous, aesthetically defined "high" art. These cultural forms reclaimed the mandate of the historical avant-garde and are, arguably, the direct predecessors of the currently emerging and recognized forms of community art practice. The concepts of ephemerality, ritual, intervention, and site-specificity are now part of the vocabulary of contemporary artists, developing from the experiments of these earlier artists.

Ultimately even these artists fell back into the conventional tropes of modernism - the issues they raised and dealt with were ultimately "art" issues. Many of the works made during this period, in fact, were aimed at provoking the bourgeois audience for whom they were intended; they were not intended to deal with issues that were important to the communities in which they worked or with whom they collaborated. Take for example the enduring image of Acconci masturbating beneath the sloped floor of the Somnabend Gallery while viewers, oblivious to his presence except through an audio feed, were unwittingly made part of his work, Seedbed in 1972 (Foster, 1983).

32 Allan Kaprow is acknowledged as an originator of the Happenings, along with Claes Oldenburg and Robert Whitman (Hertz, 1985). Like Duchamp before them these artists made the material of everyday life into art, but further pushed the Dadaist agenda to take their art out of the museum and gallery setting.
Today, artists practice with community, and although shock-value should never be underestimated as an artistic strategy, they tend to be subtle with their political agendas. I have worked for several years with Naomi Singer, a self-proclaimed celebration artist, who is the Artistic Director and founder of the Annual Winter Solstice Procession in Vancouver. This event has grown in over 6 years into a great ephemeral "happening" that draws together thousands of participants in a non-commercial celebration. The subtle subversion of Christmas and the inclusion of many non-Christians make this event an alternative to the consumer mentality of December while celebrating a celestial event that affects us all, regardless of our faith - the return of the sun. The success of the Winter Solstice Lantern Procession is entirely dependent on the participation of community (before, during, and after the event). The project has created a community that enacts itself through participation. Through the years, Naomi Singer has developed the skills necessary to make this happen. Because of the interdependence between community and the project itself, a key aspect of its success depends on skills necessary to develop partnerships and to collaborate with multiple partners. The process is essentially one of creating relationships. Or as Gablik (1991) states, "Art that realizes its purpose through relationship - that collaborates consciously with the audience and is
concerned with how we connect with others - can actually create a sense of community” (p. 158).

The modernist world of sculpture and public art also ruptured in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and saw the emergence of post modern notions of “marked sites”, “site construction”, “axiomatic structures” enter into-the-world from the self-referential and “siteless” gallery space. This was part of the reaction to the realization that the public sculpture of “high” modernism remained self-referring and autonomous from site and context. The works of artists like Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Michael Heizer, Richard Serra, Sol LeWitt, and Christo were all instrumental in the redefinition of sculpture and their work specifically announced the rupture in modernism that has become known as post modernism (Hertz, 1985).

An artist like Christo - who although worked in “collaboration” with thousands of people in realizing his monumental site-specific works - is interested in his own vision as an artist - making his practice “collaborative”,

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33 For an informative and enlightening source on contemporary public art and the issues raised by the invocation of ‘community’ see Jacob’s *Culture in Action* (1995), which documents a public art program of Sculpture Chicago. The book also contains essays, which explore the historical development of community-based public art in western culture and contextualize the specific projects being documented. The artists represented include Suzanne Lacy, Robert Peters, Mark Dion, Kate Ericson, Mel Zigler and Daniel J. Martinez.
but not necessarily community art practice (Gablik, 1991). But Christo’s and others’ artwork has been inspirational and relevant to the discourse of community art practice - as it has allowed for a new vision of the potential of public art - particularly regarding the process of its making and its purpose which has transformed from one of state sanctioned values to a practice that is concerned with communities, their histories, and aspirations (Jacob, 1995).

In the 1960s, everything changed. The social conflicts discerned by the early modernists such as Courbet and Manet no longer simmered more or less beneath the surface, but burst into the open. Inequalities resulting from institutionalized attitudes about race, gender and class exploded into debate, violence, and action. Social tensions could no longer be contained within any existing social framework; it was no longer enough for artists to substantiate and explore social conflict within the confines of the frame and the pedestal. As the crises of the cities and the environment intensified, art moved into the street, into the landscape, and in the 80’s public art...into prisons, dungeons, churches, garages, universities, and city halls (Jacob, 1995, p. 29).

It is evident that the role of the artist as a “detached observer of life” has since been transformed into one that makes her, rather, a participant. The artist, rather than removing herself from the world, meets it head-on and liberates art from the prison of the museum and gallery and uses art as a tool for exploring identity. Judy Chicago collaborated with hundreds of women between 1974 and 1979 with her piece, The Dinner Party. Through this work, Chicago facilitated the expression of voices that were traditionally excluded.
from the world of “high” art, namely women (Hertz, 1985). Her work prefigures a practice that creates meaning through process, is ephemeral, and which enlists the mass audience as participants in the work. An example of an inheritor of Chicago’s work is Suzanne Lacy, who began her practice in the early 1980s (Gablik, 1991). Her Crystal Quilt (1986) is an example of a feminist and conceptual work that involved 600 older women and required “collaborations with several service agencies, such as the Minnesota Board of Aging, and educational institutions interested in promoting authentic images of older women as participants in the public sphere” (Gablik, 1991, p. 111).

In Vancouver, between 1996 and 1997, with the Western Front and New Performance Works developed a collaborative work between artists, producers, and other professionals with young women dealing with issues they felt were crucial to their community.34 The work was “performed” in 1997 in a

34 New Performance Works, directed and managed by Barbara Clausen is an example of a non-government organization that has developed the skills to manage community art projects. Besides The Turning Point, New Performance Works manages the practices of artists seeking to work in the context of community or desiring to work with community. I have also worked with New Performance Works to produce a series of free dance performances at the Roundhouse called Dance Allsorts. These performances are always full and the artists make themselves accessible to the audience through ‘talk-back’ sessions after each show. This series programs work by artists from marginalized positions to mainstream dance - those from non-western cultural heritage, folk forms, martial arts, and dance of contemporary youth culture.
piece called *The Turning Point*. Many questions were raised by this experience and the interests and expectations of the young women involved in the project may not have been met. The demands of the “star-system” of contemporary art may have, in the end, kept Lacy from being able to fully collaborate with the women and to begin her work from the place of community rather than the place of “art”.

According to Lacy the success of a project like the *Crystal Quilt* or *The Turning Point* is determined by whether or not the process of networking (building community) continues after the work, which is ephemeral, is over. Her goal is to empower participants to “raise consciousness about certain shared conditions of being female” (Gablik, 1991, p. 110). In the case of the *Crystal Quilt*, several women continued to work in the community after the project was over (Gablik, 1991).

By contrast, Elizabeth Shefrin, a Vancouver-based textile artist has actually used the process of building community, through hand-on workshops and global connections made through the internet, to create a growing project called *The Middle East Peace Quilt* (begun in 1997 - first exhibited at the Roundhouse in September 1999) which presents a richly storied and growing work that represents a range of different perspectives on the notion of peace in
the Middle East. Individual squares of the quilt have been submitted from countries around the world. Her work underscores the fact that community art practice is about listening, being heard, and the collection of personal stories. It is the collaborative and respectful process of making the quilt that distinguishes Shefrin's project as community art practice.

An important artist who in the 1960s practiced what is now being recognized as community art practice and is seen as a "mentor" in the field, is Joseph Beuys (Gablik, 1991; Jacob, 1995; Lynton, 1980). His practice has been one that was highly political and socially minded. In *Culture in Action* (Jacob, 1995), Michael Bresson situates Beuys' practice within the tradition of Russian Constructivism (p. 30). Beuys is described as someone who believed that art was a way of life and in its role as a process to "heal social ills such as racism, sexism, and many other forms of injustice" (p. 31). Beuys is also characterized as embodying notions such as trust, empathy, and ritual in contemporary art practice. His work is completely in tune with the aim of community art practice and that is to not only focus on process rather than product, but to do this with a moral and social conscience. As Suzi Gablik (1991) states, "...Beuys’ concept of “social sculpture”...attempts to shift our understanding of art away from the creation of reified objects and the biases of self-interest, and to channel
creativity onto the concrete social tasks that need doing - that is to say, toward the moral shaping of culture itself” (p. 142). The gap between art and life gets closer.

In the 1980s and 1990s we saw “Identity Politics” and “Art about Social Issues”, become topical in contemporary art. Artists announced their presence and role as part-of-the-world - as individuals that live life like the rest of us - that deal with their own lives as content. The disembodied genius of modernism was overtly rejected. Structures of arts funding and cultural policy were contested and notions of excellence and nation on one hand were posited in opposition to access and participation (Alteen, 1995; Hawkins, 1993). The “others” of modernity were speaking back. Self-representation became the major trope in cultural discourse. This was when the notion of community had evolved from one in the 1960s, which was largely geographically and class-based and rather “harmless”, into a more fluid and diverse notion by the 1990s, expressed below.

35 In Vancouver alone there were several projects that moved into non-art venues and sites in order to transcend cultural difference and cultural elitism. Some of these exhibitions include, Yellow Peril: Reconsidered (1991), Self Not Whole (1992), First Nations Performance Series (1992), First Ladies (1992), to visit the tiger (1993), Telling Relations: Sexuality and the Family (1993), Artropolis 1993 (1993), Racy Sexy (1993), Positive (1996).
Community is not something to be magically recovered but a goal to be struggled for. It is not something to be manufactured by outside professionals but emerges out of collaboration and expression. Cultural work is an effective tool in the formation of community, it is a tool for activism. This definition does not see community in purely regional or geographic terms, it allows for the idea of communities of interest. It is also dynamic and accounts for the possibility of cultural practice being one of the processes whereby alliances form and cohere (Hawkins, 1993, p. 20).

The end purpose of cultural activity in this context then, is to establish or enact community.

The plurality of perspectives, histories, and subaltern identities that emerged through post modern and post colonial discourse has been the subject of cultural theorists and critics across disciplines, and reflects the discourses in our culture about multiculturalism, racism, sexuality, colonialism, and socioeconomic differences that characterize our time. These are issues of the life-world and have become the legitimate content of contemporary art and artists.

The focus on communities of difference in the last two decades has also affected arts policy,

... and ultimately expanded the role of the arts in our society with the realization that
Not only has the idea of a single “national culture” been contested but so too has the pervasive belief that the role of national cultural policies is to establish cultural unity. Community arts, public radio, access TV, Aboriginal and multicultural media programs are all products of cultural policies that represent national administration in terms of the management of diversity (Hawkins, 1993, p. 15).

"Managing diversity" can certainly be seen as one possible motive for the Canada Council to (finally) offer an “artists in communities” funding program for the first time in 1999. This motive is shared also at the provincial and local level where cultural policies can also be viewed in terms of "managing diversity".

When "community" entered the discourses or arts policy previous assumptions were inevitably disrupted; what the ambiguity and apparent innocence of "community" allowed was an onslaught of new forms, new constituencies, new methods of patronage and new purposes for art (Hawkins, 1993, p. 4).

As traditional meanings and institutionalized societal assumptions of modernity, including the compartmentalization of human culture and experience are deconstructed, spaces for critical discourse about these issues are opened up in other disciplines, including Education and Community Development.
5.3 Community Art Practice and Education

Community art practice, which in the context of schools, most often involves the notion of an artist-in-residence, is probably the most effective educational tool available to teachers of fine arts as well as those in other disciplines to meet some of the curriculum outcomes (Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 1995, 1995a).

The Cross-Curricular Outlines, which point to the notion of educating the "whole child" support approaches to education, that are integrational rather than rigidly compartmentalized. These include notions of Environment and Sustainability, First Nations Studies, Gender Equity, Media Education, Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism and Science-Technology-Society. These concepts point to the humanist, possibly even transformational approaches to education put forward by people like John Dewey, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Michael Apple (Freire, 1985; hooks, 1994; Miller, J.P. & Seller, W., 1990; Taylor, 1993).

In the context of Education, community art practice has the advantage and potential of connecting the student community with art-practice and issues in the larger community, while also dealing with issues that are of importance to them as young members of society. The goals of integrating various disciplines
or many lenses through which to perceive, examine and even “solve” real issues in our communities can be met through bringing artists into the schools. The key is effective collaboration between various partners and stakeholders, including students, teachers, artists, parents, and others in the greater community (Tunks, 1997).

There are many artists that offer themselves to work with teachers and students in the schools. An important local organization, ArtStarts in Schools, is an advocacy group for the arts in education and the arts in communities. It serves the interests of all partners, including artists - who can network with one another and with teachers and schools through the organization. ArtStarts also administers grant money for projects and programs in the schools and broader community.36

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36 A recent series of projects, which explore the power of contemporary art to deal with real issues raised by students is called Art as a Catalyst for Change. These projects are a series of artists’ residencies in 12 classrooms that explore, with students, issues of race and bigotry. Mercedes Baines, Marcus Youssef, Wendy Oberlander, Archer Pechawis, Haruko Okano, and Judy Chartrand are working in media as diverse as Drama and Creative Writing, Video, Performance, and Visual Arts. All these artists are well experienced in working with community and make this process integral to their practices as contemporary artists.
5.4 Community Art Practice and Community Development

In the last decade, the notion of "community" was being tested in a broader cultural context that was questioning society's assumptions and beliefs. Community was tested in a number of milieus including Community Development - where community was seen as a "force for change in urban and rural contexts" (Robinson, 1995) or as a "unit of solution" (Checkoway, 1995).

In his article, *Towards a New Paradigm of Community Development* (1995), Mike Robinson describes the development of Community Development in Canada as originating from adult education and co-operatives first established in the 1930s in the maritimes, prairies, and northern territories. This phenomenon developed into the tradition of working in "hinterland" areas of Canada and abroad in third world countries by the late 1950s on. The purpose was to provide expertise to aid economic and social development - primarily operating in terms of progress, modernization, and industrialization. By the 1990s, Robinson describes a paradigm shift that puts the focus on community and its needs; the emerging model for Community Development is people-centred and instead of "industrial economy" or "economic growth", we hear "sustainable economy" and "reduced dependency on the industrial economy and the state" (Robinson, 1995, p 22). Robinson cites Paulo Freire as a mentor.
for the paradigm shift in Community Development and describes this new paradigm as a mode of "participatory action-research", where expertise is built within communities rather than conceived of as an outside intervention or "aid". Robinson posits communities as "real centres of power" in society.

From the perspective of contemporary art, Gablik (1991) seems to concur with Robinson insofar as community art practice can be characterized as "a participatory artist using a participatory approach" (p. 150).

Empowerment is a trope of Community Development as well as Education and community art practice. Alan Barr (1995) characterizes empowerment as a process "enhanced by partnership activity rather than transfer of authority" (p. 124). It is the degree to which or process by which disadvantaged communities define their own needs and determine the response that is made to them. As in community art practice, the focus is shifted from expert to community. Like in community cultural practice "the legitimacy of the strategy itself depends on community participation in its formulation" (p. 124). Expertise (compare with the role of the artist in community art practice) is recognized as key to successful empowerment of communities. "Part of the task of empowerment is to develop local skills and knowledge but any complex
society depends on specialist expertise. Part of any empowerment strategy must therefore be access to such resources” (p. 124).

5.5 Community Art Practice within post modernism

In his well researched and written book Reluctant Modernity, Debeljak (1998) provides a convincing historical and theoretical argument, evoking Gablik in The Reenchantment of Art (1991), that the post modern contemporary situation is one that is melancholy and disenchanted; it requires a major paradigm shift in order to get out of the end game of modernism. Debeljak, through the lens of Cultural Studies (Adorno, Habermas etc.) describes broad sociological and political changes in the Twentieth Century due to the project of modernity, and argues that the public sphere, in late Capitalism, has shrunk considerably. Bureaucratization is equated with the development of a culture of surveillance, and post modern art with its bric-a-brac disregard for context is characterized as renouncing the subjectivity of individual works of art, and accepting commodity fetishism and political resignation (p. 173) instead. Debeljak offers no solutions or options, but does propose a challenge:

It remains to be seen whether artists, responding to this situation, will rise to the magnitude of the challenge and lead the way out of the perfected simulation... and muster enough courage to re enchant us
with innovative connections to the sensuous natural world. This form of imagination, I am convinced, will represent the ultimate space of artistic excellence in the next century (p. 173).

Gablik (1991), on the other hand, points to solutions and actual artists' practices in her *Re enchantment of Art*. In this very passionately written and personal book Gablik describes an orientation to the world that acknowledges broad paradigmatic changes across disciplines that question Cartesian and positivist attitudes with respect to the nature of knowledge and its place in the world. Gablik’s perspective is affected by new ecological and holistic forms of thinking that are emerging in many fields (Capra, 1996; Paley, 1995; Gablik, 1991; Abram, 1996; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993). The current post modern situation is characterized as one of deconstruction of the autonomous institution of art within modernism, which is not a phenomenon limited to the sphere of art, but has effected all aspects of contemporary culture. This deconstruction deals primarily with dismantling relationships of power that have been developed and maintained through modernity.

37 For an extremely well written and detailed description of this paradigm shift see David Abram’s *Spell of the Sensuous* - that gives a personal, yet theoretically sound account of a phenomenological and ecological orientation to the world. Also see Stewart Paley’s (1995), *Finding Art’s Place*, and Varela Thompson & Rosch’s (1993), *The Embodied Mind*, and Capra’s (1996), *The Web of Life*. All these writers express a world-view that questions Cartesian/Kantian modes of perception and experience.
...the dominance of humans over nature, of masculine over feminine, of the wealthy and powerful over the poor, and of Western over non-Western cultures. These same goals of dominance and mastery, which are crucial to our society’s notion of success, have also become the formula for global destruction (Gablik, 1991, p. 117).

Gablik distinguishes between those aspects of post modernism, which are cynical and largely deconstructive, from those which are reconstructive. It is within this latter mode of post modernism that Gablik locates her own practice and those of the artists she describes in her book. She describes this less visible, reconstructionist branch of post modernism, through the words of Morris Berman, as being characterized by a “notion of recovery...of our bodies, our health, our sexuality, our natural environment, our archaic traditions, our unconscious mind, our rootedness in the land, our sense of community, and our connectedness to one another” (Gablik, 1991, p 22). Reconstructive post modernism is therefore revealed to be about healing, as opposed to the notion that deconstruction is the only role of art - for the sake of deconstruction.

Gablik is calling for art to have a role and characterizes this role as distinct from the modernist myth of “aesthetic freedom” (p. 116); she describes a new paradigm “based on the notion of participation, in which art will redefine itself in terms of social relatedness and ecological healing, so that artists will
gravitate toward different activities, attitudes and roles than those that operated under the aesthetics of modernism” (p. 27).

It is within this paradigm and this vein of post modernism that community art practice is located. Community art practice has risen to the challenge that the historical avant-garde posed for themselves at the turn of the last century - that is to reconnect art and life, and to effect real changes in the life-world itself; autonomous art will not disappear - it has its role in being non-utilitarian, academic, or as commodity in our present culture - but the leading edge in contemporary cultural practice in the Arts is occupied by community art practice. I cannot say this better than Gablik herself:

It would seem that the capacity to move beyond the old art-and-life, subject-object polarities is precisely where the frontier of a post-Cartesian framework is to be found. Community is the starting point for new modes of relatedness, in which the paradigm of social conscience replaces that of the individual genius. In the past, we have made much of the idea of art as a mirror (reflecting the times); we have had art as a hammer (social protest); we have had art as furniture (something to hang on the walls); and we have had art as a search for the self. There is another kind of art, which speaks to the power of connectedness and establishes bonds, art that call us into relationship (p. 114).

Gablik invokes community as the site for “another kind of art” and in doing so implicates community art practice as this very art.
We must keep in mind that paradigm shifts are reported by academics but they occur in the matrix of everyday life. It should not be surprising then that the "birth" of the community arts is a relatively recent event in history and takes place in a post-war context in the late 1960s.

In the arts, as in many other fields, it was a time for reappraisal. The euphoric links between Pop Culture - the avant-garde trendy haute culture - and any real alternatives, were seen for the first time to present not a complementary ideology but one which was diametrically opposed, both economically and socially. It was in this context that artists who had fought to establish Fringe Festivals, Art Labs and alternative theatres, in an attempt to find new audiences, first clearly understood the limitations of many existing art forms (Braden, 1978, p. 15).

Artists not only questioned their isolation and autonomy and their complicity in mass culture and consumerism - but so did communities of non-artists; the Civil Rights, Feminist and Queer movements are all relevant examples.

In England and North America the concepts of artists in communities and an art for the people saw a series of programs develop in communities in many cities in the western world. Although much of this work was done in the realm of Theatre and Festivals, other disciplines were also involved, particularly visual artists. Mural painting in and with communities became such a popular
and common occurrence through the 1970s that it has been referred to as the "contemporary mural movement" and aligned artists and communities in a practice that posited community murals as revolutionary art activity and a new form of public art (Braden, 1978; Hawkins, 1993; Cockcroft, E., Weber, J., & Cockcroft, J., 1977). In the case of the Labour Movement, artists also aligned themselves with workers, developing a tradition of activist art practice known as the Labour Arts movement (Beveridge & Johnston, 1999).

Many artists, through trial and error developed strategies and practices that worked with communities - action was important at this time in history and

38 Cockcroft and Cockroft’s book *Toward A People’s Art: The contemporary Mural Movement* (1977) is a very straightforward and personalized book which documents many mural projects which took place, mostly in the U.S., but also here and Latin America, through the 1970s. The book gives a strong sense of the theoretical underpinnings and goals of this phenomenon in contemporary art and is worth reading to understand the context of the mural movement and its location in community art practice.

39 An interesting publication published by Labour Arts and Heritage in Ontario in 1999, *Making Our Mark* is an inspirational book. Written by Karl Beveridge and Jude Johnson, this book traces back the history of the Labour Arts movement to the 1880s through specific examples. The authors contend that it was in the 1970s that the Arts formally and actively became part of the Labor movement in North America, and they credit this to the fact that new artists were becoming socially engaged through their practices and that Cultural Theory, which viewed culture as an arena of political struggle brought the interests of artists and activists together. The book describes over a hundred recent Labour Arts projects that seek to empower communities of workers. They span different artistic media, including music and drama, writing, visual art (including murals), Film, Video, and Mixed Media, and are all Canadian examples.
a definite role for art as activism was developed. "The community arts movement developed out of the search in the 1960s for alternatives, is firmly based in the development of deep ties with specific communities and their realities" (Braden, 1978, p. 173). What community did for the arts was not only specify and distinguish communities and their particular issues from previously ambiguous notions of "public", "mass audience", "the people", and the "working class", but it also found diverse ways in which to define itself.

5.6 Community Art Practice Standards

Historically speaking, community arts practice has measured success through non-aesthetic values of social benefit and cultural participation. The criteria for success should ideally be derived locally and specifically from the community that a given project engages (Gablik, 1991, Hawkins, 1993). Success is also often measured by the degree to which "community" is generated by the project and the degree of empowerment that the defined community experiences. In the context of ephemeral events, success is described in terms of establishing a "utopian moment when distinctions between us and them...become meaningless " (Hawkins, 1993, p. 162).
What is clear is that no evaluation of community-based art can be made without some understanding of context. Community-based art is shaped by a particular place and particular conditions and a particular political and artistic moment. The first requirement is that the community-based art project benefit the community. The community with which the artist has collaborated must be the primary audience for the work. This community must not feel exploited by the artist; that is to say, its members must not feel that the project is serving the interests of the artist - or, for that matter, of an institution - more than it's serving them. It must be clear that for the duration of the project, no one owns the project more than they do (Jacob, 1993, p. 41).

There is a certain look and expectation of community art that often sells short the potential of artists to develop a reflexive practice, that seeks to develop a dynamic aesthetic, and which doesn’t fall back into “tried and tested” strategies of community involvement and aesthetic expression. Murals aren’t always the best medium, political guilt is not always the best strategy, and confessional modes of address are not always the most effective means of communication. The idiosyncratic nature of site and community should be deeply considered in developing the appropriate strategies; the artist does have

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4 When the Witness Exhibition was installed at the Roundhouse in 1997, the most frequent and surprising (to me) criticism of it was that it “looked too professional - and so was elitist and not really community art! The exhibition featured work by professional and non-professional artists and included works by Lawrence Paul Yuxwelupton, Theresa Marshall, George Littlechild, Nancy Bleck, Shirley Bear, Hank Bull and Ian Wallace. The comment brought home the mistrust of professionalism in community art practice and the stereotypical expectations of its aesthetic quality.
expertise and experience to share and a tradition of socially directed work to draw upon. What a successful community art project should not be, however, is "harmlessly wholesome" or "crudely rhetorical" (Hawkins, 1991, p. 163). I feel that the aesthetic/quality dimension of community art practice will be a rich frontier for exploration in the field.

5.7 The Scope of Community Art Practice: Territory

Through the preceding discussion of the development of community art practice, it becomes apparent that it has emerged in a multi-disciplinary context and serves different roles. Its inherent collaborative process means that it must be different things to different stakeholders. It is also evident that its development, both as a field and in substantive individual projects, is a process that is derived from a down-up, grassroots movement, and an up-down initiative through government and non-government cultural and social policy.

The scope and territory of community art practice is vast, reflecting new definitions and roles for art and community in recent years. A Space Gallery’s Community Art Biennale 2000 (CAB 2000), for instance, features over fifty selected community art projects from across Canada and internationally. The range of projects represented is huge and their purposes varied. What makes them community art practice is that they all involve partnerships
between artists and specific community organizations and constituencies to deal with issues specific to and determined by the communities in which the projects co-emerge.

These projects (and others mentioned in this paper) are also characterized by the notion of “compassion” in their purpose and process. And “compassion” is a mode of being and consciousness that is repeatedly invoked in the paradigm shift from disengaged (from the sensuous world) Cartesian, positivist notions of culture and knowledge to ecological, intuitive, and sensually embedded modes of consciousness and knowledge (Abram, 1996; Gablik, 1991; Hawkins, 1993; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Wing, 1986).

Collectively, these projects (and all the ones described above) may be characterized by their role(s) in society and could be described as one or more of the following notions:

- Public Art/Event
- Activism
- Education
- Expression of Pluralism
- Public Celebration
- Community Development
At their most complex, community cultural projects are all these things.

In my own experience at the Roundhouse Community Centre over the last three years we have facilitated and programmed various projects and programs that span the range of this territory. *Positive* (1997), *National Aboriginal Day* (1997-2000 - ongoing), *Songbird* (1997-2000 - ongoing), *Middle East Peace Quilt* (1999), *Gathering Threads* (1999), *Speaking From our Art* (1998-2000), *Winter Solstice Lantern Procession* (1997 - 2000 - ongoing) and *Witness* (1997-2000 - ongoing) are some of many other projects and artists residencies that fit within the territory described for community art practice. All these projects and events result through partnership and collaboration processes with specific communities and organizations, and all of them are centred around an agenda that is derived outside of aesthetic discourse, such as First Nations issues, issues of the environment and ecology, issues of peace and war; the aim is to deal with issues that effect the daily lives of participants, or to enact community through seeking a fleeting but significant "utopian moment". All these projects manifest themselves as cultural practice, but it is a practice that connects intimately with the realities of specific communities. In particular, the notion of pluralism -
that we live in complex and diverse societies - is the fuel that has ignited and sustained the flames of community art practice.

Community Art Practice does not negate the traditional modes of art practice such as art as a product to be consumed, a symbol of power and taste, a signifier of cultural difference, or as mode of maintaining hegemonic power. There is, however, an alternative to “autonomous art”. Community art practice’s space is precisely in the borderland between mass culture and “high” art, both of which are driven by commercial/power imperatives. “Whereas art that is not autonomous (or is heteronomous as Debelják, 1998 suggests), not cut off or “uncoupled” from life-world contexts, actually presents structural characteristics that are resistant to capitalist imperatives” (Gablik, 1991, p. 142; parentheses are my comments).

What community art practice represents, in a post-colonial and post modern context, is the beginning of “a non-exploitative history in which art is put to immediate human ends, rather than something destined for the brilliant collection, the dramatized auction room, the sanctuary of the museum, the graphic tomb of the expensive art book” (Danto, quoted in Gablik, 1991, p. 124).
5.8 Conclusions

In the research for this meta-chapter, I've reflected on my own experience and that of others. The consensus seems to be that community art practice is a process where a skilled cultural worker, interacts and engages in a creative process with the “community” (variously defined), to address an issue, problem, or need that has emerged within and been identified by the community.\(^{41}\)

Community art practice is inherently collaborative and results from the substantive interaction and creative work of individuals and groups. It is not the work of isolated individuals.

Community art practice is an emerging phenomenon in contemporary art discourse. From the perspective of contemporary art, it has ultimately grown out of the historical avant-garde and the avant-garde practices of the 1960s (i.e. Happenings, etc.); it has incubated within the Identity Politics and Issue-based Art, which was the focus of cultural discourse beginning in the 1980s into the 1990s to the present.\(^{42}\) This was a time that saw cultural practice...
posited as socially engaged and as an instrument of social change (Hawkins, 1993). Its recognition has coincided with the emergence and establishment of Cultural Studies as a distinct discipline; but its origins are embedded in broad sociological and paradigm shifts across disciplines, including Science, Education and Community Development.

Community art practice has matured in the discourse of post-modernism, and yet it distinguishes itself through its connection to communities and its concern with life-issues. It may have very well replaced the historical avant-garde in the latter's role to challenge middle-class values, especially since the avant-garde itself has been co-opted by corporate values of consumption. What is new, innovative, radical, and scandalous no longer seems to challenge the culture of consumption but is consumed by it. Instead what is challenging is precisely that which is local, communal, collaborative and creative (Debeljak, 1998; Gablik, 1991; Pacific, Winter, 1997/98).

Community art is a way of building - or enacting - community. Community is not a static entity, which exists “out there”, but is manifested through action - it is practiced. Or as Suzi Gablik (1991) states, “art that realizes its purpose through relationship - that collaborates consciously with the
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audience and is concerned with how we connect with others - can actually create a sense of community” (p. 157-158).

Community art practice emerges at a time when globalization and the dominant culture of consumption threatens the diversity and integrity of distinct cultural communities and our traditional mechanisms for community-building and maintenance (i.e. the local “public sphere”), and indeed our sense of being active agents in society. Community art practice is a means to cross cultural differences and provide access for a multiplicity of cultural perspectives.

Community art’s focus on process results in a practice that is strongly contextual and idiosyncratic; within contemporary art it is a phenomenon that may provide the means to answer a fundamental issue in current discourse - that is, how to present and juxtapose art (defined variously) from diverse cultural traditions (specific communities) in a manner that respects and engages the original context of each? It has the potential to be a most useful and appropriate medium through which to build understanding, acceptance, and connections across cultural difference. This latter task is crucial for the democratic “management” of diversity in a pluralistic contemporary society. To this end, it remains crucial that definitions of community art practice remain
fluid enough to include different definitions of "artist" and "community"
accounted for by cultural difference.

The emergence of community art practice is tied to the changing role of
the contemporary art, artist (i.e. as community animator/facilitator) and to
expectations of public art (i.e. as collaborative, accessible, accountable to both
the "art" and "non-art" public, as socially engaged, as part-of-the-world.) The
artist becomes a compassionate activist, collaborator, listener, celebrator and
educator. The artists and facilitators with the skills to be effective collaborators,
pedagogues, and who are aesthetically engaged and informed about their
practice, will, within the context of contemporary art and society, become
pioneers in an emerging cultural phenomenon. In the context of community,
art is no longer dead; it is reborn.
REFERENCES


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A. Alibhai. Cross cultural collaboration and community art practice: An autobiographical examination


APPENDIX A

Supplementary Audio and Visual material

Video: A Call to Witness by Hali Tsui (2000)

APPENDIX B

Selected program of workshops, instructors and special events offered to the public by the *Witness* project and the Roundhouse Community Centre.
1997-2000

June to September 1997

Carving of a 50ft Canoe – at the Roundhouse. Artist: Xwa Lac Tun (Rick Harry)

Weekend Witness Ceremonies and Workshops:

Every Weekend, on Saturdays, a traditional Witness Ceremony will take place and volunteer-led hikes to the old growth will also take place (1997-2000, inclusive)

July 12/13: First Nations Drummers, Storytelling and Landscape, geologist Bob Turner

July 26/27 and September 13/14: First Nations Storytelling

July 26/27, August 23/24, September 20/21: Mountaineering and Wilderness Camping, mountaineer, John Clarke

August 2/3 and September 6/7: Landscape Photography, artist, Nancy Bleck

August 9/10: Focus on First Nations Youth, healer, Marie Priessl

August 16/17/31 and September 6: Ecology of the Old Growth Forest, natural scientist, Terry Taylor

September 28: Closing Ceremony

Free Slide Shows and Talks – at the Roundhouse, Thursdays, John Clarke

Witness Exhibition, December 1997 to January 1998

May to July, 1998

May 16/17, 23/24: Volunteer Trail Building and Training, mountaineer, John Clarke
June 6: **Medicinal Herbs: walking tour of forest**, herbalist, Cease Wyss: History of Industrial Forestry Management in BC, lawyer & environmentalist, Paul Hundal

June 7: **Drawing Workshop**, artist, Johann Weighardt

June 13: **Friends of Clayoquot Sound**, activist, Valerie Langer: **Down to Earth Building Bee**, building with cob

June 14: **Forest Ecology**, naturalist Terry Taylor

June 20: **Mountaineering and Wilderness Camping**, mountaineer, John Clarke

June 21: **Cedar Paper Bookmaking**, artist, heather Royal-Brandt

June 27: **Reading the River**, geologist, Bob Turner: **The Media Foundation/Adbusters Outdoor Slideshow**, activists, Charles Dobson and Alan MacDonald

June 28: **Drum Making Workshop**, artist/educator, Aaron Nelson-Moody

July 4: **BearWatch**, researcher, Eric Donnelly: **Healing aspects of the Forest**, healer, Marie Preissl

July 5: **Sierra Legal Defense**

July 11: **Squamish Nation Aboriginal Title and Delgamuukw**

July 12: **The David Suzuki Foundation**

July 18: **Squamish Nation Cultural Weekend: Slahal/Bone Game**, Norm and William Nehanee

July 19: **Squamish Nation Language**, educator, Roy Baker: **Traditional Style Food Gathering and Plant Use**, Heather Royal-Brandt and Cheryl Rivers

July 25: **South East False Creek Working Group**

July 26: **Closing Ceremony and Celebration**
June to October, 1999

John Clarke will lead hiking trips each weekend in June

June 5: Adbusters Magazine & The Media Foundation, post-card campaign

June 6: History of Industrial Forestry Management in BC, Paul Hundal

June 12: Medicine Wheel & Rainforest Healing, Marie Preissl

June 13: Finding Your Voice, poet, Andrea Thompson

June 19: Tenure Reform of BC's Current System of Corporate Forestry, Cheri Burta, UVIC: Logger's Perspective, faller, Allwyn Stewart

June 20: Down to Earth Building Bee, building with Cob, Marion Halle, Jared Irwin & Ian Marcuse

June 26: Arthropod/insect Research from the Old Growth canopy of the Carmanah Valley, Dr. Richard Ring, UVIC: Rhythms of Life, Drums and Movement: water and wood: stone and skin, Vancouver Moving Theatre

June 27: Technique and Equipment for Wilderness Survival, mountaineer, John Clarke

In July, artist Aaron Nelson-Moody will carve a traditional welcome figure at Sims Creek for the Squamish Nation

July 3: Storytelling, Chief Ian Campbell

July 4: Drum Making Workshop, artist/educator, Aaron Nelson-Moody

July 10: Photography Workshop, Jeremy Williams and Guy Warrington

July 11: Squamish Language, educator, Roy Baker

July 17: Traditional Style Food Gathering and Plant Use, artist/educator, Heather Royal-Brandt

July 18: Forest Ecology, naturalist, Terry Taylor

July 24: Slahal/Bone Game: Wilderness Festival of Hearts, performance
July 25 Reading the River, geologist, Bob Turner: Closing Ceremonies, Squamish Nation

October 6: Ministry of Forests Gift Basket Presentation

October 7: International Forest Products Gift Basket Presentation

May to July, 2000

May 11 Honouring Ceremony for Randy Stoltmann, Squamish Nation Recreation Centre

June 3/4: Fireside Conversations, Squamish Nation, Sierra Legal Defense, Squamish Council, IWA, Friends of the Elaho, Western Canada Wilderness Committee, PATH, Paul Hundal, and Interfor

June 10/11: The Politics of Conservation, John Clarke

June 17/18: Medicine Wheel and Rainforest Meditation, Marie Preisil

June 24/25: Medicinal Plants, Cease Wyss

July 1/2: Photography, Video & Strategy Workshop, Mark Achbar, Nancy Bleck, & Katherine Dodds


July 15/16: Cedar Bark Weaving and Beadwork, Squamish Elders


In 2000, planning began for building a traditional longhouse at Sims Creek.
APPENDIX C

Text from the Installation *Dis-placed Indians: The Sixties Scoop*, 1996*

By George Littlechild

Please note that the text which follows in this appendix is by authors who wish to remain anonymous. Each personal narrative is printed in a slightly different font and is numbered at the beginning, in order to distinguish narrators. No part of this transcript may be reproduced without permission from George Littlechild.

Narrator One

I was placed in the foster system when I was one month old. I have been in 6 placements. Most of my teenage years were spent waiting for placement at the Children Centre and I spent close to 2 years at a Group Home.

My longest stay with a family was 10 years but that was where I was abused. I don’t remember my real parents, all I have of them are pictures. I will stare at my parents’ pictures looking for any time of reality that they were my parents. I always feel empty and feeling more alone and disconnected from them.

I would have really loved getting to know my real parents from the stories many of my relatives have shared with me. I have come to terms with each of their unexpected deaths and why I was placed in the foster system. It took 30 years of my life to forgive each of my parents for their weakness.

I refused to be called by my birth name ‘till forgave my mother. I was most hardest on my mother, because I’m a woman and I can’t conceive how any woman could allow the breakup of her family and not do anything to solve the situation.

What I liked about the homes: I learned about closeness of family. In one family, every weekend during late spring to early fall, we went camping and fishing. In some homes I had grandparents who I would spend lots of time with and I would hear of the olden days, such as the dirty 30’s, Hitler’s ruling, War, Vimy Ridge. I mostly learnt of hardship and what that meant.

I lived with one family on a farm. I witnessed and actually helped a cow give birth. I learned about the hardships about farming. I learned about hard work and that money doesn’t grow on trees. Someone cared enough about me to provide a home for me.

Christmas time and every festival occasion because my foster mom would be so happy.

Not to lie and I learnt about values, and morals and that honesty was one of my strongest virtues.

That I could be anything I wanted to be if I worked hard.

Bad things: I was horribly abused.
I was sexually abused by my foster father who I loved and when I told an authoritative person they called me “A LIAR” and I was ostracized because of my dad’s dirty deeds and I still am...
I hated my foster mother for allowing my dad to touch me (between my legs).

I was only 4-5 years old the first time - my dad touched me.

I worked from early sun-rise to late at night

I burnt my fingers - peeling the skins off of hot potatoes.

I slept in a cold basement - cement walls and floors.

I wasn’t allowed shoes during summer months - many cuts from glass and sharp rocks and rusty nails piercing my feet - there were never any comforting words or arms or kisses only scolding; because I wasn’t careful.

My birthdays were shared with my younger foster brother.

I was constantly compared to my younger - whiter - brother.

I was put down for being “Indian”

I had my waist length hair chopped off the first day I moved in.

I wore second-hand clothes and I was ridiculed for it.

I was olive-skinned and called names for it.
I was just a little girl, alone and I was violated physically, emotionally and sexually.

I was lied to about my real mother - I was told she was an Indian whore.
I was told I had no brothers or sisters.
I was told no one wanted me.

I was told I was dirty, stupid and UGLY.

I was forced to look at porno magazines sitting on my dad’s lap rubbing my bottom back and forth.

I was forced to drink straight rum when I was 10 years old and after that every time I was left alone with my dad. My dad filled big mustard jars frill of
I was forced to “hold myself in” for several hours at a time because my parents wouldn’t stop so I could use a washroom.

I would drink out of toilet bowls.

My mom would rub my nose in my urine if I pissed the bed and then belt me.

I was raised with strict religious rules. We said the rosary every night on bended knees...

But the part I hated the most was calling strangers - Mom & Dad (because they could never earn that title).

I was alone, I felt different from everyone and I wanted to be loved...
Narrator Two

First Placement:
when I was seven years old.

Placements in total:
25 homes and institutions.

Why were you placed in foster homes?
My mother died, my dad remained and couldn't cope with my mother's death, and my stepmother couldn't cope with me and my little brother.

Good things about being placed:
Occasional vacations learned to work hard. Some good memories taught me how to be a survivor.

Bad things:
Horrible abuse: physical, sexually and emotional
I never learnt stability so therefore, its hard for me to be in any kind of relationship.
I ended up in the prison system because of my anger towards the past
I grew up to be a very angry person.
I have a hard time maintaining a job due to lack of stability as a child.
I have a really bad temper.
I have a lot of anger and
turmoil.

I have unsolved issues.

I am abusive to my step-children, and I'm aware of that now.

I am controlling.

I am suicidal at times.

I'm afraid to get hurt.

I have low self-esteem

Unsure of love and its meaning.

I am emotionally scarred for life.

I have a hard time expressing my feelings.

I am constantly yearning for a real family and acceptance.
I look at those three little boys and I wonder why no-one wants us when we were babies. Days I can’t remember, but images I search for as I understand the thirty-nine years since I was taken away from my family. The boy in the middle is dead from a statistical death common to my brothers, sisters, my ancestors, my uncles, aunties, grandparents and many other First Nation people who became another “Indian Statistic” the two boys on either side are children who survived the 60’s scoop, but still deal with the racist reality of being seen as an “Indian” in a contemporary world. A society with colonial perceptions of drunken Indians, homeless Indians, dirty Indians, smartass Indians, “He/She’s just an Indian”, and “who do those Indians think they are?”

I kid you not... It doesn’t matter how politically correct people are, when they attempt to make up for the misgivings of their ancestors, their colonial past, or the attitude of a dominant culture which belittles the Native’s position in society today. I appreciate the people, who are grounded spiritually and understand the Creators’ (Jesus’) plan for all people, and attempt to be genuine with their relationship with First Nations people. I appreciate the people who try to learn and understand the history of our people and what created the dysfunctionality which exists today with some of our people. Our people, who were like these boys here, who were like me on the right, who were shuffled to sixteen foster homes by the time I was four years old. When Alanis Obomsowin produced “Daily of A Metis Child, the story about Richard Cardinal and his suicide. I knew what Richard went through. I knew what my brother went through, and I know what my twin brother went through.

This picture you see, is when I was with my people, when I was learning my tongue, my culture, my history. When my Grandfather would sing Cree songs to me as I laid in bed. When my grandmother would feed me moose stew, deer soup and bead me moccasins. When my mother and father would sing Metis songs to my seven siblings and myself. My oldest sister, who I first met in 1974 in Edmonton, told my brother and I about our forgotten past. It was 1974, when my brother and I, in this picture, met my deceased brother, my younger brother and oldest brother and my three sisters. “Family united after 16 years”, the newspaper wrote. Our family became local celebrities, CBC television found my mother in Calgary and flew her up to Edmonton. My twin brother, the left baby by my dead brother, phoned a radio station and two days later, a forty-three year old woman walks out from
backstage at the CBC studio. My brother and I walk towards her and she trips into our arms. A family is united, but what is left of this picture?

What is here today is gone tomorrow. What was there yesterday is here today. From cute brown eyes lying on the sidewalk to cute brown eyes captured on film before the assimilation syndrome. This picture was my life as my brothers and sisters on skid row are my life today. My life on this earth is based on the desires and plans of my Creator. His plan was to deal with the Indian problem from the white man’s point of view. His plan today in dealing with the white man’s problems is from the Red man’s point of view. Sure I’m voicing my opinion, but who am I to believe, after what happened to my family, what happened to the three of us sitting there?

My childhood was but a lifescape of dreams, nightmares, and forgiven journeys. Journeys by people, who didn’t know what they were doing except for their humanity, their economic gain, or their desire to help solve the Indian problem. My twin is in the system, he is assimilated much to the dismay of the white system, because he still doesn’t fit in with the typical crowd. The crowd of the bourgeois, the crown of the political majority, the economic middle class, the sporting bravadoism of jocularity. The Indian Chief of the hockey rink, the Indian soldier fighting/against Oka/Kanasatake, because he wants to do what is right. The rights of the Great White Chief. The rights of the provincial judge, who took us eight children away from our mother. The rights of the social worker when he drove up in his black shiny car.

I write from association with the other. The other who abused me, who hated me, the other who shuffled me from house to house to house to house. I write from seeing the last home moving farther and farther away from me as I looked out the back window driving to the orphanage of the unknown. The sisterhood of mercy who punish in the name of the Father, in the name of the Lord. I write from the child who remembers the hate, the beatings, the scrubbing, the denial of being, all because of the colour of my skin. I write from the memories of fighting, of being raped, of being thrown in jail, all because of the colour of my skin. This picture was me, but the system became the author of these words as I fought like the black sheep they wanted me to be. I write from the mind of a man today who has embraced the medicine wheel, Jesus Christ, Manitou, and the Devil too. I write from the life of a man who became a man who abused life because the system abused him too. From the point of sexuality to the point of self damnation to the point of becoming mad, insane, and one with death and the Creator. I write from the fantasies, the dreams, and the hopes of the little
child in me who died years ago, because I was forced into a world which was not me. Into a world which wanted me dead, uneducated, dead drunk, in jail, down in the skids, six feet under. I write from survival, from placating the white system with its own excrement as white people, black people, and yellow people saw the Indian under their feet. I write from the new man who fought for what is just, for what is the Creator’s life, for what is my life as I learn from Manitou everyday when I am still angry at the system, because nothing has changed. From when I learn to understand the greatest enemy, myself. From when I give thanks to our Creator because finally my last foster parent truly loved us and taught us something in life which is still with me today. From understanding good hard work and forgiving the actions of an uneducated past. From forgiving a system which offered money for Indian boys and girls. From forgiving the foster parents who took us for the money, from forgiving the state for separating my brother from me, from separating the six other siblings from me and for giving me the tormented soul I carried for years and years. From understanding my own worthlessness to knowing the light which shines from the Creator’s heart. From knowing my First Nations People will find the Creator’s heart and the whole world will too. From believing completely in our Creator I can give something back to the children of this world. That I can give back stories, songs, plays, movies, and hope knowing that babies like these three you see will survive Sarajevo, cultural genocide and any abuse of power, because of telling them what is just. One image can signify many meanings, but what is the signifier and what is signified?
Narrator Four

"Hours used to pass by, as I stared at the road turning into the Orphanage in Mundare, Alberta, waiting in anticipation for the arrival of my mother to come and take me home..."

"I can still hear the harshness of children of all ages calling me "Indian-face" throughout my childhood years..."

"I remember while living in my last foster home, I always felt so unsure of where I belonged and if this was NOW my home or will I be whisked away in the middle of the night as so many times before? Who was this person who wanted me to call her Mother; was I to forget I already have a mother?..."

"Confusion... am I Cree or what did you say I was? ... why is my skin brown and not white like yours? ... you say I don't belong here; what is a reserve? ... where do I belong?"

"As time went by, I soon forgot I was Cree, and the memories of my native brothers and sisters have long been faded"
"For so long, I had an unanswered question of why didn’t my mother try harder to come and take me home ... It now has been answered ... the government is a trickster ... your life appears good on paper but is it?..."

"I remember waving to my mother and watching the tears run down her face and wondering why is she crying ... I’ll be right back ... but the forces of politics made sure I didn’t return...."
Narrator Five

I was born on October 17, 1964 in Lytton, British Columbia. At the time of my birth, my mother had five other children. My birth father was a rodeo rider and travelled to various competitions throughout the States and British Columbia; I was the youngest child. We were all living with my grandmother, at Kanaka, with my other relatives, at this time. The house was crowded, my father was long gone with his riding career and my mother was ill. My aunt, and my grandmother were the caregivers at the time when I was apprehended by a social worker. I was placed in foster-care for six months. The family in whose care I remained had one child. I think I was about seventeen months of age when I was placed. We resided in Lilloett at that time. It took about three years for my adoption to be finalized. The adoption was not without it’s complications. Two of the complications were: 1) My birth-father had to be found to sign the adoption papers and 2) the adoption was initiated in British Columbia and finalized in Manitoba. The difficulty being in regards to the laws.

There were no laws in British Columbia as to whether the adoptive parents had to have a declared religious affiliation prior to the adoption. In Manitoba though, the laws were that the adoptive parents had to be affiliated with a religion I had been baptised prior to the adoption The laws in Manitoba were such that parents only of the same religion as the adoptive family could adopt a child and my adoption set precedence for future cross-provincial adoptions in Manitoba There had been put in place a ruling that religious affiliation was not necessary for an adoption to take place.

The adoption was finalized and I resided in Manitoba for the remaining years until about 1989, when I moved to British Columbia. We lived in The Pas, Manitoba for a year and a half and then moved to Winnipeg. We resided in four different areas of the city over the years. I remember my childhood as being relatively happy.

My mother gave birth to another son three years after I was adopted. I’ve been told that my older brother and I were not too happy with this new sibling. My older brother resorted to talking in baby talk and I resorted to forgetting that I was potty trained. I always looked to my older brother with admiration. He is a year and a half older than I, and I am three years older than my younger brother and we had a stormy relationship most of our lives.

School was no picnic. I endured years of taunting and ridicule. There were
always racial remarks regarding the fact I was an Indian. I came home from school in tears most of the time. My mother was unable to know what it felt like to be discriminated against. It was such that we were unable to deal with the prejudice in any way. There weren’t services that we were aware of dealing with this issue. I know that my mother experienced negative talk as a result of choosing to adopt me. This, because people couldn’t understand that I was a member of the family. My mother also mentioned that both my father’s mother in England and her father’s mother thought it wasn’t kosher that I was adopted.

At that time, people had a view that people in Canada lived in igloos and were totally ignorant about life here. Their assumptions were based on extremely old myths.

I recall when I was in grade six, I decided to run away with a friend, who was from a white middle class family. We took the bus to the river when my friend decided she’d rather go home. I took responsibility and said we could go to the legislative buildings where my father worked, and so we did. This incident was the turning point of my life. My father was furious with me, his secretaries thought it was amusing, and I was held responsible for the whole thing. The parents of my friend no longer allowed the friendship to continue. They blamed me for what occurred.

Our family then attended a family-counselling weekend. This attempt at dealing with our issues was totally unsuccessful; I guess our family wasn’t ready to deal with the issues. We left the counselling sessions and did nothing else. I do know that I enjoyed something that they were trying to teach us, as I have pleasant memories of them (councillors). It could be that deep down I knew they had a key to unlocking what I didn’t know about myself and they were gentle in their attempts to help our family.

I had only five friends who I confided in. The racial slurs had subsided and I became a part of the average middle-class crowd. I didn’t excel at school but maintained a C average.

It was in grade ten that my parents separated. I remember my mother in tears a lot and how I resented my father for his anger. I started drinking to ease the pain. I unfortunately became involved with a guy who was in grade twelve, not aware of the trouble I would be getting into as a result. The relationship was purely sexual, he being the first guy who showed any interest in me. I was unaware of birth control and hadn’t intended to even be that involved. I
became pregnant and chose to have an abortion. My family was further divided. The part which hurt the most, was that my father stopped talking to me and my younger brother severed ties with me. I felt a loss which could never be replaced.

My mother and older brother were supportive all the way in my decision. I didn’t even tell the guy responsible until after the abortion. It was a decision my mother allowed me to make. The guy questioned me and asked if I thought that we might get married. I said no and never spoke to him again.

I was in my final year of school and didn’t have a date for grad, when a neighbour started talking to me. I took him to grad and then moved in with him. By then my mother was on her way to British Columbia and my brothers and father and I were left to fend for ourselves. I didn’t love the guy but was taken care of and felt I belonged with him. He never appreciated me as he could have though. I had gone to live in New Mexico for a year but got homesick after a month. I returned to him and discovered I was pregnant. I went through this one alone. I phoned my mother and asked her not to tell anyone. She agreed to abide by my wishes. I told the guy that I had decided to abort, as I wasn’t ready or able to provide for this child. He had no say.

I had to go through the trauma of having a health committee decide whether or not I could have another abortion. It was a degrading experience which left me disliking myself even more. We stayed together for a couple of months after the abortion, but the abortion was the last straw I felt unloved and hated myself for taking another life. The guy ended the relationship all of a sudden. He just packed up and left. He also told me that when he first met me, he was afraid to bring me to his parents because I was Native. I felt so angry and alone. I felt that our whole relationship must have been a facade. We were living with my younger brother at the time.

Fortunately, he and I (my brother and I) had mended our differences two years after the first abortion. I was in college taking Early Childhood Education at this time and had been in contact with my birth family. There were letters exchanged and I had visited the family twice. My oldest brother from my birth family came to visit for a month. We didn’t talk, as we found it easier to write letters to one another in the evenings. I guess it was a way of discovering ourselves without getting hurt. I have all the letters and they remain the answers to unanswered questions about my family and I. We had an enjoyable visit and when he left I felt abandoned. I struggled the whole year with my feelings. I got excellent marks in my studies, but as the year
progressed, and the letters were exchanged, I felt it necessary to be with my birth family.

It was in June, the final month of school when I decided to drop out and move to British Columbia. I was elated with my decision. I cried, because at last I would be with my birth family. I phoned my birth mother and asked if I could live with them, she said yes. I packed thirty-two boxes of my belongings, put my golden retriever into a cage, bought a train ticket for half price as I had a status card and spent thirty-two hours on the train to get to Lytton. I remember hugging my mother upon my arrival to her home and crying. She is a beautiful woman. My life turned to turmoil. I partied with all my siblings in an attempt to belong. I really messed up, when I initiated a relationship with my second cousin and refused to end it. He was someone who loved me and I so desperately needed that love. If we weren’t cousins, we’d still be together. His mom had told him to never turn me away and that she’d stand behind whatever decision he made regarding me. He did nothing, I cried.

I was noticed by a dark individual one evening, and was asked to go get some beer with him. I asked my sister if he was a relative, she said no. I became involved, moved in and stayed with him for two years. The first year was good, we both worked, drank socially, not to any extremes and made a home ourselves. It was in the second year when I became isolated. I discovered that I was living with an alcoholic who used drugs. I put up with all forms of abuse. This included physical, sexual, mental, emotional, spiritual and economic abuse.

I’ve thought about this over the years and concluded that I stayed in the relationship to prove to my birth family I was no better than them. It appeared that they thought, I thought of myself as being better due to my upbringing. They failed to realize I so wanted to belong and felt I had to do all that I could to belong. I partied, I volunteered at community events, I was employed by the band and became accepted by elders and other community members. It wasn’t easy for me to remain isolated when I was in need of assistance. I was a victim who people saw, but no one said or did anything to help me. I walked around all bruised up and not an eye was blinked. I lied to the doctor about my injuries. Thought that if I endured this pain, as my whole family had, I would be accepted. I wasn’t. There was no open support and certainly no effort by anyone to help.

It was during this second year that I tried in vain to keep the abusive rela-
tionship and hope it would change for the better. We decided to have a baby, much to the pleasure of my distant father. He lived in Calgary, and was looking forward to having a grandchild. I became pregnant, but was unable to have the baby. It had, within two months of conception, stopped growing. I had to abort it. I was to do this alone as my partner was working in northern B.C. I had the abortion in Kamloops. My adopted mother came all the way from Vancouver to be with me. I remember waking up in tears and hearing the nurse say I could always have another child. My treatment was very unpleasant. The DNC was incomplete and had to be redone. The relationship was dissolved shortly thereafter.

I lived with a brother briefly, but was unable to stay, as I needed my own place. I secured an apartment at the senior citizen’s home and stayed there for a year. My cousin visited me and I, him. It just wasn’t possible for him to have me live with him. My family told me so. I continued working in Lytton, very isolated from my family I did have friends and elders who were my support. I then moved out of town into a trailer park about 5 miles out of town. It was a beautiful place, where I learnt what rats looked like and enjoyed listening to mice scamper across my stove.

My ex had attempted to initiate a relationship once again I had in the previous year learned that I could live without him. I told him I could only take care of myself, as all I had given him in love hadn’t been enough. I told him I didn’t want to die, and he would have to live without me. I remember phoning my mother in Vancouver asking why did he have to try and mess in my life when I had worked so hard to find peace in it? I, also in this same time period, had to suffer the loss of my father, my dog, and my grandfather (adopted) all died within 3 months of one another. My dog, I believe, was killed by my ex, the weekend I left him. I had been beaten by him severely and went to Vancouver to visit my mother. Upon arriving all bruised up I told her another woman had beaten me because I wasn’t treating my partner properly. It’s amazing that I would lie to my own mother. I felt guilty having lied to her. She said if I returned to him, I would be beaten again. I still decided to go back to him. It was a short-lived reconciliation.

Shortly after I returned, my father phoned. He was ill, and it was soon discovered he had leukemia. He was going to die in Calgary and I had to go. My partner wanted to go, but didn’t. My father died and there were to be services in Calgary and Winnipeg, as he lived in Calgary, but had been a member of the legislature in Winnipeg for seventeen years. I told my partner he was welcome to come, but that it wouldn’t be a social visit. He chose not
to, and while I had been away, he chose a new girlfriend. I came to realize life alone was alright. I had gone through enough at the hands of men. I look back at all I have gone through and am left feeling sad. I look at pictures when I was younger and see a beautiful girl. I lost my spirit somewhere along the way I lost the father I had known only a little, when I became pregnant the first time. My father was close to me as I was young, but when I became older, he distanced himself from all of us. He was never able to talk with us, as his mother had died when he was a young teenager and he had never recovered from that loss. He was cold emotionally and had anger that hurt to the core of me. His inability to love and be loved, left the whole family in limbo. To this day, we are un-able to talk about all that has gone on over the years since his death. My birth family is quiet. The family is one where everyone went to residential school and are alcoholics. I have been taught it's okay to have feelings and express them, but am unable to do so, as all I have witnessed and been a part of, has left me to internalize my feelings. I cry and am full of anger, guilt and a bleakness within myself I am loved by two mothers and two grandmothers who have all suffered abuse in some way by men.
This paper is disclosed in confidence. My sexuality was a result of my adoption. In the adoption, I was denied a chance to exist with pride in who I was. The cultural differences, the lack of services and the lack of understanding made my life that much harder. I know that all I ever wanted was to be loved. It appears that through sexual experiences I was able to receive something, not love, but I could momentarily feel that I belonged. I guess that is where my sexuality comes into play as searched for a place to belong and this was a means to doing so. I, over the years, have become less interested in sexual relations.

I fear that if I were to become pregnant before my marriage, that I would be ostracized once more. I am struggling to learn to love myself and accept that I am worthy and deserving of love. My adoption allowed me to witness a healthy relationship between my parents turn for the worse, whereby sexual relations between my parents once which were for love, were now just instances more so for my father than my mother. It was through my journey back home (Lytton) where I learnt about myself. I talked with my aunt about my adoption. It is unclear who initiated the process, but it left in its wake four women, my sister, my mother, my aunt and myself to learn how to love ourselves. My mother remains silent and guilt-ridden about my adoption. My aunt taught me to love myself and not think that I am unloved. She has stood by me all the seven and a half years that have gone by since my reconciliation with the family. She shared with me her experiences of abuse and the healing she has gone through. I feel that love is present if only one would take it with care and share it with others. My sexuality is a result of my journey into my true self. I have come a long ways. I can release myself from the pain of guilt, but know that so long as I’ve taken the lives of two children, my sexuality will remain bound until I free myself. I fear the possibility of being impregnated, though I know if I were to be so, I would bear the child and love it as I have wanted to be loved.

I realize this paper has taken a totally different direction than intended. I can only say that adoption and sexuality for myself are intertwined with self-discovery. My aunt mentioned that at the time of my adoption, there were no resources available regarding birth mothers, adoptive families and adoptees. Adoption was not talked about, nor was abuse. There was no sex education taught, and
women who became pregnant were blamed for being irresponsible. I realize that I am not to be ashamed of who I am or where I’ve come from. I will one day realize that my fiancee loves who I am now, knowing what I have gone through. I too know that it will take time for our relationship to be all it could be. My adoption has been a life long struggle for love, acceptance and fulfilment. This, which comes from within and is to be expressed freely.

I know my own family will be filled with much love and freedom to be whoever they are. I have learned from both of my families that which is healthy and that which is harmful. Sexuality remains open for discussion between my fiancee and I. He allows me the freedom to be who I am. I know that to love is good, but most important is self-acceptance. I am not bad, but experienced. I love and am worthy of love. I have experienced what many other women have experienced, in a world dominated by men I have found beauty in knowing my female relations. I am willing to let myself heal and love myself for all that I am. The journey to self-discovery will always exist and I will share my joys and sorrows along the way, with those who love me and are not judgmental. This is I hope for you, a paper which enlightens you to one experience of adoption and how it affected one individual’s struggle for self-identity. Thank you for allowing me to write as I have, I have learned, and that is what is important.
I never knew I had been raised in three homes before the fourth and fifth, and final placement. When I inquired with a social worker at the Health and Social Development department, he said I had gone into foster care as a baby. In fact, the file stated that I was a healthy chubby little baby when I first went into foster care.

I guess I had thought prior to the age of three that I had been with my parents. And now that I knew I had been in five placements made me question why? Why had I been in these five homes and not with my mother and father? What had taken place to cause my siblings and I to be apprehended?

Memories bring me back to the home before the fifth and final placement. Memories that stay deep within my psyche; memories only I and the abuser can recall. Had the woman, my caretaker/foster mother really intended to be so cruel, so violent and so mean to such a small child. Did she realize that she would scar me for life, and that fear instilled in a small innocent child lasts a lifetime (something therapy and time can heal and a lot of effort needed to forgive an abuser).

Did she realize locking a small child in a cold, dark cement basement for long hours was unhealthy?

Did she feel bad when she threw me down the basement stairs and I hit my head open and a long scar on my head remains as the reminder of that violent act?

Did she feel bad feeding my brother and I after she and her family ate and that our food wasn’t as good as theirs?

Was it necessary to barricade us from certain rooms and did she enjoy watching me eat my own excrements from my underwear, did she feel anything? She is a cruel bitch...

Did she enjoy chasing my Cree mother away from her door as she held Christmas gifts for my brother and I. What pain must have overcome my mother that day. She and my father didn’t last much longer; after we became permanent wards of the government, the
booze, the loneliness and being stripped of their children caused them early, untimely deaths...

Couldn't Social Services/Welfare step in and help repair a family in crisis or was it their mandate to take any First Nations children away the minute they saw a problem arise?

I'll never know the smile of my parents' faces, or the warm touch from a mother, - a father, or the advice and look of pride from a Grandparent... and who will teach me my culture, language and identity?
April 1965, four months after my eighth birthday, I entered my first foster home. It was the first of six homes I would live in over an eight year period with occasional stays at the Children’s shelter.

My foster parents were very kind. They enrolled me in swimming and sewing lessons, brownies and skating. The two summers I lived with them were spent at their cabin. We went boating, swimming, built forts and sand castles. It was like living in a fairy tale. But all of these things could not replace what I longed for the most, my mother and my brothers. I left there in December of 1966, along with my Easy-Bake-Oven to live in the same home as my little brother. I moved again six months later, without him, to a different city. I didn’t see him again until 1987, twenty years later.

The next foster home is where I lost my spirit and my faith. A child who lost her respect for her people and eventually the ability to laugh, to cry, to love and forgive. Many a night I prayed to God, the Catholic God, to come and take me away I prayed my grandmother would come and get me so I could live with her and my older brother. I even sent her letters, waiting for a reply, none came. She never replied because my foster parents never mailed the letters and God never answered my prayers. I was completely alone.

I cannot tell you horrifying stories about my experiences in foster homes. It was more like a slow death of an “Indian” child. Slowly erasing my identity, eroding away my self-esteem, making me feel unloved, unworthy and ashamed. I could tell you about emotional blackmail and the mental and sexual abuse but it would just make me cry. My mother died while I lived with these people, I never shed a tear for her.

Advantages of living in a foster home; three square meals a day, clothing, learning how to sew, any of these things my grandmothers and aunts could have provided would have provided if they had been allowed to.

I must admit though, it made me a strong person and I swore I would never let the same things happen to my children and grandchildren.
I am interested in how image and ideas are reflected inside each other and how our historical ancestry, informed by our recent local history, are inter-mingled and fused together.

My inquiry investigates the process of how, as humans, we are able to become more responsible for the Earth and for each other. That we, as living natural spirit, can learn to communicate with non-human life forms, and through this dialogue, we can re-shape our actions upon our one and only breathing world.

Nancy Bleck
Artist's Statement
Cedar Elder as Witnessed by Daughter of Immigrants, 2000
Nancy Bleck
Colour vertical panorama, photomural, heat canvas transfer. Actual size 3 feet x 12 feet.

Image of lone yellow Cedar tree standing in isolation of her community in the Elaho clearcut, one day before the great burn. It signifies the 'witnessing' that takes place across species and cultures; we are never 'witnessing' alone; as we are always being watched by nature itself.
Daughter of Immigrants as Witnessed by Cedar Elders, 2000
Nancy Bleck
Colour vertical panorama, photomural, heat canvas transfer. Actual size 3 feet x 12 feet.

Portrait of artist taken by Shel Neufeld in the Elaho after spending a week alone in the rainforest: fasting, bathing in the river, and photographing. I met Shel on the logging road after we finished doing our solo camping (he in the Elaho and I in Sims Creek). This was my first day after a 15 day fast. The paddle necklace is Squamish regalia to protect your heart. I imagine this is the perspective from the lone yellow cedar tree looking back at me in curiosity.
Doorway to my Roots, 2000
Nancy Bleck
4x5 graphex field camera. Actual Size 40” x 50”.

Image of rainforest in Sims Creek. Photographed in 1996. The beginning of my inquiry back to my own ancestral heritage: Germanic Ancestry. The circle or doorway made of upheaved roots is perhaps a thousand years old, and the forest itself is ten times that age. It's a reminder of who we are and where we come from.
Burning in my Heart, 2000
Nancy Bleck
4x5 graphex field camera. Actual Size 40" x 50".

Image of two giant piles of cedar wood burning. The feeling I have when I witness this.
Slow-wave Sleep in Dreamtime, 2000
Nancy Bleck
4x5 graphex field camera. Actual Size 40" x 50".

Detail image of blue wave in the river. Brings me back to this world when I am slowly returning from my dreams.
Great Flood Story, 2000
Nancy Bleck
Composite

Cedar People’s story of the Great Flood.

Breach of Protocol, 2000
Nancy Bleck
Composite

Muddy road implies that no recognition of Native lands were acknowledged in 1995 when this logging road was punched through Sims Creek, breaking even the forest industry's own forest practices code. This 'breach of protocol' means that no traditional formal welcome ceremony can be made for people traveling through the territory, because historical recognition has not been honoured of the First Peoples living there.) Portrait of William Nahanee. Road in cut block 72-2, Sims Creek. 1997 road photographed/1999 portrait taken 2000.
Trans-Historical Horizons / "Horizontverschmelzung", 2000
Nancy Bleck
B&W image of ocean going canoe with the Squamish Sea Going Society on their way to Victoria (photographed in 1997).

This image is a reminder of how as different cultures and people we work together, all paddling alongside each other to glide the canoe forward. To understand our worlds, we require an historical awareness - this 'horizon' is stemmed in the debate in philosophy between Hans-George Gadamer (Hermeneutics) and Hans Robert Jauss leading member of Reception-Theory. However, Jurgen Habermas' position is 'Trans-historical', hence this title, and looks to local political economics.
Time Watches 'Huy chew xa' 'Thank-you' prayers, 2000
Nancy Bleck
Colour vertical panorama, photo-mural, heat canvas transfer. Actual size 3 feet x 12 feet.

This image of Gene was taken in 1999, Sims Creek, where he was hired by Bill to do the 'speaking' during one of our ongoing "Witness" ceremonies. Here is where Gene shared some of his knowledge of the land to me for the first time. Just a funny note - he is wearing a watch n his wrist, and during one of the ceremonies, he takes it off and starts talking about how we've become slaves to these 'time machines', picks up some sand and runs it through his palms in his hands and begins talking about the ways of the 'old people', his ancestors. We all laugh and agree on the absurdity our lives become at the realization of our limitations of time. This image for me conveys respect for nature and the importance of giving thanks.
Talking ancestor becoming 'tumulth', 2000

Nancy Bleck

Colour vertical panorama, photomural, heat canvas transfer. Actual size 3 feet x 12 feet.

This Cedar tree was the first tree encountered when I stepped into the sacred site alone with my camera. In 1999, Chief Bill Williams asked me to go and photograph the site. Aaron applied 'tumulth' to my eyes, mouth, hands and feet before I entered in, to acknowledge to the ancestors of my 'work' in the forest. This tree spoke to me, and thus 'Cedar people' as a traveling exhibition world tour was created as a way of sharing the 'story of cedar people'.

It takes 3000 years to make tumulth, the sacred paint that comes from the lifeblood of the cedar tree. 1500 for the tree to grow to maturity, and another 1500 years for it to return back to the Earth from where it came. The paint is used for spiritual protection.