**From Artist to A/r/tographer:
An Autoethnographic Ritual Inquiry into Writing on the Body**

by

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Abstract

I am a professional visual and performance ritual artist with a desire to articulate art as education. In doing this I have re-appropriated educational language into the language of art. I experience performance ritual as pedagogy, recognize art making as research and curriculum making, view art as curriculum, and work with the body as text. The menstrual cycle and altered states of trance, further unfold as immanent and transcendent curriculum texts to be studied. Through use of these a-rational texts, internalized fear and shame are exposed as unwanted silencing survival strategies within a pathological patriarchal society.

The question that guides this thesis is: *What does it mean to me to have an ethical and aesthetic feminist art practice?* The purpose of this research is to integrate art, text, language, and the body. To challenge the dualistic and damaging mind/body split that still operates within Western culture, this thesis responds to the numerous feminists who call for women to write from and with their bodies. Within the third space of ritual, resistances are engaged and my body, art and writing are re-forged as interconnected language.

The question that lies underneath this thesis is: *What kind of an academic, researcher, pedagogue will I become?* Through a phenomenological process I embrace anti-pedagogy as an ethically resistant stance that teaches between the place of knowing and not knowing. Through practicing a psychoanalytic pedagogy within a/r/tography, my own internalized dualisms (imperfections) are exposed and

transformed. This thesis engages reflexively on my collaborative aesthetic and ethics and encourages collaboration as an essential feminist educative tool.

This a/r/tographic and autoethnographic thesis documents my journey as a spiritual feminist artist, committed to transformative and community-based educational processes, to the expanded identity of an a/r/tographer. A/r/tography as the form of inquiry weaves together the roles of artist, researcher and teacher/educator through a self-reflexive internal collaborative practice of art making and writing. A/r/tography challenges isolating tendencies of the traditional disciplines of art, academic research and education. It has the potential to synthesize and transform these traditions, benefiting each discipline and society as a whole.

“A/r/tography as ritual” expands current conceptualizations of a/r/tography, contributing further to a transformative educational tool. Ritual creates the container or third space for the alchemy of a/r/tographical inquiry to unfold within. The breadth and depth of a/r/tography as ritual when engaged with openness and commitment can greatly expand the learning imaginary of students, educators, artists, and life-long learners.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family of origin and to my co-created family,
Michael, Leah and Vanessa Fisher.

I offer this story to the Germanic Volvas of my ancestry whose
visionary blood flows through my veins.

Preface

Exposure: Who will read this body?

Image 1

Bickel, B. (2003). *Who will read this body?* video still. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(video camera documentation by Nane` Jordan)

Image 2

Bickel, B. (2003). *Who will read this body?* video still. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.

(video camera documentation by Nane` Jordan)

Exposure

I open this thesis with images (1 & 2) of my female body, the artist/researcher/ teacher's body, in the literal act of writing upon my flesh. The still images come from the video that documented the private performance ritual that began the creative process of this autoethnographic and a/r/tographical thesis project. The invitation to the thesis art installation nine months later carried this image (2). It is not always clearly visible what I, the artist/researcher, am doing.

The images have been responded to as intense and vulnerable. Often viewers are uncomfortable looking at them, at times responding viscerally with nausea. The images make visible a body-based aesthetic of immanence,¹ which for many is the aesthetic of the abject² body. The thesis project culminated in a multi-media art installation entitled *Who will read this body?* It documented the often fragmented and uncertain journey of integrating text and the body through art and writing.

I documented the private performance ritual, which became key to the research. I chose to exhibit the video and black & white photo documentation in art installation pieces to the public. The decision to expose my autoethnographic

¹ Immanence is used here within a sacred context, meaning "... that the Goddess, Gods, are embodied, that we are each a manifestation of the living being of earth, that nature, culture, and life in all their diversity are sacred. Immanence calls us to live our spirituality here in the world, to take action to preserve the life of the earth, to live with integrity and responsibility" (Starhawk, 1989, p. 10). In contrast, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) in her classic *The Second Sex*, uses the term 'woman as immanence' where women ...are defined as Other, marked as different, permanently subordinated to and overshadowed by male subjectivity. In a world so ordered women are enmeshed in the material, local, familial, biological, and relational. They lack an authentic subject position from which to act freely and to choose projects of self-realization which expand into an indefinitely open future. Defined and constrained by their position as Other, women are 'doomed to immanence'" (Warne, 2000, pp. 264-265).

² "In Kristeva's schema, the abject is always ambiguous: desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous; and moreover, the process is never simply one of repudiation: 'It is something rejected from which one does not part' (1992:4)." (Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 7).

research as art was extremely difficult. It is a private and personal act made public and thus breaks many cultural taboos. In my dilemma of deciding upon the significance of exhibiting this art I asked myself: How can exposing images of the body that illicit shame and disturbance be a form of pedagogy? My response was (and is): modeling vulnerability as a woman in a sexist world is, teaching, reminding, embodying, validating, liberating, and gift. The art demonstrates the act of troubling the reconciliation between the mind and the body³. It is meant to be witnessed and remembered, questioned, thought about and written about; as I endeavor to do in this thesis.

³ I am aware that the use of the words *body* and *mind* in this Preface re-inscribe an oppressive modern dualism. This accurately portrays my own initial privileging of the body over the mind. I have throughout this thesis journey realized my own complicity in this split and use body/mind in the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter One

Invocation: Grounding

Image 3

Bickel, B. (2004). *Grounding*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(mixed media drawing and paper collage on wood, 26 inch radius)

The Collage

I often collage onto the surface of old art pieces. Aesthetically, I prefer a pre-marked and historically located surface to begin new work upon. My past collaborations with people are the ground that this thesis builds and rests upon. That said, this thesis is a solo¹ project. Within this inquiry, self-exposure is the guiding principle; exposing myself as an artist, researcher and educator through the process of art making and writing.

I approach writing as an art form and echo the structure of collage to assist the writing of this thesis. In a collage workshop syllabus (1998) I clarify my understanding of collage:

The act of collage-making I believe is akin to dreaming while awake. In this art form elements of your life, the world around you and your psyche come together. In the collage-making process all these elements respond to and influence each other. We can guide the process but the outcome cannot be predetermined.

Different personal writing voices emerge and flow throughout the body of the thesis in the form of **journal entries**, *reflective writing*, critical academic writing, **poetry**, transcribed trances, art images and video. Different fonts and writing styles cue the alternating voices that have been collaged together. The trance text is written without grammar to capture the orally told stories as the "...printed text follows the laws of grammar, which are alien to speech" (Denzin, 1995, p.14).

¹ It is a solo project but it is still influenced and assisted by numerous others who I acknowledge, albeit, never adequately, throughout the thesis.

In this thesis the unknown leads the inquiry. Because of its non-linear path this thesis may be difficult to read and follow at times. I invite the reader/viewer to enter it as they would a dream, shifting the traditional impulse to be reading a thesis that is mastered and complete in its analysis, to reading a thesis that is in the process of analysis and emerging through the discovery of forgotten knowledge and ignorance.

I weave together the voices of theorists, writers and artists whose words and images have brought sense and sometimes illumination to my feminist art practice over the years. Through their ideas and theories, I have found that my art is not completely embedded and lost within the numinous and the mysterious. It can be unraveled. The patterns are revealed and articulated within a phenomenological,² feminist and educative discourse.

The purpose of this research project was to critically reflect on my feminist art practice of the past twelve years³, engaging the art itself in a new body of work to reflect back onto itself. I employed a/r/tography to engage an autoethnographic⁴ study. An a/r/tographer, (artist/researcher/teacher), as I have come to understand the term, works with the tools of art and writing (graphy), activating a creative

² “‘Phenomenology is the study of essences,’ says Merleau-Ponty....phenomenology does not produce empirical or theoretical observations or accounts. Instead, it offers accounts of experienced space, time, body, and human relation as we live them.” Retrieved on August 8, 2004, p. 7 <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/glossary/glossay.html#phenomenology>

³ This is my 22nd major exhibition, 13 of these have been collaborative, all of them have included artist talks and 9 of them have included a public performance ritual.

⁴ Autoethnography, according to Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000), “is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal and the cultural”. They further explain it as collaging “concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness” into stories that are related to human and institutional relationships that are “affected by history, social structure, and culture.” (p. 739)

collaborative relationship of inquiry between/with the artist self, the researcher self, and the teacher/educator self. I explain the term a/r/tography further in Chapter Three.

The research question that guides this study is **“What does it mean to me to have an ethical and aesthetic feminist art practice?”** There is a risk of narcissism in such a project. Art historian, Joanna Frueh, in her catalogue on the deliberately narcissistic art of artist Hanna Wilke wrote, “...literally and metaphorically looking at oneself,... can be a means of imagining the world differently, of coming to consciousness, of seeing oneself and life more clearly (p. 63). Historian and teacher, Christopher Lasch (1979), in his book *The Culture of Narcissism* finds that narcissists have “no interest in the future because, in part, [they have] so little interest in the past” (p. xvi). This research is a reflexive inquiry into my past collaborative art practice through creating art in the present. To avoid indulging in self-enclosing narcissism, this study draws knowledge from the past that can assist a new awareness for the future, both personally and for others interested in the identity expansion of the artist to a/r/tographer.

I have been privileged to take this time to engage an arts-based study through a graduate program; to stop and critically reflect on my art practice. In doing this I opened myself to a greater awareness of myself as an artist, and art as transformative pedagogy. In my past full-time art practice, I characteristically complete one project and immediately begin the next; limited economics denied me a self-reflective period between art projects. A/r/tographically questioning my ethics and aesthetics brought

my largely unarticulated pedagogy as an artist-educator⁵ to the foreground, by breaking open and revealing the gaps/resistances in my own philosophy of learning. The reluctant question that I am led to in the writing is *What kind of a teacher/researcher/academic/pedagogue will I become?*

The core of my art practice has been collaborative, relational, embodied, intuitive and spiritual-based. Situated within the context of the art world, I call myself a collaborative artist. By collaborative I mean that I work with others and my art is created through participatory and relational interaction. Questions of ethics rapidly entered my art practice at the end of my art training in 1992 when I began working with models as active participants in art making. I have acknowledged them over time as co-creators, collaborators and co-researchers. Situated within the context of education, my artist context of collaboration is up for questioning, rethinking, relearning, reclarifying and redefining. I acknowledge that collaboration has many meanings. In Chapter Five I expand upon and categorize the many forms of collaboration I have created art within.

My obsession as an artist (every artist has at least one) has been the body. I filter questions and ideas through the lens of the human body. The body has been a constant teacher and home for me in the midst of an unstable, and often threatening and silencing world. The body has not been a valued location of learning and knowledge creation in our western society (Cixious, 1997; Bordo, 1997; Irigaray, 1994). Through my years of creating art, based predominantly on the (re)presentation

⁵ I define artist-educator as distinct from an art educator, in that the art of the artist-educator educates. As well the artist-educator may teach art techniques or history as the art educator does.

of the female body, I have observed and experienced the female body as a site of transcendence (see image 4) as well as a location of descent.⁶ In my 1998 project, *The Spirituality of Eroticism*, I found my collaborator and myself moving beyond our own personal selves, through movement and breath work, to that of archetypal 'priestesses.' I witnessed in the 2002 *She Knows* project, women moving beyond the dualistic gravity of immanence (as defined within pathological patriarchy⁷) by participating in a "project of self-realization which expand[ed] into an indefinitely open future" (Warne, 2000).

(Re)presenting the female body through art for many years, I have witnessed the loss of connection to self and the shame that women carry within their bodies, along with their strength and wisdom. Art has been my language of choice to communicate with the world about this disconnection—to trouble it and to challenge it. Dwelling within this nonverbal environment and committed to giving voice to women through their bodies led me to ritual⁸. The form of ritual that I work with is not bound by religious identification or segregation but is a relational aesthetic between individuals and mystery. In his book, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*, Tom Driver (1997) writes that:

⁶ I use the words *transcendence* and *descent* consciously, and situate them outside of unhealthy dualisms and within the flow of the natural cycles of life (Starhawk, 1989).

⁷ I distinguish between a pathological patriarchy and a natural patriarchy (Wilber, 1995). I do not believe that all the elements of a patriarchal society are bad or wrong. Women have been part of the creation of this system and have received benefit from it as well as harm. Hierarchies that are natural promote growth and change in the system and utilize power for the betterment of the whole system (eg. the structures of some spiritual ashrams). Pathological hierarchies want to stop growth and change and use power to oppress rather than draw forward. The situated power does not want to grow and change and does not have the betterment of the whole system as its purpose.

⁸ The first performance ritual evolved from the Sisters (1995) project, where I worked with 22 women and realized that a ritual releasing (permission) of the art was required. For the first time I became aware of my own unspoken assumption that the art belonged to me, the artist. I came to realize that the models/co-creators needed to be publicly visible, presenting the art alongside me at the opening.

Image 4

Bickel, B. (2004). *Who will read this body? Public Performance Ritual*.
Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(video still, Chris Koppitz)

We learn by doing. This includes the doing of ritual. What we learn by doing ritual is not only the ritual and how it has been performed before. We discover how to do it *next* time. We discover something of the world the ritual belongs to and aims to transform. (p.188)

Ritual has been a powerful location of learning in my life, from my years growing up attending church and Sunday school every week within the Lutheran church; to my solitary cleansing rituals as a child where I would sit with candlelight and burn incense in my just cleaned bedroom; to my yoga practice; to my years of alternative community-building gatherings; to women circles, to spontaneous creation-making circles, to family meetings with my stepdaughters and partner; to large public rituals within the Reclaiming Wiccan community; to the yearly Women and Spirituality Dialogue⁹; to shared rites of passage with friends; to morning meditations; and to my art and art performance rituals. It is within these rich and varied ritual spaces that my awareness has been stretched and new knowledge generated.

Theodore Jennings (1997), quoted by Tom Driver supports my embodied experience of ritual, he claims that, "Ritual knowledge, ... is gained by and through the body...not by detached observation or contemplation but through action" (p.188). Drawing upon ritual as a location of expanding visions, educator, Allison Pryer (2002), wrote:

Ritual is a catalyst for processes of innovation and creativity, and is thus generative of new knowledge. This knowledge permits change in the

⁹ A multi-faith event now called the Women and Spirituality Celebration.

participant's consciousness, thereby changing the order of the world itself.

Although rituals are used to transmit old cultural knowledge, by their very nature, they cannot be performed the same way twice. The pedagogy of ritual is alchemical, one where visions and dreams arise in the participant/s consciousness, giving birth to new ways of being and living. (pp. 144-145)

Ritual is the container that holds the often confusing, yet ever emerging and transforming experiences and findings within this research project. In Chapter Four, I bring greater awareness to the significance of ritual through an exploration of the rituals that were part of this a/r/tographic study.

I have experienced the overlapping active roles of artist, researcher and educator to be quite challenging. A/r/tographers, Rita Irwin, Alex de Cossen, Stephanie Springgay and Sylvia Wilson (2003), describe a/r/tography as a fluid and dynamic method of inquiry that activates and weaves together the complex roles of artist/researcher/teacher through critical, theoretical, self-reflexive practice and analysis of art making and writing. It dwells in the liminal spaces between and within the worlds of the artist, researcher and educator. I have nourished and augmented this internal collaboration of roles through an understanding and practice of a/r/tography as ritual. Driver further describes this nourishing location of ritual:

Ritual...construct[s] alternative worlds, nourishing [itself] with imaginative visions. Different from ordinary life, [it] move[s] in a kind of liminal space, at the edge of, or in the cracks between, the mapped regions of what we like to call "the real world." (p. 80)

The ground that holds and supports this thesis is a/r/tographical ritual. The

lens of approach is feminist. Invoking the combination of these culturally powerful practices for this thesis has allowed an opening and honouring of the self that I otherwise might not have been able to access.

Listening for Echoes

Battle for articulation
begins within.
On the journey to body-voice
the terrain is disjointed,
its language inarticulate.
Still the body breathes
and remembers.
Chooses once again
to listen for echoes of flesh.

In this cavernous body
desire and grief dwell side by side.
Words languish in deep pools
Expression surfacing
with exhaustive effort.

Known vision is lost
without connective words.
I continue to break the murky surface,
each stroke disrupting
a strange comfort of silence.

(This poem was spoken at the public performance ritual of Who will read this body?)

Within Silence

Exposure is the word that comes to me again and again as I reflect on the sensations that arise in my body and in my mind as I write reflexively about my feminist art practice¹⁰. The thesis art exposes my body and the thesis writing is exposing my mind, and intellect, my thinking, and my emotions. Both forms of exposure elicit shame and fear at a core level in my being. I am coming to acknowledge that the historical danger of an exposed woman runs deep in my body and in my blood. As I strive to access the wisdom of my female ancestors, the fear that has been passed on to me becomes visible in forms that I am slowly coming to articulate. This study reveals the layers of shame, discomfort and fear that keep silence in place. Feminist poet, Judy Grahn (1993) in her book on metaformic theory (or how menstruation created the world) concludes the book with a shame ritual for women. She writes of “the great wash of shame”:

To hasten into consciousness the renewed menstrual mind, we might want to work with our residues of shame, which are completely related to menstrual knowledge. Shame is consciousness of ability to do evil, and it is a fundamental human quality. Shame is also acknowledgement of something unfinished, raw, and is therefore the doorway to creativity and finding solutions.... Deep shames attach to being female, and they don't diminish when we drive our shiny cars out into the world chasing our arts and sciences, learning and contributing to the new ways that men command them. We feel shame when we can't live up to all that is expected of us in

¹⁰ I address this in more detail in Chapter 2.

Image 5

Bickel, B. (2003). *Private Performance Ritual*. Vancouver: UBC Endowment Lands.
(photography by Cathy Pulkinghorn)

family obligations, in the world, and in our own psychological and sexual persons. (pp. 279-280)

This thesis travels through the raw unfinished edges of shame and holds the potential of finding solutions through the pedagogical practice of a/r/tography as ritual.

I regard writing as both a great privilege and a grave responsibility. Even with marginally sufficient finances, as a white, middle class, educated woman with no young children in my care and a supportive partner. I have the ability and time to write poetry, create art, write this thesis and continue my academic studies. Privilege such as this calls for risk-taking and acts of radical trust in the cause of contributing to a more just and compassionate world.

Exposure of the body through art (image 5), and exposure of the mind through writing, is the catalyst that has forced the flow of blood/knowledge to circulate once again -- nourishing long-silenced and forgotten parts of myself. Reading feminist artist, Judy Chicago's (1973) autobiography *Through the Flower*, was difficult as she reminded me so well in her writing, of the amnesia that is prevalent in the women's movement(s). Forgotten accomplishments constantly leave new generations of women in the place of replaying struggles that have already been fought. Feminist theologian, Mary Daly (1978), whose radically-positioned stance has kept me at a distance from her writing in the past, now pulls me towards action from a space that I know resides within me. She wrote,

Overcoming the silencing of women is an extreme act, a sequence of extreme acts. Breaking our silence means living in existential courage. It means dis-

covering our deep sources, our spring. It means finding our native resiliency, springing into life, speech, action. (p. 21)

As I reflect on when my silence began I remember that I made the decision when I was about nine years old that *I would not let any one person know all of me*. I had come to believe that it was safer to remain silent and expose/reveal myself only in small parts to different people. As an adult I came to recognize this decision as a survival strategy that I no longer needed. How did I come to make such an extreme decision? My mothers' strong belief in privacy sheds a blanket over my young decision. She silently respected my decision to not have my silent boundaries crossed, as maybe her mother did before her. I respected her silent boundaries, sealing a silently made agreement of silence between mother(s) and daughter(s), connected yet separate females living within the same space (Irigaray, 1994). In the act of writing, the small part of me that has survived intact, in silence, within the false security of amnesia, is at risk. I also, because of neglect, feel that she does not have the skills to stand up for herself in the world.

I have lived with the silencing and dissociation that Luce Irigaray (1994) writes of:

Patriarchy... has imposed silence on the daughter. It has dissociated her body from her speech, and her pleasure from her language. It has dragged her down into the world of male drives, a world where she has become invisible and blind to herself, her mother, other women and even men, who perhaps want her that way. (p. 112)

Part of my decision to enter graduate studies was to challenge the learned disconnection and foreignness with speech and language that I have often felt dragged down by and experienced as a handicap.

In her own coming to voice, Allison Pryer (2003), finds in her dissertation research that "Silence and secrecy are the defining features of childhood abuse, and are perhaps more damaging than the abuse itself"(p. 90). I read these words and I am deeply saddened. Privacy values, which often manifest as silence and secrecy within the home, are respected and valued in our society. I honour these values as intelligent survival strategies within the patriarchy. In choosing to look at these values outside of a patriarchal lens, the survival strategy of privacy or silence can fit a defining feature of childhood abuse. Although I felt that I altered my early silent survival decision as an adult, I am faced with it anew as I struggle with the fear of danger as I now write.

The nonverbal world of my art has been my sanctuary. A deep voice within tells me that writing about the art is an act of betrayal. I have frequently turned first to writing poetry in my writing process as I find that poetic language has the ability to contain all and more, of a deeply felt experience. Writer and researcher Rebecca Luce-Kapler (1997) in her reflective and artistic writing encourages a willingness to open the text and reveal its many undersides, inviting relational movement and vulnerable depth of knowledge in the unfolding of the researcher's writing process. She wrote,

My writing, my poetry can't stay out of this research. My writing is the research; the research is the writing. Poetry is subversive; reverberates.

Reverberate: to recoil *upon*, to appeal responsively *to*, rebound (p. 192).

Her words take me back to the experience of my own “women writing women” group that has supported my writing as a women researcher throughout my Masters studies. Our writing, shared in my living room early on Sunday mornings, while drinking tea and coffee, reverberates, impacts and nurtures my research and writing long after the gathering. A found poem emerges in the text collaged into one of my art pieces. I am reminded that I do not have to separate my body from my words.

The poet
her body
a word cited

(from the art piece “Spinning red words together on paper”)

We “women writing women,” allowed ourselves one Sunday each month to take ourselves away from our families and other commitments. I treated this time as sacred and precious. It is an environment of witnessing testimonies and deep nourishment. It is within this group that I shared my poetry born of resistance.

Betrayal

Why does writing art feel like death?
I ask sing me a song?
I sing the song inside my head
it cannot be heard out loud in this space
in front of a computer

Exposure comes
wrapped in my mother
fears without a blanket

my body screams
shakes silently
Sweets tempt
fill dark holes
where body citations
lie parallel
await excavation

Circulation of self
bleeds early memory
of innocent serious pact
to keep the real
self secret

The final betrayal
of the sacred
silent agreement
between my mother, my self
unravels (ir)reverent touch of keys

bel hooks (1995) writes of the depth of gravity involved in the exposure of the self :

We speak to desire together – letting out the secrets and lies that keep us
within fixed boundaries. Your body inside me violates the limits of flesh. We
cannot go any further. The only pleasure beyond this moment where the self
can be lost in another is death. Someone, anybody, must remain alive to be
the witness. To tell the truth is to transgress. (p. 136)

*I am about nine years old. I remember the specialness and excitement I
feel as I am allowed to join my mother on her diet to lose weight. I get to
make diet jello and cut it into little cubes to make the portions appear*

larger. Sitting at the large family table my mother and I eat the special diet jello while the rest of the family eats the regular desert.

The parallel timing of my decision to keep my voice hidden and to be concerned with my body weight in my childhood reveals another strategy of survival that surfaced in the writing of this thesis. My month of resistance to writing in the struggle to finish the first draft found me eating constantly while I wrote. The a/r/tographic process of art making and writing brought the gaps and holes, in my patterned ways of knowing and operating, into the light. My patterned defense to fill these holes was to literally eat and physically attempt to fill the holes back up so that the truth of the denied voice that was revealing itself to me would not surface. I have been striving for reintegration, a recomposing of my self within my Master's research. It is in the combined act of writing and making art that my fear of remembering and being seen presents itself and the conditioned split emerges to be seen, acknowledged and transformed.

Relentless resistance to writing has been a constant companion on this thesis journey. I turn to reading others writing, as a form of resistant avoidance of my own writing, as well as for inspiration. Still I am faced with a deeply embodied opposition each time I sit down to write. If I write I may remember what I have been taught to forget. Consequently, I am in awe of the fact that in this thesis I am attempting to articulate, through writing academically and poetically, what I think, feel, understand and believe. In the process of reflection, questioning and supporting my statements

Image 6

Bickel, B. (2004). *Spinning Red Words on Paper*, detail. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(mixed media collage on wood, 12 x 24 inches)

with the voices of other writers, I am taken to a new awareness of myself, my strengths and my limits.

I am remembering. As I write, I frequently get up and shift the location of my body with a sense of anxiety and an unconscious desire to interrupt the flow of thoughts and words that part of me is habitually terrified to write down. It is much easier to tear my writing drafts into small pieces and collage them freely into art (image 6). Feminist poet, Audre Lorde (1984), articulates the depth of the challenge of coming to voice that I am undertaking:

In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live. (p. 42)

My own appearance and disappearance throughout the a/r/tographic inquiry has troubled and challenged my research. Although I have worked individually in the art making and writing it has been impacted, co-shaped and co-formed by the other that is within and without myself. Consequently I have been in an ever-emerging cycle of being lost and being found, learning and re-learning as I make art, write and live the inquiry.

This thesis exposes visually and in writing the tension and accompanying shame and discomfort of being visible as a woman within a patriarchal society. It challenges societal ethics of private and public, and reclaims ritual space for the purpose of transforming silent life-depriving survival strategies into creative life enriching responses to oppression and locations of learning.

In this Chapter, I touched upon the significance of loosing voice and coming to voice in a patriarchal society. A/r/tography as ritual is introduced as a powerful container and corrective for silenced and repressed knowledge. This thesis engages four more discussions on my practice as a feminist artist, from the perspectives of the present research project, leading into the future. In Chapter Two I give the read/viewer a sense of my feminist background and present location. I discuss the ethics and aesthetics of art making as social change and share some of my past journey as an artist. In Chapter Three I further define the emergent process of a/r/tography and share some of the a/r/tographic processes. I also posit what I believe a/r/tography can offer to the disciplines of art and art education. In Chapter Four I dive into the experience and findings of the a/r/tography project, which was a solo art installation and performance ritual entitled *Who will read this body?* I specifically look at the areas of performance ritual and the body from a transformative pedagogical perspective. In Chapter Five I reflect on the ethics and aesthetics of my practice as a feminist collaborative artist, and share insights that emerged through the a/r/tographical study.

Just as I am not in complete possession of my art and writing, I am not in possession of the reader/viewer of my art and writing. This writing and art is a co-appearing with the viewer/reader. This is the notion of exposure and the act of co-appearing: the essential act of facing another in order to fully know the self, that French philosopher Jean Luc Nancy (2000) writes of:

I am talking about society making a symbol of itself, society making its appearance by facing...itself in order to be all that it is and all that it has to

be.Being-social is Being that is by appearing in the face of itself, faced with itself; it is *co-appearing*. (p. 59)

In co-appearing and exposing myself within, I have become more conscious of myself as an a/r/tographer. I am aware that the exposing of this work entails risk, risk for the reader/viewer and for myself. With the understanding that this is an ethical risk, I invite you, the co-appearing reader/viewer, to enter performatively: engaging the images and text as a co-evolving learning. I ask you to enter and share with me a ritual process within the framework of a/r/tographical inquiry and risk the transformation of shame and fear.

Embrace

Reaching

In to other

Cupped hand

cradles

The core

Life force

Soft, Wet Red, Fire

Pumping love fearlessly

Chapter Two

Desire and Fear: Finding Feminism

Image 7

Bickel, B. (2004), *Spinning Red Words on Wood*. detail. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.

(mixed media collage on wood on wood. 22 x 12 x 2 inches)

Vulnerable Love Longs

I walk in the sun
with goose-bumps
My body refuses
to receive warmth

Longing understood
Desire not for the person
Desire for the relationship
The joining of passions

Desire and fear
Knowing the destination

The spirit journey is longing
Separation brings it to light
Choose not to close the heart
Leave it open exposed
Vulnerable love longs

Finding Feminism

In this chapter I trace my hesitant journey into feminism. A feminist sensibility awakened and emerged with my art practice. I reflect on my decision to fully express myself in the world through art by sharing two of my past collaborations. I end the chapter by introducing my desire to practice an integral feminism, a feminism that strives to embrace unity in diversity.

The world of art, ritual and academic research may seem to be far removed from life as it is lived on a daily basis. I frequently grapple with the reason that I, as a practicing visual and performance ritual artist, chose to cross the disciplinary boundary into Education, a seemingly foreign location to me. Why and how has Education become a home for me in my desire to articulate my feminist art practice? Why did I not choose Fine Arts as the location for the critical inquiry into my art practice? My experience as a researcher/artist within the discipline of Education is often that of a displaced person. It is within this troubling yet rich location that my research is located.

My desire throughout this thesis is to relocate and join the life-enriching practices of art, ritual and research, within a paradigm of life long-learning. The historical separation of religion¹, science and art, although important as a movement to differentiate and foster a greater depth of knowledge within each discipline, has left modern society bereft of an integrated knowledge that is capable of a full and healthy embracing of the world in all its diversity (Wilber, 2000). I acknowledge

¹ To include *spirituality* within the word *religion*, I go back to the Latin origin of the word *re-ligio* of “connecting to a time-space-time continuum to one’s own origin” (Jansch, 1976, p. 43), where “it is only through the full *re-ligio*, the interpenetration of integration and differentiation, that human life becomes fully creative” (p. 233).

a/r/tography in this study as a powerful corrective and integrated form of living inquiry. A feminist and spiritual perspective is the overarching lens that informs the writing of this thesis. I draw upon feminist thought and philosophical writing of artists, educators, feminists, and philosophers that support an integrated form of living inquiry that encourages a prophetic² and transformative (Mezirow, 2000; O'Sullivan, 1999) learning environment.

I wrote in my first graduate paper (2002) that "Creating art as a woman became my feminist education. With art serving as the vehicle to transform myself as silent object to empowered subject I felt the strength to begin to use my voice" (p. 4). I come from a Eurocentric, middle class background. My father was a Lutheran minister and my mother a caregiver of foster children. Similar to many women, raised within an environment that taught me to serve and help others, I was not encouraged to look at oppressions that might be operating and limiting me, or others within my own privileged environment.

Feminist art³ was not made visible to me as an Art History and Fine Art student in Alberta in the mid-eighties and early nineties. I studied the "masters" of traditional art history. I was left to discover feminist art years later on my own. I did not call myself a feminist back then. My passion for the human body and what it

² The prophetic teaching role as described by Bullough, Patterson, & Mayes (2002) "has the double role of criticizing and energizing a community" (p. 314).

³ Three more categories of feminist art are described in the Barry & Flitterman-Lewis (1987) article. "Artisanal... work that acts as sub-cultural resistance, ...'separatist' (artists who do not identify with the art-world) and non-feminist (women artists who maintain that they are people who happen to be women)..." and lastly feminist art that uses "textual practice which exploits the existing social contradiction toward productive ends" (pp. 110, 113, 114).

holds, led me into visibility and into the feminist movement in the mid 1990's. It is my art that began speaking for me, pulling me out of hiding.

In my art practice, as a strategy of evolution, I have alternated between solo and collaborative art projects. This pattern has not been preplanned but has evolved as part of a creative learning cycle of ingestion and digestion. In collaborations I am stretched beyond my personal comfort zones, as well as nourished and challenged by others contributions. In solo projects I look inward and integrate within myself the new areas of growth and return to a self-initiated and self-reflective art. What follows is reflective writing on my journey with two specific collaborations, my first one and my most recent one. In sharing these I hope to give a sense of my evolution as a feminist artist as influenced by collaborative practice.

Men as birthers not destroyers (1992)

I began my first collaborations in 1991 during my last year of art school. I began with no known models or theorizing of what collaboration was. I was compelled to work in this form as I found working with the classical artist/model relationship in school completely unsatisfying as an artist and a woman ready to express myself through art. It was during this last year of art school that I returned to working with the human figure and re-found my passion for it. I had entered art school as an adult at the age of 28, giving myself permission to play and not focus on what I knew how to do well, which was drawing the body. I consciously did not take the classical human anatomy drawing classes. I did not want to have my love of drawing the human body trained out of me. The class work that I did do with the

traditional model, as led by instructors, I found unsatisfying. Outside of classes I had my male lover model for me. The experience of being in a collaborative creative relationship with my model was what I wanted to explore further.

My first collaborative art project began with a desire to explore representations of the human body with the person fully present and active in the creation of the art. I would now call this a partial collaboration (see Chapter Four). I choose to work with men in this project and wrote an article in a local men's magazine,⁴ inviting men to co-create with me in a project that would explore *Men as birthers not destroyers*. The men where invited to explore and choose the pose that reflected themselves as birthers, in this way they co-created the representation of their image (image 8). I worked with seventeen men who modeled and co-created with me. I was very aware of the switch in traditional power relationships in this project. As the men would take off their clothes to begin modeling I would put my painting overalls on. Conversations with the men, regarding this shift in power dynamics, were often part of the process. The men that answered the call wanted the experience of being vulnerable. One man was a figurative artist himself, who worked predominantly with female models. He saw this as an opportunity to know what the experience was on the other side of the power dynamic. I was fortunate that these were men sensitive to the feminist critique of polarized gender roles, who were consciously attempting to break out of their own embeddedness within a wounded patriarchal society.

⁴ Bickel, B, (1993), Men as birthers, not destroyers; a painting series of men. *Lodgepole Pine*, 13(1),9.

Bickel, B, (1993) Birthing the masculine. *Lodgepole Pine*, 13(1),9.

Image 8

Bickel, B. (1993). *Ophidian*, in Men as birthers not destroyers series. Calgary: Turacos Gallery.
(oil on wood, 24 x 48 inches)

This project was my final BFA graduation work. It is worth noting that I received no feedback on my project in regard to the process and content behind it. My professors gave me technical critique and at their best supported me by not getting in the way. I feel grateful in retrospect that I chose to enter art school later in life when I could support my own artistic passions and was not reliant on mentorship from art instructors, who were not able or willing to enter these unopened and silent areas of the art making process.

She Knows (2002)

In the *She Knows* project I put out a call for women to join me as co-researchers/co-subjects in a project of uncovering “body knowledge.” I worked with six women. Each woman went through a research process that involved entering two trances facilitated by me, (trance will be discussed in Chapter Four), one at the beginning of the project and one at the end, followed by a photo shoot and two reflective discussions on the art created. The trance and photo images were source materials for the art created. The first part of the project, the art making, was a partial collaboration as I created the art. I was a co-subject in the project as well as the artist (image 9 & 10). I went through the same research process, facilitated and photographed by one of the co researchers. The performance ritual involved a group trance, from which the performance ritual choreography came. This was a full collaboration that took place in the gallery setting.

Image 9

Bickel, B. (2002). *Shot Through/Flying Beyond/Keep Stirring*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(mixed media collages on wood on wood, 14 x 14 inches each)

Image 10

Bickel, B. (2002). *Source*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(mixed media drawing on wood, 48 x 24 inches)

The *She Knows* project, in the year 2002, continued the movement that Fenman Orenstein (1987) wrote about in the 1980s, where a feminist art was emerging that utilized ritual as a space to rebirth sacred feminist traditions.

This exaltation of natural energies releases enormous potential so that women may begin to transform themselves into living repositories of sacred knowledge, storing their total history within their bodies, their psychic memory and their art is a natural form of protection against future persecution or annihilation. As bearers of sacred tradition, contemporary feminist artists use ritual to resacrilise the female body, creating a new sacred space for the enactment of those magical rebirth ceremonies that are first coming into our culture through art. (p. 160-161)

Creating and opening sacred space for the enactment of self-empowering art with women can be a transforming experience, as Fenman Orenstein wrote, but it is not always an easy path. In these spaces ancient wounds have the opportunity to be revealed and consequently require strong commitment as well as external support to be moved through.

As the artist, who created the visual art in the group of co-researchers and co-subjects, I was deeply impacted by the uncovered stories of each of the six women. Their journeys influenced and fed the transformation and personal myth that unfolded in my trances. It is within this project that I began to record and work deeply with trance. In the role of artist/researcher I witnessed the willingness of my

co-researcher/co-subjects to draw on their hidden bodily knowledge through trance, which then moved them forward into visibility.

The complexity of research, with the use of trance, and performance ritual, along with a deepened awareness and care for ethics is evident in this most recent collaboration. In the first project an art opening took place but the men were not involved in it. Most of the men chose to be anonymous co-creators. The women in the most recent exhibition were not only part of the art opening, they were acknowledged as co-researchers and were visible co-performers in the performance ritual. Working through the dynamics of each collaborative project and the relationships within them has developed my knowledge and understanding of research, ethics and community-based art.

Embracing Feminism(s)

The feminist art of the 1970s that emerged out of the Women's Movement within North America holds elements, that unbeknownst to me, have informed my feminist art practice as an emerging female artist in the 1990s. As in the Seventies, body art, ritual and the expression of a female self, are all elements that can be found in my art. Feminist art writer, Lucy Lippard (1995), wrote in the mid-nineties that "There is a new surge of body-related identity/sexuality imagery that is reminiscent of the mid-seventies.... The visual parallels between the work from the seventies and work from the nineties is telling". (p. 17) She goes on to state that:

Younger feminist artists continue to think, debate, image, and imagine what "woman" is, what she wants, what her experience is, and how that experience

varies across class, culture, age; how it forms, is formed by, and can change society itself (p. 25).

Women artists in the 1970s, such as Ana Mendieta, Mary Beth Edelson, Hannah Wilke and Judy Chicago among others were creating art that “with its many varied manifestations, [wa]s creating a whole new constellation of charged signs, aspirational images, icons for contemplation, talismanic artifacts, and symbolic rites of passage that constitute the source of a new reality for women” (Fenman Orenstein, 1987, p. 169). Like myself, these artists used multiple modalities (visual art, performance art, writing, and video) to give voice to their art. Their art, along with my own art could easily fall into the category of feminist essentialism as it “...can be seen as the glorification of an essential female art power... that is based on the belief in a female essence residing somewhere in the body of women.... It is an orientation that can be found... associated with mysticism, ritual and the postulation of a female mythology” (Barry & Flitterman-Lewis, 1987 p. 105). In his study of “confessional ritual performance,” which I will explore in more detail in Chapter Four, Tom Driver (1997) recognizes and revalidates women’s consciousness-raising groups of the 70s as an important arena where:

...confessions were performed, providing the support necessary for their articulation and an audience in which the truth of women’s suffering under patriarchal systems could be recognized and meaningful within a liberative process. (pp. 116-117)

I have for a number of years called myself a spiritual feminist. Transpersonal psychotherapist, John Rowan (1997), describes spiritual feminism as political

feminism⁵ that uses “the construction of cultural symbols, images, rituals and archetypes of power useful to women in opposing social oppression” (p. 21). He goes on to write that, “Spiritual feminists developed the concept of ‘womanspirit’ to develop tools such as meditation, personal mythology, natural healing, dreamwork, study of matricentric history and mythology” (p. 21). For many spiritual feminists, as summarized by Carol P. Christ (1979), [c]hange and touch, process, embodiment, and relationship...are at the heart of ...re-imaginings of God and the world.... (p. 1). Through their practices, spiritual feminists challenge dominant pathological patriarchal discourses from a spiritual base.

Raised within a traditional Christian family in a Christian-based Western country, spiritual feminism has been an important ground for me to situate within because of my own lived experience of religious hegemony⁶. bell hooks (2000) in her call for feminist transformation writes that;

More than other religious faiths Christian doctrine which condones sexism and male domination informs all the ways we learn about gender roles in this society. Truly there can be no feminist transformation of our culture without a transformation in our religious beliefs. (p. 106)

Prior to identifying as a spiritual feminist I remained at a distance from feminist literature and feminists. I was afraid at some core level. I feared women who identified as feminist, who I often saw or heard being avoided and ridiculed by

⁵ John Rowan’s description of spiritual feminism as political feminism was the first that I found and read. It was after reading his description that I felt a desire to call myself a feminist.

⁶ The religious hegemony that I have experienced is the dominance of the Christian faith assumed as the sole family spiritual and religious tradition.

others. My introduction to and experiences within female-based spirituality circles gave me the support, strength and healthy sense of longing that I required to begin reading spiritual feminist writing. *Women Spirit Rising: A feminist reader in religion*, edited by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (1979), was the first feminist book that I read which inspired me to read other feminist writing. bell hooks (2000) summarizes well the space that feminist spirituality offered to me:

Feminist spirituality created a space for everyone to interrogate outmoded belief systems and created new paths. Representing god in diverse ways, restoring our respect for the sacred feminist, it has helped us find ways to affirm and/or re-affirm the importance of spiritual life. Identifying liberation from any form of domination and oppression as essentially a spiritual quest returns us to a spirituality which unites spiritual practice with our struggles for justice and liberation. A feminist vision of spiritual fulfillment is naturally the foundation of authentic spiritual life. (p. 109)

I have anchored my research within feminist discourses. In my desire to historically ground myself, I have read a variety of feminist writers situated within a wide spectrum of feminist discourses, from radical, and essentialist to psychoanalytic, postmodern and materialist to spiritual and transpersonal. Within feminist writing the questioning and reframing of gender, body and knowledge, has assisted me in my own understanding and work of challenging mind/body dualisms. The deconstruction of power and language has influenced and assisted the destabilization of my own embeddedness within limiting constructs of power and

knowledge. The significance of female-based spirituality and the questioning of religious hegemony has opened and continued to expand my own spiritual practice.

My passion as a feminist artist, creating re-presentations of the body, has been to make “visual art [that] expresses the altered world of a trance/dream state and reflects a female vision within non-confining time and space” (Bickel, artist statement, 2001). My art walks the fine line of reminding and encouraging women “To open her body in free, active, open extension and bold outward-directedness “ and in so doing runs the risk “for a woman to invite objectification.... The threat of being seen is, however, not the only threat of objectification that the woman lives. She also lives the threat of invasion of her body space” (Young, 1998, p. 271).

As a visual artist whose practice can involve risk and who’s work calls for close observation (witnessing) and re-telling of that observation (testimony), feminist psychoanalytic theorizing as written about by Shoshana Felman (1992) has opened a larger theoretical location to ethically locate my work as an artist, researcher and educator. Felman wrote:

...in the age of testimony-teaching, ...must in turn *testify*, make something *happen*, and not just transmit a passive knowledge, pass on information that is preconceived, substantified, believed to be known in advance, misguidedly believed, that is, to be, (exclusively) a *given*. (p. 53)

She encourages teachers to be willing to “*live through a crisis*,” to witness the testimony and testify in return. She recognizes and validates the artist for already doing this “*performative*” act, “to enable, *change* “ (p. 53). Feminist writing calls forth the artist as visionary and instigator of world change, to remember history and

traumatic herstory, thus supporting the importance of the creative and artistic work in the pursuit of world change (Rich 1993, 2001; hooks 1995, 2000; Lorde 1984, among others). Not coming from the traditional discipline of Education, I have especially appreciated the passionate and challenging educational stances of educators outside of the field of Education such as Shoshana Felman, bell hooks, and Adrienne Rich.

It is troublesome to note the lack of communication between populist, academic feminists, and spiritual feminists. I have rarely found spiritual feminists referred to in the texts of populist and academic feminists. Congruently, spiritual feminists cite only a very small number of the populist and academic feminists in their writing. I find myself in the gap between these important feminist discourses. Finding myself in between contributes to and offers a partial explanation for my historical struggle to ground and take a firm stance as a feminist.

Adult educator, Angela Miles (1996), offers a vision of "integrative or transformative feminisms," that I have not found taken up by other feminists⁷. I greatly appreciate that she is offering a feminist perspective that has the desire to find a core value that can transcend the differences but not eliminate them. She explains that,

The alternative value core of integrative feminisms in all their variety is the holistic, egalitarian, life-centered rejection of dominant androcentric, dualistic, hierarchical, profit-centered ideology and social structure. These

⁷ I can only speculate that one of the reasons for this might be because she has given a name to a new form of feminism. bell hooks in my mind posits an integrative feminism as well but she does so without claiming a new name for it. Her work in contrast is much more visible than Miles.

feminisms refuse the oppositions that patriarchal relations presume and structure between the personal and the political, public and private,... individual and community, society and nature. Committed to developing new political forms that reflect their holistic values, they attempt to integrate these oppositions as part of their struggles to build a new world. (pp. xi – xii)

American philosopher, Ken Wilber (1997) writes about “integral⁸ feminism” He too offers an integrated critical vision to the fragmentary tendency of feminist schools.

I believe, we need constantly to keep our eye on both the profound similarities as well as the intricate differences..., and resist the urge to sink our discussion in an ideological fervor to promote one at the expense of the other. (p. 200)

Moving beyond my resistance to draw upon a male-defined model for feminism, I find within myself a desire to locate within an integral feminism. I am supportive of the goal/task of transcending fissional discourses with the criticality that Miles encourages in her model of integrative feminisms, but without the “rejection” that she recommends. This for me is incongruent with an integrative vision. Feminism began with a focus of rights for women (although this did not include all women) and gradually broke into diverse areas in what could be, in part, a healthy process of differentiation. Some of these new feminisms were also critiquing

⁸ Integral as defined by Wilber (2002): “*Integral*: the word means to integrate, to bring together, to join, to link, to embrace. Not in the sense of uniformity, and not in the sense of ironing out all the wonderful differences, colors, zigs and zags of a rainbow-hued humanity, but in the sense of unity-in-diversity, shared commonalities along with our wonderful differences: replacing rancor with mutual recognition, hostility with respect, inviting everybody into the tent of mutual understanding. Not that I have to *agree* with everything you say, but I should attempt at least to *understand* it, for the opposite of mutual understanding is, quite simply, war. (p. 15)

and responding to the blind spots of earlier theorizations. Hirsch and Keller (1990), as cited in R.M. Fisher's (2000) master's thesis on 'conflict' pedagogy, wrote:

Discussions within feminist theory today are racked by intense conflicts.

While feminists have in principle tended to agree that difference is a more productive theoretical and political category than either universalizing consensus or divisive opposition, in practice, actual differences within feminist discourse have tended to separate [enemy] camps...At this moment... some of these conflicts have proven so divisive that they seem to foreclose rather than stimulate debate, even at times appearing to threaten the very viability of contemporary feminism as a political and theoretical venture (pp. 3-4). (pp. 4-5)

Sociologist Joyce McCarl Nielsen (2002) draws upon Wilber's "four quadrant integral approach,"⁹ which is the base of his integral feminism vision, and suggests that in this new millennium the potential for a fourth wave of feminism is evolving from the "fissioning" of feminisms. She speculates on an inclusive feminist location within culture:

Some even refer to 'postfeminism' signaling not so much an end to feminists thinking as we know it, but rather a shift away from the fundamental questions raised by earlier feminists and toward a more pluralistic, relativistic, dynamic, fast-changing, inclusive collage of feminist expression

⁹ Ken Wilber's (1997) four quadrant integral approach looks at and traces individuals and communities "not only in its intentional [1] but also its behavioral [2], social [3], and cultural [4] manifestations, thus highlighting the importance of a multidimensional approach for a truly comprehensive overview of human consciousness and behavior.... cherishing cultural differences, but set in a truly universal context (p. 35).

in the cultural (rather than the social structural) realm.... [the] goal of an integration, a synthesis, a fusion of feminist theory has not been fully realized. (Nielsen, p. 11)

The shift to an integral post-postmodern¹⁰ feminism that synthesizes feminist spirituality, my first feminist home, with the feminisms that I have been reading, studying and coming to understand these past two years, is very appealing to me. I believe, an integral feminism has the potential to resolve questions and hesitations to fully locate within the many feminisms. I would like to contribute, as an integral feminist a/r/tographer, to a healthy synthesis/collage of feminist theory that will, as bell hooks writes in her book *Feminism is for Everybody*:

...ensure the continued relevance of feminist movement in our lives...to courageously learn from the past and work for a future where feminist principles will undergird every aspect of our public and private lives.

Feminist politics aims to end domination to free us to be who we are— to live lives where we love justice, where we can live in peace. (pp. 117-118)

This chapter covers a large historical time-span and a lot of ground in an attempt to give the read/viewer a sense of my feminist background that impacts and supports this autoethnographic thesis. I briefly touched on the ethics and aesthetics of art making as social change and described two of my past collaborative art projects. I ended this chapter by locating myself as an integral feminist. In Chapter Three I

¹⁰ I draw this term from Ken Wilber's work. He describes post-postmodernism as a reconstructive postmodernism that is a corrective for the loss of ethicality found in the shadow side of deconstructionism within postmodernism.

further explain a/r/tography as my methodology and situate it within the pedagogical performative act of anti-pedagogy.

Chapter Three

Writing the Body/Resistance/Endurance: A/r/tographical Inquiry

Image 11

Bickel, B. (2003). *Mystery*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(mixed media collage and photo transfer on wood, 14 x 5.5 inches)

In this chapter I draw out the definition of a/r/tography as I have experienced it and come to understand it. The textual methodologies that evolved throughout the research process are further laid out and contextualized. My performative location as an educator is explained and situated within a psychoanalytic “anti-pedagogy”. Interwoven with the methodological writing is the self-analytic writing of resistance that continues the movement of the transition, from artist to a/r/tographer.

A/r/tography

A/r/tography draws upon the skills of the artist, researcher and teacher in an alternative and evolving form of inquiry. Educator, researcher and artist, Rita Irwin (2003), explains a/r/tography as the act of the “artist/researcher/teacher art making and writing offer[ing] complementary yet resistant forms of recursive inquiry.” She goes on to describe “A/r/tography [a]s a fluid orientation creating its rigor through continuous reflexivity, discourse analysis, and hermeneutic inquiry” (p.8).

The desire to bring fragments together and to reconstruct a powerful voice/presence has been the thrust of my art practice. The work of integration is possible because of, and with, the struggle of resistance--along with the determination to endure the unknown. I have long struggled in my art practice with the concept of fragmentation as a strategy to keep the marginalized and oppressed in a place of disempowerment.

The power of a/r/tography is revealed in the act of creating. The exposure of and reflection on the raw creative research is the substance of this inquiry. This is a vulnerable location to write from, where rich dialogue and learning can unfold.

Normally a more finished product, is presented to the public by artists, researchers or educators.

As an artist entering the academy within the field of Education, I set the intention of integrating writing, intellectual dialogue and thinking, with art. This has been a natural evolution spurred on by my frustration to have a fully acknowledged and visible voice within the world of art. A metaphoric death of my modernist individual artist self, a familiar and overly nourished part of myself, has been the cost of this integration.

The freedom of making art without a lot of responsibility is challenged within the framework of a/r/tography. A/r/tography as ritual is the container that has allowed and held the metaphoric death and transformation of this limited modernist freedom. My findings, which are often losses, emerge as traces through the art images and text of this thesis.

A/r/tography speaks to my aesthetic sensibility as a feminist artist in the 21st century, with its commitment to the integration and the honouring of theory/research, teaching/learning, and art/making and the “three kinds of “thought” – knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poesis) (Wilber, 2000, pp. 22-23) that Aristotle taught.

Contemporary philosopher Ken Wilber (2000) wrote of the paradigmatic shift from pre-modern to modern that occurred with the Renaissance. It is within the Renaissance that the concept of the individual artist was born, where the artist identity individuated from the community. Prior to that time artists were not recognized as individual creators, their identities were fused with the community

identity. Modernism allowed individual growth and individuation of the self. The task of post-modernism, Wilber theorizes, is a re-integration of the individual with the communal. This re-integration is not the fused pre-modern state or an individuation that is dissociated from the whole, but a rich complex reunion and reintegration of the individual with the community. Irwin (2003) in my mind speaks to this when she writes that:

When we adopt A/r/tography as metissage, we are adopting an image that is modernist and postmodernist. It is not about dichotomous thinking but rather dialogical thinking, relating and perceiving. It is about living in the borderlands, the spaces between and amidst artists, researchers and teachers. ...*theory as A/r/tography* creates an imaginative turn by theorizing or explaining phenomena through aesthetic experiences that integrate knowing, doing, and making: experiences that simultaneously value technique and content through acts of inquiry; experiences that value complexity and difference within a third space. (p. 25-26)

Irwin goes on to say what I believe is essential to opening the complexity of the third space in a/r/tography, that a *living practice*, as found in action research as well as in autoethnography, is required for the unfolding of this work. Irwin wrote that this research,

...is well suited to the borderlands because it includes any form of inquiry that attempts to confront complexity among human relationships within their temporal, spatial, cultural and historical contexts. ...when inquiry is oriented

to an individual who consciously alters his or her perceptions and actions, transformative practices emerge. (p. 28)

A/r/tography offers artists, researchers and teachers a framework from within which they can shift from the individual to the communal and back, through the intervals of “an aesthetic experience found in an elegance of flow between intellect, feeling and practice” (Irwin, 2003, p. 24). The ability to interweave the self with the community, while upholding the integrity of the self and the community is, I believe, the ongoing work of an integral feminist artist.

Davey (1999) in his article on the hermeneutics of seeing, positions the practice of hermeneutics with the Greek god Hermes “the god of those who travel dark and difficult roads” and the human need for guidance on the path to understanding. Hermes (hermeneutics) within the practice of a/r/tography, acts as a translating element that has the potential to open up and broaden our understanding of the world. Davey wrote,

That art comes to its proper provenance in the metaphoric translation and cross-wiring of ideas and sensible particulars indicates not only how indefensible and insensitively inappropriate are the continued rhetorics of ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ within art and aesthetic education but also how appropriate hermeneutic thought is to achieving an intimate appreciation of how art resides within the procreative tensions and interdependencies of sight and insight. (p. 8)

Drawing on the hermeneutic philosophy of Gadamer, Davy (1999) draws the connection between language and art. He brings forth a re-faming of the process of

conversation as a location of learning for me in my struggle as an artist in academia. I have found myself critiquing writers who do not move beyond a literal interpretation of art. In the land of the literal (Hillman, 1977), great depth, diversity and possibilities in the interpretation of art is lost. Davey continues,

Gadamer esteems conversation as paradigmatic of ...altheic dimension[s] of language. When underway, conversation discloses of itself subtleties of association and nuance which logical analysis could not foresee. What is said is not as important as the unsaid which the said brings to mind. (p. 9)

Through this reading that explains the connection between language and art I am brought to question my disdain for academic discussions. I have often come from the location of taking the words of academic conversation literally and in this literal framing have actually practiced that which I deplore in the experience of viewing art. Davy (1999) and Gadamer convince me of this because of what I perceive as their ability to understand the process of envisioning art, of making art, and of interacting with art. They fuse language with the aesthetic by encouraging "the use of words to expand and deepen what it held within such experience" (Davy, 1999, p. 11). Gadamer talks of "all encounter with the language of art [a]s an encounter with an unfinished event" (Davy, 1999, p. 15). I appreciate the understanding that there never is a final word in art or in academic writing, only more openings.

My own resistance to language required a radical shift to fully take on the understanding that art is theory. This transition opens to a fully integrated view of a/r/tography. Stephanie Springgay (2004) further articulates art as theory.

They [artworks] are constitutive, intercorporeal encounters that produce and

transform knowledges as a process of exchange. The artworks are not objects, which need theory applied to them, nor are they illustrations of language. They are ways of knowing and being in their own right. (pp. 117-118)

To further explore the idea of art as intercorporeal encounters and a/r/tography as an enactment of third space, I draw upon James Hillman's (1977) understanding of *soul*, written about in his book *Re-visioning Psychology*. He wrote:

By *soul* I mean...a perspective rather than a substance, a viewpoint toward things rather than a thing itself. This perspective is reflective; it mediates events and makes differences between ourselves and everything that happens. Between us and events, between the doer and the deed, there is a reflective moment—and soul-making means differentiating this middle ground Soul...is like a reflection in a flowing mirror, or like the moon which mediates only borrowed light. (p. x)

A/r/tography as a method of inquiry offers a structure to enact the very integration of self and other that I long for. My art practice has been about soul-making, yet situated solely within my role as an artist I have been unable to articulate this integration. Soul-making occurs in the interactions between the artist, researcher and educator, just as soul-making takes place in the interaction between the viewer and the art. The artist can further assist in soul-making by acting as intermediary between the art and the viewer. This has traditionally been done by the simple ritual of art openings. At an art opening the artist is present and available to talk about the art with viewers. Artist-talks within the gallery setting also augment the reflection of

soul onto art. Within my ethical feminist art practice, art openings and artist talks are an integral component of the art. The performance rituals that evolved from within my art practice extend the assistance of soul-making even further. It is a demanding and decentering form of inquiry.

A/r/tographers Springgay, Irwin and Wilson (2003, 2004) offer six renderings of a/r/tography that help develop and articulate a greater understanding of its breadth and depth as a form of inquiry. They are reflective locations that can offer a deeper connection with soul in the art making process: “*contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor and metonymy, openings, reverberations and excess*” (p. 42). Springgay (2004) in her a/r/tographical dissertation offers these renderings as;

...possibilities of enacting research as a shift, a rupture, and a loss—a movement and displacement of meaning. Renderings allow for the complexity of meaning; they un/ravel in un/certainty and ambiguity. (p. 42)

She furthers the description of the interrogative spaces of renderings as “performative gestures of meaning making that un/fold and in doing so alter the overall texture and meaning of a text” (p. 43). These renderings have historically been unarticulated components of my own art within a research process. Extracting the renderings from the art making process, breaking down the complexity, and reinserting them into the rewoven a/r/tographic process, makes the pedagogical practice of a/r/tography visible.

Within the six un/certain renderings of a/r/tography echoes of the Surrealist mystic origins reverberate. Art historian Celia Rabinovich (2002) braves a non-sanctioned art historical interpretation of Surrealism in her book *Surrealism and the*

Sacred: Power, Eros, and the Occult in Modern Art. I read this book during the exhibition of my installation and afterwards could no longer remain in ignorance of my aesthetic and pedagogical connection with modern art. Rabinovitch wrote:

The surrealists raised essential questions about art and knowledge. They believed that art arises from the imagination as a revelation: a form of insight-oriented knowledge...the surrealists created a new epistemology that includes the symbolic transformation of experience in art and religion—an unorthodox definition of knowledge made new. (pp. 8-9)

My art practice has uncanny similarities to the practice of surrealism. Many surrealist artists (Giorgio de De Chirico, Andre` Breton, Salvador Dali, Max Ernst among others) engaged, trance, free association, meditation, the double, ritual, psychoanalysis, and “the extraordinary space of the in-between in which mundane rules no longer apply” (p. 210), all a-rational tools to access ancient and new knowledges, challenging old traditions. The art historical forefronting of the absurd (madness) quality and the sexist representation of women in this movement fed my resistance to identifying with it and kept me at a distance. With the phenomenological illumination offered by Rabinovitch I can now accept my art as a feminist revisioning of Surrealism, a living practice “on the threshold between art and religion... Th[e] liminal realm [that] awakens fascination, awe, fear, and attraction in a spectrum of contradictory responses” (p.6).

As an artist I have resisted situating my art within the theorized a/r/tographical renderings. I have felt that the art as art does not need the breakdown of analysis that renderings offer. As an artist working within a/r/tography I am

challenged from my researcher and educator lens to explore these qualities within the art. The surrealist philosophical context assists situating my art within the a/r/tographic renderings. My art is *contiguously* placed within the unreal and the real (the surreal). I work with realist representations of the human body and locate it within the material element of wood or a non-sensical environment that is not confined by space, time or gravity (image 13). The relationship of the body and the ground is a contiguous one. As a collage artist who is constantly layering materials and images, the art evolves without preconception through responding to each new layer, each unfolding in present time. It is a *living inquiry*. In this way I am always working with *openings* into thresholds that can lead the art making into many different locations. *Metaphor* and *metonymy* surface in my art through archetypes and themes. These themes can drive a whole project. I worked on two major exhibitions exploring the modern archetype of Venus¹ (image 12) and her influence in the representation of women today. The feminist art of the 70's along with the surrealist art of the early 20th century reverberates through my art. Each of my art series, build upon and echo elements of past work. Finally, excess can be recognized in the representation of the body that refuses to be confined.

¹ *Her Venus Signature* (1996), a joint collaboration with jazz musician Cheryl Fisher and *Venus Crossings* (1997), a joint collaboration with six women artists from diverse art genres, Joyce Luna, Kathryn McGregor, Catherine Cruz, Laura Shuler, Echo Mazur, and Kathy Lynn Treybig.

Image 12 & 13

Bickel, B. (1996). *Twisted*. In Her Venus Signature Series. Calgary: The Centre Gallery.
(mixed media drawing & collage on wood, 40.5 x 23 inches)

Bickel, B. (2001). *Axis*. In Illuminatus Series. Vancouver: Unitarian Church of Vancouver Sanctuary.
(mixed media collage, wire and nails on wood, 21.5 x 9 inches)

Anti-Pedagogy

At one point I jokingly told my thesis committee members that I was putting myself through psychoanalysis in the writing of this thesis. After completing my second draft and re-reading Shoshana Felman's article, *Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable*, I have to admit that this has been the case and that the self-analytic process has been an essential educational component of my transforming and expanding identity of artist to a/r/tographer.

I am drawn to Felman's² (1997) ideas about learning from non-authoritarian sources. She calls for acknowledgement of Freud's contribution to this issue.

Freud learns from... the least authoritative sources of information... he knows how to derive a teaching, or a lesson from the very unreliability – the very non-authority – of literature, of dreams, of patients [women]. For the first time in the history of learning, Freud...has recourse...to a knowledge which is not authoritative, which is not that of a master, a knowledge which does not know what it knows, and is thus not in possession of itself. (p. 37)

I am attracted to this approach of psychoanalytic pedagogy, which resists hegemonic structure (the rational, conscious) and is willing to enter and work with the knowledge of the unconscious, subconscious, the messy and not always controllable. The surrealist movement was also attracted to Freud and engaged psychoanalysis as part of their practice (Rabinovitch, 2000), Felman attributes Freud, as well as Socrates, with "instituting... a revolutionary pedagogy" attributing teaching as an

² I use Felman's notion of anti-pedagogy, a term she conceptualizes, and acknowledge that Freud and Lacan's theories are highly problematized by feminists because of the repressive societal sexist views of women they perpetuated. See Sarah Kofman (1985) for an in-depth critique of Freud's writing.

“impossible” profession and in doing so “open[s] up unprecedented teaching possibilities, renewing both the questions and the practice of education” (Felman, 1997, p. 18). She calls us to look beyond the content of Freud’s theoretical statements to the “performative speech-acts” of his actual teaching, which she frames as “pedagogical performance” (Felman, 1997, p. 20).

I have unconsciously enacted an anti-pedagogical performance in my resistance to teaching. The practice of anti-pedagogy, is a negative label that has been applied to Freud and his relationship to pedagogy. Felman (1997) points out well how:

This one-sidedly negative interpretation of the relation of psychoanalysis to pedagogy fails to see that every true pedagogue is in effect an anti-pedagogue, not just because every pedagogy has historically emerged as a critique of pedagogy...but because, in one way or another, every pedagogue stems from its confrontation with the impossibility of teaching. (p. 20)

In reflecting pedagogically on knowledge Felman states that the Western pedagogical rationalist ideal culminates in Hegel’s philosophical didactic concept of “absolute knowledge” and that this absolute knowledge then completes all that there is to know. She then brings in Lacan’s conception of the unconscious as “knowledge which can’t tolerate one’s own knowing that one knows (Seminar, Feb. 19, 1974; unpublished)”(p. 24) and that “human knowledge is, by definition,... that which rules out any possibility of ... eradicating its own ignorance“ (pp. 24-25). The poetic pedagogy of Lacan and the imperative of Freud’s pedagogy as defined by Felman is “to learn from and through the insight which [like the poet and the artist] does not

know its own meaning, [to learn] from and through the knowledge which is not entirely in mastery—in possession—of itself (p. 40-41).

Felman continues and likens teaching to analysis, in that it has to deal with resistances to knowledge and that ignorance is a desire to ignore. She claims that the revolutionary pedagogy articulated by Freud was that “*ignorance itself can teach us something—become itself instructive* (p. 26). She ends her argument with the pedagogical question of “How can I turn ignorance into an instrument of teaching?” (p. 27).

As an artist coming into the field of Education I searched for theories of education that defined and encompassed a transformative model of education. Felman and Freud chose to write, theorize and enter the domain of Education with a desire to contribute and have an impact. This validates for me the significance of Education as a transformative discipline, and the importance of the field of Education being open to learn from creative, diverse and critical voices from outside the profession. Reluctant to identify as an (art) teacher, I agree with and feel validated by Freud’s theoretical statement on the impossibility of teaching as a profession. At the same time, through autoethnography, I am thrust into questioning my pedagogical location, bias and impact within my own practice of “anti-pedagogical performance.

The methods that I employ in my research inquiry are containers for a-rational or unconscious knowledge to emerge within. The structure and act of writing the thesis opened the self-analytic component, revealing resistance, emotion, ignorance, and forgotten and excluded forms of knowledge. The “psychoanalytic mode of

investigation and learning” is not in line with traditional pedagogical theory and practice. It proceeds similar to this thesis, “through breakthroughs, leaps, discontinuities, regressions, and deferred action (p. 23).”

Enactment

In this next section I will consider the unfolding course of the research project and its methods. The project fell into cycle with the Sabbots,³ the ancient earth cycle celebration days as well as my own menstrual bleeding cycle. I began the research project by enacting a private performance ritual (explained further in Chapter Four). The outdoor summer performance ritual, that coincided (unplanned) with my menstrual bleeding day, was documented in video and black & white photos. This documentation became the main source material for the art that was created in the project during the following months. For the five months following the performance ritual I entered trance and fasted, during the heaviest bleeding day of my monthly menstrual cycle. I began working with trance five years ago within my spiritual practice, shortly after it entered into my art practice and has since unfolded as a limitless source of research material.

Trance is a technique of entering an altered state of consciousness that accesses unconscious/subconscious information and knowledge. Starhawk (1979), a co-founder of the Reclaiming Wiccan tradition, from which I learned this technique, writes: “Trance techniques are found in every culture and religion – from the

³ Sabbots are based on ancient European solar and lunar festivals. They “are eight points at which we connect the inner and the outer cycles: the interstices where the seasonal, the celestial, the communal, the creative, and the personal all meet” (Starhawk, 1989, p. 181).

rhythmic chant of a Siberian Shaman to free association on a Freudian analyst's couch" (p. 154). I experience trance as a state of dreaming while awake. The trances were documented on a tape recorder and later transcribed. The trances became additional source material for the emerging art. They provided me with rich metaphors, images, felt senses, new understandings of myself and often much needed direction for the project. Because of the richness and depth of experience that ritual allows, it has been an essential mediator in the act of translation from art to words and hence has been an important space for new learning within this thesis research.

Throughout the documentation period I reflectively journaled on the experiences, wrote poetry and created art in my studio. Throughout the entire research I lived the pedagogy of ritual. Monthly gatherings with the UBC Centre for Cross Faculty Inquiry, Women Writing Women group was an ongoing ritual of sharing writing and experiences, being witnessed and witnessing other women and their journeys. Within the multiple spaces of ritual, insights surfaced and new understandings of my research project emerged.

The art became the next layer of documentation for reflection and interrogation as I moved more deeply into the project. The art created in the studio, along with art videos, culminated in an art installation in the Student Union art gallery. The installation was conceived as ritual space and brought, what in my studio felt like, fragmented pieces of art, into an integrated whole within the gallery.

To assist holding the sacred space within the public gallery⁴ that is part of an academic campus, I invited a small group of friends and family to a private pre-exhibition ritual. These invited friends were the first to witness and respond to the art with me/the artist present and witnessing their response. Their responses and the response of the two hundred plus people that I witnessed coming through the gallery space over the span of seven days, stretched my individual understanding of the art. A university peer shared that because of the subject matter (a woman's naked body) he would not have entered the gallery if I had not been present. He said having me present gave him permission to look at the art without fear of voyeurism. I witnessed women brought to tears in viewing the art and felt a deep respect from men and women who said little but nodded and said thank you as they left the gallery. This was a different and welcome response from "the art is beautiful" comments that I have most often heard in the past.

During my time of gallery-sitting I wrote in my journal, documented the installation with video and colour photographs, and engaged in conversations with gallery viewers. On the fifth day of the exhibition I held an "a/r/tographer talk" with the public. This became a rich dialogue with the viewers that came to hear more about the a/r/tographic process. When the gallery doors closed in the late afternoon I rehearsed the public performance ritual that took place on the evening of the sixth day of the exhibition. The dress rehearsal and public performance ritual were documented by video. At the beginning of the performance ritual I asked the question, *What form of communication or language brings you closer to mystery?*

⁴ I was present in the gallery for the duration of the installation.

and invited the audience to reflect on it as they witnessed the event. Following the performance ritual there was a post-performance dialogue where the audience was given the opportunity to respond and enter a dialogue with myself and those present. The art installation has continued to evolve since the completion of this showing. The documented public performance ritual has become a new piece for the art installation that will be integrated into future exhibitions. The a/r/tographic potential of limitless possibilities continues.

A/r/tography is not in possession of itself. It is in continual motion, ever learning. In the thesis writing component I write from the third space⁵ that Stephanie Springgay (2003) alludes to with Merleau-Ponty's written image, "my body inserts itself between the two leaves of the world, which itself is inserted between the leaves of my body (1968, p. 264)" (p. 8). The elements of the a/r/tographical inquiry are not presented or cast together as fixed or linear. They are in an emergent stage that includes large gaps. Exposing the viewer/reader to the raw underside of a/r/tography through text and image, feels like a huge risk. Springgay's (2002) words give stability to my uncertainty.

Art-based research is a destabilizing dissonance. It is a way of disrupting traditionally upheld beliefs about epistemology, ontology, and research. It is a form of representation that allows for the ambiguous place between presence and absence and the permeability of boundaries. (p.26)

⁵ I am drawing here on the term identified by literary scholar, Homi Bhabha, and further defined by Ted Aoki. (2003, p. 5). I use it in a psychoanalytic way, trance being the non-polarizing third space for the engagement between the conscious and the unconscious.

Resistance/Retextured Writing

The artist part of me has great resistance writing about the art, when the art is newly emerged; between the worlds/between the leaves. I am very reluctant to pull it into consciousness. The researcher part of me has been reading--reading and reading--looking for voices--of authority? The teacher part is making connections between the reading and the art and is excited to talk and delve into the learning with others. Within these roles, the artist wants to remain numinous, mysterious, the teacher is excited to begin the birth, and the researcher feels that more reading and studying are required. From this location of resistance, ambiguity and disagreement I write.

“The hegemony of patriarchy is embedded in language”(A. Dallery, p. 62).

My body rebels
legs bounce
below the computer desk
shoulders burn
facing the computer screen

My being screams
silently
as I write
giving voice, giving birth
to new language

How does one integrate the body and word after more than 500 years of

separation? ⁶ I live the split with my love/hate relationship with words. I love the mark-making aesthetic of script and the wisdom and knowledge that is shared through the written and spoken word. I hate when words and language are used to control and manipulate, when the power that they can hold is not acknowledged. I have kept my sense of power most often through silence and the refusal to give importance to words. It is in the shadow of this dichotomy that words find their way into my art.

I have worked with poets and have exhibited their words alongside the art. When words appear in one of my art pieces they are usually my own, but I resist making them clearly visible for the viewer, often leaving only traces of text in the art image to be pondered. In art created early in my Masters studies the text begins to have a more dominant voice in the art but it is still difficult to read (image 14). Resistance and endurance are the words that continually surface when I begin to share the process of art making, reflecting and writing. Can I write a language of the body without the guilt of betrayal? Can I write about art and art making without the guilt of betrayal? I am caught in the self-betrayal of my own survival strategies. Survival strategies that I rationally know are no longer required but the irrational part of me fights to keep them in place.

⁶ I refer here to the Cartesian/modernist mind/body dualism that has dominated western society for the past 500 years.

Image 14

Bickel, B. (2002). *Journal*. Vancouver: UBC.
(mixed media drawing on wood, 9 x 9 in.)

In the commitment to integrate language and writing into my art, I must continually let go of the survival strategy of silence, which is how I have held my sense of power in the world. I have resisted what Barthes (as cited in Rose, 2001) called *anchorage*: text that accompanies an image and “allows the reader to choose between what could be a confusing number of possible denotative meanings” (p. 81). As a weak form of anchorage, words have had to be hunted down in my art and are often a late discovery in the viewing. Trinh Minh-ha (1999) reframes the struggle that I find my body moving through as I write in what she calls:

...women’s womb writing, which neither separates the body from the mind nor sets the latter against the heart...but allows each part of the body to become infused with consciousness. Again, bringing a new awareness of life into previously forgotten, silenced, or deadened areas of the body. (p. 262)

Reframing writing as integrated with body literacy, not as text that dominates and silences the body, is the relational body/text integration that I strive for. As I struggle with the writing process, I return to my visual art, where the intellect is present but not dominant. A place that is familiar to me. Where the discovery of deep sources is possible. I take the time to look and reflect, entering the a/r/tographical process. I am drawn to a photo (image 15) taken during my thesis art exhibition and I write this poem.

On a small wooden ledge
lays a single crow feather its writing tip dipped in red paint

On a small wooden ledge

my large body sits poised ready yet afraid to write

On a small wooden ledge
lays a telling that has not felt the brush of air

On a small wooden ledge
spins a woman clothed in red script

This photo documents an interaction with the art that called me to lay on the floor between the installation pieces entitled "*To find traces of her estrangement*", dressed in my performance ritual costume in a yoga corpse pose. My feet are pointing towards the wall piece entitled *Spinning Red Words on Wood*. I recognize the mythological death and transformation story unfolding in this photo enactment. I observe that my body fits perfectly between the two metal containers, my body fills the space; a feminist located?

The red, black and white colour motif of my costume echoes the "ancient colour representations of life/death that show up as significant in cultures around the world" (N. A. Jordan⁷, personal communication, May 2, 2004). Red, black and white are colours that are traditionally worn at funerals and weddings in many cultures. Within the metal containers are black and white documentary photographs of me in the forest writing on my body with menstrual blood and make-up pencils. I was compelled to exhibit these photos but did not want to give the viewer direct

⁷ Information she obtained from conversations with American artist and teacher Rose Wognum Frances, while studying Women and Spirituality at New College in San Francisco, California.

Image 15

Bickel, B. (2004). *"To find traces of her estrangement"*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.

(galvanized tin, candles, b/w photographs, thread, plumbers glue and water resistant tape 59 x 8 x 10 inches each)

access to them as our contemporary experience with photographs of naked women is steeped in the voyeuristic tradition of male-dominated photography. These photos are documentation of a sacred process not meant for viewing out of context. I wanted to break any patterned viewing of the photographs and hence the photos are submerged in water, illuminated by two tall glass-encased white candles that ritually burn throughout the entire show, keeping a silent yet alive vigil. The water, along with floating red threads that emerged in my trances embody the metaphors of life's blood, and act as a protective veil over the photos. When I enter trance, water is often the medium that I move through. Water takes me to the alternate realms. Placing the photos underwater requires the viewer to leave the comfortable element of air and pass visually through to an alternate realm.

The floor installation piece "*To find traces of her estrangement*" creates a path that leads to the last art piece (image 16) created in this body of work, entitled *Spinning Red Words Together on Wood*. My observation while sitting the gallery was that if people did not take the time to walk around and through the floor piece they did not reach the wall piece. The unwillingness to descend and engage the floor piece seemed to distance and keep hidden the transcendent image from their view as well.

The creation of *Spinning Red Words on Wood* was a meditative, transcendent experience that felt like an important act of completion⁸. During its creation I

⁸ This was the last piece of art that I created in this body of work.

Image 16

Bickel, B. (2004). *Spinning Red Words on Wood*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(mixed media on wood, 22 x 12 x 2 inches).

listened to Sufi trance music, which deepened the experience for me. The double figures in the piece sit cross-legged in a kundalini yogic movement, spinning. They are in an environment of red-stained wood and inverted hand-written red words; stream of consciousness writing. A spiral of red thread inhabits the upper left portion of the piece, its tail trailing towards the spinning figures. On a small wooden ledge at the bottom of the piece lays a single crow feather its writing tip dipped in red paint. I have collected crow feathers the last few years. In some First Nations stories crows are the messengers of death. I hesitated adding the black feather to the art piece, as I was not clear on what it symbolized within the piece. The piece felt more to be an experience of the ecstatic, of life. Despite this, I chose to add the feather for its aesthetic qualities, recognizing and accepting its meaning as a messenger of death more fully only in the context of the gallery installation. I did not censor this uncanny object⁹ in the art-making process, and in viewing it juxtaposed with my exposed body photographs, submerged in water without breath, the source of breath that had been blocked by the water returned in the looking up to view the art that hung above it. This installation piece and art image came to represent the descent (death) and return (resurrection) of my a/r/tographic journey. Death and loss co-appear alongside transformation and growth as markers of the cycle of life and learning.

Helene Cixous (1975) writes of the place of loss, disassociation from the body that is so difficult for women to write themselves from:

⁹ The surrealists worked with the uncanny object. "The sensation of the uncanny oscillates between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between appearance and actuality...the uncanny exists at the threshold of religion, imbuing ordinary phenomena with fearsome energy." (Rabinowitch, 2002, p. 15)

By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display— the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. (p. 350)

In the private ritual in the forest, I returned to my body to challenge the censorship of my body writing. I was shocked and embarrassed in a moment of self-conscious judgement of the primitive location I found myself in to take the censor off my body and off of my writing. In the installation piece *"To find traces of her estrangement,"* I created a container to lay my documented struggle within. This is where the vigil was kept. A vigil of making visible and witnessing the testimony (photos) of endurance and struggle of an emergent a/r/tographic process. What began with the simple intent of echoing the rectangular shape of the photographs transformed in the lived experience of building a watertight container. Lacking the construction knowledge I required to create a watertight container, I found myself caught in a frustrating cycle of wasted long hours and a far too intimate relationship with toxic materials. As I reflect on this process and attempt to learn from it, I acknowledge that creating a container to hold a feminist journey requires support and knowledge. When knowledge is not accessed, as I experienced in my building of this container, much time and energy is wasted alongside the creation of toxic waste. This photo reveals the metaphoric death of a long censored part of myself. The body and my attention to it, often through its representation in art, is an ever-present source of learning and knew knowledge.

Foucault (1998) wrote about “an archeological approach to the history of knowledge and the loss of knowledges” that have been disqualified as inadequate to the task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy...” (p. 16). A/r/tography has the potential to facilitate the reappearance of important and hidden pieces of disqualified knowledge within history. Recovering and acknowledging stories through trance, art making and ritual have freed me to walk with narratives that had been silenced, weakened and unable to stand up.

As a researcher working with the process of a/r/tography, I am challenged to ground and support myself within the historical and current voices of artists, theorists and educators who explore the areas and address the questions that I also encounter in my art making process. In bringing questions to the surface through art and research, rigid and dogmatic thought patterns have the opportunity to shift and possibly transform into emergent new imaginaries for future inquiries of body, women, and art.

The active collaboration of artist/researcher/teacher, within a/r/tographical inquiry, that is willing to follow the process and “not [be] in possession of itself,” holds fertile ground and limitless possibilities for new ways of learning and knowledge making. I am fortunate as a practicing artist and performance ritual artist to be familiar with dwelling in the unknown territory of the creative process. As an emergent a/r/tographer I am challenged to share this skill, as well as evolve with and move beyond it.

Addressing challenging ethical, educational and theoretical questions and problems requires a constant willingness within each domain (art, research, and

education) to enter areas of discomfort, resistance, ambiguity and disagreement without limiting or shutting down the creative, researching and learning experience of a/r/t/ography. I have found that combining ritual within a/r/t/ography has allowed the weaving and mending of gaps instilled between the mind/body as well as the artist, researcher and educator in our society. Art was a leading voice in the paradigm shift from pre-modern to modern. The growing theory of a/r/t/ography I believe has the elements to lead us into an integrated and transformative post post-modernism.

In this chapter the resistances and the transformative possibilities of the challenging inquiry method of a/r/t/ography begin to reveal themselves. In the next chapter the a/r/t/ographic journey as it took place in the studio and the gallery will be unveiled further with a deepened explanation of ritual as confessional and ethical and its pedagogical unfolding significance within a/r/t/ography.

Chapter Four

Annunciation of the Mysteries: Ritual and the Body

Image 17

Bickel, B. (2004). *Who will read this body?* Public Performance Ritual. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery. Photography by Don Reicken

Body Ritual

In this chapter I unwind the mystery of rituals that are within this project and illuminate the curriculum learning texts that unfold within the rituals; the female menstrual cycle, trance, art making and art. Ritual is central to my art practice, as is the (re)presentation of the body. Within this a/r/tographic project the two are naturally blended. I end the chapter expanding upon public/ethical performance ritual as transformative pedagogy.

Deep red blood flows
from my womb this night.
Rich blood sacrificing
for the future.
The crescent moon as witness

We are greater than our selves
and that mystery even greater.

As I sit down to write this chapter my attention is taken by the cramping in my womb and I am unwillingly reminded of the cyclical shedding ritual that my body takes me through every month. A ritual that holds pain and discomfort, that carries me inside, and slows my usual living pace down, often to a halt. Still after more than twenty years of this monthly ritual I am struck by my surprise at its arrival.

The relationship to this bleeding ritual has varied tremendously throughout the years. I lament that I require modern medicine to control the explosive pain involved. I have over the years struck out consciously and unconsciously without painkillers to meet the peak of this cycle. On one of these occasions in desperation I began hitting my body to deflect the wrenching spasms in my womb. In that

desperate moment I recognized an affinity with the women mystics of the middle ages who inflicted pain on their bodies through self flagellation, submitting their bodies to great pain in a (com)passionate union with the pain of Christ's crucifixion (Lochrie, 1997). They did not have the option of modern painkillers. If I had to fully feel this pain every month for my entire fertile life cycle I wonder what mystic place my body would take me to?

Karma Lockrie (1991) writes of the body's location within medieval mysticism:

While the body may be renounced in order for the self to be lost, it is reconstituted in and around the word. The mystical ecstasy which marks the loss of self relocates into bodily excess, particularly in late medieval mysticism. Still, it is the desire first for nothing, and secondarily for knowledge or recollection, which creates the surplus that redefines the body.

(p. 67)

With the choice of effective painkillers I am not willing to surrender, as these women mystics did, to the altered states of consciousness/mystical ecstasy that I know extreme pain can transport one to.

As much as I look forward to the cessation of my monthly bleeding cycle, I am deeply respectful and consciously honouring of it. When I began my a/r/tographical project with a private performance ritual on a beautiful summer day, my body was in its full bleeding and pain cycle. Menstrual blood naturally became the ink that enabled me to externalize and embody writing as art, it also became my (l)ink to a female ancestral story. Arlene Raven (1995) writes in her article *Blood*

Sisters: Feminist Art and Criticism of the often misunderstood lineage of blood within feminist art:

The bloodline has a special significance for women. As a sign of both reproduction and violence, female blood lost, spilled, and recovered has been a primary catalyst for feminist work. But the distinction between lifeblood—the vitality that drives work, including feminist art and activism—and blood itself, a substance/subject addressed by that work is crucial, and has been little understood. (p.47)

The unplanned presence of my bleeding with the ritual prompted me to use my monthly bleeding cycle with my research. Psychoanalyst, Bani Shorter, in her study on women and initiation (1987) finds that:

Menstruation...pregnancy, menopause [are] all concerned with the making of meaning and not simply its expression. Change comes to a woman, is received and registered in her body initially; only afterward does meaning disclose itself. What ritual reveals to her, consciously and unconsciously, is what has previously remained hidden but is now ready to be divulged. Afterward, she no longer knows in part or by hearsay but by way of her psyche or soul's own verification. (p. 69)

I decided to follow this bleeding/research connection and to enhance the meaning-making chose to fast and enter a trance state on my day of full bleeding for the next five months. The trances became the ground/inspiration for the art that unfolded over the next nine months.

Unwinding Ritual

Ritual, is a word that can illicit a response of mistrust. Because of its power and transformative ability ritual can be used destructively as well as for the good (Driver, 1997, Pryer, 2003). In this section I will attempt to situate and unwind my use of ritual.

The underlying impulse of women's ritual, as stated by spiritual feminist, Dianne Neu, in Northrup's (1997) study on women and ritual, is to "affirm women's power, acknowledge its roots and use it to transform society" (p. 38). Educator, Peter McLaren (1999), echoes the underlying impulse of ritual and further defines it.

Ritualization is a process which involves the incarnation of symbols, symbol clusters, metaphors, and root paradigms through formative bodily gesture. As forms of enacted meaning, rituals enable social actors to frame, negotiate, and articulate their phenomenological existence as social, cultural, and moral beings. (p. 50)

Lesley Northrup (1997) found that "Through ritualization ...women 'reorder and reinterpret,' converting male-orienting symbols and rituals to a female-oriented belief system" (p. 21). In this reordering "the body [i]s a vital inexhaustible, and beautiful symbolic source" (p. 31). She goes on to theorize that "[r]itual...must...be able to serve the function of challenging existing power structures and provid[e] access to mechanisms of social control – or at least social equity" (p. 90). Tom Driver (1997) further affirms this task of ritual.

Ritual is neither a detached contemplation of the world nor a passive symbolization of it but is the performance of an act in which people confront one kind of power with another, and rehearse their own future. (p. 188)

Bani Shorter (1987) also found that "...symbolically, in these rites...women w[ere] able to face and express the mystery of which [they] w[ere] deprived in daily life (p. 42)." The role of ritual within this a/r/tographic journey is brought forward as a form that has the potential to weave and mend the gaps that exist between the dualistic categories of the body and the mind as well as between the often conflicting roles of woman, artist, researcher and educator.

To assist in understanding the complexity of ritual, I distinguish between private and public performance ritual. In private performance ritual I invite witnesses/participants into the space that I feel can hold and support the sacred space to do personal ritual work. The ritual is often very loosely planned and my intention is to be open to the unknown. The project's ritual that took place in the forest with my two friends is an example of private performance ritual¹. In contrast, public performance ritual is open to the public. More preparation is taken in the planning and I am committed to hold and support the sacred space for whoever comes to the event. The *She Knows* collaborative performance ritual and this thesis project's final gallery performance ritual is an example of a public performance ritual. My intention in public performance ritual is not solely personal, and is committed to present an experience and a teaching for the larger community, with a purpose of accessing a

¹ On reflection, I am aware of my choice to enact this transgressive private ritual within the domain of the patriarchal academy, yet it is in the in-between space, the endowment lands of UBC.

deeper understanding of the art that can lead to new ways of being and knowing. Further to that, performance rituals have the intention, I believe, of affirmation, letting go, transformation and a re-inscribing of female experience as well as subversion of limiting cultural norms.

In distinguishing the forms of ritual that are present in our society, Tom Driver (1997) elaborates three different, yet connected, modes of ritual that enriched my own definitions. The first ritual mode is a general aspect that can be found in everyday acts of life as well as in theatre. He speaks of it as a performance of "do and show," the observer can be the self or other (p. 107). He then speaks of the second form, "confessional ritual," that is,

...primarily concerned with identity and self-disclosure. Since mystery and awesomeness accompany self-revelation, the confessional mode always has something of a religious quality,... some... highly ritualized and others not. (p. 108)

The third mode of ritual is part of the confessional, yet evolves with and moves beyond, it is called ethical. He wrote,

In the ethical mode, performance has a different emphasis. Less focused on identity of the performer(s), it is oriented more toward affecting the world through direct social and political action. (p.108)

My distinction of private and public performance ritual are further clarified through his theory of ritual modes. The private ritual that began this project was imbued with a confessional aspect. From that starting point the trances and art making uncovered a greater understanding of the project's purpose. The final performance ritual moved

into the ethical mode of direct social and political action. In the next section I expand upon both performance rituals.

The Private/Confessional Performance Ritual

The initial performance ritual was an intuitive effort, undertaken in part, to embody and understand the numerous feminists (Helene Cixous, Adrienne Rich, Susan Bordo, Arlene B. Dallery, Celeste Snowber, Luce Irigaray amongst others) who compellingly summon women to write from their own bodies, and write with the body as a form of resistance. This intuitive undertaking involved witnessing the body/self in a ritual experience of writing on my body that was enacted on August 2, 2003 in a secluded forested area in the University of British Columbia Endowment lands. The performance ritual was a testimony, self-witnessed by myself (the artist) by the life forms and creatures of the forest, and by two women friends, Cathy Pulkinghorn and Nane` Jordan, who documented the event with a still and video camera respectively.

Charles Garoian (2001) in reflecting upon performance artist Robbie McCauley, wrote that "...she uses her body as an instrument with which to witness and give testimony.... [a]s an instrument of culture, [she] claims her body resonates with her experience and imagination" (p. 102). In my desire to find peace with words, I engaged my body and its ability to witness and serve as the ground for my reluctant written testimony. Psychoanalyst, Bani Shorter (1987), reflects that:

In ritual performance, one is released from conventional modes of behaviour or the necessity to conform to a conscious cultural canon; one gives

expression to the unconscious promptings which require symbolic enactment
for disclosure of as yet undisclosed truths. (p. 42)

In the following poem and art image (image 18) I re-enter the intimate
performance ritual experience through poetic writing and art to expand the bodily
experience beyond my self to you, the reader/viewer.

Third Body Testimony

*Not to transcend this body, but to reclaim it. To reconnect
our thinking and speaking with the body of this particular
living human individual, a woman. Begin...with the
material, with matter, mma, madre, mutter, moeder,
modder, etc. etc.* (A. Rich, 2001, p. 65)

Into the forest
We three women
Midwives, witnesses, birthers
Walk talk focus
Enter third space

In a forest grove
Our circle marked by body's fluid
The ritual
Of flesh blood and words
Begins

In the forest
Small clearing filled with sun
Illuminates a spider's web draped
Between trees undisturbed
By elements by the outside world

In the forest grove
I am witnessed held

Eyes with lenses eyes with heart
Receive me
Ground me

On the forest floor
Naked I crouch
Sweep my hands
Circular upon the earth
Clearing emptying
I write drawn from well of bleeding womb
Red pronouns I place upon my body
I - WE - SHE - HE - IT - US
The cup spills
Blood mingles with wood

Her vomit reflex shifts the words
Upon layers of red stain
I write coloured letters
Who will read this body?
Who will desire to read this body?

In the forest
I write words sense and nonsense on
Parts of my body difficult
Slow to write
Flesh moves not firm and flat

I have a large body
Requiring many words
I read I write speak softly
Frequent sharpening of drawing tools
Returns wood shavings to the forest

In the forest I read
I am read
I am red red red
Impossible to read all of me

Emerging body writing
Without voice

In the forest reaching back
Loss touch my back
How far back do I have to go
To admit cultured words?
Dis ability deeply buried

In the forest naked
This dirty scrawled upon body questions
Pencils meant for eyes
Draw attention to eyes my eyes
Draw others to look

In the forest writing
On the surface of my body
Solid form yet
Loose unpredictable surface
Tires me

In the forest complete
Testimony unwound
My body shakes and shudders
My hands arms catch the wind
Bird wings singing

In the forest
We three women sit in circle
Rub soothing oil on scripted body
Share confusion in sight
In scribed third body

Image 18

Bickel, B. (2003). *Testimony*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(mixed media collage on wood, 12 x 12 inches)

Image 19 & 20

Bickel, B. (2003). *Private Performance Ritual*. Vancouver: UBC Endowment Lands.
Photography by Cathy Pulkinghorn

As I look at the photo images of my performance ritual (images 19 & 20) and the video documentation I ask what I incarnated, enacted, reordered, reinterpreted and challenged? The self-critical part of myself wants to downplay the significance of the confessional ritual. In the experience of the performance ritual I trusted my desire to enact the event, even though I was not aware of a clear purpose beyond undertaking the intuitively driven task I had set out for myself of writing on my entire body in an effort to integrate writing, the body, and art. In the poem, *Third Body Testimony*, written shortly afterwards, I was able to describe the experience yet still felt a gap as to the full significance of the act. It is through the reading of theorists that I began to move beyond my own artistic impulse and personal criticality and began to articulate and further re-value the importance of allowing ritual space for the body.

Feminist philosopher Carol Bigwood (1998), writes that: "Though the body is primarily nonrational and nonlinguistic in its communications, it nevertheless is full of a significance and has a way of ordering of its own" (p. 106). The ordering of my a/r/tographical inquiry called for a natural nurturing and supportive environment to begin my work within. In this space of living practice I became a "living body." In her concept of renaturalizing the body, Bigwood draws upon Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body. She wrote,

The body that is sensitive and in deep communion with its environment is not the biological object-body that science describes but is the "living body" or the "phenomenological body".... [that] is not fixed but continually emerges

anew out of an ever changing weave of relations to earth and sky, things,
tasks, and other bodies. (p. 105)

Art critic, Arlene Raven (1995) acknowledges feminist artist's in their refusal to
confine women as biological objects or a social construction in their art.

The origin of art generated by feminists of the 1970s, '80s, and '90s derive
neither exclusively from female biology nor from social constructions of
femininity, but rest instead in a sort of common-blood community. (p. 47)

In ritually confessing the flow of the body and its cycles in this project, I give
testimony to a fully living body, inviting the viewer/reader to witness the female
body as a life-infused subject, not a biological object.

Trance

Trance is a performative ritual act that takes place within an altered state of consciousness. I encounter it as an active form of meditation that is not focused on the concept of stilling the mind, which predominates in most traditional Eastern meditation². The active mediation/performance of trance is a place of expanding the mind's imaginary. Where "[w]e perform our becoming, and become our performing" (Driver, 1997, p.114). Within the third space of trance the mind can imagine and hence practice performing the body outside of limiting conditioned "regulatory norms" (Butler, 1999, p. 234) that our learned minds and culture repeatedly perform. Jean Houston (1987) in her work within sacred psychology teaches trance as an inquiry method of "gaining ...knowledge from...states of consciousness that are deeper than your ordinary state...that can avail you of more subtle and comprehensive knowledge (p.173).

In moving forward with my a/r/tographical work the month following the private performance ritual, I entered a trance state facilitated by a friend who works with a trance process, developed by anthropologist, Felicitas Goodman³ (1990). This process involves creating sacred space using indigenous ritual, sitting in a specific posture (I chose to work with the "diviner's" posture) and listening to the shaking of a rattle for a timed period to assist the trance process. I enter the trance.

² Suzuki, S. (1975), *Zen mind, beginner's mind*, NY; John Weatherhill.

³ Goodman's work comes from the study of bodily postures and altered states of consciousness. The thirty trance postures that she has uncovered she terms "psychological archeology".

September 14, 2003.

I find myself in a cave where I am able to move and dance through and within the rock that encloses the cave – the colour that is within the rock is an amazing metallic turquoise blue – the felt experience of moving through the density of the rock effortlessly is ecstatic – I push my hands out and they break through the stone surface into the cave – my body follows and emerges out of the rock – I immediately dive into the deep pool of water that is in the center of the cave – once immersed in the water my human body transforms into a frog, and in this form I continue my descent to the bottom of the pool where I find ancient stones that I carry – one by one, back to the surface of the pool – I sense that these stones hold ancient knowledge and I want to bring them to the surface to be studied.

Image 21

Bickel, B. (2003). Private Performance Ritual. Vancouver: UBC Endowment Lands.
Photography by Cathy Pulkinghorn

In the Studio

Impacted by this transformational trance experience I began to investigate embodied frog energy. Looking at the photos in retrospect I recognize myself embodying frog-like postures in the original performance ritual (image 21). I chose to re-enact a frog position in my studio where I had a friend cast my body with plaster bandages in the kundalini yoga asana of the frog (image 22 & 23). Unlike the freeing experience of the performance ritual, the trances and invigorating motion of the yoga asana, the casting process became a test of my body's ability to endure confinement and stillness. My limbs lost significant blood circulation and became body parts that I felt no physical connection with. To keep the integrity of the cast, I had to endure a loss of feeling in my limbs and remain in a state of discomfort in my body much longer than I physically wanted to. The removal of the cast and the reactivation of my blood circulation was a painfully welcome experience. This experience physically reminded me of the importance of blood circulation as a key for taking action in the world.

Image 22 & 23

Bickel, B. (2003). *Ecstatic Companion*, (in progress). Vancouver: William Street Studios. Casting done by Monica Brammer.
(Cast plaster bandages, 26.5h x 27w x 22d inches)

Bickel, B. (2003). *Ecstatic Companion*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
Casting done by Monica Brammer.
(Cast plaster bandages, paper, ink, 26.5h x 27w x 22d inches)

In the next cast created in my studio I embodied the experience of the bird wings that had propelled my body at the end of my performance ritual in the forest (image 22 & 23).

My hands arms catch the wind
Bird wings singing

Although this process was not as physically arduous as the casting of the frog position, I went through the same experience of confinement and loss of awareness in my limbs and physical discomfort. Through the physical creating of these sculptural “objects” my body went through the metaphoric loss of control (subjectivity) that many theorists write of as the objectification of the female body within patriarchy. Blood circulation, the body’s fluid life source, is metaphorically blocked in the objectification of women’s bodies. The finished body sculptures reflect the quality of immanence, especially visible in the frog pose that is squatting on the ground, and transcendence, visible in the bird pose that is hung from the ceiling, transporting the body in flight.

Image 24 & 25

Bickel, B. (2003). *Bird Wings Singing*. (in progress) Vancouver: William St. Studios.
Casting done by Leah Fisher. (Cast plaster bandages, 9h x 65.5w x 16d inches)

Bickel, B. (2003). *Bird Wings Singing*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
Casting done by Leah Fisher.
(Cast plaster bandages, 9h x 65.5w x 16d inches)

In writing and re-telling these experiences I have become aware of the parallels to Iris Young's (1998) writing where she, along with Simone de Beauvoir, refers to female tension as lived in patriarchal society.

Beauvoir's account of woman's existence in patriarchal society is defined by a basic tension between immanence and transcendence.... The female person (261)...live[s] a contradiction: as human she is a free subject who participates in transcendence, but her situation as a woman denies her that subjectivity and transcendence (262).... To the extent that a woman lives her body as a thing, she remains rooted in immanence, is inhibited, and retains a distance from her body as transcending movement and from engagement in the world's possibilities. (p. 267)

I live the tension between the polarization of immanence and transcendence daily as a female in this society. The tensions and the struggles are embedded within my body and the bodies of those around me. Susan Bordo (1997) reminds us that,

Our conscious politics, social commitments, strivings for change may be undermined and betrayed by the life of our bodies – not the craving, instinctual body imagined by Plato, Augustine, and Freud, but what Foucault calls the “docile body,” regulated by the norms of cultural life. (p. 91)

The body has consistently remained central in my work and the honouring of it has been essential in countering the forces that desire its regulation. I have equated it to a temple, a sacred container. A quote by Thomas Moore has been on one of my art brochures (Bickel, 1999) for many years: “The body is indeed the temple, not simply for its beauty and value, but because it houses the holy mystery of human

existence.” The body as represented in my art holds immanence as well as transcendence in its ability to take us into the mystery beyond our individual selves.

Two artists, whose work I have been drawn to, who work with the body and address the tensions created by the regulated body in our society, are Shirin Neshat, a Middle Eastern woman living in North America and Cindy Sherman, an American woman. Freda Drees (1998) in writing about Sherman’s art observed that.

The unifying factor in her work is ...the body. The unity of her work resides in the centralization of the body. The body is the most real, and at the same time provides an image of transcendence. The living body takes on traits of God, although it is not deified or idolized. It is neither worshipped or revered. (p. 132)

Neshat utilized the text of feminist poets and Sufi mystics as a veil over the skin of the women in her art images. For Western audiences, who are the majority of viewers (as her work is not exhibited in the Middle East), the text that is written on the exposed body parts of these seemingly silent women, is unreadable and a mystery. Lehmann (2001) shared that the artist felt the images were “naked” (p. 378) without the script. The addition of the script is an aesthetic decision that I believe adds a transcendent component to the body that is energized with the challenging and spirited words. The words that covered my body in the private performance ritual, similar to Neshat’s body text, acted as a visual veil for my naked body and at the same time exposed my internal performative thoughts and challenges through text. Arlene Dallery (1992) wrote,

Writing the body, then, is both constative and performative. It signifies those bodily territories that have been kept under seal; it figures the body. But, writing the body is also a performative utterance; the feminine libidinal economy inscribes itself in language. (p. 59)

Writing on my body honoured the immanence of the body. Transcendence of the body was not my goal, instead transcendence of the limitations set on my voice by a patriarchal language was my desire.

Trance and the Double

Reclaiming and transforming the space that our bodies, voices, images and writing occupies is the dangerous ground that my art continually leads me to. I stop and ask myself: Is it ethical to take the collaborators of my art projects and the art viewers into an relatively unregulated and uncensored creative experience? Without ignoring this danger, in my art making process I enter and draw upon the territory of the third space of ritual, which offers a sacred space for the full honoring of our bodies and voices without censor. To have a place where full breath and movement is practiced, I believe, can lead us closer to the empowered place of holding a healthy and empowered ground in what is “normally” a disempowering and invaded location within our society.

Within ritual I enter the altered state of trance and find myself in the space of hidden gaps where uncensored expression is invited, with my “double” as my companion. The term “double” signifies an inner ally/teacher/guide that can be accessed through dream or trance. I embarked on five trances over the nine month

period of the research. The following trance became an important remembering of the origin of writing and text, the source of which is the body. While in the trance I spoke out loud and tape-recorded my spoken words. In the transcription punctuation is purposefully left out to capture the lulled singing quality that the voice takes on while in trance.

Within the trance process I called in and accessed the “double”. The “double” is my internal co-appearing other who has been exposed alongside me on this thesis journey and assisted me in places of being lost. Arnold Mindell (1993) and Carlos Castaneda write of the dreaming double that has long been part of shamanic practice (p. 125). Historically cultures have utilized the support of spirits accessed within altered states to do work for individuals and the larger community. I believe Luce Irigaray (1997) alludes to the internal support (doubleness) of women when she writes of woman never being simply one.

(Re-)discovering herself, for a woman, thus could only signify the possibility of sacrificing no one of her pleasures to another, of identifying herself with none of them in particular, of never being simply one. A sort of expanding universe to which no limits could be fixed and which would not be incoherence nonetheless.... Woman always remains several, but she is kept from dispersion because the other is already within her and is autoerotically familiar to her. (p. 254)

My double’s words, spoken to me in an earlier trance (Bickel, unpublished transcription) continue to influence and guide me.

do whatever you want—do whatever you want without censor—just do it—don't worry about how they tie together—how the threads work—don't worry about all the threads—just do whatever you want to do—don't get in your way (November 7, 2003).

The trance that follows is a “performative utterance” that “inscribe[s]... into language” (Dallery, 1992, p. 59) that a woman is “never ...simply one” whose “expanding universe... [has] no limits” (Irigaray, 1997, p. 254). This trance experience, I believe embodies, reflects and illuminates the multiple and complex aspects of the a/r/tographical research journey.

November 22, 2003

I find myself walking down the path - down to the ocean - watching - looking at the trees - the greenery - glad to be down here in this space - walking out and seeing the ocean and today I think I am going to walk along the path - its along the side of the ocean - I'm seeing a tree with a big hole in it - a large tree and I'm walking into that - I can slide my way down - there's an opening to pass by and I burrow through the opening - I can slide down this opening - I end up down at this flat plateau area inside - there seems to be another person there - I think it's a woman and she's dressed in aboriginal regalia - dance ritual regalia - made with natural things like large leaves - ya very earthy - she's looking at me and she's black - she's got some rattles - she's probably wondering where I've come from - what I'm doing down here - I don't know - anyway she starts dancing around me - she's starting to move around me in a circle - rattling her rattles and kind of pounding her feet - a marching dance - ya with her feet making contact with the earth - and I'm standing in the middle letting the beat of her feet and the rattles move around my whole body - taking them in - its very earthy down here - natural earth colours - she's starting to spin as she moves around me and her outfit flares out as she spins - she keeps twirling around me in a circular motion as she is spinning herself and she can do it very fast - she's adept at this move - keeps her balance - she's starting to wear through the earth where she is circling and spinning around - the earth is beginning to wear as she digs down into it with the pressure of her body and her movement - burrowing in through the earth and then the earth starts to slide down - she's let loose this platform that falls down like a very primitive elevator shoot - there is still ground under me - I'm still standing as it goes down and she is not coming down with me - I'm going down on my own - I think I'm going to lie down so when I hit I'm not thrown off - whatever the bottom is ----- I've come to a still place - I sit up - I'm reaching for my "double" - but she is not there yet so I'm going to bring her in - (deep breath out) - she comes out sitting across from me with our hands joined - and she embraces me - gives me a hug - we're kind of sitting in a position with our genitals showing with our feet flat, knees bent, legs open - aha - and we're bleeding - there's blood flowing from our vulva's to the earth - this deep part of the earth that we're in now - ahhh - its that thick red blood - very thick - its nice to be bleeding with someone at the same time - so we seem to be in a cave of sorts - and start dipping our fingers into the blood that has flowed out of our bodies - and writing on the ground - write on the ground my double does - I want to get up and dipping

A purple-toned photograph of a person's hands and arms, with the text overlaid. The person's hands are visible, with fingers spread, and their arms are extended. The background is a soft, out-of-focus purple.

my fingers into that warm moist blood – I want to write on the walls – and she moves around as she writes on the ground and I move as I write – I move with my body as I write – coming into the center to dip into the blood – I can also dip back into my vulva as well to access the blood and I don't know what we're writing but we're covering the walls and the floor of this cave – we're both very committed to that – determined – moving around the space and then we meet up together – my "double" has moved into me – come up to my side and she starts moving her hand with mine and we write in unison and she follows along with what I write – writing it with double hands – the script can get bigger now writing it with double hands and our bodies are moving fully with the script and moving around the cave – around the walls – across the floor – it's a bit of a script dance that we do – we look at each other and we are both smiling –

we have our hands together – our red hands – red from the blood – and then we dip from our vulvas more red blood and as we face each other we write on each others bodies – moving around each other – touching each other with our fingers – writing – now we have our backs together and our arms are out and we join hands – we start to spin in this cave that has our script written all around it – on the floor – on the walls – on the ceiling – as we spin – our heads together as we spin – watching all the red words blur - and at the same time on the floor as we spin we start to erase the words on the floor – mix them together – and as we spin our hands touch the walls and they also start to blend and blur together – its all very tactile touching of this cave – touching of our bodies – ahhh – its full – its full of writing – our lips to the ground and our lips to the wall and we start to inhale all these words created from this blood – great atmosphere to inhale – breathe in – ahhh this rich earth smell that we're inhaling – oh ya – and then we sit back down – back to back - touching backs – having just nourished ourselves – I think I'm ready to bring her back in – I thank her for the experience together down here – sharing blood – sharing words – sharing dance – I breath her back in (inhale deeply) and I'm on my own and the floor begins to rise - carrying me back up – back up to where the aboriginal black woman waits for me – she gives me her hand – pulls me up – and I thank her and I hug her – a brief hug – and she leads me to the entry way and I let myself be pulled back up to the upper world – to the tree and back out into the sunlight and the path in the forest – I walk along the path looking out at the ocean – the sun like glittering jewels and I head back up the path on the hill - a different environment out here – crisp not moist like below – I reach the top and bring myself back here to the room.

The A/r/tographic Statement

The a/r/tographic statement from the thesis art exhibition introduces this next section, which focuses on the gallery installation and the gallery performance ritual. It is a piece of writing that came together at the time of completing the thesis art. It proceeded the thesis writing. In the past I would have written an artist statement to accompany an art exhibit. **This statement is a marker of transition, of myself as an artist to that of an a/r/tographer.** The exhibited art and performance ritual are integral components of the thesis, yet because of the limiting factor of a temporal exhibition and performance, their presence is limited in this thesis document. They are documented throughout the thesis and attached to the thesis in a DVD format. The installation was on view for one week and seen by over 200 viewers. The performance ritual was attended by approximately 35 people. The following a/r/tographic statement was the text (or abstract) that was given to people as they entered the gallery.

A/r/tographic Statement

Who will read this body?

"The more I delve into fleshing inquiry through the body, I am more deeply aware of the paradoxes resonant within me." Celeste Snowber, 2002

"...I am an instrument in the shape of a woman trying to translate pulsations into images for the relief of the body and the reconstruction of the mind." Adrienne Rich, 1997

This body of work exposes a creative research process that began with a one and a half hour private performance ritual, witnessed by two friends, in which I literally wrote on my body. The documented private performance ritual launched the a/r/tographical⁴ inquiry that makes up part of my masters thesis in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. The performance ritual was an intuitive effort, undertaken in part, to embody and understand the numerous feminists⁵ who compellingly summon women to write from their own bodies and write with the body as a form of resistance.

My personal intention and desire in this performance ritual was to begin to externalize and embody writing as art. What has become apparent with the unfolding of this exhibition is that it transgresses the boundaries between shame and freedom through the intimate and personal exposure of both the subconscious female mind and the naked female body through the ritual process of a/r/tography.

While I have felt at home with the method of a/r/tography, I have also struggled with the challenge of being conscious of and activating the often conflicting roles of artist, researcher and educator this method demands. Through this struggle I have come to recognize art making as research and curriculum making, seen art as curriculum, experienced performance ritual as pedagogy and worked with the body as text. This statement is an attempt to articulate a complex, exciting and emergent research journey.

Who will read this body? is preceded by a thirteen year individual and collaborative (co-creative) art practice of (re)presenting the human body, predominantly the female body, in two dimensional drawings and collages,

⁴ **A/r/tography:** is a fluid and dynamic method of inquiry that activates and weaves together the complex roles of artist/researcher/teacher (educator) through a critical, theoretical, self-reflexive practice and analysis of art making and writing (adapted from Irwin, de Cossen, Springgay and Wilson).

⁵ Helene Cixous, Adrienne Rich, Susan Bordo, Arlene B. Dallery, Luce Irigaray, among others.

and in the multi-dimensional medium of performance rituals. The process and experience of art making is extremely important for my art and practice. I have attempted to bring the art making process into the gallery setting through performance rituals co-created by myself and the co-creators/models of the projects. The installation of *Who will read this body?* which will include an artist talk and public performance ritual, reveals the raw, organic, ritual process of a/r/tographic research and documentation that has in the past been hidden from the viewer/reader/learner in my art exhibitions and public performance rituals.

I have come to learn through a/r/tography that my art has a complex agenda. Not only does it encompass honouring and freeing the human body, but it also serves to challenge and bring to the surface a wounded patriarchal culture of shame and fear. I live within and embody this oppressive and hurting culture on a daily basis and believe that it is rooted in and perpetuated by the philosophical rupture between the mind and body that has existed within western society for more than five hundred years. In this split the mind is valued over the body, associated with the masculine and aligned with societal power, while the body is associated with the feminine and the natural world and is considered something to be controlled and brought into submission. In admitting my own struggle within this philosophical split I come to acknowledge my self as a microscopic part of a whole system.

I begin this journey with my self; with my own body and my own writing. I welcome the viewer/reader/learner into the exhibition space as witness to my a/r/tographic testimony; a testimony that has the potential to disrupt body/mind dualisms and as I have found illicit feelings of shame and discomfort. Drawing upon the feminist phrase "the personal is the political" I invite the reader/viewer/learner to witness the personal with or without shame and to move with the personal to the larger, more complex challenge of re-forging the often dissociated and hurting elements of mind, individual and language with those of body, communal and image. To assist the viewer/reader/learner in their transition from the mundane world into the exhibition space I request that they perform a ritual by placing their hands first in earth, then in water before they enter the exhibition space.

In this work I ask the viewer/reader/learner to ponder with me the questions that have troubled my own a/r/tographic journey:

Am I not making art? Am I not researching? Am I not educating? Am I not writing? Am I not performing? Am I not ritualizing? Am I not learning? Am I not my self?

In the Gallery

Three separate videos created a sound installation within the gallery space. Two video's entitled *Ocean Trance I* and *II* faced each other diagonally across the gallery, anchoring two corners of the gallery (image 26). On each video screen is a calm grey ocean scene with sky and horizon in view. The lapping sound of the ocean is overlaid with the five rough sound recorded spoken trance journeys. These hypnotic videos allow the viewer, if they choose, to enter their own trance-like experience. The third video (image 27), which is partially hidden by a veil when you enter the gallery, is the documented private performance ritual entitled *Who will read this body?* The sounds of the forest, with the sounds of the body being rubbed, slapped and read from, and the crackling approaching footsteps of the witnesses contribute to the sound environment, along with the *Ocean Trance I & II* video sound-scape of ocean and spoken trance journeys. The presence and layering of sound within the gallery assists the viewer to shift from the lived experience of the mundane world into the altered world of ritual and trance. At the entrance of the gallery the ritual placement of earth and a container of water is installed and the viewer invited:

Before you enter this space...

You are invited to participate in a ritual gesture of placing your hands in the earth, followed by the water. This is intended to assist you in leaving the details and stresses of everyday life behind as you enter the gallery.

Welcome to the sacred

Image 26 & 27

Bickel, B. (2004). Art installation showing *Ocean Trance I* video & *Bird Wings Singing*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Art Gallery.

Bickel, B. (2004). Art installation showing performance ritual shawl & *Who will read this body?* video. Vancouver: UBC AMS Art Gallery.

Inviting and assisting the viewer to enter a third space, physically and through sound, is extremely important in my desire to communicate through and with sacred⁶ ritual space. In the fall of 2002 I encountered the installation art of Rebecca Belmore. Her performance ritual art, which I saw exhibited as a raw video documentation of the event, installed as an art piece in a gallery, has had an impact on me in particular. My decision to exhibit the raw documentation of my private performance ritual as an art piece was informed by her raw and impactful art. The powerful and haunting visual and audio experience still lingers with me.

I walk into the Morris & Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the university where an installation of Rebecca Belmore's (2002) work is in view. Hearing names being called, I turn in the direction of the voice. A video of her performance ritual entitled "The Named and the Unnamed, Vigil" is playing on a screen with multiple light bulbs screwed into the screen. A woman stands reading names that are written on her body. She calls each name, places a thorny rose stem between her teeth and pulls it through, spitting out the ripped foliage before calling out again, like a mother calling for her children. I am fascinated entering this scene in progress. She undresses and changes her costume of jeans and t-shirt to that of a full red dress. Hammer pounding into the wooden telephone pole, she is nailing herself in the dress to the pole. I remain seated on the bench when the performance ends and begins afresh. I now witness the ritual beginning of this powerful street act. I am in awe of the physicality of her art. She is movement and intensity of ritual art incarnate;

⁶ The definition of *sacred* I follow is "worthy of ...veneration: holy...commanding reverence and respect (*The Penguin Concise English Dictionary*, 2002. p. 779).

deliberate, unrushed, focused, certain, raw. I am deeply moved. I breathe deeply and get up from the bench.

In Rebecca Belmore's art the intention of the ritual is held sacredly and clearly. Because of this I, as the viewer, could enter the scene at any point and sense the significance of the event, even if I did not fully understand what was actually taking place. In her public performance ritual, which took place on a public street sidewalk, the public viewer could encounter the scene at any point and be drawn in to the ritual. Performing ritual within this public context, I believe, is extremely demanding of the performer.

The video installation, *Who will read this body?* was not seen in its entirety by any of the gallery viewers. My intention was not to have the viewer fully understand the experience, but to sense the significance of it.

Unlike Belmore's street performance ritual, the public performance ritual that I enacted in this project was held within the sanctuary of a gallery. I chose to contain it within the space and not have viewers enter once it began. As I now prepare to transform the documented performance ritual into a video installation, the containment that I required to perform the piece in public is not required in the same way. In the installation I do not expect anyone to watch the full performance ritual unless they choose to.

The Public/Ethical Performance Ritual as Education

The public performance ritual took place in the center space of the gallery surrounded by the art installation. The inspiration material for the final performance ritual was drawn in part from the trances that I entered throughout the inquiry.

In the final component of the solo performance ritual of *Who will read this body?*, I spin with the rhythm of Sufi trance music. My body becomes an axis point, a point from which to move out and beyond myself. To become a solid axis point takes learning and practice. My body and my mind join to transcend my personal self, opening to the cosmos and to those around me. Projected onto my white clad body is a slide image of the ocean at sunset (image 28). My body fuses with the sunset and at the same time creates a human shadow that partially blocks the image. I continue this Sufi spinning in my home as I write this thesis. Remembering that I am the axis point of the writing and that it is being spun from me into the larger world.

Image 28

Bickel, B. (2004). *Who will read this body?* Public Performance Ritual. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.

April 18, 2004

Last night after installing the show with Madeleine and Michael I felt really good about the show, yet this morning I am nervous in the pit of my stomach as we drive to the gallery. Today the show opens to the public. I am very grateful that I have invited seven friends to join me in an opening ritual prior to opening the doors to the public. I have asked them to enter the gallery and to look at the art first. When they all arrive I call them together in a circle. This circle is a mixture of university peers, kindred spirit friends and my family. I ask them to share their own experience, personal or not, of putting their voice into the academic institution and patriarchal society. The sharing is rich and grateful and varied as each person shares their connection and disconnection with their voice and body in the world. Tears flow and support is voiced. We light the sage stick Tannis has brought and let it burn on the cement floor, allowing it to cleanse the ground and ourselves. Annie has brought her drum and offers a song that she sings with great passion. We end by toning and move through the gallery filling every part, every corner with our voices and focused energy. This is what I envisioned and need to strengthen and prepare myself to spend the next seven days with the art installation. I am ready now to hold the space for the public audience that is willing to enter the gallery and

witness the art. My energy is high as my circle of friends gradually leave and the gallery doors are opened to the public.

April 19, 2004

After I close the gallery doors I am inside this large space by myself and I practice. I run through the performance ritual again and again and again, five times in total. I reach a joyful ecstatic place while spinning to the Sufi trance music and I do not want to stop. I love all this space. I want to do it again and again, but I am exhausted and need to go home and prepare for sitting the gallery again tomorrow.

My experience has been that to access the sacred, humans require space. This does not have to be physical space, but some form of container, vessel, holder or structure is required to enable the human to fully step into the sacred. Religion and art historian Celia Rabinovitch (2003) links the historical manifestation of myth and art as coming from sacred ritual, "...the sacred is related to the occult, to mystery, to ritual, and to the symbolic transformation of human experience into myth and art (p. 47)." Shorter (1987) reminds us of the loss of third space in our contemporary society. She wrote, "The need to accord space, time and place for liminal feeling and ritual enactment was largely ignored in Western society for centuries (p. 79)." I appreciate that as a feminist artist in this society, I have, despite the odds, been able to keep liminal, in-between space present in my life. It is an essential part of my ethical practice to take on the challenge of sharing this space with others. I attempt to

do this through sharing the art making process at artist talks and public performance rituals, working collaboratively, and exhibiting art in a context that respects the viewer as well as the art.

April 23, 2004

I sit the gallery and iron my costume. I am calm. Moments of anxiety have passed through me prior to this day. Today I am ready. My support team begins to show up to help with the set up; Michael, Leah and Chris, Tannis, Jenny and Stacy. I have done what I can and now I leave it to them. Tannis comes into the back room with me. Yesterday at the dress rehearsal when she said that she would do a warm up with me prior to the performance, she said I gave her quite the resistant look. I know that I did. Today I am ready to let go and receive her pre-performance wisdom.

We are in the small back room. I sit on the flannel sheet that I brought. Tannis helps bring me into my body with breath and body stretches. My eyes close as she invites me to welcome in the spirit support that I require to do this piece of work. The crone⁷ appears. I see her clearly, as the roots of an ancient tree, below the cement gallery floor. From this place the crone supports the gallery and the performance ritual.

⁷ The crone represents the ancient archetype of a wise woman. She is a teacher of ancient wisdom and initiator of the ancient mysteries (Victoria Ransom & Henrietta Bernstein, 1994, p. xi).

She will keep the axis point of my body and mind firm and aligned as I move and spin through the performance ritual. I feel a deep appreciation for her support as it flows through Tannis to me. This is the same crone that I made a deep commitment to almost five years ago when I moved to Vancouver and began work with another older woman in the project of uncovering the woman warrior. The battle then was fierce and scar laden. Tonight our battle is at rest. She is satisfied and I am willing and ready.

Although this was a solo art performance ritual, my past collaborations entered the field of my present experience. Learning that was blocked and left incomplete in a previous collaboration was brought to a place of new understanding and closure in the present. Ritual is a place where past hurts, that can limit our full presence and ability to learn in the moment, can be confronted.⁸

The music and the slides begin. I watch the past images of my art pass before me as they pass by the eyes of the audience, the witnesses, and I breathe deeply. The music and images end and I enter from the back. I am clear that I am offering a gift to those that have come and they in turn are offering a gift to me. With ease I begin "Welcome to the

⁸ Bani Shorter (1987) adds that "Ritual *per se* does not ensure a safe passage, but it does ensure that the passage is signified.(p, 52)".

performance ritual of Who will read this body? Tonight is the culmination of a year of creating the art that surrounds us in the gallery. As you watch and witness this performance ritual I invite you to ponder the question; What is the form of communication or language that brings you closest to mystery in your life?" The performance ritual unfolds.

In offering the audience a question to ponder while they witnessed the performance ritual and opening the floor to discussion and questions immediately following, I took the audience beyond the traditional silent viewing position. The depth of the audience response and desire for interaction and inquiry, as well as the sharing of their experience was overflowing and continued on during the reception that followed and for a number of days afterwards (as a few friends informed me). For the first time in one of my performance rituals I allowed the educator to enter, in an overt form. Through this post-performance dialogue, I was able to cross the divided worlds of art, education and spirituality.

The question of *mystery* emerged from the performance ritual music, each title contained the word *mystery* in a different language, German, Bulgarian and English. Reading the words of philosopher, Rudolf Steiner (1964), I am reminded of an ancient form of education, the mystery schools, an integrated tradition of education.

The Mysteries which fostered...unity [a consciousness of the common source of art, religion and science] were a kind of combination art institute, church and school. For what they offered was not a one-sided sole

dependence upon language. The words uttered by the initiate as both cognition and spiritual revelation were supported and illustrated by the sacred rituals unfolding, before listening spectators, in mighty pictures. (p. 83)

At the end of the performance ritual those that witnessed shared what they saw. Then talked about mystery and how they access it in their life. In this post-performance dialogue we witnessed each other and shared connecting soulful experience. What follows are paraphrased recollections of what the viewers shared.

"I watched as your body emerged from the earth."

"When you were spinning you became one with the earth. Our bodies are not separate from the earth."

"I was uncomfortable that you ended with the spinning. It felt complete after you danced the shawl. I wanted it to end there"

"I was surprised to see what looked like a rag on the floor transform into a shawl and then into a powerful embodied story."

"Mystery enters my life through music."

"I am brought to a place of mystery when I am in the presence of nature."

At one point in the performance ritual I knelt before the shawl that was laying on the floor and wrote on the shawl with a red crayon, allowing the writing to come from the unknown, writing from a stream of consciousness. The processing of sensory information that was accumulated throughout the a/r/tographic journey was brought to a place of revelation within this performance ritual and inscribed onto the shawl (image 29).

Image 29

Bickel, B. (2004). *Who will read this body?* Performance shawl. Vancouver; UBC AMS Art Gallery

The shawl links my present art to past art projects and performances. I wore this particular shawl in an earlier solo performance ritual that took place in the sanctuary of a Unitarian church. I (Bickel, 2002) wrote in a previous paper:

I chose to situate this body of work in the traditional setting of the church, in doing this I was disrupting the dominant male history of the space and began to see feminist art as prophetic pedagogy. Bollough et al (2002) describes prophetic pedagogues as tapping "...elements of tradition to criticize tradition itself, to discover new possibilities...They also energize imagination and inspire action". (p. 317)

This shawl is reminiscent of my father's Christian ritual robes. Wearing the shawl and re-performing the space, that I was not allowed to enter as a female in the church, was a significant reclaiming of space. Another act of reclamation was performed in the performance ritual of *Who will read this body?* By writing on the same shawl with metaphoric blood/red ink, the unacknowledged story was written/became the word. Donning the shawl and embodying the words with dance was a further reclamation of the word made flesh, now in female form.

In being witnessed and witnessing others I received a deepened appreciation of mystery. In this performance ritual I am a poet, a dancer, a priestess, a story-teller, a weaver, a teacher. Each of these parts a mystery to me. Following the flow of water I do not know where I will end up. I am challenged anew as I now struggle to write my experience, citing my body, becoming the word. Educator, David Smith (1994), wrote,

[T]o raise the question of the limits of language is also to open to its possibilities. But this requires a fidelity to that which calls out to us from within the heart of which we do not understand and for which we may not at present have words. Pedagogy then becomes a vocation to live and act within the difference between what we do know and what we do not know, that is to be drawn out to what calls us from both within and beyond ourselves. (p.168)

In Smith's words I hear echoes of psychoanalytic pedagogy that stress the importance of the pedagogue becoming aware of ignorance as a source of teaching. It has been through my commitment to integrate words with the body through art, that my resistance to words has been challenged and reframed as an important location to begin teaching from. In allowing words to manifest through the body and the subconscious mind, the pedagogical vocation of living and acting between knowing and not knowing that Smith illuminates of in his writing, is enacted. A/r/tography in its dual situatedness within art and graphy, opens a structure within education for a pedagogy of mystery to emerge and expand.

This chapter has wound its way through the liminal third space of a/r/tography as ritual, a site of learning and transformation. Within third space art and writing transcended a suppressed female voice. Here the free circulation of blood, and the danger of honouring the body's immanence has been exposed as a risk of ethics. In Chapter Five I return to collaboration and categorize the many possible forms of collaboration in an attempt to expand the understanding and use of collaboration as an ethical and educative feminist practice. I bring forward

witnessing and testimony as part of the collaborative act and at the close pull
together the lost traces of this thesis.

I end this chapter with the poem that was spoken at the close of the public
performance ritual of *Who will read this body?*

Conception

Avowed now
to read no text
female bare

The body
skin peeled and
arched back
into memory,
rights fragments
spins red words
together

Annunciation of
the mysteries
delivered in
unrefined
unwound textures

Chapter Five

Listening for Echoes: Collaboration, Ethics & Education

Image 30

Bickel, B. (2003). *Listening for Echoes*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(mixed media drawing, photocopy transfer and paper on wood, 9 x 9 inches)

Listening for Echoes II

She reaches inward
listening for echoes
of flesh
formed
in words.

The Gift

This longing is not fear
It is desire for the "we"
With no protection for the "I"

You give me the gift of fearlessness
I take the gift of fearlessness
and return that gift to you.

Co-appearing Bodies

Within this chapter I reflect on the ethics and aesthetics of collaboration as an indispensable part of my feminist art practice and categorize the four forms of collaboration that I have worked with in my past art practice. Following this I enter a discussion that addresses power dynamics that are an inherent part of collaborative work and follow with the ethical educative task of witnessing and giving testimony. The chapter ends with finding and reclaiming the “traces of estrangement” (Irigaray, 1994) that have emerged throughout this a/r/tographic journey.

Returning to the thesis question, *What does it mean to me to have an ethical and aesthetic feminist art practice?* this chapter extends toward a deepened discussion of a collaborative aesthetic¹ as part of my ethical feminist² art practice. In my first artist statement (1993) I wrote of my relationship to the art medium of wood.

The human figure is ...created by...exposing the differentially stained wood grain patterns. This approach parallels the principle of “the way” in Taoism which is based on the original Sanskrit meaning of Tao as “the grain of the wood”. This creates a work of art that is a response to the forces of life and not dominating the work completely with ego will.

If I were to rewrite this statement as an a/r/tographer’s statement I would now extend this Taoist aesthetic to my art collaborations as well as my art medium.

¹ I would define a collaborative aesthetic as an aesthetic of responsiveness: responding within relationship as opposed to responding and creating solely with an individual aesthetic or one traditional idea of an aesthetic of beauty.

² Feminist ethical theorizing “...comes from a context of female oppression...centers philosophical reflection on female lives and seeks ways to nourish female vitality, resist oppression, overcome past oppression, facilitate healthy bonding and develop sound relations with larger environments.” (Card, 2000, p. 181)

Despite embarking on a “solo” autoethnographic research project, the qualities of collaboration entered through working with the multiple identities of the artist, research and teacher. Other collaborative-like experiences surfaced throughout my thesis research; in discussions with my committee members, in work-shopping my writing, and bearing witness within my women’s writing group, with the witnesses of my private performance ritual, at the pre-exhibition ritual with friends, with the public performance ritual audience and the dialogue that followed, in long conversations with my life-partner, and with the supportive artistic direction that I received from other artists. Reflecting on this, I ask myself the question: Is it humanly possible to be a solo author or artist?

Artist/educator, Rita Irwin (1999), validates my lived experience. She wrote that, “In a postmodern era, a shift is occurring from a locus of creativity within an autonomous individual to that found within dialogic collaborative, interactive, and interdependent processes” (p. 36). I have framed and written from my own collaborative location and experience as a white, middle class, feminist, visioning artist, researcher and educator. My work is impacted by and addresses the ethics and aesthetics of interdependent relationships with others, be that with significant relationships, collaborators or the art audience.

The practice of collaboration is complex. It can be fraught with conflicts and can also be extremely transforming and liberating. At its core is the courage to imagine beyond our selves, as educator, Rishma Dunlop (2002) suggests;

Our conversations, our collaborations, our writing, and our theorizing together provide us with radical revision of community, academic or

otherwise. Our collaborations open us up to a feminist imagination that moves us beyond the "ism." This is an imagination that explores the nature and value of our relations to each other, of taking risks. This imagination demands courage. (p. 12)

The value of the varied relationships that fed my spirit and imagination throughout this thesis go beyond a definition of collaboration. Working as a collaborative artist has influenced and at times altered the direction of my art. Agreements that are made at the beginning of a project sometimes change part way through. What has stayed consistent in my art practice is the transparent agenda to revalue women (myself included) as subjects, visionaries, leaders, and knowledge-makers, integrating and redressing the cultures fragmentation of women's body knowledge and literacy within the realms of education, science, religion and art. Lautier (1992), links the de-valuing of women within cultural discourse. She wrote,

At the heart of the project of revaluing women is the enterprise of re-visioning woman as subject and not as other in cultural discourse *de*-valuation of women,...is an intrinsic feature of our culture's religion, philosophy and science. (p. 3)

Feminist collaborative art, as I have experienced it, has the potential to disrupt the silencing and shaming of women's bodies, by leading women to an embodied literacy. Working collaboratively, the opportunity to transcend the cultural agenda that de-values women, is magnified. There is a truth to power in numbers. The solo project experience of this thesis brought me back to the reality of an embedded shame and silence within myself. I don't know if the unearthing

Image 31

Bickel, B. (2002). *She Knows Performance Ritual*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
Photography by D. Reicken

and transforming of my shame and silence would have been possible, without the historic ground of collaborative allies supporting my work. The discoveries of awe and respect I have come to know in my collaborative projects and collaborative public performance rituals (image 31) have held and centered me in this solo project.

Collaboration

I have not found a lot of writing or theorizing in the area of collaboration as applied to art making. It is my desire to contribute to this knowledge base, and expand the possibilities of growth and transformation within the collaborative experience and in this, make visible and address the problems that limit collaborative practices. Artist/educator, Susan Stewart (1994), writes of the importance of collaborative work:

Collaboration is an alternative and highly resistant model of creative interaction. It is a process that demonstrates a method of art making which can be democratic, transformative, and empowering, and which has the potential to renew and build community. (p. 43-44)

I have surrounded myself with a team of thesis committee members who each practice and write about collaboration and collaborative pedagogy in their work. One of my advisors, Susan Stewart (2003, per. communication) shared with me that she uses collaborative projects within her studio art classes at a local art college as a way to bring feminist principles and theory into the studio classroom.

Looking at collaboration within the larger context of feminist education, I have been stretched into defining the levels of application and understanding of the

word *collaboration*. I begin with dictionary definitions of collaborate that deceptively seem very straight forward:

collaborate: 1. to work together or to work with somebody else on a common project or with a common aim (Penguin Concise English Dictionary, 2002, p. 163).

collaborate: of *collaborare* to labor together 1: to work jointly with others esp. in an intellectual endeavor (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1981, p. 217).

My own definition of collaboration within my art practice is: Working together on a project with a mutual common goal that is potentially moves beyond individual goals. It is a "with/and" experience. Collaboration is a conscious working relationship that calls each participant to join with the collective, and extend beyond their own personal self in an effort to create something that is greater than the individuals involved.

What follows is an attempt to separate and name the nuances and variations of collaboration as I have come to know it, as applied to my own work.

Collaboration is a powerful feminist educative tool. I make these distinctions in an effort to expand the generic use of the word of collaboration. Collaboration when used grossly and not specifically clarified can actually cause misunderstandings, harmful fractures and conflicts between individuals and groups. This often arises from different perceptions and understanding of collaboration and often manifests as issues of power and control within the relationships.

Within the feminist art movement, collaborative work can be judged inaccurately if we don't share a clear understanding of the collaboration. I believe part of the critique and invalidation of Judy Chicago's form of collaboration from

feminists, stems from individually assumed definitions of collaboration. In an interview with Dinah Dosser (as cited in Robinson (ed.) 1987) Chicago clearly states that she works “co-operatively, not collectively” (p. 46) and acknowledges that “ A collaborative relationship is different from a co-operative relationship” (p. 47). Within collaborative groups we may enter the collaboration with different understandings of collaboration that don’t reveal themselves until much later in the process, in the interim, misunderstandings and conflict undermine the collaboration. What follows is my tentative effort to discern the varying categories/terms, which I posit as working definitions of collaboration.

Full collaboration is working with a peer in the same or different art form where the collaborators mutually guide and form the creative process and creative outcome. The finished product is co-authored, sometimes acknowledging the specific role each artist may have contributed. In this form of collaboration it may be impossible to know or apply individual identity to the art. The art becomes the art of the collective, a third entity. This form of collaboration has a co-leadership that ebbs and flows between the collaborators.

Because of the intensity of collaboration, full collaborations usually require a committed relationship of some form and can be found in artist collectives such as Vancouver-based Kiss & Tell, and California-based Sacred Naked Nature Girls. Each artist usually has an individual art practice as well. Because full collaboration requires the greatest commitment, in my experience, when it is successful it can be the most life transforming and enriching.

A **joint collaboration** is working with another, not necessarily a peer in the same or different art form where the collaborators mutually guide and form the creative process and creative outcome. The finished product may be joint, but upon completion of the project (art) may be separated and considered distinct. The finished art remains with the agreed upon individual or in joint ownership of the artists, while acknowledging the diverse role each artist may have contributed to the work. The separated art may take on a form of its own after the specific collaboration is complete. This form of collaboration requires co-leadership to work the most effectively.

Individual collaboration is working with a peer in the same or different art form where the artists come together with art that has been created independently, yet joined in a new mutually-conceived project. The finished presentation is joint. The art remains in the individual ownership of each artist. The art if separated may take on a form of its own after the specific collaboration is complete. This form of collaboration, although created independently, requires co-leadership in the joint presentation to work the most effectively.

A **partial collaboration** is working with another, not necessarily a peer, where one artist usually holds the vision, leads, and multiple collaborators contribute. Collaborators can be invited into the project or called to participate by the visioning artist. The process of creation is partially collaborative and the final art, produced by the visioning artist, remains in the ownership of the visioning artist.

Partial collaboration does not necessarily require full artistic ability in the participating collaborator, as the creative process is guided and the final art created

by the visioning artist who utilizes the contribution of the collaborators. This form of art can be found in Suzanne Lacy's collaborative community art (Garoian, 1999).

Because of the power differentiation in partial collaborations it is important live an ethical feminist leadership role as the visioning artist. Judy Chicago in an interview with Dinah Dossor (as cited in Robinson (1987)) shares her thoughts on her attempt towards a feminist leadership. She wrote,

“a leadership...that's not inherently authoritarian.... Leadership is necessary, it just needs to be a new kind of leadership and we need to trust women so that we can develop forms of leadership that are positive and growth enhancing and not be so suspicious of each other. (p. 49)

Relevancy

Collaborations are a great opportunity to learn how to share and support feminist leadership. Knowing the levels of collaboration that are possible ahead of time can bring the conversation of power to the foreground. Up front discussions that attempt to locate power issues ahead of time could ideally support a collaborative project when it is actually confronted with power issues.

Within the education classroom students are often turned off of collaborative or group projects. The group collaboration often unfolds depending on the dynamics/constellation of the group. Regardless of the actual level of collaboration within the group, the collaborative project is usually reviewed by the instructor, as equally created. Students could benefit from being informed of the different levels of collaboration. They would be able to communicate and acknowledge which form of

collaboration evolved within their project. In this way, possible resentment for having to take unacknowledged leadership or lack of ability to engage in the project because of expected leadership could be alleviated. This could lead to the group having a richer understanding and positive experience of collaborative learning.

Power Dynamics

I broke collaboration into four categories in an effort to articulate its varied manifestations. This can help bring forward unspoken expectations and assumptions and alleviate misunderstandings that often manifest in power issues. In addressing power dynamics Susan Stewart (1994) wrote:

This is one of the challenges of collaborative work and one of its great strengths. In this process of grappling with power relations rests the means of transforming them, both at a personal level, and socially and politically. (p. 43-44)

A collaborative project can have multiple categories within it. For example, the visual art component of *She Knows* was partially collaborative, as the art was created by me and remained in my ownership. While the performance ritual was a full collaboration. The collaborators had full creative input into the final performance ritual along with myself. It is important to acknowledge within mixed collaborations that the visioning artist can still hold an unspoken authority. This location of power, even when acknowledged, can be a place of needed guidance as well as great anxiety for all involved. I have also been part of a joint collaboration with a peer where the issue of power, although verbally agreed upon as equal, was never trusted as equal.

The ensuing conflict and mistrust was not resolved despite our committed efforts, and became greater as the project proceeded. We completed the project with the struggle unresolved and never worked together again. Through this collaboration I learned a lot about what I was not good at. It is easy to understand, considering personality and varying past history of collaborators, why the isolated artist paradigm remains in place and unchallenged. It requires a great amount of commitment, trust, flexibility and sense of self to join with another in a collaborative endeavor. An education that includes the teaching of collaboration as a tool and as an aesthetic fosters the growth of trust, commitment and liberation. I wrote in an artist statement (1998) after what I experienced as a successful and life-transforming joint collaboration.

The very nature and characteristics of a successful collaboration involves a mutual understanding of the vision, an ability to trust, and a commitment to transcend fears that allow the essence of the art to be the final guide that leads the participants to the ultimate discovery.

I have experienced different levels of success and satisfaction within each of my collaborations. I have worked with one to twenty-two collaborators in a single project. Each collaboration has taught me something new about myself as a co-appearing leader in the world.

Although my work differs from the following artists, it is worthy to note and compare their forms of collaboration. The contrast between the community-based art of Suzanne Lacy, who works with a community to create what they want to express, and the artist-based community art of Judy Chicago, who uses a cooperative

collaborative form in her community projects, where she draws upon artisans and their skills to manifest her art visions in large scale projects, is significant. I ponder the distinction between the collaborative artist and collaborative art for myself. I would say that I am a collaborative artist first and the degree to which the actual art is collaborative varies. Because of its fluid and living nature, performance ritual has been a natural collaborative space to work within that I can more often define as fully collaborative than my visual art. In the same breath, the scope and depth of my visual art, I believe, would be compromised without the contribution of my collaborators.

Performance artist, Lizard Jones (1994) of the Kiss and Tell collective echoes my understanding of artists and art making in relationship with the world.

Artists don't work alone. Their ideas are a product of their time and place, formed as much by circumstances as by inspiration.... Working collaboratively flies right in the face of that. It acknowledges that much of the art in the world is made by people working together. It forces us to deal with our ideas in a new way—to challenge the notion of a universal aesthetic, and simultaneously explore our common values. It's a dynamic and fluid process.

(pp. 28–29)

Feminist art educators, Rita Irwin, Rosa Mastri and Helen Robertson (2000), further reveal and validate the importance of feminist collaborative art-making. In a collaboratively written article they wrote of the “...*circulating* of feminist ideas, beliefs, and attitudes” (pp. 44-45) that flow into a circulation of power and

knowledge that occurs in arts-based feminist collaborative action research that has a “dedication to change over time [and] is a form of research that is ongoing.” (p. 45)

Ideally collaborative art would be written about collaboratively with each voice given the opportunity to share and interact with the others, as in the collaborative writing of Kiss & Tell (1994) in *Her Tongue on My Theory* or in collaboratively written articles (Irwin, Mastri & Robertson 2000; Gaskel & Eichler 2002; Wilson & Oberg 2002). Having moved through my own individual resistances to writing within this thesis and finding a level of fluidity with writing, I would like to consider future collaborative writing as part of collaborative projects.

Shifting from an artist context to a feminist artist context and then to that of a feminist artist, educator, researcher (a/r/tographer) brings the awareness of ethics and the inherent power relationships within art making and collaboration into an ever-more discerning location. In talking about the collaborative relationship of Kiss and Tell, Susan Stewart (1994) wrote that:

Unaddressed, a power imbalance that is acutely felt by one member and unnoticed by others has the potential to fracture a collective.... Negotiating power, attempting to understand how it works, learning to give it up when necessary or to take it on when needed, analyzing state power, empowering ourselves through our work these issues of power are constant threads in our lives and in our collaborations. (p. 33)

Stewart (1993) in a transcribed art gallery discussion shares the effort that is required to address power differentiation in a partial collaboration where she was the visioning project artist:

... I tried to be as collaborative as possible. For me that means I really allow the person I am collaborating with to have as much power in the decision making as I would and in this case I try to encourage them to have more power, as much as is possible since I am holding the camera and I chose the structure. There are a lot of contradictions here. (p. 31)

I have learned over the years that talking about power or powerlessness, is a very different experience than being in the midst of a power struggle. When I am emotionally impacted by a confrontation that triggers my sense of powerlessness or power, my clarity and ability to address the issues of power can be very unpredictable. So much seems to depend upon the specific situation and my emotional attachment to it. Greater experience in addressing power issues may not make the situation more comfortable but how it is handled can improve with practice.

Working collaboratively has given me a place to practice what I want to learn. It is here that I can dwell and work in-between the place of knowing and not knowing (Smith, 1994). I can never fully know the other and their response to me and I can never fully know or plan my own response to the other. I have learned slowly and continually about the struggle and hard work of staying awake to power dynamics. I have employed many strategies, not always successful, throughout the years in collaborations, in an attempt to give power to my collaborators. To open the space of challenging the traditional artist/model dynamic, I have used nontraditional descriptions of participants in my invitations to people to participate as collaborative models: co-creators, co-researchers.

My calls for collaborators are a call for assistance/participation as well as an offering of witnessing of individuals interested in exploring/uncovering/researching the proposed idea/theme. Donna J. Haraway (2000) wrote of the multiple tasks of witnessing and the importance of vulnerability, that I strive to be aware of as an ethical collaborative artist: "Witnessing is seeing; standing publicly accountable for, and psychically vulnerable to, ones visions and representations " (p. 155).

As part of my ethics of collaboration I am often subject/model as well as researcher/artist. To make this possible a partial role reversal is necessary, where the collaborator takes on the role of documenting and guiding me in the process. I have at times modeled and been documented by my collaborator before they have gone through that same process. In most of my work I prefer to work with the body unclothed and because I request this of the collaborators I have at times, as the photographer, been unclothed while photographing my collaborator. The exhibiting of my research video and photo documentation in the thesis installation stretched my personal comfort zone, infusing me with a full dose of shame and fear. This is a response that I have known can surface for my collaborators but one that I have not felt as fully as in this thesis experience. This re-established for me the ethical responsibility of the collaborative artist, being able and willing to experience that and more of what is being asked of her collaborators.

I acknowledge the essential/valuable role of the model as collaborator, and co-researcher. I acknowledge myself as an artist co-researcher and collaborator, and allow myself to become a "cosubject" (Heron, 1981), model as well. I am the initiator/artist but, as I hope I have made visible, that does not absolve me of an

ethical feminist approach to art making. An ethical feminist approach to collaborative art making would, I believe, involve being conscious of power relationships; creating ways of working that empower all involved and assume the responsibility of thinking for the good of the whole group, while encouraging self and group reflection and feedback processes.

Kelly (1995), an art critic, who wrote about the community art of Suzanne Lacy and her philosophy of participation, finds that for Lacy, "openness is what distinguishes participation from manipulation...[and] participation...[is] an ongoing process of negotiation without a hidden agenda," (p. 232). The art critic continues:

Participation is [not] simply a matter of agreeing with the artist at the outset of the project or of her agreeing with her participants. Rather, participation is a dialogical process that changes both the participation and the artist. Like the art, it is not fixed, but unfolds over time and in relation to the interests brought to bear upon it. For the artist, those interests represent perspective and values previously unconsidered or overlooked. They add to her as she adds them to her art. (as cited in Garoian, 1999, p. 152)

For the past thirteen years, without always being aware of it, I have followed a feminist method of inquiry in my work, in that I study myself, as well as others. Sandra Harding (1987) further describes an essential component of feminist inquiry, that: "...the researcher appears ... not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" (p. 9). Locating myself within a historical context of feminism has given me the opportunity to look more deeply into my collaborative artistic practice. It is my

desire to further my work, as collaborative learning experiences, for the collaborators as well as for the witnessing audience. In the performance ritual I am witnessed by my collaborators as well as by the audience. In this thesis I extended the witnessing of the audience by inviting the post-performance dialogue. My future performance rituals will continue to expand this returning of the witnessing to the audience.

Witnessing and Testimony as Collaborative Ethics

As the visioning artist I see my role as guide and witness. As guide I hold the space for the work of the project to be carried out. I do this by communicating, as best as I can, the parameters of a project and offer a supportive structure. I remain open to the flow of the process, which is fed by/with my collaborator(s) and their experience. As the witnessing artist, I receive the testimony of the collaborator. Roger I. Simon (n.d.) places the role of the witness as an inheritor of a gift³. He wrote:

...that the inheritance of testament is the reception of 'the gift of the ghost.'... the ghost arrives to give itself to me, demanding (from the start) my attention and my response in order to arrive at all. (p. 24)

Further expanding the understanding of testimony and witness, Shoshana Felman (1992), in her book *Testimony* reminds us that, "art inscribes (artistically bears witness to) what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events in our times" (pp. 108).

³ Simon's work is based within the study of trauma. The ghost is the reappearance of the trauma. I work with the ghost as unconscious memory and not necessarily as trauma.

Testimony unfolds within the work that I do with collaborators and myself. Within the photo-shoot, and/or trance 'the gift of the ghost' appears. The testimony (gift), then elicits a creative response in the studio, in the form of an art piece. My response is not necessarily the truth about the testimony, it is an engagement, a re-remembering, a return of the gift. Simon writes that:

...remembrance enacts possibilities for an ethical learning that impels us into a confrontation and reckoning not only with stories of the past but also with ourselves as we are (historically, existentially, socially) in the present.

(p. 4)

He goes on to write: "The only way to return the gift is by giving it to someone else. One gives back speech to a ghost by speaking of the ghost to others" (p. 25). The created art and performance ritual are gifts given back to the ghost.

Image 32

Bickel, B. (2004). *Spinning red words on paper*. Vancouver: UBC AMS Gallery.
(mixed media collage on wood, 12 x 24 inches)

Lost and Found: To find traces of her estrangement

The ghost appears to me. A few weeks after my performance ritual took place and the thesis exhibition was struck, I picked up a local artist run center magazine. There was a call for women performance art submissions, entitled "*Submit to that 70's Ho!*" I was intrigued, as a performance ritual artist who recently found a connection with the women's art of the 70s. At the same time I was disturbed. Upon a closer look, the call was accompanied by an image of a naked woman on her knees, with her head bent low, and her arms stretched in front, tied at the wrists. Reaching in from the upper left corner of the page was a hand holding a riding crop (whip) that cuts across the torso of the prostrate woman.

As I continued to read the tongue-in-cheek urban chic discourse, geared to attract emerging young women artists, I found myself becoming quite angry. Angry at the twist, the demeaning narrow lens, put on the feminist art of the 70s by a group of contemporary women curator/artists. I felt disappointed, once again, with the non-interest in sacredness or soul depth from the contemporary art scene.

My ignorance in not being able to catch the contemporary gist of the call and my frustration with pop culture in the art world, is apparent in my response. I am reminded of my location within the gaps and margins of my chosen discipline of Art. The sacredness of the body and depth of art that I am drawn to was not present in this artist call. I was extremely critical of what I read as dissociated postmodern aesthetics, void of ethics, and a respect for the female body. I did not answer the call, nor submit. I entered a place of silence that is broken within this thesis. Looking

at the image and ad now, I ask Adrienne Rich's (2001) question: "*What kind of voice is breaking silence, and what kind of silence is being broken?*"

It is through these invisible holes in reality that poetry [art] makes its way... for all who practice any art at its deeper levels. The impulse to create begins—often terribly and fearfully—in a tunnel of silence. Every real poem [art] is the breaking of an existing silence, and the first question we might ask any poem [art] is, *What kind of voice is breaking silence, and what kind of silence is being broken?* (p. 150)

As I write this final chapter I feel grateful that I have found "traces of my estrangement" on the journey of this Masters thesis. An estranged voice has broken the silence of this thesis. The artist call that I began this section with illustrates the estrangement that I feel with the contemporary world of art and artists. Throughout the thesis I trace my ignore-ance and estrangement with words and writing, with feminism, with education, and ultimately with my self.

Taking on the thesis question: *What does it mean to me to have an ethical and aesthetic feminist art practice?* I have evolved from the singular identity/role of artist to the plural identity/role of a/r/tographer⁴. I do not let go of my role as artist in this evolution, but add to it, with the roles of researcher, educator and writer. As an autoethnographic study I hope this thesis can, through its exposure of my practice, resonate with others who are artists that are educators or artists interested in their art as education.

⁴ For a full visual encounter with this journey see my website www.barbarabickel.ca

New questions have appeared through the writing of this thesis that I would like to travel with and engage more fully in the future. After many years of honouring the 'sacred body' in my art, I am ready to take on the question a/r/tographically: *How do we honour the political body?* The (co)leadership of women as evolved within collaboration could be drawn out with an exploration of honouring the 'political body.' This question assists a movement into public space after the exposure and transformation of private silence, fear and shame.

In this thesis I touch upon the meaning of curriculum. There is much literature and new theorizing on curriculum that I was not able to explore. I would like to study the question: *What could an ethical and collaborative aesthetic of curriculum look like?* Working with the anti-pedagogical concept of non-mastery, I am curious to explore a curriculum that co-appears within the collaborative relationship between learners and teachers.

A/r/tography as Ritual

I bring forward the form of ritual within a/r/tography in this thesis as a paradoxical practice of resistance and resistance-breaking. Within this paradox lies the potential thread that can weave and mend the gaps that exist between the dualistic categories of the body/mind, as well as between the often conflicting roles of the artist, researcher and educator. Ritual is the container or third space that allows a/r/tography to engage challenging and risk-taking work. Accessing the a-rational texts of the body, and altered states within ritual, allowed the ignored ghosts and forgotten/hidden knowledge to emerge. It is within this container that the metaphoric

death and transformation of my modern artist self to a/r/tographer self took place. A/r/tography as ritual within this study called for a transformative re-integration of art, science and religion as well as *theoria*, *praxis* and *poesis*.

The impact that this study has had on challenging, as well as validating, my own practices of living inquiry, has been a decidedly positive one. My future art practice will not be the same, as it will be carried out with an expanded and enriched voice, that of an a/r/tographer. Having moved through my own individual resistances to writing within this thesis and finding a level of fluidity with writing, I would like to consider future collaborative writing as part of collaborative projects. The transformation of my love/hate relationship with words that I describe early on in my thesis is apparent in the writing of this thesis, spanning 150 pages. The writing wants to continue on even as I try to bring the thesis to a close.

I am returned to self-exposure in this thesis journey, but to a self that is altered. Jean Luc Nancy's philosophy of the "singular plural" quality of humans, speaks to the experience of my journey. Christopher Fynsk (1991) in his forward to Nancy's book *The Inoperative Community*, writes of the cyclical nature of Nancy's philosophy that echoes my experience:

An advent that withholds itself by the return of its very advent, exposing us to our exposure, and further exposure, but never secure in its very return, never returning to the self (as in the investments of narcissism), and never a possession. (p. xviii)

A Pedagogy of A/r/t

This thesis took me through a phenomenological journey of exposing my pedagogy as an artist. I did not try to fit into a certain form of pedagogy at the outset of this thesis, instead my pedagogy emerged and revealed itself to me through the a/r/tographic experience.

I have found and cited several supportive forms of pedagogy within this thesis: feminist, transformative, psychoanalytic anti-pedagogy⁵. I believe these are important resistant forms of pedagogy that fit well within a/r/tography. The revolutionary form of anti-pedagogy does not operate from mastery but from the awareness of non-mastery or ignore-ance. It is a form of pedagogy that turns ignore-ance into an instrument of teaching. I can now articulate that I have gone through a process of becoming ever more conscious of my ignore-ance and limitations as an artist/researcher/teacher. I can now become an aware and useful educator.

In the unfolding of this often resistant a/r/tographical study that challenges dominant dualisms, I have reframed or re-appropriated educational language into the language of art. I experienced and claimed performance ritual as pedagogy, recognized art making as research and curriculum making, art as curriculum, and worked with the body as text. Allowing the differentiated categories of art, education, ritual, research, and curriculum to intermingle and blend, contributes to the re-forging and re-integrating of the divided realms of religion, science and art

⁵ Anti-pedagogy is the combined poetic psychoanalytic pedagogy of Lacan and Freud, as conceptualized by Shoshana Felman (1997).

(Wilber, 2000). In my expanded educative feminist art practice I have an increased awareness of responsibility, authority and ethics that will impact future work.

A/r/tography offers a bridge towards educational awareness for artists that are teaching without formal education training. As a rigorous form of inquiry, a/r/tography holds the potential for artists, researchers and educators to move beyond their own practiced disciplines, to access knowledge that is often hidden in comfortable/trained ways of knowing within disciplines. The ability that a/r/tography has to find the holes, gaps, folds, and undersides (Irwin, Wilson & Springgay, 2003) in our ways of being/learning in the world, are significant for the discipline of Art Education and Art. A/r/tography has the potential to challenge embedded and hidden oppressive ways of being and knowing, educating, researching and living. Living a/r/tography is similar to the performance art that Garoian (1999) wrote of as an art of politics that voices the potential gain of crossing comfortable boundaries:

“... performance art has enabled artists to critique traditional aesthetics, to challenge and blur the boundaries that exist between the arts and other disciplines and those that separate art and life.” (p. 19)

To practice an art form and to inquire a/r/tographically in one's life leads to new channels and endless strategies for responding creatively and authentically to art, curriculum, art students, life and the world. By bringing new questions to the surface through art, rigid and dogmatic thought patterns have the opportunity to transform. As an example of rigid dualisms that exist as a form of oppression in our society, I have, through this study come to admit that I have privileged the body over

the mind as a source of knowledge, and in doing so embedded myself within, and perpetuated the same oppressive dualism in my resistance and othering of it.

Artist Education

The powerful and clear connection of a collaborative aesthetic within my art practice that emerged through this study doubly challenges “isolation and alienation as the artist’s natural fate” (Lucy Lippard, 2000 (p. 7). I believe my resistant reaction to the art call at the beginning of this section is an example of my frustrated attempts to collaborate, with integrity and ethics, with the North American art world. I believe this is an aesthetic dissonance/gap and place of isolation that is present for many artists. Teaching ethics to artists, with a practice that is collaborative, can be an antidote to the isolated and struggling artist paradigm.

There are often few choices available for an artist graduating with fine arts training to continue their art practice. The main choices are *commercial* and *conceptual*. In the first choice, art is sold by galleries, or if the artist is a good business person they sell the art themselves. There are *very few artists* who make a living above the poverty line in this category. If they do, they often have to compromise their art to fit the narrow art market. In the second choice, art can be exhibited by artist run centers and public galleries. In this track it is essential to obtain government or other funding, as artist fees, if paid, are not living fees.

Alternate routes are *art therapy* and *art education*: here the artist’s art practice tends to be secondary. In these two last options artists often find that they have little if any time or energy left for their art practice.

I asked the question early on in my thesis: Why did I choose Education as opposed to Fine Arts for my graduate studies? My question is answered through this study. As a collaborative artist committed to an ethical and aesthetic art practice, I had to find a location with an ethical collaborative aesthetic. Education was the closest to this, yet I still had resistance to teaching and did not want to put my art practice into a secondary location in my life. A/r/tography offers an additional and unique option to artists that are committed to, or want to commit to a meaningful art practice. This option comes with a critical artistic/academic/educational rigor, with greater ethical responsibility and accountability given to the community, than what a modern art practice would likely give. The emergence of a/r/tography within the curriculum of Art Education speaks to the importance of nurturing and sustaining critical and transformative art practices, beyond the K-12 school system.

Throughout this study my art practice has been rejuvenated and expanded. Artists could benefit from this practice. The percentage of artists that are practicing art even five years after they graduate is extremely low. A/r/tography is a practice that can reinvigorate an isolated and dying art practice. Learning a/r/tography skills while still in an art training institution would be a beneficial contribution to artists and society. If the artist's visionary and prophetic voice, as described by many feminists, philosophers and educators cited in this thesis, are essential to a healthy society, we need to be teaching ethics and skills to artists while they are in training.

Underneath

The sub-question that emerged in the process of this study is *What kind of teacher/researcher/academic/pedagogue will I become?* or *What kind of professional art educator will I become?* My resistance to call myself an “art educator” has led me to call myself an “artist-educator” and an “a/r/tographer.” I am not interested in art education as a subject to be mastered. My passion for teaching awakens with a co-evolving curriculum-- where the curriculum follows and co-appears with the learners. When I add the question, *How do I teach ethically and aesthetically?*, this thesis project models my answer. The teaching will not be a comfortable authoritative practice. It will be a constantly questioning emancipatory practice, willing to be disrupted, disrupt itself, and expose the unknown, the shadow, and in this, face itself in facing (co-appearing with) others.

The responsibility that comes with understanding the internalized oppression that has kept my voice hidden is clear. My survival strategies embedded within a pathological patriarchy have been exposed. What began as an artist committed to body literacy, enacted as literally writing on the body, has evolved into an a/r/tographer committed to a critical and creative, ethical and transformational feminist educational practice.

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Image 33

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Appendixes

Notice

MEN AS BIRTHERS, NOT DESTROYERS: A PAINTING SERIES OF MEN

by Barbara Bickel

The history of life can be understood as the creation of ever more sensitive creatures in a Universe where there is always another dimension of beauty to be felt and savoured. Think of yourself that way, as a supreme power of sensitivity surrounded by magnificence"
— from *The Universe is a Green Dragon: a cosmic creation story* by Brian Swimme.

Recently I have begun a series of figure paintings that has evolved into a project of portraying men non-traditionally as beautiful, vulnerable birthers evoking emotions, rather than as stereotypical warriors and rulers evoking respect through fear and dominance.

The beauty of the human figure has always excited and intrigued me. In my present paintings I respond to a wood grained surface that is covered with dark glazes of oil paint. The human figure is then created by removing the glaze and exposing the differentially stained wood grain patterns. This approach parallels the principle of "the way" in Taoism which is based on the original Sanskrit meaning of 'Tao' as "the grain in wood." This creates a work of art that is a response to the forces of Life and not dominating the work completely with ego will.

This painting series is a personal endeavour in accepting masculine energy, in others and myself, as an important part of the healing journey. As long as I fear and reject the masculine in myself, I will be unable to be in this world as a liberated person. My unconscious view (image) of men as aggressive hurtful beings is, and will continue to be, contradicted in this painting series. My unconscious fears are being brought to the surface to be faced

and truthed.

In bringing this project out to be seen by the public, I intend to raise the same question that is brought up in me: are we ready to accept men as nurturers, loving birthers, and creators of Life?

To fulfill this integrative healing journey, through the experience of painting, I am asking men to model in the nude and be co-creators of the way they will be portrayed, as it reflects their own journey in dealing with the male body in our society.

The process of working and responding to each other in this vulnerable endeavour is as important to share as the finished paintings. I will be documenting the experiences of myself and the men as this painting series is created. This article will be published as part of the final exhibition.

As an artist raising questions for others through visual images, I will challenge my own beliefs and those of others. Through challenging comes the opportunity for truthing our fear-based biases toward the masculine in ourselves and others. Only by overcoming these fear-based biases will we experience the deepening beauty of the reintegration of the masculine and feminine energies in both men and women.

Note: if you are a man and you are interest-

ed in modelling anonymously between Sept. '92 and Mar. '93, contact Barbara at 287-9528. Models will receive \$10/hr. This particular series is to be exhibited at the M.E.N.S. Network Annual Symposium, Apr. 30 - May 2.▲▼

Fall 1992

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The Lodgepole Pine, Volume 2, Number 3

She Knows Artist Statement

These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through that darkness. Within these deep places, each of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep. Audre Lorde

I believe that a feminist epistemology includes the dark along with the light. We have a wealth of knowledge waiting to be unearthed. Knowledge from the body and the unconscious has often been ignored as a valid site of knowledge in a modern era of scientific epistemology. My art practice for the past twelve years has been focused on the human body, working predominantly with women in a collaborative process. The underlying base that has flowed through all the work has been the honouring of the body as a sacred vessel and container of wisdom. This honouring contradicts the shaming of women's bodies and the invalidating of women's wisdom that has gone on for hundreds of years in our society. Internalized judgements keep women divided from themselves and others. The feminist art that has evolved in my own practice attempts to reunite this divide, it encourages the reconnection and reintegration of woman's knowing. My decision to study Arts-based Inquiry at UBC is a development in my art to integrate the intellect of the mind, through the study of theory and the written word, with the knowledge of the body.

I use the words trance, journey and visualization interchangeably. They all speak about going inside and accessing awareness from an altered place; a location that is removed from the mundane world. It is a space for dreaming while awake. I have experienced this state as a rich source for my creative exploration into the wisdom/knowing of the body. Trance work combined with art-making has allowed me to access a depth of knowledge that is often hidden and ignored.

Through working with trance the inner "double", who acts as an ally, guide and/or teacher, emerged as a vehicle for communicating with the Self. The uncovered inner knowledge from the trance has been transformed into art and performance ritual. In the creation of ***She Knows***, I collaborated with six women who entered the trance process to access inner knowledge. I facilitated, witnessed and participated in these journeys. I listened to the taped trance to create the three small collages, which are a visual narrative of each woman's journey. I made the large drawings last with the intention of integrating each woman with her "double". A sound installation, using the women's voices recorded in trance, along with a performance ritual that was collaboratively created through a group trance with all of the women, accompanies the visual art. The transformation of hidden knowledge, drawn from the female body into visual language, voice and understanding is the essence of this collaborative exploration.

Barbara Bickel December 1, 2002.

Barbara Bickel
WHO WILL READ THIS BODY?

A multi-media art installation

video still

*Still the body breathes
and remembers
Chooses once again
to listen for echoes of flesh
formed in words*

Exhibition Dates: April 18 – 24, 2004
Artist Talk: Thursday April 22 at 2pm
Performance Ritual (followed by a reception): Friday April 23 at 7pm
Gallery Hours: 10 – 4pm artist in attendance

Barbara Bickel is a Vancouver-based visual and performance ritual artist. Her art has been exhibited across Canada for the past 13 years. This Masters thesis exhibition exposes the challenging dynamics of the artist, researcher and educator working to integrate the Western philosophical and physical rupture of the mind and the body.

AMS Gallery
Student's Union Bldg. East Mall
University of British Columbia

www.barbarabickel.ca

Performance Ritual – I have come to recognize performance ritual as a form of pedagogy. It is a ritual enacted within the gallery setting that has the intention of embodying and integrating the art making experience. It offers the audience/witness/learner an in the moment, felt experience that can inform and expand their understanding of the a/r/to-graphic process. This performance ritual is drawn from private ritual and the art making process. You are invited to participate as witness/learner. This performance ritual is a component of my Masters thesis in Education.

Acknowledgements

This performance ritual has been fed by all of my past collaborator/co-creators. I would like to particularly acknowledge the creative guidance and support of my life-partner **Michael Fisher** whose spirit connection has kept my heart and mind and body open to the depth and breadth of life long learning. Along with Michael, **Tannis Hugill** graciously offered her performance expertise to the creation of this performance ritual. My UBC thesis supervisor **Shauna Butterwick** and committee members **Rita Irwin** and **Susan Stewart** (ECIAD) have encouraged and thoughtfully challenged me as I have made my way through the often murky terrain of my masters thesis.

Barbara Bickel

Who
will
read
this body?

Performance Ritual

Barbara Bickel

Program

The performance ritual will be videotaped
7:00 performance ritual begins
7:25 post performance ritual
dialogue with audience
7:45 reception

Performance Ritual Music

O ignis spiritus
from the CD *Materia Mystica: homage to Hildegard von Bingen*
by Estampie

Qui Sunthi, O Antique Sancti, Aer Enim Volat, Kyrie
from the CD *Materia Mystica: homage to Hildegard von Bingen*
by Estampie

Pilentze Pee
from the CD *Le Mystere des Voix Bulgares* by the Bulgarian State Radio & TV female vocal choir under the direction of Philip Koutev & Krasimir Kyurkchiyski

el-Hadra: the Mystik Dance
Musicians – Ted de Jong, Klaus Weirs & Mathias Grassow
Composer: Klaus Weirs

Poems

Listening for Echoes
Conception

Conceived & Performed by
Barbara Bickel

Performance Technician

R. Michael Fisher

Artistic Direction

Tannis Hugill

Video Technicians

Chris Koppitz

Stacy Friedman

Graces

Jenny Peterson

Leah Fisher