ENGAGING WOMEN'S HISTORY THROUGH TEXTILES: 
ENHANCING CURRICULA WITH NARRATIVES OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

by

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Abstract

In this interpretive study I bring aspects of women’s history into sharper focus by examining the close historical relationship with textiles that has featured in the lives of many women. By engaging the manifestations of this relationship, the creative work or the associated stories of selected women, I demonstrate that ‘textile narratives’ are historical sources that together with the study of objects provide more delineation of women’s lives in a historical frame that can enhance the teaching of women’s history.

Many facets of history now more fully reflect the lives of women yet a fuller delineation is needed. Textiles are meaning-laden objects that are under-appreciated and under-utilized in the teaching of history. Literature is lacking that specifically addresses how textiles and the stories associated with them can be used as sources to augment the teaching of history, particularly women’s history.

Through a methodology that draws on the conceptual framework of memory study, examples, including one from suffrage history, demonstrate the analysis of textiles as historical sources. Three narratives that reflect women’s negotiation of historical circumstance are examined in detail through their textiles, objects of memory and stories. Through a qualitative analysis of elements that emerge from the oral history and material culture of women’s lives, agency is identified as a core attribute in their individual selection and articulation of memory in textiles. An analysis of the narratives demonstrates the value of textiles as a means to shed light on marginalized histories.

A theoretical grounding with reference to practice demonstrates how textiles are used as a means to communicate knowledge, history and identity and how these might be adapted to enrich curricula that strives to integrate women’s history, gather new knowledge through narratives of memory and hear more women’s voices. Through the appealing story form, these humanizing narratives and their analysis provide a model to gather details of women’s lives for a more nuanced history. I suggest ways to integrate this knowledge into an inclusive democratic model of curricula through interdisciplinary approaches that can engage students and simultaneously centre more history on women ameliorating their marginalization.
Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Table of Contents iii
List of Figures v
Acknowledgments vi
Chapter 1
Locating a Study of Women's Textile Narratives 1
  Three Introductory Reflections on Textile Memories 1
  Rationale for Study 4
  Framing a Study of Textile Narratives 6
  Locating Women's Textile Narratives in Memory and History Discourse 15
Chapter 2
Literature Review 28
  The Historiography of Women 29
  Critical Approaches to Knowledge 33
  The Literary Link in Curriculum 49
Chapter 3
Methodology: Accessing Women's History Through Textile Narratives 54
  Utilizing Literary Methods 55
  The Interviews/Narratives 57
  The Analytical Framework of Material Culture 62
  Analysis of Narratives 64
Chapter 4
Articulating the Threads that Bind - Three Narratives 67
  Narrative 1: Artist and Educator Yvonne Wakabayashi 67
  Narrative 2: Coast Salish Weaver Debra Sparrow 76
  Narrative 3: Latvian Canadian Anna Samens 88
Chapter 5
Gathering Interdisciplinary Strands - Analysis of the Narratives 97
  Strands of Analysis 97
  The Articulation of Historical Memory in Three Narratives 109
  Strands of Comparison 152
## List of Figures

| Figure 4.1 | School photo of Ayame | 68 |
| Figure 4.2 | Yvonne Wakabayashi | 74 |
| Figure 4.3 | Selisya – detail | 79 |
| Figure 4.4 | Debra Sparrow 1986 | 81 |
| Figure 4.5 | Debra Sparrow and students | 84 |
| Figure 4.6 | Map of Latvia 2000 | 88 |
| Figure 4.7 | August and Anna Samens | 90 |
| Figure 4.8 | Samens family 1943 | 92 |
| Figure 5.1 | Suffrage handkerchief | 103 |
| Figure 5.2 | Quilt detail | 108 |
| Figure 5.3 | Detail of Ayame | 111 |
| Figure 5.4 | Mrs. Tasaka | 114 |
| Figure 5.5 | Yvonne in yellow dress | 116 |
| Figure 5.6 | Tribute to Koji | 123 |
| Figure 5.7 | Detail of tribute | 124 |
| Figure 5.8 | *Water’s Edge* textile | 126 |
| Figure 5.9 | Selisya | 132 |
| Figure 5.10 | Sparrow Sisters’ blankets | 138 |
| Figure 5.11 | Ali Sparrow | 141 |
| Figure 5.12 | Young Anna | 144 |
| Figure 5.13 | Samens factory | 146 |
| Figure 5.14 | Samens ski outing | 147 |
| Figure 5.15 | Samens storefront | 148 |
| Figure 5.16 | Glenbow exhibit | 149 |
| Figure 5.17 | Ilga Samens | 151 |
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CHAPTER ONE

Locating a Study of Women’s Textile Narratives

We weave narratives like cloth, creating multi-patterned garments that we inhabit as memory.
-Cavanaugh and Warne, Telling Tales

Three Introductory Reflections on Textile Memories

A Tweed Suit

In the urban classroom of the mid sixties, a substitute teacher arrived to take over, for several months, the Social Studies classroom of an ailing war veteran. At a time of fervent fashion consciousness for an adolescent girl, the mature teacher had a commanding presence but was decidedly unfashionable. She sported a finely crafted suit from the late forties, nearly twenty years out of date, which she proceeded to wear every day with only slight variation. As a student of textiles, I was fascinated with its beautifully designed and executed details in green tweed; piped seams, topstitched flaps, flared peplum and double back pleat. I mused on her background – had some calamitous situation forced her, on the brink of impoverishment, back into the classroom?

My memory of the suit is unreliable; sometimes it is green, other times rust with knife pleats all around. I do know it held my attention as the teacher strode about in its dated forties glamour drawing me in to a history that started to come alive in her hands. Before and after her tenure, I experienced instruction by both men and women that varied markedly in skill but was not memorable as hers proved to be. On the substitute’s arrival, our textbooks were open in readiness to underline the already underlined passages, our usual way to pass the hour. Instead the textbook was relegated to out of class reading in favour of an intellect-stimulating lecture devised by the nameless tweed-clad teacher.
Forty years hence, in a continuing contemplation of textiles I have come to view the tweed suit as a metaphor for women’s history, a field that did not then exist notwithstanding the apparent ability of a woman teacher to articulate traditional history. Under the guise of masculine verging on military styling, the forties suit granted enough authority to its bearer to gain entry to the hierarchy of history, but marginally. The suit was other than the norm, neither the male standard nor the valued female dress of conformity, yet demanding of attention. The alluring tweed suit in actuality clothed an everyday story of a woman’s life. She too was other than expected; women teaching senior history, albeit the classic prescribed variety, were rare role models. The tweed suit, as a textile, had entered the curriculum by covert means. Its story, like that of the woman teacher remained untold.

A Quilt

In the following musing on my family’s quilt, my thinking on the nature of objects and memory is informed by a reading of Kavanagh (2000) and Tilley (2001).

An object of memory comes to me by the hand of my great-great grandmother, Sarah Jane Palmer. As soon as the quilt was passed to my hands, I felt connected to the mother and daughters who worked together to create a work, both functional and artistic, likely around a farmhouse kitchen table in Embarrass, Wisconsin. I’ve scrutinized it for clues to the early lives of the women I knew much later, the daughters of Sarah Jane. Historically the textile would be of interest to many because it is part of a quilting tradition that can be dated roughly by the number of stars featured on its United States flag; it is perhaps c1870. But to me, it has always signified a thread to my pioneering forbearers, especially the women who included the youngest of the family born at the end of the Oregon Trail on the trek to Lund, B.C. She was my great-grandmother and a great quilter whom I knew well.

I think of Sarah Jane’s actions as she assembled the quilt. In the tradition of nineteenth century “crazy quilts” it is composed of many pieces of fabric, bits that most likely came from family garments, homely homespun to silk, evocative of momentous
family events or family routine. Only Sarah Jane would know the provenance of each piece, whether it came from her mother’s fine dress, her child’s first nightie or a scrap traded with a neighbour. As a document of her life composed of things, the quilt contains her memories, a way to create a permanent record of the lineage, significance and most probably her positive associations with the cloth fragments. In an inventive act to make the past tangible, she was creating a touchstone to memory and sought something attractive to attach it to. I imagine her releasing dormant memories with the sensory experience of moving her fingers over the surface of a quilt that is a testament to her existence. Her gift of cloth will go to one of five daughters.

I am intrigued by the notion that Sarah Jane knowingly gathered her girls and possibly young sons to learn stitches, make designs and forge a connection to the future. It is a richly visual and tactile object of memory; I can absorb the patterns and colours of their lives. Like Sarah Jane I can rub my hands over the textures and tiny stitches that they made for themselves and those individuals yet to come and intuit the connection.

A Handkerchief

As a student of history I had an image in mind whenever I thought of the suffrage struggle of women in Britain before WW1. It is a visual of a small feisty woman, protesting still, as she is unceremoniously carted away by a burly policeman. It is an almost comical picture as her feet dangle above the ground. At this juncture, as she is placed under arrest, she has little control over the situation.

Many years later on reading The Subversive Stitch, I came across a different image. While on a hunger strike within the walls of Halloway prison, a woman had made a record of her protest and experience in an embroidered handkerchief. It somehow saw the light of day, and from the recesses of a historical past, presented an alternate focus in her deliberate stitching. Within the bounds of extenuating circumstances, she was finding a way to make her voice heard. As students of history, or any other discipline, why hadn’t we heard from her before?
Rationale for Study

Missing in History

The three opening autobiographical vignettes of memory demonstrate the tasks involved in bringing women’s history into a shared spotlight. As traditional history is reconceptualized, stories that resonate with the inter-woven voices of women are valued and recouped. In this ongoing process, many facets of history now more fully reflect the lives of women beyond the ‘contributions made’ approach. Yet a fuller delineation of their historical experience that explores both their interior lives and varied identities is still needed. Current historiography, the scholarly research, analysis and presentation of authentic historical knowledge, would benefit from greater sourcing possibilities to augment narratives found in the written record. In the wider consideration of what is valued as history, different underutilized narratives can be heard that are currently missing. In this study I undertake to bring aspects of women’s history into sharper focus by examining the close historical relationship with textiles that has featured in the lives of many women. By engaging the manifestations of this relationship, the creative work or the associated stories of selected women, I will demonstrate that they are sources, together with the study of objects, which may provide more delineation of women’s lives in a historical frame.

Missing in Curriculum

In educational theory, Uhrmacher (1997) calls for reflection on what is privileged in a curriculum and what is disdained and forced to the shadows. Textile study falls into the shadows and is valued little outside the visual arts/art history/art education domain where its status is often ambivalent due to its associations with domesticity and craft. Yet textiles have a history of being associated with many other aspects of women’s lives, a relationship that is slowly being probed for the knowledge it may hold (Parker, 1984; Tickner, 1988; Ulrich, 2001; Welsh, 2000b). The correlation between women and textiles has the potential to reveal a kind of knowledge that should be part of a patchwork that illuminates women’s lives more fully in history and other humanities classrooms. The
problem, as Uhrmacher describes it, is that curriculum may privilege “a certain way of knowing and being”, casting other ways as well as topics that could augment the curriculum, to a shadowed position (p. 318). Too often, topics that relate to women or their connected histories are relegated to the shadows or are missing altogether.

**A Textile Study**

I present here an interdisciplinary study centred on textiles as a medium that engages women’s history and counters two marginalizations. The first is that women and their accomplishments outside the ‘women worthies’ are poorly delineated in mainstream history and second, textiles as a source of knowledge suffers a lowly status in academic study, including that of history, in part due to its gender associations. Exploring aspects of identity through the medium of textiles can detail not only a fuller picture of women’s lives for a reconceptualized history but can lend more credence to the analysis of textiles for knowledge. By searching out meaningful narratives of women that reflect history recorded in textile form, I engage this ‘history from the margins’ to revalue what is deemed of historical worth in a process that will help to close the gap that exists in our understanding of women’s historical lives. Through an analysis of selected objects of memory accessed through narratives, I place women’s stories at the centre of the study to demonstrate the kinds of knowledge that can emerge and potentially be represented more fully in curricula.

**The Promise of Alternative Approaches to Curricula**

In my experience history is not inherently interesting to all students. This is reason enough for educators to examine the repertoire for new means of connection. The physicality of art and artifacts from our past engages a dimension of understanding beyond the usual in historical study. Textiles, I believe, hold the possibility to engage students, and perhaps additional students, in a unique way. In the following pages I outline a framework to use textiles as an agent in the ongoing process of reinterpreting women’s history. I begin with the theoretical approaches to framing such a study.
Framing a Study of Textile Narratives

Terms Defined

Textiles

The term textile is variously understood as “an array of artefacts ranging from yarns to finished goods” to being the “largest group of designed objects” that encompasses fashion, interiors and industrial production (Schoeser & Boydell, 2002, p. 1). By convention textiles is as collective singular noun that in unrestricted contemporary practice may include knitting with wire or studying an impression made by fibre in clay centuries ago (K. Grauer, CUST 565B notes, University of British Columbia, May 9, 2002). Textile art conjures a work, like visual art, that goes beyond practical applications to not only engage the senses but the intellect. This is not to say that functional textiles or those designated as craft may not hold meaning beyond their aesthetic characteristics. In this study I use textiles to denote fibre works that may be utilitarian or conceptual or both and relationship to suggest its connection, affinity and importance in the historical experience of women.

Identity

I use identity to name the cohering ability of common experience, status or physical existence that is the result of such commonalities as class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, occupation or familial experience (Cobley, 2001) that construct a sense of self in individual identity and as a member of a collective.

Narratives

The narrative has a history of maintaining identity informally since early oral cultures by recalling identity and embodying facts or events in stories of human action in a re-presentation of events (Cobley 2001, Glossary). I also employ McEwan and Egan’s (1995) characterization of narrative as “a way of knowing and a way of organizing and communicating” that they remark is under-appreciated (p. xii). These characteristics of narrative, the act of re-presenting, make it useful for exploring the stories constructed by and associated with women that may fall outside formal social records that in my study will entail a purposeful melding of the under-appreciated.
Historical Memory

I use this term to indicate how history was *experienced*, not just the past as it has subsequently been used (Hutton, 1993) and how it is individually and collectively *remembered* that appears in the form of historical narrative (Crane, 1997).

Parameters and Perspective

I am intrigued with the textile arts not only for their visual, tactile and connotative qualities but also for the human stories they possess. My abiding interest in the historical, cultural and studio dimensions of textiles is grounded by the disciplines of history and visual arts and fuelled by the *frisson* of engagement that an affinity for textiles can offer. I bring to this research my experience as a teacher of humanities in traditional and cross-disciplinary settings. My experience as a university college and secondary school teacher informs a longstanding interest in women's history. Perhaps because of my own learning experiences as a teacher and student in interfacing disciplines that have included history, literature, visual and applied arts, textile history and design, fashion theory, education and women’s studies over many years, the interdisciplinary lens fits comfortably. It prompts me to consider the possibilities of textiles to cross traditional discipline boundaries and illuminate different stories. These can help to secure and furnish women’s history in a well appointed ‘room of its own’.

I restrict my focus to Western history and background my study with examples that include those chosen geographically and historically from the Western Canadian provinces within a time frame of approximately one hundred years. As well, I apply a lens influenced by feminism’s focus on the ‘everyday’ lives of women; they may be remarkable but I do not restrict my study to a focus on an exceptional few.

Further, I am partial to more traditional textiles and many related arts practiced in the last century. As a genre, I have explored its history and participated in its creative possibilities both as a student and teacher. It is this lens of personal preferences and background that determines my approach to the narratives.

Situating Studies in Textiles

Textiles emerged as a new focus in the 1970s as part of the study of objects of ‘low aesthetic value’ in the newly delineated study of *material culture* (Schoeser &
Boydell, 2002) and as a vehicle to voice women’s solidarity as a new wave of feminism looked to the old collaborative days around a quilting table as a model. Early interdisciplinary approaches of the 1980s coined the term textile studies in Great Britain, a term I use to denote the subsequent theories promoted from these beginnings that borrow ideas across discipline boundaries. The status of textiles as scholarly study is still emerging while its ‘social capital’ in most contexts is minimal. In situating a study of women’s stories vis a vis textiles, I am cognizant of the role of a Euro-American heritage and of gender in determining its subaltern status. Textiles geographically located in Canada bear a heritage transferred through the culture of colonizers whose decorative and applied arts, whether by the artistry of men or women, were devalued in the ascendancy of ‘the fine arts’. It is women’s association with textiles as a cheaper source of labour in its production, and as needle workers against a backdrop of domesticity over the last hundred years that has served to determine a lesser ranking generally for cloth among objects that bear meaning.

In spite of the devaluing of textiles as a meaningful activity over time, in contemporary practice of textile arts and scholarly research, it has become the organizing hub for meaningful endeavour for women and men. Feminist art history, thirty years from the outset, has put women in the picture beyond their earlier roles as objectified models and muses. Their work [that incorporates textile art] is now positioned in relation to politics, ideology and social context (Carson, 2000). The boundaries of feminist art theory have expanded to include psychoanalytic, anthropological, postcolonial perspectives and queer studies (Jefferies, 2000a) reflecting more porous boundaries and scope for all those who use textiles for contemporary expression.

In this conceptual fervour, textiles have come to be considered as sites offering a means to “move through multi-layered interpretations” of our past and present identities (Jefferies, 2001, p. 5) and as a medium through which to explore issues. Robert Windrun utilizes the 19th century feminization of embroidery to explore homosexual identity in fibre to explore the social construction of gender (Bachmann & Scheuing, 1998; R. Metcalf, 1998). Barbara Todd quilts atomic weapons onto a child’s ‘security blanket’ as a response and commentary on the Cold War (Grenville, 1998). Paul Sharrad (2004) references postcolonial discourse to analyze the complex Kashmir shawl as a ‘map’ that
signifies conquest, exchanges of power and status as a prized art form (Sharrad, 2004). In my study, I draw on this current engagement with textiles that gathers imbued meanings to focus on those works associated with women that interface with the past. My particular interest is in how women negotiate their historical lives. To this end, I pursue meanings that are apparent or imbedded in their stories and the fabrics of their lives.

A focus on women

In this enquiry, I focus on the stories of women. As I elaborate in the Literature Review (chapter 2), I consider that many women have had a close connection to textiles that is based not on an essentialized ability but on a bond that has developed by circumstance and conditioning. However the attachment has evolved, I propose it holds stories of women’s lives in instances where the relationship is particularly rich. In recent decades scholarly attention has probed women’s close association with textiles in an historical frame. In the history of New England, Ulrich (2001) links textiles solidly to the creation of female property. Women forged relationships with textiles not only as owners, she holds, but also through their 18th century labour. In a modern context, textiles are associated with women not only for traditional feminine handiwork, but as the major labour source for the global textile industry since the invention of the sewing machine. Although labour in a mass production sense is not my focus, one of its issues serves to clarify my approach. Joan Scott (1990) warns of naturalized gender attributes associated with particular labour, that fixes categories of difference; this I would like to avoid. As Parker (1984) articulated in her history of embroidery, the definitions of sexual difference and the definitions of art and artist that were weighted against women are not fixed [my italics]. “They have shifted over the centuries”, she concluded, “and they can be transformed in the future” (p. 215). In focussing on women and the multiple ways they may have expressed themselves or established a subculture, I do not suggest an exclusive ability for women to express themselves in fibre.

To recover history on which to base innovative curricula, I consider postmodern approaches that proffer alternatives to ‘received’ history that was often not only stultifying but failed women by perpetuating a hierarchy that ignored them. Key among the approaches is feminist theory that plays an essential role in the re-conceptualization
of women, their history and its presentation in educational practice. Two questions pervade contemporary feminism and relate to women as they search out their history. How did we get here (Tickner, 1988)? Secondly, which voice speaks for us? Recent feminist tracts (Cavanaugh & Warne, 2000; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Goldberger, 1996; Grumet, 1990) advance that this ‘voice’ is a multi-vocal one. These are the voices missing from curricula in their full measure.

The Approaches to Re-interpretation

Recouping Voices of Women through Narrative

Those of us who listened to a deep baritone voice intoning the ‘news of the day’ as the noteworthy activities of male leaders were depicted in black and white on movie and classroom screens, might well have assumed that the voice of history bore a masculine identity. Inferred, was that the activities presented were of greater value than those of the silent onlookers. Since those limiting days of the 1950’s, history as a field has begun to embrace the diversity of class, race, sexuality and gender through new sources and methods. Strong-Boag (1990) comments on the gradual inclusion of women in history as the feminists asked where “…were girls and women in books and articles, courses, faculty and even, sometimes in the population?” (p. 177). Many current approaches to historical understanding emphasize a re-valuing or reconceptualization of what is deemed worthy of study. I outline here particular knowledge bases or approaches that hold promise to recoup voices of women.

To teach women’s history in particular, the still emerging voices can be heard and experienced meaningfully through narrative sources including autobiography and oral history, the latter ‘becoming respectable’ in the profession (Donald, 2000). To date it is largely through these means, engaged by feminist researchers and brought to our classrooms, that we hear the stories that are still needed to flesh out the historical realities of women’s lives. To locate a study of women’s textile narratives in history I refer to the presentation of women’s history to the present and the theoretical bases currently in use for reconceptualization. To frame the questions I ask in this study, I consider the approaches briefly.
Utilizing Feminist Approaches to History

The influential feminist theorists who have considered how to approach the women’s history project are detailed in the Literature Review (chapter 2). I summarize here three structural approaches that evolved from those theories that I incorporate in my approach. The impetus to re-conceive a history of women in a Western context was to correct the picture that found women not only missing or portrayed questionably, but devalued for participating in activities dominated by women (Boxer 1998). Initially, the ‘heroic’ women who ‘counted’ were deemed historically significant by the standards made by and appropriate to men (A. Gallagher, Lubelska & Ryan 2001). Early in the reconceptualization movement, feminist historians remarked that women could not be added into history as mere footnotes; the structure itself that inherently valued male activities needed to be changed (Scott, 1988b). In reviewing feminist literature on the redesign for a more equitable framework of history, it is the oft-maligned narrative methods such as oral testimony and personal accounts that emerge as frequent providers of the best clues to women’s lived experience (Gallagher, 2001). This I pursue as a pathway to further delineate women’s historical lives.

Secondly the feminist embrace of interdisciplinary methods to glean details of everyday life that can create ‘her-story’ is significant for my study. It is in keeping with movement in more mainstream history that sees women, minorities and ‘the everyday’, belatedly, accorded historical worth (Cowan & Finlay, 2002). A multidisciplinary approach responds to a quest for a ‘history of the present’, as framed by Foucault, that traces processes and how they came to shape or influence the present; this helps to answer the question of how we as women developed historically (Tickner, 1988). Finally, feminist strategy according to Scott (1990) must insist continually on multiple differences in individual and collective identities that are recognized and included in order to demonstrate equality. The voices I wish to recover, consequently, will have multiple and diverse chords. For this replenishment of history to incorporate the voice of women in its quotidian as well as exceptional forms, textiles is ably situated.
Recognizing Difference and Women as ‘Other’

Reinterpretations of history must consider how difference has been constructed for women, particularly marginalized women. Scott’s (1990) vision repudiates the binary oppositions of a universal male versus an essentialized female in a feminist analysis that favours individual and collective diversity. Scott alludes to one opposition that pervades textile and women’s history that can be used as an organizing concept. She utilizes the concept of ‘the other’ where the feminine serves as the negative counterpoint to the masculine, but her focus is on culture not biological difference (p. 143). [I consider notions of the ‘other’ more fully in chapter 5.] This concept of a culture or subculture is useful in considering the fibre handwork, whether domestic or public, that is associated with the feminine and has suffered in comparison to male intellectual endeavour. This I view as a site for change and educational possibility. It allows for the study of women’s production, not as a segregated enclave, but as a cultural expression in varying contexts that can ultimately evolve beyond gender lines as it hears marginalized voices, that in the telling of stories, becomes less so.

A Postcolonial Approach

Not surprisingly, aboriginal scholars (Battiste, 2000; Bird, 1989; J. Y. Henderson, 2000; L. T. Smith, 1999; Taiaiake, 2003) resist many concepts of Western history as it has been known and represented in textbooks. These include the totalizing discourse of development that selects what counts as knowledge. It advances one coherent narrative or binary categories that suggest ‘discovery’ and literacy as an antidote to ‘prehistory’ (Smith). Notions of patriarchy similarly excluded aboriginal women absent from sites of power as Contact history was recorded. There is a need in the history of indigenous women to re-do the ‘travellers’ stories’, the earlier impressions of many European hobbyist researchers and adventurers who recounted tales of ‘the other’ to an audience back home (Smith). Not only did these impressions shape those of the colonizers but, significantly, were constructed around the role of women in European society with their own views of gender, sexuality and primitivism that became “fixed in the milieu of cultural ideas” (p. 8). Missing from historiography are sufficient positive and detailed images and voices of aboriginal women.
Cultural Theory

The approach of cultural theory, specifically that of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is worth considering here as part of the theoretical frame to visualize women's history despite scholarly criticism of his "remarkable lack of engagement" with feminism (Lovell, 2000, note 1, p. 44). Nevertheless, his provocative insights into the relationship of power and culture in society relate to the assignment of power within gender and history. In Bourdieu's Marxian analysis of class, the privilege of heredity and economic capital beget a social commodity he calls 'cultural capital' that goes beyond aptitude to play a role in the success of individuals (Bourdieu, 1961; Fowler, 1997); a cultured speaking voice, a respected family ancestry, a knowledge of great paintings can all be embodied with inherent value for the individual. Within feminist theory and consequently women's history, how cultural capital and with it, power, is acquired is an important facet of re-conceiving a history where the status of women and the status of textiles are inter-related.

The three vignettes with which I began this chapter manifest aspects of women's history that could be accessed through textiles. The tasks they illustrate are: the analysis of the inherent meaning in textiles (the ability of literary references such as the suit metaphor to facilitate explanation), the interpretation of objectifications of memory (such as the quilt for what it can tell us of its makers and its legacy of meaning) and lastly the re-interpretation of history based on new perspectives or objects as evidenced by the 'new' deliberate acts of performance.

This is knowledge that contributes to a reconceptualization of history that, I will demonstrate, can be part of an educational conversation that incorporates a history of women wherever the opportunity arises. I believe many textiles are meaning-laden objects that are under-appreciated and under-utilized in the teaching of history. Some have felt knowledge derived from experience with textiles is devalued in a scientific world (Hardy, 1994). In considering the knowledge that emerges from the narratives of selected women, my goals are twofold. I demonstrate the value of the textile connection to provide historical insights in the study of identities and I engage in a process that continues to elevate the status of textile studies. Further, following an exploration of
textile narratives in these pages, three in depth, I analyze how the emergent knowledge might unfold its pedagogical worth.

_The literary Link_

The approaches detailed above provide a conceptual ground and literary means to explore textile narratives. As a way to 'hear' the historical memory in the narratives, I draw on the methods of literature where the interior lives of women were first meaningfully explored. Literary works are thought to “exemplify the working of memory and serve as objects of cultural memory” (Neubauer & Geyer-Ryan, 2000, p. 12). Inasmuch as textiles may also tell their own stories or have narratives that are linked to them, I draw on literary analysis to apprehend their meanings and interpret expressions of memory. Other than their 'print' associations or textual meanings, textiles are decoded visually for their iconographical meaning and their haptic qualities perceived through the sense of touch (These and the literary devices, I engage in the analyses in chapter 5). By applying these combined methods in a study of textiles and their stories, we may more fully engage the fabric of women's history. As well as the literary origins of 'voice' and agency referred to below in relation to memory, the utility of the device of metaphor as an explanatory tool employed in the analysis of the narratives is explored briefly here.

_Metaphor_

To demonstrate the powerful possibilities of metaphor to express women's relationships to textiles as it has done in literature, I provide one example that has stayed with me since I met Judy Reimer at a Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation event in the mid 1990s. Reimer conceived a collaborative quilt project initially as a legacy for her young children. She used a visual metaphor of a forest cut down in its prime, and a re-seeded one, not only to articulate her struggle with breast cancer but also to indicate hope and voice a spiritual rebirth. The _Life Quilt for Breast Cancer_ (Todkill, 1999) grew to international stature and became a travelling fundraising exhibition incorporating the stitching of 20,000 participants. Clearly not confined to women, thousands of men have also embraced the metaphorical comforting qualities and used quilts to memorialize their
loved ones in *The Names Project* in response to the devastation of AIDS (Sturken, 1999). The well developed study of quilts has initiated the thoughtful examination of meaning behind contemporary textiles. These examples reveal everyday stories and complex metaphors—some small-sized comforts and others purposefully public such as these created on behalf of breast cancer and AIDS constituents—that have taken health issues once rarely spoken of and created public and political memorials through the power of metaphor.

Perhaps no other fibre medium has spoken quite so thoroughly for women since the 1970’s as quilting. The notion of ‘piecing’ a quilt was analogous to piecing a life; the quilt seemed to offer an opportunity to create order in a woman’s life where it was lacking (Bower, 1994). Feminist Lucy Lippard called it “the prime visual metaphor” for women’s lives, a comment some now see as universalizing (Jefferies, 1998, p. 109). Because the role of quilting in women’s expression has been extensively analyzed since its adoption by the women’s movement in the 1970s (Hedges & Wendt, 1980; Torsney & Elsley, 1994), I focus my study elsewhere, but the quilting metaphor remains a touchstone in discussions where women’s lives and textiles intersect and is part of my analysis (chapter 5) where I consider the metaphors that emerge from my research. Such constructions of identity that articulate voice and agency are imbedded in the textiles of women. They are manifested as narratives; each one is mediated by memory.

Locating Women’s Textile Narratives in Memory and History Discourse

*Women and the Literary Link*

In the form of letters, novels, diaries and memoirs the literary canon is rife with works that memorialize, commemorate and otherwise commit to memory. That women of the past excluded from the practice, engaged history by borrowing from another discipline, that of literature, to record it provides an avenue to consider other creative ways that women express their stories. There is a link between this narrative voice of literature, with abundant acts of memory, and the story function of many textiles that I believe holds promise for educational conversation. In this section I survey the historical background to *memory* as a study and appraise its suitability as a conceptual framework.
to ground a particular approach to women’s history, one that negotiates identities. I present a pathway to engage the threads of narrative, identity and women’s history imbedded in textiles. The threads are pursued through the discourses of memory, the interplay of gender in expressions of culture and history and in chapter 4 through selected narratives of women who engage historical memory through their close relationship with textiles. I access historical and contemporary examples of art, craft and objects to hear the voices of women that emerge from the narratives via interviews, the material objects of production and the textiles themselves.

Memory and History

The History of Memory

In choosing memory to adhere the threads for a study relating to women’s history requires an outline of how memory study has developed in social and cultural studies and how it is currently practiced. Memory itself has a history. I outline here the aspects of memory study that explicitly relate to my inquiry. The relationship of memory to history, sometimes deemed oppositional, is now widely understood as a site where subjective questions of how gender, culture and identity are constructed intersect (Hutton, 1993; Melman, 1993). The concept of memory once seen as strictly involuntary or what could be seen or heard, now encompasses the performative, representative and interpretative (Lourie, Stanton, & Vicinus, 1987; Sturken, 1999). Hence in selecting memory to gather my threads I embrace the framework of memory that provides innovative ways to explore the neglected topics of history.

My exploration of women’s narratives via memory is in step with contemporary historical research. A pursuit of acts of memory in their textile form benefits from the considerable scholarly attention focussed on the study of memory in the humanities, particularly in the domain of history (especially social history) and most recently in cultural studies. Lerner (1997) defines history as the purposeful shaping of the past so as to create meaning. In this constructed process where creating knowledge of women’s history is creating meaning, the role of memory is pivotal.
As a conceptual frame, the discourse of memory reflects the scholarly discussion that has evolved around it. The ‘memory industry’ as it has been termed, now runs a gamut that includes museum studies, battles over repressed memory, therapeutic processes as well as a fascination bordering on obsession with historical memory (Davis & Starn, 1989; Klein, 2000). Absorbing debates that focus discussion on memory and history include German and Japanese war guilt, the Holocaust and Japanese internment (Davis & Starn). The contested direction of memorials for the young women victims who died at the Montreal Polytechnic in 1989 or of the September 11, 2001 attack are other such deliberations. In addition to initiating vigorous public debate, scholarly assessment of memory has become a burgeoning and contested field. I explore it here (and in the review of literature in chapter 2) to identify conceptual elements that frame my study.

The History of Collective Memory

The theoretical framework currently used to consider the role of memory in history rests on the thought of French philosophers active in the 1970s. Theirs was a delayed response to work of their forbearers who, steeped in nineteenth century revolution, reacted to the realities of change with newfound awareness of commemoration (Hutton, 1993). Foreshadowing later psychological and neurological research on the multiple functions of memory in the brain, Henri Bergson, in a work published in Paris in 1896, advanced the concept of memory as an active recalling and remembering of the past that occurs in “the living, active present” (Crane, 1997, p. 1373). It is the whiff of agency, key to imparting identity, which suggests an element useful in conceptualizing further memory studies and how it might relate to women’s history. As “an articulation of identity from the vantage of the present”, (Starn, 1999, p. 192) with its continuing sense of the past (Crane, 1997), collective memory study is most often associated with sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). Arguing in print in Paris in 1925 against Bergson (and Freud) Halbwachs declared memory a social creation outside psychological and psychoanalytical frames (Klein, 2000) and professed it to be forged by a collective consciousness based on pre-existing social identity (Megill, 1998). As a counterpoint to his view, cultural preservationists in keeping with nineteenth century historicism, sought to express group identity in collective memory through a unitary
vision that yearned to capture as much lost, lived reality as possible (Crane). This attempt to capture the ‘totality’ of history by saving anything and everything is long out of favour; it prompted Halbwachs to lament at the time that history would become a “crowded cemetery, where room must constantly be made for new tombstones” (Crane, p. 1373). Rather, implying a selection process, Halbwachs saw memory as a way to organize representations of the past that over time forged identity, a concept I return to in the analysis of the narratives (chapter 5).

To further background memory study and seek useful conceptual features for my inquiry requires an elaboration of the role of Pierre Nora, closely associated with memory. A French publisher in the 1970’s, Nora built on the ‘antihistorical’ concept of collective memory by repudiating preservationists and initiating an extensive project to conserve only that deemed truly meaningful in the culturally unique collective memory of France (Crane, 1997; Megill, 1998). Nora saw a disembodied nation in need of genuine connection with the past; this could be forged through deliberate and self-conscious engagement with sites of memory that have symbolic and unifying power (Crane, 1997; Wood, 1999b). Nora is of interest in conceptualizing an approach to memory and women’s history due to his unprecedented success in articulating collective memory and his valuing of non-traditional sources such as folk wisdom that opens the door to alternative memory-laden vehicles such as cloth.

Additionally, it can be argued that institutions of learning are “the major site for the construction of collective memory in contemporary society” (Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000, p. 2), more reason to weigh thoughtfully the varied scholarly attention devoted to the topic in order to make considered educational choices.

**Individual Memory**

Collective memory with its problematic singular view of historical events is ‘out of favour’ in the discipline of history in favour of individual memory with its current rich yield in studies such as material culture (J. Barman, EDST 500 notes, University of British Columbia, October 10, 2002). In memory history, Halbwachs’ individual memory was built on the subconscious, family experience and the social milieux of collective
vision that yearned to capture as much lost, lived reality as possible (Crane). This attempt to capture the ‘totality’ of history by saving anything and everything is long out of favour; it prompted Halbwachs to lament at the time that history would become a “crowded cemetery, where room must constantly be made for new tombstones” (Crane, p. 1373). Rather, implying a selection process, Halbwachs saw memory as a way to organize representations of the past that over time forged identity, a concept I return to in the analysis of the narratives (chapter 5).

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memory (Wood, 1999a). In classic Aristotelian terms, individual memory initiated in the private realm is a faculty, an involuntary or deliberate recollection, whereas collective memory is seen as a practice that constructs the past (Starn, 1999). Yet as individuals it is apparent we construct the past, as we would like it to be remembered, every time we throw away unpleasing photographs. It is evident that no matter what form individual memory takes, private or public, it acts as a self-portrait that simultaneously conveys group history and identity (Hirsch & Smith, 2002). That memory, collective or individual, is socially mediated is a cornerstone of the conceptualization of memory as a discourse and relevant to how we view women constructing their historical lives.

Contemporary Approaches to Collective Memory

That memory discourse initiates divergent views is evident in Michel Foucault’s coined term ‘counter-memory’ that designates the ‘resistant strains’ of memory that do not fit with official versions; this provides the theoretical base for reconceptualized history that considers marginalized people [and their commodities] to be worthy of historical study (Davis & Starn, 1989). Social history as an alternate to the political, studies of everyday life, non-Western foci, global rather than national histories and women’s histories have proliferated in this divergence. Counter-memory, although considered a redundant term by some historians (Klein, 2000), appears to be in full use in feminist circles in a challenge to collective memory (Davis & Starn, 1989; Lourie et al., 1987) where awareness of marginalization is acute.

A literary discourse can illustrate measures to counter women’s marginalization through a feminist challenge to collective memory that is still viewed as inequitable. German Democratic Republic novelist Christa Wolf has retold the myth of a ‘muted’ Cassandra placing her in the central active role as narrator, thus creating a kind of counter-memory that is not the ‘historical truth’ but is seen as a more valuable ‘narrative truth’ (Jansen, 2000) that confronts the issue of one ‘grand narrative’ of history, a pillar goal of reconceptualizing history. To give purchase to neglected voices, the path of memory study, as well trodden as it is, continues to spark academic interest and offers an effective tool to explore ‘the corners’ of history.
Memory as a Conceptual Framework

To employ memory as the conceptual framework for a study of women's narratives in textiles, I refer to topical issues briefly where concern has been articulated around memory and history in academe. That we are besotted with our past, is seen as a reaction to the insecurity and identity crisis that trauma and change has wrought (Klein, 2000; Megill, 1998; Starn, 1999). The consternation of some sociologists, historians and literary academics orbits the excess of memory activity that has appeared relatively suddenly with its attendant possibility of tainting research with seductive trends. Also at work may be anxiety in academic circles over disciplinary identity as boundaries loosen, a permeability that the feminist perspective views positively (Allen, 1991).

The inquiries that cross boundaries, despite academic qualms, involve multiple perspectives and sources that present the best opportunities to fully engage women's history. Although interpretive studies are challenged it is apparent that Ulrich (2001), for example, meets very high standards in her research on early American material culture that encompasses textiles, other artifacts and political, social and economic history. While noting that historical standards and the pitfalls of excess nostalgia may be counter productive or distorting, research around textiles aligned with memory study can pursue elements from the theory of collective memory. The construction of group identity, the questions of how we connect with the past, how we value objects and choose media to make the connections are all promising avenues to consider. One of the readily apparent discourses of collective memory that appears in textiles is the act of commemoration. The social change in orientation that has occurred is evident in the French example of Nora's sites of commemoration; the milieux concentrate public interest beyond monuments to re-valued traditions.

A focus on individual memory similarly discloses the vagaries and complexities of human stories that are integral to a humanities tradition that can enhance learning when a pat 'received' history is abandoned. It too must be continually viewed as constructed. Starn (1999) comments in reference to 'post-Cartesians' who seek 'authentic history' through standards of logical certainty that “human affairs are actually too complicated and uncertain... and too morally fraught besides to be treated like geometry or physical science” (p.197). The value of memory as an organizing hub for educational
exchange is that it facilitates interpretive study of expressions of identity through a characteristic that its popularity has not effaced, its resonance with the learner.

Memory and Narration in History

The Narrative Link

I return to the literary links of memory. Memory and narration are intertwined human desires that are conscious endeavours to engage the past (Lerner, 1997). Lerner finds the narrative impulse results in many acts of inadvertent history-making and remarks, “We live our lives; we tell our stories. It is as natural as breathing” (p. 199). The linkage of memory to narration in textiles is supported by historians who note that the linguistic meaning of the word history denotes not only the things that happened but also the narration of things that happened, thus combining the objective with the subjective (Klein, 2000). In an expansion of disciplinary boundaries in the 1980s scholars from literature, art and anthropology became active in cultural history. This interpretive study of culture and memory, initiated by literary analysis, retains the narrative link of its origins. It is the link that provides the starting point for the study of women’s narrative expressions of memory in textiles.

Each narrative of identity in or around cloth is an interpretation of history grounded in the narrator’s memory and culture as well as the subculture of women, a term used by Lerner (1997). Feminist scholars have endorsed narrative as a way of knowing, observe McEwan and Egan (1995) (attributing a totalizing phrase to these ‘scholars’) for its expression of “distinctively feminine values that form connections rather than make divisions, and work collaboratively rather than in hierarchically ordered systems…” (Introduction). Each act of narration creates agency, the valued constituent sought in women’s history. In feminist analysis, when women enact narratives “we apprehend ourselves as agents”; we embody our stories in narrative in order to make sense of them (Hartman & Messer-Davidow, 1991, p. 12) as we constitute identity.

Memory and Identity

The concepts of memory and identity are now typically “yoked together” (Klein, 2000, p. 143). The motivation to compose identity and preserve it as personal expression
in its objectified concrete form is a powerful one pursued in many art forms including fibre media. Social environment, as Klein indicates, clearly shapes what and how we remember. Although there may be community input and implied context in the production of art-oriented textiles, it is the individual grappling with what signifies remembrance and her relationship to that memory that directs my focus. It is through such historical awareness, Lerner (1997) finds, that memory imparts agency to sustain individual identity. At its most basic this is a self-preservation impulse or ‘remember me’ urge or an act to remember others.

The use of textiles to sustain individual identity in a Western context can be demonstrated through historical examples from World War I that sought to preserve the soldiers’ lives in wartime or to preserve their memory if they perished. A textile chit, a label sewn into soldiers’ uniforms identified them and offered a reward for their safe return serving as a literal life saver (Rivers, 2003). Other textiles executed almost exclusively by women exemplify the search for a place in passing history to sustain the memory of the collective or individual soldier. Mary Card (1861-1940) a very successful crochet designer and businesswoman, published a pattern to commemorate the ANZACS (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) killed and wounded at Gallipoli, Turkey on April 25, 1915 (Ballantyne, 2001). To follow the pattern was to commemorate a catastrophic nation-shaping event and likely served a therapeutic role signifying a collective remembering of identity for the future. Another textile illustrates the desire to preserve an individual’s existence in history. An embroidered photographic ‘shrine’ to a dead British soldier, George Young, invests narrative and memory in a material form through therapeutic stitches (Edwards, 1999). Helpless in the face of war’s toll, there is agency in the act of the embroiderer to commemorate and give significance to the relationship that was. Lerner (1997) explains the role of agency in the face of history that is reflected in these textile acts; we give meaning to things that have happened in the past, choose what to emphasize and what to leave out and define how we represent ourselves.

In addition to wanting to leave a personal mark on the world, the creation of memory satisfies a fundamental human need to locate each life as a link between generations past and future. It is this connection that nourishes personal identity. “By tracing one’s personal roots and grounding one’s identity in some collectivity with a
shared past—be that collectivity defined by race, sex, class, ethnicity, religion or nationality—one acquires stability and the basis for community” (Lerner, 1997, p. 118). This fundamental connection can be embodied in material culture in many forms including selected textiles. When the memory is attached to a material form, it allows for ‘authorial ordering’ in a purposeful arrangement essential to the evocation and construction of memory (Edwards, 1999 citing Glenn Willumson, p. 231). In a focus on how women remember and construct memory I take into account the vital role of gender in shaping a sense of self.

Memory and Women

Mythical Origins

Historically, the phenomenon of memory was closely associated with women from its inception. In terms of feminist deconstruction, the effacement of the association of memory with a once powerful goddess, Mnemosyne, is indicative of the loss of power experienced by women as discipline studies developed over the centuries. Mnemosyne was replaced and “dis-membered by philosophy, rhetoric, the arts and sciences controlled by men” (Lourie et al., 1987, p. 3). The women’s studies enterprise, adopting Foucault’s ‘counter-memory’, is constructed to correct this imbalance as visualized by Julia Kristeva to transform repressive paternalism (Lourie et al.). From this tall order, a core goal emerges for inquiry, to recreate memory that is gender equitable both in its representation and the distribution of power to preserve it.

Gender and Memory

In historical contexts, it is clear women remember differently and that their remembrances are socially constructed. As well, separate spheres for women determined the physical locations that shaped memory and experience that excluded ‘historical spaces’ such as court rooms and battle fields (Melman, 1993). Although some women successfully put acts of memory in the public domain in literary form circumventing exclusions, others memorialized in cloth. Aside from liturgical goods, these expressions were largely in the private realm. Hence, difference as it is understood in feminist discourse does impact memory in historical settings; one mediated by circumstance.
Clearly many women had ample opportunity to bond with, express identity through and communicate with others through textiles in myriad ways.

The question remains; is memory gendered? Psychologists who tackled the question of gender difference in memory scientifically in 1986 identified differences that were ‘unexplainable’ (Loftus, Banaji, Schooler, & Foster, 1987). Gendered social conditioning was apparently inseparable from skill. There is no mention of notable examples of exception. Recent feminist literary analyses of gender and memory (Hirsch & Smith, 2002; Jansen, 2000) support the ‘nurtured’ view claiming the technologies of memory are gendered. That is, ‘the frames of interpretation’ and ‘the acts of transfer’ [to literary or art form for example] in the memory process are based on cultural models, experience and identity markers that are coded by gender (Hirsch & Smith). Women are, in this analysis, ‘the storekeepers of memory’ not due to innate qualities but due to generations of caring for and nurturing others that defines women as a separate ‘remembrance community’ based more on culture than biology (Jansen). Jansen cites the research of Richard Ely and Alyssa McCabe that finds women recall the past more vividly and in greater detail and have superior recall ability for dialogue and speech. The differences in innate memory skill appear unresolved. My reasoned working premise is that social conditioning has rendered many women adept at remembering through a variety of media or stimuli including cloth. It may well be different in the future.

Mnemonic Devices

That textiles function as mnemonic devices is largely overlooked by conventional historical study. Traditionally, historians refer to mnemonic devices such as commemorative monuments, statues and gardens as concrete aids to memory (Hutton, 1993). Prominent in our culture is the use of mnemonic techniques such as autobiography and psychoanalysis (Hutton, 1993) as well as photography. Although, historians prefer documents to artifacts in their field (Lubar & Kingery, 1993), changing communication methods in the ‘print culture’ envisioned by Marshall McLuhan challenge the ‘official memories’ and methods of the past (Hutton). Looking back, the medieval art of memory did not distinguish between writing as a mnemonic aid and any other mark recorded on a surface, a concept eroded over time. Now, be it “alphabet, hieroglyph, ideogram,
American Indian picture-writing, or Inca knot-writing”, all are considered symbolic representations that trigger memory (Starn, 1999) that have historical value to communicate. Just as the oral mnemonic rhyme chanted to remember weaving patterns centuries ago can yield historical insights, so too can mnemonic textiles.

The use of mnemonic terminology for textiles suggests a tactile and/or visual object of memory as a site of remembrance. Mnemonic textiles remember a loved one, tradition, event and the creator’s relation to any or all of these. As Klein (2000) puts it, “...memory serves as a critical site for the generation and inflection of affective bonds” in an essentially mystic activity (p. 130). As noted, women have not had sole prerogative expressing affective bonds in textiles in the past century, but there is a vast array of textiles, much of it personal and domestic that can explore the purposeful attempt to bond with the future and maintain attachments to the past that can tell us more about the women who made them.

**Memory and Material Culture**

Research in history beyond the political has been correlated to the impact of the study of gender history; the resultant surge of interest in material culture is due to the knowledge that can be gleaned through its methods (Donald, 2000). A concurrent discovery occurred during Ulrich’s (2001) innovative study of New England artifacts. Considerable new detail of women’s lives emerged. The historian demonstrates that a woman’s life left an historical imprint on her possessions. Textiles were key to her unravelling. Ulrich reads the textile as an historical source revealing nuances based on archival research and hunch that lend a greater intimate and resonant quality to lives we otherwise know little about. Augmented by an approach rooted in material culture, textiles or other objects can be appraised for their inherent stories and mined for narratives. That these stories will include elements beyond the domestic, is evidenced by Ulrich’s encompassing social, political, economic and cultural history in her accounts that have been gleaned from objects. Through material culture study, objects and stories are elevated to be worthy of such scrutiny. As a consequence, many of the stories that are revealed are those of women, whose stature as a ‘subject’ is similarly raised.
The physicality of art and artifacts from our past engages a dimension of understanding beyond the usual in historical study. If we understand with our senses before our minds when presented with objects (Schlereth, 1985), there is an opportunity to teach in a dimension that is not contained in the written word.

Women, History and the Conceptual Framework of Memory

In my appraisal, the conceptual frame provided by memory study is a most suitable foundation to support an exploration of women’s narratives in textiles. From an overview of memory history, it is evident that the selective process in acts of memory is performative; memory creation possesses the element of agency vital to legitimating identities. With its interpretive mandate, the pursuit of memory is an art as well as a thematic tool that can be used to witness how women, speaking in varied voices, have selected and organized their own pasts. Interdisciplinary approaches to pursuing history allow for many threads to be twined together. Memory provides a foundation that can encompass innovative ways to look at neglected topics. It allows for a gathering in of strands that may present themselves through creative art forms, stories or objects that generate an interpretive encounter with historical knowledge gleaned from collective and individual remembrance. In this encounter, authentic history cannot be reproduced but memory is witness against powerful institutions (Starn, 1999). This is important to how women in the three narratives on which I focus, negotiate encounters with authoritarian forces. Relating such negotiation is a challenge that fulfills a primary goal of women’s history, to continue to reorder the hierarchy until it is no longer exclusionary.

Questions

Pursuing a broader and more flexible approach through their disciplines, historians of art already attuned to visual sources, social historians and historians of gender and women’s history have ardently expanded source material to oral and visual sources (Donald, 2000). At the same time recent work in material culture has demonstrated that objects are not ‘mute’. I situate my study in the interdisciplinary approaches that draw on these disciplines and others to conceive of a shared human history that encompasses the stories of women.
A review of the conceptual grounding for memory and narrative reveals that the constructed story of the individual is acknowledged as the most effective medium to transmit cultural memory and reinstate forgotten stories (Hirsch & Smith, 2002). I advance the following questions which I pursue through individual women’s narratives:

**Have women used textiles to articulate historical memory? If so, in what ways do women’s relationships with textiles articulate historical memory?**

**How can these relationships be analyzed? What can be learned from these textile expressions? In what ways could this knowledge enhance the teaching of women’s history?**

Narratives reveal aspects of everyday life, perspectives of the marginalized and social values shaped by culture and gender that may have been hitherto ignored. Through these questions I will demonstrate the narrative function of textiles and their associated stories to explore a means to hear more women’s voices in history, multi-vocal voices from differing contexts. To position my study of women’s relationships with textiles and their pedagogical use beyond usual applications further, I outline key literature in the next chapter that relates to my research.
A collection like Our Story− permeated with pain, struck by joy and veined with personal experience − is not only about what historical events can mean to different people, but also about how the threads of this collective narrative make a cloth that is strong and beautiful.

−Her Excellency the Rt. Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General of Canada in Cardinal, Our Story

I don’t think you intend to be discouraging in your book. I think you have merely overlooked those who are routinely overlooked, that is to say half the world’s population.

−‘Rita Orange d’Ville’, Carol Shields, Unless

In this chapter, I review the literature that relates to my concept of using textiles as a source of knowledge to enrich the teaching of women’s history. The status of textiles as a field of study and the theories of knowledge that inform the teaching of history are identified here to outline the gaps that may exist in this relationship which I hope my study can address.

I begin with the sources that document the ways women have been excluded from being full participants in the practice of history, the problem in whose solution I want to participate. I proceed to notions of theory and practice in the discipline of history that conceive of methods of reconstituting women’s history.

Having chosen memory discourse as the conceptual framework to support my inquiry into its relation to identity as evidenced through textile narratives, I review the divergent historical and theoretical scholarly studies on memory to establish my placement within the approaches. To reference the objectification of memory that has caught the attention of scholars in cultural studies, I include writing on such projects as memorializing through quilts.
In choosing women as a focus, it is necessary to clarify my approach relative to the contested ground of feminist approaches to viewing women as a group. This I do by consulting the key theorists on difference as a structure in women’s history and women’s studies to determine a methodology to examine cultural products and constructions of memory that pertain specifically to women.

My approach to the education literature is to determine if there is theoretical support for my concept for the wider inclusion of textile related media in humanities classrooms and if using textiles in such a way in educational practice has been the subject of writing. As the narrative function in literature and textile construction emerges as the central focus that I wish to pursue, I survey the support for narrative as a source of knowledge and instruction in the considerable literature on this topic.

Within my reading on education and history, all roads lead to discussions of diversity. My selection of women whose narratives embody issues of conflict with the dominant society or with a historical force, necessitate some immersion in postcolonial literature and the history of specific historical events. These plus a reading of feminist oral history and interviewing approaches support my conversations with three women who share their narratives with me in this study.

From textile studies literature, I select books and articles to survey the scope, theory and practice of contemporary textiles as well as historical background to specific textile practices that feature in the narratives presented in detail in chapters 4 and 5. I conclude with literature that, I believe, supports the greater inclusion of textiles and the narratives of women in the teaching of women’s history.

Historiography of Women

The overall trend is for greater inclusion of women in the literature and media of history and education. Many writers comment on continued challenges to effecting this change.

The Exclusions of the Past

Recent historiographical writing points out that it was not that various peoples or art forms were not valued in their time, but that the positivist recording of history,
particularly in the nineteenth century, permeated histories and texts with a lasting legacy of exclusions. Billie Melman (1993) points to a history that like memory was characterized by its *presentism*; it was intended not merely to inform but to educate citizens and “apprentice them in the active service” of the nation-state (p. 9). This was a necessarily public functioning that excluded women. Historians Edward Cowan and Richard Finlay (2002) note that since the sustained post-modernist attack on empiricism, evolution in the field of history means it no longer vies for one objective truth; it has fundamentally changed to recognize many historical perspectives informed by ideological, gender, social and cultural influences. If, as they state, women, minorities, the oppressed and the everyday have belatedly been accorded historical worth, part of my endeavour should be to find if textiles are assuming the wider role in these histories that this entitlement brings.

**Women and Textiles**

Any investigation of women and textiles must take into account the status of textiles and its pervasive association with women and feminist tracts on this subject. If textile arts were de-valued in history subsequent to the practice where both men and women were valued as practicing artisans in European history, it seems likely that it is a result of the association of the needle and thread with women as ‘separate spheres’ emerged. Rozsika Parker’s (1989) *The Subversive Stitch* documents how this evolution took place in the practice of embroidery. It remains a touchstone work twenty years from its original publication date. Parker’s arch assessment that the feminine ability to do needlework was perceived almost as a secondary sexual characteristic continues to reverberate in academic textile study and is relevant in Canada and other areas that received British and European heritage. Her view, through an uncompromising feminist lens, of the relationship between women and the needle arts as an often negative shaping force of femininity, must be taken into account in any study in this field.

**Women as Historians**

Detailing the way in which women were ‘written out’ of history is relevant to considering how women and textiles may now be included in the canon. An Australian
scholar, Mary Spongberg (2002), details the ways that women excluded from the public sphere, were outside the realm of history while it was being recorded. But since the Renaissance, she notes, women have actively recorded history in unrecognized ways. Although, many have covered this ground, her emphasis on the agency of women and what they managed as ‘undercover’ historians is valuable. That women borrowed from another discipline, literature, to engage in history recording pertains to my research concept. The link between the narrative function of letters and diaries and the function of many textiles may provide one avenue for women to ‘write’ themselves back in.

Melman (1993) traces a “new kind of woman historian”, university educated under notions of citizenship that extended education to women, who proceeded to produce professional work that couldn’t be ignored (p. 19). An example of this is in the change to how indigenous women are viewed. It became apparent when anthropological sources such as Eileen Power’s writing came to light, that colonized and sequestered women who had experienced no access to the political world had in fact been ‘active’ throughout history. They “enjoyed degrees of freedom” (p. 30) that served to quell preconceptions. These observations influence how I now approach indigenous women’s history.

To locate women’s work in recording history in a Canadian context, women’s studies specialist Beverley Boutilier and professor of history Alison Prentice (1997) have documented the struggles of women to participate in the history profession in English Canada. Noting that it was rare to have a scholarly dissertation about women in the 1960’s, it is evident that fields so strongly associated with women, such as textiles, would not receive scholarly attention either. Only when women become historians in the public sphere, Boutilier and Prentice maintain, is the view that real history equals politics challenged, opening the door to a re-valuing of what is important to study and the introduction of interdisciplinary methods that welcome women and their history.

The Teaching of Women’s History

Gerda Lerner (1997), as a pioneer in the field of women's history is credited with teaching the first postwar college course in women's history in the United States. In Why history matters, Lerner explicates her goals for historical understanding by presenting her
major writing on the subject in one volume. She writes from her perspective on the front lines as a feminist historian and her understanding of difference shaped by her status as a Jewish refugee and woman scholar. As a Professor emerita in the 1990’s, Lerner proclaims women’s history to be a frontier of historical scholarship that warrants its own discourse. The historian rejects as arbitrary striation the categories of sex, race, class and ethnicity as ‘vertical boxes’ that can conceal features that overlap, preferring a more nuanced teaching that appreciates shared commonalities but notes all differences. In this she warns against a mantle of universality or an “imaginary norm” when studying women and their history (p. 147). Her work is an overview that speaks directly to the goals of teaching history and places the teaching of women’s history among its debates. As a background to my research approach, I value her wisdom. By remembering the past, Lerner advises, we shape our present and consequently the next generation. For my topic, it means young women could know their history and students as a whole could hear more humanizing stories.

The Feminist Reconceptualization

A British trio of feminist historians, Anne-Marie Gallagher, Cathy Lubelska and Louise Ryan (2001), as many others have, ably summarize the gendered history skewed to the ‘normative’ male. What I find useful in their collection is their admission that all views are perspectival including the feminist and that reparative, or to use their term re- visioning histories, need to include subjective approaches best interpreted by more than one discipline. This is a view supported by Canadian feminist educator Veronica Strong Boag (1990) who promotes an interdisciplinary approach to securing women’s history. She also suggests crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries to engage women’s history. Strong Boag takes early note of the advent of material culture studies that re-define historical sources to include quilts and cooking pots. This literature, with its focus on the development of historical writing that omitted women as historians and subjects, provides a functional rationale for the omission of textiles from mainstream history and a framework to consider the role that textiles can play in the reconceptualization of history, one that includes both women and the artifacts associated with them.
Much of the material that forms ‘new’ knowledge of women’s historical lives has been gleaned from the feminist oral history interview that values the quotidian dimension of everyday lives as presented in the work of Gluck and Patai (1991), Heyl (2001) and Sangster (1997). In *Women’s words: the feminist practice of oral history*, Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai comprehensively outline how the experience gleaned from other disciplines has allowed oral historians to use insights from anthropology, psychology, linguistics, psychology, sociology and literary theory to conduct interviews cognizant of culture, social restraints, and the importance of subjectivity in memory. Evident in the oral history research they background is the importance of speech communication and women’s speech patterns. In support of feminist methodology they stress that the very telling of a story validates the importance of the speaker’s life. These works on oral history advance an approach that recognizes that interviews are a constructed process in a conversation between equals; they offer an essential preparation to inquiring into peoples’ lives.

**Critical Approaches to Knowledge**

**Feminist Theory and Women’s History**

Evident in the literature is the early agreement among feminist historians that women could not just be added back in to history at significant junctures. It is also apparent that there are diverging ideas as to how a gender equitable history should be achieved. Early European feminism established the contentious ideological ground that frames any search for women’s voice in history that traces its origins to the ‘Old World’. The essentialist nature of women as put forth by Jean Jacques Rousseau in *Émile* epitomized difference in contrast to notions of equality that still trouble the presentation of women’s history. Bonnie G. Smith (1989) details extensively the European origins of women’s history in *Changing lives: women in European history since 1700* noting that early British feminist Harriet Taylor Mill, presaged the ‘equality versus difference debate’ when she promoted equal rights that rejected predetermined gender spheres as ideological paths to ‘unfreedom’. Yet sexual difference is viewed by feminist historians
as a controlling historical force wrought by patriarchy that keeps women politically impotent (B. G. Smith, 1989). Hence with this early contested ground as heritage, when we look for an authentic historical voice for women within narratives are we looking for one that proclaims equality or one that embraces difference? Contemporary theorists help to re-frame this question.

**Feminist History and the Focus on Women Debate**

In reconstituting a history of women, and consequently much of textile history, two positions are prominent in the literature. An emphasis on difference and a belief that a woman-centred history, at least for a time, is essential is promoted in the writing of feminist historian Veronica Strong-Boag (1990). Key theorist Joan Scott (1988, 1990) embraces *gender* in her early work as an organizing concept and de-emphasizes the binary opposites of male-female difference opting for an ultimate integration into an altered mainstream history. It is her approach that re-frames choices in the presentation of gendered history.

Scott’s (1988, 1990) analysis of the relationship between poststructuralism and contemporary feminism confirms the need for theory to analyze how patriarchy and its relationships of power have worked. Her poststructuralist critique of language reveals the construction of power and social relations that challenge the assumptions of objective knowledge, assumed truths and the structure of hierarchies. The theorist deconstructs the oppositional language that would have us select equality or difference as a misrepresentation of terms that essentializes difference.

Two salient points from the theoretical work of Joan Scott influence the shaping of my inquiry. She warns that a separatist history further segregates women perpetuating inequality. Scott’s work is important for its warning of isolationism and her call to think in terms of diversity and integration in new constructions of history rather than universality which usually denoted the masculine in the old.

Several decades into this debate, the views no longer seem so divergent given what is deemed history has evolved to include much more. Although I lean to integrating methods, I rely on a woman-centred approach to research and provide the means to do it,
with the hope that integrating woman-centred material meaningfully into an altered mainstream history may be challenging but possible.

I am less drawn to the social science argument for a ‘woman’s way of knowing’ but it remains topical and offers insights into the construction of knowledge. In response to their earlier work of the mid-1980s that was labelled essentialist, Nancy Goldberger et al. (1996) revisit ‘women’s ways of knowing’ with a new focus on class, race and ethnic differences among women. They continue to examine the social construction of knowledge and truth from a social science perspective that maintains gender as a category that affects all life choices. Two chapters from the collection are useful here. Goldberger explores diversity in ways of knowing with a focus on the painful and confusing process of acculturation for marginalized peoples who experience the “coercive and exclusive” imposition of a dominant culture (p. 337). Her phrasing of the challenges facing the cultures faced with assimilation, living with ‘dual realities’, is echoed in the story told to me by a Coast Salish weaver (chapter 4).

In the same volume Sandra Harding (1996) argues that women’s ways of knowing and theories of knowledge can “at least analytically” be distinguished by social positioning (p. 448). In an important but possibly time dated distinction, Harding bases this on the extent to which “women and men are assigned different activities and experiences…” to arrive at an antiessentialist or gendered theory of knowledge (p. 448). Studying the sources of knowledge for women in the margins of history and culture, Harding assures, will legitimate and explore rich and diverse socially situated knowledges that restate the preceding “one true story” (p. 449). To the extent that the differences are based on cultural and historical differences that theoretically hold the possibility of change, I accept her distinction as a tenet for approaching stories with a historical focus from a gendered point of view.

**The Discipline of History**

By all accounts, mainstream history has evolved to incorporate elements of a feminist perspective that makes studies less fraught with ‘either or’ constructions in a more interpretive discipline of history. Recent literature points to inclusiveness of peoples, identities and sources as the discipline boundaries are challenged. Historian
Richard Evans (2002) in a collection entitled *What is History Now?* responds to E. H. Carr’s positivist *What is History?* lecture of 1961 that dominates traditional historical method. Evans gives an account of the tumult of recent decades in the history profession, which will not be my focus, but of interest is his noting of the current emphasis on cultural history, the individual, identity and ordinary people that has replaced the grand narratives. Cowan and Finlay (2002) concur noting that “seeking the silent voices in history requires an imaginative interrogation of the sources” (Introduction) or I might add, different sources.

History theorists at least, have rejected exclusive approaches of the past. Since textile studies articulate gender and cross-cultural identities particularly well, I think they hold promise to add inclusiveness to reconceptualized history where boundaries have recently become permeable.

**Women's History through Narratives**

Historians pursue the possibilities of permeable borders. As Catherine Cavanaugh and Randi Warne (2000) recently report, although history is supposedly shaped by all participants, the basic task of recovering women’s stories continues. The “relative neglect of Western Canadian women’s history” can be altered by an historical inquiry, they envision, with a conscious shift in focus that asks new questions that will undermine a naturalized perspective leading to learning more about women (Introduction, p. 11). Interestingly, Ulrich (2001) masterfully fleshed out the lives of women in part by asking new questions of traditional sources without focusing on women per se. New questions are also being asked of traditional themes such as how women interacted with history as it unfolded. If Western Canadian women’s stories are largely unheard, it remains to ‘ask new questions’.

Historiographical writing by Mary Spongberg (2002) also indicates that women excluded from the field of history borrowed from the discipline of literature to engage in historical record making. The link between the narrative function of women’s letters and diaries and the function of many textiles from the past provides the basis of my approach, that each provides an expression of identity for history.
The Interdisciplinary Approach

A key source to consider regarding the addition of textiles through interdisciplinary methods is Pulitzer winner and Early American historian Laurel Thayer Ulrich (2001), whose *The Age of Homespun* traces women’s labour (especially weaving) in the course of a multi-faceted approach. She finds the work of women is key, not peripheral, to the founding of New England culture. The historian demonstrates that despite a lack of property and the gradual erasure of family name a woman’s possessions could be revealing. Textiles were key among them. Ulrich’s analysis questions historical sources, from household objects to speeches, to reveal nuances based on meticulous historical research and hunch that lend a greater intimate and resonant quality to lives we otherwise know little about. Ulrich’s thesis suggests a methodology attuned to material culture that can be used to approach textiles for their inherent stories and tease them for history and meaning. Her writing in American history encompasses social, political, economic and cultural history yet she zooms in to stories of individuals with commanding effect. A single textile unfolds a family history and a culture around it in a methodology that crosses disciplines.

Ulrich chose a series of objects, including an Indian basket, a niddy-noddy (to wind and measure yarn) and an unfinished knitted stocking around which to organize her study. She illustrates “the intersection of Algonkian and English textiles and the interweaving of household production and commerce” as she builds her case that textiles “were a form of wealth and the core of female inheritance in a world where fabrics were so precious that rugs covered beds rather than floors” and “tablecloths were more valuable than [the] table” (p. 39, 40). Using traveler’s accounts, memoirs, diaries, letters and probate accounts Ulrich approaches each textile as an historical resource and presents one embroidery as indicative of “the intersections of agriculture and commerce, religion and politics, literature and life” in its locale (p. 229). As the historian crosses disciplines and unravels textiles for their narratives imbued with economic, social and cultural information, she interleaves domestic life and production with other aspects of existence. Ulrich documents “forgotten forms of work, enduring habits of possession, and the mnemonic power of goods” (p. 414) thereby revealing imbedded stories of women. Although her focus is not explicitly on narrative or women, Ulrich’s methods divulge
new knowledge of both and point the way for material culture to reveal historical memory that is central to my inquiry.

**Material Culture**

In *Material cultures: why some things matter*, Daniel Miller (1998) isolates the advantage of employing material culture as a tool of analysis; without disciplinary status there is freedom to study cultural life through concrete means. As Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley (1999) point out in *Material memories: design and evocation*, material culture as a study supports historians of design and culture with its basic tenet that objects store information analogous to human memory. ‘Reading’ objects and visual analysis is detailed and supported as a source of information in the literature of Paris (2002), Schlereth (1985) and Werner (2002). This literature articulates the connection of objects to memory, a precept I employ in framing my approach, and the use of photographs as objects of memory. Elizabeth Edwards’ (1999) *Photographs as Objects of Memory* is particularly useful in the analysis that I apply to the narratives (chapter 5) where photographs serve as a ‘conduit of memory’ that augment the knowledge that emerges from the narratives and the textiles themselves. That the photographed subject may be ‘framing’ herself consciously for posterity is explored in Liberty Walton’s (2002) analysis of Victoria, BC’s Kathleen O’Reilly (1867-1945) which provides a model for scrutinizing historical photographs for context and meaning.

**Feminist Art Criticism**

*The Fine Arts Canon*

Inasmuch as textile practice functions as an art in many contexts, the historical exclusions of the fine arts canon are relevant to appreciating how the status of textiles is constructed. Mitchell Schwarzer (1995) chronicles the origins of the art history survey course and text that privileged painting, sculpture and architecture for 150 years to the exclusion or denigration of other art forms. Although many ‘minor arts’ and decorative
traditions have been dismissed by art historians and art academies irrespective of gender, feminist art historians focus on the exclusion of women.

The limited role accorded women in the fine arts canon that is resistant to change has been dissected since second wave feminism. The critical analysis of feminist art historians highlights the dilemmas when selecting topics that border on fine art history. Linda Nochlin’s (1971) provocatively posed question, “Why have there been no great women artists?” and her subsequent analysis of what constitutes art, and who is privileged to create it, continue to reverberate (p. 145). Her conclusion is that the viewpoint and substructure of art history is based on myths, such as that of the male artistic genius, which is erroneous. This presents an educational opportunity and a dilemma. Work denigrated as craft and the domain of women, whether homely or recognized masterpiece, is now worthy of historical examination and study. It opens the door to much missing women’s history and presents the task of re-valuing what should be recognized as art worthy of study, or alternatively, what is to be valued less for its artistic merit than for its ability to give voice through the story it tells.

The excision of women from the canon has been pursued and linked by Linnea Dietrich and Diane Smith-Hurd (1995) to the art survey phenomenon that left a legacy of hierarchical exclusions. It is evident from the art historical literature that the exclusions of female and sometimes male artisans along with modern textiles and other work denigrated as ‘craft’, is linked to the hierarchy that has valued connoisseurship and male genius and saw women reduced to rendering bovine models rather than nudes (Nochlin, 1971). As well, Gloria Hickey’s (1994) collected essays on the meaning of craft are useful to challenge the historical perception that art has meaning and craft (and textiles) do not. This is part of an ongoing struggle to elevate textiles and other associated media within which I position my study.

Textile Studies

Textiles and Meaning
That cloth has meaning is a concept that may have been explored first in ethnography. In *Cloth and human experience*, Jane Schneider and Annette Weiner (1989) use scholarly methods to examine the semiotic power of cloth from a world culture perspective. In twelve cultural contexts they demonstrate that cloth “has an almost limitless potential for communication” (Introduction). It is the methodology of such studies as the initial sources of detailed information on cloth and meaning that provide a means to view our own society’s use of cloth.

Textiles and its social meaning is the subject of inquiry for a range of innovative journals that enhance studies with a textiles focus. *Textile History* now includes social history along with its initial economic focus. The new *selvedge* and *Textile: the Journal of Cloth and Culture* (United Kingdom), *Textilforum* (Europe), *Surfacing* (Canada) and *Piecework, Textile Society of America Newsletter* and *Journal of the Surface Design Association* (United States) assess key developments in a design and material culture vein that inform textile studies.

The concept of meaning in textiles and its widening scope is indicated by the editors of *Textile: the Journal of Cloth and Culture* who refer to the familiarity of textiles that belie complex histories that invite speculation about “an astonishingly broad range of human experiences” (Barnett & Jefferies, 2004, p. 2). With textiles positioned within the broad contexts of material and visual culture, Pennina Barnett and Janis Jefferies, indicate that the potency of textiles lies in the ability to access ‘multiple sites’ to commingle with personal, social and cultural meanings. The editors stress the potential of textile studies as a platform for ‘critical practices’ that access an expanded and multifaceted field that examines “art and craft; gender and identity; cloth, body and architecture; labor and technology; techno-design and practice” (p. 2). With little supportive academic structure for textile inquiries outside select international universities, the conceptual frame and output from such journals is invaluable in conceiving of how a textiles focus could be used. From this statement of aims from an editorial board, it is the concept of textiles providing access to topics, issues and identities that I take to my inquiry.

A Canadian collection of essays on contemporary textiles and issues, Ingrid Bachmann and Ruth Scheuing’s (1998) *Material matters: the art and culture of contemporary textiles* is a compilation of provocative discussion on identities and the use
of textiles to express ideological values. The essays of artists and writers explore contemporary art practice through the medium of textiles as "[s]teadfast and pervasive time travellers" that gather "rich and varied meanings" (p. 13). A small volume, it spans the topical issues of its essayists in four themes: the embodying ability of textiles in its materials and processes, articulating gender and identity, colonialism and resistance and new perspectives on viewing textile art history. It is this volume that houses a resource key to my focus on one of three narratives that follow, that of Debra Sparrow (1998).

*The Suffrage Textile Example*

In chapter 4, by way of introducing an analysis of historical knowledge derived from textiles, I offer an example of a work from the struggle for women’s suffrage housed in the Museum of London. To detail the significance of this sample, I have consulted the work of the main scholar on textiles within the movement, Lisa Tickner (1988), who details a complete social history for its context. I also utilize a book review on Tickner’s dense *The Spectacle of Women* by Beckett and Cherry (1989). This literature illustrates the important process of revisiting historical events and its documentation in the re-visioning of women's history.

This is exactly what June Purvis (1995) has done in revisiting the imprisonment of British suffragists to evaluate the different ways historians treated these political protesters. She finds that early histories (about 1917) treated the movement somewhat sympathetically. This was followed, the historian notes "incredulous[ly]", by decades of relying on a dominant narrative supplied by one source [George Dangerfield published 1935 to 1972]. Purvis notes pointedly that the single source ridiculed the over one thousand women imprisoned for suffrage activities as irrational sado-masochists (p. 104). This disdain, finds Purvis, seeped into early socialist feminism that dismissed the prisoners as bourgeois, a view that has only recently been challenged.

Purvis, Founding and Managing Editor of *Women's History Review*, contributes research that details prison life and dispels persistent misconceptions that the prisoners were single middle class women. By pouring over prison records and letters from gaol, the historian finds a cross section among the militants who were variously poor, working, married, mothers of young children, members of various classes and of all ages, physical
stature and health. Additionally, the sociologist details life behind bars that depicts the
torture that contributed to later ill health and strokes for many. The study also documents
the camaraderie that united a disparate collective of women through months of
imprisonment in a number of British prisons. Accounts of research such as this that both
detail a commonality of experience and the particular ways it was memorialized, are
essential to provide a balanced historical record of a pivotal collective moment in
Western women’s history.

The Discourse of Craft

Craft theorists with their promotion of the humanizing potential of craft try to
raise its position as a practice marginalized by modernism. Gloria Hickey’s (1994)
collection *Making and Metaphor: A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft*
examines the role of craft in society. It draws on the disciplines of ethnology, social and
cultural anthropology and museum studies to frame craft practice and theory. This is
important to how I approach Coast Salish weaving in one of my narrative foci; the craft
theory demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of craft practice and its potential to make
meaning in contemporary culture.

Piecing Lives through Quilts

I referred to the pervasive quilt metaphor which accompanies women’s
engagement with textiles in chapter 1. At some point, an inquiry into women and their
textile narratives will engage the quilting metaphor. Two sources illustrate potential
approaches to incorporating the metaphor. Donnell Radka’s (1990) *Quilts as women’s
art: a quilt poetics* engages the metaphorical role of quilting that provides “a rich record
of women’s past lives” (Introduction). Unfortunately, as Allan Fletcher (1990) has
pointed out, Radka applies an exclusive gendered approach throughout reserving creative
ability with cloth to women; as a ‘natural disposition’ to use Ann-Louise Shapiro’s
(1994) term that limits the usefulness of her work. Cheryl Torsney and Judy Elsley’s
(1994) *Quilt culture: tracing the pattern* takes a different path. It traces the history of the
quilt as a cultural artifact and component in women’s lives without essentializing the
ability to participate fully in its practice. Of interest to me in this volume are the many parallels, some scholarly analyses, of the shared characteristics of quilts and writing. This literary connection with a textile practice that engages metaphor echoes my thoughts on a strategy to approach women’s narratives.

Memory Discourse

History of Memory

Crane (1997), Hamilton (1994), Hutton (1993), Klein (2000), Megill (1998) and Starn (1999) detail the emergence of memory in historical discourse. These historians specify memory’s close association with identity but do not explore women and memory as a focus. Patrick Hutton (1993), Professor Emeritus of the University of Vermont, in History as an art of memory outlines extensively his particular interest, the study of memory and collective mentality. The historian articulates a postmodern perspective pursuant to the developed work of Halbwachs and Foucault. Of interest here is his placement of memory in contemporary historiography as an interdisciplinary discourse across the humanities. Hutton notes its increased democratization as concern with the authority of received tradition is supplanted by social history as an alternative to political, a valuing of everyday life over the experience of the elite, women’s history, non-Western history and global rather than national history as new historical foci to be pursued. These elements form the basis, as Hutton describes it, of a change from ideology to imagery as culture supplants politics as the focus of a new historical method that sees history best appreciated as an art of memory. Hutton argues that history is ‘an art of memory’ because “it mediates the encounter between two moments of memory: repetition and recollection”, a source of images of the past that continue to shape our present understanding (Introduction). I accept and use his analysis of the relationship of memory to history extensively.

The potential of memory as an avenue for study in the twentieth century is traced by Hutton (1993) interestingly to its surfacing in the field of literature before that of history where it was dismissed as elusive and subjective. Hutton recognizes the 1960s
work of English Renaissance scholar Frances Yates, now quoted in feminist academe (Lourie et al., 1987), with the advent of memory as an art to connect with the past in interpretive ways. Yates traced the classical art of memory of Renaissance philosophers as a recall technique of oral culture to its function in manuscript literacy and subsequently print culture. By seeing beyond memorization, Yates is credited with highlighting memory as “a resource for recovering lost worlds” (Introduction, p. xvii). It is the ability to engage the past through such interpretive processes sanctioned by the field of history as described in this literature, which holds promise for memory inquiry and its educational possibilities through textiles.

The scholarly surge in memory literature that reverberated internationally in the 1980s and continues to impact the memory terrain is traced by Kerwin Klein (2000) and attributed to the publication of two tomes. They set an elegiac tone and identified memory as a primitive or sacred form, in contrast to modern historical consciousness, that resonates to the reaches of women’s history. One was Nora’s edited anthology Lieux de mémoire (1984) and the other Yosef Yerushalmi’s Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (1982). This period is of importance to the considered use of memory as a theme to explore identities as it crystallizes self-conscious memory discourse and puts the issues raised by memory study at the forefront of studies in the humanities (Klein).

Some scholars (Lowenthal 2000, Megill, 1998) remain dismissive of the valourization of memory which follows what they see as subjective excesses. Allan Megill is dismissive of the “memory craze” (p. 38), clearly sceptical and uncomfortable with the ‘subjectivities’ of memory. He wants memory’s claims for validity to be justified and authenticated. I can agree with his caution that it is a mistake to see memory as being the “raw material of history” (p. 54) and with David Lowenthal’s concern with ‘presentism’ that may leave us ‘blind’, but find the interpretive approaches of other scholars more useful to my approach.

To engage the surge of scholarly interest in the subject of memory and history, early modern historian Randolph Starn (Davis & Starn, 1989; Starn, 1999) cleverly revisits the topic first engaged a decade earlier with Natalie Zemon Davis. He argues that the study of authentic memory is in fact not so new, and should not be disregarded because of the ‘craze’ that has enveloped it (p. 198). Instead the immediacy of authentic
memory has a role to play vis a vis large historical forces, he advises, as “testimony against distortion or dilution or excision by institutional orthodoxy” (p. 193). Starn proposes that the marginalized skills of critical assessment, research and accountability be reapplied to the study of memory, a reasoned approach that values an interpretive but scholarly approach to memory amid scepticism.

Women and Memory

Women and memory has been the subject of some focussed but limited study (Loftus et al., 1987; Lourie et al., 1987; Stimpson, 1987). Hirsch and Smith (2002) in a special issue of Signs offers one of the few follow-ups to theoretically engage both feminism and memory, with the editors wondering why memory studies and feminist studies have “developed on parallel but separate tracks” given the consonance between the two (p. 4).

Billie Melman (1993), lecturer in Modern History, Tel Aviv University, directly speaks to gender and memory in history as she traces the presence of women in the historiography of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through quantitative analysis of female participation in historical periodical press and British historical societies, the historian can explain to women in a concrete way how we arrived historically to a marginalized position. From this scrutiny she concludes that the notion of the historical mind as an exclusively masculine entity capable of abstraction was displaced by a redefinition of memory and gender as capable women historians joined the professions of economic and social history. To Melman, the very notion (a Western one) of history was gendered because men acted as the agents of change. It is useful to heed her perspective on approaches to memory further, for the professor traces difference between and within the sexes and her cautions are echoed by others. Melman concludes that the act of memory, re-configured once women historians were involved in the profession, is “gender-related, rather than gender-specific” where “women and men,...girls and boys will remember the past and learn its lessons differently” (p. 19). This indicates that it is not a collective unified memory of women that I seek. Billie Melman also warns that in any search for a unified history of women ‘the disunities’ of circumstances will prevail.
Contemporary Study of Cultural Memory

Marita Sturken (1997) examines cultural memory and its place in the nation (particularly the United States) as constructed, recollected and interpreted narratives. Her writing analyzes the reappearance of memorial culture in the 1980s through such memorials as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the AIDS Quilt...that “disrupt master narratives, those of American imperialism, technology, science, and masculinity” (p. 16). The communications scholar acknowledges the influence of Michel Foucault’s writings on knowledge and power in her own formulations, notably the process of ‘constructing’ histories and the role of ‘subjugated knowledges’. These are “the voices from archives and unlegitimated sources that tangle with history’s stories” and play a crucial role in understanding the past (p. 6). Her documentation of contemporary collective memory is very useful as it analyzes the processes of particular objectifications, such as quilts, with her expertise in visual culture that provides a rare scholarly source referring to the role of textiles in constructions of memory.

Women, History and Memory Journals

The following journals are particularly relevant to inquiries about women, history and contemporary viewpoints: Women’s History Review (U.K.) and Journal of Women’s History (U.S.) focus on women’s history and gender history as historically constructed and shaped by women’s experience. History and Memory (Tel Aviv and Los Angeles), which grew out of Holocaust studies, provides a focus on collective historical consciousness within the narrowed scope of memory.

Background Sources: the Narratives in Context

The three narratives of women on which I focus leads to sources in three particular areas of political and social history. In the first narrative the internment of the Japanese community during the Second World War becomes a backdrop to the narrative. In the second narrative, aboriginal culture represented by British Columbia’s Coast Salish community provides the context. Thirdly, the cataclysm in Europe and particularly in Latvia at the conclusion of World War II is the background to the final narrative.
Secondly, I refer to two textile processes that are central to the first two narratives, Japanese *shibori* (Wada, 2002) which I explore in chapter 5 and Coast Salish weaving. At the conclusion of each narrative in chapter 4, I contextualize the narrative with background sources.

*Curriculum Theory*

**Reconceptualizing Curriculum**

The literature of educational research indicates that teaching history with reconceptualized content and structure is under way in various domains. Teaching practice, as curriculum theorists outline, can further transform the curricula. In shining my research light on one small corner of the humanities in order to *add* to the canon I find support in Paul Axelrod’s (2002) critique of the shrinking space afforded the humanities in universities timely. He finds that while responding to market pressures, universities “incrementally marginalize the humanities, the social sciences and the fine arts” which is “culturally costly” (p. 5-6); in this I find sound reasoning to justify research into corners of social and cultural history.

As I propose to research the addition of humanizing themes to curriculum, I find the theory proposed by Kathleen Kesson (1999) also appropriate. She terms curriculum ‘re-conceptualized’ if it avoids inequalities of the past and engages the discourses of gender, race, sexuality and culture. In advocating for the human dimension in curriculum and the liberal arts in general, Kesson also provides a further theoretical grounding for my research goal to enhance humanities curricula. This I believe dovetails with the humanizing themes and enhanced historical understanding that stories focussed around textiles can bring to curriculum.

*Democratic Curriculum*

Henderson and Kesson (1999) delineate the value of democratic curriculum that encompasses the learning relationship between teacher and student. Deborah Britzman (1997) adds another aspect by provoking teachers to think of how they value ways of knowing in her contemplation of Joseph Jacotot’s 19th century writing on pedagogy. Rather than the ‘droning explication’ of teachers delivering the known to the unknowing,
she challenges teachers to begin with “the assumption of the equality of intelligence” that refuses ‘certainties’ (p. 35). It is a thoughtful addition to the acceptance of more ways of knowing that has facilitated greater historical learning gathered from the margins. Britzman makes us consider ‘the detours’ in pedagogy and what they might offer.

*Teaching History*

For an overview of the current issues and approaches framing curriculum in the teaching of history I have referred to the comprehensive international collection of Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg, (2000), *Knowing, teaching, and learning history: national and international perspectives*. The authors report on research and change and present models that encourage historical understanding among students. The editors indicate that there are broad intellectual changes that are impacting practice such as that in psychology where cognitive understanding and conceptual change are now valued over behavioural goals in education. This, together with what they call the “historiographic revolution”, has produced a new dynamic that makes it a good time to change the teaching of history (p. 12). Without focusing on women per se, I find room in their discussions to integrate the kind of history I envision into current practice. They also tie disciplinary history, importantly I think, to students’ beliefs about the past and how these beliefs relate to their identities. The authors describe history as a specialized exercise within an array of memory practices which I take to be an opportune reference to the thematic possibilities of memory at a time when disciplinary change is possible.

*Interdisciplinarity*

In addition to the proponents of interdisciplinary methods within the women’s studies and women’s history purviews, there is considerable support for its use in education. Sam Wineburg and Pam Grossman (2000) edit a collection of current writing which elaborates on the usefulness of this approach that reaches beyond the narrow disciplinary specializations to allow for the ‘big picture’ or patterns to emerge by utilizing “common ways of knowing” across subjects (p.3). Included in *Interdisciplinary curriculum: challenges to implementation* is a chapter by Boix Mansilla, Miller and
Gardner in which the multidisciplinary, where “disciplines stand juxtaposed around a theme”, is distinguished from an intertwining that is interdisciplinarity (p. 31). Sometimes interdisciplinary signifies ‘joint teaching’; my interest is in the permeability of borders between the disciplines. When “specific modes of thinking in each discipline are woven together” (p. 21), they can shed new light on a problem. The collection clarifies the potential usefulness of this approach to pursue the details of women’s historical lives.

The ‘Other’

Lerner (1997) explains the essence of being ‘other’ or different, from her experience as a “prototypical outsider - a woman, a Jew, an exile” (p.15). The problem she isolates of being ‘other’ is one of denial of self-definition for women, the group defined by others the longest. It is an important lesson to take to the classroom with the added perspectives of Kevin Kumashiro (2001) and Ted Aoki (1993) on ‘difference’. Kumashiro warns against complacency or thinking we have the solutions to difference in the classroom. Aoki advises that ethnicity and national identities may still be a “pivotal mediating context” used to negotiate identities (p. 133). Together with the feminist realization that gender may not be the paramount concern when difference is experienced through race, class or ethnicity (Sangster, 1997), the literature reinforces that an awareness of the constructs of diversity must be present in our classrooms.

The Literary Link in Curriculum

The Narrative

In education theory, narrative as a way of knowing and teaching with its origins in oral culture has been well explored (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Grumet, 1990a, 1991; Kennedy, 1998; McEwan & Egan, 1995b; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). David Carr (1986) in an early exploration of how narrative is viewed by scholars supports the view “that fictional and historical narratives enlarge reality”, expanding our notion of narrative as a diversion from reality (p. 120). It appears narrative as a means of engagement that extends beyond the literary is in considerable favour.
Again, women are not always referenced specifically, but the theory evidently embraces their inclusion. Maxine Greene’s Foreward to Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings (1991) classic ode to the narrative *Stories lives tell: narrative and dialogue in education* speaks of individuals “long inarticulate”. She illustrates with a reference to women. [They are] “overcoming the silences by thinking and speaking in terms of story (p. ix). Many of the sources [of stories], she continues, “lie in women’s experiences of such overcoming”. The enthusiasm of Witherell and Nodding for narrative to facilitate our understanding of the meaningfulness of everyday life is infectious. As writers, they acknowledge a central role for narrative in the formation of the self and in cultural change. This is scholarly affirmation of the exploration of narratives as a means of recovering culture, memory and self and its application to education.

Narrative is also embraced by educators Kieran Egan and Hunter McEwan (1995), who extol the transformative abilities of narrative further. In *Narrative in teaching, learning, and research*, an edited collection, the ability of narrative as a tool for moral reasoning, self-recognition and cultural understanding is explored for its potential place in teaching, learning and research.

*Learning about women through Fictional Narrative*

Clandinin & Connelly (1992) support the inclusion of narrative into the curriculum in less expected places noting that it is the immediacy of narrative that makes a connection with us. A collection that grew out of a European literary conference on memory provides a further intellect challenging aspect (Neubauer & Geyer-Ryan, 2000). Literature, the editors assert, is part of cultural heritage that is “incorporated into readers’ body of experiences” and language function “waiting for their resuscitation through memory” as literary experiences that can be “activated to interact with the other forces that determine identity” (p. 6). This literature suggests the promise of embellishing to captivate and form meaning with students, that using fiction alongside history might effect, in teaching from textiles.
Metaphor, Voice and Agency

Of value in reformulating women’s history are literary means that have facilitated hearing from and about women, primarily through their writing, and an understanding of what they say. Metaphor emerges frequently in textiles as do agency and voice. I have utilized a book review by a philosophy professor and a poet that succinctly described the interpretive power of metaphor. Karen Houle (2004) clarifies metaphor as a communicative means that I apply to the analysis of the narratives.

I have found Madeleine Grumet (1990) to be most cogent on ‘voice’. She chose the metaphor of “voice” in the 1970’s to distinguish her work and announce her resistance to the male voice of universalistic knowledge. Grumet observes in Retrospective (1990) that the initial use of the voice metaphor in relation to women’s history was to correct the anonymity of quantitative research. This signalled a small revelation to me on first reading Grumet as I thought back to studying Sir Clifford Sifton’s immigration policy in Canadian history decades ago. The direction signalled by Grumet would be the difference between studying immigration statistics for nineteenth century Canada to learn about women’s lives versus reading Susanna Moodie’s account of her life roughing it in the bush. In speaking directly to a feminist approach to education, other curriculum specialists point to the search for voice as we strive to find sources more appropriate to women’s existence. If as Janet Miller (1998) indicates, the dominant narrative we have grown up with is linear and sequential, we need to look beyond traditional scholarly sources to explore the dimensions we are missing, tenets I undertake to incorporate in my study.

Feminist historians quickly grasped the term ‘agency’ seeing the potential of stressing women’s own role in their history (Scott, 1988a). Spongberg (2002) describes how women historians used a social history approach in the 1960s as they developed a cultural history project that considered women’s culture, agency and resistance with emphasis on women as a collective. This, Scott cautions, runs the risk of painting an overly positive picture of women’s achievements (p. 20) and a universalizing one as well. Agency that sees women as authors of their own history or as bell hooks (1994) terms it—
as ‘subjects’—remains a criterion of the reconceptualizing project but one that should be
undertaken with the cautions, once again, of the collective approach in mind.

Concluding Comments

The gap in the literature which I address is the one where there is too little delineation
of the lives of women, especially in Western Canadian historical contexts, and negligible
writing on methodologies to access textile related studies to incorporate them into
humanities curricula at the post-secondary level.

Textiles have the ability to embody narrative. To date, I have not located literature
that specifically addresses the practice of teaching textile history as a means to augment
women’s history or to teach history through the narratives of textiles. It is the latter
apparent gap, where I foresee a role for textiles in pedagogical knowledge, which leads
me to gather narratives of women that revolve around textiles to engage their possibilities
to disclose aspects of historical lives.

My inquiry is in keeping with current approaches in the field of history that seek
to avoid past exclusions of women (and textiles) in the addition of humanizing themes to
curriculum. As well, the literature reviewed suggests that an interdisciplinary framework
is best to re-value what is important in history. Historians promote a cross-discipline
approach and note that the field of history no longer vies for one objective truth (Cowan
& Finlay, 2002). The literature supports the inclusion of textiles, whether the objects of
women’s affections or everyday utility, in an interdisciplinary approach steeped in
material culture that reconceptualizes women’s history.

If the objects and memories of our lives can be imbedded in textiles that have
belatedly been accorded historical worth, they have yet to assume the wider role in the
processes of history and its literature that this entitlement should bring. As Gerda Lerner
(1997) whose writing was central to my understanding comments, “All re-
conceptualization must start with a new conceptual framework” (p. 144). Based on a
reading of the literature, I have settled on a framework of memory, oft expressed through
the act of narration, as the basis of a methodology to enhance knowledge about women’s
history that may be gleaned from textiles. It is through the focus of a singular story that
difference and particularity of context (Hirsch & Smith, 2002) can emerge eloquently. This methodology of expressing memory through narrative, I outline in the following chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology: Accessing Women’s History Through Textile Narratives

_This was of red and purple flowers on a black ground – my mother’s dress; and she was sitting either in a train or in an omnibus, and I was on her lap. I therefore saw the flowers she was wearing very close; and can still see purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose. Perhaps we were going to St Ives; more probably, for from the light it must have been evening, we were coming back to London. But it is more convenient artistically to suppose that we were going to St Ives, for that will lead to my other memory…_  

—Virginia Woolf, _Moments of Being_

The gap in knowledge that I have identified is that women’s historical lives (I focus on a Western Canadian context) are not well delineated in the teaching of history. I suggest that there are details and nuances of culture and individual identity imbedded in textiles and their stories that can be sources of information about women’s existence and their relationship to history. An unanswered question that emerges from my study of the literature is how might this knowledge be applied to curricula to enhance the teaching of women’s history?

I undertake my study to determine if women have used textiles to articulate historical memory and if so, to examine the ways they have used a relationship with textiles in this endeavour. I approach my topic with the conceptual framework of memory study in mind and strategize that a qualitative approach that allows for an interpretation of intimate textile relationships, with their quotidian connotations and expressions of identity, best suits my questions. To engage these expressions of memory sought from ‘the margins’ of history, I utilize the ways individual expressions of identity function in literature as a model to pursue those, enacted in or around cloth, that express human ties
to history. These I approach as narratives that are often purposefully imbedded and culturally constructed in fibre, and that also exist in the stories associated with their creation. One narrative emerges not from a literary model but from object analysis that incorporates the methodology of material culture. I select three narratives to pursue in detail and employ qualitative analysis techniques grounded in educational research to explore commonalities in the narratives. My findings, an analysis of what surfaces in the narratives, I consider as new knowledge. These are the particular ways in which women express collective and individual memory, details and nuances about women's historical lives. Through a synthesis of curriculum theories, I consider the ways this knowledge could enhance the teaching of women's history in humanities settings to answer the questions posed.

Utilizing Literary Methods

I have outlined that memorializing or memory has literary ties and that the literary devices of metaphor, voice and agency have been helpful in delineating women's identities. I referred to voice and agency in the Literature Review and expand here on the appropriateness of metaphor and narrative to further my investigation.

In this study, I engage the metaphors that emerge in my analysis of the selected narratives for their ability to shed light on the historical lives of the women featured. In one narrative for example, the future of a family is tied to the continued existence of an object. It assumes a mystique in the family as its survival metaphorically mirrors their own. Metaphor, explains Tilley (1999), “provides an interpretive thread by means of which we can weave together into a fresh constellation” the brute ‘literal’ facts of the world (p. 8). Tilley elaborates that it is the explanatory ability of metaphor to facilitate the transfer from one level of meaning to another that allows the comprehension of some entity from the perspective of another. As an element of my methodology, utilizing metaphor aids the way we understand the literal circumstances of a particular family caught in ‘history’ and also helps us comprehend the ‘big picture’ and potential consequences of their drama.
As a means of communicating, Houle (2004) declares metaphor is inherently interpretive and in its clever coupling of unlike elements crafts meaning that is enlightening and engaging. Exploring metaphor as part of my methodology helps to structure the application to the curriculum—how students might engage the emergent knowledge from the narratives. ‘Spinning back in time’, is a literal and figurative function in the second narrative (Debra Sparrow) that encompasses weaving that can elucidate the mesmerizing ability of weaving and afford a visual aspect to the active connection to the past. These attributes make metaphors useful to ‘hear’ women’s narratives more fully and to anticipate ways they could be understood by students.

_Employing Narrative_

In the search for authentic historical sources for women, I interlace the stories of textiles in cases where “women had enough ego to write as well as stitch” (Ulrich, 2001, p. 247) with written accounts to contextualize stories where available. Historically, however, print sources have been less available for women because they had lower rates of literacy; consequently fewer autobiographical works exist to document their lives (Donald, 2000). Where there is no such record to provide context, textiles present puzzles where methods from studies in material culture help to uncover a woman’s voice embedded in culture. In this history “…textiles is an ongoing conversation of women over time” finds Toby Smith, Associate Professor of Political Studies at Fairhaven College in Western Washington (personal communication, March 23, 2005), a conversation that may reveal details to be woven into a reconceptualized history of humanity. These details may provide a picture of individual women (and where commonalities exist, other women) that reveals what they were doing and possibly feeling at the moment history was experienced.

In my methodology, the vehicle of narrative is how we ‘hear’ and see the manifestations of memory. In the third narrative that I explore against a backdrop of Latvian history, a woman’s story is partially revealed through an archival record and chronicled further by the daughter I locate who continues the story. As with much storytelling, its chronological references are intermittent as the themes lead from one
kernel of experience to another associated one. This is suitable to women’s history where the chronological in positivist history evolved largely without the participation of women. As outlined in the Literature Review, historians of women (Cavanaugh & Warne, 2000) have determined that storytelling is a superb medium to explore women’s history and I undertake to find three narratives through which to demonstrate this.

The Interviews/Narratives

*The Selection of the Interviews/Narratives*

With a qualitative analysis in mind, I selected narratives that held promise to demonstrate the role that stories imbedded in textiles can play in the re-visioning of women’s history. Each potentially provides a visual and possibly tactile opportunity to examine textile objects and their imbedded stories in an educational setting. They were chosen to highlight and explore the *relationship* of an individual to the work, its process and/or attendant history and what knowledge it can reveal. Before focussing on three narratives, by way of introduction, I include a short autobiographical quilt memory (preamble to Chapter 1) that speaks to the connection of family heritage that is attached to material objects through *possession*.

Two of the selected narratives explore connectedness to ancestry and historical memory through *process, materials* and the *ancestry* of two contemporary artists, designers and educators: Yvonne Wakabayashi creator of *shibori* textiles and Debra Sparrow, a weaver. The third narrative, of Anna Samens, is defined by a woman and her family’s attachment to a treasured object and her economic relationship to a textile process (production knitting) that is a literal lifesaver.

The narratives are selected with an eye to how they might be analyzed and related to curriculum issues. My autobiographical exploration of the quilt that is accessible to students lends itself to an introduction of the memory discourse and a discussion of the evocative power of objects. The account of a practicing artist engaged in an international textile phenomenon, *shibori*, allows for a focus on historical memory, how it functions in a studio process and how the practice of the craft has evolved to reinforce memory in fabric both figuratively and literally. The chronicle of a Salish weaver has a similar potential to be explored through a studio focus, but has been selected here with a view to
examining a personal context of memory and connectedness within a cultural one. Finally, the narrative of a family’s memorialized survival based on a textile skill provides an avenue to discuss women’s work. All may be examined against backgrounds of wider historical themes if it is desirable, in particular aboriginal dispossession, Japanese internment and European authoritarian movements. Where all the narrative protagonists chosen may at times associate their textiles with pleasurable experiences or even relaxation, I have selected people and processes that speak to the significance of the textile connection to identity, culture and history. This is a conscious choice to obviate past trivializing of women and their textile activity.

**Through a Lens**

The selection process was also structured to balance my own cultural lens. My background (and interest in history) is shaped by the strong presence of ‘elders’ in my own life as I actively related to three great grandparents and a grandmother (my ‘daycare’) whose birthplaces and world views were shaped by Ireland, Scotland, Victoria, BC before 1900 and the end of the Oregon Trail in the newly settled northwest of the United States. As a member of mainstream settler culture, I directed my attention to narratives that were on the margins of western dominant culture.

The first narrative voice that I settled on was that of a textile friend who has been both my instructor and fellow student. Canadian born Yvonne Wakabayashi uses a Japanese inspired textile process. The second narrative hails from the First Nations community of Musqueam on whose traditional lands Vancouver was built. I lived a few doors from this aboriginal community for a decade, observing washed fleece hung out to dry, unaware of the cultural revival that the fleece signified. I became aware of Debra Sparrow’s role in the weaving revival through her contribution as an artist in an academic compilation on contemporary textiles (Bachmann & Scheuing, 1998). I felt that because she had published an account of a personal journey imbedded in aboriginal history she would be amenable to further inquiry. Lastly, while intrigued with a Glenbow Museum exhibit in Calgary, Alberta that focussed on textile skills brought to Canada by immigrants, my attention was caught by a knitting machine and an old black and white photograph of its owner, Latvian Anna Samens that ‘spoke to me’ of material culture. An
archive file of donations from the family held by the Glenbow Museum revealed a harrowing refugee tale with the knitting machine at its centre.

Additional factors fashion my lens. Experienced in studio practice, I have felt the ‘zen’ of throwing a shuttle on a loom and enjoyed any number of processes that frequent tactile and intuitive dimensions. Yet I would describe my approach to the research of the narratives as academic. This becomes apparent as I grapple with the different ways of knowing presented by aboriginal culture. My focus is also on how the relationship with textiles functioned in women’s lives rather than the techniques of their making. Geographically, I search out the history of women in my own locale, the Canadian West that reflects the last hundred years and in the aboriginal context, millennia. Finally, my approach is also informed by feminism, one of my goals being to add stature to a strand of women’s history.

The Interview Process

Prior to the interviews, I review the conceptual groundwork in the literature that relates to the process of interviewing and the analysis of interviewee’s responses. Oral history, in particular as developed by feminist researchers, offers a way to learn what is behind memory and to consider its narrative content and relate its significance to a sense of identity. It is particularly suited to women’s stories for in its search for her voice oral history does not focus on events or the quantifiable. Hence my model is an alternative to the positivist interview that asks pre-ordered questions. My goal is to engage the interviewee in a process that constructs a narrative and redirects our gaze to overlooked topics (Oakley, 1981; Sangster, 1997). In allowing for the subjective and objective to coexist, I can be alert to the unexpected rewards that oral history can yield with its mix of reality and myth that are characteristic of human perception (Thompson, 2000). This concept appears useful in any interview that has a central focus of memory.

The term ethnography is prevalent in the conceptual literature and requires some engagement. It is frequently used in museum conservation of aboriginal collections. It carries the baggage of an earlier, intrusive, one-sided and romanticizing approach to research (Clavir, 2002). The term has evolved beyond its anthropological origins and “inherent power imbalance”; it now signifies a productive partnership to exchange
knowledge (p. 34). Ethnographic interviewing allows the interviewer an ‘interactionist stance’, clearly not neutral, that can shed light on cultural and social meanings of the interviewee’s world (Heyl, 2001). Hence the personal perspective of the interviewer, such as my mission to examine a particular aspect of textiles in the women’s lives and histories, can be explicit. With these guidelines I draft a tentative list of respectful questions, undertake to go where the conversation leads and to return to my questions if it feels appropriate.

Indigenous Research

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) comments in Decolonizing methodologies that, from an indigenous perspective, research is inextricable from European imperialism and colonialism. It puts Maori under a microscope ‘like an insect’… “[where] the ones doing the looking are giving themselves the power to define” (quoting Merata Mita, p. 59). As one of an international community of indigenous scholars, Smith cautions that research is a site of struggle between two ‘ways of knowing’ that casts indigenous people as ‘other’. ‘Ethnographic’ and ‘qualitative’ may sound more sensitive (citing Russell Bishop in a New Zealand context) but to be empowering to research subjects, their ways of knowing must be valued. Unable to tell their own story freely, they are denied being “creators of their own culture…” (p. 1). As I prepare for an interview with a member of British Columbia’s Coast Salish community, I should not be surprised by a wariness of research that has historically been conducted by “inquisitive and acquisitive strangers” (p. 3).

Since the mid 1990s, methods that dispense with the ‘expert’ position of the interviewer approaching marginalized communities have gained ground. Goldberger (1996) cites the success of the narrative interview that emphasizes storytelling, listening and exchange in ‘postpositivist’ research. I comment in some detail on this interview as in terms of methodology it was inherently challenging to strike the right balance in this exchange.

Interview with Debra Sparrow

I meet with Debra Sparrow June 10, 2004 and again March 10, 2005 to ask her about the revival of the ancient art of weaving at Musqueam since the 1980’s, a development in which she played a central role. At the outset, I focus my research topic
for her indicating that I am interested in how memory and stories may be imbedded in women’s textiles. I specify that I would like to learn what the revival of Salish weaving has meant to her and her community. I describe my preparation for our meeting by outlining the reading I have done on the topic of aboriginal identity and Salish weaving. In the hours before we meet I view the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology’s long term exhibit to experience her work and that of other Musqueam weavers. Sparrow has considerable experience in talking to researchers and she guides the conversation in a circular route, which I conclude suits both her cultural context and her goals in meeting with me. In recording her narrative here, I utilize my own conversation with her foremost, and interweave her other published narratives in the public domain, to add clarity as I impose a more linear structure to her circular account for coherence in print.

I am clear in speaking with Debra that my particular interest is in the stories of women. I note that Gustafson (1980), in her exhaustive historical account, uses the term ‘women’s work’ to refer to Salish weaving specifying that women were the blanket weavers in all cultures of the Northwest Coast (Gustafson, 1980). I ask Debra a number of times about the role of women in textiles. Debra states that she does not dwell on gender; she sees ‘divisions’ (of sex roles) as ‘natural’ along the lines of men should be men. It clearly is not her focus that it was women who gathered to learn weaving, form the collective and undertake the projects with scant male participation to re-institute a tradition of weaving at Musqueam. It is self-evident. Her vision is concentrated on culture and its survival. In the twenty year span of the revival, there have been male weavers. The history however, both ancient and recent, bears out that women have overwhelmingly been the chief participants and I feel comfortable sifting her account of her role in the regeneration at Musqueam for the stories of women.

During our first conversation, I refer repeatedly to my reading of Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision (Battiste, 2000), an academic collection of aboriginal writing. It does not seem to interest Debra but I return to it repeatedly to formulate questions as many topics we touch on from her life echo the themes from this work. In this way we construct a narrative as I recognize her right to tell her story in her fashion
and she renders comments on and reinforces the themes of the reading that are fresh in my mind. This is an active process where I am both engaged and educated by her story.

The Analytical Framework of Material Culture

The physicality of art and artifacts presented to us, as noted earlier, hold our senses from the outset before we are intellectually engaged. Increasingly objects are being afforded credence for their ability to divulge human attachments and history. Material culture study as a way to interpret the past has become ever more evident in scholarly discourse (Schlereth, 1985) offering a framework of analysis for the third narrative and a way to consider an object’s role in history and education practice.

*Reseaching the Narrative of Anna Samens*

In the first two narratives, the story and the essence of their art work are simultaneously encountered and interwoven. To a considerable degree the concrete form of the weaving or the wall memorial of the artist being interviewed shapes the story that emerges. The third narrative requires a different method. I am introduced to the third narrative by the display of a machine bereft of its product—the prodigious output of a machine knitter. By donning the white gloves, I can examine the archival folder #M5622 that supports the exhibit at the Glenbow museum (2004/2005). Its information was supplied by two sisters Ilga Samens and Skaidrite Krause to Frances Roback in the Glenbow’s Cultural Historical Department, on the 29th of November 1979 and later additional photographs were added by Skaidrite Krause. On examining the file, it becomes clear that the items it contains: family history, details of the donation of the knitting machine, knitting patterns, photographs and business papers are items swept together at one historical moment in 1944 as a family prepared for flight. It is a partial story of Anna Samens, the initial information around which to frame an interview.

*Visual Analysis*

Recent historical analysis views photographs and images as part of the evidence of material culture no longer considering them mere objective reflections; the
photographer selects according to interests, beliefs etc. conscious and unconscious arrangements according to visual conventions of the day (Burke, 2001). It is the rather small black and white photograph above the ordinary knitting machine that catches my eye in the Glenbow exhibit. My initial impression, and one I pursue in the analysis of her narrative, is that the photographer has intentionally framed a woman, Anna Samens, as the important person in the composition. Through contact with the daughter of the woman in the photograph more photographs, not offered or not thought of interest to the museum, are made available. With the studies on visual and photographic analysis of Edwards (1999), Schoeser (2002), Paris and van Kraayennoord (2002), Walton (2002) and Werner (2002) in mind, I analyze the photographs that accompany the historical sections of the narratives for what they might add to the picture of the past. In effect, the knitting machine and photographs are examined as primary sources.

Object Analysis

The study of artifacts, Schoeser (2002) finds, can explore aesthetic concepts and make evident the range of skills, tools and techniques. Where textual sources were previously relied on, ‘mute’ objects through analysis can reveal evidence that complements ‘two dimensional sources’. Andrade (2004), for example, analyzed surviving garments to illumine practices in the early days of French couture. The analysis of objects not only revealed the quality of production and how designs were interpreted from archival sketches, but illuminated the “strategies or hierarchies within the trade overall” (p.112). Elements of these strategies can be adapted for teaching; vintage garments for instance could demonstrate this kind of analysis.

Teaching with Objects

The visual and object analysis methods referred to here are among those that lend themselves to curriculum usage. (I refer to teaching with objects more fully in the final chapter.) Schoeser (2002) provides a structure for such teaching stressing that an object’s value and how it is viewed may change over time. In object research that seeks the intrinsic value that is present or represented by the object, the textile historian categorizes the values that are sought into five categories. The first is locational or the object’s
association with a particular site. In the context of a collection where the object may be housed, its *archival* value may depend on its position within a collection or its ability to explicate a particular historical process. The object's *iconographical* value rests in the intellectual meaning of any imagery present and entails the meaning associated with the object's signs and symbols. *Aesthetic* value or taste is “the level of appreciation” associated with the appearance of the object (p. 7). Its *transferral* value relates to the esteem it attracts whether through monetary exchange, attached sentiment or functional value. Schoeser concludes that interdisciplinary studies flow naturally from these values as we seek to know who, when, where, why and what an object represents. This provides a structure and process that can initiate learning.

Analysis of Narratives

*Interdisciplinary Methods*

For the purposes of textile studies, interdisciplinarity takes from any discipline the elements or perspectives for the task at hand (Schoeser & Boydell, 2002). Using such interdisciplinary methods to supplement background literature related to the subjects, I draw on object analysis, literary sources such as Sparrow’s own writing, and oral history to create together with my interview sources, the narratives which follow. These I analyze in a subsequent chapter through a qualitative analysis detailed below. In response to the varied nature of the narratives and their foci, I tailor further analysis to distinctive elements pertaining to individual narratives. Yvonne Wakabayashi’s narrative speaks to a visual training, orientation and product, a textile/visual art form. Debra Sparrow’s narrative concerns the appreciation of craft and I refer to contemporary craft theory and research. The Anna Samens account revolves around a textile object that as noted, is best understood through the methodology of material culture. Each of these has the potential to be a pedagogical means of engagement that I consider in the concluding chapter.
Qualitative Analysis

As the framework for examining the textile narratives I use a qualitative analysis that determines the core around which I select, organize and evaluate the data that emerges. I do this with LeCompte's (2000) proviso to be aware that researchers tend to record data that they find intriguing or makes sense to them. Awareness, she suggests, of tacit and formative theories that act like filters or potential biases, is essential. Tacit theories guide daily behaviour and help predict what we expect to happen and can lead to bias in data collection and interpretation. Formative theories “generally derive from the disciplines” and can shape the researchers questions (p. 145); this suggests a self-awareness is integral to how questions and data are gathered and analyzed.

LeCompte (2000) outlines a structure on which to impose the data. This I have done by identifying items or elements, specific things that emerged from the narratives that can be labelled noting the frequency of their appearance, others that seem to be omitted and the items that the interviewee identifies in some way as important. This is followed by a ‘sifting’ and clustering of elements.

Through this process approximately seventy facets or constituents emerged that ranged from ‘ways of knowing’ and ‘social dislocation’ to ‘creative expression’. These were clustered into categories or themes that included: the interview process, biographical/historical context, cultural context, identity construction, meaning of objects, relationships with textiles and life metaphors that surfaced from the narratives. By this process, themes emerged presenting possibilities for further analysis.

See Appendix 1 that itemizes the elements which surfaced and were clustered in my analysis.

Applying the Feminist Lens

In the Introduction and Literature Review I have referenced the delicate task of charting an inquiry in a topic defined by women in relation to history. I came across one word in the literature which I adapt for my methodology as I gather narratives of memory to analyze. It is negotiation. It is credited to Susan Stanford Friedman (Professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison) who proposed it as a way to manoeuvre through the confrontation of history and memory implicitly
rejecting a separate history for women (Perkowska-Alvarez, 2000). As women’s history is restored to history there is a simultaneous negotiation that mounts a challenge to concepts and practices in historical discourse “to suppress otherness” (p. 57). This is my approach as I engage my thesis questions by collecting and analyzing women’s narratives that entail a relationship with textiles. If history is a construction, “…the imposition of a narrative” on a “chaotic jumble of events” (B. Metcalf, 2002, p. 20), as I value and select for presentation from the narratives related to me, I impose another layer to their constructed meanings as my own agency surfaces.
CHAPTER FOUR

Articulating the Threads that Bind – Three Narratives

What we call History, as a record of notable events, or transactions, under names and dates... I conceive to be commonly very much a fiction. It is not the starred epitaphs of the Doctors of Divinity, the Generals, the Judges, the Honourables...that mark the springs of our successes and the sources of our distinctions. These are rather effects than causes; the spinning-wheels have done a great deal more than these.

--Horace Bushnell, 1851 quoted in The Age of Homespun

Narrative 1 - Creating Memory in Contemporary Textiles:

Artist and Educator Yvonne Wakabayashi

Yvonne Wakabayashi of Burnaby, British Columbia is an educator and internationally shown textile artist. A former instructor of textile art and fashion design at two colleges close to Vancouver, she continues her involvement with education as a college advisory board member and sought after guest lecturer. [Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from personal communications October 31, 2002 and March 6, 2005 and are distinguished by Arial font.]

In our interview Yvonne Wakabayashi relates that when she was searching for her own artistic voice in the 1970’s, her art education teacher (Penny Gouldstone of the University of British Columbia) encouraged her to travel to Japan to research the ‘art history’ of her ancestors. She did so, delving into the long history of tying, dyeing and decorating fabric surfaces. The artist uses an example to demonstrate the family connection she made between the textile processes to which she was exposed on that initial trip and the focus that has developed in her art and teaching. “I looked at my mother’s high school yearbook [from Japan] and examined her school uniform. It was indigo and ikat! [discussed in chapter 5] I got more and more excited...” When students need guidance to choose a focus amid a plethora of visual images, Yvonne suggests a path that has worked for her “…my number one focus is heritage”.

67
Wakabayashi speaks enthusiastically of the narrow fabrics she now brings from Japan to work with and the tools she uses. "I appreciate tools as a work of art". One in particular the Japanese hera, elicits special notice. "I'm little...it fits in my hand, it's an extension of me". Although the hera is conventionally used to spread katazome paste in a Japanese stencilling process, this textile artist uses the traditional tool to disperse and mix colour 'as she goes' in the contemporary practice of screen printing. These elements of fabric and tools uncovered in her search in Japan are linked with a design sensibility rooted in her family and culture. Together, they have become central to her art and her teaching as she has developed a shibori specialty (compressed, tied, dyed fabric) in a fashion-related art form that she exhibits at home and abroad.

Arashi Shibori (denoting storm) is the traditional name for the textile process explored by Yvonne Wakabayashi. In textile arts it fits into current 'surface design' processes undertaken by a number of textile artists who add layers of meaning to fabric.
Predominant in Wakabayashi’s work is a sense of explanation of cultural ancestry. “I have my parents’ wedding photo on the wall. My mother wears an obi age [sash]. It may have inspired my work”. While some of this artist and educator’s processes reflect heritage directly through the choice of fabric or embellishment, others memorialize key memories of family heritage through metaphor. Yvonne tells the story of her Uncle Jack, clearly proud of his accomplishments as a sought-after shipbuilder honoured in Ottawa’s Museum of Civilization where his restored ship, Nishga Girl, resides. In her textile hanging entitled Tides of Life [now in Prince Rupert, BC] Wakabayashi honoured the uncle using screen-printed imagery developed from photographs found in a story about him in BC Fisherman magazine. She combined her family memories and the images using Japanese silk as a ground. As in much of the artist’s work, the pleats of shibori organically echo the sea; the beads used for embellishment are often made from shells. The imagery is of the sea that not only surrounded the life of the uncle but Sashima Island, the homeland of his parents. These were Yvonne’s grandparents, who emigrated from Japan; their ancestry recurs in much of her work.

Yvonne Wakabayashi is at pains to point out that she is a “hyphenated” Canadian which her very name demonstrates. “I’m not trying to be all Japanese”. There is a balance of origin and contemporary processes evident in her work. “There is a different audience here; I can bring two cultures together...this is the Canadian part; it’s multicultural. Teaching makes you find out about the contemporary scene. The processes ...like French devoré [burnout] are so global”. In a recent international exhibition for weavers, spinners, dyers and surface designers, Convergence 2002, a guest recorded a complimentary comment about Yvonne’s work describing it as “an east-west exchange”. This pleased her. The artist’s goal is “a Japanese feeling” with a Canadian element; “it is the old and the new”.

Our discussion of memory and history in her work leads to a pivotal period in her family’s history. At the mid point of the Second World War all people of Japanese ancestry were ordered ‘as enemy aliens’ to turn over their property and to assemble at Hastings Park within twenty-four hours to be forcibly relocated away from the coastline of British Columbia. Between 21,000 and 23,000 Japanese Canadians, three quarters of
whom were naturalized citizens or Canadian born, moved or were moved out of the protected area (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005). The alternative was to be deported to war-torn Japan (McAllister, 1993) or imprisonment. Yvonne Wakabayashi’s family of origin, the Tasakas, as well as the Wakabayashis (her husband’s family) were interned to the interior of British Columbia to tiny communities near Salmon Arm and New Denver respectively for eight years. “I wasn’t so affected...I have no pre-war memory” but Henry [her husband] was more so. To some degree she has internalized his memory of his father coming to the door of his grade two classroom to take him away, as the concerned teacher put it at the time, ‘because of something happening on the other side of the ocean’. Both Tasaka parents lost their professional jobs teaching. “My father went from white collar to blue collar”. Clearly a calamitous turn of events for a highly educated man who had struggled to pay for his university education, he adjusted. In some ways “he kind of enjoyed the change [to physical labour] but it was hard for my mother with three little ones”.

The legacy of memory for a young Yvonne, and the role of Ayame in it, is rooted in Japanese culture and a life of work for her mother. An educated woman from the same ancestral village as the Tasaka clan, Ayame arose at 4:00 a.m. to do the washing and tend the store of her adoptive family. As a young bride of 20 she joined a new family, the Tasakas, where she assumed the significant role of wife to the eldest son of 19 children in earnest when she came to Canada five years later in 1937. Through hard work Koji and Ayame Tasaka established themselves, he as Principal and both as teachers at the Gogakko, Kitsilano Japanese Language School. As a couple they already bore weighty responsibility before the outbreak of war. In events that could not have been foreseen, Koji became responsible for all his sisters and a helpmate for many more as the crisis developed. At one point he was detained and Ayame, who spoke no English and had three little children, was traumatized. Over the years, “She often referred to how frightening this was”. From the time war broke out until the internment decree of March 1942, their small home was filled with relatives and tensions as “they were trying to figure out what to do” (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005).

In the face of calamity, Yvonne’s family focussed on the positives of relocating to the countryside. Her immediate male relatives operated a sawmill that allowed for some
independence but no profit, and many women learned or honed their dressmaking skills out of necessity as no new clothes were available. Food was supplemented by foraging.

On the family’s immediate return to Vancouver in 1949, while her husband found work labouring by week and gardening by weekend for a sawmill owner, Ayame and Yvonne (about ten) did housework for the owner’s family (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005). With the start of *Broadway Dressmakers*, Mrs. Tasaka drew on her skills to provide further for the family.

The pace of Mrs. Tasaka’s life, always demanding, accelerated. Previously she had an afternoon babysitter while she taught in the after school program of the Japanese school and returned to cook for the family and frequently others. Once allowed to return to Vancouver where their previous homes had been confiscated, a number of Tasaka families lived behind storefronts maintained by women while many of the men, including Koji Tasaka, worked several jobs wherever they could to provide for their families (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005). For Ayame, a clever, warm-hearted and admired woman, in addition to her business that closed its doors at six o’clock, there was non stop food preparation in a modest home that was a way station for extended family year in and year out. A six day work week concluded with Sunday socializing at church and more cooking for guests. Of her death at 69, Yvonne says “she died young...her heart gave out”. This was attributed to the magnitude of work, although willingly given, and the lasting effects of internment (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005).

Of this period and its aftermath Wakabayashi notes, “human rights” were not under discussion. “We were just surviving and all that [internment] was on the back burner”. Yvonne says she does not choose to ‘complain’ about the past but acknowledges that others feel the need to secure redress, sometimes the third generation on behalf of the first. The Wakabayashis attended a reunion for Henry’s elementary school in 2002 and took a lot of photographs of remembered sites in the BC interior. Although it occupies a large part in family memory, the artist chooses to bypass internment in favour of cultural inheritance, her family’s affinity for the sea for example, as a subject nucleus for her art. In this focus she implicitly echoes the quiet dignity of the elders of her grandparents’ generation toward their treatment at the hands of the Canadian
government. “We have a saying, shikataganai”. It is a Japanese term that approximates ‘such is life’ that indicates an unwillingness to focus on misfortune.

Over time, the Tasaka family returned to professional status. Wakabayashi comments that she has made educational choices based on her heritage, “Teaching was a good profession...”. Speaking of her parents’ generation and her own visual and aural (as opposed to written) orientation she notes, “The Japanese don’t talk a lot but listen a lot”. She outlines her early art education at home that emphasized the visual, an emphasis she chose much later for her own Masters of Education studies. With The University of British Columbia professor Graeme Chalmers, Yvonne examined the sociology of art education and how “we’re affected by objects as we grow up”. She uses examples from her own childhood in the family rooms behind her mother’s dressmaking business located on Broadway Street in Vancouver, to explain.

Our conversation turns to the influence of Mrs. Tasaka and the family home on her daughter’s approach to family memory. She is intrigued by objects and memories from the quarters behind the business that in part supported the family. “I found a paper in her jewel box. She charged $1.50 for hemming a skirt and $1.50 to cuff pants. My gosh, she had to do a lot to put a meal on the table. This is a memory that might work into my [designs] someday... The fact that my mother was a dressmaker has a total effect on what I’m doing.” Referring to the cramped family quarters (in fact one room partitioned to provide a sleeping space for the children) Yvonne elaborates, “This was her space, her way of expressing herself ...There was no money for paintings...There were Japanese calendars, Japanese colours, utensils and ceramics for the tea ceremony. The table was set a certain way”. Japanese sensibilities are “always understated, reserved. That’s why I wear black; I’m comfortable in subdued colours”. The textile artist uses ikebana, the art of flower arranging, as an example of what she learned in her home with her mother. Similar design principles are used in textile arts. “I still do the same in my designing; arranging the shapes, textures, the scale”.

Memorializing her father is part of Wakabayashi’s narrative. “He was a great guy, ninety when we lost him. He was an educator and community worker. In Japanese culture, you are a teacher for life. Because of the war, when men were
shipped off to road camps...he was a go-between...he let families know [what was happening]". It was his letter writing to families around the province that aroused RCMP [police] suspicions that resulted in his detainment in jail one night. His role as community leader continued unabated. "...There was a lot to deal with after the war... As president of the Japanese Citizen's Association, he did a lot for the community". Of her work she notes, "he took pleasure in my [art] shows...the most when I used maps of the area where my grandmother and mother came from...in a compositional piece" [1982 exhibition in Maple Ridge, BC]. Before he passed away the Emperor of Japan bestowed an award on him... I still use the crest of my father's certificate in my work... I use the Emperor's chrysanthemum imagery, calligraphy with Dad's name, basically to record and remember through my father and share with my family. I use it all the time...in gratitude... to remind me of all their sacrifices".

Evident from our discussion of her memory-oriented textiles is Yvonne Wakabayashi's sense of being one of the family historians. She and her cousin have produced an account of the Tasaka clan (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005). Of the descendents from the 17 surviving children of her grandparents, only she has the interest and talent to preserve family memories for posterity in textiles. There are still many elements from the historical narrative of family that the artist would like to memorialize such as the commercial fishing to support those 17 brothers and sisters and their ties to the Gulf Islands, birthplace of many Tasakas. As well there is the story of her enterprising grandfather and uncle who built the charcoal pits on Saltspring Island to supply briquettes to coastal salmon canneries and a soap factory in Victoria, BC. Of this memory preservation the artist comments, "I'm keeping it alive; sharing it with my family."
A memorable part of the interview was when I asked Yvonne about objects of memory in her own possession. (She had already spoken of her mother’s obi or kimono sash.) “Well, there’s the chair…” Wakabayashi recently remembered it and rummaged through family storage to find it. Yvonne has strong memories of her mother sitting on the chair sewing by the hour. She now sits on it herself to do handwork and says, “It
comforts me”. The chair anchors the memory of her mother’s manipulation of fabric, and its many possibilities for expression, to her own.

*Contextualizing Narrative 1*

**British Columbia’s Internment of Japanese**

A pride and interest in ethnicity led to well documented investigations of the period of internment of Japanese Canadians by writers in the 1970’s (McAllister, 1993). These tomes educated mainstream Canadians and informed academic writing in subsequent decades all of which is referenced in Kirsten Emiko McAllister’s MA thesis in Communication (SFU, 1993). For a subject that has been extensively examined in recent decades, the thesis zeroes in on aspects that are topical for my own research. McAllister outlines how cultural production in displaced ethnic peoples, specifically the efforts of the Japanese Canadian community, played a role in rebuilding political relationships after WWII. She applies a theoretical analysis of cultural production to a community history gathered largely from the writing of Japanese Canadian academics and interviews with an oral history focus. Within this framework McAllister analyzes one cultural production, a 1991 video by Ruby Truly documenting a reunion of 50 Japanese Canadians to their former sites of internment in the Slocan Valley, BC. The thesis proves useful for its overview, consideration of dominant narratives and stereotyping, as well as its focus on the means of communicating culture among postwar Japanese Canadians.

Contesting the way Japanese Canadian history had previously been portrayed, the redress movement, as described in the thesis, advanced a “political historical narrative” of its own, critiques McAllister (1993) that was itself a patriarchal narrative featuring a chronological cause and effect progression of history (p. 131). With its focus on male agency it “does not explore the active roles women played as brides, wives, mothers, labourers, businesswomen, cultural workers and community organizers” (McAllister, 193, p. 132). In this analysis the cause and effect narrative can be vital for understanding chronology, but other legitimate narratives allow for reflection and understanding.
Debra Sparrow is an educator, weaver, designer and community leader of the Musqueam band. Her individual narrative, one of seeking validation and identity, is embedded in a culture that has been gravely challenged. By engaging cultural memory, Sparrow’s quest and pride of accomplishment are intertwined with a concerted effort of band women to revitalize Musqueam culture through the revival of Salish weaving.

Musqueam refers to an aboriginal people numbering approximately 1000 (named for the sea grass that once covered their delta) and their home, 416 acres of remaining ancestral land identified as Musqueam Reserve No. 2 in 1870 (Fairchild, 2001). Many of the band live on the reserve at the mouth of the Fraser River in south western British Columbia where the City of Vancouver has all but engulfed traditional territories in the last century (Trouton, 2001). Although the term ‘Salish’ was not what they called themselves (Gustafson, 1980), the Musqueam people use it in reference to their weaving.

In relating her story Debra Sparrow is quick to point out that she does not speak for all Musqueam weavers. [All quotes are from personal communications June 10, 2004 and March 10, 2005 and are distinguished by Arial font unless otherwise noted.] She recounts her past in terms of a spiritual struggle and describes the need to overcome her own initial resistance to join in the cultural regeneration. As a historic textile process, weaving in its full context held inherent significance for the Salish women who wove in the past and for their culture as a whole that endowed their blankets with enormous prestige and value. Of their ancestors who stood at the loom the women descendants who now warped and twined asked, “What were those women thinking about” (Sparrow, 1998, p. 155)? It started as a way to honour ancestors and became a means to grapple with a historical legacy.

In her own words, the weaver parallels her personal quandary with that of her people, “there was a hole in my life, a hole in the community”. In what Sparrow describes as her ‘party phase’ and a life centred on alcohol, her resistance to participate fully in the initiative to revive Salish weaving in her own community lasted a year.
During this time of avoidance she struggled with spiritual questions. “I was yearning to
know why I existed. I delved into the darkness asking, ‘Who are you?’ I was
working through the layers. I realized that out of my weakness I could find my
strength...find insight. The strength was to say no to alcohol”. The spiritual process
and attentiveness to an ancestral culture shared in longhouse ceremonies, led to a
discovery. Speaking of her people, Debra declares, “Textiles are the foundation of who
we are”.

On a meaningful level, those who became a new generation of weavers at
Musqueam...“searched, feeling that we were not going to think with our minds, but that
something in our spirits was calling for us to pay attention” (Sparrow, Journey p.149).
The initial concept to weave again at Musqueam grew out of converging factors. There
was a brief contact with another revival underway. Debra had ongoing discussions with
her sister, former Musqueam Chief Wendy John Grant (now Sparrow), on the need for
visual representation of their culture during which they voiced their curiosity about the
once rich visual arts of the Coast Salish. At the urging of their grandmother, Rose
Sparrow, the granddaughters took her for a drive more than 90 kilometres up the Fraser
Valley to the Chilliwack area from where Rose had originated. They visited the shop of
the Sardis weavers whose revival was underway. After this stimulus Wendy John took a
course at the Vancouver Aboriginal Centre in Vancouver, obtained government funding
and initiated the weaving group at Musqueam in 1983. This her sister Debra eschewed;
she watched the group of women weaving in a shed for a year.

At this initial stage of regeneration, the strand of cultural knowledge and expertise
of Coast Salish weaving had become extremely tenuous. Musqueam experienced cultural
loss from the time of European colonization in the late 1700s. The once great demand for
blankets had been effaced by the factory made variety, goat hair became even scarcer and
most importantly the cultural value placed on the once prodigious blanket making had all
but been obliterated. Oliver Wells, a resident of the nearby Fraser Valley who took an
active role in the early revival efforts of Coast Salish weaving in Sardis, wrote eloquently
of the ancient art in 1966. The advent of “the white man in the gold rush” and the
determination of missionaries to force indigenous peoples to discard traditional customs
It is cited that there was one woman known to be weaving at Musqueam in 1952 (Joanne Vandenburg’s University of Washington M.A. thesis, *Chilkat and Salish Weaving*, 1953 cited by Fairchild, 2001). Debra Sparrow queries this noting a possible confusion with the Squamish people. Her father, then in his middle years, “would have mentioned it” [in their discussions of weaving history]. Clearly, all that remained of the once pivotal activity by 1980 was a thread of memory.

As recognized with the Coast Salish knitters of Cowichan, BC (Gustafson, 1982; Welsh, 2000a), knitting had become a kind of substitute activity for the once great line of weavers. It was, along with sewing and some basket making, taught by Europeans in schools where weaving was not. In many aboriginal communities it served to keep a textile process alive, to card and spin wool from sheep rather than goats and to use knitting skills that recorded ancestral design in items sold, in many cases, for grocery money (Bernick & Johnson, 1986; Welsh, 2000a). Debra observes that she had the opportunity to learn knitting practiced in Musqueam village; “my grandma offered” but “I was too busy being a rebel” absorbed in mainstream society (Sparrow, 1998, p. 150). When interest was piqued to revive the art, Sardis had a few practicing weavers where the old skills were not a memory. Musqueam did not.

Sparrow (1998) refers to this period as dormant not dead; “It existed in each of our spirits and was waiting for the right time to emerge” (p. 152). But the practitioners were gone. The Musqueam weavers questioned elders for their knowledge of an ancient art that left remnants from over 3000 years ago later excavated by archaeologists (Grant John, 1986). They also acknowledge the profound importance of Paula Gustafson’s book (*Gustafson, 1980*), that included technical information as well as an awe inspiring record of previous achievement, in the process of relearning a cultural skill. When it occurred to Debra Sparrow in 1983 to ask her grandfather, Ed Sparrow (b. 1898), about weaving in their village she was profoundly affected by his response; she affirms this and their many other talks were fundamental to her education. The weaver discovered her grandfather’s vivid memory of the crafting of a ceremonial blanket for his own naming ceremony 85 years earlier and identified its three weavers by name including his own grandmother and Selisya. To Debra, stunned and thrilled by the living history shared by this ‘man of few
words’ who loved the history of his people, his words were pivotal (Trouton, 2001). She told him that day, “It makes my work even more important...that I am connected now!” (p. 88).

Although looking for a meaningful path in her life, Debra Sparrow did not immediately recognize the potential for her personally in the weaving activity. When she was drawn to join the weaving group, it was by the money offered. The many skills involved in taking raw wool through to a finished weaving were a challenge to learn and the weaver comments wryly that she resisted learning: “When I learned how to warp the loom I pretended that I forgot how so I could waste more time” (Sparrow, 1998, p. 151).
Also at play was her dismal experience with formal education to grade eight, that Sparrow notes adamantly, "failed me". The feeling of inadequacy returned when she first worked alongside the new weavers where she doubted her own abilities (Sparrow, 2002). Debra indicates that what followed was a genuine education that warrants respect; to comprehend the entire weaving, spinning, dyeing and designing process required mastering "mathematical, scientific and social aspects of who we are". She was awed when she examined the old weavings and contemplated the lives of the ancestors connected to her through time; “This is what I needed to know. This is what I needed to educate myself with, so that I know my history, and I know where I come from” (Trouton, 2001, p. 89). Now a respected educator, the weaver is a proponent of an all encompassing education that values traditional knowledge; her role as an educator evolved from her engagement with the textiles of her ancestors.

In our conversation Sparrow further outlines her education in the years before she joined the textile group. "I set out to educate myself. There are different kinds of education." She is emphatic that she had no mentor in the process. With her own community depleted of visual sources of design, the Musqueam band member approached the University of British Columbia and later the Museum of Anthropology (the beginning of a respectful collaboration). "I was given slides from UBC’s collection [from Dr. Kew, professor of Anthropology]. I felt excitement when I looked closely at early spindle whorls, especially their swirly, free-flowing design set apart from the rigid North Coast [aboriginal] designs. I immersed myself in the design of the ancestors… to absorb the designed objects from the past. I didn’t want outside teachers. I taught myself design and drawing.” As a jewellery maker Debra Sparrow was entranced with a number of objects including the intricate design of a goat horn bracelet. Her philosophy (shared by others she observes) values artifacts [Debra prefers ‘belongings’] as the tools for discovering the story of and gaining a feeling for a people’s history.
With increased coordination in the spinning process came a stirring among the weavers, a connection to the past that grew as the early wall hangings and blankets took form. The group, Sparrow found, started to identify with the Salish weavers of their past. “We wanted to connect with them, to be a part of them” (Sparrow, 1998, p. 152). With the growing respect for their precursors, came a connectedness and budding self-respect among women at the looms. “We realized that weaving was teaching many of us as
Aboriginal people to regain what some were very seriously lacking...patience and understanding what our people represented to each one of us” (p. 152). This has been a step to regain cultural knowledge and wisdom passed from one generation to another. As in the past the textiles are the basis of wealth. “As women we start with textiles,...we build our self-esteem on this heritage. Women and culture are together”, Sparrow emphasizes, “like power and knowledge.”

As Debra Sparrow relates her story that includes significant accomplishment of goals, she is articulate as to how her role and her work should be viewed. “I don’t want a romanticized label of ‘artist’ – that’s tokenism, a label removed from ‘intelligence’.” She takes a wider world view of her inspiration than a “genetic coding” to produce art. “Creativity is spiritual and circular. When it is used up there is inspiration from the spirit world... a convergence of Mind, Spirit and Soul... what is created is a gift back to God.” Some Musqueam weavers sell or show their weavings through galleries; Debra does not show but does commissioned weaving and is very pleased with a work she has just sent to a private collector in Belgium. Commercially, she and Robyn Sparrow collaborate on designs for the Richmond, BC based Kanata Blanket Company. Aside from her private work, one of the weaver’s goals is to help Musqueam rediscover its roots and to show them to a wider world; this is achieved through public display.

The skill evident in the woven ancient artifacts of the past awes its current practitioners, but the contemporary weavers through a painstaking process of self learning, produce respected works eloquent in their connection to the past. Debra Sparrow’s first large piece was worked with her sister Robyn. Now their collaborative weavings are among those of stature presented at public installations at the Museum of Anthropology and as part of an extensive large scale installation of aboriginal art that includes the work of a number of Musqueam weavers that welcomes world travellers at the Vancouver International Airport. The display is intended to greet visitors as they step onto territory that is at once part of Musqueam, British Columbia, the Northwest Coast, and Canada (Roy, 1999).

The public display has a communicative purpose that Debra alludes to in her published article, Journey (1998); it is the possibility of memorializing ancestors whose
ways of knowing were dismissed by colonizers and all but forgotten by their own people. “We need to reintroduce, through weaving and tapestry, a message that can be read by society as a whole” (p. 154). Reinforcing her view of education, Debra wants the large scale work to reflect … “the integrity and intelligence of the people who existed in this land prior to the arrival of the Europeans. We were a functioning people with skills and intellect equal to any other” (p. 154). The weaving revival has served to educate a wider world while restoring pride to the culture and to the individuals who have woven with the ancestors in mind.

The educator’s desire to help Musqueam people find their roots goes beyond the boundaries of disciplines and gender. “History, politics and textiles can’t be separated”. In our conversation Debra Sparrow elaborates on her stance that a textile art is only part of the story that should not be seen in isolation. “Weaving is really part of a larger whole that can’t be extracted. If you extract it you take it out of its context, and you lose some of its power, and its meaning” (Sparrow, 2002, p. 2). Restricting weaving to an aesthetic domain would ignore its political dimension, its intrinsic history of ownership established through land use (Roy, 1999). Our discussion of textiles includes fishing treaty rights. Debra has sought to expand the revival to other cultural contexts noting, “There is a commonality of design” in Salish visual culture. The designer would like her son to be the kind of male leader that was evident earlier in her culture (“good strong men”) and to have him wear the designs of his ancestors. Her interest in cultural revival and preservation, as we speak in 2004/2005, is evolving to encompass other contemporary dimensions; a written form of storytelling and clothing design.

Debra voices some frustration that not all of the weavers who set out on the journey feel the same embodied connection to the past in the process. “The ancestors are with me when I stand at the loom”. Others feel this to different degrees. When she says, “I feel that I’m only the hands through which my ancestors work”...(Sparrow, 2002, p.2), her meaning goes beyond metaphor to envision a continuing role for Salish ancestry. “I know that weaving could be part of our economy, as it was in the days gone by (p. 2). Debra Sparrow has three children and is a young grandmother who speaks her concern to me about the future of her work, the positive force of the weaving revival in her village and the need for ongoing commitment. “There are no young ones to take
over or who are showing interest”. The revival falters also as some of the early successful weavers are frustrated by the ratio of time spent weaving and monies earned.

As we speak again in 2005, Sparrow has initiated an after school program and is delighted that eight young Musqueam girls (aged eight to twelve) have stepped forward to learn the weaving of their ancestors. “We’re doing everything…going out to look at plants this week” [for dyeing materials]. “The teaching is not just about weaving tools…but there are values, insights to pass to them…” This weaving education allows for hope in a continuum and for cultural learning beyond fibre techniques.

![Figure 4.5 Debra Sparrow with weaving students at Musqueam, 2005. Photo by author.](image)

When complimented on all that the Musqueam weavers and she personally have accomplished, the weaver pays homage to her mother Helen to whom the weaving by Debra and Robyn in the grand hall of the Museum of Anthropology is dedicated. The
mother of six daughters, she tells me, is Norwegian/Scottish who married into the community. She “raised us to only identify in Musqueam” (Trouton, 2001, p. 79). As a child of mixed parentage, Debra felt she did not fit in and clearly suffered a colonial education;...“as First Nations people, we believe that we aren’t worthy, or that our people are somehow less educated” (Sparrow, 2002, p.2). This is a situation she views as changing positively. Her own role in it, she believes, is determined by destiny.

The weaver/educator believes that her abilities and accomplishments of the last twenty years have been accessed through her spirit, that she is predestined to be “a bridge with the past” and to balance “two understandings” in mutual respect. It is, she has stressed, not about her personally but...“a whole history that needs to be retold...to some degree I am an interpreter” (Baird, 1997, p.35). The two worlds, she noted to Curator of Education Jill Baird during a collaboration with the Museum of Anthropology, “are very complex and similar, but also very different” (Baird, 1997, p. 52). In our conversation, Debra Sparrow refers to her growing up years noting, “I was walking in two worlds”. Of her role as an educator of her own people and a wider world she concludes, “I’m weaving two worlds”.

Contextualizing Narrative 2

Aboriginal and Postcolonial Context

Indigenous scholars have formed an international community pooling their insights into their colonial experiences and how to best chart cultural recovery. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), an indigenous theorist and researcher, writes on the decolonization of Maori in New Zealand. Her Decolonizing Methodologies critiques Western dismissal of indigenous knowledge, outlines the ways imperialism is still at work and offers a theoretical groundwork for researching the colonial past especially for indigenous researchers. As well, to refute the claim that European imperialism is over and that the lessons of the past have been learned, she cites examples of the “new language of imperialism” and its evidence from the context of New Zealand (p. 95).

Tuhiwai Smith pinpoints the “mix of science, cultural arrogance and political power” as continuing threats to aboriginal peoples everywhere (p. 99). She provides an indigenous
voice, schooled in Western theory and Maori culture, which cautions against research that perpetuates a power imbalance.

The usual dilemma in presenting a cultural perspective is how an indigenous people can speak for themselves. The goal, as informed by this literature, is to de-colonize and de-marginalize avoiding the imperialist tradition of owning knowledge creation (Muzychka, 2002).

Aboriginal Context/ Salish Weaving

Coast Salish weaver Debra Sparrow, although leery of the written form, has written a brief account entitled *Journey* (1998) that contributes greatly to an understanding of her quest as I study her narrative in depth. As testament to its lasting importance, the book on Salish weaving by Paula Gustafson (1980) is not only my key source for the art of Salish weaving in the community I visit in 2005, but was used as a touchstone for the revival of Salish weaving twenty years ago when there were no physical models. Other interested parties contributed writing and support to the revival which have left records important to the study of this craft and people. They are local weaving supporter, the late Oliver Wells (1969) and Kathryn Bernick and Elizabeth Lominska Johnson (1986) as well as Jill Baird (1997, 2002, 2004) on behalf of the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology which has collaborated successfully with Coast Salish weavers on various projects. Debra Sparrow has also been interviewed previously by Lycia Trouton (2001) in a postcolonial journal.

Aboriginal Context/Postcolonialism and Textiles

Volume 3 of a British series *Reinventing Textiles* (Collett & Sharrad, 2004) comprising contemporary textile theory provides further context for the second narrative. It is subtitled *Postcolonialism and Creativity*, a record of an international conference at the University of Wollongong in 2002. It serves as a background to postcolonial approaches from those involved directly in textile practice. The submissions link postcolonial literature study with the creative arts. It includes a collaborative chapter by Musqueam weaver Vivian Campbell (a former student of Robyn and Debra Sparrow) and Jill Baird of UBC’s Museum of Anthropology. They collaborate to outline the Musqueam
Museum School as the foundation of a joint cultural education program that supports the provincial curriculum in British Columbia and includes indigenous ways of knowing (Baird & Campbell, 2004). This ‘textiles’ compilation complements the postcolonial writing of Smith (1999) and that of the aboriginal writers in Marie Battiste’s (2000) collection.

Aboriginal Literature

In addition to Sparrow’s (1994, 1998, 2002) own writing that enhances a consideration of her textiles and indigenous knowledge, I find the inclusion of an indigenous author’s short story form that encompasses myth, history and cultural knowledge adds markedly to my understanding and potentially that of students. Aboriginal scholar and granddaughter of legendary Chief Dan George, Lee Maracle (2004), in her short story Goodbye, Snaug evokes the poignancy of cultural displacement most effectively. The displacement was experienced in part through the destruction of the site of aboriginal food gathering which now houses the Granville Island residential area and tourist attraction in Vancouver. With its reference to textiles and a particular woman, it becomes a pedagogical tool to augment learning that can arise from a study of Debra Sparrow’s narrative.
Narrative 3 - Knitting Family Preservation:
Latvian Canadian Anna Samens

When Anna Vipulis Samens was faced with fleeing her home once again, she was a determined woman. "The knitting machine is my life; I will not take a step without it" (Glenbow Archives, 1979). In her Latvian homeland Samens operated her factory in the capital of Riga through the First World War, Russian Revolution, German occupation and Soviet expropriation. As the Soviets approached to reoccupy Riga in 1944, the Samens family buried family valuables; china, silver and a stamp collection. Anna's husband had sold a race horse for three gold czar's coins which secured an open truck for a hurried escape for the family of five with a few of their possessions. On October 4th the knitting machine chosen for the journey, a lighter commercial model was placed in a coffin-like box with extra parts. In preparation for another temporary displacement, Anna took the key to her factory, some business papers, a small sewing machine, patterns, yarns and the box. It took four of the five family members to carry the box.
The information that Anna’s daughters Ilga Samens and Skaidrite Krause provided the Glenbow Museum Archives in 1979 recounts that Anna Vipulis (1892-1979) was “born into the trade”. Ilga Samens outlines family history to me [personal communications March 3 and June 16, 2005 in Arial font] to explain how her mother came to be managing a factory at a young age. Anna’s father had a grocery store and a knitting factory where Anna trained in 1909 at age 17. She managed the factory 1910-1915 at which time the young woman married August Samens and received three knitting machines of her own as a wedding present. It was a momentous year for the young couple who fled a German occupation of Riga to St. Petersburg, Russia. “They thought they were leaving Riga for a few hours and were gone five years”.

Anna Samens was reminded of this period of her life when, in her seventies, her daughter Ilga took her to see the movie Dr. Zhivago. Anna remarked, “Why didn’t they show me? I was putting sandbags by the Czar’s palace!” The young displaced couple supported the czar who they found ‘human’. While her husband, August, served in “the Czar’s army until communism broke out”, Anna Samens undertook to use her skills to alleviate dire circumstances. She knitted and exchanged her goods for food and other items on the black market until it was possible for her to return to Latvia. August Samens survived the annihilation of much of the Czar’s army and walked back to his homeland to join her, returning gaunt and bearded.

After the five year hiatus, the Samens knitting business was operational in 1921 with Anna overseeing the production of gloves, socks, caps, scarves and sweaters. She had a master knitter’s certificate from the artisan’s guild that qualified her to train qualified knitters. The business expanded over twenty years with Anna employing her brother and sister and other employees “who stayed and stayed” and numbered 50-55 by 1945.
The knitter also operated a custom design business and sold sweaters for $50.00 each in 1939 when a top wage for a select few knitters was $5.00 per day. Years later when Anna came to Canada, “she couldn’t believe how people wanted to wear the same thing” [as one another]. Ilga Samens notes that Anna, a skilled knitwear designer, “did a beautiful blazer in black and white checks” [that has stood the test of time]. As a stylist in Europe, Anna Samens destroyed each pattern to maintain exclusivity. This
approach that eschewed mass production was maintained as her business grew; the factory was housed in a city block ringed by shops that included the beautifully appointed Samens retail outlet.

When I inquire as to the roles in managing a family firm, Ilga Samens responds that her parents "had a beautiful marriage" that lasted nearly 65 years. The business acumen is clearly attributed to Mrs. Samens. "My mother was a marvellous person...very smart, a real businesswoman. My Dad was very nice". Anna gave August the bank deposits to deliver. Family lore has her asking "How can it take three hours to go to the bank?" A gregarious man, "he had to talk to everyone". There were no serious pressures for it to be otherwise. With a successful business, the family that included three teenaged children as the forties dawned, enjoyed a comfortable life with nannies, maids and a summer house with extensive property 30 kilometres away. One archival photograph that demonstrates Anna’s role in the community depicts her in a well dressed group of perhaps 50 women and a few men at an event of the Women’s Help Organization. An apparently thriving benevolent association, it raised funds for the disadvantaged through the sale of handicrafts (Glenbow Archives). Ilga describes her mother as a ‘giver’. One wall of the storefront was filled with certificates and awards for charitable giving; one of Anna Samens’ awards was a ‘Scouts’ medal—one of only eleven in the country to be awarded.

The family photograph of 1943 (figure 4.8) presents a prosperous family who in their business and private lives cope with the demands of another German occupation of Latvia. From 1941, German occupying forces require that two-thirds of the Samens factory output supply the army. During this period, the Germans took Jewish businesses away; Anna Samens buys one, a wholesale enterprise. While the parents are engaged in the business enterprise, Anna’s eldest daughter leads a ‘social’ life. The middle child, a son, is described by his younger sister Ilga as “frail and brilliant” with an interest in rare stamps.
As Russian forces advance daily in October, 1944 the family evades certain reprisal and flee for their lives. Instead of the anticipated Russian retreat and quick return home, they catch the last German boat leaving Riga for Danzig as Latvia is once again occupied. As *flüchtling*, their flight from the advancing Russian army is through Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia. They number 26 Displaced Persons who bargain for a boxcar along a rail line by exchanging the women’s jewellery with the stationmaster. Fourteen at the time, Ilga Samens recalls when the railcar stopped in Bavaria they were told, “This is as far as you can go”. Mrs. Samens knew someone in the boxcar from a village; this opportune encounter gave them a lead as to where to turn next. In Hawangen, a village of 800, they found shelter that split the family between two farmers’ homes. “The mayor of the town told the German farmers to give half their rooms to the DP’s.”

The knitting machine came out of the box and Anna Samens got to work setting up in a room of a German farmer’s house. “When we got to Canada we sent..."
packages back to that family - they were so good to us. They gave her a huge living room which was partitioned” [for living and working]. Ilga Samens recalls the details of daily commerce. “We traded on the black market in Germany to survive”. Anna took an order for a sweater. “She would ask for a lamb for it. The lamb would be killed and hidden in the bushes. I would go out at night, always at night, and the exchange would be made. I came back with a lamb over my shoulder at 10 o’clock at night...If you’re caught then it’s the end…”

Mrs. Samens knitted with an expanding underground business that was supported by their hosts. Over time Anna registered her business and converted any profits into food. Her eldest daughter stayed with her. August worked in a dairy. Ilga Samens went to school and drove a manure wagon to fertilize the fields as her brother did light work on the farm. Ilga comments that when “the Americans came in she got a litre of cream a day” for her work. That not only helped with her bleeding ulcers but it was more than she could drink. “I might trade it for a piece of leather; that I could trade for shoes…”

The family endures the same fate as the German farmers as their lodging is located near a German air force base that draws fire. In 2005, Ilga Samens vocalizes the distinctive sound of a bomber flying overhead when it is fully loaded as she recalls April of 1945. “My brother [aged eighteen] did not want to hide in the basement with the others when there was shooting [during the American occupation]. “One morning, it was six o’clock... he asked my mother for a glass of water... he died... a heart attack. It was the stress. “We don’t talk about it, you know...'This is life’…”

Following World War I, Anna’s husband’s sister had married a German Mennonite and homesteaded in Canada. It is she who “almost signed over the farm to get us in”. With this sponsorship, Anna and her family entered Canada as Displaced Persons in 1948 settling first in Drumheller. “We didn’t speak a word of English... the first years in Canada were terrible; there was no welfare in those days... we never quit”. During these lean times, Anna washed dishes in the Crystal Café Coffee Shop and knitted goods for farmers and coal miners. In 1949 the family managed to purchase a home in Bowness (outside Calgary, Alberta) for $2500. Finding employment more appropriate to her skills, Anna went to work for the White Ram Knitting Co. in S.E. Calgary for some years. The owner was highly impressed with her talents but Anna
Samens was limited by her poor English, the gruelling two hours’ travel by streetcar to work and her age.

Approaching her senior years, Anna joined her daughter Ilga to work at the Baker Sanatorium that was much closer to home. She undertook heavy laundry work operating a mangle, work that would have been done by household maids in Riga, for which she was paid $97.00 per month. At this time, the total family income was $324 per month and the house payment was $100. The sanatorium forced Anna to retire at 65 but there was no pension until age 70. She turned to her knitting machine that had made the same journey she had from Latvia.

People of the Morley (Indian) Reserve had discovered Anna’s heavy socks that went over the knee. “They were so warm”. The knitter secured “odds and ends of 3 and 4 ply yarn inexpensively from the White Ram Mill” then made “very colourful socks that appealed to the Indians”. For this work Anna managed a profit, but refused to take more than $2.00 per pair for her socks. “She was a fast knitter, always trying different patterns; she used a hook like crochet” [to create patterning in machine knitting]. She tried to teach her daughter Ilga, but Ilga herself concludes; “When it came to knitting, she was it!”

In spite of hardships that contrasted her life in interwar Europe, Anna Samens thought Canada “a wonderful land”. In our discussion of luck and fate, her daughter recounts how the family caught the last ship out of Riga and missed the bombing of Dresden as their train spent 10 days on the track in a tunnel. She comments that realistically, had her brother lived, his health would have excluded their emigration to Canada.

Toward the end of her life, Anna wanted to return to Latvia. Ilga says, “I told her there is nothing left in Latvia. You can go and cry or we can go to Hawaii.” Anna took her spending money saved from sock knitting for the trip. It was a success. Ilga remembers her mother’s comment, “To have such a lovely Christmas…I can die in peace”.

Without such a knitter in the family, the question arose as to the disposal of the machine that had provided so much over forty years. In the end, Anna’s two daughters donated it with the documents and patterns that had left Latvia with the family, to the
Glenbow Museum in Calgary. Here it became part of a temporary exhibit (concluding in 2005) entitled *Heritage from the Homeland: Earning a Living*. Alongside the factory photograph of Anna Samens and her staff of knitters is a summary of her journey with the machine. It is entitled “A Woman of Courage”.

The Glenbow archive records a tribute from the husband who shared the same history and partnered Anna in a happy marriage until his death in 1975. “He once remarked that if making a living had been up to him, they would have all starved.”

Contextualizing Narrative 3

*Latvian History*

Modris Eksteins, Rhodes Scholar and professor of history at the University of Toronto at Scarborough, is himself Latvian, one of the 300,000 whose family fled obliteration as WWII segued into the Cold War. His *Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of Our Century* (1999) is an acclaimed documentation of the country’s turbulent history (Allemang, 1999; Goetz-Stankiewicz, 2000/01). His account intersperses vignettes of his family’s survival in a thorough documentation of political history devoid of chronology. In a fragmented narrative format that mirrors an ‘incoherent’ age, Eksteins echoes the disintegration of Latvia and the diaspora of her peoples. The book serves to background a borderland society representative of Eastern Europe that amid the collapse of empires was beset by a ruthless ‘whirlwind’ of violence and a brutality that the ‘liberal mentality’ of the West’s leaders simply didn’t comprehend (Eksteins, 1999). His account of his family’s survival, the more remarkable given the obliteration of 90% of Latvian Jews (*Latvia - History*, 2005), is a key scholarly resource that serves to ground the oral history of the Samens family whose narrative I record. It parallels (but experiences through a differing religious and cultural lens) the buffeted life of the Latvian refugee in flight. The journeys of the Eksteins and the Samens family both end at their Canadian destinations as DP’s within the space of a year that admitted 3331 Latvians.
In contrast to most political histories, there is a small but significant thread apportioned to the role of women in this history of a disordered Latvia. Amid the battles and betrayals Eksteins weaves the family lore of his headstrong great grandmother, a beautiful peasant impregnated by a German baron. Her embittered response to life, metaphorically threading through his account, is analogous to the turmoil and patterns of retribution of the political and social history of the country. At one point, Modris Eksteins simply stops his account to speak of women who are not featuring sufficiently in the record of political events. Two sections entitled *Hour of Women, Hour of Mothers* and *Black Market* (p. 166-170) that focus on the family-saving tactics undertaken by his mother, Biruta Eksteins, bear many similarities to the Latvian woman on whom I focus, Anna Samens. To be Latvian in the first half of the twentieth century was life threatening to all comers; to be Jewish, as the Eksteins were was to be a breath away from annihilation. Eksteins’ book is invaluable to me to grasp a difficult history and I use it to support the Samens story, which is not similarly documented, without equating the two.

In the quote that opened this chapter Horace Bushnell (Ulrich, 2001) speaks of the anonymity and dignity of the unknown textile worker. By making the work of women central, not peripheral, to pioneer stories he challenges notions of conventional history that are taken up by Laurel Thayer Ulrich. To pursue this approach I have chosen to place women and their stories that are spun around a textile focus, at the centre. Lerner (1997) asserts that women are in a unique condition in relation to their own history in that ... “for five thousand years, they have been excluded from constructing history as a cultural tradition and from giving it meaning” (p. 121). In the next chapter I analyze what the narratives demonstrate in terms of constructing a history of one’s own via the ways women select and articulate memory through their relationships with textiles.

96
Chapter Five

Gathering Interdisciplinary Strands – Analysis of the Narratives

Pieced quilts, patchwork from best gowns, 
Winter woolens, linens, blankets, worked jigsaw 
Of the memories of braided lives, precious 
Scraps: women were buried but their clothing wore on.

—I have a great interest and passion to make things right for our people. I wake up mad every morning! (laughter) … So how do we make things right? There are different paths.”

—Alfred Taiaiake speaking at Musqueam, 2004

Only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless…”

—bell hooks, talking back (p. 12)

Strands of Analysis

An Interdisciplinary Approach

In this chapter I interpret the forgoing narratives to examine the relationships of the women featured to the ongoing story of textiles in their lives. My analysis crosses disciplines to determine how these particular women have used textiles within their widely varying social contexts. I explore the notion that textiles bear symbolic meaning to ascertain if these narratives, centred on women’s relationships with textiles, are a means to articulate historical memory. In addition, I examine the manifestations of memory imbedded in the narratives to explore any commonality or uniqueness. This knowledge, what can be learned from particular expressions of women’s collective and individual memory in textile narratives, I consider for its potential pedagogical worth in the following chapter.

How can the narratives be analyzed? The methods to interpret textiles are adapted here from the discourses and practices of textile studies, visual art and craft. A
consideration of the memorializing content of the narratives is further informed by the historical and literary discourses centred on memory as outlined in chapter 1. Additionally, as these discourses affirm, fabric and the tools of their manipulation are concrete items to which memory and emotion can be attached. To this end, the approaches of material culture are engaged. To organize these elements I have used qualitative analysis as outlined in chapter 3 to disassemble the many elements of the stories and the written work of the principals where provided. This method extends to the visuals, artifacts and textiles where the constituent parts can be examined as historical sources closely associated with the women’s lives. These constituents grouped by themes present themselves as possibilities for further research and for further distillation here as one is selected to consider more closely.

Response to the Narratives

My own initial response to the narratives shapes how they will be analyzed. I have gathered the information from the outset with a focus on women and textiles and what the stories around these relationships might reveal about their individual histories. As the narratives were unfolded to me and I returned with further questions, I was struck by the sheer resolve imbedded in the accounts of the women concerned to preserve self, family and threads of memory. This enactment of agency will be the focal point that molds my analysis.

The theme of agency is one of many that emerged from the disassembling and regrouping of the narrative elements. It is closely related to expressions of identity, both individual and collective, that become discernible as agency when we give ‘voice’ to such identity. Surfacing from these tales of lives confronted with historical drama is the pervasive thread of memory, one resonant with ancestral ties or connection to culture or family. For these women it manifests itself in a textile process or tale that articulates their ties to the past and aspires to a sense of continuum. Whenever the narrative voice is exercised “the rhythms of human feelings” are close at hand; the language of narrative allows us to delve below the surface to engage the “thoughts, feelings and intentions of agents”, or individuals we encounter (McEwan & Egan, 1995, Introduction, p. xi). It is
this outward show of behaviour, the arrangement of a story for the telling, that can reveal history from the margins.

**Women, Textiles and Historical Memory**

Before considering its storytelling aspects, I background the functioning of textiles as an historical engagement of culture. The approaches of textiles studies clarify how craftspeople have created functional and decorative textiles that historically key into a continuum of methods and materials whose origins may be thousands of years old (Schoeser, 2003). Textile theory holds that because the components of a textile may be made first [such as in spinning fibre], textiles reveal considerable insight into cultural development that embraces “not only technology, agriculture and trade, but also ritual, tribute, language, art and personal identity” (p. 7). This is exemplified in the weaving of Debra Sparrow. Women in Western history have long been associated with fibre, but with the advent of the ‘art/craft divide’ in the Renaissance textiles were associated with the domestic sphere of women chronically positioned in a hierarchy well below fine arts, the purview of male creation (Parker, 1984). Regardless of the vagaries of social value, women generally have retained a link with cloth that reaches back in time. By adapting textile processes initiated in the depths of the past, women take the first step in engaging historical memory to express their narratives.

If women speak through textiles, as I believe they do, they have been doing so for a very long time. To articulate in cloth is to take advantage of the semantic link between ‘textile’ and ‘text’; even without inscriptions textiles convey all manner of ‘texts’ or expressions that layer meanings (Schoeser, 2003). Links between writing and other creative activity, as envisaged by Roland Barthes, is at play in textile analysis that sees the viewer as an active participant who also produces meanings or ‘weaves text’ upon being engaged by a creative work (Barnett, Jefferies, & Ross, 2003). As with writing, the content must be decoded; it may be ‘read’ through an active viewing or remain mute through a lack of contextual understanding. Each textile may not be a narrative in its entirety but imbedded in each is the story of its origin, its components and manufacture; all imprints of its maker. One example demonstrates the facets of analyzing a textile for its historical components.
Recently, the textiles of rural poor African-American women from Gee’s Bend, Alabama have attained prominence in the study and display of contemporary textiles. Originating in the ‘Freedom Quilting Bee’ of 1966 the impoverished quilters use materials from thoroughly worn work clothes to create asymmetrical boldly coloured quilts that are analyzed (controversially) for their design heritage from West Africa (Tate, 2003). If these women are utilizing culturally imbedded design sensibilities, they are articulating a historical memory. Aside from their aesthetic stimulus, they engage in processes, materials and collaborative techniques in their desire to add design elements to the functional that are themselves memory driven.

An interpretation of agency and the telling of women’s stories in Western textile work can be contextualized by considering briefly a few additional examples that act as markers both within and outside textile history. This serves to background agency as a strand of analysis that shapes the way textiles can be viewed as historical sources or engagements with memory and the way the narratives are considered here.

Agency in Textiles

The notion of agency in textiles was brought into focus for me by meeting Judy Reimer (whose Life Quilt for Breast Cancer is referenced in chapter 1) a few years before her death in 2002. She chose the quilt medium to raise funds and awareness and to record her narrative of a young mother’s life interrupted by breast cancer. Quilting bees to assemble the squares around the main painted panels brought together more than 20,000 men, women and children from BC to the Maritimes (1995-1999) in a kind of ‘narrative therapy’ for those whose lives had been affected by breast cancer. The quilt has profoundly affected people and has joined the voicing of many stories about women and breast cancer. In 1999, Reimer, a nurse and expert seamstress, commented on one outcome of the project, “when strangers sit down together to work…[you] are forced to relax”, she said, “to settle in; with this comes a sense of control, and of creativity…” (Todkill, 1999, p. 92). Judy Reimer organized the project so that it lived beyond her years to tell her story with its message of hope the way she wanted it told. As a textile work it embodies her agency.
Resistance

Agency is at its most compelling in textiles when it enacts resistance. Outside a gender focus, the semiotic struggle of Gandhi who handspun his own khadi to defy British rule and textile domination in India establishes the possibilities of (in this case) political resistance in cloth. In both historical and contemporary circumstance, women have collectively re-appropriated a textile process and used it as a signifier of resistance (Toby Smith, personal communication, March 23, 2005). Ulrich (2001) documents the political act of American women in the 1760s non importation movement; by spinning vast quantities of yarn they spurned British goods and taxes. Contemporary Canadian activists, some called ‘craftivists’ use knitting as the vehicle for protest. ‘Craftivist insurrection’ such as the Calgary chapter of the international Revolutionary Knitting Circle, which includes men, builds on British suffrage banner art (O’Connor, 2004) to voice sometimes light-hearted resistance to serious issues. (They staged a G-8 ‘knit-in’ to coincide with the political event in 2002.) In these ways, textiles provide a text or language and act as a vehicle to voice agency in some small and some profound ways. When analyzing textile narratives, agency may show a public face such as the revolutionary knitters or a private one; subtle or overt resistance may materialize.

Resistance in textiles has been the site for research that reveals new sources of articulated agency. Parker (1984) found as expected that Victorian embroidery was a means to steep women in the feminine attributes of patience and selflessness but she also revealed the potent drive that could emerge and be harnessed to voice resistance. In one sampler usually a marker of ‘progress’ “on the ladder to womanhood”, she found the enforced stillness of needlework instigated a small rebellion in a sampler that voices in thread, “Polly Cook did it and she hated every stitch...” leaving a young girl’s record of her unhappy compliance to training in femininity (p. 85, 132). Such research has placed the semiotic potential of embroidery at the centre of a pivotal struggle in women’s history, that for women’s suffrage, which can provide an example of how textiles can reach the margins of history.
A Suffrage Example: An Analysis of Historical Memory

The instance of needlecraft in the struggle for the vote for women in Edwardian England demonstrates the issues at the heart of reconceptualizing Western women’s history that textiles as a site of resistance can demonstrate. Embedded within the art and textiles of the suffragists was a struggle for a political voice for women that galvanized debates on enfranchisement. As Tickner’s (1988) study illustrates, the over 700 banners created in homes and ateliers were used brilliantly to exploit women’s traditional accomplishments, materials and unpaid work for a cause. In using silk and velvet associated with the drawing room and working in feminine embroidery and appliqué, they succeeded in using amateur craft identified with a “chaste and domestic femininity” to mount a political challenge that sought short term political gain and long term social change (p. 62, 69, Introduction). The power of the textiles as a tool, Parker (1984) uses the term ‘weapon’, is evident in a brief analysis of the example that caught my attention and to which I referred in the preamble to this study, a handkerchief.

The piece of embroidery in Figure 5.1 features tiny embroidered violets and art nouveau lettering worked in the suffrage colours of purple, green and white that were strategically chosen to signify dignity, purity and hope (Parker, 1984; Tickner, 1988). It was embroidered in Holloway Prison during a hunger strike chiefly by Janie Terreno a member of the Women’s Social and Political Union who was arrested in London in 1912. The actions some women took to further their demands for the vote such as sabotage, stone throwing, marching, inviting arrest and the refusal of food exemplify their “Deeds not Words” motto which is registered at the centre of the handkerchief. It is flanked by a list of inmates that distinguishes those who were force fed and records visitors. It further documents the March 1st date of arrest of Terreno and her March 27th sentencing to four months in prison and names the judge officiating as Judge Laurie. A photograph of two women, the Pankhursts, heroines to the rank and file of the movement has been superimposed at the base of this piece from the collection of The Museum of London.
Figure 5.1 Suffrage handkerchief by inmate Janie Terreno, 1912. Museum of London.

Suffrage embroidery such as this, with its clearly intended symbolic content, was a sophisticated and calculated instrument to counter propaganda aimed at the 'hysterical sisterhood' of suffragists (Parker 1984, Tickner, 1988). At the same time, participating in the spectacle of the campaign shaped a sense of identity in women in the act of presenting
their work to the public gaze (Tickner). The handkerchief that embodies this identity of a collectivity in a struggle for political voice for women was made with a sense of the past and the future in mind. It is an act of commemoration; in its conception it is infused with the agency of women expressing a new collective identity through their relationship with textiles that resists and knowingly enacts historical memory as they create history.

At the same time the embroidered handkerchief voices and preserves the identity of its maker. Following common admission procedures that “stripped individuals of self-identification” (Purvis, 1995, p. 107), Janie Terreno names herself at the centre of her embroidery and records those who support her actions. Capitalizing on its semiotic power, the handkerchief juxtaposes delicate embroidery with the grim reality of the forced feeding and humiliation of suffrage prisoners (Parker, 1984; Tickner, 1988). It embodies a resistance to overzealous authority and the degradations visited on individual women.

The form of the textile is redolent of domesticity; presumably neither the “hankie” nor the tools of embroidery were denied the prisoner as, in context, they evoke the feminine. In the still emerging accounts of imprisonment in Holloway, there are particulars that support this. After four weeks of imprisonment, Purvis (1995) found, women were allowed to leave dismal cells to “take their needlework or knitting to the hall downstairs, which was more airy, and sit side by side, although talking was still forbidden” (p. 109). It was likely assumed that these women were performing a more ladylike task than the protests that put them in gaol. By embroidering a record of the hunger strike and its personal violations apparently under the noses of the authorities, the violence of the incarceration becomes visible for a future audience.

The embroidery’s construction also reveals that the content has been ‘framed’ by satin ribbon suggesting a kind of testament or witness to display what transpired within the prison including visits to prisoners. Those serving less than a month generally received no visitors, with the others receiving visits of up to three friends at month’s end (Purvis, 1995). Given the brutality of enforced authority visited on prisoners who had committed non-criminal acts, it seems reasonable that the embroideries were not examined for subversion or they would not have survived. Such embroidery of a prisoner’s visitors, Parker (1984) notes, joined a female tradition of embroidering guests’
signatures to commemorate a social visit to the act of political protest where the signatures become "gestures of solidarity and protest" (p. 191). Its stitches are in a subversive textile tradition where women "managed to make meanings of their own in the very medium intended to inculcate self-effacement" (p. 215). Janie Terreno in articulating in stitches a *do not forget us, do not forget our cause, do not forget me* message has fully engaged agency in an act of memory. It is this agency that is cognizant of the power of symbolism and the ability of the textile to carry its meaning to a wider world that demonstrates one way that women have used textiles to provide a text or language to articulate historical memory.

As an historical source the handkerchief signifies new approaches to women's history that can be analyzed within its historical context beyond its technical or aesthetic merits. As with many textiles and women's work that is 'hidden from history', it languished with other suffrage art and propaganda beyond the confines of the disciplines where it might have been employed. It was deemed "[t]oo artistic for... political history" and "too political" for art history (Tickner, 1988, p. ix). The valuing of art and textiles as historical sources is evidence of a new approach as is the new historical perspective of a 'history from below' that looks beyond the stories of the powerful (Burke, 2001). Although the famous Pankhursts are recorded in the embroidered handkerchief, and their leadership is acknowledged as their photograph is later added to the embroidery, their names are stitched in the company of the many unrecognized ones of women who withstood hardship to advance a cause. Tickner expands on the historical worth of such stitcheries; the suffrage textiles function to help the pursuit of Foucault's 'history of the present' as contemporary feminism tries to determine the path to the present. As an historical object imbued with history and meaning, it has a role to play in these new approaches to history with the net effect of supplying details from its margins, details about women's lives.

I return to the dominant visual image in mainstream historical accounts of Mrs. Pankhurst as she is arrested by Inspector Rolfe outside Buckingham Palace on the 21st of May, 1914 (Tickner, 1988) that caught my attention years ago. It likely was part of a conscious manipulation of the media by women which saw them respond to the accusation that they were "making a spectacle of themselves" by doing precisely that as
they “produced and controlled” the spectacle (Tickner quoted by Beckett & Cherry, p. 126). Terreno’s stitched words that accompany her listing of inmates as “the Bold Bad Ones” supports this awareness. If as recent research asserts, the photographic images from the suffrage era are too often used as “unproblematic illustrations” of the movement (p. 122), the purposeful needlecraft provides an abundant historical archive. As an expression of resistance, the suffrage textile provides an avenue to view a segment of history from an alternate viewpoint, one where agency is fully in play. Recent social and textile history research such as the suffrage scrutiny, has clarified an issue at the heart of women’s history, that alternative approaches and materials for study can be utilized to enhance the illumination of women’s lives.

The instance of suffrage needlework establishes that textiles have been used as a means of communication by women, as a vehicle, to present their messages and meaning making to a wider world. Further, these acts articulate a sense of individual and collective identity that bear relevance to crafting a more complete picture of women’s history, a concept that helps to bring other women in other time frames into focus.

Global Textiles and Resistance

A glance at textiles used globally for political agitation or symbolic commentary in recent times reveals communicative functioning similar to the suffrage case. These expressions of agency operate uniquely given the historical and cultural frameworks of women’s lives as in the well documented arpillerista movement (Griffith, 1997). Chilean women, often working clandestinely, create arpilleras to describe in patchwork pictures the brutalities of General Pinochet’s government and to ask the whereabouts of 10,000 ‘disappeared’ loved ones (Jefferies, 2000b). From a position of powerlessness, the women have taken action through textiles and achieved what men could not risk. Women are dismissed as being of no political consequence, a position that has been exploited as they protest silently and effectively through fibre, rife with symbolic imagery, crafted for the express purpose of political resistance. This is one example of a textile language, created by women in a historical and cultural circumstance of disenfranchisement, which allows a degree of action. This language of textiles is “a dialect that women have used to tell their stories” notes Toby Smith whose doctorate in Political Studies focused on resistance in textiles (personal communication, March 23, 2005). The language of textiles
affords a strand of analysis that can reference women in other contexts and their means of communicating through textiles.

These examples illustrate possible approaches to analyzing textiles. These strands of analysis, as evident from the models above, are somewhat overlapping in nature. Individual or collective identity is articulated or acted upon through agency that further defines identity. Resistance, which may be a subtle or overt presence, is a frequent companion to both in the narratives of women’s lives.

To initiate the analysis of textile narratives, I return to the vignette on my family quilt that opened this study, to consider it as an articulation of historical memory. I employ approaches of material culture to explore the evocative and meaning-laden nature of objects of memory to demonstrate how they can be used to discern information and enhance what we know of women’s historical lives. This emphasis on the evocative nature of objects is an additional strand or means of analysis.

Autobiographical Narrative: A Quilt Object of Historical Memory

As noted by historian of women’s domesticity, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, cloth as “moveable goods” were part of a woman’s rightful inheritance; “Land was passed down through men [and] fabric through women” (Harrison, 2002, p. 103). Such is the case with The Sarah Jane Palmer Quilt which I inherited. It serves as an embodiment of what Tilley (2001) calls a biography of things; the quilt contains the memories of my antecedent’s life. In the quilt’s creation she was perhaps also actively defining her own cultural identity in an objectification process such that “through making things people make themselves” (p. 260). Sarah Jane not only created a sensory experience but physically grounded her memories and planned to pass them down the female blood line. In this she would express continuity and give her memory quilt a life of its own that would not die with her; this is her act of agency.
Kavanagh (2000) provides a framework to think about the quilt’s relationship to me. Through such a memory object in my hands and the oral history I’ve accumulated, I have a narrative that connects my identity to past generations. As I seek a rootedness in engaging the past, I can salvage a sense of family that “time, migration and resettlement have dispersed” in this haphazard process that gives us a tangible record of memory (p. 23). The quilt traveled the Oregon Trail by covered wagon as the family sought a home where no other was in sight, ultimately arriving in Okeover Inlet, BC. Sarah Jane had eleven descendants four generations ago and somehow the quilt came to me. It is clearly a neutral, inanimate object until I actively engage it and project “emotion and memory” onto it (p. 22) with what I know and still yearn to find. (I have found the embroidered initials and names of some of the children and continue to find ‘new’ things.) Tilley
(2001) calls the gift of cloth a continuous thread that binds kin groups, in this case the women of my family. This laying down of historical memory is a process Sarah Jane set in motion. Did she pause in her life to imagine where it might become another link in the chain of memory?

My family quilt would tell a different story to someone unrelated to it. I am the one with the embedded memory of its family origins; the recipient of the tale of the migration and family lore who will steward its memory. For the moment agency has been passed to me. As well I hold lived memory of some of the quilters. It is a child’s visual memory of their flashing brown eyes and fingers angled by rickets accompanied by the auditory one of the perambulating Wisconsin speech pattern shared by the four surviving sisters who interacted with me, the first great grandchild of one of them. My authority to interpret the quilt’s story and that of the girls/women who created it is entirely based on this family legacy of memory and possession. It is not a detailed story, but it is a different one from the dominant family lore centred on the trapper husband of Sarah Jane.

These facets of interpreting memory, evidenced in considering the quilt, are approaches from material culture study that can be employed when objects of memory are altered or interpreted: questions of the authority to do so, the embodiment of memory in objects, their ability to evoke emotion and meaning, the provenance of memory through family dispersal and the functioning of identity and agency through memory selection. These aspects I explore where the narratives lead to objectified memory.

The Articulation of Historical Memory in Three Narratives

Historical Context and Agency

As the three narratives detailed were unfolding, it was clear that wider historical concerns would background personal histories. The extent of the inexorable force of historical circumstance that had impacted generations previous to those I now spoke with was considerable. The experience of Japanese internment, aboriginal decimation and cataclysmic warfare linger tangibly in subsequent generations of men and women. I am intrigued with how the women of former generations may have experienced history in
distinct ways and how they enacted agency with the preservation of family and culture in mind. I pursue the imprint of memory that reverberates among some of the subsequent generations to reflect on how each individual adds layers of her own experience, expressed through textiles or the preservation of family lore, which has developed around them. In their acts of preservation they articulate historical memory.

The narratives are interpreted here, highlighting two processes that evoke agency. The first considers how memory has been selected or drawn upon in conscious or possibly unconscious ways. Secondly, I pursue how these selections are actualized or articulated in some way. I argue that these women exercise agency using textiles or its lore as a vehicle to enact meaning and embody a sense of identity in a lasting form. (All quotes in Arial font are from personal communications).

Narrative 1 Analysis: Yvonne Wakabayashi –
The Language of Textiles

Interview Comments

I have known Yvonne Wakabayashi as a ‘textile friend’ for a number of years. We ‘speak the same language’ in our passion for textiles; she understood implicitly my initial question on the influence of memory in her work. Although I knew her work and its Japanese shibori origins, we had never discussed her background specifically. It was helpful in my role as interviewer to have previously read about ‘muting’ so I could listen ‘in stereo’ to dominant and muted information in her narrative, some of which might be accounted for by our variation in cultural heritage (Anderson & Jack, 1991). This was relevant, for example, to how I ‘heard’ her speak of forcible internment as “relocation” or her comment that there was “no need” for Japanese school teachers after the war, clearly understated given the drastic measures taken against her kin. The topic of the internment was not the central focus of our discussion nor is it of Wakabayashi’s art, but it appears as an unbroken thread in the background fabric of her own Japanese-Canadian family and the other into which she married. It reverberates in any discussion of her parents whom she clearly cherished and her memorializing of them.

It is evident that when Yvonne approaches the family memory topic to describe it to a wider world, she speaks first of her father, the clear head of the family in her cultural
context, whose wide accomplishments brought public recognition from the emperor of Japan and here in British Columbia. On reviewing my first interview notes and the recently available family history TASAKA (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005) that speaks specifically to the role of dress-making in internment, I became aware of the significant role of Yvonne’s mother in the shaping of the artist’s sensibilities and subsequent focus on the textile form. A follow up interview that focused on her mother, Ayame, jogged many memories and connections that Yvonne communicated to me in ensuing weeks.
As Yvonne and I conversed about her mother and memory, she spoke excitedly in response to one of my questions about finding her mother’s school photograph taken in Japan eighty years earlier. In it she has found her mother and the other students dressed in materials that not only speak of the fabric traditions of Japan but are evident in contemporary surface design techniques favoured by textile artists. The two techniques featured in the garments are indigo dyeing and ikat, respectively traditional Japanese techniques of dyeing (blue) and the resist tying of yarns before dyeing for subsequent weaving. Yvonne Wakabayashi, an active indigo dyer, was delighted to find a familial connection in the record of her mother’s garments to the art she has studied alongside Japanese master practitioners.

A further ‘reading’ of the photograph reveals that the bearings of the young women range from subdued to outgoing, passive to ‘striking a pose’ as the photographer readies to snap. Ayame, who starts her day working at 4:00 a.m. and often swims a short distance to reach the school, appears confident and engaged as the moment is recorded. As a record of her identity in Japan it is an object of memory that is packed for the voyage to Canada after Koji Tasaka ‘comes calling’.

Articulating Historical Memory 1:
The Language of Textiles – Ayame Tasaka

Yvonne recalls a home imbued with the design sense of her mother who aesthetically expressed her identity in the home; in this Ayame selected cultural memory that nurtured her. As her daughter reflects on it now, “My mom always arranged her flowers (just branches, wild flowers from the meadow)....I now realize that it was her way of expression and it was creating her own space to meditate perhaps...in a very hectic life”. As historical circumstance impinged on her life, Ayame’s aesthetic approach to her environment may have become more important to preserving her sense of self. Yvonne observes, that “…flowers and beautiful things erase the not so pleasant thoughts and feelings” and that this appears to have been at play in her mother’s life. “Both my parents always focused on pleasant thoughts and not the
negative even when life was a challenge”. The challenges for Ayame became acute; her life as Yvonne words it “was not what she expected”.

As was alluded to in the narrative, the recently emigrated Ayame suffered trauma in Vancouver where she feared for her husband. This was followed by the loss of her home and the relocation of her young family. Japanese owned property was sold or destroyed by the Custodian of Enemy Property. “They lost their businesses, churches, houses, community halls, farmlands and fishing boats which housed not only community records and personal effects but materialized their collective sense of the past, present and future” violating Japanese Canadians “on a personal level as individuals and families”… and on a public level as Canadian citizens (McAllister, 1993, p. 111). Difference in age, community role and gender meant that experiences during incarceration diverged, which militates against generalizations, but one key institution survived: “Japanese Canadians dealt with their material, social, cultural and psychological devastation by turning towards the extended family” (McAllister, p. 114). In this new shrunken community of family, Ayame adapted her role to pursue family welfare in different ways. Where she had previously engaged historical memory to preserve her cultural identity in her home and busy life, she was to draw on it to secure the family financially and to preserve the identity and dignity of her family.

The prominence of dressmaking in the clan emerged as an unexpected outcome of internment (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005). The information gathered around this facet of Japanese Canadian lives allows for some of women’s history to be revealed from the margins. When the families returned to the Vancouver area to re-establish their lives, three of them set up dressmaking shops which doubled as much needed homes for numerous family members. TASAKA, the family history, underscores the role of the wives, sisters and mothers who were able to act to provide for their families financially while the men struggled to find employment. Women played key roles as care givers and community leaders, the importance of which was amplified as men became unable to provide as ‘bread winners’ and community protectors (McAllister, 1993). Some of the businesses continued to be central to family security for years. With dressmaking as a central focus, Ayame’s communication through textiles can be traced.
The calamity of internment is the kind of haphazard process of a major life disruption that Kavanagh, (2000) remarks impacts the tangible record of memory. It is through memory objects, he asserts, that a sense of family that was dispersed can be salvaged. Ayame’s creative solutions to clothe her family and the visual record of them embody such memory. Certainly Yvonne views the photographs of her mother’s accomplishments with wonder. The Tasaka - Wakabayashi history and the work of Ayame can be pursued with the assistance of photographs as memory objects. Over time, Ayame’s deportment changes in these photographs. In her initial class photograph from
Japan she is perhaps the most exuberant one striking an active pose. Her wedding photograph is formally structured and depicts Ayame in stillness except for the motion of one hand which is caught by the camera as she undertakes a new life and a share of Koji’s responsibilities. Finally, the composed photograph of an internee mother bearing the weight of all that entailed, presenting her children might be seen to reveal a serious, still and dignified demeanour of a mother who is, on many levels, holding the family together. Burke (2001) observes that photographers are like historians; they offer not reflections of reality but representations of it as it is framed through the lens by another person. A visitor, with a camera, has identified this moment as one that should be preserved.

Yvonne Wakabayashi believes that cameras may have been confiscated during internment and that the photos the family has of this period were likely from two sources. "I remember we had a photographer friend, Mr. Miyashita who would take pictures whenever he visited us from Alberta during the internment". She also wonders if "Caucasian friends and neighbours took some and gave them to us". Combined with her own recollections and family history, they provide a record of her mother’s resolve and ingenuity in the face of historical fact and facilitate a discussion of how Mrs. Tasaka used the language of textiles.

When uprooted from the newly constructed life as a wife, mother and professional teacher and plunged into uncertainty, Ayame was able to draw on skills honed in Japan. A photograph from the mid 1920s shows Ayame’s dressmaking class. In a well appointed classroom where about forty identically clad young women, all with long single braids, are engrossed in their tasks. Three dressmaking forms are in one corner and a detailed pattern displayed across the blackboard indicates an advanced level of study. The knowledge and expertise from this educational experience provide a means for Ayame to act some years later; to provide a foothold against an insecure future.
Yvonne is photographed in a dress of yellow taffeta with black trim crafted by her mother about 1943. If photo taking was somewhat rare, it indicates a sense of accomplishment may have accompanied the desire to record a young daughter’s passage through the years. The dress is constructed from material from Yvonne’s Aunt Iko’s bridesmaid’s dress. The fabric’s origin indicates an informal bartering or cooperation within the extended family to assemble materials at a time when no new clothing was available. The photograph indicates a ‘well turned out’ child replete with crowning bow. She recalls, “...during the internment my mother was so resourceful...[she] recycled everything into useful clothes for her family”. Yvonne remembers her mother’s efforts to outfit her children for special days at school. “Being a visible minority and the only Asian kids in the school, our parents did what they could to
help us to be accepted by other children and the community”. Using ingenuity Ayame created fine clothing out of very little to present her children to the outside world.

The photograph of Ayame and her three children from the mid 1940s confirms the level of skill and resolve of Mrs. Tasaka. With little call for business attire, some of Koji’s clothes were transformed into outfits for Yvonne and her two brothers. “My brothers and I are wearing clothes made from my dad’s suits. Of course the interior of BC was so much colder than the mild coastal weather and we were not prepared for it”. Although the reason to be finely dressed that day is forgotten Yvonne recalls, “When we got dressed up it was usually for funerals and weddings…I do remember attending a funeral in Salmon Arm for Dr. Kosaka... an important physicist who died in an accident during the internment”. Mrs. Tasaka, in an outfit completed with a hat and fur trim that shows a cognizance of fashion, is a dignified presence. Yvonne acknowledges the effort that must have been involved in their appearance. “Dignity was always important”. Authority, opportunity and capacity are seen as constituent elements of agency (Werner, 2002). Her professional authority is gone but Ayame maintains her rights as a mother, in circumscribed circumstances, to care for as many aspects of her children’s needs as possible drawing on a proficiency still available to her. Mrs. Tasaka demonstrates agency in her resolve, ingenuity and skill to present her children in these photographs with the deportment of a proud family, powerless in circumstances, but undiminished in self-possession.

Through her clothing construction Ayame found a way to communicate pride and resolution in an avenue that was open to her. This was extended to the labour of her dressmaking business in Vancouver that proved essential to the family. As an exercise of agency it provides an alternative reading of a period of history that does not repeat what McAllister (1988) terms a “dominant discourse of victimization” (p. 143). Mrs. Tasaka has in fact resisted a cast role as a passive participant in history. This reading of agency and resistance in her mother’s actions and bearing is one with which Yvonne Wakabayashi concurs although she adds “…it was done in a quiet, unassuming kind of way”.

Selecting Memory 1: Yvonne Wakabayashi
The origins of textile artist and educator Yvonne Wakabayashi’s motivation to preserve family and cultural memory spring from a determination to combine her Japanese roots and Canadian life, two elements that have shaped her strong sense of self. As mainstream history has become more democratic and the commonplace is re-evaluated for historical worth, the history embedded in family life is potentially rich. In the meandering process of my conversations with Yvonne I learn much of the dramatic force of historical circumstance on her family’s life which lies behind many memories, but also of the nuanced texture of everyday family dynamics that enriches her story and reveals more about the lives of women.

In a process that echoes the evocative power of the family quilt, Wakabayashi creates new artifacts that become resonant with memory and family attachments. Cultural identity, in Yvonne’s case a ‘hynenated’ identity, is embodied Tilley (2001) maintains, in the person and objectified in their possessions. In this way her mother’s obi sash becomes the inspiration for a new design imbued with significance. The artist confirms that “objects are stepping off points” for her that “I keep in a special part of my house to keep them alive in fabric work. But some is more personal; it’s not all to be shared.” Her comment reaffirms the emotional power of objects that may be too resonant for public display. Once memory is attached to an object in this way it loses its neutrality and possesses agency because of the effects it produces on people (Kavanagh, 2000). Clearly more powerful to family members, a ‘reading’ of textiles also intended for the public gaze offers insights to the viewer.

Reflecting on the nature of history, Thompson (2000) observes that it is “not just about events, or structures, or patterns of behaviour, but also about how these are experienced and remembered in the imagination” (p. 162). There has been a purposeful selection in Yvonne’s ‘biography of things’ and the voicing of her narrative that creates a permanent record of cultural lineage and establishes what is significant in family lore. Wakabayashi’s art is not overtly political or brimming with resistance. With a resolve that reaffirms the shikataganai outlook of an earlier generation she respects, Yvonne’s exercise of agency is more subtle. Where McAllister (1993) found that the incarceration of the Japanese was not only omitted from Canadian official history but was absent from family histories because many “dealt with their incarceration by refusing to acknowledge
Wakabayashi’s wording is different in focus. She affirms that the ‘such is life’ approach of at least the older community members, to getting on with things, is common.

This artist’s choices in memory selection reflect an identity steeped in a culture that respects the quiet dignity of elders and their perspective. It is in keeping with how Halbwachs saw memory as a selection process, a way to organize representations of the past that over time forge identity (Crane, 1997). Yvonne has selected a focus on the positive that negates a legacy of internment by re-appropriating memory that could be debilitating; in this she personifies a family dynamic of resolve in the face of adversity.

Wakabayashi’s vision as an artist and the choices she makes in processes imbued with memory are evident in her own words that embrace her heritage and identity:

My visual expression is a ‘blending’ of cultural sensitivities of east and west; old and new; both in ideas and processes. The textile history of Japan inspires me, ‘connects’ me, and fulfils me with a feeling of belonging to a familial heritage. This defines who I am and comforts me in knowing where I belong.

(Artist’s statement, 2002)

Her heritage and identity is further supported by her choice of materials from her own lineage that reinforce her sense of self. The artist does not see her role as re-creating things Japanese but in synthesizing two cultures in her heritage-influenced textiles. Tilley (2001) refers to identity construction at the centre of the creative process that selects memory and creates an object that evokes it; “through making things”, he states, “people make themselves” (p. 260). In both acts, to memorialize others or to express her own identity, Yvonne has enacted agency as she chooses memories and further defines her own ‘hyphenated’ identity.

It is apparent that Yvonne Wakabayashi, as her mother before her, has selected and shaped memory in the service and preservation of family identity. In the further step to act upon or articulate memory, Kavanagh (2000) maintains that a sense of control is one of the motivators for those who preserve memories, for we have a very personal stake in how we remember. This is evident in a number of Wakabayashi’s textile works.
Ulrich (2001) finds that the needle arts are “simultaneously a site of cultural production and a field for personal experience” (p. 40); this is clearly conveyed through Yvonne’s creative work. She participates in an international forum of artists who communicate through textiles and at the same time uses the medium for family purposes. As the conservator of memory in an objectified form for her kin, the textile artist fulfills the task that Kavanagh (2000) observed is often performed by women who express continuity by passing items of memory down to subsequent generations. In this she has assembled a language that allows her clamped, tied and embellished surfaces to gather meaning as she creates layers of imagery, evocative surfaces and detailing that can be ‘read’ as objects of material culture. The act of remembrance, as the family members are honoured in various textile works, has the power to evoke human experience and emotion when the piece is ‘read’ (Edwards, 1999). The message of the rememberer speaks eloquently because of her reflection on their past lives and her investment of time in the handcrafted memorials such as the one memorializing her father. By manipulating the surface of fabric she creates a similar entity to the photograph with her arrangement of imagery. The material form of the textile inseparably enmeshes visual meaning with memory, in turn creating an object of memory for future family (Edwards, 1999).

The relatives, who meant so much to Yvonne and whose descendants she bonded with in the small family living quarters, are remembered with pride and affection in her art. A public showing of the tribute to her uncle, *Tides of Life*, ensures that the shipbuilder’s contributions to the family and to his province are not forgotten. In this example the textile itself suggests text or conveys a narrative. It is also a gift to his six children. In this she re-balances to some degree the narrative of disempowerment that overshadowed their lives for a time in a process similar to ‘redress’, the descriptor widely used to reference the formal movement to address the legacy of internment. In this she has re-appropriated what was a victimized history and reaffirmed the positive history. This work of textile art serves as an example of how she has selected and arranged memories by ‘authorial ordering’ or constructing a memory around a favoured image as a
focus (Edwards, 1999). It is graced with the added intimacy and meaning that design derived through thought, personal connection and labour can provide. A second textile narrative demonstrates the impact of memorializing on family and identity that spurs another memorial, a poem.

Yvonne Wakabayashi paid tribute to her father through the construction and display of a textile in 1997 shortly after Koji Tasaka’s death. It is a narrative that layers meanings and creates an object of memory. The presence of narrative in fibre art can be implied by the artist or imagined by the viewer; it is the presence of a story element that defines it as ‘narrative textile’ (Hemmings, 2002) as Yvonne’s work is. The large wall hanging is effectively a shrine (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005), a nod to Koji’s culture of origin, made from traditional shibori clamping and dyeing techniques used in combination with contemporary screen printing to preserve and present the images of the crest, maps and photographs all resonant with meaning to the family. Some of the panels hang separately, evocative of the ritual of omikuji, which Yvonne explains. In this tradition wishes are written on pieces of paper at Japanese temples and kept if they are good ones or pinned on a tree if they are not. In her crafting of a memorial, Yvonne has been able to act on her strong attachment to her father focusing on ‘his full and active life’, and in the act of remembering also forgetting as she chooses. Memory, as Sturken (1997) describes it is a narrative not a replica “that can be retrieved and relived” (p. 7). In her construction of memory she has created a new object or talisman of memory that so moved one family descendant that she composed a poem in response to it. The poem demonstrates the power of the memorial and the interface of memory within individuals.
Memory

Tattooed in my skin
is my history
the crest of the family
the seventeen children
an old photograph
the Inland sea
journey
liberation
life
Panel One is indigo, a colour of Japan,
the dye seeps in and leaves a memory
Panel Two is the Inland sea, a map of our
Great grandfather’s journey to Canada
Panel Three are images of the lives lived,
faces of our family, friendly villages, activities
Panel Four is our crest, with indigo water
stains sharing space, lingering
Panel Five is more faces of our friends,
the family, left on silk
Panel Six is another part of the Inland Sea
Panel Seven is the indigo, that’s me

~ Leah Kitamura, TASAKA, p. 206
Leah Kitamura, a teacher and descendant of Yvonne’s grandparents, expresses the inclusive power of shared memory held by family and culture in the cohering of identify. She responds to the visual memorial by recounting the lore that is attached to it, noting the early emigration of her great grandfather to the opportunities of North America in 1893. Imbedded in the silk she can trace the ancestor of the seventeen surviving children born to the couple who settled in Steveston, BC, who is her direct link. As with the tattoo, the memory visualized in the tribute and elegized in her poem, is indelible and with her for a lifetime.
Using textiles as a medium Yvonne articulates the historical memory of her cultural heritage and lives lived in Canada (Yvonne’s father was born in Canada). Where some of this artist and educator’s work reflects heritage simply through the choice of fabric or embellishment, others memorialize key memories of family heritage through metaphor such as her uncle’s life on the sea or the memory textile for her father. “The piece for my dad had to be indigo [layered blue dyeing process]. It ‘says’ Japan [as does] shibori, binding, clamping, tying…” The choice of medium, message and materials that Yvonne Wakabayashi employs to solidify memory are a consequence of embracing her Japanese-Canadian heritage. She uses the Tasaka family crest as a symbol, a kind of signature or imprint of her identity printed onto her fabrics. Another graphic element used purposefully for memory preservation as well as for a design element in Wakabayashi’s textiles is the seal of the Japanese emperor. The seal appeared on the emperor’s award to the artist’s father, a noted leader in Vancouver’s Japanese community. Imagery based on the seal appears in her work as a tribute to Mr. Tasaka’s accomplishments and her pride in them. Sturken and Cartwright (2001) explain such
choices in imagery: "[W]e invest images with the power to incite emotions within us..." (p. 72). Her construction is an act of agency as she decides how to remember her father. The visual components offer more nuances of historical memory.

In what Werner calls an ‘iconic reading’ the selected visuals, images, objects or events take on larger symbolic meanings especially for members of ethno-cultural groups. An iconic reading begins with the “manifest content” and moves on to the “implied or associative meanings” of the content (p. 413). At first ‘reading’ the text of the textile is a record of homeland, emigration, dynasty and remembrance associated with one man. At an implied level, I read a testament of collective agency that Yvonne’s cousin, Ted Ohashi (Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005), articulates is behind the magnitude of accomplishment of the immigrant family facing adversity. The family story shows that like other immigrant narratives, he says, the burdens of survival fall upon the early generations and that their resolve permeates the subsequent ones; a ‘can do’ attitude underpins the success of the family in a celebration of the human spirit. The associative content is an ethic, perhaps an expectation, that being part of this family that experienced the full impact of history is to embody a pride in the fact that the Tasakas not only survived adversity but thrived as well.

It is noteworthy that the textile artist chooses processes that bear significance to her in her act of making memory visible. Wakabayashi uses indigo in the tribute. It is emblematic of Japan and as a dye sits on the surface, making its ‘lingering’ presence known [it will also linger on your fingers long after the first rinses], like memory. The textile process of shibori itself embodies memory. As an artist who visualizes memory, Yvonne utilizes its visual, tactile and metaphorical forms. As the “foremost expert” in this craft in Canada, she combines ancient and new techniques to “create works that metaphorically reflect her interest in water” (Richmond, 2005, p. 4) as in Waters Edge III. Arashi Shibori, that originated in Arimatsu, Japan entails making patterns resembling a rainstorm created by wrapping threads and compressing fabric wrapped on a pole and pouring dye onto the surface in multiple layers (Circle Craft: Yvonne Wakabayashi). The folds leave a memory on the fabric and the surface remembers the dye. The practice of shibori produces highly individual impressions of the touch of the artisan, the level of force and nature of stitching, even the effect of an individual’s temperament shape how
the dye is recorded by the cloth (Wada, 2002). It is as individual as the selection of memory which inspires the crafting of the ‘text’ of the textile.

The artist turns to the family’s relationship to the sea as her textual source: “I am drawn to the water...the patterns on the waters’ edge, jelly fish, sea birds, the pebbles I collect – I relate it all to shibori.” At the root of her choices is the attachment of her grandparents and parents to Sashima Island home to Tasakas since the 1600’s and the relationship of the Tasaka clan to Saltspring Island, BC. Of her focus, Yvonne explains, “It all comes from the fact my parents came from an island...I work a lot in this imagery.”

As Yvonne Wakabayashi transforms her heritage of historical memory into the language of textiles, she enacts her agency to honour the history of her own family and articulate the values and sense of self that have been bestowed on her in a form unique. Her visual narratives of memory become the gift of cloth, the continuous thread that binds kin groups envisioned by Tilley (2001). By presenting textile art in the public
realm, the artist and educator offers her heritage and memory transformed into a substantive visual form as a bridge to the past that embodies her notions of art and self. To her present and future family she constructs the threads that bind.

Ulrich (2001) finds family identities, as well as personal ones, “are built from selective fragments of the past – names, stories, and material possessions...that can be lost or re-created, abandoned or invented” over time (p. 135). Yvonne Wakabayashi has had a focus of preservation and re-creation of memory since her mother’s death in 1981. Her choice of textiles as a form of communication, Yvonne Wakabayashi avers, is a reflection of her mother’s needlecraft skills that were honed in Japan and revived in internment when needed. Her narrative with a focus on family identity examined through textiles is relevant to how we understand a period of Canadian history and its impact on its Japanese Canadians. But it is the further detailing of her mother’s generation which unfolds from within Yvonne’s narrative and the textile artist’s legacy of memory construction revealed through her interaction with fibre and the tools of her heritage, that offer us new aspects about women’s historical lives to consider.
Interview Comments

Debra Sparrow unfolds her story in a circular un-layering that is a unique experience for me. I interpret her approach to be an exercise of some control over her story as well as an evident expression of culture. Later, I learn more about the storytelling form based on an oral legacy of repetition, that is ‘iterative’ not linear or chronological (J. Y. Henderson, 2000). Hers is a story of regeneration from personal and cultural pain, anger and alienation imbedded in a history of colonization. I am uncomfortable in the knowledge that my own ancestors were of the ‘settler culture’ and that I have lived and gone to school on traditional Musqueam territory without any substantive knowledge of her culture. A reading of post-colonial literature confirms that ‘the interview’ is difficult territory given its unfortunate history of ‘an expert’ interviewing an ‘other’ (Clavir, 2002; L. T. Smith, 1999). The weaver has told her story a number of times and her comment to Jill Baird (1997) in an earlier interview possibly identifies why Debra continues to share her story as she does with me, “I think we need to school your people about who we were” (p. 36). Aboriginal teaching rests on oral traditions, stories and memories (J. Y. Henderson, 2000); our discussion is negotiated and constructed around my questions but I accept that Debra is teaching me.

The narrative is framed throughout by her concept of “having been led” to weaving. Prior to the interview I might have thought we’d discuss the aesthetics of her art: form, pattern, colour as well as its meaning. It leads alternatively to a more spiritual journey centred on memory. Debra Sparrow strives to effect respect for her heritage through knowledge “where it has been lacking”. Her story originates in collective identity destruction, and through her own course of action, evolves to identity creation based on pride of culture and hope. Central to this construction is the affirming memory of a past excellence in weaving and how a sharing of its meanings might bring cross-cultural understanding and pride of origin within Musqueam.

Postcolonial studies, that stress Sparrow’s ‘subject position’ as opposed to being an object of study (De Castell & Bryson, 1997), provide a guiding frame to analyze.
Sparrow’s narrative. It allows her voice to speak, whenever possible, to her relationship with textiles and the expressions of agency that followed the stimulus of re-connecting to the skills of the past.

*Selecting Memory 2: Debra Sparrow’s Ancestral Agency*

The wellspring of Debra Sparrow’s agency is her connection to ancestral knowledge. As described in her narrative, she was initially not interested in pursuing traditional ways of knowing. “I would go back to my grandfather’s and grandmother’s house and feel the gentleness of their life. I knew they had something to offer me, eventually, that I would need in my life, to complete it” (Sparrow, 1994, p. 43). In this she pinpoints a dislocation that a colonial past wrought on her education. It is also evidence of the force of assimilation that distanced a young aboriginal from the ‘cultural constructions’, some derived from myth, that subtly transfer values, beliefs, worldview and the ‘know-how’ of craft traditionally from grandmothers (sometimes meaning ‘older woman’) to young girls (Gustafson, 1980; Schweitzer, 1999). When Debra Sparrow came to action it took the form of a spiritual quest that looked back in time within the fibre of her culture.

When Debra sought cultural connection, she bypassed the decades of dislocation to the memory of the proficient and purposeful weavers, possessors of power, women who communicated through textiles. As Debra unfolded her narrative to me she noted pointedly that she didn’t want her work called ‘craft’. She resists labels that would see her work isolated as an aesthetic exercise (in galleries) unrelated to Musqueam culture as a whole or as an exotic interlude in mainstream education. (“...I’m slotted into this category of a romantic history or something...I don’t want to be slotted into a little romantic social studies hour” (Baird, 1997, p. 36). She is also cognizant of the ambiguous role of craft in Western academic canons. Although its status is ascending craft is still largely denigrated as “those spaces [that] are devalued because women occupy them (Kimmel, 1997, p. 3). In her identification with Salish weavers of the past, Sparrow ignores ‘craft’ actively choosing the total experience that weaving meant to her forbearers as a site imbued with power. These were women respected for their knowledge who enjoyed power or ‘cultural capital’ as they produced a revered and economically valuable
product at the heart of their culture. This is the historical memory resonant with ancestral agency she selected, or as Debra would phrase it, where her calling led.

If Sparrow’s source of agency is ancestral, her ability to enact it is rooted in a personal transformation that brought pride in identity. She has in fact selected her aboriginal ancestry as a focus, not her Scottish/Norwegian heritage, a stage set perhaps by her mother’s immersion by choice in a life at Musqueam. Paula Gustafson’s (1982) book depicting images of Coast Salish weavers pointed to a unique heritage; nowhere else in North America had artistic and valuable weavings been made in such abundance. The book provided the stimulus. “I wanted to be one of those women. I had a role model. I had a reason to exist” (Sparrow, 1998, p. 152). The weaver has a clearly defined identity within her community and beyond that has sprung from her weaving. This has given her the grounding to evolve in new directions. “I used to be holding on by a thread – If I wasn’t doing the work I’m doing I don’t know where I’d be. I’ve taken the thread and attached it to the meaning of why I exist”. Debra explains the reflexive process of this identity connection. Since she’s “…come to a better understanding of what I am, I have a better understanding of what my people felt, what their understanding was… it just gives me more of an identity…” (Johnson & Bernick, 1986, p. 30).

Although craft is not a word used by Debra Sparrow, it has been argued persuasively that craft is a ‘way of knowing’ the world through personal experience accessed through the fingertips as well as the mind (Hardy, 1994) that is apt to the way the weaver has engaged history and memory. Although its status is uncertain, theorists and practitioners of craft, consider it to be an intuitive social movement (B. Metcalf, 2002) that has parallels in the weaving revival. Craft possesses a body of knowledge in harmony with nature and “functions as a vehicle to construct meaning” [that] “gives substance and dignity and grace to individuals’ lives” (p. 17). Much of the process of revival weaving and the creation of meaning is in step with the contemporary craft movement ideologically.

With a greater sense of self, the weaver withstands acculturation by choosing a way of knowing excluded by a dominant society; she chooses the wisdom and ‘intellectual competencies’ of her culture of origin (Goldberger, 1996). Sparrow has selected ancestral knowledge as her touchstone for cultural memory, but she wants more.
“What I want as a Musqueam woman is to stand equally with the people in Vancouver and the people of the world” (Baird, 1997, p. 34). If she finds Western society “a pretty arrogant one” with questionable values (p. 34), Sparrow further selects from the memory of her people for a solution. It lies in a tradition of education, devalued in the onslaught of assimilation, but holding possibilities to teach me and the community beyond Musqueam and the young people within it.

Articulating Historical Memory 2– Debra Sparrow and the Language of Textiles

As Debra Sparrow made the link to “the ancestors” in a process grounded in the acts of spinning, weaving and dyeing she intuited a language that imparted traditional knowledge. To be fully conversant with her heritage she had to study outside sources, see how a weaving unravelled to understand how it was made, gather the plants herself with which to dye, draw on elder knowledge and make the connections to the spiritualism of her cultures’ longhouse tradition (some of which remains private). As they thought of the women weavers who imbedded their culture as they wove, the revivalist Musqueam weavers acknowledged a desire to communicate through fibre. As one of the group who continues to weave, Debra sees her mission as one to deliver a message of cultural worth in new ways via the communicative power of the textile. “I have this belief – and I’ve heard other Native people talk about this too - that each blanket, each tapestry, has a message within” (Sparrow, 1998, p. 154). For Debra as an individual, the call to action that spurred nearly two decades of weaving tapestries imbued with cultural memory, has cohered her sense of self. The language of textiles the weaver constructed connects her to her affirming past. For the Musqueam people the textile designs of the weavers deliver a message of collective identity, an act of agency that conveys historical memory in a culture attempting to fulfill a future that honours its past.

Recovering Memory

Weaving again at Musqueam articulated the historical memory of Coast Salish women bringing them into sharper focus by valuing their contribution to traditional culture and providing a link to the agency of women in the past. As they were not
politically active at the time of European contact, they were ‘hidden’ from history. With my own lens attuned to revisit women’s history, I see this focus as an act of recovery as women and their creations of the past are valued. The weaver speaks primarily of ‘culture’ rather than ‘women’ but speaks often of ‘women and knowledge’. Debra indicated in our conversations that she sees sexual divisions of labour as part of a ‘natural’ order and her focus, when the gaze is turned to the past, is clearly on cultural recovery. In a circular manner, she reveals the path of her agency; “We come from an oral tradition. We believe, strongly, in that what I have to say is what has been handed to me from my ancestors and, through that, I have confidence that I will say what I need to say, or what they want me to say. So, that is the gift that has been given to me” (Trouton, 2001, p. 83). To reciprocate, Sparrow seeks respect for her forbearers.

Figure 5.9 Selisya (a Squamish woman) spinning with a traditional Salish spindle at Musqueam in 1915. Photo C.F. Newcombe, Royal British Columbia Museum.

Through Sparrow’s act of connection to such ancestral knowledge she has contributed to the gaze backward initiated by writers Paula Gustafson (1980) and Oliver
Wells (1969) as well as her sister Wendy John Grant (1986) and the other revival weavers. Selisya’s traditional manner of spinning at Musqueam captured in the photograph of 1915 is supported by an earlier sketch by Paul Kane of similar Salish spinning in 1847 (Gustafson). In a method apparently unchanged for generations, Selisya spins seated on a folded Salish blanket on a hand woven rush mat amid large balls of spun wool with a finely crafted basket clearly visible. Spinning, embedded in the historical past, is culturally significant to Coast Salish. Perhaps derived from the transformative action of controlling flimsy fibre into a strong yarn or the mesmerizing focus of the spinner on the spindle whorl designs, Salish spinning is associated with ritual purification (Gustafson, 1980). Debra alludes to the mystical quality of spinning when she speaks of the discoveries “when they spun back into time”.

When we view the archival photograph of Selisya spinning from this historical moment of the present rather than twenty years ago, it is in the context of the experiences of the revival weavers, Debra’s learning from her grandfather and Debra’s ‘hands on’ interaction with her young students. It is through Sparrow’s conversations with her grandfather on weaving in the past at Musqueam, that the details from ‘the margins’ emerged. Selisya and Spahqia spun and wove while Spahqia’s grandson, Edward Sparrow, watched the “old ladies”, played among the balls of wool and was occasionally bidden to ‘go outside’ (Trouton, 2001, p. 88). The women were at work on the garment for Spahqia’s grandson about 1904 (Eng, 1989) some years before the historic photograph of Selisya. As Ed Sparrow poetically phrased the timing of the imprint of memory, it was “[w]hen I was a little boy just come to my senses, about five years old…” (Sparrow, 1994, p. 44). We have a glimpse of the textures of the women’s lives as they engage in a valued creative process to preserve a name in a blanket of cultural memory for the young one at their knee. This knowledge is provided by the oral transference of a child’s memory and the bond with a grandfather.

Through a language of textiles, Debra Sparrow learned what she needed to know of past weaving to engage this connection. With other band members she traveled out of the country (about 1985) to study some of the finest surviving Coast Salish blankets at the Smithsonian Institute, the American Museum of Natural History and the Museum of the American Indian where they approached the ancestors’ weaving as historic
documents (Fairchild, 2001). She details the learning process as one discovered through tactile experience with artifacts, touch that included the unravelling of old blankets, and the first experiences preparing the wool and taking it to the loom. The weaver expands on the task:

We have to study the old blankets to learn how to do this—there’s no documentation, there’s nothing...just that, ‘it was collected at the mouth of the Fraser in 1786’, –not who made it, not what we thought it was, why they did it, what the dye meant. There’s absolutely no history of what any of the design meant. We can only dream about it. (pause) Because we don’t know. So when we work with them and out fingers are actually touching the warp and the work in-between, we have a sense of what they may have meant.

(Trouton, 2001, p. 85)

Debra credits her grandfather with being her greatest teacher in the second part of her life who instructed, “…you have to know who you are and you have to know where you come from” (p. 83) [then you can act]. The gift of heritage, resonant with ancestral knowledge which is transformed to agency, is reclaimed from artifacts and the wisdom of elders.

The reclamation of memory gleaned from the museums or from a grandfather reinforces that aboriginal knowledge is learned; “[e]ach perspective of the worldview [is] not genetically or racially encoded” (J. Y. Henderson, 2000, p. 261). Interestingly, the first projects the revival weavers embraced were the production of belts and tumplines (forehead bands attached to backpacks or baby carriers) identified historically with women’s use, remnants from a disconnected past (Dockstader, 1993). From this beginning the weavers became conversant in textile language that allowed women to articulate a creative response to marginalization. It provided the vehicle “to make themselves visible in a historical context”, contemporary political participants affirming
historical continuity (Roy, 1999, p. 3). Debra Sparrow is an active community leader as a result of the cultural recovery of collective and individual memory.

Making Memory Visible

To articulate historical memory through textiles is to make it evident to others. One of Debra’s goals at the outset, shared by her sisters, was to re-instigate visual representations of their culture that would be rich in Coast Salish design. This implicitly asserts collective identity and meaning. As the revival weavers of Musqueam have created new artifacts that embody identity they have a sense that other originating peoples in other regions at home and abroad might follow their example to visually restate their culture. Debra speaks of this global intention to spur others to act on their own behalf in Journey (1998), “If people have to see to believe, then we now have our weavings to show, something to share with you” (p. 154).

The educator further articulates historical memory as do a number of Musqueam artists in works, projects and programs with an intentionally public profile. Among these, textiles provide the organizing hub and a means to speak to a wider culture as well as their own. Debra speaks of the message within a tapestry, for example, as intended to outwardly display the competency or status of skills that simultaneously honour ancestors and right some of the wrongs done to Native people (Sparrow, 1998) and to raise the self-esteem of her band. Such is the case of the impressive display at Vancouver Airport which Fairchild (2001) terms “public signifiers of Musqueam identity” (Abstract) or the collaborations of a number of Musqueam designers and artists with the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in the creation of its displays and education programs.

An Education in Memory

One of the ways that Debra Sparrow articulates historical memory as the ‘grandmothers’ did before her is through her teaching that uses weaving as a conduit to communicate heritage, skill and culture. As in the Sardis revival, such teaching came with the assistance of elders. In that instance, Mary Peters who had learned basketry from her Thompson River mother possessed a wealth of knowledge such that Salish weavers say of her that she “knows everything because she never went to school” (Gustafson,
1980, p. 105). This preserved thread of memory from an elder, functions to reclaim the link for their culturally dislocated descendants. Sparrow’s sister, Wendy Grant, describes the role of elders in the mid 1980s early in the education of the revival weavers that has imprinted current teaching. Two women still conversant with weaving rush mats, shared the old ways in a schooling that differed from ‘any classroom’ Grant had been in before. “I think what they taught us could never be measured…they taught us an attitude about …how you feel, how you think when you are weaving….The only word I can think of is patience, understanding, feeling for each other and what you are doing” (Bernick & Johnson, p. 25).

It is this word *patience* that I hear Debra Sparrow reiterate with her young charges in 2005 as they grapple with spinning the rough ‘tow’ into yarn. In a Musqueam community youth centre she has gathered nine Musqueam girls aged eight to nine, and is teaching them the weaving that Selisya and Spahqia did many years before them. It is an opportunity to reinforce culture in many ways. “I’m teaching them much more than weaving.” Sparrow began her journey on a self-preserving quest; she continues it now as a teacher with the continuum of an enduring band culture in her goals. The weaver considers her first group of young novice weavers hopefully; “If just three continue”, she tells me, “we will still have weaving at Musqueam”.

As Sparrow teaches young girls the techniques of their great-grandmothers, she finds there is an element of exchange that validates her role. “It verifies that young women were taught this way before…my people must have taught their young ladies the way I’m teaching them now”. Identifying with creative and power possessing Salish women of the past, who exerted their knowledge and entitlement through a textile process, has been of value to Debra Sparrow in an acculturating world. It may provide a mechanism for a new generation of Musqueam women to voice their identities and exercise agency amid the challenges of marginalization.

Weaving plays an additional role in programs that express identity. *Musqueam Museum School* in conjunction with *MOA* is a five-week collaborative program with other elementary schools in the community that provides an opportunity to articulate collective identity beyond the band. It allows Sparrow and Musqueam cultural teachers to
“take responsibility”, to act to provide neighbouring students with insights into a culture marginalized by anthropologists of the 1930’s (Fairchild, 2001). Musqueam culture is largely unrecognized in contrast to the more distant and artistically celebrated Haidas (Trouton, 2001). Weaving is one of two components around which this program to articulate identity is built. Although agency ripples through many aspects of cultural production and identity creation that are evident in memory recovery and education, it is perhaps most apparent in overt acts of resistance or political purpose.

Cultural Memory and Resistance

Sparrow (1998) refers to the political and meaning laden process of weaving, an integral and inseparable component of her metier and culture, in Journey where she reflects, “If I have to use my hands to reflect a message to people then I will do that, but the messages do not belong to me individually: they belong to all our people” (p. 154). The messages delivered through weaving and tapestry, she writes, are not “to make people feel bad about what has happened in the last two hundred years...” but to reassert “the integrity and intelligence of the people who existed in this land prior to the arrival of the Europeans” (p. 154). That is to employ weaving, that has a heritage of denoting boundaries, in today’s quests.

To this end the textual message of the weavings also asserts the collective political identity of an aboriginal community still in treaty negotiations with the provincial government of British Columbia and the government of Canada. This is demonstrated by a recent article in the national newspaper The Globe and Mail (Hume, 2005). The accompanying photograph (Jeff Vinnick, Canadian Press) of two government officials and the Musqueam First Nation Chief celebrating the signing of an agreement, makes it clear that the action is located on Musqueam territory. All three wear blankets of Debra Sparrow’s commercially produced designs (labeled Sparrow Sisters for Kanata Blanket Company) against a backdrop of Coast Salish wall hangings. There is a historical referent in a visual culture that ties an earlier record to this one. A 1906 photograph of Chief Joe Capilano and a number of other chiefs wear the mantle of power, each bedecked in a magnificent Salish weaving in a proud display before Capilano travels to England to meet King Edward VII (Gustafson, 1980). Weavings as material culture,
notes Roy (1999) evoke land use of the past [and power as evidenced by the two photographs] and have currency on the political stage as a strategy to identify a ‘distinct’ status. Sparrow refers to the inherent power of contemporary Salish tapestry when she observes, “As we go about our business and community politics, the weaving represents a success equal to anything that others are doing” (Sparrow, 1998). Their use in 2005 is an overt visual sign affirming that the levels of government are negotiating with a functioning people with a long history. It is a statement that resists assimilation or loss of sovereignty and rests on a contemporary construction of identity.

Debra Sparrow walked out of her junior high school education desperately unhappy in the classrooms she experienced and unconnected to her history. When ‘her destiny’ led her to the stories and knowledge of the past, she held fast. Such holding onto culture is an act of resistance (Taiaiake, 2003, 2004). She resists a legacy of aggressive
integration by passionately spinning her stories around an ancestral process that signifies a new chapter in a journey. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) clarifies that contemporary aboriginals tell stories to memorialize and reclaim the past, give testimony to wrongs and strategize for justice. In a comment that parallels recouping a past for women generally in history, Sparrow comments there is “a whole history that needs to be retold...I feel sort of chosen to interpret that now…” (Baird, 1997, p. 35). The need to tell these stories “remains the powerful imperative” of a process to configure “a powerful form of resistance” (Smith, p. 35). Australian scholar of indigenous history, Deborah Bird Rose (1989), maintains that social and cultural identity is reclaimed when we take possession for ourselves of … “the moment in which lived experience is symbiotically linked with time and others” (p. 135). This occurred when Debra Sparrow spun backward in time and stood at the loom experiencing historical memory. It led her to take possession of her own narrative and retell it in an affirmation of self and culture.

Decolonizing Historical Memory

In her engagement of historical memory, Debra Sparrow has anchored and enhanced individual and collective identities in a persistent culture honouring tradition that not only reclaims history and places it in the centre but accommodates change in evolving circumstances. Allowing her designs to be machine produced and styled as 'high end' fashion coats under her control, for instance, is an adaptation Debra Sparrow can effect from her firmly grounded position. It is not unlike the adaptive process undertaken by the Abenaki craftswoman Molly Ocket in 1778 in the borderland between New England and New France. Ulrich (2001) asserts the pocketbook the Abenaki woman cleverly crafted embodies a “complex intertwining of cultures”; the embroidery traditions of New France twined in an Algonkian weave of hemp and moose hair into a European styled pocketbook with a commercially woven wool lining (p. 260). A consideration of this example and the ancient origins of Sparrow’s designs, serve an important function in the decolonization process. It reclaims women’s history lost in the ‘master narrative’ defined by patriarchy and ‘development’, that held what came ‘before’ was pre-historical, simple, and not of importance (Roy, 1999; L. T. Smith, 1999). As a ‘tyranny of the immense’ such class and national histories threaten to engulf individuals
(Bird, 1989) and the marginalized of the past, doubly if they're women. By exploring and valuing the narrative revealed by a textile focus with the women weavers in a ‘subject position’, a step is taken in the decolonization and reclamation of, in this case, aboriginal women’s history.

**Memory, Authenticity and Contemporary Agency**

As indigenous peoples draw on heritage in their cultural creations there are issues of maintaining authenticity in a struggle for autonomy: what to share, what to sell without losing the legitimate voice of their ancestry. There is a history to trying to make weaving a viable economic enterprise at Musqueam (Fairchild, 2001), a goal that has long been a concern for Sparrow. The time consuming methods of traditional weaving do not generally provide a living wage. To earn through her labour and maintain artistic control of her enterprise are further expressions of agency that go some distance to expunge the perceived ‘unworthy’ status that accompanied her own and her people’s past. She acknowledges a boundary shift in the twenty-year span of her artistic production that sees her make collaborations for profit in a balancing of goals that also takes her articulation of memory to a much wider audience. She observes, “I’m moving into a contemporary level to share…not just being a traditionalist”. It is a pragmatic expression of agency for Debra Sparrow to exercise an authentic voice in a medium of expression and commerce.
In her own words the weaver/educator had to first prove to herself that she was “a capable, intelligent and functioning spirit…” to pursue her destiny (Baird, 1997, p. 37). Her resultant relationship with textiles has articulated historical memory in many ways through her own work and as part of a collective movement that has made cultural design visible as it provided new artifacts and forged connections through touch and other technical processes that validated ancestral knowledge. The exercise to recover memory and lay claim to an imbedded agency reunited women in an activity imbued with self-esteem, a constituent of identity, and reinforced the political and cultural foundations of
Musqueam reaffirming traditional land claims to the areas that provided goat hair and other materials for weaving. As Debra Sparrow communicated Musqueam culture and Salish ancestral abilities to a wider audience, she reclaimed the memory and agency to fortify her own foundation. The original collective of revival weavers has dispersed leaving an uncertain future. The tangible changes, wrought through a textile language that is by no means secure at Musqueam, culminate in the extension of the thread of memory to a subsequent generation of weavers who may grasp it.

If as Fairchild (2001) claims, “...Weavings have recovered a form of cultural capital” (p. 49), and I believe they have, Debra Sparrow by reclaiming memory and exercising her agency through weaving has created her own cultural capital. Through an identity founded on self-esteem, an essential element of agency and authenticity in original design (Carson, 2000), she has become the ‘hands’ of her ancestors in a renewing relationship with cultural memory. This has allowed the weaver to resist a culturally decimating message and ‘bridge’ and ‘interpret’ the shifting ground of two worlds. Memory theorist Allan Megill (1998) cautions that it is “a mistake to turn history into merely the offshoot of struggles for identity in the present” (p. 52). That her history exists as a reflection of its own time to Debra Sparrow, as well as a support to current identities, is evident in a reflective approach that asks what the women ancestors were thinking as they too spun the yarns of their culture.
Narrative 3 Analysis: Anna Samens –
The Tools for Survival

Interview Comments

The story of Anna Samens is constructed through the memories shared by her daughter Ilga and an analysis of objects for the history they reveal. The questions that I ask Ilga Samens over tea and Latvian buns, the photographs that we select to tell the story and my own reading of the photographs shape the narrative of the refugee who bartered and knit to preserve her family. Ilga Samens makes the history real with her tale that by turns visits trauma, grief, anger and pride in the story of a family’s life turned upside down by a national invasion and the legacy of communism that has limited the retrieval of property and its attendant memory.

Selecting Memory 3: The Agency of a Knitter

The tools of material culture.

Implicit to studies that draw on material culture is the topical approach that considers how we remember, what is deemed of historical worth and the inadequacy of traditional sources to fully realize historical understanding (Kavanagh, 2000; Kwint, Breward, & Aynsley, 1999; Tilley, 1999, 2001). Proponents of this approach note that too seldom are artifacts used to understand the past or too often historians miss opportunities for understanding by a conception of the artifact that is too narrow (Lubar & Kingery, 1993). There is now a recognition that we mediate our personal and cultural histories through images including photographic records, documentary and personal, as well as personal art forms (Sturken, 1999). These “formerly deligitimated” sources are a means to construct identity and negotiate (a sometimes traumatic) history that is “framed and reframed” in the process (p. 2). Consequently our gaze can be turned to a newly legitimated visual and tactile historical source, textiles, as evident in the Wakabayashi and Sparrow narratives and to the tools of textile production that engage the past through personal or cultural memory, as in the Samens narrative, to increase knowledge.
In the material forms of the photograph the visual meanings and memory are indivisible (Edwards, 1999) providing a valuable source for memory related study. Studio photographs present a conscious ‘framing’ of the subject for public scrutiny and evaluation that are sources of documentary evidence (Walton, 2002). The studio photograph of Anna Vipulis (figure 5.12) that records her religious confirmation is likely
from her later teens (c1908-1910) about the time she was training in her family’s factory. It is a testament to the ‘cultural capital’ (Edwards, 1999) with which she began life. The seated woman who has not been identified as family is possibly her religious instructor. Anna is dressed entirely in white including hair ribbons, gloves and a richly embellished gown. The attire, arrangement of the figures and the bouquet of flowers are testament to a significant occasion. The photograph imparts a social position of financial means with access to a photographic studio.

Studio photographs generally reflect the desires of the paying customer (likely Anna’s parents); the choices of clothing, posture and facial expression are likely theirs within the cultural context and purposes of such recording of milestones. It is further molded by the control of the photographer. Within a romantic tradition, the photograph is not structured to portray an image based on realism but appears to reflect the creators’ (the customer and studio photographer) interest “in the internal rather than the external lives of their subjects” that included moral activity (J. Green-Lewis quoted by Walton, 2002, p. 30). The photograph, a memory selected for preservation, records a life passage of a valued daughter and denotes her and her family’s social station. Chronologically, it is followed by the sober presentation in a more realistic vein of a young married couple in 1920, Anna and August dressed simply, who have survived the Russian Revolution.

It is the small photograph on the back wall of the Glenbow exhibit that initially draws my attention to Anna Samens. It appears that both she and the photographer have placed her in the foreground central to the ‘framing’ of the photograph. August Samens sits with a neutral bearing to have his portrait taken, somewhat to the side. Anna is engaged, exuding pride in her still small operation and her knitters that suggests that the photo taking is at her behest. All sources confirm that the factory is essentially her operation, based on a family endowment and her managerial force. This allows for a story with a textile focus to emerge with an economic, managerial and domestic blending at its centre, an alternative to usual recordings of women’s early twentieth century histories.
The factory photograph is taken in the late 1920s when Anna is a mother and ‘in her stride’ in her early thirties. In contrast to the romanticism of the studio photograph, she has purposefully clustered her staff around the machines which are the source of their livelihood. Materiality is often construed as “a neutral support for images” rather than as “integral to the construction of meaning” (Edwards, 1999, p. 225). Hence in terms of material culture, Anna’s construction of the photographic setting amid machinery affords their “intrinsic and affective qualities” a role in what matters to her in evoking or “making pasts” in these material forms of memory (p. 225). The prominence of the knitting machine at this early date reinforces the ‘rightness’ of her decision to choose it as the singular object of affective meaning that is repeated at various times in her life.

Presumably the eldest child of her parents, Anna employed her younger sister (pictured) and “started her brother in another business a block away”. The growth and success of the business under her management is recounted by Ilga Samens and is evident in other photographs, including one of the larger factory, taken by Anna’s daughter Skaidrite Krause when she was in Latvia in the 1980s. They offer a visually
‘concrete’ record of the family’s business, a partial memory, as the Russians effaced the Samens name that was carved deeply in the granite marquee.

As a “conduit of memory” photographs are objects that allow us “to unpick the more subtle connections with cultural lives and values” (Edwards, 1999, p. 221 and D. Miller quoted by Edwards, p. 223). Given what followed historically, the Samens family could look back on what was. The photograph as an object serves three purposes in the Western tradition: it constitutes or furnishes our picture of the past, stimulates remembering possibly by a “serendipitous encounter” and creates a record analogous to human memory (Kwint et al., 1999, p. 2). The photograph of 1932 recounts an interwar period of some security and leisure; it records an outing of an extended family skiing together. They are well dressed sporting ski sweaters and fine gauge knitwear from the business. It also portrays the son and brother, Vilnis, who did not survive. Like all souvenirs, keeping photographs is “an act of faith in the future” (Edwards, 1999, p. 222).
They are returned to in the present evoking a mix of emotion and memory. These photographs are in the album rescued by Ilga as a young teen; it made the journey of the displaced and continues to be a valued possession. They have been selected both by the initial act of picture taking and in their subsequent preservation as memory.

Figure 5.15 August and Anna Samens in the storefront in Riga, early 1940s. Photo courtesy of I. Samens.

I selected this photograph from Ilga Samens’ collection; it depicts Anna at the pinnacle of her business years in Latvia. A possibly impromptu snapshot, it is minimally arranged by the subjects if at all. The background is the finely crafted mahogany millwork that houses the knits in the retail shop fronting the factory. The photographer seems torn as to where the focus should be. August, is at the till where he can interact with the public, a role in which he excelled. Anna has her eye affixed to the business at hand, possibly on orders or figures. It is dated to the early 1940s which means the business is largely serving the German occupiers, a position together with their bourgeois
status which will be untenable when the Russians sweep in. The photograph marks the turning point in the narrative.

Articulating Historical Memory 3: The Knitting Machine of Anna Samens

Figure 5.16 Glenbow Museum exhibit of Anna Samens’ knitting machine, June, 2005. Photo courtesy of I. Samens.

As well as the more usual sources of family memory and photographs, the story of Anna Samens emerges from an object critically important to its owner. It is displayed at the Canadian Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta in 2004 - 2005 with the accessories that accompanied the family’s flight. The knitting machine and its paraphernalia are unassuming. It includes a niddy-noddy to wind the yarn in preparation for machine knitting and tools that can create a patterned surface. The spools allow for colours to be blended before knitting as Anna did for the socks that caught the fancy of
Alberta aboriginals. A miniature of the poster that lined theatre halls in Riga to advertise the Samens line is displayed at the back of the exhibit alongside the small black and white photograph of the staff from “when the factory was small”.

It is interesting to consider that these were the items chosen as the family made a hasty exit from their lives in Riga; family lore records Anna’s insistence on the packing of this collection of business items. The financial papers, patterns, advertisements and tools signified the growth of her business over 30 years, but were not valuable in themselves as were the items buried by the family and other Latvians en masse. When I enquire as to the type of knitting that Anna Samens did in Russia in an earlier exile long before the birth of her children, her daughter confirms that it was by machine. Possibly one of the machines Anna had just received as a wedding gift accompanied her to St. Petersburg and ensured their food supply; this necessitates an elastic reading of the family phrase that they were leaving Riga for ‘a few hours’ in 1915. That too was expected to be a short exile.

The truck loaded three decades later, consequently, held the items that Anna deemed would ensure survival in case they were not back in their home within two weeks as expected. The ball gowns coveted by the incoming communists were eschewed for practical items. As Ilga, aged 14, ran back into the house to grab a family photo album that she particularly cherished, Anna called out to her daughter to pick a shawl hanging at the back door for “it might be cold on the coast.”

In June of 2005, Ilga Samens unfolds the shawl. It is an aged teal coloured textile with a subtle pattern that a few moths have visited. “No one will care about this…it doesn’t look like anything.” Ilga demonstrates its usage, folding the metre and a half square in half to make a triangular scarf that covers the head, is crossed ‘farmer’ style in the front and tied under the arms at the back. To her mother Anna, it became the last textile she possessed that had been produced in her factory. Knowing its importance to her mother, Ilga struggles to express its value now. It has importance because she gave you the memory of it, I suggest. “Yes. Yes!”
Figure 5.17 Ilga Samens, June 16, 2005 holding her mother's Latvian shawl. Photo courtesy of I. Samens.

When Anna Samens uttered, “The knitting machine is my life; I will not take a step without it” in 1944, she articulated its importance to her that was reinforced as it once again became the means for survival. With her remembered skills and the memory of bartering her knits in Russia she determined to support her family. As such it was an embodiment of her agency; it allowed the knitter to provide for her family in desperate times or to provide more when each food item or commodity was almost unattainable. During exiles, Anna’s husband and later her children joined the ranks of labour which were abundant. Hers was the specialized skill that could provide a service and items that were in demand. Stripped of all else, she was able to act on her family’s behalf resisting the helplessness that characterized the DP experience. The knitting machine remained an outlet for her agency to the end of her life easing the immigrant experience in Canada.
where her ‘cultural capital’ bore little resemblance to her earlier life. When she took her ‘sock money’ to Hawaii near the end of her life, unbeknownst to her family, she paid for their New Year’s feast. “You see, I too can do something.”

Through her attachment to her knitting machine and the knits she produced, Anna Samens articulated historical memory and asserted her identity. She firmly placed an object, laden with meaning, at the centre of the memory she constructed. That her daughters recognized this is clear when they determined that in spite of a ready buyer following their mother’s death, they chose to contact a museum in Calgary. In the notes collected by Frances Roback of the Glenbow at the time of the donation in 1979 is a comment that “… the family had esteem, one might say reverence for the knitting machine, especially Anna Samens. It provided continuity with the past and ensured the family’s future in face of recurring economic hardship” (Glenbow Archives). Anna articulated memory in her attachment to the knitting machine and the goods she could produce with it. Imbedded in her knitting machine and her memory was its potential as a tool for survival in her hands. The object was a conduit for agency to sustain the individual identity of Anna Samens and through her the collective identity of her family.

Strands of Comparison

The most striking commonality between the three narratives was the resolve of women who articulated their response to historical circumstance in different ways. The ‘such is life’ philosophical approach arose in wording that was verbatim from the individuals of Japanese and Latvian heritage who sought, on their particular life paths, not to dwell on trauma. In the aboriginal context, the approach was more to confront the past and seek healing through traditional means. Joining the past to the future in the three narratives and the supporting examples that introduced the chapter, are the selected threads of memory.
Threads of Memory: A Textile Language of Metaphor

Cloth has been called a metaphor for society (Schneider & Weiner, 1989). In a narrowed focus on women, textile metaphors abound in the stories where their lives interface with fibre as they do in the narratives studied here. Metaphor seems particularly apt in describing the imprints of memory that surface repeatedly; it provides a literary means together with the tactile and visual ones to relate one narrative to another. These strands of compared meanings, crafted by women at particular junctures of their lives, can furnish women’s history.

The narratives unfolded, in many instances, through meanings elucidated through metaphor. Yvonne Wakabayashi uses the imagery of the sea to ground the textile narratives she creates that memorialize her family’s heritage and tenacity. Her mother Ayame, in an immaculately turned sleeve, metaphorically embodies dignity through her sewing that resists an imposed alien status. With her line of poetry, “Tattooed in my skin is my history”, Yvonne’s niece Leah Kitamura evokes her indelible Japanese Canadian heritage and her attachment to it. Debra Sparrow sees the Musqueam weavers as a ‘bridge’ to the past and enacts the metaphor that she is her ancestors ‘hands’ leaving no doubt as to the connection she has made to her cultural past. Tilley (2001; 1999) points out that we think through metaphors forging connections between the known and the unknown that “creates intimacy between the speaker and listener” (1999, p. 9), a process that can be effected between an artist/creator and a viewer. The women of these stories sought the connections of historical memory, selected and articulated them in definitions of identity, individual and collective. As a tool in revisiting women’s history, the metaphors that emerge from the narratives juxtapose in new and alternative ways women’s lives and the meanings they make through their art, production and storytelling. They help to go beyond the quilting metaphors of women’s lives to communicate diverse and multiple meanings through a language of textiles.

Agency and Narrative

I have shown that textile narratives can be analyzed as constructions of historical memory that cohere identity. The selected women’s narratives were articulated via ‘traditional’ skills associated with their gender. As knowledge it is trivialized for it
“...grows out of experiences, out of continued contact with particularities of material, sensory objects... strongly shaped by the subjectivity of its knowers...” (Loraine Code quoted by Hardy, 1994, p. 51). Yet the individual story that materializes serves as a witness challenging “official hegemonic history” (Hirsch & Smith, 2002, p.7) and affirms memory, the means by which we remember who we are (Sturken, 1997). The examples and narratives outlined here demonstrate that in their multiple contexts and perspectives women have, in these instances at least, used their relationships with textiles as a means to articulate memory in ways that allow their stories to be revealed and valued as they provide more nuanced dimensions to conceptions of history.

Each act of narration creates agency, the valued constituent sought in women’s history. In feminist analysis social constraints remain, but when women enact narratives we see ourselves as agents who shape our own lives and create our own stories; we embody our stories in narrative in order to make sense of them (Hartman & Messer-Davidow, 1991). It is a step in finding a place for each woman in the larger picture, in enacting identity through constructions of memory. In the final chapter I consider how the knowledge presented here, with the humanizing details imbedded within narratives of selected women, allow us to more fully contemplate their historical lives in the conversation of education.
CHAPTER SIX

Crafting Curriculum: Engaging Women’s History
Through Textile Narratives

*Stories, like culture and language, have been constant traveling companions to human beings, always and everywhere.*

~McEwan & Egan, *Narrative in Teaching, Learning, and Research*

*On this bridge, we are in no hurry to cross over; in fact, such bridges lure us to linger.*

~Ted T. Aoki, quoted by Pinar, *Curriculum in a New Key*

Weaving Women’s History into the Curriculum

The narratives presented and analyzed in Chapters four and five are qualitative research that yields the kind of memory, as it unfolds from narrative and material sources, that leads to a greater understanding and documentation of women’s culture and history that was ‘defined out’ in the past (Gallagher, 2001; Gluck & Patai, 1991). In this chapter I identify the curricular theories that support an interleaving of the knowledge that emerged from the narratives into human history and delineate the ways this knowledge could enhance the teaching of women’s history. Opportunities to teach such history I believe arise in the disciplines as curriculum is being envisioned and practiced. Where instructors have knowledge of what textiles can offer as a vehicle of instruction, these opportunities can be utilized in interdisciplinary ways as a tool to integrate more meaningful and more complete impressions of women’s historical experience. I direct my observations to the integration of this knowledge to humanities curricula generally, with specific comments on undertaking textile studies.

*A Kindred Reconceptualization*
The feminist historical scholarship that shaped the search for women's narratives has a parallel in the theories that support curriculum making. With its affinity for critical theory that examines how power shapes social construction, feminists have sought to replace the positivist stance with new history and practice (Boxer, 1998; Kincheloe, 1999). Reflexive educational practice, for example, that incorporates moral inquiry is attuned to the philosophy and strategic goals of the women's history project (Boxer). These goals are in step with those of a 'reconceptualized' curriculum advocated by educational theorists in the 1960's such as Paulo Freire, who did not mention gender, but challenged the hierarchical classroom and questioned transmissive teaching in general and the transmission of dominant cultures in particular with lasting effect (Boxer, 1998).

The new history and practice envisioned by the sixties theorists that sought to correct inequalities in education by engaging the discourses of gender, race, sexuality and culture dovetail with feminist objectives but are yet to be fully realized in curricula (Kesson, 1999). These strands of educational theory discourage marginalization and support a meaningful interweaving of women and their activities into curriculum in both theory and practice. This is in keeping with one strand of curriculum theory that places democratic goals foremost.

**Democratic and Transformative Curriculum Theory**

The democratic curriculum is envisioned to replace or reform the certainty of the scientific model (Kincheloe, 1999). It arises through critical theory that proposes open reflection in education with no pre-determined answers or rules; this opens the door to participation of 'others' and different ways of knowing (Boxer, 1998). The *mythopoetic* approach develops democratic curriculum along a more interpretive road valuing tacit sources of knowledge, 'the immeasurables', that speak "to what is perhaps most basic in human beings – the capacities to feel, to empathize, to imagine, and to reflect on the larger purposes and meanings of our lives" (Kesson, 1999, p. 84). This curricular model is the antithesis to the objective stance that shut women out of the teaching of history and suggests a supportive frame for narratives of women.

Curriculum theorists lament teaching in a closed hierarchical system that follows a linear cause and effect logic (Gough, 1999). Its goal, maintain the critics, is to teach
knowledge and content without context through behavioural methods to reach predetermined ends (Kesson, 1999), essentially the kind of teaching that covered the ‘frontier’ or ‘taming of the West’. In this history the supportive framework and labour of its women were invisible (Clark, in press; Strong-Boag, 1990). A study centred on ancestral knowledge, as just one possible alternative, would approach the ‘contact’ or colonial history with very different results. A pedagogy that employs themes and interdisciplinary approaches as an instructional tool avoids a stultifying march through history that may gather the facts but miss some of the participants, including women, and the essence of history.

The concept of freedom in education is central to Maxine Greene, “an existential and phenomenological educational philosopher” who has had far-reaching influence on curriculum theories (J. L. Miller 1998, p. 147). The teacher and student being ‘authentically present’ to each other in a democratic setting is pivotal to her holistic approach to education that envisions a caring learning community (Henderson, 1999). Her legacy of a non-hierarchical participatory vision of teacher and student is attuned with the educational goals of feminist approaches to history.

The avoidance of hierarchy allows for the transformative nature of the democratic curriculum sought by curriculum leaders. Building on Maxine Greene’s existential concept of inquiry for a meaningful life and her removal of the teacher’s ‘managerial mask’, curriculum scholars foresee a collegial and collaborative process that allows teachers to continue learning, often from their students (J. G. Henderson, 1999; J. L. Miller, 1998). Critiquing the traditional role of teachers, bell hooks (1994) comments, “The self was presumably emptied the moment the threshold was crossed, leaving in place only an objective mind - free of experiences and biases” (p. 16) As teachers we seem to be encouraged to put ourselves in the classroom as never before. I should feel free then to use my own experiences, novel reading or bits of family tatted lace, for example, as a starting point for the exploration of women’s historical lives. In a collaborative endeavour, I might expect to find further direction for inquiry from the uniqueness and research of my students.

Influential theorists Madeleine Grumet and William Pinar find the essence of curricular meaning in the lived experience rather than in the abstractions of subject matter
(Kesson, 1999). Hence, many curriculum leaders point to a holistic education that stresses self-esteem, strong inter-personal connections and process over content. A poem or a quilt may be a better way to receive a particular woman’s history and still be in step with current educational thought and provide an opening for interdisciplinary study.

The absence of the behavioural objectives of the prior learning model, (Osborne, 1999) and the advent of holistic approaches has allowed for the development of self-esteem and teaching for critical empowerment that are part of creating a moral democracy (Henderson, 1999; Kesson, 1999; Kincheloe 1999). Hence many curriculum theories are aligned philosophically with women’s studies; they advocate open inquiry in a more equitable setting where students are more likely to be drawn in by intriguing topics.

The role of the teacher of women’s history, consequently, can be enhanced by curricular theories that welcome lived experience, personal practical knowledge and collaborative curriculum making as central to the profession. Rather than the transmissive role of the teacher when curriculum is a means to an end, the teacher’s lived experience is valued as a source of data, moral agency and understanding of issues encountered in the classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, Kesson 1999), an interaction that is valued by some educators over content goals (Grumet & Pinar, 1996; Kesson, 1999). Advocates of the sharing of personal practical knowledge find that it allows students to see who we are as individuals as we negotiate the ‘big questions’ together in our community that is the classroom (T. T. Aoki, 1993; Grumet, 1987) and allow for ‘detours’ in educational conversations (Britzman, 1997).

Many of the educational theories outlined here are related to phenomenology or the study of human consciousness as popularized in part by Maxine Greene and explored by Grumet (1987, 1990, 1991), J. L. Miller (1998) and Pinar (1992). Its interpretive focus on the individual grappling with life experience is not universally embraced, but has value to historians who seek not just the grand stories of accomplishment but the meaning of a life in context. Phenomenology seeks to communicate, to name ‘the spaces between the stars’ and determine how they relate to us (Pinar). To this end the narrative voice is fundamentally suited.
The narratives presented in chapter 4 are lived experience. The appropriate curricular framework on which to stitch together such narratives of memory to illumine women’s lives is a transformative and democratic one that values lived experience and allows marginalized voices to be heard and valued. True change occurs when a reconceptualized history has not only been conceived in the curriculum but is found to engage students. To this end, I turn to the power of the ‘good yarn’.

Engaging Women’s History through Narrative in the Curriculum

Narrative Theory

The narrative, specifically a textile related narrative, is the vehicle I have used to gather and analyze stories about women. The weaving of these stories and others like them into the curriculum serves a number of purposes. It provides an alternate route to political and social history destinations that allow for unconventional foci along the way. These amplify the role of women from its diminished position. (The Latvian refugee tale allows for such a focus on what women were doing in war torn Europe.) The textile narrative also allows for teaching without text if desirable utilizing oral history, the tactile and the visual, expanding the analytical abilities of students. Textile narratives allow a connection to be made to a wider audience, drawn by the ‘hook’ of narrative to an alternate focus and another way of knowing. This wider reach will extend the teaching of women’s history. In this section I advance the theoretical appropriateness of narrative to this task with its abilities to first engage and then enlighten students. Secondly I touch on cautions to consider when students are involved in narrative making.

Proponents of the narrative herald the return of storytellers in our society and in education where “a pervasive nonnarrative and behaviourist chill has prevailed” (McEwan & Egan, p. xii). That we are ‘hard-wired’ for narrative is supported by psychoanalytic theory that sees our earliest engagement with fairytales and later with myths, dreams and stories of all kinds, as part of an adult individuation process (Kesson, 1999). These bridges to growth make ample use of metaphors to “literally construct the world and our responses to it” as we endlessly tell and retell stories to refigure the past and create purpose for the future (Kesson, p. 92; Clandinin & Connelly, 1988). Whereas
our dominant historical artifacts have traditionally been print on paper, narratives [in many forms] offer new sources for discovery (Gough 1999). How we choose which narratives to legitimate is crucial. According to Aoki (1993), the privileged grand narratives of modernism that have dominated our curriculum landscape, should be replaced by everyday narratives, stories and anecdotes “that embody the lived dimension of curriculum life”; these can provide not only knowledge but wisdom (p. 263). Acknowledging subjectivity as we choose which narratives to study offers us a potential benefit to the process, a transcending of the identities that others have constructed for us (Grumet, 1990a). This has special relevance in choosing the narratives for a study of women’s history where self-definition has been an issue.

Madeleine Grumet (1987), looking beyond ‘banking education’, has done extensive work in narrative calling it one of her ‘little organic gardens’, part of her drive to have educational practice honour the history and agency of the subjectivity of human experience. Having previously thought of narratives as literature, she has come to see them as educational research and she detects a special quality to women’s stories. They “take risks that our brothers, isolated and defended, rarely take” (p. 322). This view validates the inclusion of women’s stories in curriculum for the different viewpoints they may voice.

Narrative use in curriculum that includes students as narrators bears responsibilities that have been alluded to by Grumet. The risk in telling a story involves ‘giving oneself away’ as its interpretation is beyond our control. This is illustrated perceptively by Grumet’s (1987) account of telling a friend a personal story only to have it appropriated and taken in a direction in which the friend wanted to go. What teachers can take from Madeleine Grumet’s thoughts is a cautionary note on the art of listening and the process of interpretation. Teachers must facilitate classroom sensitivity so that we do not inadvertently ‘expose’ students beyond their comfort level through their narratives.

This is echoed by bell hooks (1994) who warns that professors cannot expect students to share ‘confessional narratives’ if they themselves are unwilling to share. This amounts to a coercive use of power, an anathema to feminist approaches. To take this a step further evokes ‘the memory wars’, the terrain of therapeutic and recovered memory.
Feminists have long theorized "that psychological and political structures of forgetting or repression..." have disempowered women or enabled them to veil their own painful past lives (Hirsch & Smith, 2002, p. 4). Although it is not the focus of this study, it bears noting that women's memory can be sensitive terrain. Rather than avoiding "the historical and current vulnerability of women as rememberers", self-narrative activities are important to "develop personhood" (p. 16). The caution that must temper the exuberant promotion of narrative by theorists who encourage its extensive use in education, is that it must be undertaken with an awareness of the attendant emotion that conjoins narrative and memory. My suggestion from working with women and projects of memory is to structure curriculum that accommodates choice in its development by the student which allows them to create personal distance from the narration at points of their choosing.

To hear the 'choral' voices in history rather than a solo universalizing one (Grumet, 1990b), we need curricula and methodology for teaching history that employ narrative as we seek to hear more retrieved voices. In supplanting the baritone voice of history, one that drew on the texts of 'dead men' to be our standard for human experience (Grumet & Pinar 1996), Grumet (1990b) identifies what she is looking for in the choral voice: "Drawn from the body and associated with gender, voice splinters the fiction of an androgynous speaker as we hear rhythms, relations, sounds, stories and style that we identify as male or female" (p. 278). In the following section I suggest ways to hear the full complement of voices in the curriculum that will allow for more historical voices of women to furbish history.

The Authentic Voice

Who is telling the story, and the authority of the speaker, is all important to the subsequent value of the narrative (Cavanaugh & Warne, 2000). To reference Judy Reimer's *Life Quilt for Breast Cancer* again, hers is a most persuasive voice as she communicates her narrative, a textile landscape of her abbreviated life. Many can speak about her, yet her own narrative voice is the most powerful. It is the authenticity of the narratives recorded in chapter 4 that, I believe, concentrates our attention and holds the power to similarly engage students. The authentic voice that expresses agency through
textiles demonstrates agency manifested in different forms. The selection and articulation of memory in Debra Sparrow's instance, enacts a spiritual agency to counter cultural and psychic loss. Yvonne Wakabayashi memorializes and celebrates family against a background of social upheaval. Anna Samens constructs a response to the traumas of war and dislocation with a lasting legacy for her family. Each story allows us access through memory clothed in pain, hope and resolve, which identifies and humanizes the context of the narrator and her origins. In this way it helps students of history to understand.

Choosing Narratives

The opportunity to put women in the centre of narratives for students entails choices where neutrality is an illusion (Cavanaugh & Warne, 2000). All curriculum decisions have been called moral decisions; they "touch the core of what it means to be human, to live in community with others, to find meaning and purpose, and to create a more just and peaceful world" (J. Dan Marshall quoted by Henderson & Kesson, 2004, Foreward). The main question of course is who chooses? The criteria for choosing curricula can be made explicit thereby becoming a discussion [and decision making] vehicle for students and teacher (Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000b). If it falls solely to the instructor to choose, Kumashiro (2002) has made us aware that in our choices "popular notions of authenticity, tradition, and nature offer a sense of identity, belonging, and normalcy" by their repetition that can be dismissive of others (para.3). This is reinforced by Aoki (1983) when he speaks of totalizing approaches, where "one converts a way of life into the way of life" (p. 334). Theorists elucidate how this constituent of curriculum might be acknowledged as we consider how to include narrative.

Multiple Voices

Women have been considered 'other' than the norm, a term that can be applied to men and is often applied to any who visually or culturally appear 'other than' the mainstream, limiting their participation by stressing difference. For educators, theoretical works help to 'de-centre' the usual perspectives and allow for genuine diversity. In a perspectival shift from an initial white western focus of privilege in feminism, scholars now agree that women's lives are shaped by race, ethnicity, imperialism, sexuality, age
and class as much as by sexual difference (Cherry, 2000). If ‘coming to voice’, means emerging from this interlocking system (hooks, 1989), we need more narratives from the margins. By including more narratives of women, some accessed through textiles, we lessen the ‘other’ factor. In practice, we want to return previously marginalized peoples to the discipline of history “not as victims or textbook ‘sidebars’ but as active participants” (Seixas, 1996, p. 776).

These narratives, consequently, must be inclusive of aboriginal women, for example, in a meaningful way to debunk the notion that there is one coherent and totalizing history of knowledge that incorporates “imperial beliefs about the Other” (Smith, 1999, p. 30). Narratives of ‘the primitive’ and cultural disappearance can be replaced “by stories of revival, remembrance, and struggle” (James Clifford quoted by Roy, 1999, p. 81). The narrative of the Musqueam ancestral women weaving is such a narrative. Yet no one truly speaks for any group, suggest theorists who consider ‘the other’ in depth. (We must include multiple voices from within a group.) The ‘other’ functions not only in the content of education but in its practice. Ted Aoki’s experiences as a Japanese Canadian student and teacher echo those from the Tasaka/Wakabayashi family narrative (chapter 4) and the overt discrimination of internment and its aftermath in our communities (T. T. Aoki, 1983; Ted T. Aoki, 1999; Pinar & Irwin, 2005) that allowed members of the community to feel like “unwanted strangers in our own homeland” (Aoki, 1983, p. 330; Ohashi & Wakabayashi, 2005). Educators need to be alert to more subtle oppressive behaviour within practices of education that may not be visible or intentional, but may be oppressive for some who experience “the privileging of only certain ways of identifying, thinking, or relating to others” (Kumashiro, 2002, para. 3). In addition to non-western perspectives an instructor must allow for gender diversity in the classroom (not assuming heterosexuality), strategize to combat racism, acknowledge post-colonial thought and consider non-hierarchical teaching methods. In adding women’s narratives to the curriculum, we must question if we are ‘normalizing’ some approaches over others.

*Evaluating Narratives*
One of the most effective recovery tools to excavate, document and begin to understand women’s past lives is the practice of oral history. It has been used in this study to augment the textiles or objects as they inform the teaching of history. In adapting its use to supplement curriculum, oral history’s constructed nature must be considered. We must always ask what is being left out of a story notes Gough (1999). [I would consider this a question interviewers and historians ask of themselves as they consider their transcripts.] Clearly painful aspects were omitted in the stories I collected. Details emerged or did not, at the interviewee’s choosing. A risk in collecting oral history is that a single-minded interviewer can appropriate the narrator’s voice especially in the editing of a written form (Gluck & Patai). Megill (1998) laments that valorization of memory often occurs “where historical events and circumstances intersect with personal and familial experience” (p. 50). That is, we relate stories not as an accurate representation of history but for our ‘sense of self’. I think we know this about narrative and live with their exaggerations for the value of personal connection to the past that they render to us. Some narratives can be contextualized by written records as I have done for the three selected narratives, but in the end the stories will be useful in curriculum if they possess a ‘narrative truth’ that ‘speaks’ to its audience. As the memory historians point out, memory is a representation of the past. As such we can learn from it as a particular representation of ‘an immeasurable’.

Using Narratives in the Curriculum

In the presentation of narratives to students, the concept of ‘muting’ is a useful one to impart. Initially the recovery of voice through oral history was hindered by traditional methods, focusing on women’s activities where women tended to ‘mute’ their roles (Gluck & Patai 1991, Anderson 1991). Hence a farm wife carrying an impressive daily workload would just be ‘helping out’ (Anderson) or the extensive and tedious, but ultimately important work of pioneer women, was sidelined from official histories and texts (Clark, in press). With improved techniques, interviewers now listen attentively to the main and muted messages in an interview and give more weight to intense vocal quality and body language (Anderson). An understanding of the field techniques that have recovered a voice should be part of any oral history presented in the classroom.
Presenting Narratives of Women

To redress the substantive neglect of women in the historical record there are pitfalls to avoid in the new portrayals we choose. Lerner (1997) warns of romantic individualism and Megill (1998) of his concern that we prefer memories of the heroic story over the everyday. In women’s literature, Elaine Showalter acknowledges the “exaggerated” importance of women’s culture in the desire for “a literature of our own” (Jefferies, 1998, p. 109). I turn to Ulrich’s (2001) masterful tome The Age of Homespun to ponder issues of exaggeration, cognizant that certain narratives stand in my memory since I first read it months ago. I cite two here to consider how we as curriculum shapers choose narratives on which to focus and whether they reflect women of their time accurately and/or appeal to us from our present vantage point for some reason. To reference the women’s history project, are we looking for everyday women or an exceptional few?

One of Ulrich’s stories (2001) I refer to as Tabitha’s ride and the second as Sun up to sundown. In the first instance orally recounted to Ulrich, a New Hampshire woman related her grandmother’s ride. Tabitha set off on a colt to obtain a reed and harness she needed for her weaving. With a baby in her arms and one on the horse behind her she traversed five miles over ‘some of the worst hills’. As she started for home, with the reed and harness ‘at least four feet long...bound to the colt’, she discerned signs of a coming storm and passed a relative’s house who reported that when he saw her ‘...she was going like the wind, the sky was black’ and the ‘thunder and lightning terrible’. When the storm cleared ‘uncle Cate’ saddled up and set off expecting ‘to find Tabitha and the children dead in the road’. But he ‘went clean over, and there she was, getting supper and singing as lively as a cricket’ (p. 289). In Sun up to sun down Ulrich similarly records a story from a Massachusetts newspaper of 1769 when women routinely gathered to spin to support the clergy financially: “...the minister reported, that ‘among the matrons there was one, who did the morning work of a large family, made her cheese, etc., and then rode more than two miles, and carried her own wheel, and sat down to spin at nine in the morning, and by seven in the evening spun 53 knots, and went home to milking’.” (p. 183). To contextualize the author’s choices, these two stories are amid scores of others.
that reinforce that industriousness among the women of New England was the norm. It might be hard to document cases of sloth among such enterprise. Ulrich’s perspective also values the creative work that she documents and ascribes agency to women working in prescribed circumstances. *Tabitha’s ride* and *Sun up* survived because they were good stories, one repeated through oral history and one preserved because it made the paper of its day. I conclude that they were remarkable not necessarily exceptional in their own time and a reasonable inclusion among the many varied stories with a common theme. For their inclusion in curricula, they are inherently in keeping with the past.

A second consideration in selecting narratives is the subtle education protocol to tell uplifting stories. To remain positive at all costs in education has been called ‘wilful blindness’ by de Castell and Bryson (1997) who focus on difference and declare that “not all stories are pretty, positive and redemptive” (p. 6). When an interview is undertaken, the destination is for the most part unknown. One of the narrative foci here, Coast Salish weaving, had many positive outcomes but concludes with its future uncertain. The tale of a Latvian émigré sees a woman’s circumstances, along with that of her family, reduced drastically in a bargain for survival.

Thirdly, there is the tendency to apply a kind of universality to women in assembling a history as if they are unified solely by gender. As Scott (1998) reminds us, too much commonality runs the risk of further isolating women and reinforcing that those individuals not of the main group are ‘other’. As researchers have found, women may identify more via race, class or ethnicity (Gluck & Patai 1991) making unity a fiction. These are issues that must be weighed when presenting women’s history in a classroom setting making curriculum choices critical. The pedagogical worth of a narrative of memory will be its ability to sufficiently engage interest and educate with its constructed representation of the past without misrepresenting a time and its people. As Grumet (1990) intimates, the selection of the narratives is an opportunity to shape the telling of our history.

Our narrative sources, Grumet (1990) instructs us, can take many forms including those of literature, song and photographs; each implies our presence in the world and explores our relationship, teacher and student, to it. To Grumet’s list I add textiles and objects of memory.
Weaving in Women’s History through Interdisciplinary Approaches

Interdisciplinary ‘Tools’

If narrative is a way to organize experiences (McEwan & Egan, 1995b), an interdisciplinary structure will provide the means to bring unconventional topics such as textiles into the curriculum further delineating some women’s historical lives. With interdisciplinarity come the benefits of an alternate way of looking at things. Not merely a juxtaposing of two disciplines around a theme, interdisciplinary curricula intertwines concepts and modes of thinking from two or more disciplines (Boix Mansilla, Miller, & Gardner, 2000). It is accessing the analytical ‘tools’ of each discipline that facilitates seeing from another perspective (G. Minnes-Brandes, ETEC 532 notes, University of British Columbia, June 27, 2005). This can be illustrated by the poem and memorial shrine of the Tasaka family referenced in chapter 5. Through the analytical skills of literature we can interpret Leah Kitamura’s poem and appreciate the ‘transfer’ of memory from another family member’s narrative memorial [of Yvonne for her father] in cloth (memory study, visual arts, textile studies, storytelling). A visual analysis (visual arts and literacy) decodes historical detail of family, emigration, settlement and achievement over several decades (historical socio-political interpretation). The combining of disciplinary skills facilitates a dialogue of cultural and familial identity that can create an understanding greater than a single disciplinary perspective. In this way textiles enter any of the disciplines mentioned and enhance learning.

A Gender Focussed Interdisciplinary Study

In advance of introducing a textile focussed study to the uninitiated through interdisciplinary means, a short preparatory inquiry and discussion can alert students to the kinds of knowledge available from textile study and sort through gender associations and preconceptions related to it. A starting point might be an accessible and humorous essay that delves into gender and art practice generally. In Linda Nochlin’s (1971) classic Why have there been no great women artists? she juxtaposes the success of male artists in history, the ‘geniuses’, with women and queries why “mad Van Gogh with his fits”
could ‘make it’ and not women (p. 153). It concentrates a discussion of gender and participation in the arts and the gendered associations of textiles as a prelude to a study.

To proceed in an art history context, visuals of intricate white knitted lace dating from c1890, a child’s chemise and a piano ‘skirt’, can be examined. The lace is one of a number of exquisitely detailed pieces knitted in Yuma Territorial Prison 1876-1909 by a male knitter and ‘lifer’ C.E. Roberts. He was not the only male knitter in the prison; a number used heavy cotton sewing thread to knit fancy goods that they were permitted to sell in bazaars and keep the money (Nehring & Seubold, 2002). Other visuals available include the ‘mug’ shot and one of the cell block, an improbable looking place to produce such work.

A reading of an excerpt of Jill Ker Conway’s (1989) biography The Road from Coorain offers a contrast. In an ultra conservative and harsh environment in Australia’s remote outback, Conway as an orphaned young woman resuscitates a sheep farm from its dust bowl status just out of the Depression. Assuming her father’s role after his suicide, she runs the sheep station, sheers the sheep and supplies the yarn industry against staggering odds (before becoming an academic). Her writing is engaging and leads the reader through the gendered hostility and business challenges she faced. It is improbable, true, and a good story. The point of the short disciplinary study is to deal with the ‘essentialist’ perceptions of textiles and make the medium accessible to male students where it might not have been, opening the door to more involved study through interdisciplinary channels.

Utilizing a Textile Language in Curricula

In this section I consider the opportunities that the inclusion of textile narratives might afford in the practice of teaching women’s history for its alternate focus, and methods that can augment student understanding.

A Language of Objects and Design

Visual Analysis
One of the means employed to gather knowledge of women’s history from the narratives (chapter 5) was visual analysis. Textiles themselves and photographic images offer a means to involve students in practices of looking that facilitate an understanding of visual media (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). If students can interpret visual sources in our “visually saturated environments” we strengthen their agency (Werner, 2002, p. 401). To distinguish denotative or literal descriptions from connotative ones that inscribe cultural and historical context, requires skill (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Yvonne Wakabayashi’s textile shrine can be analyzed in such a way (figures 5.6, 5.7) for student interaction. Objective or literal content encompasses the representation of actual photographs that denote her direct ancestors. A connotative reading sees the overall shape (echoing a Japanese kimono), the family’s crest and the depictions of an image of one individual repeated at different stages of life, that of Wakabayashi’s late father. To determine that it is a memorial contextualizes it as a tribute to her ancestry as a whole and an individual in particular. Learning occurs, notes Werner when texts or images can be actively read, thoughtfully engaged and where readers have authority to question and theorize the images. When extended to objects, their ‘reading’ can entail the same approaches of literacy that involve the viewer in “decoding” to determine not only the creator’s intended meanings but other possible meanings (Paris & van Kraayenoord, 2002, p. 224). These are interrogations or resistant readings that extend student agency and understanding (Paris & van Kraayenoord, 2002; Werner, 2002).

We can also draw meaning from sources other than the textual and teach in other dimensions. Beyond the ‘reading’ of textiles which stresses its relationship to ‘text’ and the dominance of ‘print culture’ (Allan Fletcher, personal communication, April 30, 2004) textiles offer other means of engagement; the tactile and even olfactory (Hardy, 1994). By valuing learning apprehended through our many senses there is an opportunity to teach in dimensions beyond written text employing objects resonant with meaning. This also applies to creating objects; with its design component textiles has the possibility to engage in ‘hands on’ creative constructions where students who might not otherwise ‘make a connection’ are included. M. Davis (1999) finds design, in the sense of planning and creating artifacts for human use, to be inherently interdisciplinary. Looking beyond the humanities and science disciplines, design is seen as “a third way of knowing” that
facilitates learning through unique interdisciplinary abilities (1999b, p. 2) that may make way for students who learn best in this way.

**Material Culture**

The shawl of the Samens family demonstrates the resonant meaning that an intertwining of memory study, material culture and history can elicit. It is not of substantial interest in itself until the memories are attached to it as a possession from the family members’ former lives before their flight from Latvia. Material culture has avoided a disciplinary status and freely studies cultural life through concrete means which particularly illumine the everyday (D. Miller, 1998). The shawl demonstrates the ‘object’ as sign and offers a means of interface where “understanding and empathy” derive from the study of what people do with objects (p. 19). The background narratives to each of the three foci in this study mediate how we or students will subsequently view the objects (Paris & van Kraayenoord, 2002). It would provide a contrast to have students view the suffrage handkerchief (Figure 5.1) before and then after context is provided, possibly complemented with a reading from one of the letters a young woman wrote to her child from prison. Objects read ‘deeply’ in this way, demonstrate they are not neutral but can be emotionally charged (Paris & van Kraayenoord, 2002), essential to understanding the humanizing aspect of memory.

**A Textile Language**

From the early historian of memory, Frances Yates, we have learned that the ancient art of memory involved an association of some text or idea to the image of a place (Davis & Starn, 1989). I have used a memory related project along these lines with students in a textile design and world culture course with a fashion design component. One student recorded a response to this project. [I looked to my] “...original culture to find inspirations. I know my Chinese root is so deeply planted in my soul that I cannot help turning my heart to the country I love and grew up [in]” (Yang, personal communication, November 24, 2004). Yang chose the ripples of Chinese rooftops and re-created the “texture and atmosphere” of the ripples in a pieced leather garment that featured raised edges. Using earth coloured leather scraps she added decoration reminiscent of Chinese paper-cuts “featuring different symbols and characters that signify
prosperity and auspiciousness”. Yang was clearly pleased to revisit, articulate and embody her memory associations and present her project to her peers.

The contrast of two video recordings, which I have used in a textile design class, highlights how women have spoken through the language of textiles historically and how students apprehend this knowledge. The first is Through the eye of a needle: stories from an Indian desert (2002). It is the story of the Kutch embroiderers of India and its women’s cooperative that is facilitated by Vancouver’s Maiwa Foundation. It documents the successful marketing of the women’s traditional craft as they produce colourful traditional embroideries for a high end market eschewing lesser quality tourist goods. The women buy cooking pots with their wages and put money aside for future weddings. A second resource is Christine Welsh’s (2000) Prairie Girls production of Story of the Coast Salish Knitters (2000), a documentary that through interviews and reconstruction tells the story of the Cowichan knitters of British Columbia. They also include ancestral imagery in their designs. The women recall knitting for ‘grocery money’ particularly in the 1950’s. Their success in creating a cultural art form, the internationally recognized ‘Indian Sweater’, is tempered by the poor wage they received in the past from tourist shops in Victoria, BC. They also have formed a cooperative. The voice they present is one of women trying to hold family together with the one resource they had at their disposal. This story of women, culture and work can be related in practice to the Musqueam weavers and to issues of textile piece work and textile production, traditionally fuelled by the labour of women for little pay.

The two visual recordings offer a useful contrast for a written analysis that has been undertaken by students who compare the two. Each group of women speaks through a language in textiles resonant with history, memory and cultural identity and relies on their work economically for survival. Students found “amazing similarity” between the two groups of women. One noted that she “never knew how hard the native people of British Columbia have struggled...” In writing, the students synthesized their thoughts about the women, their work and culture as presented in the videos.

The Textile Narrative in History Teaching
This moment in time has been called a good one for changing the teaching of history (Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000a). The narrative can help effect this change. Kennedy (1998) asserts that good history is a good story. Using the facets of a good novel, he outlines what works to create learning in the discipline. The good historical story is not about “abstract ideas or about vast impersonal forces” but “about people who face dilemmas and make choices, people who may be caught up in large tides of change, but are still able to swim, to shape the lives they lead, and take responsibility for them; in the modern phrase, people who have agency” (p. 323). The three narratives in this study exemplify such stories and present opportunities for students to connect to such histories. Kennedy hopes to have students see the connectedness of their own times and their own lives to dilemmas and struggles that featured in the past. Hirsh and Smith (2002) detail the connection in terms of empathy, “Listening and retelling, especially in the case of individual or cultural trauma, require empathy as well as distance—being able to say ‘it could have been me’ but at the same time asserting that ‘it was not me’ ” (p. 10). All three narratives have trauma as constituent elements of memory and identity. Such study allows us to actively “engage the past and try to meet the needs of the present” through historical understanding (p. 13) that will in the process encounter the integrated stories of women in a structure that avoids historical periodization where their presence bordered the action.

Utilizing the Literary Link

Textile narratives that can be interwined with literature study augment the teaching of women’s history with more women and girls in ‘subject’ positions. These reflect more details and nuance from the everyday lives of the marginalized but also allow for their relationship to larger historical issues to come into focus. It is another venue, with its related literary analysis, to explore the language of textiles for what it may reveal about women’s historical lives and identities. This textile language sometimes appears in literature offering opportune linkings.

The novel is identified with entertainment but its educative and transformative value should not be overlooked (Overly & Spalding, 1993). Socially and historically situated, novels allow the “consideration of timeless themes from multiple perspectives”
inviting social and cultural critique (p. 144). The natural affinity between history and
literature which has been the beginning of ‘thematic’ pairings continues to be valuable
(with greater interdisciplinary learning possible when other disciplinary knowledge
comes into play). Jackson (1995) proposes that our encounters with text play a
transformative function that create new appetites and change our outlooks such that
through identification with characters, “we somehow become ourselves” (p. 12).

This connecting to the written form of narrative through its immediacy offers
opportunities to discuss issues of women’s history, issues of cultural awareness, quests
for identity and other ‘big questions’ and to reflect student diversity. Maxine Greene
promoted ‘role taking’ to see from another perspective especially on race and gender
issues. She read imaginative literature as “one way of disrupting and questioning any one
final version of her self or the world” (Miller, 1998, p. 148). In this way literature can
support interdisciplinary studies centred on textiles that bring specific histories of women
to the fore.

Debra Sparrow’s narrative (chapter 4) offers a potential interface with written
work, including her own, to make use of a textile focus that allows for ‘teaching from the
corners’. Sparrow’s circular oral history, gave me pause not only to absorb her own
circumstance, but to think of the ancestral women whose lives revolved seasonally
around the valued production of blankets and tumplines. The ‘stilled fingers’ described
by Oliver Wells (1969), surely brought a full stop to a clearly defined social and
economic role with the advent of Hudson’s Bay blankets and their like. Not represented
in the canoes that met travelers or at treaties (and therefore not recorded), aboriginal
women need other sources to bring them into focus. The historic photograph of Selisya
provides another resource for multidisciplinary study. (One can only hope that when she
is added to textbooks that the image is not an insert to appear to include women [or
aboriginals] but for her respected position as an active weaver of culture and memory).
Carlson’s (2001) atlas of the Coast Salish includes wonderful photographic images of
Salish women in traditional clothing as well as an innovative recording of a geographical
perspective that includes stories. The atlas, the photograph, a quote together with the
literature excerpt which follows, constitute the beginnings of an intertwining of
disciplines that could ultimately consider the social and political realities, as initiated from their textile stories, of aboriginal women.

Discussion Quote

"To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve what we were and remake ourselves" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 4).

Literature Excerpt

Lee Maracle, born in North Vancouver, BC and of Coast Salish/Cree ancestry, traces the origins of the Musqueam territory named Snauq in a short story infused with history, noting that it was home to members of the Squamish from across the Burrard Inlet year-round from about 1820. It was “a common garden shared by all the friendly tribes in the area” (Maracle, 2004, p. 208). On its sandbar, Musqueam and Squamish women tended oyster and clam beds. Fish were abundant. This is her account of the aboriginal displacement from Snauq now at the urban core of Vancouver:

...Summer after summer the nations gathered to harvest, probably to plan marriages, play a few rounds of that old gambling game lahal.

Not long after the first smallpox epidemic all but decimated the Tsleil Watuth people, the Squamish people came down from their river homes where the snow fell deep all winter to establish a permanent home at False Creek. Chief George—Chipkaym—built the big longhouse. Khahtsalanog was a young man then. His son, Khatsahlano, was born there. Khahtsahlano grew up and married Swanamia there. Their children were born there.

"Only three duffles’ worth," the skipper of the barge was shouting at the villagers. Swanamia did her best to choke back the tears, fingering each garment, weighing its value, remembering the use of each, and choosing which one to bring and which to leave. Each spoon, handles lovingly carved by Khahtsahlano, each bowl, basket, and bent box had to be evaluated for size and affection. Each one required a decision. Her
mind watched her husband's hand sharpening his adze, carving the tops of
each piece of cutlery, every bowl and box. She remembered gathering
cedar roots, pounding them for hours and weaving each basket. Then she
decided to fill as many baskets as the duffles could hold and leave the rest.

Swanamia faced Burrard Inlet—she could not bear to look back.

Her son winced. Khahtsahlano sat straight up. Several of the women
suppressed a gasp as they looked back to see that Snaug's longhouses
were on fire. The men who set the fires were cheering. Plumes of smoke
affirmed that the settlers who kept coming in droves had crowded the
Squamish out.

This excerpt allows for an interdisciplinary study of the displacement through a rare
usage of an aboriginal woman’s historical voice. It potentially supplements Debra
Sparrow’s writing, oral history and weaving with anthropology and material culture.
Aside from potential disciplinary study employing the ‘tools’ of social and political
history and urban geography the tools of literary analysis can be applied. Among the
interpretations, is the one I reached, that Swanamia was offered three duffles to fill with
the family’s possessions. In order to take the hand woven baskets she cherished, she
eschewed the duffles to take an equal amount inside her baskets, in what might be seen as
an act of resistance. Such pedagogical approaches avoid the chronological in a
consideration of a historical moment bound to be more engaging once we settle in to hear
Swanamia’s voice.

Finally, the study of literature when combined with memory further illuminates
the constructed process. This is evident in Virginia Woolf’s memory of her mother’s
dress (which began chapter 3). Artistically, she wanted to rearrange her memory to make
a better story.

Narratives help us interpret the world (McEwan & Egan, 1995a). They are a
means of engagement. To succeed in engaging students with narratives of women’s
history, an integrated history rife with humanizing narratives is needed in a curriculum
that facilitates an active voice for students as they connect to the past. The pedagogical
worth of the narratives of memory lies in their ability to engage students with their
authentic voices as they reveal their identities and tales of resolve.
Conclusion

A reconceptualized women's history together with a democratic concept of curriculum, provide a framework that can engage student understanding in a transformative conversation designed to teach an integrated history. Textile narratives are a means of engagement that allow us to see the value of the everyday as well as profound voices. If education is about a human being making sense of her world as Madeleine Grumet (1996) asserts, a curriculum should offer reflections which can be accessed through multiple sources, where a student can see herself and her predecessors and find her place in the continuum. In this way, the teaching of history will serve its full mandate.

I have focused on how the women central to the three narratives of Western Canadian women studied, experienced their circumstances, and how they have used textile narratives to articulate eloquently their historical memories. Each of these narratives of identity is mediated by memory. It may be expressed in cloth or story or imbued in an object by ‘transfer’; each embodies a language that reveals a life and identity grounded in culture. As the early theorist on matters of collective identity, Maurice Halbwachs conceived it, memory was not only a selection process but a way to organize representations of the past that over time forged identity (Crane, 1997). The women central to the studied narratives did that. Not just about events or behaviours, each history embodies everyday (and some extraordinary) times, and how “they were experienced and remembered in the imagination” (Thompson, 2000, p. 162). How women have remembered and articulated their memories restores a thread to the positive association of women and memory to their mythological antecedent, Mnemosyne, and her empowering associations.

“Memory and history, both individual and collective,” asserts Chambers (2003), “are located in particular places, giving rise not only to concrete experiences” but identities emanating from these particular places that should be reflected in curricular writing (p. 233). I have written from a particular place that is intended to “[work] on behalf of everyone” (p. 233). The experience of interviewing and contemplating the experiences and memories that were shared with me has allowed an expression of my own agency, a role in recording and presenting details of women’s history that might
otherwise not be imparted to others. These nuanced stories may find their way to the teaching of women's history in some form and will certainly influence my own practice.

**Significance**

This study has employed textile studies as a vehicle to explore women's history through narrative, a methodology not represented in the related fields of literature. I offer a theoretical grounding with reference to practice that demonstrates how textiles are used as a means of communicating knowledge, history and identity and how these might be adapted to enrich curricula that strives to integrate women's history. The specific approach, a gathering of new knowledge through narratives of memory, I have demonstrated, allows us to hear more women's voices. Through the appealing story form, these humanizing narratives and the analysis I have provided can be used as a model to gather such narratives from other communities of women. I suggest ways to integrate the humanizing narratives into curricula through interdisciplinary approaches that can engage students and simultaneously centre more history on women to ameliorate their marginalization.

**Future Study**

It would be useful to monitor how women and textile topics are or will be integrated into textbooks. I have commented on the addition of aboriginal weavers, for instance, not as exotic additions but to be represented for the central role they played and play in their society. Similarly, the political histories of Japanese internment said little about and visually represented few women meaningfully, offering possibilities for analysis.

The perspective of textile studies suggests other less explored avenues. My study touched on the role of craft and design in the teaching of women's history, roles that are not well delineated in pedagogical contexts. Topics that I have identified for possible research include women whose work has entailed the operation of fashion businesses and constituted labour in production textiles in Canada, which have not been fully explored from a social and historical perspective.
The two videotapes I referenced point to the dearth of such visual materials, locally produced, to enhance the teaching of women's history. A more thorough search, or the creation of new media that support delineation of women's historical lives, I suggest, are avenues to explore.

I have referenced literature that features textile relationships as beginning points for curriculum. This literary connection suggests possibilities of further research to locate works that begin with the geographical location of students or topics or processes as starting points for study. (Lace historian Janine Montupet (1988), for example, fictionalized seventeenth century French lace making interweaving detailed knowledge of the industry into *The Lacemaker*.)

Lastly, the rediscovery of historic methods of textile production may provide further opportunities to explore women, identity and agency as did the Coast Salish rediscovery of their weaving roots.

*The New Narrative*

Historical scholarship has propelled women towards the centre. Seixas (1996) discerns that significance is attached to “women’s work, women’s lives” because women in the late twentieth century have redefined the “we” to whom historical accounts must relate” (p. 769). Women will tell their stories.

The narratives centred on textiles that emerged from this study illustrate that the teaching of history need not be based on the written text with a conventional voice-of god narration (Lerner, 1999, p. 155). Objects, images and oral history are alternative historical foci that challenge traditional themes and facilitate the more frequent inclusion of multiple voices. The narratives achieve one of the major goals of reconceptualized history in a Canadian context, to challenge the “nation building” mantra put forth by historians who were themselves part of a cultural elite...who understood their story as the universal story...” (Cavanaugh & Warne, p. 4). By exploring and valuing narratives revealed by a textile focus with women in ‘subject positions’ as storytellers where it is warranted, a step is taken in the decolonization and reclamation of the multiple voices of women.
This inquiry has delved into narratives of women’s historical memory as a kind of ‘woman centred’ inquiry determined by Lerner (1997) to be necessary for a time. It contributes details and nuances of women’s historical lives to a history still lacking in such texture. The memories of women that can be unfolded from textile study will build on those provided by literature and from other disciplines through an intertwining of analytical tools to delineate further the tapestry of women’s lives that is history coming to the centre. We articulate historical memory to make it evident to others. An inclusive democratic model of curriculum can take the knowledge from the narratives and allow its multiple voices to be heard in the presentation of a humanized history.

The narrative act of agency creates the valued constituent sought in women’s history. In feminist analysis social constraints remain, but when women enact narratives and apprehend themselves as agents “we become conscious of ourselves as makers of our lives as well as makers of narratives” (Hartman & Messer-Davidow, 1991, p. 12). Each “coming to voice” is an affirmation (hooks, 1989, p. 18). It is a step in finding a place for each woman in the larger picture, in enacting identity through constructions of memory. By providing alternate sources for historical study, unravelling the languages of textiles so we can hear its multiple voices and experiences, the narratives have made this agency evident. In these ways the knowledge which emerged from the study of textile narratives will enhance the teaching of women’s history.

The dominant textile metaphor for women has been one of a life assembled in pieces, a pieced quilt. I began this study with another metaphor that suggests a woman’s life could be a whole cloth, one patterned with memory that at a moment of her choosing is unfolded to communicate her story.
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187


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## Appendix 1

Related clusters/codes/themes from the narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biographical/Historical Context</th>
<th>Cultural Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of control</td>
<td>Ways of knowing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>Bridging cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical threat</td>
<td>Prejudice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural threat</td>
<td>Family ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social dislocation</td>
<td>Education/teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>Collective memory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loss of heritage</td>
<td>Cultural decimation</td>
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<td>Survival</td>
<td>Constructing memory</td>
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<td>External threats</td>
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### Interview Process

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<td>Details of trauma – narrative 1,3</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Threads of memory</td>
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### Object Analysis

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<th>Textile relationships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>photographs</td>
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<td>textile art</td>
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### Textile relationships

<table>
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<tbody>
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<td>Pride of accomplishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recording memory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional standing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection to ancestors/history</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honouring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women &amp; craft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
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<td>Socially mediated</td>
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<td>Language</td>
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