

**CONTEMPORARY ART/CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGY: INTERRUPTING
MASTERY AS PARADIGM FOR ART SCHOOL EDUCATION**

by

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Abstract

Contemporary art/contemporary pedagogy: interrupting mastery as paradigm for art school education is a narrative exploration of artistic and pedagogical practices within the specific context of post-secondary art school education in stand alone art schools as opposed to a university art department. This study considers the following three primary questions: How can art school education better reflect postmodern cultural production? What are some of the ways in which pedagogical practice disrupts the monolithic model of mastery? How can art school pedagogy be re-oriented away from an overly deterministic notion of education?

Through reflexive inquiry, I offer a personal perspective on art school education, weaving together my own experiences as student, artist, teacher and administrator, and juxtaposing 'my' text against the text of three artist pedagogues, representing specific aspects of field experience. Throughout the dissertation I seek to unearth the hidden assumptions that are embedded in historically inherited ways of being and doing in relation to contemporary art. I suggest that the partitioning of the institutional space into studio disciplines also segregates knowledge, and as such, largely determines the pedagogical framework of art schools. In the face of the interdisciplinary character of contemporary practice, I question the usefulness and relevance of disciplinary pedagogies modeled around the notion of achieving mastery as a paradigm that has shaped curricular practices in art schools in the past, and largely continues to define art school education today. I propose that the three artist pedagogues in this dissertation are each contributing

to creating new inquiry structures that challenge boundaries between studio disciplines, between school and not-school, and between and among places of learning.

I end by suggesting, as a topic for further research, complexity science as it may offer a productive framework to re-consider art school education.

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Pour Marie-Josée

et

tante Fernande

1 INTRODUCTION

As an administrator, I am constantly reflecting upon what an art school education is or should be. I ask myself if art school education should look to art worlds as points of reference for what and for how we should teach. And if it should, I ask how can art school education keep pace with an art world that is moving in new directions all the time, an art world that is not always defined by an artist's ability to manipulate materials with the virtuosity that defined the Masters of earlier centuries. I question established curriculum in relation to what the students bring with them today, which is different from what I brought as a student more than thirty years ago, and I turn to my own experience as a student and as an artist as a way of unpacking how we got to where we are now. At the end of this journey, I do not intend to suggest replacing one grand narrative with another, but rather I hope to offer a deeper understanding of the conditions that seem to prevent us from imagining a more fluid concept of pedagogy that takes as core value the connectedness of teaching, learning and curriculum to art in its multiple forms and to the broader social and cultural context.

In researching this dissertation, there is no doubt that a review of the literature related to historical and contemporary curriculum discourse would have been valuable. However, given my particular focus on art school education, I selected to concentrate instead almost exclusively on the work of those who have written from that perspective. Specifically, I have examined texts that address the problematic of teaching, learning and curriculum in relation to contemporary art as a social institution and not as a self-contained universe that exists independent of the cultural, political and economic context.

Most academic administrators do not inherit a blank slate from which they can proceed to build a vision. In the case of art schools, the duties of administrating inevitably require a certain appreciation for the values embedded in the academies of earlier centuries, but also a critical stance towards their lingering effect today. As Academic Vice-President of an art school, an integral part of my interactions with colleagues and students involves questioning the practices and beliefs that define learning and teaching in such a context. This process inevitably brings to light conflicting views about a number of issues, which often have the appearance of debates about old versus new, or tradition versus experimentation. However, these matters are complex and cannot simply be considered in binary terms.

As a consequence I approach this dissertation with a desire to address the multiple layers that make up my own understanding of where we, as art school educators, stand at this juncture in history. As an administrator, I see my role as having to navigate between my own awareness, and the multiple and varied views of all those around me in a living pedagogy (Aoki *et al.*, 2005), attempting to break with the taken-for-granted in a shifting and multifaceted world (Greene, 1993). But as Carol Becker writes, “the woman in authority tests herself and is tested, in a very literal sense, hour by hour” (1996, p.256). Indeed, the hurdles encountered along the way are multiple and require a strong heart, which is always tested by the vicissitudes and dissonances that come with the territory. It is in part through the process of evaluating my own educational experience (Krall, 1988) through autoethnography, that I seek to identify and understand some of the broader curricular and pedagogical issues relevant to art school education today. It is also through

ethnographic techniques such as semi-structured life world interviews (Kvale, 1996) where I interact with three artists and teachers' life worlds that I gain insight from their own interpretation (Kvale, 1996) and involvement in art and in art school education. I turn to my artistic practice, revisiting images and projects of the past in a process of re-interpretation while working also on new images, integrating knowing, doing, and making as a living practice (Irwin, 2004) to ask the following questions: how can art school education better reflect postmodern cultural production? What are some of the ways that pedagogical practice disrupts the monolithic model of mastery? How can art school pedagogy be re-oriented away from an overly deterministic notion of education to foster non-linear ways of learning, allowing for unpredictable connections?

1.1 Overview

I have always experienced tensions between my two roles, as a doctoral candidate and at the same time, as a full time academic administrator. At the university, my inability to be with and to feel part of a cohort of students means that I have often felt isolated from the program, aware that I was missing much of the experience that my peers were benefiting from. On the other hand, I could not have arrived at the topic, much less written this dissertation without being fully involved in my professional life as Vice-President, Academic of an art school. So in the interest of transcending boundaries, this text invokes multiple voices, including my own at different times in my life. Throughout the dissertation, a series of text boxes denoting some of the dilemmas that I experience in my role as administrator offers a reflexive account of a few of the many encounters that I have had in the process of interacting with colleagues for the specific purpose of examining entrenched practices.

In *Notes on Methodology*, I turn to the work of Carolyn Ellis to examine the ways in which accounts about the self provide insights into the construction and transformation of meaning and identities. I see the inclusion of the reproductions of my art work in this dissertation as an integral part of the text and as a means of accessing practitioner knowledge that might otherwise remain hidden. Finally, I introduce the three participants in this study in relation to their artistic and pedagogical practices.

In **Mapping the Terrain: Art school, pedagogy and the disciplines**, I begin by situating current issues in art school education, questioning inherited practices from the past, in relation to disciplinary pedagogies and my own teaching. Through reflexive inquiry, **Pedagogy and the Vanishing Master** offers a personal perspective on art school

education, aware that through this dialectical process, I am interpreting and rewriting both my experience and myself, understanding that there is no existing *real* out there waiting to be discovered outside of experience, and knowing also that readers will also interpret this text through their own body/subject (Kaufmann, 2005). I put forward the notion of *mastery* as pedagogical model in art schools, as being a hierarchical and linear construct that works against education that is developmental and transformative (Doll, 1993). The chapter **Drawing Stories** locates my current artistic practice in drawing, documenting anecdotal information from a Western world context while working against received schemata, weaving my own experience as a student and as a teacher throughout the dissertation. In **Disciplines in Context**, I make the claim that the notion of discipline takes on a specific meaning within the context of art schools, and I question the relevance of disciplinary pedagogies in relation to contemporary art practice.

I selected the research participants, **Laiwan, Susan Stewart, and Eric Metcalfe**, the three artists in this dissertation, on the basis of prior knowledge as artists who live in my community. Before beginning this study, my perception of each of their individual artistic practices was that it was fluid and could not be consistently described by referring to a specific artistic medium, and this was also a factor in selecting them as informants/participants. As an academic administrator in art school, I was also aware of the three artists' teaching practices in the same institution, although I had no direct supervisory duties over them. I have interviewed each artist on two occasions for about two to three hours. Both the first and second interviews were taped and subsequently transcribed and all began with a set of pre-formulated questions. Some of the answers

triggered new questions, turning the interviews into open-ended conversations (Gudmundsdottir, 1996; Holstein, 1995; Kvale, 1996). All three artists read the respective chapters about them and had the opportunity to comment and offer corrections. These were minor, and are included in the final text. I also examined publicly available materials such as exhibitions, exhibition catalogues and web sites related to the three artists.

In the final chapter, **Teaching and Learning in/as a Living System**, I suggest that current pedagogical and institutional models may be too rigid and may undermine the notion of curriculum as an interactive process. I make the claim that mastery as the root metaphor for teaching and learning in art schools and its attendant disciplinary curricular practices are inadequate to account for living, teaching and learning in a complex world.

1.2 Notes on Methodology

In this dissertation there is a strong autobiographical connection between me, as researcher, and the phenomena I became interested in investigating (contemporary art school pedagogy). As João A. Telles writes, “ I had to turn to myself [inwards/outwards] and revisit my personal, educational, and professional histories [backwards/forwards] in order to evaluate their roles in my process of growing personally and academically” (2000, p.254). In order to consider art school education in depth, I had to wear multiple lenses observing from within, from my own experience, but reflecting also on the experiences of the three participants in this study. As an artist, it was impossible not to include my work in this study since what takes place in the studio is the result of a cumulative experience, not only as a maker, but also as a researcher, an educator, and an administrator. Because these multiple roles overlap and cannot be contained within well-defined boundaries, it became clear that this research project had to become a text woven of several strands.

1.2.1 Autoethnography and its Implications

In effect, we make ourselves, rather than the Other, vulnerable; we reveal ourselves in the text as a narrative character, not as an act of hubris but as a necessary methodological device to move us toward a newer understanding of reality, ourselves, and truths (Tierney, 1998, p.6).

By examining the autoethnographic work of Carolyn Ellis, I became aware of the transition from telling a story to actually becoming the story (Denzin, 1990). So I approach the following dissertation from the perspective of a visual artist whose practice

to this point is largely invested in producing meaning from memory, personal histories, places, and time. It is thus as an artist, an educator, a student, and a researcher that I turn to Ellis' work as a means of understanding the implications of placing one's own story at the centre of a sociologically driven inquiry.

Carolyn Ellis writes to reflectively investigate aspects of her life. Her thick descriptions (Denzin, 1988; Geertz, 1973) reveal the many layers of human experience while dealing with issues such as death, illness and racism through narratives which draw the reader into an intimate closeness. For example, in reading *Final Negotiations A Story of Love Loss and Chronic Illness* (Ellis, 1995), I become conscious of the double-bind in which I find myself; I am at once immersed in the story, but I am also painfully aware of the human struggle that makes the text real.

As a young scholar, Ellis worked within the traditional ethnographic methodology of participant observation but gradually embraced a literary approach to investigating context, her writing becoming a means of producing knowledge as opposed to simply a means of recording observations. In the following example, Ellis' advice to a graduate student doing research on women cancer survivors puts into practice the notion of writing as both, a creative endeavor and an epistemological tool:

You could write the dissertation, as Elliot Eisner suggests, in the form of a novel. The plot would consist of your research journey. You'd let readers experience with you your search for understanding, the questions you ask, how the women respond, what their answers open up for you, new questions that arise, and how you interpret their stories (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000 , p.757).

Literary texts are sometimes juxtaposed with scientific texts to illustrate the contrast between them. What one lacks, the other has (Clifford, 1986). “Literary texts were deemed to be metaphoric and allegorical, composed of inventions rather than observed facts” (Clifford, 1986, p.5). However, Ellis’ commitment to autoethnography is driven by a desire to access the subjective layers of human experience to make them apparent, and it is precisely through the intermediary of literature and its power to render what seems invisible to the eye that she is able to articulate multiple aspects of experience. As she states, “when ethnographers like me make texts, try as we may to report and represent accurately, we necessarily invent and construct the cultures we write about. We cannot help but read something into what is there, because we are there with it” (in Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p.20).

Ellis’ introspection and descriptions complicate how we form our multiple understandings of life. In *Final Negotiations* (1995), an account of love and loss of her partner to a chronic illness, Ellis’ writing does not lead to a return to normalcy as in Hollywood cinema. Instead, the reader is invited to take in the story with its attendant complexities and ambiguities allowing for unanticipated and potentially conflicting interpretations. As events unfold, they give way to the expression of feelings that draw the reader into an experiential text (Denzin, 1997). This is because Ellis depicts her experience, not as an accumulation of facts, but as a collage where introspection and action intermingle to create a space for the reader’s own interpretation. Throughout the book, excerpts of dialogues, descriptions, and reflective introspection together allow for thick interpretations (Denzin, 1989). As a reader I feel engaged by both, the story and my

own emotional response to it. In this case study, Ellis depicts the complexity of her emotions, partly by insuring that the context within which they emerge is tangibly rendered, drawing in the reader uncomfortably close. The text thus functions as a site of interaction and negotiation. Through writing as a material practice, Ellis draws from her own specific experience to talk about what it means to be human. As a reader I am aware that her text is a representation, and not an exact mimesis of the world (Gergen, 2000), conscious that I belong to an interpretive community in which each member produces her own version of the text.

Throughout *Final Negotiations*, Ellis reflects on conversations with her dying partner, friends, medical personnel, and others. We form meanings about these people through Ellis' encounter with them. Although verbal exchanges are reported in quotation marks, I am always aware that Ellis crafts her narrative. She chooses words and edits sentences producing an aesthetic experience for the reader, and words run parallel to her daily life without explaining it. In the following excerpt, Ellis uses internal dialogue to make the reader feel the effect of her loss.

Walking to the parking lot, I keep my head down so that I do not see people.

Now tears flow. I breathe the fresh air, ridding my nostrils of the stench of death, but hold on to the paper sack from whence escapes his body odor. I should have gone there, earlier, been with him when death first appeared. It would have been easier for him with me there. Did he need me? Was he scared? In pain? I crave the details. I'll ask the nurse. What were the last hours like? But I never do. What can she say? Perhaps he had to be alone to let go of life. The thought calms me. As I

drive out of the parking garage, I think of saying to the parking attendant, “Do you get a discount if the patient dies?” I laugh, hysterically almost, but I say nothing (1995, p.297).

Tears, self-interrogation, and black humour together emphasize the aesthetic of the text and draw the reader into the complex web of feelings that arise when we live a strong emotional experience, and I am reminded that we do not encounter death and loss with pre-existing habits of mind.

At the end, Ellis speaks of the ethical dilemmas and difficulties that she encountered in writing *Final Negotiations*, and the response the book received from colleagues in the sociology community. For some, it was difficult to conceive of a work with the potential of being both, therapeutic and scholarly (Ellis, 1995). But it is Ellis’ ability to make connections between the personal and the theoretical that makes *Final Negotiations* compelling. As a reader, I feel that I have gained insight into the emotional dimensions of death, loss and grief, precisely because of Ellis’ explicitly articulated practice of reflexivity. It is through that process that learning takes place, that is, through the interpretation of events linking one experience to another (Davis et al., 2000).

In an article co-authored with Arthur Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), Ellis’ life partner, Ellis and Bochner deliberate on the form that their contribution on autoethnography will take for the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Yvonna, 2000). A transcript of a telephone conversation between the authors centers on the difficulties of writing about autoethnography as a research method while avoiding the usual didactic form, and the importance for researchers to use the personal voice. The

second section of the article, titled *Introduction to Autoethnography*, includes another dialogue between Ellis and a graduate student in search of guidance for her own research. The encounter becomes the format within which the reader (and the student) are introduced to the process of doing autoethnographic research. Another section gives an overview of the various genres that fall under the broad category of autoethnography, and their respective fundamental principles. This section concludes with an invitation by Ellis to the same student to accompany her to a departmental colloquium where Bochner is to deliver a short paper on why personal narrative matters. Using the personal voice, Bochner tells the audience about his own journey towards claiming a space for narrative of the self within social sciences. He argues his position in relation to a range of critical standpoints and concludes by engaging with the audience about his presentation. In the exchange that follows, Bochner resists reducing the autoethnographic process to a set of criteria, emphasizing instead its imaginative character. Then follows a later encounter between Ellis and the student who by now is deeply involved in autoethnography. The article concludes as it opened, with a telephone conversation between the authors; this time about the student's thesis proposal defense, and the arguments presented by the members of her examining committee. Weaving informal and academic talk throughout, the article emphasizes the connection between lived experience and research.

The dictate 'form follows function' is reflected in this article. The student's questions about autoethnography and its validity as a research method within academia act as performance of the interpretive space characteristic of autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). So instead of delivering a list of methodological criteria through the

conventional third person authoritative voice of academic writing, conversations and discussions between the authors, and between Ellis and the student, reveal the inherent ambiguities of autoethnography, and also its creative possibilities. The article in effect illustrates the process of dispelling commonplace beliefs about what constitutes academic research while introducing the reader to an alternative form of inquiry which in itself displaces relations of power. Here, I am referring to Foucault's notion of power, consisting of complex relations as opposed to something imposed from above. In this context, the self is not something to be discovered, but something to be continually constituted (Foucault, 1993).

Clifford (1986), Denzin (1997), Neumann (1996), and others have addressed a number of issues related to ethnographic writing as interpretative writing. These authors have pointed to the problems associated with writing ethnography as if it directly corresponds with a reality that exists independently from the observer. Consciously grounded in experience, it is possible to situate Carolyn Ellis' autoethnographic work in opposition to the view that authenticity can only be achieved from observing at a distance. Indeed, in her work, distances collapse into proximity, merging the personal with the social, her self-reflective voice always present. I suggest that Ellis' writing about her situatedness and life experience cannot be dismissed as self-indulgent, mainly because what is revealed are the processes at work that make her into a subject, and in doing so, her work provides insight into what Foucault calls *technologies of the self* (in Martin, Gutman & Hutton, 1988), a concept that I address in chapter 3.

1.2.2 Between words and images

Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study. These performances are messy and pedagogical. They instruct our readers about this world and how we see it (Denzin, 2006, p.422).

I suggest that we learn about ourselves through a variety of discourses, including visual art, music, and literature. And if we believe that art does not passively reflect a reality that exists independently from experience, then we also understand the seamless interplay between fact and representation as culturally and socially produced. There are thirty-six reproductions of my work in this dissertation, and together they form an integral part of this inquiry. Although many of these works were completed prior to commencing the research for this dissertation, by re-framing them in this context, they directly inform the text, and in turn the text makes possible the formation of new meanings from these works. Making art, in effect, is a process of articulating oneself as a subject, capable of action and knowledge (Agamben, 1999). Like many other artists, I work in series. Throughout this dissertation, I include only a few examples from several series that span a thirty-year period. My art work allows me to reflexively engage with the provisional interpretations that it generates at different times, perpetually postponing closure. As Derek Pigrum writes,

the way the artist 'layers' material and work, conventionally in the studio, is mirrored in the reflexivity of the researcher. The essential property of this layering is connectivity: the power of the way in which place is organized to produce connections and links between diverse entities or events... In such a place, artistic concerns, labor, problems, and solutions present themselves not as

fixed configuration of objects but in ever-changing relationships of near and far, juxtaposition, overlap, and dispersion... Conceived in this way, the place of research closely shadows the configurations of the artist's studio, in which nothing is ever seen alone but always in relation to other things (2005, p.7-8).

The visual work in this dissertation occupies a space in relation to the written work, serving not simply as illustrations to emphasize a specific point in the text, but rather as markers of the centrality of my ongoing involvement with physical materials as a method of inquiry. During the time I researched this dissertation, I participated in three artists residencies at the Leighton Studios in Banff, Alberta. On one wall of my studio, I hung the drawings I was working on and on another I pinned the pages of the chapter I was writing moving alternately between text and images. I work in series but the space between each of these is always transitional and always filled with tension since for many artists it is often experienced as a void without knowing where it will lead. And it is only from a distance that one can read into this apparent emptiness a process of unfolding that can never be fully articulated. As an artist, I also feel conflicted by the notion that my education has ingrained in me that making art deserves the entire devotion of the artist while teaching and certainly administrating are considered compromising diversions. So inserting my visual work with my written work is also intended as an affirmation that investigating experience takes on multiple shapes and is enriched by intersecting perspectives always feeding each other in unpredictable ways. The first image in the dissertation is one of tourists at the Grand Canyon. It is about people looking at the vast space ahead of them but it is also about me, the artist photographing the scene, looking,

observing. The shirt series in *Pedagogy and the Vanishing Master* perhaps most directly addresses the question of pedagogy in that it represents my own apprenticeship with painting materials, and at the same time, the questions that have surfaced in my mind while teaching in art school. I chose to paint the same image in multiples, precisely because I had never studied painting in art school and thus I felt that it would serve as a model to speak about the paradigm of teaching and learning through progressive steps towards achieving mastery. Later on in the same chapter, *Past: Presence* shows a series of diptychs that combine photographs of objects that have been passed on to me by my family and drawings based on illustrations from a scientific text book that belonged to my grandfather. Each diptych includes a text from a conversation between my mother and my aunt. This series looks to the concept of autobiography as a means of communicating a sense of my own identity to viewers in Asia, where the work was exhibited. The last project reproduced in this chapter is comprised of two parts: photo collages with painting on canvas and black silhouette drawings. Titled, *The Subject*, this series questions the formation of feminine subjectivity in relation to images of the woman as a subject in art. The drawings of *Drawing Stories* are purposefully kept light on the paper and appear to suggest rather than define simple scenes from every day occurrences. They can be seen as frames of a continuous loop of events that one can readily identify as taking place in a Western world context. This series is ongoing and has kept me intermittently involved in the studio while working on this dissertation. The last image of this chapter represents a drawing from a series done in the late seventies, which many years later, I now consider as the beginning of my attempt at breaking away from rules and notions of art fostered in

my education and which failed to engage me as an artist. I end the dissertation with twenty-four images in chronological order. Together they form an overview of my artistic production, ending with the most recent series. The final image, of my late mother and me seen from the back walking into space, speaks of loss but also of renewal, of exploring unknown directions.

While the text does not directly engage with the layering of decisions and materials that make up the art work represented in this dissertation, throughout my writing, I reflect on the multiple meanings generated by the layering of my experiences as student, artist, researcher, and educator.

1.2.3 Three artists and pedagogues

Those who argue against the study of practice—and the imaginative and narratively generated diversity that goes with it—often define practice as the execution of skills (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.37).

With only three artists in this study: *Laiwan, Susan Stewart, and Eric Metcalfe*, my intended goal is to generate a narrative inquiry to articulate a sense of continual reformulation of what it means to be an artist and a pedagogue, and to position ‘my’ text against the text of these three individuals in order to represent aspects of field experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I felt that by finding the ways that the three participants of my study understood their own artistic practices and their role as teacher, I could also gain insights into my own knowing about myself, my artistic practice, and my role as a teacher and administrator. Like in portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), my hope is that the chapters on these three artists and pedagogues will inform and inspire, but also offer documentation of their lived experience as embodied knowledge through the

interplay of their dual roles as artists and teachers, contributing a new sense of meaning about art school education.

Laiwan

Laiwan's approach to both her artistic work and her teaching centers on interrupting assumptions about identity in order to become mindful. Although she uses traditional art and non-art materials to give form to her ideas, she rejects any reliance on mastering traditional artistic techniques as being essential to making art. This is evident in her artistic practice but also in her teaching practice.

For her, visual arts is an open-ended process, a way of asking questions. She seeks to engage her audience sometimes through very simple means such as manipulated bus transfers, or at other times through complex site-specific installations that require the expertise of collaborators to be realized. Nevertheless Laiwan sees in shaping materials a process of *becoming* that cannot be achieved through any other means.

One of Laiwan's key concerns in her work and in her pedagogy is the limitations of instrumental thinking. Working against the goals of prediction and control embedded in social practices and in the objects that circulate within the culture that we live in, Laiwan experiments with a range of approaches and mediums, calling attention to thinking as a multi-modal and complex process. For her, as for Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) the notion of improvisation represents a hopeful prospect in that it calls for mindfulness in every day experiences. It is from such a perspective that Laiwan engages in a pedagogical practice that is hopeful of the future, however, not as a means of

achieving a pre-conceived ideal, but rather, as a process of becoming aware of the context in which one develops and operates as an artist.

Susan Stewart

It is while she was a student that, for Susan Stewart, the concept of difference began to take shape. Working against established institutional practices, she had to develop the confidence to find ways to persist in exploring the ideas that were important to her, despite the opposition that she experienced from her teachers. Moving from photography to performance, and from video to site-specific installations, Stewart feels no allegiance to any specific medium. Although particularly proficient in the techniques of photography, she rejects being called a *photographer* because for her it implies a sense of commitment to specific skills rather than to the ideas of representation and/or misrepresentation that can be investigated through photography.

For Stewart, teaching in art school is not about inculcating students into the narrative of mastery. On the contrary, her pedagogy involves students in defining art itself as an open-ended collaborative process of meaning making, while bringing forth the values embedded in the versions that, together, they collectively articulate. This attitude is reflected through a range of means, such as, for example, looking at objects that are usually discarded in favor of new ones and examining them closely by identifying a range of economic, social and cultural connections associated with them. Students are thus invited to reflect beyond the aesthetic qualities and usage value of the objects themselves to see them also as part of a constellation of relations that our daily exchanges make invisible.

Collective sense-making and the juxtaposition of ideas thus produce versions that exceed the sum total of individual interpretations in a process of emergence that is generative and unexpected (Davis et al., 2000; Fleener, 2002), and which characterizes Stewart's pedagogy.

Eric Metcalfe

The eldest of the three artists in this study, Eric Metcalfe is the only one whose educational antecedents initially prepared him for a more conventional practice in drawing and painting. However it is by being exposed to newer forms of production that he broke away from a disciplinary practice to embrace more experimental forms. In large part, this took place as a member of one of the oldest artists' collective in Canada, The Western Front, which Metcalfe, a co-founder, considers as having been his "best teacher".

For Metcalfe, the school is a porous environment where what goes on inside must relate to what goes on outside. Indeed, for Metcalfe teaching cannot be isolated to the disciplinary structures and the internal dynamics of the art school, but must instead function as an invitation to interact with the world of art outside the institution. As an artist and as a teacher, Metcalfe values craftsmanship and although he spends a considerable amount of time teaching technical skills to his students, in his own practice he reaches out to peers with skills other than his own to collaborate on projects.

Since Metcalfe's practice has principally evolved within a particular segment of the art world, that is, in artist-run-centres and public galleries, a distinguishing feature of his pedagogy focuses on community building and collaborative practices. Metcalfe insists

that it is essential to be seen by students as being an active member of the art community since, for him, art is a process of engagement with a group of peers where ideas intersect and from which new collaborative projects may emerge.

2 MAPPING THE TERRAIN:

ART SCHOOL, PEDAGOGY AND THE DISCIPLINES

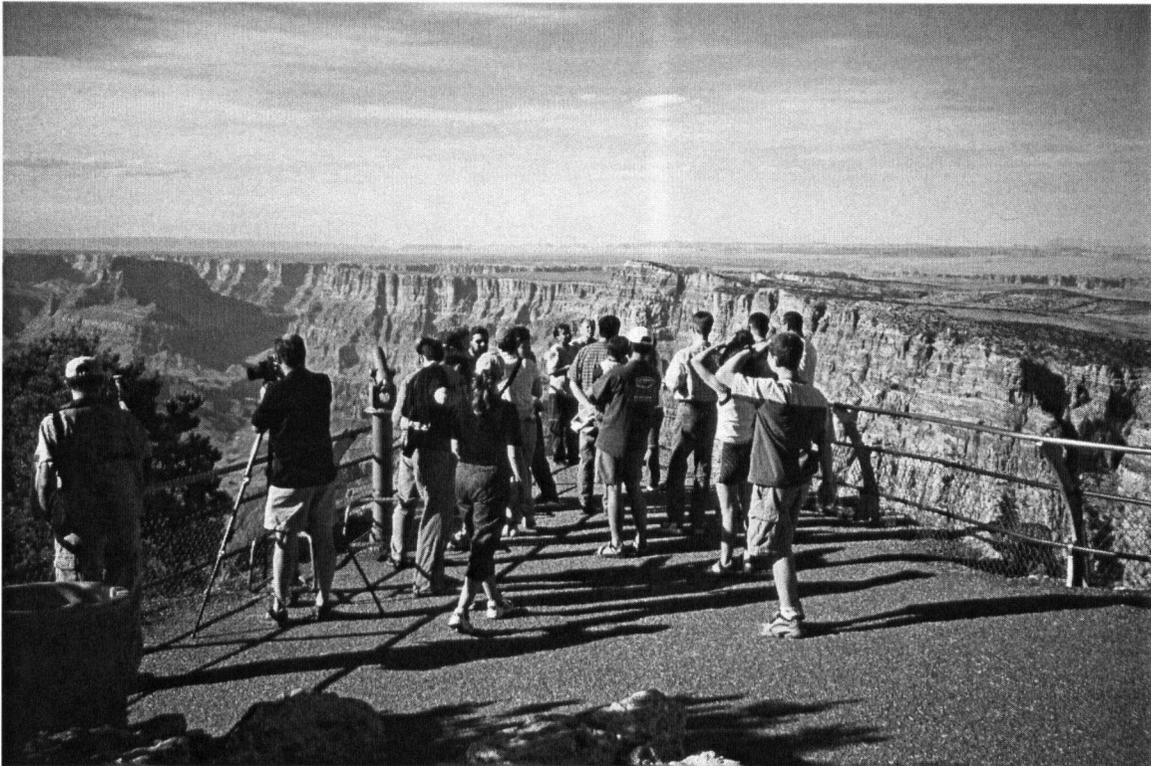


Figure 2.1 Monique Fouquet **Grand Canyon** (photograph), 2000

I have on my wall a photograph I took of tourists at the Grand Canyon. I like that picture for its aesthetic qualities but also

for what it evokes. People stand on the edge of this piece of land that intrudes onto the dramatic landscape so as to get closer to the real thing. With their cameras they attempt to capture the expansive vista much like artists have before them with oil paint, watercolor, or drawing. Some of them pose with the site as background while others are content to frame the landscape as markers of their presence for those who are absent. I, in turn, look at the small crowd through my viewfinder with the intent to make an image of the moment.

I see in that moment a version of art as mimesis, an attempt at representing the experience of seeing beauty, vastness and distance imprinted in the memory through multiple exposures. Perhaps it is true that only a few would have been familiar with viewing landscape paintings in galleries and museums, but most would have seen multiple images of landscapes co-opted for decorative purposes in objects and images of all sorts from wallpaper to calendars.

I see a scene where past and present co-exist side by side, where people rely on relatively recent technology to create instant

pictures, some of which to be sent electronically to friends and family anywhere in the world. The past is present, not only in the referent of the picture, the geological site, but for me as an art school educator, in seeing people engaged in acts of representation like so many others did before them.

I think of the painters and artists of earlier centuries who have depicted similar scenes and the time they likely spent developing their craft in order to capture the impact of such spectacular site. Although it is not always with the intent to make art, today's digital cameras allow the photographer to quickly get a sense of how the picture will appear rendering possible instant multiple retakes. With such possibilities and access to many other technological innovations, as well as the ever-changing context for art and cultural production, it is hard to imagine that art school curriculum should remain largely the same as that of the twentieth or even nineteenth centuries.

In this chapter, I look at current prevailing issues in art school education in relation to past educational practices introducing my own position as teacher. I question the usefulness and relevance of disciplinary pedagogies modeled around the notion of

achieving mastery as a paradigm that has largely shaped curricular practices in art schools in the past and for the most part continues to define art school education today.

As Antonia Bardis writes, “with the flexibility offered by new technologies, artists today have now chosen to upset the boundaries between the visible and the invisible; to create and simulate rather than merely to record” (Bardis, 2004, p.213). Inevitably, the work of artists reflects the conditions in which it is made. It thus seems imperative that the values embedded in the pedagogies and curriculum of our art schools be continually re-examined and considered as a discursive system. Where there might have been a time when the seclusion of art in the museum made it appear autonomous, alienated, something apart, referring only to its own internal history and dynamics (Crimp, 1993), art is art only by virtue of its place as such within the social sphere. And while not long ago the primary, if not sole, purpose of art schools was to form individuals as exhibiting artists, today’s graduates operate in a much broader framework than the gallery or museum world of the past. New and expanding areas form new contexts, and if art school curriculum is going to be relevant, these must also be taken into account.

Cultural theory, cultural history, criticism and practice may need different amounts of time in a fine art curriculum, but they need to be presented as a combined strategy. For it only through such dialogue that the ideologies which have sedimented in the rooms, spaces, personnel and accounting of our fine art education can be exposed to ensure that creativity is being fostered and art students are being adequately educated (Pollock, 1996a, p.29).

In the process I also learnt that there is no ready-made solution to the crisis in art schools; that the first thing to do was patiently to reconstitute a community of good artists who love art, who respect each other and their students, and who take their task as transmitters seriously; and that the last thing to do was to want to unite them around a banner, a programme or an ideology (de Duve, 1994, p.40).

2.1 Theory and practice

Today's art schools occupy a difficult terrain where inherited practices and assumptions at times conflict with current conditions and the flux of an ever-changing context. Situated in the UK, feminist scholar Griselda Pollock takes a critical look at the education of artists (1985, 1996a & b) and writes more than twenty years ago, "there is in art schools a generation or two of teachers and artists whose sense of art and culture was formed at a different moment from that of their current students" (1985, p.8). By itself this statement describes a situation that is not only common to art but also to other fields in higher education. However what makes these words resonate within the context of later writings by Pollock is her suggestion that change in art schools seems to be stalled by those who lack the capacity to think outside of their own educational experience. In her critique, Pollock advocates for change in order to educate artists with the awareness of the social and cultural space that art occupies and within which artists operate. Pollock argues against what she perceives to be false dichotomies, that is, making versus

thinking, practice versus theory. She insists that students must develop the skills to critically engage with their own work and the work of others, and this, informed by multiple perspectives outside the white Eurocentric male dominant paradigm.

However, Pollock never directly proposes strategies for assisting students to become critically engaged within the studio classroom. In fact Pollock's critique of art school education remains confined to how art is discussed, received and circulated, and thus by focusing her approach on the critique of art rather than on the making of art, Pollock seems to reinforce the divide between theory and practice. When Pollock asserts that fine art education is "the systematic destruction of the creativity of the majority of students" (1996a, p.27), she dramatically states her case but fails to articulate how we might proceed in order to address the problem other than by suggesting the integration of theory with practice (1996a).

Susan E. McKenna takes a more pragmatic approach to the same issue by introducing concrete strategies for making students aware of the inextricable link between theory and practice (1999). As a teacher in art school, McKenna works with her students to emphasize the belief that the vocabulary of art making, rather than being neutral, reflects ideological positions and proposes studio projects that engage students to recognize the connection between thinking and making. For instance, one of her projects requires that students closely examine various photographs taken from popular culture to analyze how camera angles, far from being neutral, depict a certain position vis-à-vis gender, class, and race. But on McKenna's own account, her efforts may have too little

effect if these are only limited to her classroom thus leaving unchallenged core ideas about art schools and curriculum (1999).

While it is not the purpose of this dissertation to examine the discourse surrounding practice-based PhDs, I nevertheless want to note that aspects of the discussion around this relatively recent innovation in academia provides further insight about the persisting impact of positioning art making in opposition to theory. The fact that North American universities have been awarding PhDs in the arts such as music and theatre for many years, but no such credential in visual or studio arts until very recently, perhaps reflects a binary approach to making as being distinct from thinking, and a dominant model of research as essentially based on a notion of objective knowledge or truth (MacLeod, 2005). In the UK where such degrees have been established for at least a decade, most of the related literature centers on providing proof of the validity of doctoral work in the practice of art and justification of methodological procedures (MacLeod & Holdridge, 2005). As MacLeod and Holdridge write,

...many years of empirical research into student experience of doctoral study and sustained investigation into Art and Design research, have led to an understanding of just how easy it is for both the broader inter-institutional research cultures and the social cultures which frame them to produce binary distinctions: art is conceived as practical rather than as theoretical or intellectual and the practices of art are thus confirmed as occupying an academic terrain which is separate from that of theory (2005, p.143).

If we accept a post-structuralist account of meaning as being situated and never fixed, the autonomy of the art object is thus put into question (Marriner, 1999). That meaning is relational and contingent on the relationship between signs within a system requires that the process of articulating meaning about works of art must consequently take into account the particulars of that system. As Marriner writes, “it would seem to me that theory therefore has to be included in an art education that is to give an understanding of and access to how works mean” (1999, p.57). But I would suggest that what is at stake here is not only about making space for theory but about developing a process whereby practice and theory are integrated into the pedagogical framework of institutions.

There is no denying that critical theory and the Frankfurt School have played a significant role in the development of art criticism and the production of art which in turn had an important impact on the teaching of art at the post-secondary level. However this is perhaps more directly felt in seminar and art history courses than in studio courses.

In this study, I am particularly concerned with investigating studio-based pedagogy as it remains the dominant mode of teaching and learning in art schools. Specifically I seek to unravel the practices that we take for granted so that art school curriculum may be informed from the perspective that knowledge principally emerges out of webs of connections and not simply by keeping existing disciplinary boundaries in place.

Michael Ginsborg writes, “instead of going off to do history or theory at the safe and false distance of the seminar room, smaller more realistic subject-specific work could

take place” (1994, p.82). The desire by some to keep theory at a distance perhaps is motivated by the contradictory conditions that it suggests. Faced with a post-modern view that questions the autonomy of the artists, students and faculty must negotiate the notion of a self that is located in fragmentary relations to the world we inhabit (Wilde, 1999). To be clear, on the one hand, students in studio classes are encouraged to take risks and to explore new territories, and on the other, they are confronted in their theory classes with the notion that their discoveries are not exclusively the result of their own doing but that of cultural forces at work within and outside different worlds of art.

It seems that the privileging of student self-determination, that is, the perception of the student as already an artist emphasized by competitive admission processes and curricular practices that lay emphasis on individual performance, works to undermine the interconnections between material knowledge, and contemporary and historical knowledge. There is a certain urgency to discarding the stereotype of the isolated and ego-led artist (Parsons, 1999) and to look closely at the incremental shifts that are taking place sometimes in isolation, but which nevertheless are beginning to affect the epistemological framework of institutions.

2.2 Art in the social sphere

Carol Becker (1994, 1996, 2002) takes an institutional look at art schools in relation to the changes that have taken place in art production in post-modernism and beyond. She argues for educating artists from a perspective that is inclusive of the many ways art functions in society and the creative exchanges that take place outside established curricular structures of art schools. She states,

Our job now is to offer these students a version of their options and possibilities which is as large, as diverse, as passionate as the sum total of our own experience, to give them the courage to challenge themselves, the structures of our institutions within which they study, and the larger society in which they live (1996, p.105).

In *Art Subjects*, Howard Singerman follows the trajectory of how the art world has evolved into the subject to be studied in art school by examining certain conventions (1999). For instance, it has long been common practice in art schools, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, to invite visiting or guest artists as a way of providing a link between institutions and art as it is practiced outside of its walls. As Singerman writes, “visiting artists are chosen by students or faculty from national journals and magazines, from the pages of *Flash Art* or *Art in America*, and they speak to students, whatever they say, in the shared language of those journals and that community; their speech constructs that community” (1999, p.3). Thus it is possible to think of the art world and art schools as symbiotically joined by a language which reifies art excluding other domains that are not specifically designated as part of the art world by the art world. Singerman argues that the subtext of art school curriculum is the artist and the art world presented here as a monolithic entity. However I want to suggest that the art world is neither homogenous nor autonomous as it is inextricably linked to the broader social context. And even if one insisted that the exclusive role of art school education was to prepare students to become active participants in the art world, it would be difficult to deny the fact that artists live in a world where art is only one of its multiple and infinite manifestations. It is thus imperative as Becker suggests for students to see themselves in

more complex terms outside the familiar frame of reference of art (2002). Indeed, I would suggest that art students must develop a view of citizenship that does not simply reinforce social marginality, but instead offers a range of possible and imaginative models.

We might consider exchange student programmes and migration as factors that increasingly contribute to cultural diversity amongst the student body, and which will continue to have a strong impact on art school curriculum. While such diversity presents opportunities, it also challenges the dominant framework of Western art introducing new aesthetic paradigms and slowly changing the demographics of the teaching staff. As Clémentine Deliss writes, “as a cultural institution in flux, the art college offers a powerful breeding ground for critical reflections and research into the future of a global aesthetic dialogue” (2005, p.19). It is from such a perspective that Deliss recently engaged in a research project called *Future Academy* where participants from ten countries explored topics such as “communications, economic structures, and spatial considerations for a future art and design academy” (2005, p.25). The project proposed to examine three key areas: “the shifting epistemological framework or knowledge based of art and design, the architectonics of the college including the effects of increased mobility on the physical and virtual sites of such institutions, and finally structural considerations that might support deeper transfers of knowledge across disciplines and continents” (Deliss, 2005, p.19). I believe that such an approach provides an example that may lead to new ways for art schools to become socially grounded institutions that reflect the reality of the global social network that we are increasingly operating within. As it is,

from my own experience I see that many efforts are currently being made to develop mechanisms and services to facilitate adaptation by students of diverse cultural background to pedagogical practices that have been in place since the Academies without fundamentally questioning the relevance of these practices to changing conditions. For example, in most institutions surveys of Western art courses continue to be the principal way that students are introduced to art history. Such courses do not routinely situate Western art within a broader international context, but rather place Western art as the normative standard and art from other parts of the world as peripheral to it.

Early in my administrative experience, I was tested by a faculty member who had been at the institution for many years and who was not contributing very much at the departmental meetings other than opposing any suggestions that might result in a substantial change to the way we operated. As a faculty, I had sat beside him a few years earlier during a discussion about a proposed curricular change that I thought would benefit students. He had voted against the change on the grounds that what was being proposed had been tried at another institution ten years earlier, and since it had not worked there, it was not going to work here.

He was close to retirement and I knew that I could probably simply “put up” with his behaviour just a while longer but that did not sit well with me. A few times, I had responded publicly to what I considered to be inappropriate comments from him, asserting my authority in the way I had seen it done by others before. However, I quickly resolved to make it a challenge for myself to find a way to engage him again.

Knowing that he only had a couple of years left to teach, I asked him to document a collection of materials that dealt with visual perception, something which he had carefully researched over the years and which he used to teach colour theory and other courses. He became very enthusiastic about the idea and after doing a presentation half-way through the project at a departmental meeting, several faculty members came to see me to ask what I had done to motivate him.

The material, culled from varied sources over an extended period of time, including scientific journals, and other non-art publications, had informed his approach in his courses and was displayed in the room where he insisted on doing most of his teaching. His personal notes were also on view, and as a whole, the information formed a constellation of images, diagrams, texts and illustrations that, in addition to serving as a resource for the students, also pointed to the potential connections between art and other areas of knowledge. While in this instance, he recognized the intrinsic value of open-ended exploration for art to expand in new directions, what was perplexing to me is how, in other circumstances, he could so easily reject ideas that challenged how art education had functioned for so many years.

I have never forgotten this experience. On the one hand, I was happy that I had found a way of connecting with this individual, but on the other, the whole interaction served to highlight the ongoing gap that seems to exist between the practice of art and the practice of education within art schools.

2.3 The Artist as Teacher

The debate so far has often centered around notions of old and new, conventions and innovations, discourse around making and thinking, and tensions between opposing ideological positions. In the last ten years, there has been a number of conference proceedings published in the UK specifically addressing the education of artists. In the early 90s, the Wimbledon School of Art in association with the Tate Gallery opened an ongoing series of conferences with the topic, “the artist as teacher” (Hetherington *et al.*, 1994). One of the presenters, Glynn Williams (1994) laments what he sees as the gradual substitution of professional artists in art and design schools with art educators. Williams argues that the diminishing role of artists in setting the educational agenda of art and design schools is counter productive and will lead to the eventual decline of art itself. Williams’ argument relies entirely on a dichotomy that situates the artist in opposition to the educator seemingly without any possibility of reconciling the two. Furthermore, Williams assumes that the only context that is relevant to art education is the art world and the only measure of success being the ability for graduates to become participants in the art world as he sees it. This, as if such world was a stable and unified entity, hence denying the potential for graduates to engage meaningfully within a broader and larger social arena.

Williams claims that assessing learning instead of the work that the students produce will lead to mediocrity mainly because educators, too preoccupied with teaching and disengaged from the art world, lack the knowledge and experience for assessing art. Williams writes, “ the practitioners brought a sense of real comparison in quality between

the individual student's work and the art world beyond the art school walls" (1994, p.24). By pitting art versus education, Williams seems to return to the model of the early academies where art was understood as the outcome of talent in men trained by masters in their field to serve ideological functions (Goldstein, 1996). Yet most of us who teach in art schools know that graduates become involved in many art related employment opportunities in addition to individual studio practice. For example, the term 'creative industries' has evolved out of a wide range of occupations. Creative industries have a broad reach and are defined by the Department of Culture in the UK as "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (Department of Culture, 2001). Furthermore, while Williams' argument implies that art schools' success lies exclusively in producing artists who will engage with the art world, taken at his word, his position suggests that any deviation from such goal amounts to failure. At the same time, it fails to account for the important changes that have gradually occurred over the years in what constitutes the art world. Public and commercial art galleries and museums, once the principal venues for artists to show their work, no longer represent the only options. Art collectives, artists-run-centres, artists networks, and more recently the world wide web, and other digitally mediated environments allow for a much broader audience than the gallery going one and offer new ways to conceive and produce work. Art schools, it would seem have a role in exposing and preparing students to engage with these new forms, not only in terms of teaching how to use and think through the technology, but in making students aware of

the expanding field in which they operate beyond art school. As Lucy Chadwick states, “it could be argued that the most important goal in the art school environment is to break the insular tendencies of the intrepid student and encourage an open dialogue in order to prepare and expose the student to the production-consumption aspect of their endeavours” (2004, p.28). But developing a sense of connection to the world outside of art schools is not only to prepare students to make inroads into the art market but also to understand their social responsibility as cultural producers (Becker, 1994, 1996, 2002; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993; Gablik, 1991; Kester, 2004, 2006; Lippard, 1984). For example, artist Barbara Naidus advocates for a pedagogy that seeks to explore daily problems and collective consciousness rising in order to promote social change (2005). Other artists/teachers such as Tom Collins and Reiko Goto seek to categorize the ways that some artists contribute to the ecological health of the planet by rethinking the nature-culture relationships that exist so often at the detriment of future generations (Collins, 2005a, 2005b).

While it may be obvious that artists should teach artists since it is assumed that they are the people who know best about the skills and knowledge associated with being artists (Painter, 1994), the increasing connections between art and other fields of knowledge may require a different pedagogical approach to that experienced by most artists who teach in art school today. For instance, the new kinds of imagery made possible by science and technology are having a profound impact upon our culture and the way artists think about making art (Mottram, 2001). What is at stake is not only about making accessible these new forms of production to students, but more importantly, it is

about teaching students the underlying principles, processes and structures to contextualize them and to follow connections to important strands of contemporary knowledge (Mottram, 2001).

2.4 Art and Art School Curriculum

According to Andrew Brighton, “works of art are not sites for the application of criteria rather they are sites for debates about criteria” (1994, p.37). Although this perspective seems appropriate if we consider an aspect of art as being an evolving inquiry process, it nevertheless conflicts with the increasing pressure to make things explicit for the purpose of accountability coming from many fronts including governments, funding bodies, and other stakeholders that emphasize pre-determined learning outcomes and which, in doing so, fail to reflect the complexity and ambiguity involved in creative endeavours. Indeed, if art cannot be defined through a set of criteria other than by ever challenging existing ones, the issue of accountability presents a dilemma. For example, while the ability to deal with ambiguity could be considered a learning outcome, this cannot necessarily be dissected into measurable components by artists/teachers for whom knowing is often a matter of tacit knowledge, or knowing by doing (Schön, 1983, 1987). Indeed the pressure to clarify how and what we teach in ways that are overly explicit may in fact be self-defeating.

Recollecting a conversation he had with the artist Mario Mertz, Jon Thompson (1994) asked what he thought of British art. Thompson speculates from Mertz’s answer that “British art is very well made”, and finds in this simple but incisively critical comment a symptom of the problems with the state of teaching in art schools. The objects

of British art Thompson declares “are the product, in many cases, of extremely effective teaching that over-determines them in some way. They are well-made conceptually, well-made physically – all those things, but they don’t feel like art” (1994, p.46). Thompson claims that the essential feature of successful art education is the desire for art “namely, that in any educational endeavour focused on the practice of art, desire for art and by implication the artist must be placed at the centre” (1994, p.48). However I believe that ‘desire for art’ can easily be misconstrued, by both teacher and student, for a desire to *imitate art*, to make things that look like art skimming the surface of existing objects, images, or events risking of getting entangled in a self-referential field where art and the art world are imagined in isolation from the social sphere.

The tendency to equate the success of art education solely with the quality of the material production that results from it, I would suggest, relies largely on historical practices but does not necessarily constitute a definitive measure of its effectiveness. Indeed while it is convenient to frame teaching and learning in a linear cause and effect relationship, doing so contributes little to our understanding of the more complex patterns of interaction which indicate that learning is not a simple matter of adding to an existing store of knowledge (Davis et al., 2000). Furthermore, using objects, images, performances, etc. that the students produce as the locus for assessing the value or quality of an art education fails to expose the extent to which the frame of reference for making such judgments does not stand alone but is part of a complex system.

While I agree that artists are well placed to teach future artists, the authority to determine what is good or bad art does not necessarily equate with the ability to

determine what constitutes good or bad education. As we have seen with the Mertz anecdote, to produce good art, or to educate artists, requires more than the application or communication of a set of criteria. Since according to Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler, knowledge is contingent on changing conditions that are never absolute, universal or fixed (2000), making art or curriculum as systems of knowledge, I suggest, are also subject to these same conditions. Since I do not intend here to specifically explore the issue of learning theories, I take as a starting point Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler's position that learning is principally a matter of keeping pace with one's evolving circumstances (2000).

If talent was a pre-requisite to be selected as apprentice under the tutelage of the masters in the academies, the Bauhaus founded in 1919 and a point of crystallization of the several movements that gradually broke away from the outmoded model of the academies, did not have such constraints. In fact, one of the pedagogical underpinnings of the Bauhaus was that art in the sense of 'high art' simply could not be taught. Art was to respond to the new political economy that mechanization had brought about, and the role of the artist was to bring craft skills to the trades and industry (Wick, 2000). It would exceed the scope of this dissertation to give a detailed account of the history and the legacy of the Bauhaus, but it is important to note that the artist as innovator was a key element of the Bauhaus pedagogy which aimed at unleashing the creativity of the student believed to be within all individuals by teaching and learning specific skills in order to grow his or her natural abilities (de Duve, 1994; Wick, 2000). This contrasts with the academies that sought to elevate the natural talent of the apprentice to the status of master

by developing predefined skills received from the past through methodologies that were based on mimesis (Goldstein, 1996). The structure and pedagogy of art schools today owe much to both, the academies and the Bauhaus. Certain practices such as teaching focused on imparting technical skills, or teaching centered on the professional status and work of individual faculty (read master), continue to have a strong impact on the curriculum and organizational structure of institutions. Thus I want to suggest that by relying heavily on methods of the past, common pedagogical practices continually in effect in today's art schools fail to adequately respond to current and changing conditions.

2.5 Art Education and Digital Natives

At my own institution, I found myself recently absorbed watching a student working on a large mural painting as part of a collective project. I watched as the student attempted to align the projected image from an overhead projector with the unfinished painted figure on the wall in full view of visitors and passers by. I assessed the scene as I would when deciding to make a drawing in my studio speculating as to what it says about our time and place. At that moment, I was reminded of a newspaper article I had read about artists who use lenses, cameras and photographs as a means of quickly achieving likeness in painting or drawing. The article offers a cursory look at issues that arise when artists use tools and devices for such purposes (Kimmelman, 2002) alluding to the commonly held belief that artists' reliance on technology is considered a weakness and perhaps even proof of a lack of *natural* abilities. From such perspective, technology is not considered as enabling but rather as a crutch, or even as a means of *cheating*. He

writes, “our displaced anxiety must partly entail a fear of being tricked [mistaking a tracing for a freehand drawing] and, more particularly, a fear of technology: a concern that what makes us human is being sacrificed to the brilliance and reliability of the machine” (2002, p.3). During my own early training as an artist when much time was spent learning to reproduce things as they appear to the eye, the value assigned to the skills acquired through that process was indeed proportionally high. Perhaps this is why I have later sought to reconcile that experience in my own art and pedagogical practice. And this is also perhaps why watching the young student unselfconsciously manipulate the overhead projector to quickly transfer an image, I realized the significance of that moment as an act of triumph, and not as one of failure.

*Today’s students have not just changed **incrementally** (emphasis in original) from those of the past, nor simply changed their slang, clothes, body adornments, or styles, as has happened between generations previously. A really big **discontinuity** (emphasis in original) has taken place. One might even call it a ‘singularity’ – an event which changes things so fundamentally that there is absolutely no going back. This so-called ‘singularity’ is the arrival and rapid dissemination of digital technology in the last decades of the 20th century (Prensky, 2001, p.1).*

The overhead projector that the student used is not sophisticated technology: a light bulb, mirrors and a magnifying lens, quite rudimentary really. But as a tool, it provides a short cut to reproducing an image at the desired scale. The instant gratification that it allowed perhaps serves the needs of students who have grown up with digital technology and their expectations of the world (Prensky, 2001). However, those of us who have not move at a different pace and may have different expectations. We like to teach the way we were taught “slowly, step-by-step, one thing at a time, individually, and above all seriously” (Prensky, 2001, p.2).

At a conference I attended a few years ago I heard a speaker from a high profile institution in the United States talk about the moment when he realized that his students had a more sophisticated understanding and deeper knowledge of a particular software programme than he did as the teacher. Although he was well aware that his role exceeded simply teaching how to use computer software, the experience triggered something else, namely that he had to reflect on his pedagogical practice from a new perspective. As digital natives his students had new skills developed through years of interaction and practice with receiving information at an unprecedented pace (Prensky, 2001). That the students have the skills to quickly learn ever increasing new versions of computer software, he suspected, was only one manifestation of many potential others. Although I believe that it would be worthwhile to assess the impact of new technologies on learners in another study, here I only want to point out that complex learning theories suggest that knowledge involves a complex web of experiences, actions and interactions and as such is dynamic and evolving. While new technologies as a whole is only one of the many threads that runs through the fabric of knowledge, their effects on the learners is inevitably part of our changing circumstances (Davis et al., 2000; Maturana & Varela, 1980, 1992; Varela et al., 1991). For art schools specifically this represents a paradigmatic shift from when the teacher was once considered Master and holder of knowledge, and the student apprentice and recipient of that knowledge.

2.6 Disciplines, Foucault, and Pedagogy

Generally speaking, it might be said that the disciplines are techniques for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities (Foucault, 1979, p. 218).

As Foucault states, “one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an anti-nomadic technique” (1979, p.218). It is not surprising then to see that modeled from the past, most art schools today are organized around distinct disciplines such as sculpture, painting, printmaking, etc. for curriculum and administrative purposes. And also because it is commonly believed that each of the disciplines represents a distinct body of knowledge, both technical and historical and therefore deserves focused attention. In most schools, students must choose to focus on one or two disciplines sometimes after a brief period of multidisciplinary exploration. The movement from the general to the specific thus allows for a convenient way of controlling resources and curriculum that largely relies on a linear system of skills acquisition. Framed as logical progression, introductory, intermediate and advanced courses are presented in hierarchical sequences and in segments that are organized as such by the master. “Disciplinary power develops a general code for the transition from student to master, put into practice in various fields of learning” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p.69). The disciplines (and the courses specific to them) are methods of training (Foucault, 1979) that enable individuals to become integrated in the particular ways of being that they (the disciplines) represent. Disciplines thus produce and reproduce themselves in isolation from one another through the allegiance that they require of their disciples, and through the partitions that they delineate as spaces of inclusion and exclusion. Like Foucault’s panopticon, the supervision of these spaces is facilitated by the clarity in which the boundaries are

delineated. As Foucault writes, “the panoptic mechanism is not simply a hinge, a point of exchange between a mechanism of power and a function; it is a way of making power relations function in a function, and of making a function function through these power relations” (1979, pp.206-207). Within the context of art school, the issues that disciplines raise are many and subject to heated debate. A conference organized by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 2005 is a case in point. It is worth noting the defensive tone of the invitation to participate which has the character of a call for reinforcement (Appendix A). As Foucault writes,

It [discipline] must also master all the forces that are formed from the very constitution of an organized multiplicity; it must neutralize the effects of counter-power that spring from them and which form a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate it: agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions – anything that may establish horizontal conjunctions (1979, p. 219).

The call for participation in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts conference reaffirms disciplinary teaching and curriculum while simultaneously acknowledging changing conditions outside the school. Conceding that we live in an interdisciplinary world, and that new disciplines such as video, book arts, digital media and others are now taught along with traditional disciplines, the call openly seeks to find ways to further entrench a disciplinary approach to curriculum. Although the text of the invitation makes the claim to be responding to “the complexity of the 21st century”, it clearly avoids suggesting that, in itself, a disciplinary approach may no longer be appropriate. Careful to include the notion of interdisciplinarity, it is presented here as one

of the disciplines, or “self-designed major”, added to a growing lists of new forms of production, thus neutralizing the term and what it stands for by enclosing it within disciplinary boundaries (Appendix A).

The compartmentalization of art into specific medium and techniques, which in most art schools takes the form of departments, reflects a modernist legacy where a medium was taught to have its own syntax and language (de Duve, 1994). Like in the academies, content experts in a specific medium act like masters in maintaining a stronghold on the organization of curriculum into distinct departments (disciplines). Discipline presupposes the unruly body and works to regulate it. It identifies the body as inherently non-mechanical (McHoul & Grace, 1993), “the bearer of forces”(Foucault, 1979, p.155), and seeks to train it according to a body of knowledge, that is, “a body manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits”(Foucault, 1979, p. 155). Despite acknowledging changing conditions, the conference titled *Respecting Boundaries: Teaching the Disciplines within an Interdisciplinary World* can be read more as a warning that everything is not well than as a celebratory call to for what is.

From my experience as a teacher and as an administrator in an art school, I see students transgressing disciplinary boundaries like outlaws surreptitiously breaking the rules. They navigate through the walls we put in place to access the range of form making we judiciously keep apart. While they may be successful at getting what they want, they/we may never know what they/we lack. To that end, we may begin by asking ourselves:

What does it mean to work collaboratively across disciplines?

How can we imagine curriculum outside the boundary paradigm?

How can we structure ourselves to reflect the realities of 21st Century art practice?

What is at stake in maintaining disciplinary boundaries under the pretence of preserving the disciplines?

Who do we exclude by holding on to pedagogical models of earlier times?

By ignoring the increasing web of connections reflected in contemporary art practice in relation to disciplinary pedagogical models, we are prevented from developing the theoretical knowledge specific to teaching and learning within such changing context. Because the knowledge that disciplinary models perpetuate is subjugated by what Foucault called, “a functionalist coherence or formal systemization” (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, p.81), it cannot account for the ambiguity of working in the interspaces of disciplines. So while the conference may ask, how can we do what we do better, it fails to recognize the increasing gap between the premises onto which disciplinary based pedagogy rests in relation to contemporary art practice.

Left unexamined, the enclosed disciplines have for effect that of a social quarantine (Foucault, 1979) where nevertheless the unfolding of art practice continues to evolve outside its perimeters and despite the constraints of a narrowly based pedagogical model. Thus the gap between practice and pedagogy continues to grow. Some might be inclined to understand the attachment to disciplinary pedagogy as a necessary precursor to interdisciplinary practice based on the belief that one must know the rules before being able to break them for productive ends. However, one must then ask by what course of action would one be led to make a break with a disciplinary way of thinking and making

to an interdisciplinary one, to one that accounts for the multiple connections between disciplines. In other words, if we accept that contemporary art practice no longer reflects disciplinary thinking, as even the call to the conference seems to suggest, how does one who has been taught in disciplinary ways make the bridge to interdisciplinary thinking?

I am reminded here of my own experience teaching drawing in first year of art school when, confronted with an assignment that extended beyond reproducing facsimiles of what was in front of them, some students objected on the basis that dealing with subject matter or ideas should be demanded of them only after they had acquired the necessary technical skills to do so¹. In response, we would discuss things, and I would ask them such questions as: at which point, or by what 'markers' would they know that they have reached sufficient technical skills to begin dealing with more complex ideas? Indeed whose' authority would they rely on? Or is there something that is felt in the [social] body that makes one aware of becoming able to work in more complex ways?

As Foucault states, "the power of the Norm appears through the disciplines" (1979, p.184). But if the role of art is to challenge established criteria as suggested by Andrew Brighton (1994) or to challenge the norm, I would suggest that it also ought to challenge disciplinary pedagogy in order to counter conformity:

¹ Rather than simply asking students to draw a still life to practice rendering highlights, shadows, and texture, I asked the students to set up a still life with objects which, from each of their own perspective, represented the culture that we live in. They had to come to the next class prepared to articulate why they chose each object and how they understood the word, 'culture'. While they did get to practice their technical skills, they also had to reflect on their choice of objects and the meaning that they individually assign to them.

In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences (Foucault, 1979, p.184).

It seems that my students' reluctance to make drawings that were not solely focused on demonstrating levels of technical skills came from being asked to work with their own interpretations and their own experiences. By striving to be true to life, working in a representational way provided a simple and clear sense of purpose, but faced with the open-endedness of selecting their own objects and articulating their own sense and meaning of culture demanded efforts from students that could not be as easily measured against established models (norms). In the regime of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1979), the threat of punishment "measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals" (Foucault, 1979, p.183). In the regime of mimesis, distinguishing between success and failure relies on normalizing judgments. Yet one of the challenges of teaching, mainly in the early years of art school, rests in working against students' expectations that what they produce can easily be measured against existing standards by the teacher/master. Mindful of this, as a teacher I gradually changed my approach to curriculum so that, while nurturing craft skills, students were also expected to venture out on their own, encouraged to give shape to

materials so as to give physical presence to their visions through their interactions in the world. My hope as a teacher rests in the desire to make students aware of their presence as emerging artists in relation to the time and space in which they live.

In this chapter, I reviewed some of the key issues that dominate aspects of the current discourse about art school education. I reflected on disciplinary pedagogies and mastery as problematic paradigm for art school education today. I also turned to an example from my own teaching that indicates a shift in my thinking as a teacher.

The non-linear movement between the positions that I simultaneously occupy as artist, teacher and administrator means that the complexity of the relation between them is always tangible with each role constantly being re-defined and always in process. In the next chapter, I turn to my own experience as embodied knowledge to examine identity formation as it relates to the process of change as an artist and as an educator.

3 PEDAGOGY AND THE VANISHING MASTER

In the following chapter, I reflect on my work as an artist and on the process of acquiring a second language as representing aspects of my lived experience which provide specific insight into my own understanding of what it means to teach and to learn. From there, I explore the contingency of meaning, both in relation to language and in relation to art. It is from that standpoint that I consider art school pedagogy, which I suggest, relies on mastery as a linear construct leading to an imaginary ideal.

The stories that I tell in my artwork are not complete before they are told. They evolve as I paint, draw, or write. They take shape out of the process of making, manipulating, seeing, reading and listening. They come out of language as best as they can, and as much as language will allow.

Several years ago I did a project with the intention of investigating aspects of the power dynamics involved in teaching art. To that end, I painted a series of twenty studies of the same image representing a mid-section of a shirt as a stand-in for the drapery I had learned to draw at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Each image of the shirt was painted on primed paper using oil pigments mixed with various additives and hung in chronological order of execution from the first to the last (Figures 3.1& 3.2). Below each study explanatory notes written in pencil document steps, pigments, and materials used for each painting thus rendering accessible the information necessary to produce each painted image. By revealing information that is usually unavailable when looking at a painting in a museum or an art gallery, the text disrupts contemplation as a privileged process for engagement with art.

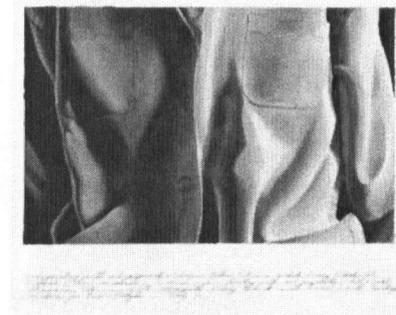


Figure 3.1. **Mediation and Image** (Installation view), 1992 Figure 3.2 **Shirt study**, 1992

At first glance, the characteristic that emerges from seeing all twenty studies together is a noticeable progression towards realism. The twentieth shirt does indeed convey the drapery with its texture and surface details rendered in a more convincing way than the first one implying that as the author, I am reaching for an imaginary ideal. It is precisely because the ideal is out of sight and unimaginable that the series could continue indefinitely suggesting that, while the production and succession of the same image are driven from the position of the artist, the desire for *improvement* is itself socially constituted by and through our discursive practices. One of the goals for this project was to invite the viewer to regard the series as a metaphor for teaching and learning, and to call attention to the limitations of working within the paradigm of the authoritarian constraints of what Henry Giroux calls, “pedagogies of certainty” (1994).

Since the site of the exhibition for this project was in an art school, I was actively addressing students who, by virtue of their being there, one may assume have an investment in wishing to become artists. Consequently, the visible formulas for each

painted image is intended as a critique of the confines of teaching and learning focused exclusively on the acquisition of technical skills and the attendant belief that such skills constitute the quintessential aspect of curriculum in art school. The traditional polarization of thinking and making has been challenged by many (Becker, 2002; Cary, 1998; de Duve, 1994; de Ville & Foster, 1994; McKenna, 1999), and others who look to art schools not only as a means of developing abilities to manipulate materials but also as a site for critical pedagogy where thinking and making intertwine. Therefore making explicit the position of the viewer in *reading* the work shifts the focus away from the illusory autonomy of the art object to stress instead the essential role of the viewer for creating meaning from the work. I believe that this shift is crucial for promoting critical approaches to pedagogy within art schools, an issue I will return to later.

3.1 Leaving Home

As a child of about 11 years growing up in Quebec City, I dreamt of leaving home. I dreamt of adventures. With my cousin Denis, I would ride my bicycle around in the tourist areas of the city looking at parked cars. Denis tried to guess car makes and models and marveled at the sight of Buicks, Chevrolets, Meteors and Studebakers, while I looked at license plates imagining places such as Maryland, Vermont, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. My curiosity was not so much about what these specific places looked like but what they stood for. Growing up in Quebec in the 50s and 60s meant that seeing the world for people around me was going to France, 'the Mother country'. But seeing the world for me was much more about a desire to leave a cultural context in order

to access another, the thought of living in English sounding far more exotic than going to France.

Desiring English persisted during my childhood. I was raised in a Catholic unilingual francophone community. Given the context, my childhood was interspersed with acts that I now recognize as simultaneously defiant and acquiescent. I recall imagining that my name was "Nancy" and while exploring my neighborhood I discovered a construction site where an empty hole had been left to accumulate water; I named it *Lac Simpson*. Living in Quebec when I did, I now know that my fascination with English was not with the language itself but what it represented. English symbolised the opportunity to transform myself, that is, a way to gain distance from the controlling socio-cultural context of home, and to access the dominant discourse it stood for. In elementary school, I remember vividly my English textbook. Shoes, trousers, pie, boat, book, flower, words and illustrations for things from John and Mary's world. Not mine.

In my hope for liberation from the technologies of domination (Foucault, 1988) embodied in the set of rules and conditions of family, religion and culture, Toronto offered unknown possibilities. From where I stood, speaking English implied self-assurance, success, and participation in the hegemonic culture. As Braj Kachru writes, "the alchemy of English [present and future], then does not only provide social status, it also gives access to attitudinally and materially desirable domains of power and knowledge" (1986, p.325).

At the bank where I worked in Toronto, there were low-paid clerical workers like me, and there were people in middle and upper management positions but their status did

not matter as much as my perception of the way people spoke. My inability to fully understand all that was being said translated into a perception that all that I did not understand had value and purpose. Living in a predominantly English context was a means of acting on myself. Every day I existed in the interplay of hierarchical and mutable relations engaged in shaping myself under the rubric of progress. In *Technologies of the Self*, Foucault (1988) discusses the history of how an individual acts upon himself to regulate her 'self' to be a self. According to Foucault, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle of the modern world and care of the self comes from the process of gaining knowledge of oneself. Living in English, I was confronted with new experiences which demanded that I actively engage with notions of identity. Who is this self that feels different from an earlier self?

I discovered later that it is not uncommon, when learning a new language, to sense that one's 'true' identity is located in one's own first language. In Toronto, I optimistically lived with the impression that I was gradually working towards becoming in English who I was in French, wishing to fill a gap that could never be filled. I lived my daily life with the paradox of wanting to be who I once was as if there was a pre-existing and stable subject, and, at the same time, wanting to transform myself. I longed for the sense of control that I unconsciously enjoyed in French unaware of the interpretative limits of language. As Judith Butler writes, "language is not an exterior medium or instrument into which I pour a self and from which I glean a reflection of that self" (1990a, p.175). Language is constituted by and constitutes the self. "To understand identity as a practice, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the

resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life" (Butler, 1990b, p. 176). I remember being misunderstood and resigning myself to the new meanings my way of speaking seemed to generate. Sometimes it was in ordinary events like making a purchase in a store, and at other times it was in more significant social exchanges always oscillating between amusement and frustration. However as Maturana and Varela write,

Only when some interaction dislodges us — such as being suddenly relocated to a different cultural environment — and we reflect upon it, do we bring forth new constellations of relation that we explain by saying that we were not aware of them, or that we took them for granted (1992, p. 242).

Thus living in and learning English provided a standpoint from which to reflect on my cultural origins, not as an outsider looking in, but as an observer of the place I came from and its connection to where I now stood.

Some years ago, I produced a video that attempted to evoke the experience of living in and learning a new language. I filmed five individuals for whom English was not their first language and asked them to share an anecdote about being misunderstood. Although one participant's story could have had a potentially tragic outcome, most of the accounts were humorous on the surface. On the surface because what stands out, after listening to each story, is an undeniable sense of vulnerability and exclusion. As the stories told were, for each person, from a relatively distant past, imagination undoubtedly had a mediating role in the recounting of the experience (Ricoeur, 1981). However individual anecdotes were selected by each participant from probably countless others and, as such,

serve to represent the memory of their own experience. As Pierre Bourdieu writes, "all linguistic practices are measured against the legitimate practices, i.e., the practices of those who are dominant" (1982, p. 473). In realizing this video project, I wanted to give visual form to my own experience, to see and hear it from a distance, and to see and hear aspects of the experience of others as a way of delineating a shared territory while being aware of the distinctiveness of each person's circumstances. The retelling and the juxtaposition of the stories thus make evident the hierarchical structure of language. As Bourdieu writes,

The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as acceptable in all situations in which there is occasion to speak.

Here again, social acceptability is not reducible to mere grammaticality. Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence (1982, p. 474).

The video project was done many years after my initial experience living in Toronto. But looking back this project and others serve as reflective indicators playing a significant role in my own understanding of the self as being a constituted subject (Butler, 1990a) always in the making, that is, a "questionable-subject-in-process" (Kristeva, 1980, 1984, 1998). As representation, the video project with its multiple voices also functions as what Stuart Hall sees as a means of securing reality (in Fiske, 1996), not in a sense of an essential reality but as an artifact that enters the cultural discourse thus potentially contributing to the formation of new realities. In short it makes

visible that which could remain invisible and outside of the social and political sphere and doing so is a pedagogical act.

I now realize that, just like in the painted shirt series, becoming an English speaker has no possible end in sight, my accented English functioning as a permanent marker within the social, the cultural and the political context in which I live. However, as Stuart Hall maintains, accented English opens up language as historically contingent inscribing it as a site of struggle for meaning (see Fiske, 1996) and, from a personal perspective, as a site of cultural production.

3.2 Crossing the Ocean

I can usually trace the work that I make directly or indirectly from specific events or moments of my life such as in *Past:Presence*. (Figures 3 & 4), an installation that includes seven diptychs each comprising of a drawing representing antiquated laboratory equipment, and a black and white photograph mounted on black paper of an object such as a book, a camera, a pen, or a measuring device, and in quotation marks text from conversations. Drawings of unfamiliar objects contrast with photographs of familiar ones. From the beginning I produced this body of work knowing that it was going to be part



Figure 3.3 **Past: Presence** (installation view), 1996

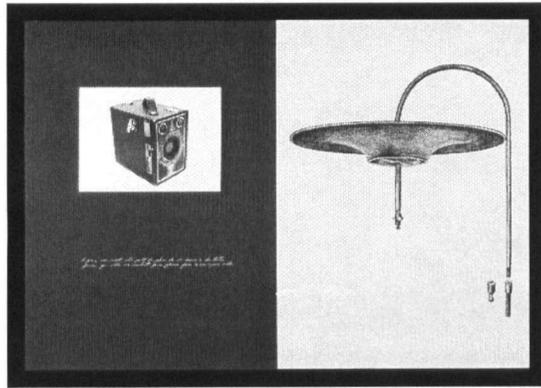


Figure 3.4. **Past: Presence** (detail view), 1996

of a traveling exhibition to Japan and Taiwan titled *Vancouver Perspective* which included artwork by twelve female artists. At the onset I looked at that project as an opportunity for exchange across cultural boundaries, imagining a Japanese or Taiwanese visitor at the exhibition.

My intention was not to 'package' and present identity as coherent and stable but rather to offer a glimpse of some of the dynamic forces at play in my own life. In juxtaposing seemingly disparate elements I sought to simultaneously suggest connection and discontinuity so as to interrupt notions of a unified subject and calling attention to

history as constituent of the cultural environment since, as Lakoff and Johnson write, “the kind of conceptual system we have is a product of the kind of beings we are and the way we interact with our physical and cultural environments” (1980, p.119). On buff colour paper the drawings based on illustrations taken from my grandfather’s 18th Century French textbook on acetylene lighting are rendered in such a way as to undermine the gestural, often considered an essential aspect of drawing, to suggest instead a sense of distance and objectivity. In contrast, the black and white photographs depict the objects’ patina alluding to their utilitarian purpose and their use over time. French texts written in white pencil below the photograph represent excerpts of recordings of conversations with my mother and her sister talking about memories, constructing history. In the exhibition a Japanese and Mandarin translation of a statement I wrote hung with the work, and the text from each diptych was translated into English. But it would be presumptuous to assume that, even with translation, dialogue transcends cultural boundaries. However, I want to suggest that my position was never to assume a seamless exchange between the work and a viewer in Japan or Taiwan anymore than I would with a viewer from my own country. Quite the opposite, I produced this work with the intent to call attention to the contingency of meaning working against the notion of art as universal, or of art as essentially transcending geographical and socio-political boundaries.

After the exhibition had closed in Japan, the male Canadian curator shared with me a remark from his counterpart in Japan, also male, who declared that since they had just finished organizing an exhibition of all women’s work, that they should now mount an exhibition of male artists’ work. Since I only have superficial knowledge of how women

are perceived within Japanese culture, I am unable to decipher the subtext of the Japanese curator's comments. However, from my position as a white female artist living in Canada, I can only surmise a desire on the part of the curator to address the 'inequity' that he perceived in producing an all female art exhibition.

When I was approached to participate in the Japan/Taiwan exhibition, I reflected privately on the fact that it exclusively included female artists but I did not probe into the curatorial premise for doing so. After the fact, I am suspicious of my own silence, my acquiescence. I am mindful of my taken-for-granted attitude and my benefiting from feminist interventions in the history of Western art which have opened the debate so that I and others could claim a place in the public realm as artists.

3.3 Feminism and Making Art

Feminism stands for a commitment to the full appreciation of what women inscribe, articulate, voice and image in cultural forms: interventions in the fields of meaning and identity from the place called 'woman' or the 'feminine' (Orton, 1996, p. xv).

In a project titled *The Subject*, details of my face and head are photographed and mechanically reproduced (Figures 3.5 & 3.6). These are then mounted on canvas adjacent to a painted detail modeled after a sculpture by Michelangelo, Canova or Bernini. I selected these art historical figures for their status within the canon, and as such for the iconic power they have in contributing to the definition of beauty and the feminine in the Western world. I was not surprised once to see a copy of Canova's *Three Graces* in the display window of a jewelry store draped with necklaces of pearls and diamonds. Nor was I shocked to see at the back of a popular magazine on interior decoration, an advertisement for replicas of Bologna's *The Rape of the Sabine Women* with the caption

"Elegance Speaks Softly". But perhaps the impetus for this project was a book on the work of Canova with photographs by David Finn (in Licht, 1983) where the cool white marble is flooded with a warm yellow glow and details of *The Three Graces* are cropped in a titillating manner enticing the (male) viewer to reconsider these 18th Century sculptures in today's context.

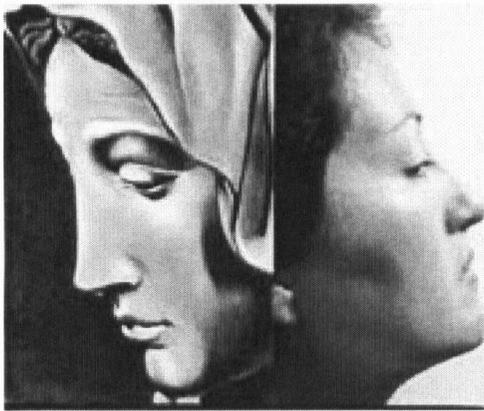


Figure 3.5 **Madona #3**
(mechanically reproduced photographs & oil on canvas), 1993

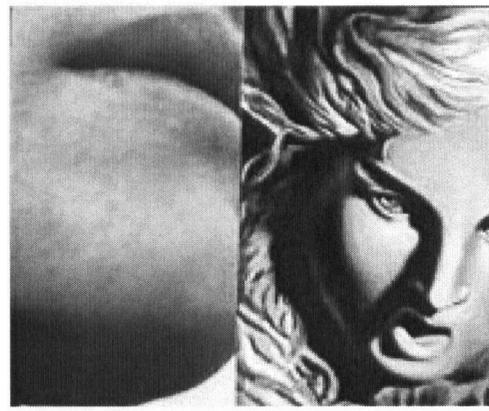


Figure 3.6 **Daphne**, 1993

In *The Subject*, a two-part project, I explore historically specific notions of the female body and how such notions are enmeshed in culture. Griselda Pollock writes, “the body is a construction, a representation, a place where the marking of sexual difference is written, and it is because the body is a sign that it has been so invested in feminist politics as a site of our resistance” (Pollock, 1996b, p. 6). Indeed many feminist authors have placed the investigation of the body as a subject of representation in art and culture at the centre of their inquiry. For example, Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (1993) consider

art from various historical periods to analyze how visual representation of the body functions to symbolically and systematically define and reinforce beliefs and social practices. “As has frequently been observed, since women are assigned a position as the objects of artistic creation, their bodies may appear to be the only medium for their art” (Adler & Pointon, 1993, p.4). In the early 80s Griselda Pollock with co-author Rozsika Parker (1981) exposed the problematic of working with corporeality as a means of articulating women’s experiences since, despite the best intentions, the risk remains of perpetuating the fetishization of the female body for the male gaze. The debate within feminism persists today, but as Lynda Nead writes, “the image of the female body may never be free of contradiction but patriarchal traditions of representation can be sufficiently disturbed to create new and different associations and values” (1992, p.78). Indeed the re-imagining of the female body by women artists is an ever evolving project which aims at re-inhabiting the social body of modernity (Betterton, 1996) and its lingering impact.

In juxtaposing details of my own body with emblematic representations of the female body, I am of course calling attention to the gap between the two, seeking to make space for the intersubjective, that is, the spaces of femininity (Pollock, 1996b), and the spaces of corporeal experiences left mute by the canon of art history. But it is only retrospectively that I was able to see the limitations of this approach. The manner with which I juxtaposed my own image with an image from art history intending to engage the viewer in a process of comparison to underscore the chasm between my body and that from the canon now seems too literal. Art, I believe, is at its most engaging when it

embodies ambiguity, not for its own sake but for the interpretive space it allows. While the painted surface and the photo-collage form a split image so as to problematise the sense of unity and wholeness promoted by the humanist ideal of femininity, the multiple canvases succumb to stylistic mannerism. In fact, in treating each canvas consistently and varnishing the whole surface of each work, each piece then becomes part of a continuous stream working against the sense of interruption and disconnect I was trying to articulate.

Anyone of us looking at a stretch of blue water glinting in the sun, and later finding that it was full of chemical pollutants, would feel ourself [sic] confronted by a sign that lied. (Grundy, 1993, p.74).

With these words, Isobel Grundy calls attention to the coercive ideology of beauty which imposes on women the absolute necessity to be beautiful. And it is this ideology that, as a body of work, *The Subject* sought to expose. However, I believe that the second part of this project reached my intentions more successfully than the first one.

Black silhouettes of female figures drawn from canonical works of Western Art from antiquity to modern time suggest both presence and absence (Figures 3.7& 3.8). The visible female body signals the lack of the female subject. For example, without Rubens' painterly treatment of the flesh and without the pictorial and narrative context that mediates the female figure, Andromeda's nude body and chained hands become emphasized. The black silhouette thus reframes the body to suggest an alternative and critical reading of the painting from which it emerged. And together as a series, the silhouettes point to the enduring social and political implications of the canon through time.

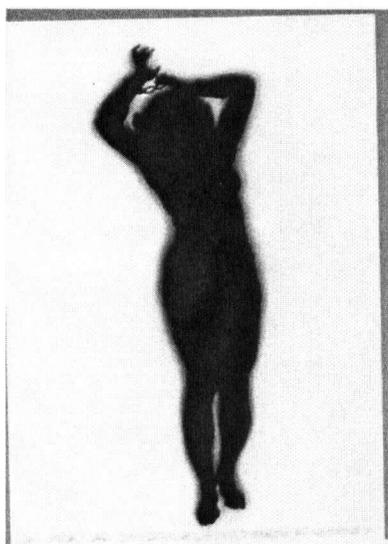


Figure 3.7 **Andromeda (Rubens)**
(acrylic, charcoal and pencil on paper), 1993



Figure 3.8 Installation view, 1993

Below the silhouette, a handwritten quote in pencil taken from a monograph on the artist is followed by a library call number ². The work's reference to its source, that is, a library book, alludes to the library's role as a social institution which, amongst others, functions as both a guardian of knowledge including myths on art and artists and, paradoxically, as a resource to which, as an academic, one must turn to critique those same myths hence insuring their enduring circulation through time. The series of silhouettes points to the complexities of representation and of interpretation by making a direct link to socially grounded practices such as the library, and by reinstating to vision

² The following is the text and library call number are written below Andromeda's silhouette: *In the Reformation, it was understood in an even more radical sense: The Cross, the punishment and agony of Jesus, was considered the pinnacle, the ultimate point, of Christian experience. From this, it follows that perdition, torture, annihilation, the abyss, confusion, disorder, fear, trembling and death present themselves as models of erotic experience. P.245 B105B64F72*

the political significance of these repeated configurations through time³ (Salomon, 1996). Further, the silhouettes do not simply highlight the gap between the homogeneity of mainstream images and the multiplicity of female experiences, but they also underscore the incredibly enduring set of power relations structured on gender difference (Salomon, 1996). As Diana Meyers writes, "although official cultural norms uphold the values of equality and tolerance, cultures continue to transmit camouflaged messages of the inferiority of historically subordinated social groups through stereotypes and other imagery" (2004).

³ Each silhouette stands for a specific time period in order to indicate the continuum of the practices that they represent and their inscription in culture. I have used the following figure: *The Venus of Milo*, Boticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, Rubens' *Andromeda*, Canova, *Hope Venus*, Ingres' *La Source*, and Aristide Maillol's *The Nymph*.

I have lost count of the number of emails I received in response to one faculty member's effort to bring attention to his conviction that the school was going to close down the program from which he had just retired after many years of service. He had sent hundreds of emails to colleagues and organizations in his field seeking their support. I was even approached at a conference by someone who had been contacted and could not understand why we were doing this.

The truth is that there was never such a plan, but because this individual was not immediately replaced upon retirement, he felt that there was something in the wings and that he had better be vigilant about it. This was not the only faculty member who, in the history of the school, had not been immediately replaced upon retirement. However, because there were other issues about the program that needed to be addressed, even when he was still teaching, he became suspicious about the administration's intent. In reality, the question was, do we continue the program as it has always operated or do we consider a new approach more in line with artistic practices that are not currently reflected in the curriculum? This had been discussed with him and his colleagues over several years but nothing had ever been done. I simply wanted to create a different description for the vacant post, one that might reflect a new direction, one that might break with disciplinary traditions.

I have seldom experienced direct criticism from faculty and staff. This is because it is probably easier to see administration as an abstraction rather than targeting an individual. But I also believe that, if I have been personally spared of disparaging remarks, it is not necessarily because I am perceived to be without reproach, but because it is easier to think of authority as being the purview of a man rather than that of a woman.

3.4 The Shifting Ground of Mastery

We tend to live in a world of certainty, of undoubted, rock-ribbed perceptions: our convictions prove that things are the way we see them and there is no alternative to what we hold as true. This is our daily situation, our cultural condition, our common way of being human (Maturana & Varela, 1992, p.18).

The apparent instrumentality that I assign to my work takes shape as I reflect from the perspective and distance that time offers. The questions I ask through drawing, photography, or painting become clearer through the process of making but also through the process of looking back at the work. Initial ideas are often only the starting point to other new ideas unimaginable prior to getting involved in the process of manipulating materials. Tacit knowledge, implicit knowledge, non-verbal learning, learning-by-doing, are modes of learning that have been discussed by writers such as (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000; Polanyi, 1966, 1983; Reber, 1993; Sternberg & Horvath, 1999) and are characteristic of learning in art and design schools (Danvers, 2003).

Visiting artists' talks in art schools or other public venues usually consist of presentations of continuous strings of *finished* projects. We tend to construct coherent narratives (Lakoff, 1980) that keep hidden the twist and turns that were never pursued. Seemingly unfruitful attempts, experiments, or rejected work remain invisible hence obliterating much of the experimental aspect of making art to the audience. Like many other artists, I keep a drawer full of unfinished work and abandoned ideas which I consider an important part of my research. I once shared some of that content with my students in an attempt to disrupt the image of the artist in control, continually moving forward, personifying an imaginary mastery.

As it was in the European academies of earlier centuries, teaching and curriculum in today's art schools tend to be structured along *continuous schemas of development* (Foucault, 1972). At the undergraduate level, most schools have a Foundation programme or first year followed by a second, third and fourth year; each year level intended to build upon the preceding one. This sequential structure, of course, is not specific to art and design schools but also to most degree programs. Furthermore, the organization of curriculum in chronological order with advanced courses requiring specific prerequisites reflects a conception of learning as a linear process, "one that seeks to minimize ambiguity through a highly structured pedagogical style" (Davis et al., 2000, p. 62). In art school, most of the technical and theoretical knowledge is apportioned into convenient chunks for ease of assimilation and managed by faculty and administrators for purposes of accountability to the student, the institution, the government, and the public. Although students may learn about semiotics, postcolonialism, cultural studies, or about other theoretical discourses aimed at challenging the status quo, they usually do so separate from their studio courses in specific departments called Critical Studies, Liberal Arts, Cultural Studies or Academic Studies.⁴

Students accumulate *credits* towards their degrees. In this banking approach to education (Freire, 2000), students usually follow a predefined path that has been laid out for them by others in the position to do so. As Freire states, in a banking approach to

⁴ I am aware that several experiments in teaching have been and are currently taking place in many institutions specifically designed to bridge theory with practice. For example, at my own institution, praxis is emphasized in the *Interdisciplinary Forum* course taught collaboratively between an academic faculty and a studio faculty. However such initiatives are isolated efforts and do not necessarily produce fundamental change at the institutional level.

education, “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (2000, p.72). Such perspective may seem extreme and antithetical to an art school context where independence of mind is publicly acknowledged through the importance assigned to creativity and innovation as the following mission statements illustrate:

*CCA educates students to shape culture through the practice and critical study of the arts. The college prepares its students for lifelong creative work and service to their communities through a curriculum in art, architecture, design, and writing*⁵.

*ACAD is a leading centre for education and research, and a catalyst for creative inquiry and cultural development. We engage the world and create possibilities*⁶.

*Otis prepares diverse students of art and design to enrich our world through their creativity, their skill, and their vision*⁷.

The compartmentalization of expertise into discrete areas or departments reflects certain epistemological beliefs. Although teaching is perhaps not explicitly about

⁵ <http://www.cca.edu/about/>

⁶ http://www.acad.ab.ca/acad_mission.html

⁷ <http://www.otis.edu/index.php?id=82>

bestowing a gift from the teacher to the student, the segregation of content into specialties reveals the underlying belief that knowledge must be transmitted to the student by a teacher who masters a body of knowledge. From such a perspective, specific subject knowledge and skills are unambiguously stated and content expertise “controls what is delivered and what it looks like after delivery” (Boldt, 1998, p. 61). This approach as well as the vestigial structures that have long been in place, I suggest, may seem contradictory to the claims that art schools make for developing “innovative thinkers, creative problem solvers, and visually talented students”.

But art schools do not stand outside the economic and political system within which they operate. And as all institutions, they are part of the web of transactions and modes of exchange that make up a social and cultural context. For instance, governments, funding agencies, and lobbying groups all put forward their respective power and self-interests when articulating their expectations from higher education. Publicly funded institutions such as my own are subject to a number of government policies and accountability measures that take different forms according to the political party in power⁸ and the social climate of the day. For instance the impulse to pre-determine learning in

⁸ In British Columbia, the current Ministry of Advanced Education under the Liberal government now requires all publicly funded post-secondary institutions to submit a “Service Plan”, which according to the Ministry’s web site constitutes, “an approach that puts students first, expands the skills and knowledge of our workforce, broadens our understanding of the world, and helps ensure continued economic prosperity and social well-being for all British Columbians”.

(<http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/annualreports/aved/default.htm>)

The previous provincial government led by the New Democratic Party issued a similar document titled, “Charting a New Course” which stood as the strategic plan for the public post-secondary education sector. It was intended “to ensure that all British Columbians are prepared to participate in today’s changing society; find productive employment in a

ways that appear uniform for all students, or to quantify learning in economic terms is evident in the terminology used such as 'learning outcomes' or 'key performance indicators'. Such terminology also speaks of the desire to eliminate ambiguity and to promote the idea of certainty. But, as Davis, Sumara and Kapler note, education like economy are complex systems, and even economies "emerge from, but are not reducible to, the activities of citizens" (2000, p.55). Indeed, economies like the human body or weather systems are complex and cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts. "Unlike complicated [mechanical] systems, which are constructed with particular purposes in mind, complex systems are self-organizing, self-maintaining, dynamic, and adaptive" (Davis et al., 2000, p.55). In an effort to promote a sense of accountability or effectiveness, multiple forces thus converge to reduce the complexity of the educational process to a cause-and-effect schema.

I would like to return for a moment to the transmission perspective of teaching (Boldt, 1998) in the context of art school. Indeed not all curriculum in art school is structured explicitly or implicitly from a transmission perspective (Pratt, 1998). In senior studio classes, teaching is more likely to take the form of individual tutorials where faculty discuss work that is initiated by the student. In her role, the professor acts as a sounding board giving the student the opportunity to articulate ideas both verbally and visually, and in turn, is expected to respond to what is being presented. In this particular instance, teaching usually reflects a nurturing perspective (T'Kenye, 1998).

competitive labour market; have opportunities for continuous learning; and receive value for the investment made in public post-secondary education and training" (Charting a New Course A Strategic Plan for the Future of British Columbia's College, Institute and Agency System, 1996, p. 1).

At the senior level students commonly register in classes based on affinity for the professor's own production or reputation, and not because they are specifically aware of the approach to curriculum that a particular individual may have. At its best, the pedagogical process that permeates the tutorials is dialectical and focused on what Freire calls problem-posing:

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation (2000, p. 83).

“Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to be, it must become” (Freire, 2000, p.84). However, at its worst, teaching can be contrary to the emancipatory principle of education since it “ can be a source of diminished self-efficacy, convincing learners that they are not cut out to succeed, or not inclined to learn” (T'Kenye, 1998, p.151). In this case, students are narrowly evaluated on the objects they make which are frequently taken as sole evidence of their learning. As faculty, we make qualitative judgments and we tend to assess the effectiveness of our teaching by analyzing the end product. In art schools, we look at the work that the students produce and make decisions based on our relationship to curriculum and to the objects that we have previously encountered as art.

What is a good painting? What is a good sculpture? What is a good artist? Although most art professionals such as teachers in art schools might venture to formulate an answer to these questions, doing so would hardly reveal any common

ground. Despite these differences, pressures to clarify the educational process sometimes generate expectations of uniform standards most often concentrated on grading and assessment methodologies. These are frequently reduced to indicators such as class participation, punctuality, progress, quality of work, technical achievements, etc. I suggest that this search for certainty promotes a conception of teaching with a significant focus on micro objectives.

Referring to Henry Giroux's notions of micro and macro objectives, Peter McLaren writes, "micro objectives" ... "are characterized by their narrowness of purpose and their content-bound path of inquiry"... , "micro objectives are concerned with the organization, classification, mastery, and manipulation of data" (2003, p.71). On the other hand, macro objectives, "are designed to enable students to make connections between the methods, content, and structure of a course and its significance within the larger social reality" (p.71). If the main goal of art schools is to develop creative individuals capable of shaping the culture of the future, the heavy emphasis on micro objectives may indeed work at cross-purposes. Technical knowledge, knowledge focused on the acquisition of theoretical concepts, 'how to' type of knowledge, I suggest, only address a narrow aspect of artistic development. In art, mastery is frequently understood as a point of culmination identifiable in a certain level of performance. However I would suggest that as a referential field, mastery is reductive and rather than stimulating new directions, it limits and imposes restrictions on the imagination. Mastery implies a linear progression from ignorance to knowing, or from good to excellent, and reflects a hierarchical construct as we see in the following statement by John Brademas referring to music:

Learning to play a musical instrument demands the achievement of technical mastery through the discipline of regular practice over a period of years. The ability to read and play correct notes in rhythm gradually evolves into the ability to shape phrases lyrically and to imbue a performance with fluidity and subtle colorations. When students begin to sense this "artistry," their drive to reach the next plateau of achievement accelerates (1995).

In contrast to micro-objectives, macro objectives represent a dialectical approach to teaching and allow for student empowerment and self-transformation (McLaren, 2003), and as such, I suggest, play a central part in developing innovative thinkers. Mastery implies moving upward towards an ideal eschewing the complexities of making art which requires that manipulating materials and thinking be intertwined in multifaceted networks of decision making processes. It is worth quoting Elliot Eisner (2002) at length here to illustrate this point:

In Western models of rational decision making, the formulation of aims, goals, objectives, or standards is a critical art; virtually all else that follows depends upon the belief that one must have clearly defined ends. Once ends are conceptualized, means are formulated, then implemented, and then outcomes are evaluated. If there is a discrepancy between aspiration and accomplishment, new means are formulated. The cycle continues until ends and outcomes are isomorphic. Ends are held constant and always are believed to precede means.

But is this true? In the arts it certainly is not. In the arts, ends may follow means. One may act and the act may itself suggest ends, ends that did not precede the act,

but follow it. In this process ends shift; the work yields clues that one pursues. In a sense, one surrenders to what the work in process suggests. This process of shifting aims while doing the work at hand is what Dewey called 'flexible purposing'.

Flexible purposing is opportunistic; it capitalizes on the emergent features appearing within a field of relationships. It is not rigidly attached to predefined aims when the possibility of better ones emerges. The kind of thinking that flexible purposing requires thrives best in an environment in which the rigid adherence to a plan is not a necessity (2002, p. 10).

I would like to return to the shirt series mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Aiming for each painting to be an improvement on the preceding one, the micro objective of getting closer to the photographic model after which it is painted, the series evolved in a linear progression. As a model, the value of this simple exercise lies, not in the technical skills it may impart, but more importantly, in the realization that it could be repeated indefinitely, independent from the moment within which it takes place. As a young art student I spent hours drawing highlighted folds and creases of drapery, and plaster casts from antiquity trying to emulate the Masters' tricks. Every time I entered the school I attended, I left behind the world I lived in. It was said, that art after all existed as a timeless and universal category. But art like art schools does not exist in a vacuum but as an integral part of a social, cultural and political context. And as Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler write, "learning is coming to be understood as a participation in the world, a co-evolution of knower and known that transforms both" (2000, p.64).

I suggest that students, like artists, shape the objects that they make not only from the material they manipulate, but also from the world they experience. Therefore it is precisely by engaging discursively with how meaning 'means' that teaching in art schools can keep pace with the times.

In the chapter that follows, I introduce an ongoing series of drawings making the link between my artistic practice and my educational antecedents as they are both pivotal factors in developing my own awareness of what constitutes some of the salient issues in art school education today.

4 DRAWING STORIES

I begin this chapter by locating my current drawing practice as a process of documenting the social and cultural context of a particular place in history through small vignettes of every day experiences. I follow by examining drawing as a medium and as a means of discussing my experience as a student and later as a teacher to question some of the current assumptions about art school education.

I recently attended a Memorial gathering for Brenda, the sister of a friend of mine. Each of her three children stood up and told anecdotes about their mother. Other family members and friends also spoke. People told stories, little stories. Except for one anecdote, about the time when Brenda decided to move her family from Calgary to Guatemala, most of the stories were ordinary. Listening to the stories I was reminded of some of the images in my drawings.

Sarah, Brenda's youngest daughter, a university student, told the audience about an experience she had on her way to visit her mother on a rainy evening. While running across a busy intersection, trying to catch her bus, she saw a glove fall out of a man's backpack. He was also trying to catch a bus. Deciding that she did not have time to stop, Sarah ran by the man, without picking-up the glove, and without telling him that he had just dropped something. They both made it on the same bus, and Sarah felt badly. When she finally arrived at her mother's home, she felt compelled to tell her what had just happened. After their conversation, Sarah resolved that she owed the world an act of kindness to make-up for a moment of selfishness.

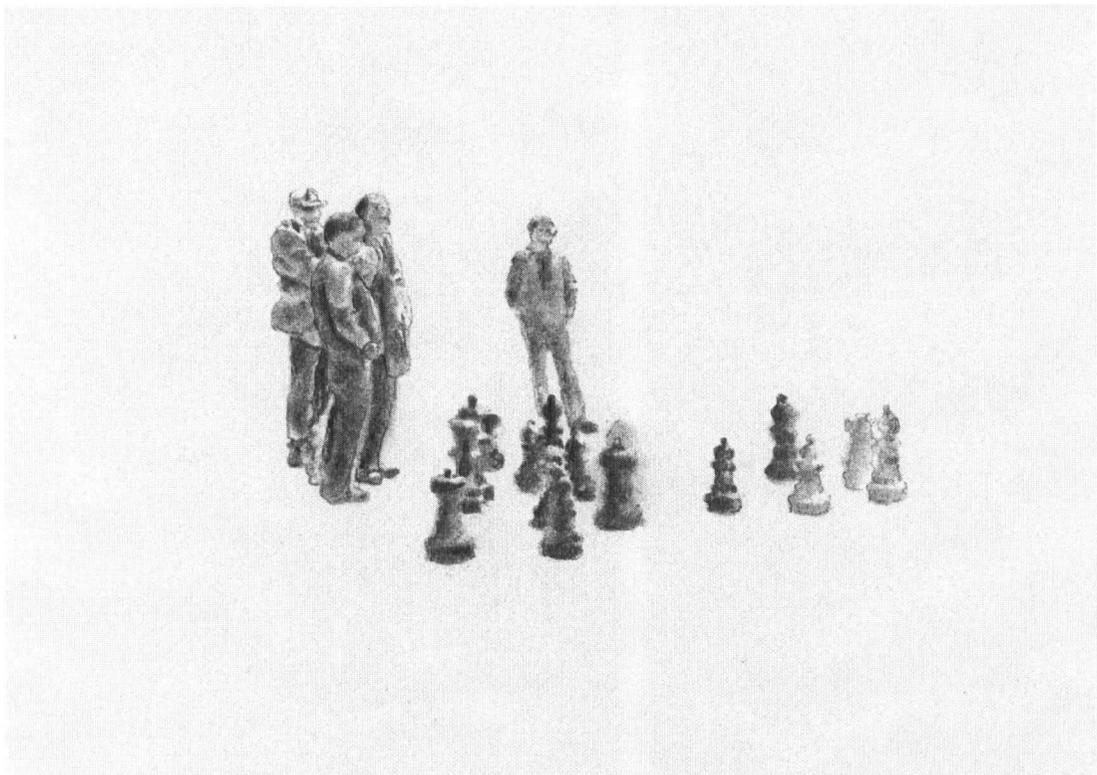
I have started this text with a story as a means of talking about my own drawing practice as a process that takes place inside and outside the studio. Isolating and emphasizing elements taken from photographic images, I eliminate inconsequential details and focus on the relationship between people as well as between people and their surroundings. I want the possibility of generating multiple meanings from situations or locations which are otherwise too familiar to deserve any special attention. I am curious about seeing what we may derive from our interactions with the world as insignificant as these may seem because making art is not an autonomous process. It is inextricably tied to histories that we live and places that we inhabit in a dynamic interchange between maker, viewer and context.

Aware that my work is mediated through several filters using codes of aesthetics, and codes of art, I seek, in my recent work, to subvert the common notion of drawing as a privileged medium for recording primary experience in a direct and intuitive manner. Initially, the verisimilitude evident in the images that I produce brings forth the photographic apparatus, calling attention to the lens as a framing device that simultaneously and deliberately includes and excludes. I draw from transparencies for practical and ideological reasons. I habitually carry my small camera, collecting scenes, documenting daily life while paying particular attention to moments that might generate meaning, understanding that meaning is historically and culturally situated (McKenna, 1999). At the end, I discard most of these snapshot images keeping only a few. I draw from the projected image, from the light on the wall using graphite dust, being careful to capture only what I consider essential. A certain tension is created by the need to resist

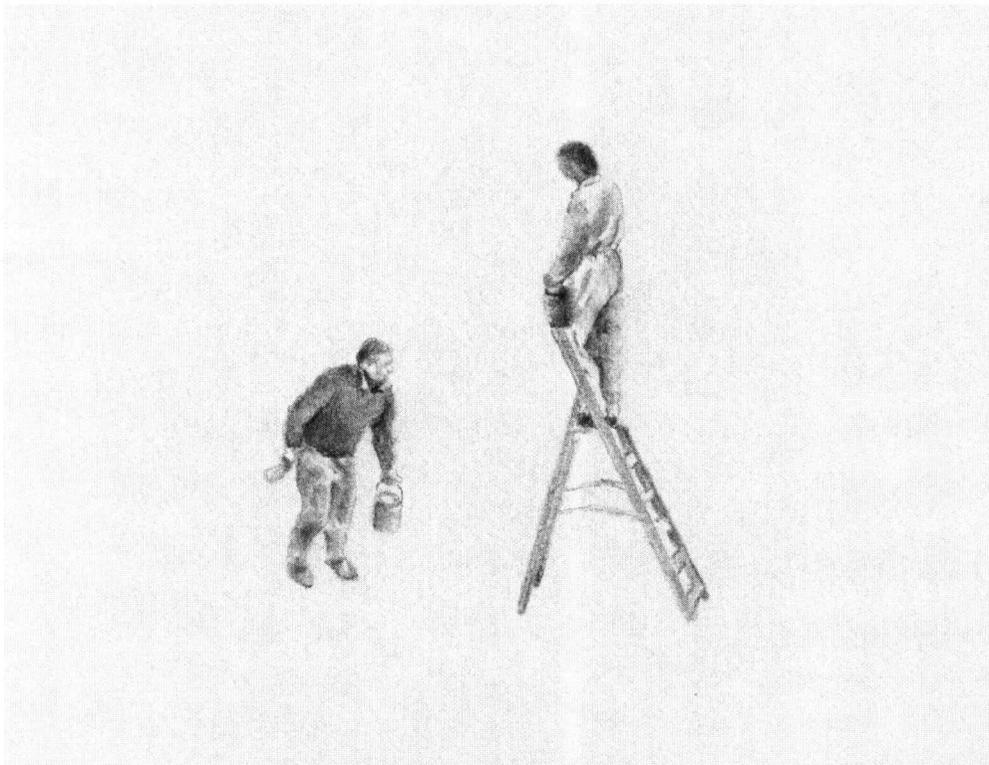
the impulse to render explicitly, to overstate lines, forms, or shadows, and from this I can trace a direct line to my past, to my first art school experience, to all the rules that I was taught and that I am now breaking. I feel what Norman Bryson calls "the entire weight of received schemata" (2003), but I consciously work against it as a deliberate and conscious strategy. I want to challenge the traditional ideas of virtuosity and mastery as these imply exclusivity and hierarchy, ultimately undermining what I want to achieve as an artist and as an educator. Photography not only provides a short-cut to the drawing, it facilitates the process of seeing. Drawing obviously is not photography. Drawing does not have the same relationship to time, place, or events as photography does. "To draw is to look, examining the structure of appearances," as John Berger writes in *The Sense of Sight* (p.150). Photography denotes a direct connection to the material world, but drawing, even when it closely mimics reality, has no such connection to things outside of itself. Although potentially altered, photographs accumulate evidence while drawings unravel it. But like all art forms, drawing always refers to culture.

I work in series without clear beginning or end. With my current work, each drawing stands as a moment in an ongoing narrative which I have always imagined displayed as a full panorama, much like a film strip that tells a story about time. I refer to time not like in a photograph that captures a precise moment, but time as cultural context. These drawings are intentionally soft and sometimes blurry because I wish for the viewer to engage in a moment of recognition, and at the same time, to become aware of the flux of appearance, of the simultaneity of a multitude of moments, of the elusiveness of memory in trying to discern the image.

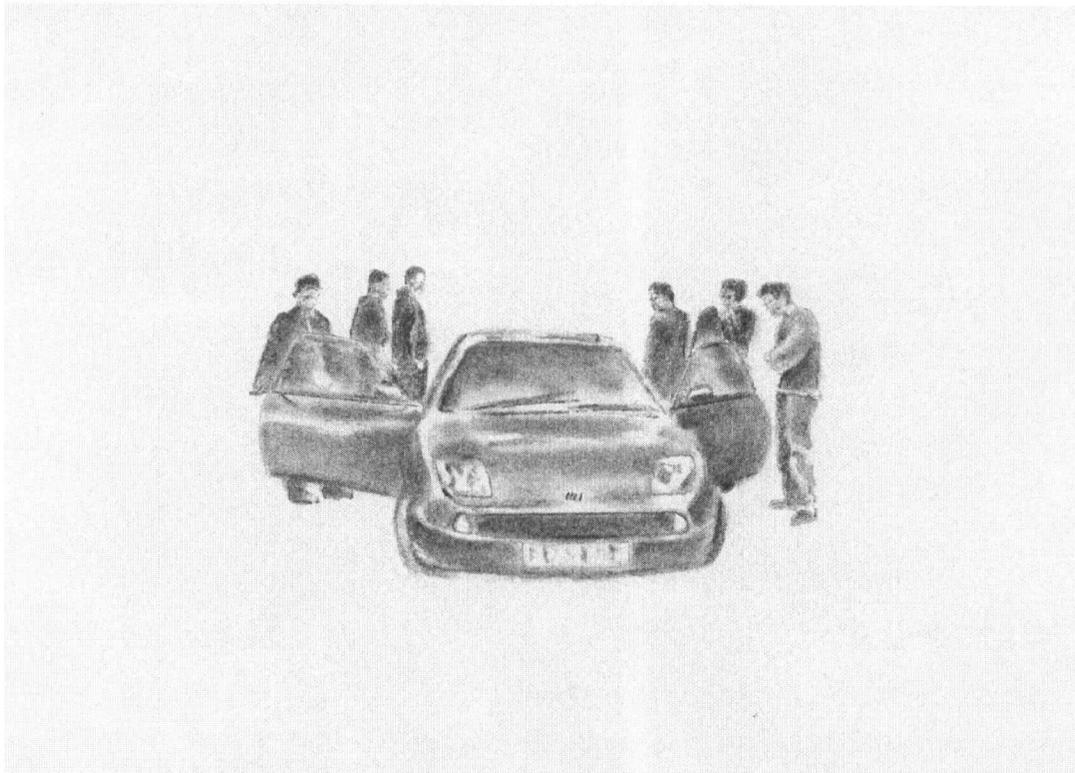
I saw a group of men playing chess in Amsterdam. It was a 'giant' chess set in a park. The players' concentration was remarkable given the number of curious. Strategies were played out for everyone to see.



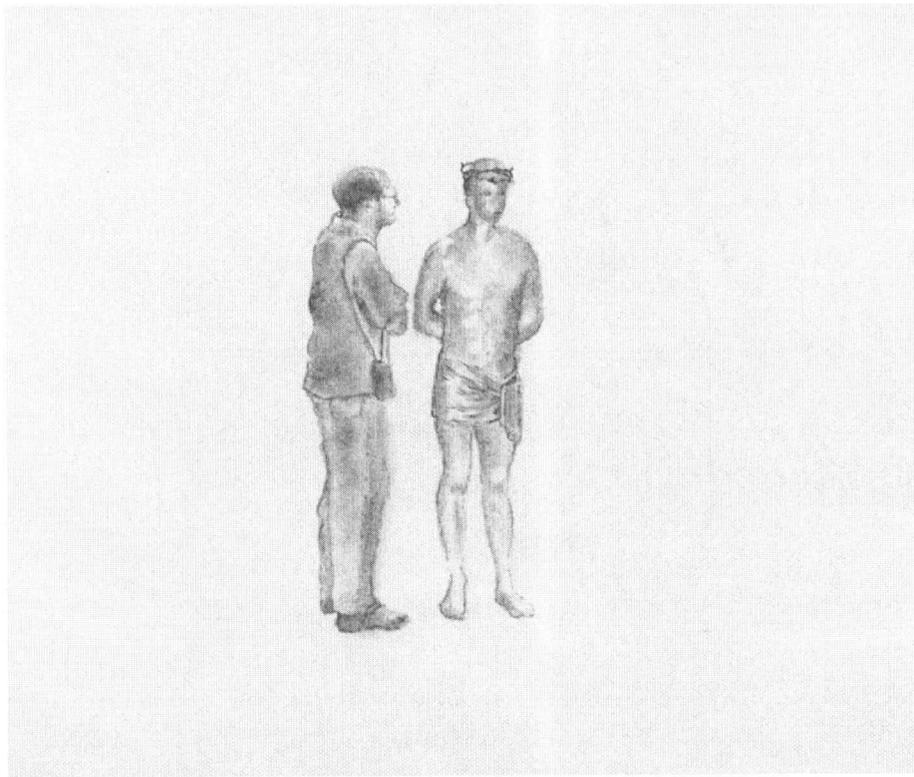
One day, I was looking out of our hotel room in London when I saw these two men getting ready to paint a wall across the courtyard. The enormous surface, stories high, dwarfed the two men. I think that they were there to do some detailing, perhaps around the windows and exterior pipes. They were talking. I imagine that they were planning their day, negotiating how they would approach the task ahead.



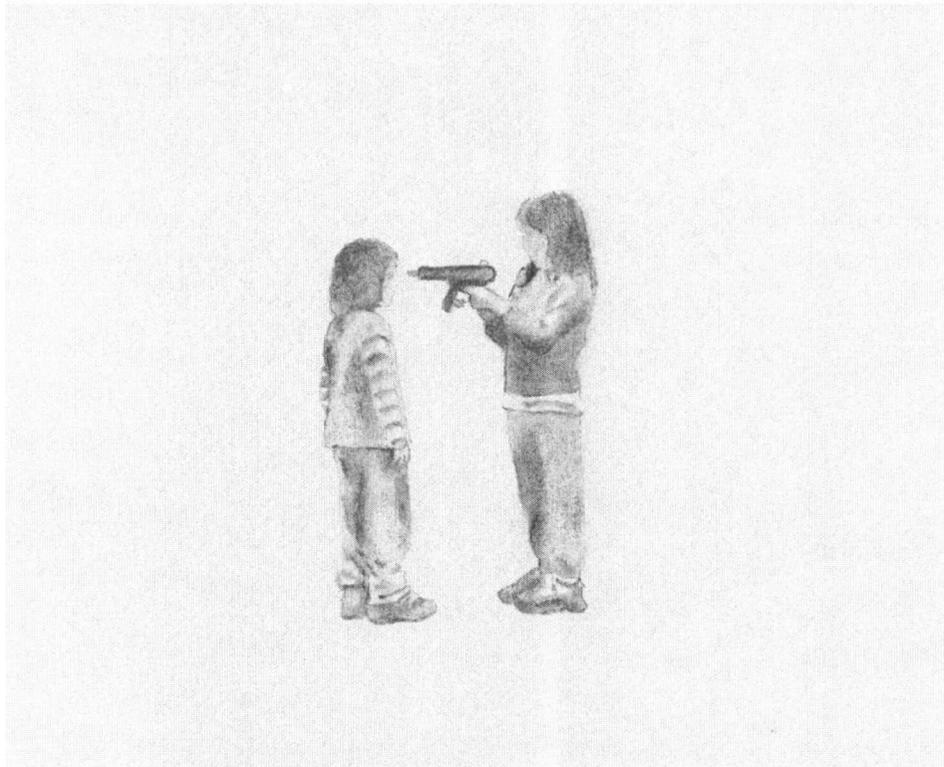
An exhibition at the Barbican museum in London included a car parked on the rooftop. Inside the museum, near the door to the rooftop, there was a notice announcing the times of a performance involving the car. I looked out of an adjacent window and saw men taking turns sitting in the car. I am not sure what the performance was, although it appeared that turning the ignition key produced some kind of outcome.



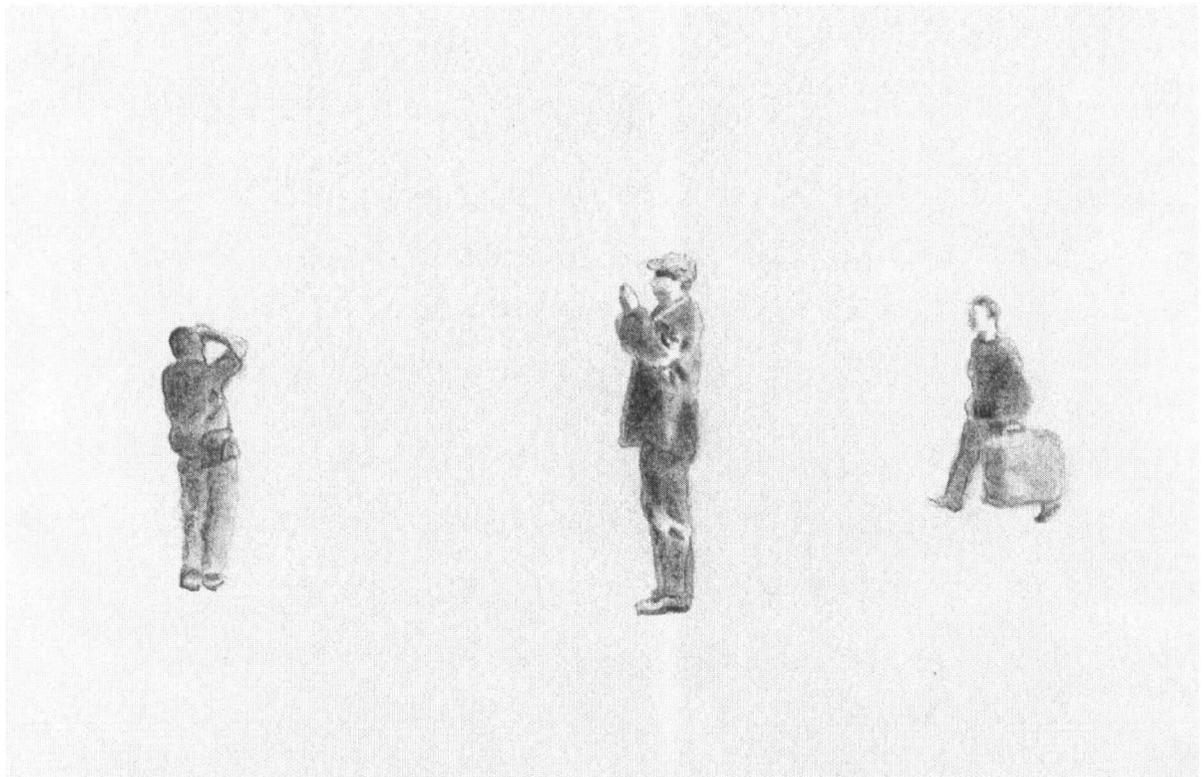
At the Venice Biennial, Michael stood next to a life size figure that looked like a contemporary version of Christ. I suppose that what made him contemporary was his short hair. I always thought of Christ as having long hair. At least that is what I know from all the illustrations that I have seen in art history texts. His crown was made of copper, which contrasted with the monochromatic gray of the figure.



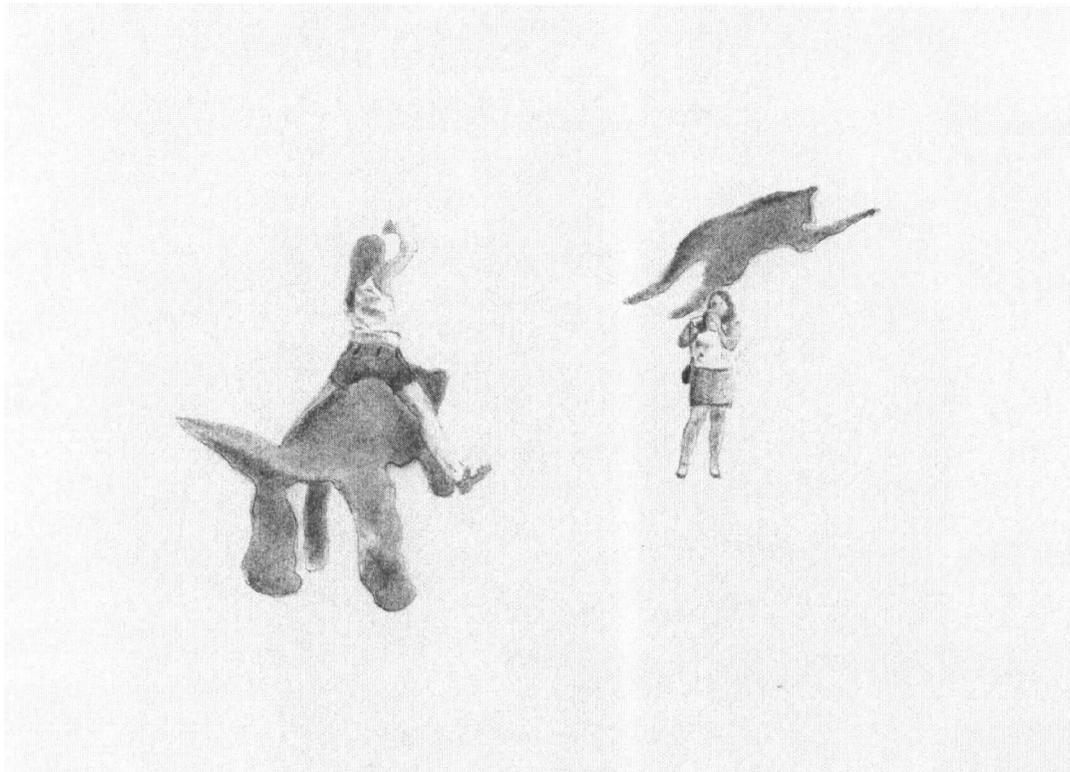
Michael and I were sitting having coffee at a piazza. There were not many tourists around. There were families, mothers talking and kids playing. I noticed that two little girls were playing with a plastic gun. The older one held the gun directly at the smaller girl's face. I don't know if their mothers noticed, or whether the girls were sisters or just friends.



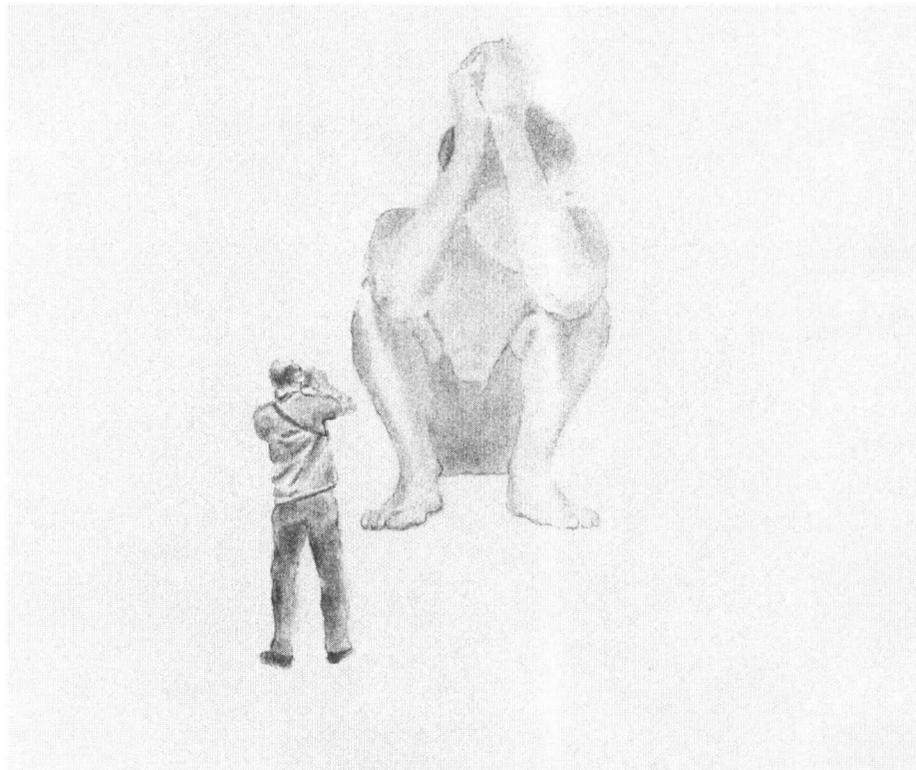
People stroll along the walkway that runs parallel to the Thames River. There is a mix of tourists and locals, usually identified by their walking pace. People look at each other or at the surroundings.



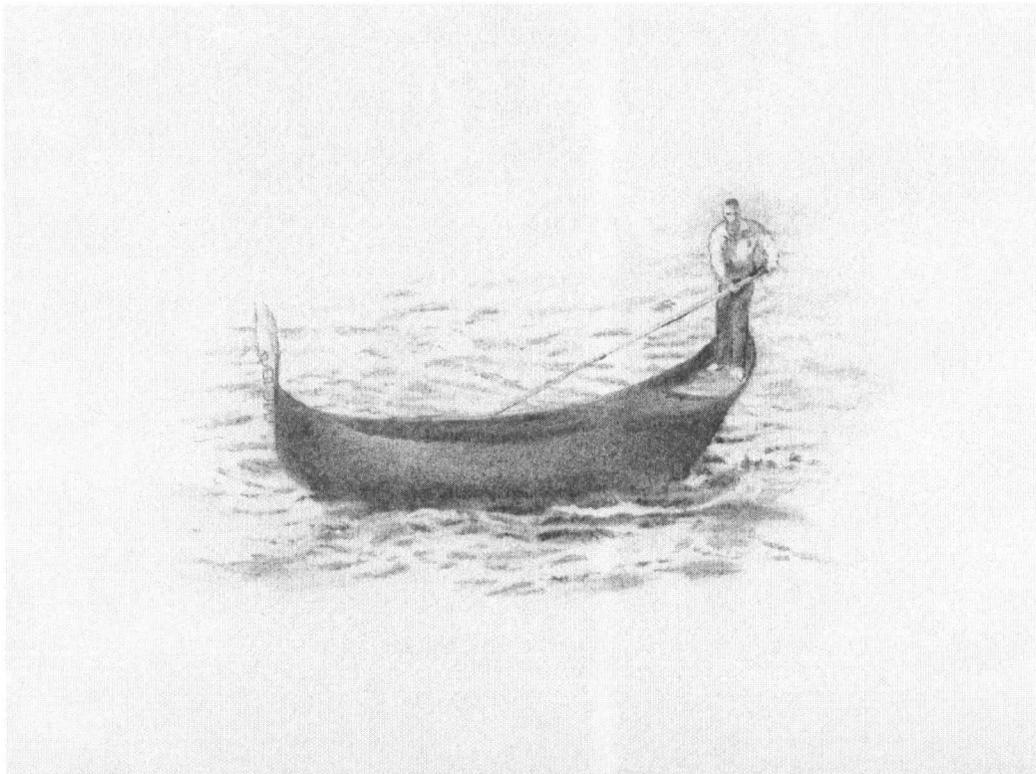
A girl was sitting on a sculpture shaped like an abstracted four-legged animal. An adult, probably her mother, was taking a picture. The sculpture had several components that evoked animals leaping in the air. It made me think about the idea of public art.



There was an enormous sculpture of a boy crouching. He had glossy eyes that appeared to be observing the viewer. The sculpture of the child almost reached the ceiling of the immense exhibition hall. Michael seemed so small.



This lone gondolier propelling his boat seemed oddly archaic. Usually, gondolas are full of tourists and when empty, the awkwardness of these boats stand out. I tried to guess where he was going. Perhaps he had just finished his day. It seemed romantic and sad, both at the same time.



An old man stood in an unusually vacant piazza. He looked like he was in familiar territory. There was a slight wind making garbage and dead leaves swirl off the ground. A pigeon stood close by as if he knew the man.



Drawing

Emphasizing

Perspective
Skill
Resemblance
Study
Formula
Scale
Opaque
Meaning
Verisimilitude
Texture
Motion
Pressure
Influencing
Chance
Media
Framing
Allegorical
Small brush
Darkness
Projection
Paper
Looking
Pencil point
Soft clothe
Visual
Process
Rendering
Charcoal
Scene
Culture
Figure
Transparency
Appropriating
Contemporary
Light
Eraser
Rules
Air
Practice
Tortillon
Making
Background
Camera
Decision
Tracing
Illusions
Thoughts
Rubbing
Lines

Narratives
Weight
Mimesis
Observing
Time
Images
History
Space
Composition
Smoothness
Representation
Depicting
Film
Mark
Middle ground
Shaping
Disappearance
Blurring
Praxis
Repetition
Mass
Graphite
Chalk
Sharpening
Surfaces
Lead
Tearing
Vellum
Shortcut
Glassine
Perceptions
Sheets
Connecting
Conventions
Shadows
Foreground
Dexterity
Art
Propositions
Pressing
Soft brush
Point
Experiments
Structures
Ideas
Tools
Imagining
Codes
Details
Models

Expressions
Contexts
Combining
Margins
Density
Layout
Aesthetic
Dispositions
Setting
Viewpoints
Appearances
Relationships
Selecting
Metaphorical
Elements
Critical
Mechanical
Polemics
Producing
Academy
Volume
Strokes
Vernacular
Recognizing
Process
Implements
Methods
Impulses
Accomplishments
Conjuring
Scenarios
Telling
Stories
Subjects
Fragments
Pictures
Mapping
Traditions
Discursive
Tonal
Complexities
Sourcing
Inspirations
Connotations
Ambiguity
Characters
Fiction
Contrasting
Signs
Virtuosity

Systems
Perceptions
Lenses
Describing
Language
Views
Layers
Icons
Focusing
Mind
Definitions
Performance
Illustrating
Disorder
Moments
Gestures
Lost
Overlapping
Shapes
Words
Stories
Places
Studying
Faces
Hands
Techniques
Models
Abstraction
Outlining
Projects
Stages
Sources
Connectivity
Boundaries
Defining
Reason
Intentions
Approaches
Qualities
Materials
Writing
Semiotic
Self
Borders
Deleting
Effect
Form
Outline
Mass
Silhouette

4.1 What is Drawing?

Of all the arts, drawing has the potential to reduce to its smallest the gap between meaning and non-meaning, between repeatability and singularity (Newman, 2003, p.100).

Drawing is a way of asking questions, of making connections with things inside and outside of art, of recording gesture or concept, of exploring ideas. Drawing can be a means of expression but also a deliberate act of consciousness, the manifestation of which is culture and, by extension, the social and political realm (Zegher *et al.*, 2003). As such it crosses traditional and non-traditional art disciplines, and it extends beyond art itself.

Some of the most striking drawings I have ever seen were those by survivors of the Hiroshima bomb, published as a collection (Corporation, 1977). It is precisely because of the lack of artistic concerns that those drawings convey the personal impact of the event. The realism of the drawings does not reside in verisimilitude or anatomical accuracy, but rather in the simplicity with which the drawings evoke horror and suffering. Drawing can be a language that moves across art and non-art worlds. The Hiroshima drawings were not necessarily intended to enter the art world, but more likely to tell a story from the perspective of those who have experienced a horrific event. A drawing, as opposed to a painting, allowed the survivors to give their memories a material form as simply as possible and nothing more. It is beyond the intent of this dissertation to delve further into whether the Hiroshima drawings constitute art. My intention is to cite these drawings as examples of the broad scope of drawing.

Drawing seems as basic and intrinsic to human communication as writing- we scribble an image to cut to the core of a complicated idea, we doodle idly in a flow of consciousness, or we jot a diagram to explain connections. Its immediacy is as vital in the everyday world as it is in the art world (Augaitis & Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003, p.11).

Drawing is an affirmation of being. And for artists, drawing is also a practice with art historical antecedents against which one is situated despite any potential impulse to think of oneself as acting autonomously. To return to the survivors of Hiroshima, the fact that they may not have conceived of their drawings as entering the world of art is an important distinction. They are seen differently from those that are classified as such with similar subject matter, that is, works which aim at occupying the world of art as in Goya's Disaster of War drawings (Griffiths *et al.*, 1998), George Grosz's political drawings (Lewis, 1991), or the anti-violence work of lesser known artist Sue Coe (Coe & Metz, 1983). Artists draw for several reasons: to explore, to represent, to visualize, to render, to articulate, or to see. But drawing as it is, commits to the surface of the blank sheet of paper in a different way than painting on canvas. While the blank canvas of a painting can be re-worked over and over again, dissimulating the process that has led to the final image, the surface of a sheet of paper reveals all the marks that eventually become the drawing (Bryson, 2003). This inherent characteristic of drawing is articulated by American artist Jim Dine who describes the layers of his drawings as containing the history of his involvement (in Glenn *et al.*, 1985). The accumulating marks on the paper do not simply stem from a pre-existing mental image in the artist's mind, but rather from a dialectical process that evolves as the marks accrue on paper (Bryson, 2003). Drawing involves the brain, hand and eyes working in a continuous feedback loop.

Contemporary artists have expanded the vocabulary, methodology, and materials of drawing. For example, Sol LeWitt's wall drawings are ephemeral works, usually visible only for the duration of an exhibition after which the wall is painted over, the drawing forever gone. Such work challenges the idea that drawing comes from the individual gesture because it is realized by assistants who follow a set of written instructions from the artist. That the instructions function like a musical score to be performed by others (Lewitt & Addison Gallery of American Art, 1993) emphasizes the conceptual role of the artist and undermines that of the artist as craftsman. Similarly, Johnathan Borofsky's temporary drawing installations occupy walls, ceiling and windows. Borofsky traces large drawings from projections of small sketches and texts that he numbers and accumulates during a specific period of time. The exhibition then becomes first and foremost a representation of time (Rosenthal *et al.*, 1984) without apparent concerns for such conventional notions as proportion or mimesis. Artist Raymond Pettibon follows a comparable trajectory with a comic book style to emphasize drawing and text equally. Pettibon explores themes from art history and nineteenth-century literature alongside American politics and contemporary popular culture.

Betty Goodwin's figure drawings done with oil, oil pastel, graphite and metal on paper have a tactile quality that is more readily associated with sculpture than drawing. Goodwin says that "drawing is the simplest way of establishing a picture vocabulary because it is an instant, personal declaration of what is important and what is not. Drawing is the most unalienated medium. It is private; it practically doesn't have an audience in mind, just the artist's expression" (Morin *et al.*, 1989, p. 17). Another artist

who challenges traditional notions of drawing is Michelle Stuart, whose scrolled drawings use non-art materials, such as soil and dust taken from a specific site. They are rubbed, pounded and polished on to muslin-backed rag paper. The works thus become records of geographic locales as well as of her physical actions on the paper.

Ann Kipling, is an artist living and working in the interior of British Columbia. Her drawings are done with chalk, conté, pastel, or ink on paper. She works with traditional media but dismisses archaic rules. She works from nature, but without pictorial accuracy as a goal (Kipling *et al.*, 1995). Drawing for Kipling is a search process (Kipling *et al.*, 1995). Her drawings are hard to decipher, they are portraits or landscapes but they remain ambiguous open for interpretation. In contrast, Marc Lombardi's work eschews traditional academic skills entirely and develops complex charts about world events. His drawings consist of elegant and elaborate diagrams based on information culled from public records on large pieces of paper that point out connections between political or economic events, wars, institutions, governments, and geographical places. About his work Lombardi writes, "my purpose throughout is to interpret the material by juxtaposing and assembling the notations into a unified, coherent whole" (in Pierogi, 2003). He uses arrows, broken lines, graphite and red pencil to produce what he calls "narrative structures" showing the network of relationships behind events such as the Vatican bank downfall in the 1980s, the role of an American bank in the sale and export of embargoed high-tech weaponry, or the Iran-Contra scandal (Pierogi, 2003).

Whether drawing is seen as a loose approximation of an idea generated spontaneously, a synthesis, a genesis or as an end in itself, drawing as a practice has

undergone radical changes since the academies. Drawing can reveal a mental process and a search for clarity, it can employ art and non-art materials often blurring lines between media, but most of all it defies any narrow definition.

4.2 Looking Back From a Distance

The Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Québec was located in the old city in a former shoe factory probably built in either the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. It had a grand entrance with a double staircase and as soon as one opened the front door, the unmistakable smell of turpentine marked the place with a certain romanticism. This was 1967, the year of Montreal's World's Fair, where people from everywhere came to tour the architecturally radical pavilions and see what Montreal had to offer. The following year the site would be converted into a theme park called, "Man and his World". In 1967 it was also Canada's 100th birthday. And it was the year of the world's first successful human heart transplant.

The selection process for new students was purportedly based on talent, which was both comforting and scary, comforting because I was selected and scary because everyone else in the school was as well. Although I had been attending Saturday morning classes for three years, my first days as a full-time student were very intimidating. What I remember the most are the rooms full of easels with people silently drawing. In my class we spent hours drawing from plaster casts, drapery, still life, and finally the human figure. Life drawing was indeed the essence of the academy and Antiquity its model (Boime, 1971; Boschloo, 1989; Goldstein, 1996; Pevsner, 1940). "Even nature had to be corrected, if she did not tally with Greek and Roman sculptures. Rome was considered

more essential to the creation of a perfect work of art than nature” (Pevsner, 1940, p.95). The atmosphere was very serious, with each student concentrating to render on paper the forms and tonal values of the object placed in the centre of the room on a platform.

The curriculum at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Québec, like most art schools in the Western tradition, drew its legacy in part from the European academies, and also from the Bauhaus (Elkins, 2001; Goldstein, 1996; Pevsner, 1940). It was a hybrid of academicism mixed in with a systematic study of colour and form. Professors, some of them wearing lab coats, would teach by giving advice as they walked between easels. In the colour class, past students' work was shown as successful examples to guide us before starting to work on a new exercise. Every once in a while we would get our assignments back with a letter grade written on the back and no other comments.

In my third year the school had moved to a new location in a new building. The plaster casts had disappeared but we still spent six hours a week drawing from observation. We drew the human skeleton, plants, the still life and the human figure, sometimes working from the nude and other times from models in costumes, while in the painting department, students were carefully dividing up their canvases into sections with masking tape to produce hard edge abstract paintings. The critiques were about formal issues such as the organization of the picture plane, the respect for the properties of material, or the illusory or real flatness of the canvas. Art history courses were always about the past and never about what was going on in the art world at the moment. Unhappy and impatient, I left for Toronto before graduating where I worked in a bank and learned to speak English.

While a student in Quebec, I had been to Toronto before to see an exhibition on the Bauhaus, a school that came from the merging of two institutions in 1919: an academy of fine arts and a school of applied arts in Germany (Goldstein, 1996; Wick, 2000). Its principal and founder, Walter Gropius, thought that while the fine arts had been used in the past to embellish buildings as an integral part of the architecture, current 'salon art' existed in isolation. Gropius then set out to organize a school that sought to merge art and craft as he believed that art alone was more a result of divine intervention than anything that could be taught. This is evident in the following excerpt from the Bauhaus manifesto: "There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. The artist is an exalted craftsman. In rare moments of inspiration, transcending the consciousness of his will, the grace of heaven may cause his work to blossom into art" (in Goldstein, 1996, p. 261). The Bauhaus was a very progressive school and its influence on art and design education continued beyond its relatively short existence.

As a student, I knew nothing about the rationale for my instructors' approach to teaching. It just seemed that the way they taught was probably the way they had been taught themselves. During class, we dealt almost exclusively with issues of form, materials and technique. Once in a while we were given assignments with surprisingly few restrictions that seemed completely unrelated to what was going on in class. In response to an assignment, I once made a collage using a transparent acrylic medium, which, like wallpaper paste, allowed me to plaster the surface of a canvas with pages of a book onto which I had painted shapes and integrated images of the Beatles. It was

received very positively. In retrospect, it looks like certain assignments were specifically given to test students' creative abilities seemingly assuming that creativity itself was a natural phenomenon exclusively present in quantifiable levels in certain individuals, rather than seeing creativity as a process, or a way of approaching things explicitly integrated in the educational experience.

After working for a few years in Toronto and feeling more confident speaking English, I returned to art school and graduated in the mid-seventies from the Vancouver School of Art. Art school in the seventies was based on a rather open structure. In the Fine Arts department, courses were loosely organized in progressive levels and almost entirely based on the acquisition of technical skills. Although there were visiting artists who would talk about and show slides of their work, discussion about contemporary art was not an integral part of the curriculum. There were no drawing classes because drawing, at that time, was considered irrelevant. This was a time for abstraction, for conceptual art, for process art and for performance art. There were in fact very few signs of the academy's legacy except perhaps for a group of students who would meet weekly without an instructor to draw from the model. Areas of concentration were clearly defined and there was almost no interaction between painting, printmaking or sculpture students, and virtually none at all with design students.

One day my lithography instructor, who had left the United States for Canada as a conscientious war objector, showed the class his print collection. The prints were from very well known artists and many were addressing political issues such as the Vietnam

War in a very direct way. I remember asking myself, what is my cause? What do I make art about?

Three years after graduating, I had a solo exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery showing a series of drawings that combined abstraction and realism. The drawings were done from paper models I had constructed and made indirect allusion to landscape (Figure 1). With the meticulously rendered texture of the paper models and the abstraction, the drawings were in effect, testimony to my academic training in drawing, and at the same time, my desire to break free from it.

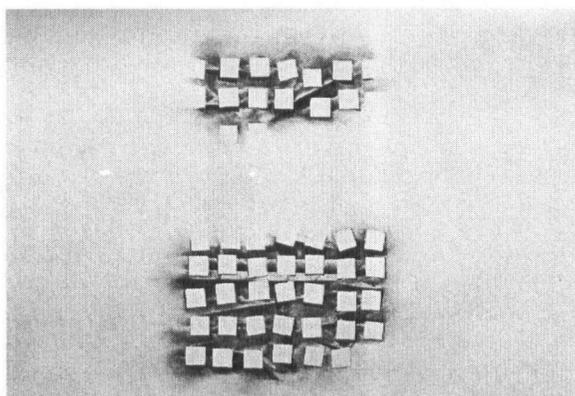


Figure 4.1 #26 (graphite on paper), 1977

4.3 From Student to Teacher to Student Again

When I started teaching drawing in 1986, I was given minimal information about curriculum content. The assumption was and continues to be that public recognition as an artist is considered a main indicator of the ability to teach. As I understood it, the intent was to introduce students to issues related to drawing and to develop drawing skills.

Students liked my classes perhaps because I took great pleasure in designing curriculum so that their hand/eye coordination and knowledge of contemporary drawing would improve. I made conscious efforts to challenge some of the assumptions that had characterized my own art education. For example, I always introduced the model by name and, prior to consulting with her or him, I would ask the model to briefly speak about her or his personal interest besides modeling before we started to draw. My intention was to reduce the propensity to see the model as an empty signifier. I did a lot of research and invented my own drawing exercises. I also made sure that the discussions were not only about technical issues, but also about ideas, about the gap between intention and meaning, about the position of the maker vis-à-vis the viewer. As a teacher, I was critically reflecting on my own educational experience while trying to subvert it.

I returned to school to complete a Masters' degree in the early nineties after teaching for four years. Seminar discussions then were the principal focus of the programme, and at that time, the studio experience became less significant than the ability to demonstrate knowledge of theory specifically about issues of representation and authorship, audience, ethnicity, feminism, subjectivity, narrative, semiotics, post-modernism, and the anti-aesthetic.

In the broader context of professional art education, theory and practice are often set in opposition creating divides within institutions. At one end of the spectrum is a belief that art is the expression of an unmediated self, while at the other, art is thought as the product of a conscious engagement with critical issues by a socially constructed subject. As Susan McKenna writes, "like all dualism, theory versus practice

oversimplifies, as each side must dig in determinedly to hold on to the oppositional position" (1999, p. 76). Like McKenna, as teacher and later as administrator, I have observed mounting tension between different and sometimes contradictory perspectives on curriculum and on teaching.

I have attempted to sketch out my journey as an art student and as a teacher to give the reader a sense of the paradigm shifts that have occurred over the years in art school education and an idea of the two radically different antecedents that continue to linger as we try to imagine how we might proceed. As Thierry de Duve writes,

On the one hand, there is the academic model; on the other, there is the Bauhaus model. The former believes in talent, the latter in creativity. The former classifies the arts according to techniques, what I would call *métier*; the latter according to the medium. The former fosters imitation the latter invention. Both models are obsolete (1994, p.27).

I constantly debate in my own mind how to negotiate the relationships around me, which are an integral part of my institutional life, specifically when it comes to dealing with change. I agree with David Halpin (2003) that radical change can only happen if there is a re-evaluation of the shared assumptions and beliefs which help to reproduce what goes on in institutions. In my position, I often feel caught between my own understanding of the historical antecedents from which art schools have emerged, and to some extent, the idea raised by a few colleagues that, given that new technologies have dramatically altered how we think about the objects and images that circulate within our culture, current art school models must be entirely re-thought from the ground up. I believe that even if that was possible, it seems unlikely that a new version would, in itself, succeed in being a more flexible one than what we currently have unless we examine the deep rooted beliefs of the individuals involved in making an institution what it is. Otherwise, are we not just trading in an old model for a new one?

Because I strongly believe that mastery as a pedagogical model prevents the development of a "spectrum of actualization" (Iser in Doll, 1993, p.183), I feel that it is less important to look at integrating recent technological innovations than to critically examine the dominant pedagogical paradigm that has shaped curriculum since modernism. Old models of teaching and learning remain old models even when camouflaged by innovative technologies. As William Doll states, "curriculum in a post-modern frame needs to be created [self-organized] by the classroom community, not by textbook authors" (1993, p.180), nor by masters in control of their technical prowess, or any other kind of master.

After eleven years as an administrator, I have never felt at ease with the idea of using my position as a way of imposing change, maybe because it seems a futile exercise to do so. My challenge continues to be a balancing act, navigating between conflicting expectations of what leadership is or should be, and my own intuition that being a leader is more a matter of synergistically engaging those around me into considering how new possibilities can emerge rather than convincing them of a pre-existing vision.

4.4 Imagining Change

It took some time to begin to ask questions, to see that none of my teachers at art school had been women, that all my teachers were white, that the art that I was shown was almost always made by white men, that disciplines⁹ were kept in isolation from each other for convenience and ideological reasons, and that the relationship between teaching and learning was never examined. And now I have become increasingly aware of the institutional habits and assumptions that are being questioned from diverse perspectives. In a paper presented at a conference on art and education held at the Tate Gallery in London, the social art historian Griselda Pollock wrote,

Fine art practice – and education is one part of the continuum – is also a historical space, where histories and ideologies intertwine and get recycled, where real histories become selective stories and modernist myths which only comfort and sustain certain people. In the name of the excluded people's histories, these myths are being challenged and a call is going out for accountability (1996a, p.28).

In 1995, I organized a symposium titled, *Pedagogical Issues in Contemporary Art and Culture*¹⁰. The one-day event with standing-room only was my own confirmation of the mounting interest in bringing to light issues that were ignored in the past or that have

⁹ The term 'discipline' is used here to designate practices such as painting, sculpture, printmaking, etc.

¹⁰ The symposium was held at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design on February 18th, 1995. The speakers were artists and art historians including Dr. Carol Williams, *From Homogeneity to Difference: History and Theory as Enabling Tools*; Kati Campbell, *Purity and Danger: Theory in the Studio, Practice in the Classroom*; Dr. Heather Dawkins, *Embodied Histories and the Critical Stories of Art*; Ingrid Koenig, *Developing Feminist Criticism into a Studio Practice Close-up View of a Foundation Model*.

recently emerged. With similar intentions, *What Art School Did and Didn't Do for Me*, a conference organized by Wimbledon School of Art and the Tate Gallery in 1998 focused on the art school experience of a few well-known artists in order to gain further insights about the role it played in their lives. The dialogues mostly revealed dissatisfaction, however the ambiguity with which they spoke makes it difficult to isolate specific reasons. This can be seen by the tenor of the following excerpt of a conversation between Andrew Brighton, Head of public events at the Tate Gallery, and the late British avant-garde artist, Helen Chadwick:

AB: Another thing I want to ask you about is technical assistance. Some people got an immense amount from certain technicians. That is to say the information base is not just the teaching staff but the technical staff too. Did you encounter that at all?

HC: In one individual. It's true to say that I think the people I've learnt most from in my life were technical people; they were makers. I was learning a kind of attitude in order to be able to make something; not just understanding what the material can do, how you do it to the material, but a kind of – I don't know how to put it – a kind of empathy with working. It was through people who made, but they were a minority, given how many there were at those institutions. It's a very particular individual that you might meet who enables you... who gives you a depth of... you can't really describe how it operates... who gives you a perception into things. That is not education. It exists in a more profound dimension. I don't think one can expect that from a teacher or anyone you

encounter, but it does happen occasionally. And that's quite precious. If that is an exchange that can happen in education, if there are possibilities for that, then that is an absolute gain.

AB: Were they people who showed you things, not by telling you, but by showing you how it might be done?

HC: Kind of Zen, almost, being able to cope with situations.

AB: Could you make it more specific? What sort of things are you talking about?

HC: No, I can't make it specific. It's not academic (2000, p. 81).

From certain perspectives this way of talking, with unfinished sentences, thoughts that are hesitantly put forward, abrupt shifts from one idea to another, and vague abstractions that are hard to follow may sound meaningless at best, or at worst, indicative of a lack of coherence by the speaker. But is it? The artist Susan Hiller claims that,

Anyone who has ever worked in art colleges knows that they are full of people who disclaim any taste or talent for abstract generalisation, logic, words. These are students whose right-brain access and ability to visualise is so strong that it has survived the educational system of our society (1996, p.47).

It would exceed the scope of this dissertation to investigate the particularity of the mental processes of art students, if indeed they are significantly different from the rest of the population. However I suspect that the vagueness with which many of the artists in the Wimbledon's conferences describe their educational experience would likely contrast with the way students of the seventeenth century academies, or of those from the Bauhaus would regardless of their differences. While the academies intended to train

painters and sculptors according to the inherited tradition of skills and beauty drawn from antiquity (Goldstein, 1996), the Bauhaus aimed at preparing artists to participate in the industrial sphere bringing art and craft to production (Wick, 2000). Nevertheless they each had more explicitly defined intentions than those of institutions in the later part of the twentieth century.

If we consider how often artists, philosophers, art historians and others have asked and continue to ask, what is art, we may infer that, simultaneously, the question, how does one become an artist” must also be asked over and over again. Being an artist may in fact not be sufficient enough to answer such a question. At various periods in history, artists such as Michelangelo, James McNeill Whistler, and Walter Gropius have bluntly declared that art could not be taught (Pevsner, 1940). However, from my own experience I see that, although many artists have not gone to art school, most have. Of course we could speculate that it is original talent, or natural dispositions, that make someone an artist whether or not he or she attends art school. But this position requires that I ignore my experience as a teacher and the growth and changes that I have witnessed in students from first year to graduation and who have gone on to art related careers. If we think of art as a socially located enterprise, we realize that in trying to answer the question, how does one become an artist, we must consider the multitude of perspectives that exist and for which a single answer could not adequately serve.

4.5 Moving Away From Grand Narratives to Allow for Multiple Stories

The arts community, and in particular emerging artists and artists of non-western traditions, continue to express a strong interest in areas of art that do not fit comfortably into the standard categories of artistic discipline (Schryer, 1999).

In art and design schools, perhaps as in most other educational institutions, contemplating change based on a desire to improve the educational experience of students usually meets with overt skepticism and resistance. I believe that this comes in great measure from the propensity by those within to see schools of art and design as being more closely aligned with the art and design worlds than with the field of education. From my experience, this might explain why, despite knowing that only few graduates will likely work as independent artists following graduation, a belief in equating progressiveness of a school with the progressiveness of the work being produced within its walls persists. In other words, if the work that students and faculty produce in a school share several common characteristics with the art that is currently receiving critical acclaim in the art world, such a school will tend to be seen as a progressive institution. The following excerpt from a statement of purpose listed on the web site of the *National Association of Schools of Art and Design* in the United States, a national accreditation body, illustrates the central role played by the art and design world in curriculum planning and development:

“To invite and encourage the cooperation of professional art and design groups and individuals of reputation in the field of art and design in the formulation of appropriate curricula and standards” (Design, 2006).

I want to suggest that as institutions whose primary mandate is the professional education of artists, looking to the art world as a measure of effectiveness simply illustrates the hegemonic reach of the art world. However, if this is done with the critical awareness that art is indeed a social practice, then it is also incumbent upon us as educators to imagine curricular practices that also reflect the multiple and complex cultural dimensions of society. With such awareness, a notion of art as a monolithic enterprise is no longer sustainable as the function of art school education as servicing the insatiable needs of the market.

Many institutions, particularly in North America, have made efforts to develop new courses or alter existing ones to become more inclusive of changing conditions, but this work is usually the result of individual or small groups initiatives and do not necessarily lead to radical shifts in institutional practices. At my own institution, we have courses such as *Introduction to Feminist, Gender and Cultural Studies*, *Studies in Contemporary First Nations Art*, *Issues and Methodologies in Non-Western Arts*, as well as a host of special topic courses. However, these are contained within well-defined departmental structures, which as a whole support traditional and exclusionary views of art production. It is not surprising to see that the boundaries that such structures delineate are often also echoed in the way museum and galleries organize collections into curatorial specialties such as drawings, prints, paintings, sculptures and photographs. I am reminded here of an anecdote told by American feminist artist Coco Fusco who, despite having been invited to teach performance and critical theory, was hired by the painting department because there was no other places within the institution for her to

teach these courses. Fusco's experience, I suggest, serves as an example of how institutions find ways to *accommodate* new forms and potentially challenging points of view without fundamental shift in curriculum perspectives. I believe that our task is to imagine a space that would allow for more than mere accommodation and that would actively promote the elaboration of new forms of art and design production, new exchange of ideas and perspectives, and ultimately, the telling of multiple stories.

5 DISCIPLINES IN CONTEXT

Beginning with an account of what I experienced as a student and which I now consider as apprenticeship-like in lithography, this chapter focuses on the persistent role of disciplinary pedagogy in art schools and the impact it continues to have on a range of practices from hiring new faculty to the way teaching and learning revolves around purpose built technical facilities. By outlining a few examples of contemporary artistic practices, I am suggesting that to teach and to learn within a narrow disciplinary model may inhibit keeping pace with the times.

Taking as a starting point that normative modes of disciplinarity (Stenberg, 2005) are key features of pedagogy in art school, it seems important to reflect on what disciplines mean within that context so as to better understand the issues that prevail today in art school education. I suggest that by assessing the continuous impact of disciplinary thinking on teaching and on learning, one might begin to envisage more productive possibilities.

Within the broad context of contemporary life in the Western world, visual arts can be considered as a distinct discipline, distinct from science and distinct from literature for example. The following description from James Slevin offers a definition of discipline within a university context but which I suggest can be extended to the context of art school:

A discipline is currently understood as the knowledge of a given field of study, the intellectual skill and labor required for the making of that knowledge, and the disciplinary community in conversation with one another about it. It is

conceptualized as a spatial object, with perimeters that contain a specialized knowledge, method, and dialogue. Disciplines are thus defined by their boundaries, and distinguished membership in the discipline, not to mention tenure and promotion, can be gained only by extending these boundaries, almost always in an agonistic relationship to others engaged in similar work (quoted in Stenberg, 2005, p.10).

Many disciplines can themselves be broken down into other disciplines or sub-disciplines. For example the discipline of physics can be further divided into astronomy, quantum physics, nuclear physics, etc, each representing a distinct body of knowledge, method and nomenclature. Likewise, the visual arts are sub-divided into painting, sculpture, printmaking, film, photography, etc. My goal here is not to argue the case for articulating the difference between disciplines and sub-disciplines since both terms ultimately suggest segregation of knowledge. Rather I want to emphasize that it is precisely the notion of division, of conceptualizing knowledge into distinct parts which plays a significant role in the pedagogical framework of art school education and which I suggest requires scrutiny.

I recently held three meetings with faculty from this area. They seem convinced that the *administration* has a hidden agenda with the ultimate goal of getting rid of analogue technology.

I realize that discussing budgetary concerns and curriculum issues in the same breath sets up a dynamic that sends mixed messages. What are we really saying? But the truth is that in art schools, these issues are intermingled and cannot easily be separated. The challenge in these exchanges is to keep focusing on the students, their needs, and what is happening out there in the world, all without making faculty feel like they are not up to the task.

Of course, it is not just about equipment and resources, it is about pedagogy, it is about ideas that extend beyond this specific discipline. From my perspective, it is really about how the discipline in question intersects with most of the other disciplines that we teach at the school. I believe that it is that intersection, and those multiple meeting points, which gives the discipline its relevance in this context. In essence, it is the very fact that this particular art discipline, and others, as well as non-art disciplines, criss-cross in so many ways in contemporary art practice that the notion of interdisciplinarity cannot simply be set aside.

5.1 Lithography is a Planographic Medium

On my first day of a printmaking class the instructor ¹¹, a very accomplished lithographer, taught everyone to fold a sheet of newspaper in the shape of a square hat. This was obviously something that he had done countless times before as a rite of initiation for each new group of students. I remember that putting on the hat along with my classmates felt like we were part of a small ritual, taking a symbolic step towards becoming a *professional printmaker*. Our instructor frequently reminded us, during

¹¹ Instructor was used in the art school where I was studying and was replaced in 2000 by professor when a professorial ranking system was established.

critique sessions, of his goal to make us professional printmakers, the subtext being that any deviation from it on our part would be interpreted as a lack of commitment.

Stone lithography is a printmaking process invented in 1796 in Germany by Aloys Senefelder. We felt that we were about to discover the intricacies of an ancient and complex process, hoping to become adept at manipulating the necessary chemicals to produce consistent multiples of the same image, and this made us different from other students in the school. It was like belonging to a guild with its rules, and with the kind of knowledge that could only be accumulated through hands-on, dedicated apprenticeship. In my school, printmakers were not just printmakers, they spent their time in specific places such as in lithography, etching, silkscreen, or relief studios, learning the particular skills of each and sometimes focusing solely on one and excluding any other form of image-making by becoming committed specialists.

There was so much to learn: grinding and leveling the stone, using tusches and crayons, achieving solid blacks, perfecting subtractive techniques, processing the stone, using water washes, acid biting and counteretching, proofing and printing, image transferring, transposing images, mixing gasoline reversals, choosing appropriate papers, determining the *Bon à Tirer*, manipulating stop-outs and resists, using metal plates, positioning the tympan sheet, registration, maintaining the press, scraping the rollers, selecting the scraper bar, cementing stones, aspects of which all required methodical and focused attention. Looking at the prints pinned on the wall and using technical jargon as our newly acquired shared language, critique sessions revolved around successful demonstration of lithographic processes with little emphasis on the representational

aspects of the images that we were looking at. Indeed, assessing technical achievements dominated the discussion, while to various degrees we were silently struggling with the value and meaning of our work. Nevertheless, learning something new that not many people could do without going through the same extensive training felt empowering, and I recognized through the certainty with which my instructor taught an authority that was reassuring and that gave my peers and me a sense of purpose even without knowing how or whether it all connected to the world of art.

The *shop*, as we called the lithography studio, had individual workstations in the centre of the room, with printing presses, other equipment and materials neatly organized against the walls. There was a precise place for everything and everyone was responsible for returning each piece of equipment to the right space and in the right condition after using it. I cannot remember if anyone broke the rules but if there was a breach, I cannot recall my instructor admonishing anyone publicly. But perhaps there were few offenders to begin with due to the emotional impact of the story he had once shared with the class about being scolded by his own professor for having neglected to respect his instructions. That story seemed to have resonated as strongly with us as the experience had with him.

The litho shop was a highly specialized area with a clearly defined purpose but it was not only the equipment that defined the space, but also the attitude and behaviour of my instructor. He had recently moved to Canada from the United States where he had taught graduate students lithography in a school with a strong reputation for it, and shortly after his arrival he set out to raise the profile of lithography and to build better facilities at our school. I remember him often being there on evenings and weekends,

setting-up everything, building furniture and working on whatever else he felt was necessary, and I interpreted the frequency of his presence as a standing proof of his unflinching commitment to his students and most of all, to lithography.

Upon entering the shop one got an immediate sense of being part of a community. We looked over each other's shoulder to see what the other students were doing, paying particular attention to how well everyone had assimilated the latest addition to our store of technical knowledge. One of the things I most enjoyed was when students assembled to hear guest artists talk about their work. The shop was temporarily reconfigured to accommodate a slide show and follow-up discussion. Chairs were fitted in between workstations and the guest, as well as students, would sit on the edges of tables and on press beds, giving the event an overall informal atmosphere. Some of the guests were very well known and attracted students from other departments. My instructor had met many of them personally because he had worked as a master printer in a shop that specialized in producing print editions of work by so called blue chip artists. We looked at the slides and listened attentively to the accompanying comments, sometimes hoping to find a direction to follow, and occasionally asking questions mainly related to materials and methods of production. For me, the shop stood as the school, and although I made occasional forays into other departments by taking courses such as silkscreening or film animation, I mostly felt like an interloper, always happier when I returned to my home base. The school was thus a conglomerate of several departments that were mainly organized around tools and equipment with technical staff and faculty assigned

accordingly. Knowledge was transmitted by instructors/masters modeling their teaching much from the way that they had been taught themselves.

During a summer session I took a course with a visiting instructor who had been my teacher's teacher. This person was very accomplished in lithography, having written the authoritative text on the subject at the time. There were many days when both my summer instructor and his ex-student, my regular instructor, were in the shop at the same time, either demonstrating a technical aspect of printmaking or simply involved in conversation with each other. Their dual presence further added to the sense of importance and purpose that permeated the shop, and their relationship to one another and to lithography spoke of a tradition of which I was hoping to become a part. When asked about our plans after graduation, many of us answered by saying that we wanted to set-up our own litho shop and continue making prints.

5.2 Disciplinary Pedagogies

During my last year of art school, I became more interested in drawing than in printmaking. While drawing is often a stage of printmaking, my own experience as a student in the litho shop meant that it had largely been focused on acquiring material and technical knowledge at the detriment of discussing the value and meaning of making images whether drawing or printmaking, or talking about art as a whole.

It was not long after leaving the litho shop, while trying to find my footing in the art world that I found myself equally preoccupied by both process and content. Somehow the fact that I was able to print a perfect water wash or to print an edition of ten identical images did not have the same impact outside the world of printmaking as it did inside. I

never made another print, not as the result of a conscious decision, but because I gradually became more involved in exploring meaning beyond and despite the specific training I had just received. So the fervor that I once had for making prints dissipated as I found through drawing the means of testing and articulating ideas.

If there was a crisis in professional art education at that time, I was unaware of it. As a student, I was more focused on what I was learning than on how I was taught assuming that pedagogy was a neutral vehicle for transmitting knowledge (Stenberg, 2005). Yet it is clear that there were issues brewing in the horizon. Nineteen seventy-three was when I resumed my art studies after a three-year hiatus and a move from one end of the country to another. At that same time in another continent, symposia were being held in the UK to discuss the state of art and design education. The following statement by David Warren Piper reflects on the discussion at the time and takes a critical stance on the situation:

Instead of concentrating on the teaching of specific techniques and on the passing on of specific bodies of knowledge, we must turn more to what have been called the meta-subjects, such as the nature of knowledge, the process of discovery, the values that are implicit in the judgements we make (1973, p.144).

As a new graduate, I did not have the insight nor the distance that might have given me the perspective to reflect on my recent educational experience. However, in looking back thirty years later, I have no regrets for having immersed myself in lithography, but I lament that it took the place of being educated about art. So as I walk the halls of the school where I work and where lithography is still being taught, I ask

myself how is it being taught? How indeed do art schools today negotiate the *what* and the *how*?

Generally speaking, the assumption has been that a good artist makes a good teacher. Writing specifically about a university context, Stenberg maintains that the most deeply entrenched metaphor is “the professor as scholar, whereby good professing has more to do with the relationship one has to knowledge than to students” (2005, p.12). Since most current faculty hiring processes in art school rely largely on selecting professors based on an active exhibition record and on the quality of the work that they present as assessed by their peers, it appears that, like in the university, the conceptual underpinning of art school pedagogy rests firmly on the faculty’s commitment to their own work and on the assumption that students will therefore learn from their knowledge and experience in the art world. Although it is common practice when hiring new faculty to require applicants to submit a statement of teaching philosophy, my own experience reveals that a number of other factors are given priority, including the currency of the candidate’s art work, the status and frequency of exhibitions and/or performances or other professional accomplishments, and the manner in which a candidate locates his/her practice within the context of art. I would suggest that qualitative judgments about the suitability of a candidate frequently reflect beliefs about how well he/she will fit within the existing structures and practices of institutions. Based on my experience of chairing over ten faculty search processes, I would add that this is also true about assessing statements of teaching philosophy since evaluating the suitability of a candidate on that front seems to be more a matter of tacit agreement than on comparing candidates based

on explicitly articulated criteria. At my own institution, attempts at identifying the teaching abilities of candidates also take the shape of mock seminars or critique sessions with student representatives from the department. For studio-based positions, students usually display their work and in closed sessions each short-listed candidate is invited to critique the work before them. For instance in the case of a printmaking hiring, the candidates meet with printmaking students who, in my experience, compare candidates principally based on their knowledge of printmaking and their ability to discuss work within that specific context. The student participants are then invited to present their comments to the search committee on the premise that this process provides additional insight into each candidate's aptitudes for teaching. On the surface this step of the process may indicate that the institution places particular value on teaching, but given that the students are essentially comparing the performance of short-listed candidates under contrived conditions and within the confines of established departmental structures, I suggest that it is doubtful that such a procedure actually leads to very insightful information about a candidate's ability to think more broadly about pedagogy. This leads to the suggestion that standard processes of hiring new faculty point to how various practices from hiring to teaching are mutually constitutive elements that shape the dynamic of institutions (McLaren, 2003). Indeed, while it would be a worthwhile endeavour to critically analyze the hiring practices of art schools, I simply want to suggest here that the process I described at my own institution is one of the ways where disciplinary identity (Stenberg, 2005) is enacted.

Within most art (and design) schools, tensions between art and design are common. At a simplistic level, art is considered to be free from the constraints which are imposed on design by clients. The belief is that while designers solve other people's problems, artists generate their own ideas. The reality is that neither operate within a vacuum.

I remember many divisive meetings where artists and designers debated the pros and cons of a common Foundation year for students. The discussion would consistently go into two distinct directions: those who tried to articulate what kind of curriculum could serve both artists and designers in their first year of studies, and those who claimed that an artist simply cannot teach a future designer and a designer cannot teach a future artist, although I must admit that the latter is rarely articulated as overtly as the former.

I have been part of these debates as well (on the artists' side), but as I now look at the situation from the more remote distance offered by my position as an administrator, I see that many of the conflicts arise from a clash of beliefs about pedagogy. On the one side, are those who believe in pedagogy as a process of exploring what is unknown (mainly the artists), and on the other are those who support the idea of pedagogy as a process of transmitting what is known (Doll, 1993). However, the distinction is not as clear as it might appear since I have noticed that the artists who also teach at other levels tend to retreat to a transmitting mode in subsequent years, perhaps as a default position vis-à-vis the organizational structure of the institution into distinct disciplines after the Foundation year. While I feel that the "transmission" perspective is sometimes appropriate, particularly when dealing with technical knowledge, it seems essential that doing must also integrate reflecting-on-doing (Doll, 1993). Thus I hope to find ways to re-orient the debate around Doll's notion of a post-modern curriculum where *Richness*, *Recursion*, *Relations* and *Rigor* offer a new understanding of curriculum as enabling transformation in both teachers and students.

It seems that any argument that centers on difference to justify division seems to lack vision. Although it is true that art and design have much in common, it is also true that there is divergence between the two. However I think that it is precisely the juxtaposition of commonalities and distinctness that can provide shifting relationships and spontaneous self-organization, leading to new iterations and emerging forms. But before this takes place, what perhaps must come first is a process of unearthing the hidden assumptions that are embedded in the thinking frames of all those involved in these deliberations.

5.3 Art School as Site of Production and Reproduction

As mentioned earlier, most art schools are typically structured around departments, equipment and specific technical services in order to provide access to the specialized space and resources needed for producing work. For example, sculpture departments usually include foundries as well as wood, metal and synthetic material facilities while film departments might include editing suites, sound and film sets, and so on¹². One can gather from such partitioning of the institutional space, not only the grounding for keeping teaching and learning in segregated and specialized areas, but also a clear emphasis on the role of art school as a space of production. While the education of artists and designers particularly at the undergraduate level commonly involves hands-on experience, it is taken-for-granted that teaching should take place around the resources that makes this possible. Indeed, I would suggest that in addition to the segregation of knowledge, it is this dominant feature of art school that predetermines its pedagogical framework with the curriculum principally conceived as an adjunct to production¹³. The instrumentality of studio-based curriculum thus is evident in the majority of courses which largely aim at instilling in students the skills and the means to realize concepts and ideas within a specific studio discipline. In some institutions, teaching is sometimes divided between technical staff, who are mainly responsible for teaching technical skills,

¹² Theory, history and other academic courses are usually offered in nondescript spaces such as seminar rooms or lecture theatres.

¹³ The BFA generally includes approximately one-third of courses in liberal arts and two-thirds in visual arts. For a detailed description of what constitutes a BFA in the North American context, please see the web site of the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD). (<http://www.aicad.org/whatsbfa.htm>)

and faculty who teach other aspects usually more explicitly related to art. Thus from each of their hierarchical perspectives, both faculty and technical staff engage in a perpetual re-enactment of pedagogy, more often than not, tied to disciplinary practice. As Susan Brind states in a recent survey of British art schools, “in the main, the majority of teaching time at undergraduate level is spent giving ‘advice on research’ and ‘ideas behind student work’ whereas at post-graduate level most time is spent on ‘evaluation and analysis of actual work” (2004, p.12). For the most part students produce things¹⁴ to be assessed by teachers who in turn dispense their knowledge by responding to what they see, hence giving further license to students to refine and produce other things to be assessed. However, the location of teaching in studios, workshops, or ateliers as they are sometimes referred to, especially in Europe, presents a paradigmatic approach to teaching and learning that does not necessarily take into account the reality of contemporary practice. The following statement by Guadalupe Echevarria serves as a reminder that the studio/atelier is inescapably a value-laden space: “the atelier is something tied to history, something that permits the meeting of the past and the present so that what disappears and what appears find a link” (2000, p.201). But in contrast to Echevarria’s somewhat idealist view of the studio as a site of historical continuum, I believe that the central role it plays in most art school curriculum today perpetuates an uncritical view of the past that conflicts with any conception of a future that seeks to rupture from notions of indoctrination, methods, techniques and ways of being that insist on maintaining disciplinarity as a principle for the internal functioning of the institution (Foucault, 1979).

¹⁴ I use the word ‘things’ here in reference to images, objects, time-based works, performances, or any other manifestations of the creative process.

While I do not have the intention of tracing the historical trajectory of recent art and the major shifts that have occurred specifically after modernism, I would nevertheless like to take a moment to underline certain aspects which I suggest have impacted on art school education.

If art and, by extension, art schools have sometimes been viewed as sites of self-expression, of uniqueness, or of originality, postmodernist art has undoubtedly challenged such understanding. As Atkinson writes, “the idea of a self signifying an accessible original entity or presence has been replaced by understanding the self as socio-psychic *performance* (emphasis in original) that occurs within specific discourses, practices and their immanent power relations” (2006, p.18). The ideal spectator of modernist art, that is, painting and to a lesser extent sculpture, was thought to be elevated above the flux of life in time and history (Buchloh, 1984; Rosler, 1984; Wood, 2004) by art that was considered to be autonomous. In contrast, since the seventies hybrid postmodernist art sought to critique the signifying practices of modernity at work within and outside of art actively suppressing the idea of the contemplative spectator moved by the aesthetic effect of the work assuming instead a viewer as active co-participant in the making of meaning (Wood, 2004). As Paul Wood writes, “postmodernist art is about something – some cultural condition, psychic malaise or social issue – much more overtly than modernism ever was” (2004, p.29). One aspect of this shift is a re-conceptualization of skill and technique. As it is, contemporary artists access a broad and diverse range of forms and materials and their work often involves modes of production where individual expertise rests more on the ability to select appropriate means of production whenever

and wherever available than on technical self-sufficiency. In what follows I will give a brief description of a few examples of contemporary art practices that illustrate this point.

In *Homebound*¹⁵ Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum assembles kitchen utensils, furniture, electric wire, light bulbs, a computerized dimmer switch, amplifier and other found objects to construct a work intended to destabilize the familiar and gendered association of the home (Wood, 2004). Clearly the skills involved in such work have more to do with the ability to discriminatingly select appropriate objects with specific intentions than with the necessary competencies to construct the objects themselves in the first place. Artists must sometimes seek expertise and knowledge outside the world of art. Such is the case for British artist Damien Hirst for a piece titled, *Some Comfort Gained from the Acceptance of Inherent Lies in Everything*¹⁶ that includes sectioned, eviscerated, and preserved cows suspended in formaldehyde filled tanks which can be interpreted as a work that examines the processes of life and death. It is indeed highly likely that the realization of such work required the knowledge of specialists in the preservation of dead animals in order to be carried out successfully¹⁷. For some artists, working outside the studio is essential when, for instance, producing large-scale work for public spaces. This is true for Catalan artist Jaume Plensa who created *Crown Fountain* for Millennium Park

¹⁵ A photograph of *Homebound* can be viewed at http://www.e-flux.com/displayshow.php?file=message_1077232202.txt

¹⁶ A photograph of *Some Comfort Gained from the Acceptance of Inherent Lies in Everything* can be viewed at <http://vassun.vassar.edu/~jamundy/Somecomfort.html>

¹⁷ For a newspaper article related to another piece by the same artist titled, *The physical impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* see <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/article01.asp?id=355> The piece involves a dead shark and states that the curator of fish at Britain's Natural History Museum advised Damien Hirst.

¹⁸ in Chicago that includes two 50-foot towers made of glass blocks onto which a video showing the faces of one thousand individual Chicagoans are cyclically projected showcasing the vast cultural diversity of the city (Affairs, 2006). Although Plensa had a very specific aesthetic in mind, he did not know what technology would deliver what he wanted (Nunn, 2005) and therefore collaborated with faculty and technical staff from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to experiment with various technologies to realize his project. In a related way, Liz Magor is a Canadian artist whose practice moves back and forth between gallery and public spaces. A recent work titled *Light Shed* ¹⁹ overlooks Coal Harbour in Vancouver and is situated along a seawall attracting an ongoing flow of pedestrians. *Light Shed*, a sculptural installation, constructed in part of cast aluminum boards, reflects the history of the area as a working waterfront with docks, freight sheds and fish boats and references waterfront workers of the past. Although Magor is very well known for her exceptional skills in using synthetic materials to create simulacra of ordinary objects, the scale, materials and technology involved in *Light Shed* required that she work with assistants who had the technical expertise and resources that she did not have in her own studio. It is however important to note that while Magor seeks the expertise of others whenever necessary, she nevertheless refers to herself as a studio artist because of the way she works, which she refers to as “thinking through materials”. She states, “I don’t work from the idea to the product, I kind of learn the idea as I make the thing. That makes me a studio artist. I need to have stuff around me” (Canada, 2006).

¹⁸ A photograph of the Jaume Plensa’ *Crown Fountain* at Millennium Park can be viewed at http://www.millenniumpark.org/artandarchitecture/crown_fountain.html

¹⁹ A photograph of *Light Shed* can be viewed at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/seawallrunner/21595703/in/set-502165/>

While I am not aware if Hatoum, Hirst, or Plensa would also describe themselves as such, I hope that it has become evident, even from these few examples, that the way artists work with materials today is no longer exclusively the outcome of having developed certain skills only possible after prolonged technical training and embodied in everything they make. Indeed the idealization of craft, which historically has played a significant role in the construction of artistic identity, needs to be reconsidered in relation to current practices and in relation to the pedagogical agenda of art school.

This is particularly relevant when considering the work of media artists for whom digital technology plays a central role. As George Legrady writes, “the transition from the analogue to the digital has reformulated conceptual and practical methods of artistic engagement with the materials, tools and project directions” (2006, p.215). It has become obvious that the scale and technological complexity of certain media arts projects often involve the skills of collaborators from different disciplines that come together to work with a shared understanding of the goals of a given project. It is thus implicit in the realization of such work that no individual possesses all the necessary technical knowledge (Legrady, 2006). This change perhaps suggests the necessity to re-conceptualize a view of knowledge, learning and teaching which in art school so far has largely been based on notions of transcendence and authority (Atkinson, 2006).

There are undoubtedly many other ways that the integration of digital technologies dramatically challenges traditional notions of artistic and pedagogical practices, and while I do not fully examine this matter in this dissertation, I have attempted to introduce the issue to further emphasize how disciplinary pedagogical

models may no longer be appropriate. Whatever direction art takes now and in the future, my hope is that by calling attention to a limited aspect of the shift that has occurred from modernism to postmodernism, I am underlining the need to question the process of subjecting and constructing curriculum around the studio/workshop/atelier model of teaching and learning, not only because it is no longer the exclusive site of cultural production, but because art school is first and foremost a site of epistemic practice.

In the following three chapters, I examine the work of three artists and teachers, Laiwan, Susan Stewart and Eric Metcalfe. I consider their artistic practices as being interdisciplinary and their pedagogy as challenging disciplinary modes of teaching and learning.

6 LAIWAN

Laiwan wants to live, teach, and make art with everyday mindfulness. She remembers the day when as an art student one of her teachers showed interest in her poetry. Until then, she didn't think that poetry 'counted' in art school. Laiwan's ongoing search for meaning, for the "shape of thinking"(Laiwan, 2005) draws from her desire to situate her work deeply within her living context and to investigate ideas beyond predetermined pathways. Whether through visual art, poetry, music, or other forms of production, her search for meaning as a teacher and as an artist must proceed unencumbered by artificial boundaries in order to access diversity of consciousness and diversity of perception.

6.1 Being Situated

And that is the condition of being 'colored' in South Africa, or as Will describes it, 'halfway between... being not defined – and it was this lack of definition in itself that was never to be questioned, but observed like a taboo, something which no one, while following, could ever admit to' (Gordimer quoted in Bhabha, 1994, p.13).

Born to Chinese parents in what was then Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and having lived there until she was fourteen years old, Laiwan is now becoming increasingly aware of the impact of her upbringing under apartheid on her art and pedagogical practices. Seeking to shape the thoughts, movements, and ways of being of those it kept segregated along racial lines and of those responsible for upholding the system, apartheid defined a territory built on division and polarity. However, in the everyday practice of apartheid in Rhodesia, like in South Africa, being Chinese meant being in-between, in the ambiguous space of being neither black nor white. Laiwan recalls being a young child playing in a

public playground with specifically designated washrooms for each of the two ethnic groups, and not knowing which door to enter, or on which side of the ideological divide she belonged. But in contrast to her older siblings, for Laiwan it was more by osmosis that she experienced apartheid than from her daily interactions in the world.

In a recent interview, Laiwan said that she feels situated between Zimbabwe, China and Canada, between colonialism and imperialism. According to Homi K. Bhabha, “an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness” (1994, p.66). Being Chinese, neither black nor white, being in an in-between territory presents a challenge to the rigidity imposed by the colonial discourse of apartheid. Laiwan speaks fondly of how her parents and older siblings avoided steering her into the legislated ways of being. As she recalls in the anecdote about the racially divided washrooms of the playground, they did not consider it to be their role to clarify things for her. This is not to say that they had not themselves internalized the methods of social control under which they lived, but that at least with their youngest child, they were inclined to let her chose her own path despite the constraints of their situation. Laiwan’s ethnic and cultural antecedents continue to challenge the notion of fixity as does her art practice which in part focuses on probing the mechanisms by which systems of power and authority emerge and are maintained, and also on how they seek to shape the whole trajectory of culture.

Laiwan considers that as a process for investigating ideas, visual arts, unlike other fields of inquiry with more predictable methodologies, allow for open-ended research and as such often provides more questions than answers. However, her interest is less focused

on any particular discipline such as sculpture or painting, than on philosophy and poetics. Although it is infused by her own internal struggles, she wants her work to be read in a larger context (Canyon, 1998). She states, “I aim to find where ‘ideology’ has constructed ideas in me – in socio-political, cultural or technical ways” (in Canyon, 1998, p.10). Laiwan insists that her work is not about self-expression, but I would suggest that it *is* about the expression of a culture at an increasingly complex time. Indeed, her work examines our (Western) contemporary condition, specifically the manufacturing or institutionalization of identity (Laiwan *et al.*, 1998, p.9). Laiwan is interested in letting the subtexts of objects, texts, images and their ideological construct float to the surface (Canyon, 1998) through the process of excavating meaning in the everyday experience. As Dewey writes, “a conception of fine art that sets out from its connection with discovered qualities of ordinary experience will be able to indicate the factors and forces that favor the normal development of common human activities into matters of artistic value” (1934, p.11). But unlike Dewey’s motives for looking into the every day experience, Laiwan seeks to identify the factors and forces that make up that experience in order to find what compels our experiences.

For example, for one of her works, *Ethos: writing with found objects*, Laiwan collected bus transfers for one year to write poetry with the letters printed on each transfer working within the constraints of being limited by the sixteen letters used by the transit system to represent the various bus routes (Figure 6.1).

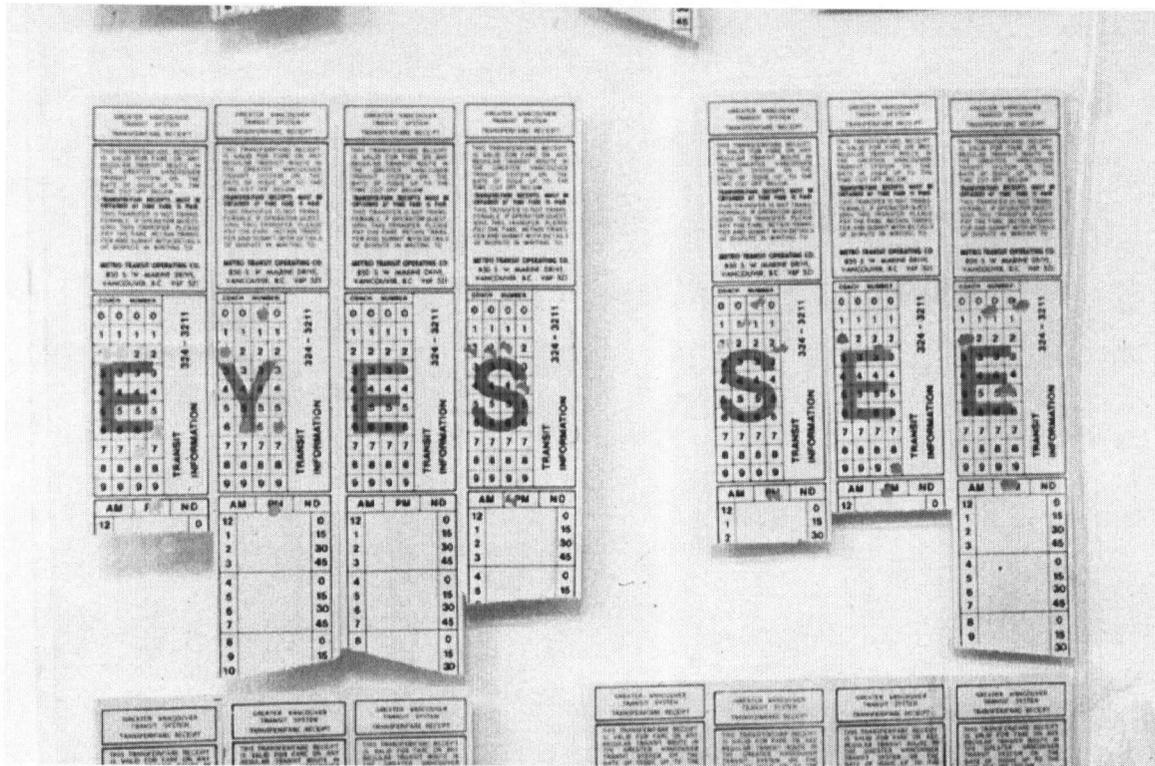


Figure 6.1 Laiwan **Ethos: Writing with found objects** (detail), 1982.

As Laiwan states, “the title refers to a ‘spirit or character of an institution’, the poetic text reveals an emotion that struggles with institutionalization, and the process of collecting the transfers points to our day to day linear construction of movement”(in Canyon, 1998, p.10). Such a mundane object as a bus transfer thus becomes a sign for the ways we negotiate our comings and goings according to established conventions which in turn the poetic text subverts with all its potential meanings and interpretations avoiding closure.

It is also the potential for art to engage an audience and affect perceptual change in seeing and/or listening that informs Laiwan’s practice. However, her interest is not in

the representational function of art, or what she terms, the “aboutness of art”, or art as finished product with determinate meaning, but rather in art as a process of engagement, or of what Heidegger calls, ‘of unconcealment’ (in Pattison, 2000) in order to pursue truth. Art reveals new depths, new meanings, and like truth is always on the way, never reaching an end (Pattison, 2000). And for Laiwan art is a way of making things happen and a way of learning through the process of making, as she believes that there is something about working in time and space, in physicality that teaches us lessons that we cannot learn otherwise. This is something that Dewey acknowledges when he wrote that “the artist does his thinking in the very qualitative media he works in, and the terms lie so close to the object that he is producing that they merge directly into it” (1934, p.16). As Laiwan states during an interview, “I am very interested in materiality – what you know – whether or not an installation decides to go the way you want it to go or whether it decides to go in another direction. That tells me a lot about materials but it also tells me a lot about me”.

Aware that there are different approaches to making art, Laiwan chooses to focus on art as a means of expanding consciousness and perception. One of her ongoing projects involves meticulously and selectively whiting out and obliterating words in an English/Chinese dictionary as a symbolic process, questioning the authority of such a reference book, and our belief in it, in assigning equivalency to words in two vastly different languages (Figure 6.2).

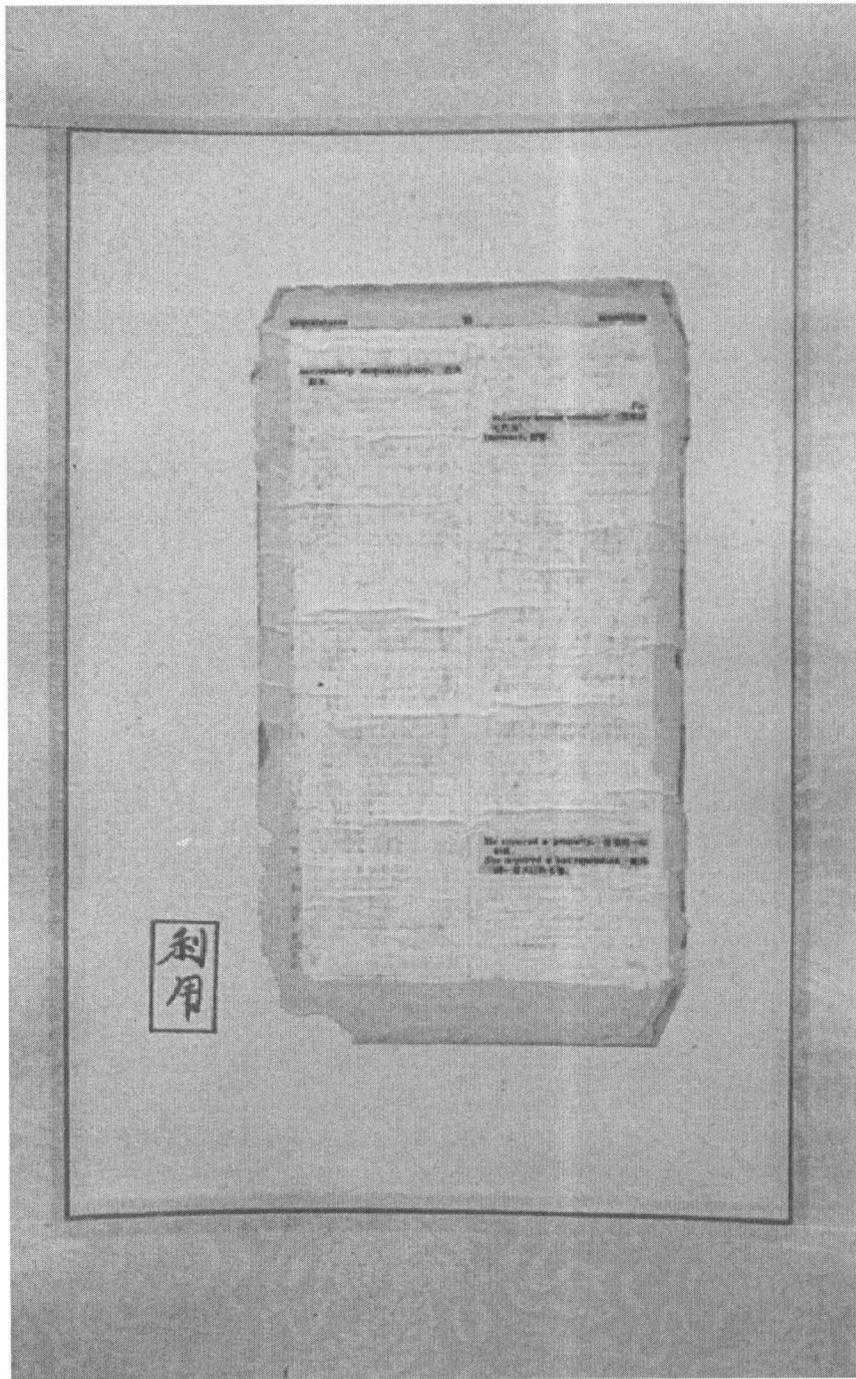


Figure 6.2 Laiwan Dotting like flatheads: this is the english I learn (painting and collage), 1996.

Indeed what is also at stake here is the reductive notion that a concept in one language has an exact corresponding meaning in another as if context was extraneous to meaning. Nikos Papastergiadis argues that “language is not only one of the strongest and most resilient media for shaping cultural systems, but can also serve as model for understanding how meanings are produced and transmitted within culture” (2004, p.335). Meaning shifts within and between languages. “Not even a basic concept like time is identical in all languages” (Papastergiadis, 2004, p.335). Thus the process of whiting out words interrupts the communicative function of the dictionary. And since the opacity of the paint renders the text non-legible, what remains is the icon of the dictionary as a cultural artifact which rests on the assumption that concepts are transferable in any language. I would also like to suggest that in purposefully using fluid that is designed to correct errors in a typewritten text instead of white paint, Laiwan not only questions the authority of the dictionary, but also seems to refer to the process of obliterating old technologies to make place for new ones. As a viewer, I see the lumps of whiting fluid on the surface of the paper as a sign that invites comparison with the apparent benefits provided by computer technology which allows for multiple changes in the text without leaving visible traces of that process on the paper. New technology is framed as an essential component of progress and old technology as obsolete and disposable. As Lyotard writes in *The Postmodern Condition*, “technology is therefore a game pertaining not to the true, the just, or the beautiful, etc, but to efficiency: a technical ‘move’ is ‘good’ when it does better and/or expends less energy than another” (1984, p.44). The dictionary project can thus be considered a precursor to other projects where Laiwan

seeks to expose the limitations of instrumental thinking, concerning herself with exposing the predetermined internal structures embedded in new processes and new technological innovations. To counter the fundamental goals of prediction and control, she turns to improvisation as a means of accessing meaning and of accessing thinking without predefined outcomes, this, with no internal structure in order to go beyond the already known and explore the possibilities of the present. I will return to the issue of improvisation but first I want to consider a collaborative project titled *Quartet for the year 4698 or 5760 Improvisation for 4 projectors* (Figures 6.3, 6.4, 6.5)²⁰.

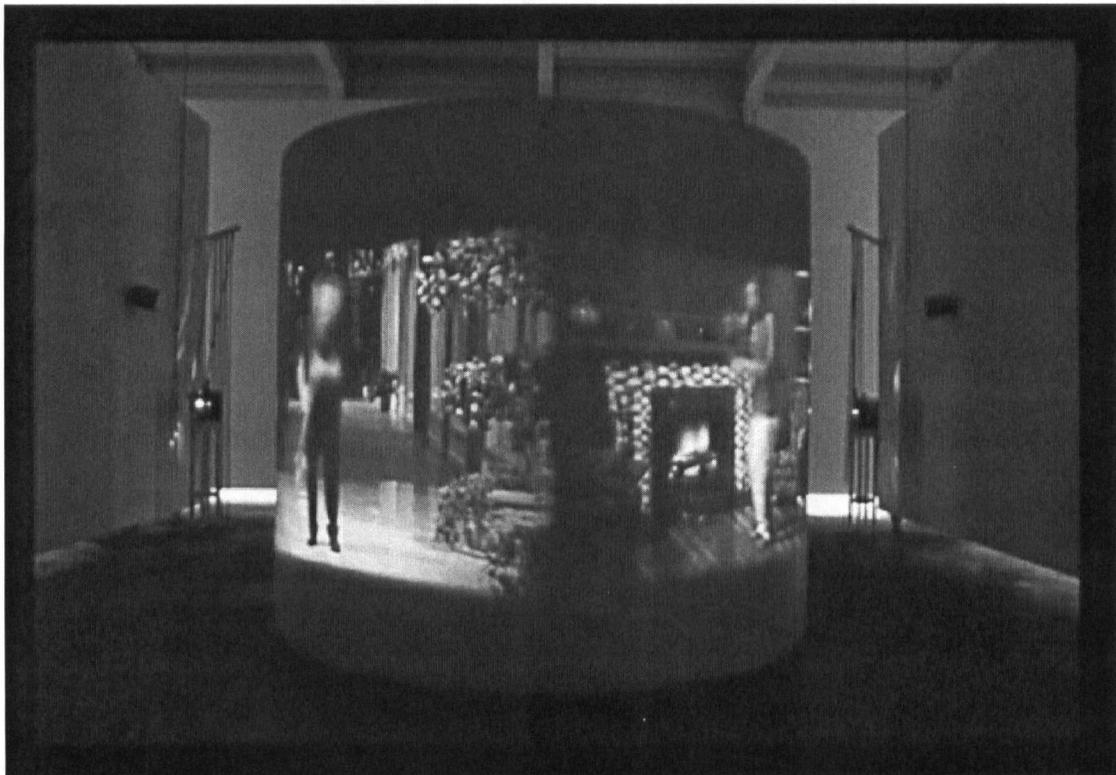


Figure 6.3 Laiwan *Quartet for the year 4698 or 5760 Improvisation for 4 projectors*, 2000

²⁰ For a detailed description of *Quartet*, see the literary review *West Coast Line* (Laiwan, 2000).

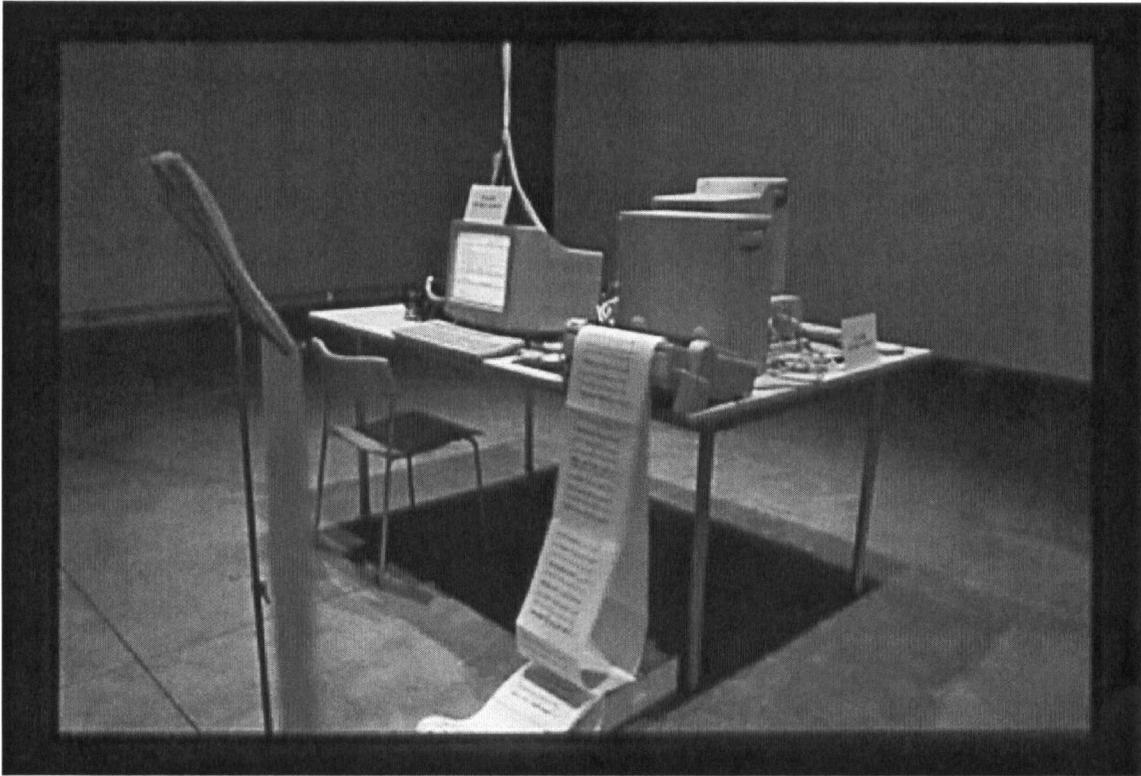


Figure 6.4 Laiwan Quartet for the year 4698 or 5760 Improvisation for 4 projectors, 2000

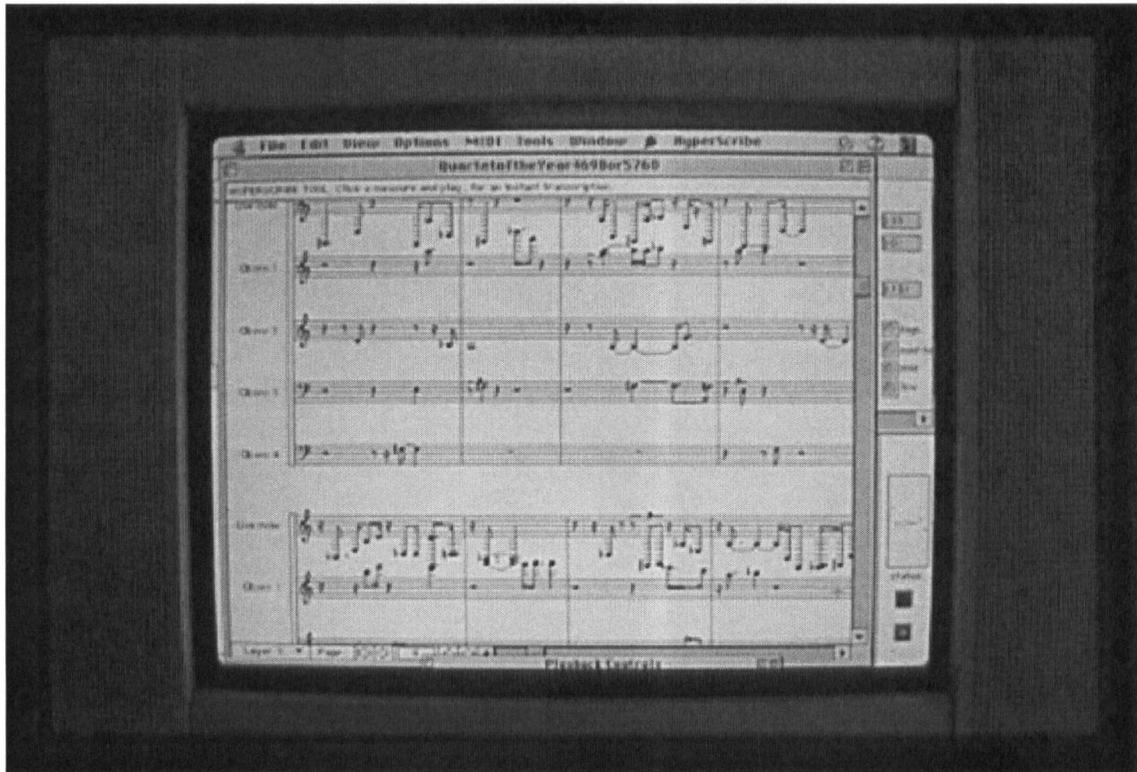


Figure 6.5 Laiwan **Quartet for the year 4698 or 5760 Improvisation for 4 projectors** (detail), 2000

Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is (Laiwan, 2005).

Laiwan claims that her interest in improvisation is motivated by a desire to produce work that challenges calculative thinking (2005). She sees in improvisation a way of working without a pre-existing schema, that is, a way of working in the moment. Informed by Heidegger's writings, she seeks a path of thinking that is not constrained by any actual or possible worldview (Pattison, 2000) in search of new questions, and in search of meaning. But this search does not assume that meaning exist independently from lived experience. On the contrary, it can only come from mindfulness *meditative*

thinking, that is, from being engaged with life unimpeded by predetermined ways of thinking *calculative thinking*. For *Quartet*, as for all of her other art projects, Laiwan embarked on an experiment without knowing how it would conclude. In its final form, which takes on different configurations each time it is exhibited, the piece is an installation that allows participants/viewers to experience calculative and meditative thinking simultaneously.

The computers demonstrate calculative thinking by seemingly absorbing and recording all the sounds, music and noises that are generated in the installation, both intentionally through the music performance and unintentionally through the interaction of the audience with the piece. Since the computers produce a musical score in response to the sounds they record, one is inclined to believe that the sheets of notes coming out of the attached printer indeed represent accurate notations that could be used as reference to 'replay' the music in its original form, perhaps precisely because of the faith we invest in computers. As we discover that the score is really gibberish, we are confronted with our own assumptions about the confidence that we have in technology on the one hand, and on the other, with the way our thinking so readily follows a deductive path. While it is beyond my purpose here to analyze the inner structure of computers or to debate whether computers only have the capacity to process data that has been accounted for in the programming parameters, I believe that what is at stake in *Quartet* is the common expectation that computers produce predictable outcomes and the impact that such a belief has on our ways of thinking and behaving. Laiwan insists that her point is not to situate

computer thinking and human thinking in binary oppositions but to call attention to thinking as a multi-modal and complex process.

Without the benefits of advanced knowledge in computer science, one might be inclined to believe that computers unlike humans only have the capacity to hear what they are programmed to hear. In Laiwan's piece, meditative thinking is embodied in the musician's improvised playing, accompanying the unpredictable projectors and ambient sounds of the gallery. In *Quartet*, it is indeed through bodies that we experience meditative thinking, both through our own as participant and through the musician's. The circular screen onto which the image of the musician is projected from different points of view, showing front, back, right and left sides, each performing one part of the quartet, is intended to evoke bodily presence as an essential component of improvisation. Indeed, without the body, improvisation cannot occur. As Alfonso Montuori writes, "to improvise means to draw on all our knowledge and personal experience, and focus it on the very moment we are living in, in that very context" (2003, p.244). In improvisation, the body is engaged in performance, not as a depository of social, political, economic, and aesthetic agendas, but as active challenge to such agendas (Garoian, 1999). Here the body in effect acts not as a receptacle for culture, but as an active agent in culture.

At a certain level, *Quartet* can be framed as a cautionary tale against the pitfalls of uncritically following paths that are imprinted on our psyches and on our ways of being (Laiwan, 2005). As Laiwan writes, "whether a mall, a wilderness reserve, a camping site, an Internet site, my movements and my needs will have been forethought. My desires will be anticipated, predetermined, predesigned" (2005, p. 3). In investigating

what it means to be human, Laiwan believes that one of the differences between humans and machines is the human's ability to improvise. For Laiwan, improvisation holds the possibility of reclaiming thinking for oneself and of moving towards meditative thinking and unforeseen possibilities.

In the popular mind improvisation often means to make do with whatever is at hand, a compromise of a sort (Montuori, 2003). This implies that under different conditions, when order is reinstated, things would be better (Montuori, 2003). Yet as Montuori questions, could we say that someone who presents at a conference without written notes is of lesser value than one who does? Or does it show different skills? As he writes, "the kind of thinking that relegates improvisation to a lesser status operates within a disjunctive paradigm in which order is privileged over disorder, a paradigm of either/or, dichotomous thinking" (2003, p.245). Montuori maintains that "taking improvisation seriously arguably means addressing the very way we think" (2003, p.239). It is therefore with the seriousness of someone who wants to explore what it means to be human that Laiwan identifies nine qualities that she considers essential for improvisation:

- Bodily presence & engagement in every moment in 'real' space
- Attentive listening
- Lack of predetermination
- Ungrasping
- Unconditionality
- Curiosity
- Playfulness

- Generosity
- Collective & responsive ethics & judgement (2005, pp.5-8).

From the perspective of someone who grew up under apartheid, for Laiwan improvisation does indeed present a radically different way of thinking and being. As a Chinese girl, the system of rules of apartheid made her both visible and invisible, and she suspects that this continues to play itself out in her art practice. For example when she specifically reflects on the work that she produced before 1999, she feels that it is largely invisible or ephemeral. Therefore, wanting to challenge herself to take up space, that is to assert her presence against all rules, she seeks in improvisation a different shape of thinking. Laiwan's art practice is embedded in her practice of living; for her there is no such thing as an art space and a non-art space.

I would now like to turn to the work of Varela, Thompson and Rosch as a source for further insight on Laiwan's approach to making art and to teaching. Taking the position that cognitive science cannot ignore human experience in the elaboration of its epistemology, Varela, Thompson and Rosch state that "mindfulness means that the mind is present in embodied everyday experience" (1991, p.22). To that end the authors turn to Buddhist mindfulness/awareness practice as a means of becoming mindful, "to experience what one's mind is doing as it does it, to be present with one's mind" (1991, p.23). The authors go on to argue that, "the disassociation of mind from body, of awareness from experience, is the result of habit, and these habits can be broken" (1991, p. 25). It is also from this perspective that Laiwan investigates the notion of

improvisation motivated by a desire to break or interrupt the habit of disassociating mind from body, of awareness from experience, in order to gain mindfulness.

While Varela, Thompson and Rosch's work focuses on a critical assessment of our evolutionary pathways, which they see as being largely constrained by a Darwinian model of survival, making the case for the alternative view of 'natural drift' as a way of conceptualizing the world, Laiwan looks to our investment in technology and the way it shapes our identities, as well as our ways of thinking along predetermined pathways. Whether natural or cultural, our environment is not made up of structures imposed on living beings by outside forces, but rather it is the creation of living beings (Varela et al., 1991). This suggests that it is only with mindfulness that we can begin to access ways of thinking that lead to alternative ways of being, that is, to ecological ways of being. Indeed in pointing to mechanistic ways of thinking, calculative thinking, and to the ongoing cycle of technological innovations, Laiwan's work also calls to mind Lyotard's notion of the organic connection between technology and profit (1984) which as we have come to realize, is not always compatible with the health of the planet or with what Dewey termed "everything that is".

The knowledge of knowledge compels. It compels us to adopt an attitude of permanent vigilance against the temptation of certainty. It compels us to recognize that certainty is not a proof of truth. It compels us to realize that the world everyone sees is not the world but a world which we bring forth with others (Maturana & Varela, 1992, p.245).

Technological advances tend to become part of the invisible background of perception (Davis et al., 2000). As Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler suggest, part of the reason that technologies become transparent may come from our "long-standing habit of

using the most recent innovations to interpret human experience”(2000, p.172).

Furthermore, the perception that machines such as computers are able to explain human experience has led to a culture of specialization at the detriment of a holistic worldview (Davis et al., 2000). As Bowers writes, “the root metaphors that gave conceptual direction and moral legitimacy to the Industrial Revolution continue to frame the public’s understanding of technology and science – which they view as the highest embodiment of progress” (2002, p.413).

In education, the fragmentation of knowledge into specialized parts takes for granted that students will find ways to make use of such knowledge despite living in a world where boundaries between fields of knowledge, or between disciplines, are not always discernable (Davis et al., 2000). Humans’ experiences of the world do not often fall into neatly defined boundaries. To structure education as if it was, I suggest, perhaps undermine the students’ ability to develop the necessary skills to participate in a complex world. Unlike complicated systems that can be explained through their parts, complex systems like the ecosystem cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts because the parts are themselves alive and dynamic and therefore unpredictable (Davis et al., 2000). As a counterpoint to segregating knowledge into parts, I suggest that the qualities that Laiwan has identified for improvisation propose an awareness of the interconnectivity of art with life, and of life with pedagogy, integral to an ecological understanding of culture as embodied action. As Dewey so eloquently states, “the career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way” (1934, p.13).

6.2 Pedagogy

A primary task is thus imposed upon one who undertakes to write upon the philosophy of the fine arts. This task is to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doing, and suffering that are universally recognized to constitute experience (Dewey, 1934, p.3).

During an interview, Laiwan states that there are two things that govern the kind of work that she does:

1. To work towards the person I would like to become.
2. To work towards the culture or the society or the world that I would like to live in.

Such are the aims of Laiwan's pedagogy. As a teacher, she believes that the structure of the institution should reflect its philosophical beliefs since institutions largely define the nature of the field in which one works. For Laiwan one aspect of teaching is to guide students into becoming aware of the role of institutions in shaping thinking. She asks "what kind of curriculum do we need to encourage students to become aware of how their perception and consciousness is being shaped by the school they are in?"

In recent years, Laiwan has been teaching in an alternative liberal arts college at the graduate level in a low-residency, long distance programme located in the United States. She states in an interview that what is important to her "is a holistic approach. I really try to have a balance between thinking, body, spirit and mind". Within her current context, the institutional framework requires that students participate fully in the design of the institution's curriculum as well as in the design of their individualized degree programme rather than pursuing traditional faculty driven disciplines (Buchanan, 1998). In order to

expand the perceptual field of the students, they are expected to demonstrate wide knowledge, thoughtful action and self-discovery, and to contextualize their practice broadly, whether it is painting or any other form of production. She cites the example of one of her students whose interest was principally painting and who moved to Germany for love at the age of twenty-one. Laiwan saw her task as asking the student to contextualize his practice by asking questions such as “what does it mean to be a painter today? What does it mean to be an American in Germany today?” Painting is thus tacitly understood as being connected to every aspect of the student’s life and not as an autonomous and separate sphere of activity. Together, teacher and student identify readings that encompass a wide range of works about subjects such as painting, history, philosophy, and love, but ultimately it is the student’s responsibility to determine what and how he is going to learn. The focus on process thus seeks to uncover and to examine the multiple factors that lead to the making of a painting in all its dimensions.

As a pedagogue, Laiwan’s focus on agency promotes a process of inquiry that takes into account the role of the larger context and its impact on thinking, body, spirit and mind. She sees herself as having an ethical stance as an artist and as a teacher in her desire to expand consciousness and perception, working against ways of thinking that are prescribed through unquestioned practices and institutions. Her ethical stance parallels that of French philosopher and social critic Edgar Morin when he states “our thought system, which permeates education from primary schools to universities, is a system that breaks down reality and renders our minds incapable of linking up the knowledge we are made to pigeonhole into disciplines” (1997).

During an interview, Laiwan states that “one of the key challenges for teaching or for developing curriculum is the empowerment of the students so that they believe in their convictions and their passion and have the will to pursue them”. So in striving to achieve her pedagogical goals and keeping with the ethos of the institution in which she teaches, Laiwan focuses on the holistic development of the artist that the student wants to become, and not on any established notion of what an artist is or does. Although Laiwan is a strong supporter of the school’s mandate, her pedagogy may be less influenced by institutional imperatives than by her formative experience as a young child in Rhodesia. Since there were no pre-schools for Laiwan to attend in Harare at the time, between the ages of three and five she would often accompany a family member on their daily chores or to their place of work. She often sat beside her father who drove around to pick-up supplies for his store. Laiwan remembers these escapes fondly as her father, happy to be away from his small business, would tell stories about Chinese philosophy and history, or about opera. She also accompanied her elder sisters, one an English teacher and the other an art teacher, to their schools or other activities. The family thus provided a nurturing environment where, despite the restrictions imposed by Apartheid on each member, they would freely engage in artistic activities. To a certain extent, it seems that the pedagogy of the family made it possible for her to subvert the limitations of the political system.

In her current teaching position, there is an expectation that students will be involved in determining curriculum, which Laiwan considers to be a practiced democracy. In an interview, she states, “if there is a practiced democracy then in some ways the students have to be involved and be responsible for the institution as much as the faculty”.

As bell hooks writes, “teachers who have a vision of democratic education assume that learning is never confined solely to an institutionalized classroom” (2003, p.41). For Laiwan, the ability for students to make decisions about what they want to learn requires an open structure, which she also sees as necessary for interdisciplinary teaching and learning. As she says during an interview, “ I think that there has to be quite an open structure because the nature of interdisciplinarity itself is to encourage exploration in whichever area that is deemed necessary by the student or the artist”. If democratic education is not limited to the classroom as bell hooks suggests, learning cannot be limited to specific instrumental goals.

To understand the interconnectivity of the different aspects of life requires reflection both from the teacher and from the students. For Laiwan, rigor and quality of thought are essential aspects of teaching, learning and being an artist. Teaching to a group, she structures the class as a laboratory, positioning herself as facilitator, and inviting students to pursue research about ideas of interest to them personally and to share their findings with their peers aiming for learning to take place through their collective presence. It is their contribution that will make either the class productive and engaging or simply uninteresting. Laiwan admits that sometimes she encounters students who feel frustrated by the open structure of her classroom, but rather than responding by filling the perceived void with information, she sees her task as teaching students to collaborate so that they learn the necessary skills to find meaning in their interaction with others in a multitude of fields. Thus the process of integrating theory and practice is imbedded in her

way of being with the students as co-investigator, and not as an authoritarian figure (master).

In order to set the tone, Laiwan devotes time to establishing the context for their collective investigation. First, by sharing with students how she herself has approached dilemmas in her art practice, and also by establishing what they as a group, have in common. Though there might not be a basis for unity in terms of what art means or signify for each of them, Laiwan strives to establish trust as common ground by emphasizing the open nature of their inquiry which, as such cannot be judged based on predefined criteria. Her confidence as a teacher does not come from the amount of knowledge she may feel she has, or from seeing herself as a master, but rather, it comes from her ability to establish an atmosphere of trust and safety with her students. Since her current institution takes a student-centered approach to teaching and learning expectations are that students themselves articulate what they want to learn over a specific period of time. In that context, her role is as peer. As members of the group, participants must reflect on the approach, and on the success or failure of the discussion; process is just as important as outcome, the distinction between the two not always apparent. The fluidity of Laiwan's pedagogy comes across in the example she gives of a student who chose to conduct a workshop on body alignment, which in turn led to a discussion on the origins of ballet as a dance form. Participants learned from one another and as the discussion evolved, ballet was not only discussed in terms of its historical antecedents, but also in relation to Louis XIV's purported fetishistic connection to this dance form and the movement's emphasis on the calves of dancers. This example shows how an event, an action, or a discussion can

give way to a chain of unpredictable connections which in turn have the potential to lead to new forms and new processes.

6.3 Interdisciplinarity

In other words, the point is not to construct some kind of Esperanto, or some kind of abstract language originating from nowhere, but on the contrary, in order to give life to new signs [whether one is dealing with natural language, colours or spatial forms], it is necessary to establish a bridge from one's origins to the arrival and appropriation of a whole new set of signs (Kristeva, 1998, p.16).

For Laiwan, interdisciplinary art practice means having awareness of whatever is important to one's work. She admits that without rules, interdisciplinary art practice is very vulnerable, but for Laiwan it is precisely this vulnerability that appeals to her. Perhaps this is in reaction to having experienced the rigidity of the apartheid system and the way it divides, compartmentalizes, and intends to fix identity. Indeed, cast against the methods of apartheid, interdisciplinarity is situated at the opposite end of the spectrum. To refuse to work within established boundaries, to reach out to work collaboratively across disciplines, and to reject consistency are all acts of transgression against an ideology of purity. As Kristeva states, "interdisciplinarity is always a site where expression of resistance are latent" (1998, p.6).

In her first year of art school, Laiwan felt attracted to the notion of not having any clear path to follow and being able to pursue anything. She began to realize that her strength was in ideas more than in any aptitudes within a specific discipline. It is by asserting the importance of the quality and depth of research that she responds to the criticism that interdisciplinary art practice lacks rigor. Rigor, she maintains, is also measured by how her work resonates with her audience. As Julie Thompson Klein writes,

“criteria for judgment constitute the least understood aspect of interdisciplinarity, in part because the issue has been the least studied and in part because the multiplicity of tasks seems to militate against a single standard” (1996, p.210). But it is important to note here that the issue of defining standards for assessing the value of the work produced in art school, as in the art world, already relies on indeterminate and mostly ambiguous criteria which are polymorphous and based on a number of factors such as social and economic context, ideological stand point, and individual perspective, to name a few. For example, the criteria for assessing students’ work in certain schools may be based on the notion of achieving some kind of mastery, as is suggested in the following mission statement: “The College’s curriculum is based on a respect for traditional forms of teaching which have produced master artists throughout the ages”²¹, while for others it is based on the opposite: “California Institute of the Arts educates professional artists in a unique learning environment founded on the principles of artmaking excellence, experimentation, critical reflection and independent inquiry”²². And yet for other schools, such as Goddard College, it is on the basis of art as social engagement: “Goddard encourages students to become creative, passionate, lifelong learners, working and living with an earnest concern for others and the welfare of the Earth”²³. The latter is reflected in Laiwan’s answer when I asked how she integrates theory and practice in her teaching: “my feeling about Western art or even Western perception is that there’s a lot of emphasis on the external, on the material or in the technical and less so on the internal skills of self reflectivity, of

²¹ <http://lymeacademy.edu/art-education-mission.htm>

²² <http://www.calarts.edu/about/index.html>

²³ <http://www.goddard.edu/about/missionandphilosophy.html>

raising consciousness, knowledge of the self, following intuition, these kind of skills which, when I was an art student, may have been taught by osmosis but were not explicitly taught, nor did they frame the discourse about teaching and learning”.

Laiwan’s art making and teaching work against colonizing practices (hooks, 1994), be it apartheid or other systems which impose power, implicitly or explicitly, for cultural, social or economic control. Her commitment to interdisciplinarity is imbued by a profound desire to work and teach informed by an approach and awareness that values diversity in multiple forms and meanings in order to investigate the shape of thinking outside predetermined pathways. Laiwan strives in her art as in her teaching to dwell on the moment, working to unconceal the premises onto which our desires are shaped, so as to allow for new possibilities to emerge.

7 SUSAN STEWART

At the centre of both Susan Stewart's art and pedagogical practices is the notion of difference. While a significant aspect of her art practice focuses on the ways various social institutions define difference, as well as on issues of identity politics and social justice, her pedagogy reflects her desire to empower students to develop their own voice, grounded in the social, cultural, and historical context in which they live. Stewart believes that students must engage with the learning process, based on understanding that knowledge about one's self and knowledge about the area of inquiry at stake are co-emergent phenomena (Davis et al., 2000).

7.1 Making Art for Diverse Realities

In her final year as an undergraduate student, Stewart's experience was seemingly pivotal in setting the tone for her future work as an artist and as a pedagogue. Organized around traditional art disciplines, the school she was attending did not have the resources that she needed to complete her graduating project. However, by seeking external mentors, Stewart took charge of her learning and refused to accept the limitations of the institution. But as she learned, stepping away from conventions was generative but also risky.

Her graduating piece included a series of photographs and accompanying texts about heterosexuality and gender politics, and included a series of photographs depicting a male in full frontal nudity juxtaposed with photographs of a woman's head with a range of facial expressions. At the time, there were very few female teachers, and the response that Stewart received from her all male teachers was strongly negative. In Stewart's

words, “they really despised it”, “they were angry at me for showing it”. Within the formalist/technical system that dominated art education at that time (Grover, 1989), Stewart’s work presented a challenge that could not be met by her teachers, this, at a time when feminism and critical discourse had not really emerged in art schools. But after receiving such a negative response, not only from her teachers, but also from the visiting public, Stewart questioned whether art was really what she ought to be doing. And although she continued pursuing her exploration of sexuality through photography she did not have the courage to show her work until several years later.

An important feature of Stewart’s practice is the absence of orthodoxy or sense of commitment to a discipline. For example, the *Corpus Fugit* project involves photography, a lived presentation in front of an audience and video projection as a multi-media performance (Figure 7.1 and 7.2).

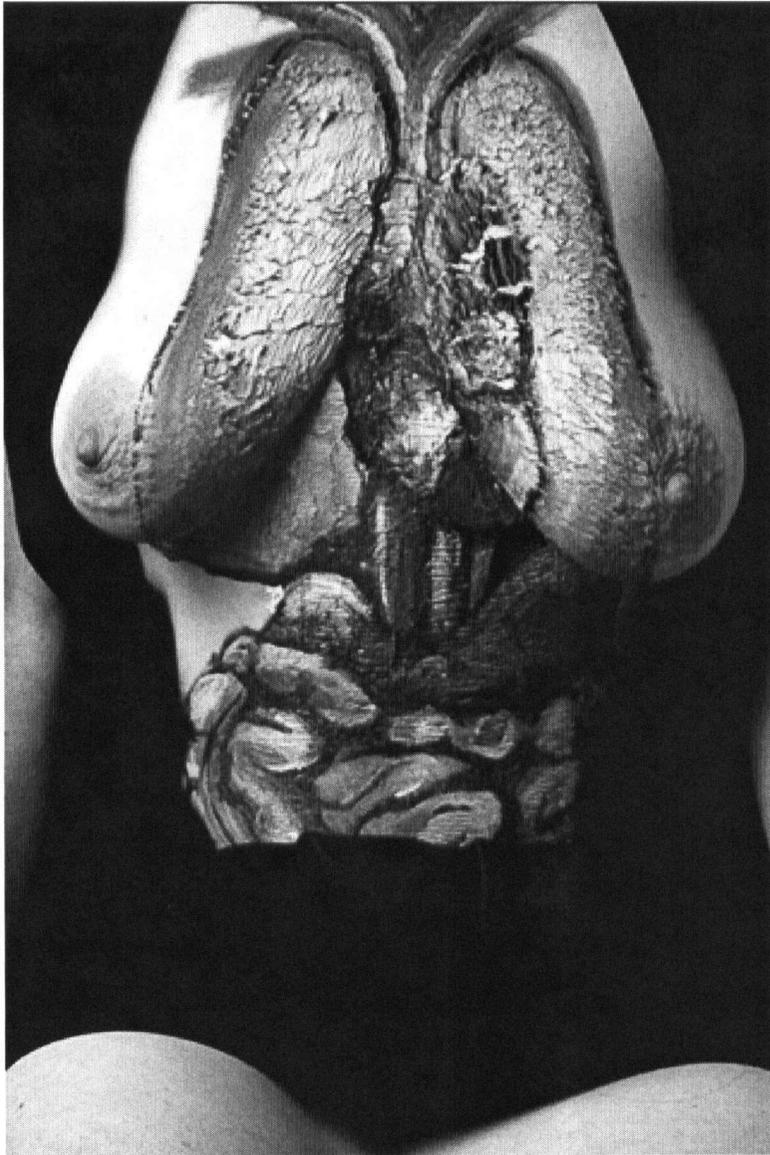


Figure 7.1 **Corpus Fugit** (video still) 2002



Figure 7.2 **Corpus Fugit** (multi-media performance), 2002

Nevertheless, Stewart has worked with photography for over thirty years, which she feels gives her a sense of knowing photography well, or as well as anyone who may call himself or herself a photographer. Early on, Stewart understood that a discipline was not only about knowledge and technique, but also about how it links to the social context within which it exists. As she says, “photographs have a wonderful ability to traverse the edge between what is commonly known as reality and the invented, making it unclear which is which” (in Blackbridge *et al.*, 1994, p.14). Barthes writes that the functions of photography for the photographer are “to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to

signify, to provoke desire” (Barthes, 1981, p. 28). And for Stewart, one of photography’s functions is also to teach. It is precisely what photography *does*, that engages Stewart, and not what it *is*. For Stewart, to think of herself as a photographer would mean to take on the narrative of the master, with its stultifying effect. While Stewart demonstrates the competencies of a professional photographer, it is not the medium that interests her but everything that is outside the frame and beyond the image. As Susan Sontag writes, “photographs in effect hide more than they disclose”(1977, p. 23). Stewart uses photography precisely because as a medium that conceals, photography also suggests existing realities unrepresented within the frame.

Stewart is a member of the *Kiss & Tell* art collective, started in 1984, which produces performances, videos, books, and interactive exhibitions. As a collective, *Kiss & Tell* is also an “epistemic community”(Collective, 2004) working with and through ideas. One of *Kiss & Tell*’s most prominent projects, titled *Drawing the Line*, first exhibited in 1985 exemplifies Stewart’s interdisciplinary approach to her art practice, challenging conventions throughout her career.

Like the photographic series from her art school days, the 1985 multi-media installation that Stewart collaboratively developed with other artists who were later to form *Kiss & Tell* generated controversy. In response to a public debate following the publication of a poster advertising *International Lesbian Week*, Stewart and her colleagues embarked on a three-year project investigating how individuals determine the difference between pornography and art, in effect asking, where does one draw the line?

*Drawing the Line*²⁴ includes a series of explicit and staged photographs depicting lesbian sex. The project sought to create a context for open debate where women and men would contribute their own view on what made one image art and another pornography, and where comments as part of the installation would in turn generate others, thus creating an open forum where censorship was no longer a question of complying with a higher and concealed authority, but one of negotiating and articulating one's own personal beliefs. The exhibition traveled all over the world and viewers' response stimulated heated debate wherever it was shown. Although as Stewart says during a recent interview, "different communities had different triggers for different images and for different conversations", boundaries between art and pornography remained intensely personal despite the range of geographical locales.

Drawing the Line examines the notion of boundary from multiple perspectives, and in revealing opposing feminist views on pornography, *Drawing the Line* problematises censorship. As a series, the blur between reality and the imaginary becomes evident since photographic images do not have an indexical relationship to life, but in this case they seek to give a virtual presence to the lack or scarcity of explicit lesbian sexual imagery at the time it was produced (Grover, 1991). The performative character of the photographs, made evident through the acting out of a range of persona

²⁴ I saw the exhibition *Drawing the Line* in partial format at Women in Focus Gallery in Vancouver in 1985. From my perspective the black and white images as a whole could not be mistaken as simply pornographic, partially due to the elaborate staging evident throughout the series, but also due to the integration of viewers' comments in the exhibition, and the specific aesthetic qualities of these photographs which are traditionally associated with art. They were, however, erotic photographs concurring with Barthes when he writes that, "the erotic is a pornographic that has been disturbed, fissured" (Barthes, 1981, p.41).

and sexual practices by the two models, as well as the space allocated for viewers to write comments on the walls of the exhibition (females) or in a book (males), juxtaposing texts and images, serves to articulate complex ideas. Furthermore, by making both the photographs and the viewers' comments integral parts of the exhibition, desire is explicitly rendered as a social construct, while underscoring the relatively limited representation of lesbian sexuality in the dominant discourse, thus calling attention to the way mainstream culture structures absence of lesbian sexuality or presents it as deviant or negative (Grover, 1989).

Although it is not my purpose to elaborate further on the critical dimensions of *Drawing the Line*, I have nevertheless attempted here to identify the conceptual underpinning of this project as I believe that it provides useful insight into Stewart's drive to investigate the values implicit in certain social practices in order to allow for new possibilities to become real and a range of voices to be heard.

As a member of a collective or as single practitioner, Stewart grounds her work in the social context within which it takes shape and considers the intended audience/viewer as an integral part of the production process, her practice embodying the belief that art is a system of interaction with the world (Gablik, 1984).

Artists can be like philosophers: they struggle with the issues of their historical moment and give shape to knowledge, often longing to step aside from these questions, but are nonetheless embroiled in them in the very fiber of their beings, inextricably implicated in the mess and in the mass (Becker, 2002, p. 23).

Early in her career, Stewart felt the need to commit her artistic practice to issues of social change, thinking that she had to make a conscious choice to do so since her early interest in abstraction and its exclusive connection to the art world seemed out of

synch with her social conscience. Years later, she now believes that making art is not simply about determining categories to delineate the parameters of one's practice, but quite the opposite; she feels that it is about allowing oneself to integrate different ways of working. After thirty years of working collaboratively as a performance artist, a video maker and a photographer, Stewart expresses a desire to re-energize her practice.

In a recent interview, Stewart states the following, "I have not been inwardly focused at all in the way that a writer is when they have a blank page, and what I think painting is about when you're looking at a blank piece of paper and you have to go into yourself to start to find something deep within". Perhaps Stewart is responding to the instrumental role of most of her work and the need that she feels to investigate new directions. While Stewart alludes to the excitement of the unknown as a source of creativity, I would suggest that Stewart's introspective questioning does not refer to a repressed desire to return to the subjective individualism of modernity, but rather it represents a need to interrogate art itself and the nature of her own engagement within it since, for artists, the process of negotiating a place inside and outside society (Becker, 1996) is an ongoing project, one that can never be settled.

As part of the group exhibition *A Set of Suspicious Scene Unseen* (Figures 7.3 and 7.4) consists of a three channel video installations about a proposed plan by the local police department to set up surveillance video cameras in an area of the city populated by low-income citizens and where the drug trade and its consequences are readily visible (Brown & Artspeak Gallery, 2001). Like Foucault's panopticon, public knowledge of the video surveillance is intended to induce a state of conscious and permanent visibility that

would assure the automatic functioning of power. Through the juxtaposition of a range of video camera techniques, photographs and text captions, Stewart's piece attempts to expose the further violence perpetrated on victims despite the claim to provide protection and control, and by inference, questions the side stepping of the plan to achieve long-term benefits for marginalized people by avoiding addressing such issues as poverty and affordable housing.



Figure 7.3 Susan Stewart *A Set of Suspicions Scene Unseen* (video projection), 2001

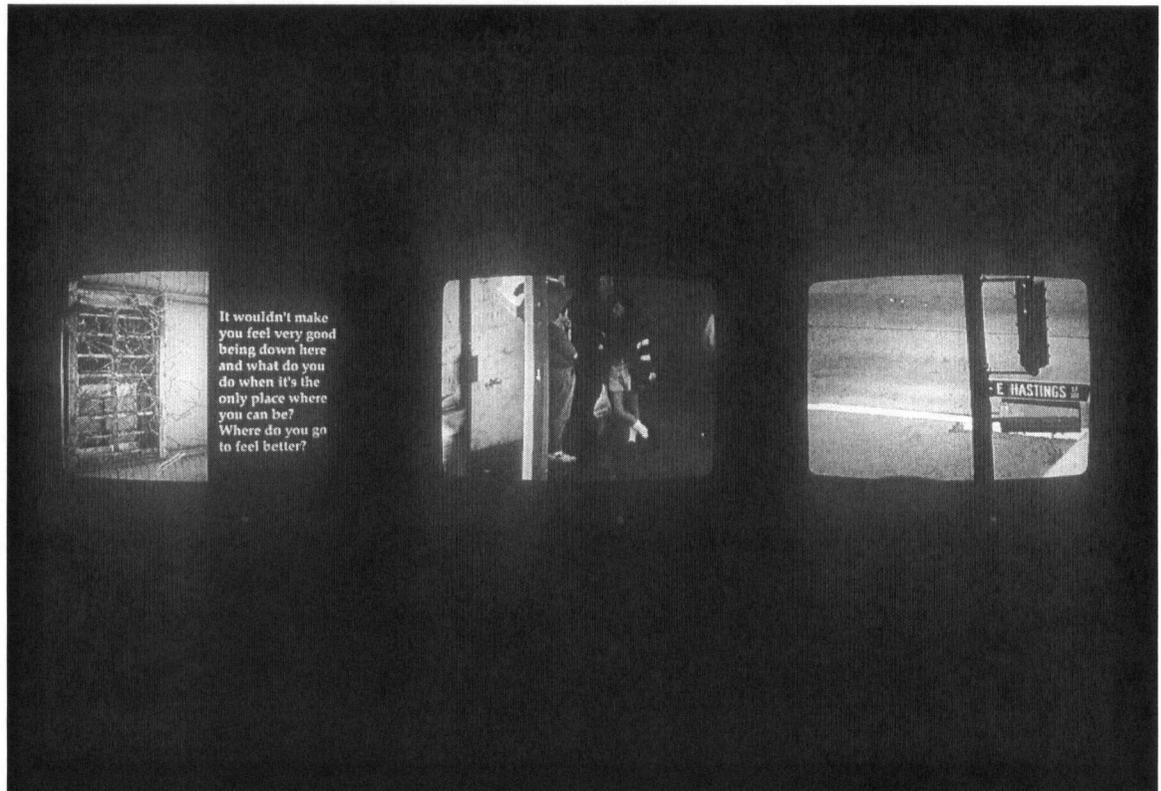


Figure 7.4 Susan Stewart **A Set of Suspicions Scene Unseen** (video projection), 2001

Whether addressing identity and gender politics, or closely examining some of the other ways power is exercised in mainstream culture, Stewart's art practice fundamentally seeks to claim public space to represent the absent, and to activate engagement with viewers/audiences challenging the status quo. But despite the activism of her practice, Stewart avoids being prescriptive by refusing to impose her own worldview on the audience, and instead creates situations in order to elicit engagement by inviting the viewer to question and to ask 'what is going on here?'

7.2 Interdisciplinarity

Stewart defines interdisciplinarity as working across difference. Indeed, working across difference is at the centre of her art practice, not exclusively in terms of the issues

she chooses to explore, but also through her collaborative approach to production. As a member of *Kiss & Tell*, Stewart learned to make art collaboratively. But as she says, “in this culture, collective art practice is associated with loss of control, power, and material reward. This conception is completely reinforced by art institutions and funding bodies, artists’ fees and grants” (Blackbridge et al., 1994, p.41). Despite a system which celebrates the individual as a genius who takes risks and stands for unique vision, it is precisely the working of differences through the collaborative process which allowed Stewart to find her own voice. As Stewart states, “in *Kiss & Tell* we have different class backgrounds.... this matter of different backgrounds plays itself out in curious ways and provides an example of how power issues can be obvious and dealt with directly, or elusive, hidden, and potentially destructive” (in Blackbridge et al., 1994, p. 41). While working with *Kiss & Tell* provided a context for art as social expression rather than self-expression, Stewart’s own approach to art production took shape out of that collaborative experience and continues to develop within the broad space of representation. She is determined to understand the perspective of her own discourse.

Stewart’s acknowledgement that collective art practice may suggest loss of control and power finds a parallel in a common critique of interdisciplinarity. For many, the notion of interdisciplinarity means a dilution of knowledge, a loss of control, and by extension, a loss of mastery. Although interdisciplinary practice is not always a matter of collaboration between individuals, according to Julie Thompson Klein, interdisciplinarity assumes interaction of some kind at its core (1990). Klein states that “interdisciplinarity has been described as both nostalgia for lost wholeness and a new stage in the evolution

of science” (1990, p.12). In the specific context of art school, discussion about interdisciplinarity often leads to debate where opposing ideological views compete. For some interdisciplinarity means the abandonment of deep knowledge in a specific discipline with its accompanying historical and technical discourse, while for others it is the inevitable outcome of contemporary art production, ushered in by new forms of communication which cut across geographical boundaries as well as new technologies, and by the intersection of different areas of knowledge. In art school, interdisciplinarity also presents a challenge to the standard organization of knowledge within a departmental structure, with boundaries established along traditional disciplines such as painting, sculpture, printmaking, etc. But if as Stewart suggests, interdisciplinarity means working across difference, then its full implementation will need to work against the current system of inherited borders which keeps art disciplines apart and fosters a continuing attachment to a pedagogical model that is blind to the realities of contemporary art practice and which continues to promote hierarchical forms of knowledge.

7.3 Pedagogy

Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants (Freire, 2000, p.88-89).

As in her art practice, the notion of difference occupies the centre of Stewart's pedagogy. Running against the grain of the master narrative, she takes as a starting point the personal, while making obvious to students that producing art is part of a semiotic

system that interacts with other semiotic systems. For instance, on the first day of art school, Stewart may engage students in a dialogue about the definition of art. Inevitably, multiple and varied points of view emerge and students are thus introduced to the idea that art is not a fixed entity but one that is linked to individual perception, culture, and experience. This process aims at leading students to consider the possibility of new meanings while at the same time realizing their individual role as bearer of knowledge and contributor to the creation of meaning. To involve students in defining art as they begin their studies may seem like an overwhelming task, but Stewart's strategy is principally to challenge assumptions from the very first day and to implicate students and herself in a generative process where everyone accesses each other's way of knowing. Furthermore, as a full participant, Stewart steers the discussion away from reaching a crystallized end since the idea is to create a context for situated learning, that is, where the classroom or the studio becomes a space for the co-production of knowledge as inseparable from learning, where knowledge is the product of the activity and situations in which it is produced (Brown et al., 1989).

As Paulo Freire writes, "the more educators and the people investigate the people's thinking, and are thus jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate" (2000, p.109). This is only the first step in a process that unfolds over the length of a course, with Stewart guiding students towards understanding that each of their respective worldviews about art is subject to change. Art is discussed not as a frozen monument, but as an ongoing project always in the making, and like all social texts, as the values that are embodied in the multiple versions of art that co-exist. From such perspective, the

investigation of art cannot be restricted to aesthetic or representational features but must also seek to uncover the value position of the maker and that of the interpreter. In such a framework the self becomes manifested within established forms of knowledge while developing new knowledge (Davis et al., 2000). In short, Stewart engages with students as active agents and producers of knowledge by facilitating dialogue as opposed to taking on the position of master. Her strategies build on students' knowledge and seek to frustrate hierarchical models that are embedded in our ways of being and in our institutions. Furthermore, Stewart's pedagogy strives to oppose authoritarian education, official voices, received knowledge and univocity, and advocates for a model of education that opens up possibilities and that depends on and encourages student ownership.

Stewart's ethico-political horizon (Biesta, 2001a) in teaching and in developing curriculum projects a sense of care and a drive for justice. Here justice does not point to a predefined ideal to which everyone should aspire, but to a state of *becoming*. As Gert Biesta writes, "it belongs to the very structure of justice itself that it never can be present [and therefore never will be present]"(2001a, p.48). As Derrida asserts, "it is by necessity a 'justice to come', which means that it is *always* [emphasis in original] to come" (Biesta, Egéa-Kuehne, 2001b, p. 48). Hence Stewart's pedagogy is first and foremost about process, that is, about becoming.

Without dialogue there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education (Freire, 2000, pp. 92-93).

On the first day of teaching a first year course, Stewart introduces students to the differences among them by asking questions about their own experience, such as where

do they come from? What do their parents think about their choice of attending art school? What do they expect from the school? The questions are not solely intended for Stewart to gauge how she might conceive her curriculum and her teaching in order to be responsive to the particulars of the group, but for students to hear their own voices and those of their peers. Their answers become material for further discussion and set a dialectical tone to the class and how together they are going to look at and discuss the objects, images, and work that they are about to produce and be exposed to during the course. Early on they get introduced to the idea of excavating, or as Stewart puts it, “unpacking” ideas, concepts, objects, images, performances and other artifacts from art and from popular culture, while simultaneously unpacking their own words, responses, and ways of describing and talking about what they see, what they hear, and what they produce. This focus on inquiry builds knowledge by attempting to reveal layers of meaning beyond what seems apparent to everyone in order to access specific points of view. Corresponding to Derrida’s concept of deconstruction, this generative dialogical process deconstructs meaning in order to enlarge meaning, since “it [deconstruction] is a matter of going further, displacing, *changing* (emphasis in original) society, changing the state of things...”(Derrida, 1992, p.180). In this exchange of views, knowledge arises out of interaction, where those involved try to understand a horizon that is not one’s own in relation to one’s own (Smith, 2001).

Stewart’s pedagogical perspective is exemplified in a course called *Creative Process*. As part of this course, Stewart once required students to bring to class a machine of any kind that they found in a junk shop. The idea was to take apart the object and

create something new from it. However before students could begin taking it apart physically, Stewart guided them into a process of deconstruction which underscored the social, economic and cultural dimensions of the objects before them by asking questions:

What do the assembled objects tell us about the culture within which they have been produced? What is the relationship between their form and their function? What is their use-value? What other values do they represent? Are there any contradictions in these values? Who made them? Where do you think they were made? What materials were used? Where did the materials come from? Who used these machines and for what purpose? Are they gendered? If they are no longer functional or used what meanings do they still hold for us? In what context might you consider them as art objects? At what point do they become historical artifacts?

In response to these questions certain themes emerged, such as the capitalist pursuit of cheap labour from developing countries, the production cycle of goods versus sustainability, and the disparity between economic classes, to name a few. This process was one of highlighting what was present in the objects by excavating, unpacking, and exploring the tensions that were embedded within them as social texts (Hedges, 1998). Suppositions, assumptions and speculations become conjectures but also theories, inextricably linked to the objects and materials about to be transformed. The production of the student's own object is thus informed, not exclusively by aesthetic concerns, but by a discussion about the context, which makes it possible for them to be working with these materials. The following is an example of one's student's approach. For this project, a

First Nations student came to class with an old computer and in the end, he had discarded most of the parts except for the keys from the keyboard which he used to line the soles of a pair of shoes. In this case, the student merged two objects in a symbolic and poetic move, and the meanings engendered by this gesture are multiple and open-ended. The fusion of the shoes with the computer invites one to speculate from a number of perspectives. At the most obvious level, the 'keyboard shoes' are for walking on the detritus of technology, but as I recall when I saw the piece, it displayed qualities, which like all good art, resist closure.

As a first year project, this assignment challenges pre-conceived notions about art and begins to reduce the emphasis on art as product, in favor of art as process. As curriculum and teaching strategy, this project allows students to make connection between what they know and what they are about to discover, that is, to take something familiar and create something new. As Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler state, "to begin, inventive pedagogies must include interruptions to the familiar" (2000). Furthermore, by asking students to reach outside the art school or the art supply store to search for materials to be transformed by them, students are presented with a learning opportunity which challenges the normative aesthetic production of objects within the context of studio teaching. It also allows students early on in their studies to get a sense of the complexities of the network of production that link 'their' objects, and by extension, the many other objects that surround them to the world outside of art school. It also exposes students notions of evaluating, assessing and comparing, skills that are not exclusively specific to art but are applicable to life outside of art school. This is one example of

Stewart's pedagogy which focuses not only on cognitive learning strategies, but also on metacognitive strategies, preparing students for learning to learn (Cornford, 2002).

Stewart makes a point of remaining mindful of the existing disparity between students, based on their various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and consciously works to create an educational milieu that promotes exchange rather than competition. In class critiques, she avoids making value judgments about the success or failure of students' work by focusing on their work as an entry point for discussion, and not as a marker of the students' ability to successfully measure up to an imaginary ideal. It is Stewart's goal for students to learn through the quality of the discussion generated by their work and through their own engagement with their peers, and in doing so, she questions the art apparatus itself and who validates or sets the standards for determining good or bad art. More than twenty years ago, Suzi Gablik commented on the impact of modernism on artists: "the problem has never been as acute as it is today, because individual conscience has never before been replaced by an organizational imperative that relieves one of the task of thinking for oneself" (1984, p.71). Learning to think, as a way not only to investigate their own beliefs, but also as a way to situate their beliefs within the context of their peers' own articulated values as well as that of their teachers' and the institution, invite students to form questions that may otherwise remain unarticulated, moving towards possibility, which according to Maxine Greene, is what learning should be (2001). The issues that are raised often challenge notions of the "norm", or "commonsense" or of "naturalness", that is, the hidden curriculum of the social, cultural and economic system in which we live.

Unlike in her early days of teaching, where she entered the classroom with a well-prepared plan, Stewart now relies more on the complex mediation and dialectical process that takes place with and between students to make curriculum directly related to their experience and to the particular concerns of the moment. Her approach, of building teaching around discourse by inviting students to join in a dialogue, presents a particular challenge to the notion of teaching and learning to achieve mastery. Indeed, Stewart's efforts to create an environment that shifts the focus away from art as autonomous object to art as manifestation of a specific cultural, social, and economic moment, works against many aspects of the hidden curriculum of art school (Ahola, 2000; Margolis, 2001).

For example, one of the first lessons that students learn, even prior to their first day of class, comes from the selection process for admission, which is largely based on the evaluation of a portfolio of work. Since it is a competitive process, students learn that based on the objects, images, or other kinds of artworks they have presented, someone (the authority) has determined that their work was more deserving for admission than that of other applicants. They also learn that they did not have to talk about their work for it to have value or meaning. In fact they did not even have to be there, and therefore "my work speaks for itself" is a cliché that still has potency in art school and behind which some students, and often faculty, find refuge. The emphasis on the object as a stand-alone indicator of suitability for art school admission is also reinforced by popular pre-college or community based courses whose objective is to improve the quality of the admission portfolio. As Michael Apple states, "curriculum...is the social product of contending forces" (quoted in Pinar, 1995, p. 243). Art school students learn in and outside

classrooms and studios through their interactions with others and through the practices that have become institutionalized in and outside art school. Hidden curriculum works to reproduce dominant cultural values (McLaren, 2003), and in art school this could be that:

- *The object matters more than process* - reinforced by exhibitions within the school and in the art world as well, and by the economic system of the art market.
- *One must be competitive to be successful* - emphasized through merit-based scholarship, curatorial selection of work for exhibition, awards, etc.
- *It is imperative to learn the game* (Ahola, 2000) - that is, the kinds of attitude, values, modes of being that one must develop to be successful within the school and beyond.

Thus the expectations and attitude of many art students, when entering art school, are founded on a belief that art is essentially determined through the objects and images that artists make. This is reinforced in several ways, not only by the admission process mentioned above, but also by notions of art that are in circulation in mainstream culture. New forms of production, made possible by increased accessibility to digital technology, have developed into areas called 'digital art', 'new media art', or 'computer art' to name a few, and they have gradually altered the ways younger generations may think about art and about object and image making. According to Derrick De Kerckhove, "we are forever being made and remade by our own inventions"(1995, p.5). In a world where technology allows us to experience the world differently, where we are invited to "see more, hear more and feel more", as stated by Karl-Heinz Stockhausen (in De Kerckhove, 1995, p.85), where we encounter the world with our senses extending into cyberspace,

one might speculate that how we teach today may begin to look differently from how it did when today's teachers were students. I believe that it is also worth pointing out here that because many young art students enter art school without having had broad exposure to contemporary art venues such as non-commercial art galleries or artists-run-centres, they may not be familiar with these contexts and the work that they show, most of which specifically seeking to expose the complexities of art beyond its materiality.

While teaching a senior level course, Stewart recently had an experience which she feels was illuminating. In a team taught class that she shared with a colleague whose ideology about art Stewart considers to be diametrically opposed to hers, she had a most productive encounter. Stewart remarked that students saw that difference could be exciting. They saw that someone could be very passionate about the edges of a painting while someone else could be equally passionate about the gender politics generated by the same painting. To have a team with opposing views in one classroom, allowed students to make sense of their own confusion, faced with conflicting opinions from teachers in separate classrooms, without having to feel that they had to necessarily align themselves with the beliefs of one over the other. They saw that there are different and multiple approaches to making and viewing art and many ways to assess quality other than that based on the economic exchange value of the Western world art market system. As Baker writes, following a study about constructing receptive space for productive conversations, "a spirit of openness to hear differences is associated with a sense of increased opportunities for learning" (2002, p.109).

Stewart firmly believes that to be exposed to different perspectives can only enrich and broaden students' own understanding of their position. In the case of the senior class, because of the tacit agreement to respect each other, Stewart and her colleague modeled difference as a bridging strategy. From that experience, Stewart feels that such occasion should be formalized, suggesting that team teaching should be organized around difference rather than around shared beliefs, medium, or interests. She asks, "What is a good pairing to produce change at numerous levels?" This contrasts with the view of Becker (1996), who suggests setting up "committees" or seminars in art school that bring together faculty who may work in different media but who share similar goals in art making under a specific theme. However, both Becker and Stewart share a desire to educate students as informed art practitioners and to that end they both recognize that art schools, as they are currently constituted, may not serve that purpose.

By focusing on difference, Stewart's approach also presents a challenge to the notion that being a committed artist means complying with the exigencies of the medium and materials with which one works. This was the message that Stewart received during her own art education in the 70s, and which still lingers on today in the structures of our institutions, which are mostly centered around disciplines.

In the context of contemporary art, where new forms of production and technologies open up new ways of working, and where even an old medium such as painting is part of a changing constellation of elements that are in flux, Stewart's approach to her work as an artist and as a pedagogue provides a critical standpoint from which to examine current practices. In doing so, we must ask how our institutions serve

existing and changing conditions without simply discarding traditional forms of production to make way for new ones, but rather by exploring ways for any medium to critically address substantive issues.

8 ERIC METCALFE

At first glance it seems difficult to connect the dots between the eclectic components of Eric Metcalfe's art practice. After all, what do painted replicas of ancient Greek pottery and an installation based on film noir have in common? His work always displays exquisite craftsmanship, which perhaps is a legacy of Metcalfe's traditional artistic training. However, it consistently evades simple categorization. Early on, his teachers perceived Metcalfe as a promising young painter. However towards the end of his formal studies, Metcalfe was exposed to more experimental methods of production such as video, mechanical reproduction and Polaroid photography, which led him to explore new directions. In retrospect, it was not his departure from painting to newer forms of art making which early on made his practice innovative, but rather his collaborative approach to working with other artists. In a world where, for the most part, the value of an artist is as much bound to authorship as it is to being a generator of ideas given form through trained craft skills, sharing the creative process with others perhaps represents a more significant challenge to conventions than the particular means and materials Metcalfe uses to make art.

If the participation of other artists continues to play an essential role in Metcalfe's creative process, this is also reflected in his approach to teaching, as he positions himself from the perspective that art exists in a community of interrelated individuals and interrelated contexts.

8.1 Drawing as a Connecting Line

I have chosen here to focus specifically on the role of drawing in Metcalfe's work

since it serves to illuminate some important aspects of his art practice. If drawing evokes the making of a mark on a surface it also refers to a process of pulling out. Both meanings apply to Eric Metcalfe. It is indeed through drawing that Metcalfe negotiates his way through his diverse projects, generating and conceptualizing ideas, attempting to give form to them, relying on drawing as a language through which he communicates with his collaborators. Indeed, drawing puts into play the way in which matter is figured out (Butler, 1999). It defines the shared space where prototypes are imagined and debated and where the visual plenitude of the works to be realized can only be suggested. As an act of mediation, drawing requires faith and trust and the line must translate ideas clearly enough for them to take form in other hands. Eric Metcalfe tells his students that to draw requires a specific way of holding the pencil different from that for “writing a letter to their grandmothers”. He wants them to work against their own grain to avoid finding comfort in the familiar, readily admitting that he is more concerned with expanding the students' vocabulary than for them to achieve a specific level of mastery. As he says during an interview,

I am not trying to teach drawing so that they can draw like Michelangelo. Other people can do this better than me. I am interested in drawing as an entry point into media. I often tell my students that drawing may seem retro these days but I still think that it is important to have a way of looking at something through the hand. I don't think that drawing, as a way of rendering things in a masterful way is important anymore.

I will now turn to one of Metcalfe's projects so as to provide further insight into his

art practice. Based on a single illustrated page from a handbook on Greek art, Eric Metcalfe creates a fictional museum, *The Attic Project* (Figures 8.1 & 8.2), which includes three-dimensional replicas of amphora, vases, urns and other vessels from the Attic period (White, 2000)

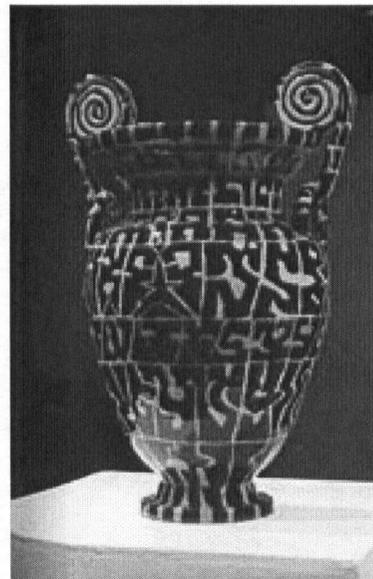
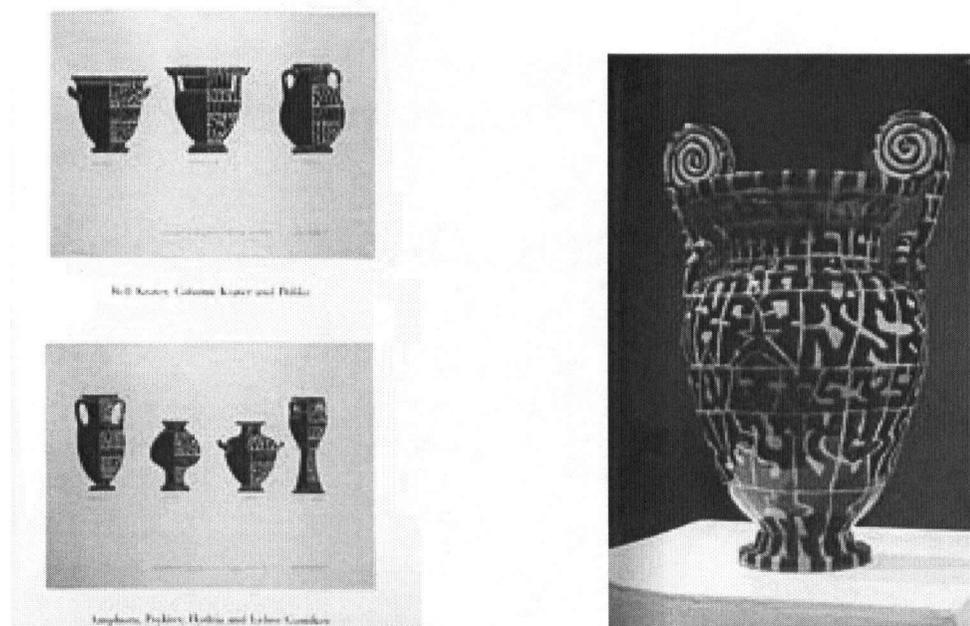


Figure 8.1 **The Attic Project** (gouache on paper), 2001 Figure 8.2 **The Attic Project** (glazed ceramic), 2001

In this instance, he collaborated with a ceramist and potter who produced the objects which were then painted and glazed by Metcalfe. The drawings included in the installation seem more like an extension of the three-dimensional objects than the typical preliminary studies that one might expect in such a context. The half painted black shapes on paper are reminiscent of illustrations such as those found in texts on archeology, intended to depict more vividly the original faded designs and colours of long lost objects. However the surface patterns of the vessels of *The Attic Project* are Metcalfe's

own and do not attempt to replicate those found in the originals. Instead they evoke a junction between past and present by juxtaposing the ancient shapes of the urns with Metcalfe's own shapes and colours, extending from the objects to the framed gouaches on paper and onto the wall in a large mural drawing. For those familiar with the artist's earlier work, the pattern itself alludes to the passing of time as it evolved from the metamorphosis of leopard spots, a distinct feature of Metcalfe's artistic practice and persona from the seventies, into geometric forms that sometimes display abstracted musical instruments, a reference to the artist's interest in and extensive knowledge of jazz music.

The leopard spots in Metcalfe's artistic persona were not simply for aesthetic effect, but more specifically they functioned as a sign of Western culture's appropriation of the exotic and promotion of consumption (Watson, 1992). They also allude to the artist's commitment to blurring the line between art and life. Leopard spots allowed Metcalfe to take on a new identity, that of Dr. Brute. As Scott Watson writes, "Dr. Brute was an armature against society and its demands. It was about setting an agenda for alternative lifestyles and alternative art in a world where traditional forms of high art had become irrelevant" (1992). Indeed in the context of traditional forms of high art, drawing has always been considered peripheral to painting or sculpture. And while drawing might seem to be essentially conservative, compared to other forms of image making, in *The Attic Project*, it refuses to be contained within traditional definitions and purposes, such as drawing as studies for other media, or drawing as a means of representing how things appear to the eye. It is thus in this liminal space that for Metcalfe drawing in effect

refuses to be constrained by conventional practices spilling out instead imposingly onto the wall.

Metcalfe is not the first artist whose work refers to the impact of the museum on works of art. Many contemporary artists such as Fred Wilson, Hans Haacke, Jenny Holzer, and Daniel Buren among others have addressed the ideologically biased foundations of the museum, looking at issues of race, capitalism, class and history respectively. However in *The Attic Project*, Metcalfe turns to the museum with tongue firmly in cheek, alluding to the particular institutional ethos that imbues objects with the aura of time. As he does in most of his work, Metcalfe uses humour to investigate ideas and to engage the viewer. Thus by constructing a museum within the context of an art gallery, Metcalfe plays with the notion of *mise-en-scène* calling attention to the conventions of both institutional spaces.

Staging is a common strategy of Metcalfe and one that he used early on in his artistic practice from performance to video, and from drawing to photography. Rather than examining the whole of his oeuvre, in this dissertation I will look at specific aspects of another recent project titled, *Laura* as it brings to the fore how drawing plays a significant role in Metcalfe's artistic and pedagogical practices.

Laura is an installation that consists of a fictitious stage set, referring to the film noir *Laura* by Otto Preminger. A mantelpiece, a grandfather clock, two vases, a silhouette profile of a female head, a shotgun, curtains and lights are some of the elements that contribute to this carefully constructed *mise-en-scène*. Each element of the installation is carefully crafted, hinting at the possibility that perhaps this could have been

the original set for the film. The opening page of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition shows a reproduction of a sketch by Metcalfe (2004) depicting him on the set with the caption *Jim Breukelman Shoot* (Figure 8.3). A few pages later, there is a black and white photograph of Metcalfe taken on the set as depicted in the sketch (Figure 8.4). But what is striking here is the markedly different atmosphere depicted in the sketch and in the photograph. While the drawing shows the artist in full figure on the film set with gun in holster and hands on his waist, his smile as well as the fluid and broken lines imbue the whole scene with a sense of playfulness. In contrast, the photograph shows Metcalfe standing in the foreground, the surface of his bright white shirt interrupted by the cast shadow of film noir's archetypal Venetians blinds, looking directly into the lens of the camera with the film set in the background.

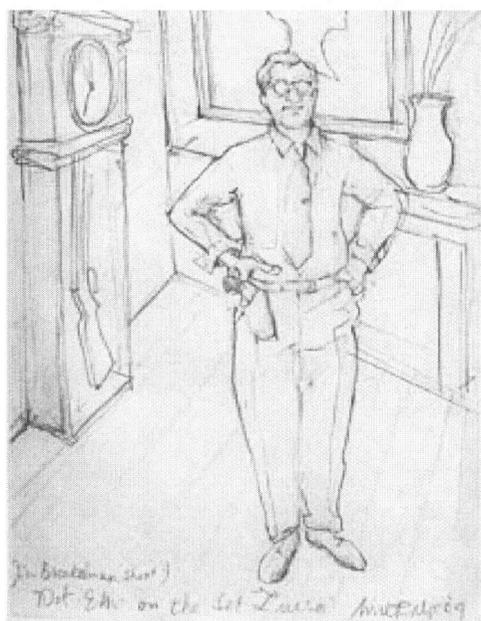


Figure 8.3 Eric Metcalfe **Laura** (drawing on paper), 2004

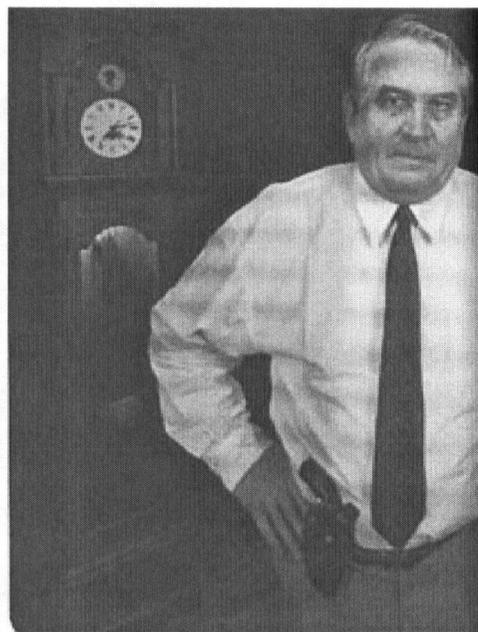


Figure 8.4 Eric Metcalfe **Laura** (photograph by Jim Breukelman), 2004

One must then consider the drawing and the photograph together to realize that they

simultaneously represent aspects of how the artist works with collaborators. Here, the drawing is evidently an entry point and not a blueprint for the photographer to attempt to replicate in another medium. Indeed the differences between the drawing and the photograph imply that a process of intersubjective exchange took place between the artist and his collaborator. It is really from the catalogue that one can begin to get a better sense of how Metcalfe works with collaborators.

In addition to the sketches leading to the photographs, Metcalfe contributed with writer, Nancy Shaw, whose texts read as letters to Laura, the invisible protagonist of the film, but also *Laura*, the film. The text directly alludes to the genesis of the project by recalling Metcalfe's first experience viewing Preminger's film as a child and is typewritten on a technical form such as those used for film shoots. The effect of the text situates Metcalfe as a curious five year old watching a film noir, and calls attention to the cinematic apparatus and the impact it has had on his artistic production all through his life. As Laura Mulvey writes, "curiosity projects itself onto, and into, space through its drive to investigate and uncover secrets, carrying with it connotations of transgression and danger" (Mulvey, 1996). Throughout the catalogue the text moves back and forth between a critical analysis of film noir, descriptive narration, and biographical notes.

Dear Laura:

As I enter the gallery's scenography, I am transported to a space commenting on your own. The artist's recollection of your condition is constituted, in part, through his viewing of your performance when he was a young child. Recollecting his horror and love of objects, he has chosen to evoke your intersections in objective

form - a schema worked through and over (Shaw, 2004, p.45).

I do not intend to explore the psychoanalytical dimension of the artist's production in this dissertation, but it is important to note that the reproductions of Metcalfe's sketch book pages, scraps of paper with lists and diagrams and a compact disc of an audio soundscape, all inserted in the catalogue, not only reveal information that is rendered inaccessible by the slick and beautifully crafted set/installation of the gallery, but also offers to the viewer/reader an additional perspective that underscores the autobiographical aspects of the piece. The catalogue in effect seems to function as the backdrop for the set, behind which the messiness and ambiguity of the creative process is carefully concealed.

For *Laura* as well as other projects, Metcalfe draws objects, ideas, concepts and then turns to other artists to fabricate them. Although he publicly acknowledges the work of his collaborators, for Metcalfe, it seems that collaboration is less a question of cultural form or ideological position than a pragmatic strategy for getting things done. While Metcalfe's art involves the skills of others, I would suggest that he does not intentionally situate himself to undermine his own individual authorship and autonomy. But nevertheless, I submit that such interactions begin to erode the romantic image of the artist as a solitary genius positing instead a community of co-creators (Kester, 2006).

The notion of working collaboratively brings attention to the conditions under which art comes into being (Roberts, 2004). While even the solitary painter relies on the labour of paint manufacturers, factory workers, transportation services and store clerks among others, the work of those involved is largely hidden as it takes place outside the

context of art. As part of a market economy, their production provides artists with 'raw' materials but remains innocuous when a painting hangs on a wall. I would suggest that the same applies for large public sculptures that are visibly fabricated by industrial means rather than in artists' studios. Even in 'environmental art' where artists such as Robert Smithson, Richard Long, Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer and others use natural materials such as soil, water, or rocks, such work often involves heavy machinery and is generally more frequently viewed in the art world through photographic reproductions than through direct physical encounter with the work, and like painting, photography represents a whole production chain.

The idea of the artist's studio being a self-sufficient environment, or more specifically a space where materials are brought in, altered, and eventually returned back into the world in various forms as art, has a long history (Goldstein, 1996; Echevarria, 2000; Pevsner, 1940). However as Guadalupe Echevarria, director of Ecole des Beaux-Arts of Bordeaux states, "it is to be noted that the atelier has always had the double meaning of the workshop where the artist works, and the team with which the artist works" (2000, p.201). While it is clear that regardless of scale, process, or medium, all art is part of a complex network of production that involves more than the individual artist, it is worth noting that in more modern times, the concept of the studio as being the domain of the individual artist has largely dominated the discourse as opposed to the idea of the studio as a conglomeration of collective activity. A deep-rooted belief in the notion of the studio as the private space of the artist not only helps to promote the idea of the artist as essentially having to be isolated from society in order to be creative, but also supports the

image of the artist as an autonomous individual with all the skills to make whatever he/she chooses to give shape to ideas. I would suggest that this notion is also deeply embedded in the structure and pedagogy of art schools. On the other hand, art explicitly produced collaboratively offers a new understanding of artistic authorship (Green, 2001) and challenges conventional ideas about artistic mastery in that a work comes into being as the result of collective efforts and not as the expression of individual genius. As Green writes, “the process problematizes straightforward suppositions about both artistic identity and the origin of postmodern art” (Green, 2001, p.xi).

8.2 The Artists as a Member of a Community

Eric Metcalfe continues to work with others, developing ideas and motifs collaboratively. His projects have become far more complex over the years, in step with contemporary media-based artworks generally; the issues too have moved away from the private obsession, self-knowledge and self-indulgence, and toward a shared concern for consumer consciousness and social history (Gayle, 1992, p.61).

Eric Metcalfe is a founding member of The Western Front Society, one of Canada's first artist-run-centres and artists' collectives. Formed in Vancouver in 1973 by eight artists whose desire it was to create a space for the exploration and creation of new art forms, it very rapidly gained a major international reputation for its innovative and experimental approach to artistic practice, which embraced multidisciplinary approaches, new technologies and an interest in non-Western cultures such as contemporary art from Asia and Latin America (<http://www.front.bc.ca/>, 2006). Throughout its history, the Western Front has encouraged interaction between people and activities rather than promoting a notion of art as product striving to achieve the status of masterpiece.

The social network that continues today to be at the core of the Western Front's

existence was influenced, at an earlier time, by the Fluxus group with whom Western Front members had a connection. Although I do not intend to delve into the history of Fluxus or of the Western Front in any depth, it is worth noting the parallel between the artists of Fluxus and those of the Western Front, and their shared approach to the production of art as a form of interactivity. Writing about Fluxus, Craig Saper states:

The term interactive suggests the shift away from the notion of passing some unadulterated information from the mind of an author, an artist, or a teacher directly to the eyes and ears of a spectator. Instead, participants interact with ideas, playing through possibilities rather than deciding on the meaning of a work once and for all (1998, p.137).

As Ron Burnett writes, “the transformation of art from an object oriented enterprise to a lived experience for artist and community alike is what has defined the WF [Western Front] throughout its history” (2000, p.351). As a place for experimentation, the Western Front promotes art and community simultaneously, existing as a resource for the production of art, and also, as a site for the public to interact with artists and their work. In his essay, *Museum in a Hat*, Burnett situates the Western Front in relation to the 1960s Intermedia movement where audio-visual technology was used to create “emotionally real experiences” which, as he suggests, anticipates current developments in computer and networked technologies. But the interactive aspect of the Western Front's productions was not only limited to audio-visual technology but was also enacted through more simple means such as the postal system. In the late sixties, Metcalfe joined New York artist Ray Johnson's mail-art network and worked collaboratively with other artists to

produce performance events that were communicated by mail (Watson, 1992). As Metcalfe states,

I was very active in correspondence art in 1969 and curiously enough, it was precursor to a lot of what we are doing now with e-mail and faxing and the Internet. But I was one of the early people practicing that, and that's why I connected with all these people, and in this vast correspondence network, I became known as Dr. Brute (quoted in Burnett, 2000, p.356).

The notion of a network of artists, circulating ideas and materials, engaged in producing work as a result of their interconnection challenges the belief in a solitary maker who contributes discrete objects to the world. The work produced at the Western Front was indeed the expression of a collective movement bringing people together around the creative act (Burnett, 2000).

The Western Front and the network of artists associated with it modeled interactivity much before technology made it possible to communicate instantly across continents and produce work with aesthetic qualities that, not long ago, would have been out of reach without investing a substantial amount of time to develop a range of specialized skills, or without the means of accessing significant resources²⁵. It is not only the capacity to communicate quickly or to have access to new forms of production that is central to interactivity, but also the issues set in motion through the active interrelations

²⁵ To give a simple example, it is now possible to construct an image without learning such skills as typesetting, photography, colour separation, and professional printing just by using readily accessible computer software and print that image without any intermediary step. This image can also be instantly transferred to someone else's computer across the world.

between players and mediums (Arata, 1999). As Arata writes, “interactivity in its most general form is a mode of creation, a way of being, a perspective” (see <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers.html>). Within the context of art, this relatively new phenomenon presents a challenge to the disciplinary lines that have traditionally defined art itself and the organization of art schools around departments such as painting, sculpture and photography, to name only a few, as these no longer can account for the full breadth of new possibilities. Without wanting to ignore the specific impact of digital technology on art production, I would suggest that whether it is via the postal system or through the Internet, technologically mediated environments not only facilitate exchanges between artists, and between artists and audiences, but they also create communities that link the artist to the outside world, not only as a means of disseminating the outcome of production but potentially as a means of production itself.

8.3 Pedagogy

That the Western Front is a place where artists have always learned from other artists seems to have an impact on Eric Metcalfe's teaching. As he states during an interview, “the Western Front is probably the best teacher and my practice is very informed by the Front”. Indeed for him it is imperative that students look outside the formal setting of the school in order to make them aware of the limited impact of the institutional environment of the school on their learning and on their future practice.

If Metcalfe extends himself in his own work by taking on public personae such as Dr. Brute or Detective McPherson, he also demands from his students that they put themselves in situations as artists outside the familiar educational milieu. He does so, by

demanding that students connect to the local artistic milieu as an integral part of their studies. In an interview, Metcalfe speaks of what it means to have an artistic practice: “to have a practice, you have to have a dialogue; you have to be aware of what is going on; you go to all the openings; you make art; you have responses to the work that you see”. And this is also how Metcalfe positions himself in a studio class. He states, “if you come in the classroom and you don't look like you are a part of something, then the class is going to lose confidence in you - you have to know what you are saying; you have to have a presence”. I suggest that the sense of being “part of something” is a key point of Metcalfe’s approach to pedagogy. Indeed, in his artistic practice as well as in teaching, the notion of belonging to a community of peers is crucial. As Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler write, “great teachers of writing or mathematics or dance need not be great authors, mathematicians, or performers. They must, however, be persons who have a deep interest in and involvement with the form they are teaching” (2000, p.199). While Metcalfe is a very accomplished artist, as a teacher he seems to rely less on his own personal achievements than on his close connection to a segment of the art community, as reflected in his pedagogy.

In his emphasis on making students aware of how they engage with the art community outside the school, Metcalfe positions himself and the students as individuals interacting within a context. For example, a project that he once assigned to a senior class required that each student develop a mock exhibition proposal for one of the artist-run-centres in the city. Metcalfe brought floor plans of the various galleries to the class and students were then asked to visit the galleries in order to select one to which they would

like to submit a proposal. This of course required students to become aware of the differing missions, curatorial directions or objectives of the various galleries in the city. As Metcalfe states during an interview, “only one or two students had already heard of these galleries. The response was fantastic! It was a really good exercise”... “now they know about the connection to the community out there”. Introducing students to a specific sector of galleries in the city did not only serve to inform them of their existence, but more importantly, in selecting one gallery over another, students had to consider how their own work related to the published mission of each gallery. In short, they had to consider the specificity of how a work is produced, presented and received, having to look beyond art as isolated discrete objects suitable for display in any art related contexts (Stiles, 2004). Metcalfe’s approach to teaching and, more specifically, the emphasis that he puts on art as occupying a place in the social realm, tends to undermine the notion of art that privileges the primacy of individual talent operating in isolation. Furthermore, within an art school context, art may begin to be understood less as a body of knowledge to be transmitted by the artist/teacher/master to the students, and more as an evolving phenomenon that is constantly being redefined by artists themselves, and also by an ever shifting and complex network of connections within which art and artists exist. As Charles Esche writes on the topic of teaching art, “if anything needs to be taught, it is a particular attitude to the world and the confidence to reinvent the term art every time you make a new work” (see http://societyofcontrol.com/library/_a-e/esche_protoacademies.txt).

Jamming on the idea is how Metcalfe describes how he conducts critique sessions, a common teaching strategy in art school. His description seems to reflect an improvisational approach to the critique process, reminiscent of a group of jazz musicians responding to each other's music as it evolves without predetermined outcomes other than collectively creating music. During an interview, Metcalfe states, "it's like playing in a band. It's a kind of unpredictable communication process that happens spontaneously". Yet the unpredictable character of the critique may not necessarily be the result of Metcalfe's own approach to the process but more a reflection of the practice itself, which within the context of art education, has a long history, but also flexible meaning (Elkins, 2001). However, unlike in a improvisational jazz session where musicians are engaged in replying to each other's sounds and notes in a reciprocal exchange, during a critique session the teacher and the students generally focus on the object(s), image(s), or performance(s) of one student at the time. Therefore the one-way nature of the critique tends to put the student at the receiving end and not necessarily as an active participant in a process of mutual exchange. Nevertheless, Metcalfe's use of the term "jamming on the idea" perhaps has to do with the discursive aspect of the critique process where a group of individuals sharing a common context learn to function as an interpretive community (Elkins, 2001). Speaking about the critique process in his class, Metcalfe says, "I tell students that I want them to bring their work to class and we are going to talk about it. We are going to talk and see how you can improve this drawing, this piece of work. I want everybody to be involved. Everybody is helping everybody else out".

In the context of the critique process, I would like to return briefly to Metcalfe's assignment mentioned earlier that required students to develop a mock proposal to show their work and select a specific gallery based on their published mission statements. Looking at Foucault's genealogical investigation of methods for care of the self, Hutton writes, "if the making of culture is a creative process, it is also a prescriptive one in that the vocabularies we employ and the institutions through which we act provide patterns that set boundaries and give directions to future creative effort" (1988, p.122). I would, therefore, suggest that in calling upon individuals to help their fellow students to improve on their work, Metcalfe also calls attention to the role of external authority in validating art. "Jamming on the idea" is thus perhaps less a free floating exchange of views among peers and more a process of initiation to the protocol, nomenclature and rules that allow one to begin to feel part of an art world. Furthermore, by requiring students to consider their work in an external context, Metcalfe expects students to situate themselves in relation to that context so that they can begin to consider the implications of their own desire to become part of it or even to reject it.

It has been my own experience during critique sessions that one can often hear comments about that which is being critiqued i.e. the work, and not the artist. This is a way of mitigating the impact of the critique on the student. But as Elkins writes, "most critiques maintain the strange fiction that the work can be considered entirely apart from the person who made it" (2001, p.132). Whether this is the case in Metcalfe's class I do not know, but his strategy of asking students to conceive and produce work to be exhibited in a specific context requires that they investigate the particulars of each gallery

in order to consider where their own work might most appropriately belong. I propose that such a strategy works against the belief in the autonomy of the art object, as the idea of separating the maker from the work seems to emphasize the contingency of meaning.

8.4 Interdisciplinarity

From this notion of crisis, I would like the viewer to, first of all, regain a fascination for the visible, and secondly, for him or her to enter the visible, that is to say, for him or for her to be able to see how much each encounter with the visible is in fact a negotiation with the invisible (Kristeva, 1998, p.19).

Art that brings the viewer closer to the conception of thought seems also to distance her/him from discipline boundaries and predictive understandings (MacLeod, 2005, p.148).

As we have seen earlier, Metcalfe is less concerned that students develop virtuoso technical skills than increase their ability to work with ideas. However, as a teacher it remains important for him that students have an appreciation for craftsmanship and for the aesthetic quality of what they produce. This appreciation for craftsmanship encapsulates an appreciation for the visible, as it suggests that it is through the visible that art engages the viewer. As Kristeva states,

we need to learn anew how to negotiate both the visible and the invisible, and this has to start with paying tribute to the visible; it is a structuring element which is essential. In other words, the production of objects is essential. The loss of skills, such as drawing or sculpture, would have very severe consequences. There are no valuable reasons to sacrifice representation (1998, p.19-20).

For Metcalfe, drawing is a way of looking at things, a way of observing the world, a way of connecting with other artists/collaborators, and also a way of connecting with

the invisible. While he might use conventional strategies to teaching drawing, he also relies on less conventional ones to introduce students to ways of thinking of the visible as leading to the invisible. As he says during an interview, "I am interested in drawing as an entry point into media". For example, by asking students to draw a story board, and calling their attention to the function of certain cinematic conventions such as leitmotiv, points of views, and perspective, Metcalfe directs students to think of drawing as a means of representing what falls between each frame of their story board, that is, what is invisible. Such an approach contrasts with more conventional methods of teaching drawing which concentrates on the development of hand/eye coordination, assuming that achieving a certain skill level must essentially precede the exploration of ideas. However what matters to Metcalfe is not necessarily bound up in teaching students to become masters in drawing, but more importantly, it is to make drawing a means of connecting to things outside of the medium itself. It is thus the instrumentality of drawing that is vital to his teaching and to his work process as an artist, and which crosses disciplinary boundaries.

While I have chosen to focus on the specific role of drawing in Metcalfe's production, I have done so as a means of pointing out how, despite the conventions that surround it, drawing serves to connect the artist and his collaborators in an interactive process of exchange where ideas are clarified and where forms begin to take shape. That the artist does not work in isolation is further emphasized in the way a significant number of projects such as *The Attic Project* and *Laura* connect to art from the past as it also calls attention to intertextuality where the meaning of art resides less in the objects but more in

the way they are received by an individual or a community of readers (Suleiman, 2001).

The notion of transcendence is thus challenged, as is the deeply rooted notion of the artist as a self-sufficient producer embedded in the structures and pedagogy of art schools.

9 TEACHING AND LEARNING IN/AS A LIVING SYSTEM

The question in education in general, and in art education in particular, that we have not yet begun to deal with is not that of specifying what we need to know and how we need to know it, of who determines this and who benefits from it. Rather, it is a question regarding how we may know what we don't yet know how to know (Rogoff, 2006, p.146).

I began this dissertation as a process of investigating my own experience as a student, a teacher, an artist and an administrator in order to understand the assumptions and beliefs that lie beneath current practices in art school education today. I followed by questioning the relevance of disciplinary pedagogies in relation to contemporary art practice. Finally, I turned to three artist pedagogues as examples of practices that challenge an overly deterministic notion of education with its underlying paradigm of mastery.

I open this last chapter with a far-reaching project from two artists, which can be understood as a trope for how one might begin to think differently about art, and by extension, about art school education. I continue by reiterating how current practices, largely based on models that support outdated paradigms of art school education, are limiting and mainly support overly deterministic notions of education. I return again to the pedagogical approaches of Laiwan, Susan Stewart and Eric Metcalfe, the three artists in this study, as they each represent more fluid alternatives which disrupt the monolithic model of mastery. Finally, I suggest directions for further research.

9.1 Painting by Numbers

In 1993 Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, two Russian émigré artists in the United States, decided to use a professional market research firm to find out people's

aesthetic preferences and tastes in painting²⁶. Polling a variety of ethnic, economic, and geographic groups, they suggest that there is an objective way of identifying the characteristics that would make a painting the most or the least desirable in the countries surveyed. They asked more than one hundred detailed questions about likes and dislikes in painting such as:

If you had to choose from the following list, which type of art would you say you prefer?

Would you say that you prefer seeing paintings of wild animals or domestic animals?

Would you say that you like it best when the painting shows them in their natural setting, or when it looks like they are in a studio?

Would you rather see paintings of outdoor scenes or indoor scenes?

If outdoors scenes, which season would you most like to see depicted?

Do you prefer paintings with thick, textured surfaces or with smooth, flat surfaces?

Do you like to see the colors blend into each other or do you like it when different colors are kept separate (Wypijewski, 1997, pp. 141-197)?

Komar and Melamid then painted the most and the least wanted paintings for a number of countries based on poll results, but at the end, the most wanted paintings for Kenya, France, Iceland, and the other countries surveyed, all looked rather similar. As philosopher Arthur Danto suggests, one can speculate broadly on the reasons behind this, such as the possibility that most people's concept of art was formed by calendar art which often shares common aesthetics with the statistically preferred forty four percent blue landscape with water and trees (1997). Perhaps the most revealing aspect of this exercise

²⁶ For an overview and images of the project go to <http://www.diacenter.org/km/>

is the imaginative way in which the artists illustrate the futility of attempting to break art into components, or understanding art as an accumulation of distinct and knowable parts.

The irony is that while it is debatable that all those paintings produced from statistics can in fact be called art, the whole project titled *Painting by Numbers*, as part of the artists' conceptually rich practice, was unequivocally recognized as such by major museums and galleries throughout the world. Indeed, if we were to follow Komar and Melamid's lead by endeavouring to articulate *each* of the material features that make *Painting by Numbers* art, I doubt that it would be as easy as what we may have been led to believe by the two artists. After all, if art could simply be discussed and taught based on a list of material criteria, as detailed as these might be, it would not account for the breadth of transformations that have taken place over time, due to the unpredictable interactions of art with other forms such as the changing political, economic and social landscapes characteristic of a living system. As addressed in chapter 2, art is art only by virtue of its place as such within the social sphere, and as such operates as a dynamic system in relation to other systems. According to Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler, "a living form is a complex body, one that emerges from the interactions of other forms, one that participates in an ongoing structural dance with similar forms, and one that, in the process, can contribute to the rise of more complex forms" (2000, p.211).

9.2 Art School Education

As discussed in this dissertation, much of art school curriculum is built around technical facilities, shops and studios with the equipment and staff to assist students in producing works to be discussed in seminars, critique sessions and courses. Today's art

schools, in effect, mimic the artist's studio, or rather the idea of the artist's studio as it once existed more than one hundred years ago when artists, sometimes with apprentices, forged everything they made from raw materials and, most of the time, from socially or culturally sanctioned themes. Furthermore, it seems appropriate to call attention here to the common practice in teaching that involves discussing the work of other artists, which usually means that the work discussed in a painting course is mostly that of painters, and in a photography course that of photographers, and so on. This also means that it is possible for students to see things, and to experience ideas, almost exclusively through the perspective of one studio discipline without ever being exposed to the notion that diverse interpretations or debates around similar ideas in a range of mediums, by *bumping* into each other, may potentially lead to new ideas or new forms of production in response to contemporary experiences.

As it currently is, the overall art school pedagogical model is thus intimately linked to the segregation of studio disciplines and to the production of objects, images, performances and other artifacts. Teaching is thus focused on enabling production based on developing knowledge largely through repeated practice.

As implied by the whole project of *Painting by Numbers*, art is more than the accumulation of parts. Indeed if we think of art as a complex system, we must then reconsider the mechanistic and reductionist thinking that is characteristic of modern science, and which as a framework, largely continues to inform the decisions that we as educators in art schools make. It seems that in order to understand art as a complex system, and by extension, of art school education as such, we would be required to

critically examine the historical present and all our relations to the practices that have been in place for centuries. As teachers we must perhaps begin by questioning why mastery, as a set trajectory with some final destination or markers that determine that it has indeed been achieved or is on its way, has endured for so long as the root metaphor for curriculum and pedagogy in art schools.

9.3 Conclusion

In this frame, where curriculum becomes process, learning and understanding come through dialogue and reflection (Doll, 1993, p.156).

When Laiwan asks a young student to frame his painting practice in relation to his place in the world, her concerns are not simply to ensure that the student situates his paintings within the context of other paintings, but equally important, that he becomes conscious of the interrelatedness of painting with his unfolding experience in the world. In essence, she is asking the student to think about what painting means to him as someone who is young, American and about to move to Germany to be close to the person he loves. This does not preclude learning the skills to put paint on canvas, but it requires a different view of curriculum and pedagogy as encompassing lived experience. As William Doll writes “the self of *currere*, the very beginning of curriculum as Dewey knew so well, must always interact with the text of life” (in Doll & Gough, 2002, p.50). Such perspective reflects a view of curriculum that is iterative and discursive, that is, as part of ever changing circumstances.

As a teacher, Susan Stewart creates opportunities for collective sense-making that place process at the centre of art making and challenge the modernist emphasis on art as

objects (Fried, 1998; Greenberg, 1961; Greenberg & O'Brian, 1986). For Stewart, curriculum is also a dynamic process that encourages diversity, multiple perspectives, and exploration (Fleener, 2002). As discussed earlier, the machines that she asked her students to bring to class as a starting point for making other objects is clearly not just a simple found materials exercise. It is one of the imaginative ways in which curriculum emerges, not from predefined outcomes, but as a result of interactions between students, teacher, materials, objects, and the world inside and outside the institution, that is, out of experience. Thus the objects that the students eventually create are not only made of plastic, metal or electronic components, but also out of a discursive engagement with these materials as nodes in a network of relationships.

Like Laiwan and Stewart, Eric Metcalfe imagines curriculum as emphasizing connections. The assignment that required students to develop a proposal to exhibit at one of the artist-run-centres in the city necessitated that each of them reflect on her or his own emerging practice in relation to the different mandates of these galleries²⁷. Thus, rather than reinforcing a notion of the art world, and ultimately, of art as dominated by market values, by being exposed to the divergent mandates of each artist-run-centre, students are

²⁷ The following web sites give a sense of the breadth and differences of gallery mandates; <http://artspeak.ca>
<http://www.vaarc.ca>
<http://www.orgallery.org>
<http://www.helenpittgallery.org/>
<http://www.grunt.bc.ca>
<http://www.front.bc.ca>

invited to engage in a dialogue with diverse communities²⁸. This approach to curriculum and to pedagogy situates the school/institution within complex networks of relationships, rather than as an autonomous site that prepares students for a reality that is momentarily suspended or that mainly exists outside the institutional walls.

9.3.1 Complexity Science and Art School Education: A Direction for Further Research

As pedagogues, I suggest that Laiwan, Stewart and Metcalfe are contributing to creating new inquiry structures that challenge boundaries between studio disciplines, between school and non-school, between and among places of learning, creating occasions where multiple experiences and interpretations co-emerge and interact.

Although the objects, images and performances that Laiwan, Stewart and Metcalfe produce demonstrate a commitment to craftsmanship, it is worth noting that they do not place the development of craft skills as the primary factor, or at the core of their work either as artists or as educators in art school. That each of them see curriculum as a process of engagement may very well mean that for them, there are no divisions between teaching, learning, curriculum, pedagogy and their own art practice. Indeed, I would suggest that the perspectives that they represent challenge the organizational and pedagogical structures of most art schools, which as seen earlier, largely revolve around the acquisition and refinement of a range of skills and ideas within a context of segregated studio disciplines. Such partitioning, I suggest, inhibits the bumping, colliding and juxtaposition of ideas, all essential elements of recursive living systems, and topics

²⁸ I want to note that the artists-run-centre movement in Canada can itself be understood as an iterative process where new galleries and new mandates regularly emerge as a result of changing conditions, situations and relations.

for further research. Indeed, we may ask: what are the implications of understanding art school education as a dynamic and adaptive system? While individual talent has traditionally been at the core of selecting and promoting students in art school, “complexity science compels us to attend more to the creativity and intelligence of emergent collectives such as classroom groupings and societies than to the abilities of individuals” (Davis & Sumara, 2007, p. 59). How can we then re-imagine the development of craft skills beyond the manifestation of individual abilities, and instead, see such skills as a way of expanding the space of the possible and broadening what can be known and done (Davis & Sumara, 2007)? And what are the epistemological implications of the concept of emergence (Osberg & Biesta, 2007) within the context of art schools?

I believe that in re-thinking the purposes of art school education within theories of complexity, we have the opportunity to engage in a constant interrogation of teaching and learning, avoiding the propensity to replace one grand narrative with another.

9.3.2 Recursive loop

For the past decade I have been writing and speaking about the education of artists. I have theorized, analyzed, and deconstructed how we educate our students and why we must finally break, in both theory and practice, with the nineteenth-century Romantic notion of the artist that has dominated our educational institutions for almost two centuries (Becker, 1999, p.11).

I offer the following anecdote as an open-ended closure. Several years ago, I was welcoming an assembly of new first year students on their first day of art school. As usual, many of them had come to us directly from high school and looked very young. I talked to them about what they might expect during the following months and years. That

took me to my grandmother's garden and the wonderful tomatoes that she grew, which despite my best efforts, I have never been able to match in my own garden. I told the students about biting into the juicy, freshly picked tomatoes as a child and how the memory of the taste lingers on today. I told them about the exotic varieties that I grew such as *Tigerella*, red with yellow stripes, and the tiny yellow pear shaped ones. I spoke about seeing the beautiful tomatoes at the market located near the art school, and about feeling the distinct gap between appearance and taste. I talked about the pictures of tomatoes on display in food magazines, those with the perfectly shiny red and unblemished surface. They are pitched as the perfect specimens, the model for the ideal tomato, the one that I look for when I want to buy one. Then I asked the students how many of them had used Photoshop, a relatively new piece of software at the time, and the little stamp tool that allows the user to correct unwanted flaws in photographs. There you have it! The perfect tomato! So now, tomato growers only have to catch up to the image. And next thing you see is those homogeneous surfaced tomatoes in the market that do not taste as good as they look.

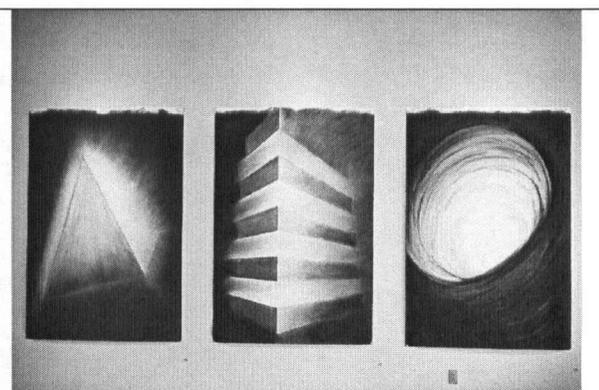
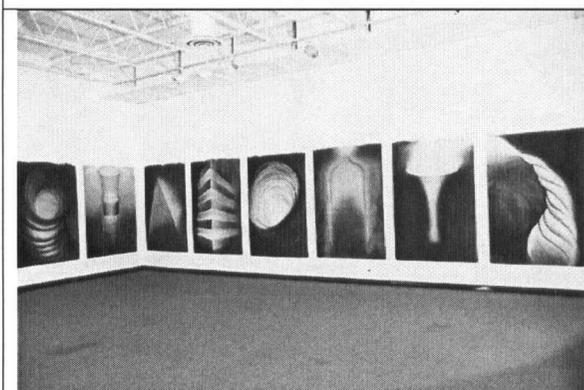
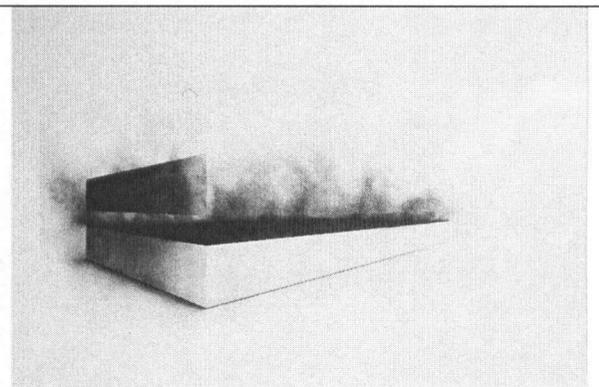
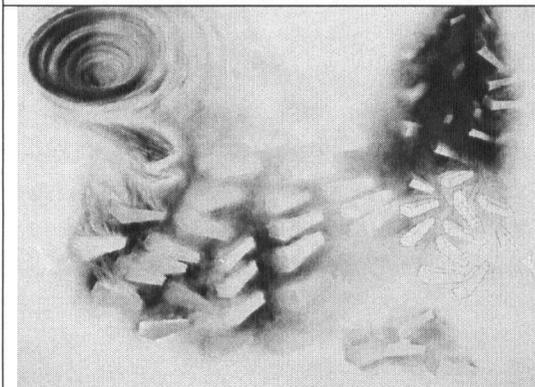
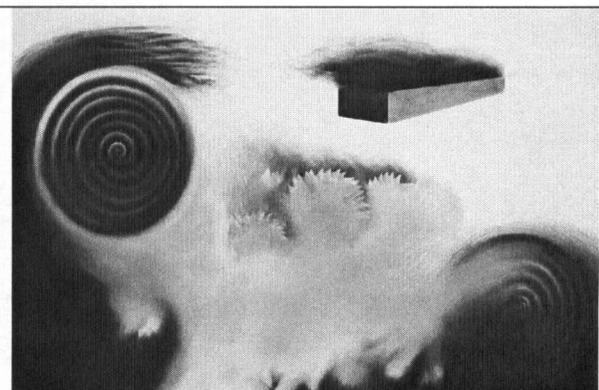
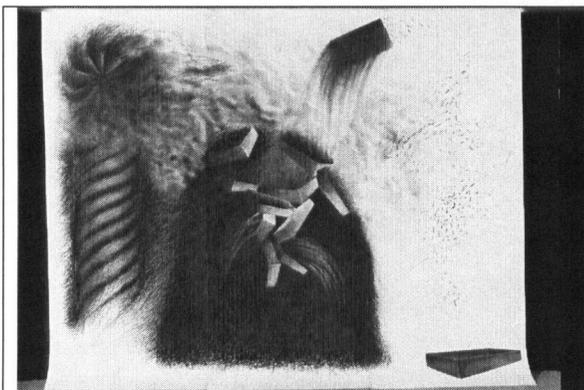
Just like the tomatoes in magazines, the idealized image becomes the desirable object in a recursive loop of representation and production. Images of the female body in fashion magazines, of a car, of a tropical island, or of a pair of shoes more often than not exist as signifiers of how the material object ought to look. Representations, meaning and language thus operate through our symbolic practices and processes (Hall, 1997). To return to my address to the students, my tomato story was intended as an allegory, as an entry point to understand the discursive character of art making. Art and the stories we

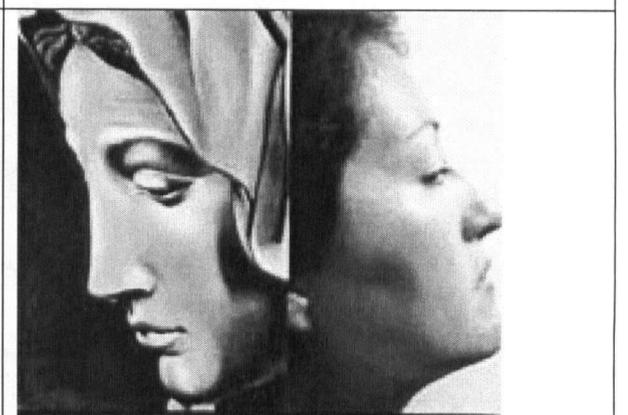
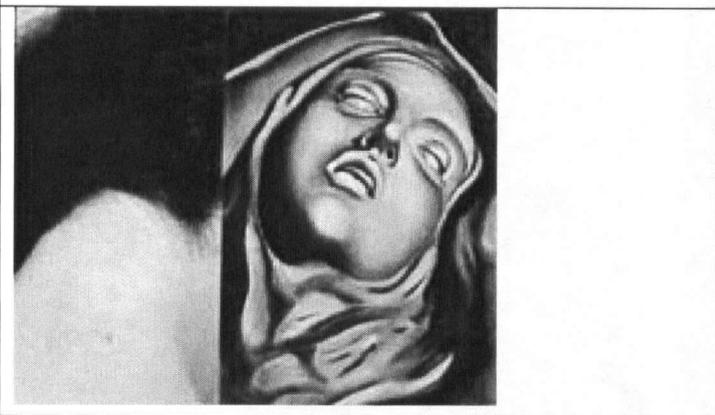
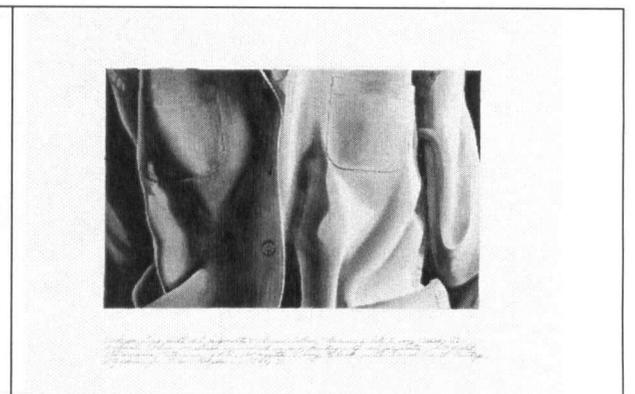
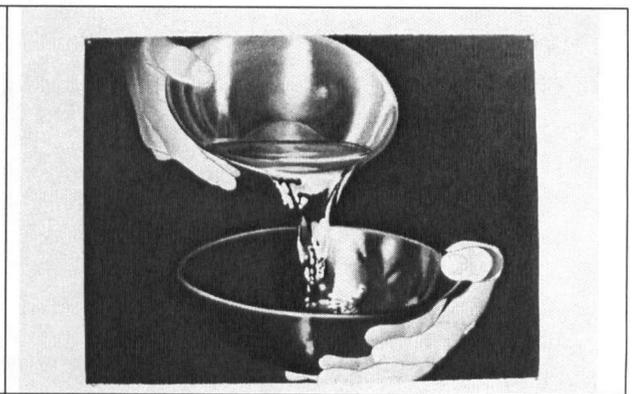
tell do not, like a mirror, passively reflect a stable pre-existing reality. Instead, they are an essential part of how we produce meaning, and how meaning actively works to shape the world in which we live. But if I were telling my tomato story today, I would have to take into account certain changes that have occurred since I first told it, for example, the increasingly popular demand for varieties of heirloom tomatoes. It would appear that in certain circles, the demand for the perfect tomato is now based less on appearances than on a desire to recover the lost tastes of non-hybrid varieties. Obviously, the future of tomatoes is neither fixed nor settled. It is an open-ended story that makes linear thinking clearly inadequate to describe the inextricable link between biology and social agents, that is, the consumers, the farmers, the agri-businesses, the growing awareness of ecology, etc., which are all integral parts of a living system. In retrospect, I now understand my tomato story as a call to new students to see art for what it is, as a complex system.

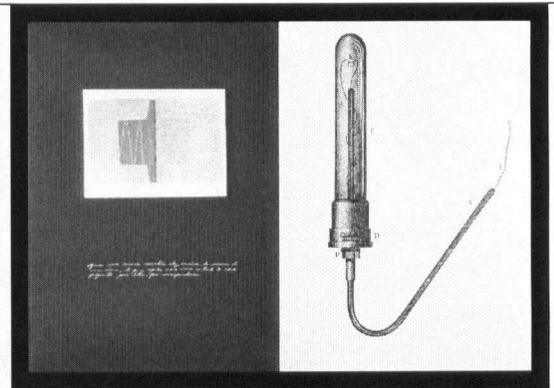
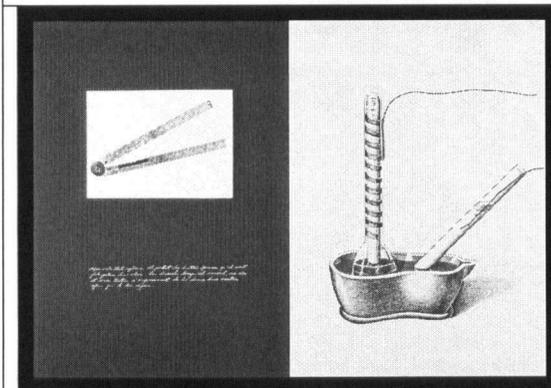
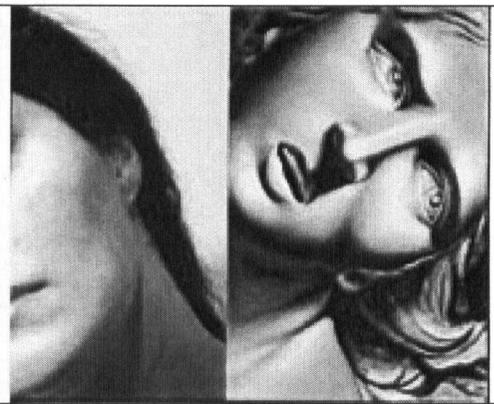
I have undertaken this dissertation as a process of inquiry about art school education without knowing where it would take me. I remember again my first days of art school, hoping to find my own 'style' as if somehow it already existed a priori. It seems that it had everything to do with the visual. I, of course, did not know what kind of work I would eventually make. As an artist, I slowly discovered that the way that art looks has nothing to do with style. Art in effect has less to do with the specific ways materials are put together than with the process of transformation of materials by agents/artists making things in a complex world. Thus it is with this knowledge that I look back at the transformation in my own work over many years, first as a student, and later as an artist,

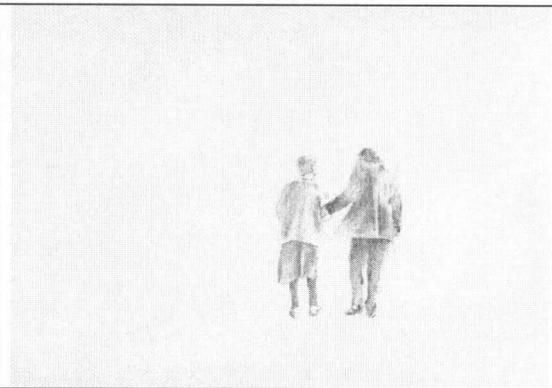
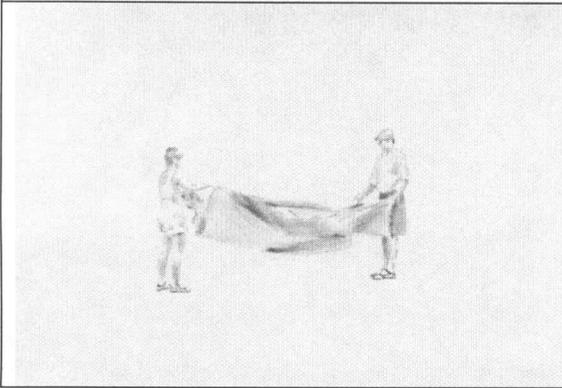
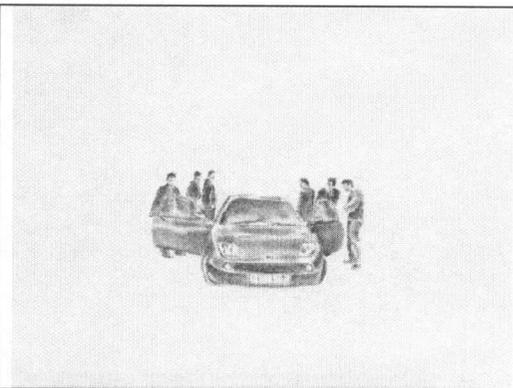
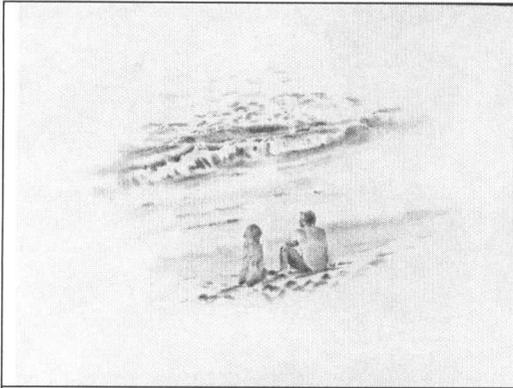
an educator, a researcher and an administrator, and from the interaction of these roles in a recursive dynamic without always knowing where one begins and the other ends.

Monique Fouquet Work 1982 - 2006









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Appendix A

Respecting Boundaries: Teaching the Disciplines within an Interdisciplinary World

November 3-5, 2005

Hosted by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

You are invited to ask faculty from your AICAD institutions to participate in this opportunity to discuss and reconsider the assumptions and challenges of the various disciplines of art and design education. The symposium will feature presentations, distinguished speakers, panel discussions and ample time for sharing ideas with colleagues.

THE THEME

In an interdisciplinary world, the separate disciplines of the visual arts retain their distinctive histories, techniques and methods of instruction. Like it or not, we still teach our students to be designers, ceramicists, painters, illustrators, video artists, sculptors and other discipline-based professionals. Our curricula are built on a number of separate and distinct disciplines, and the list is growing.

Thirty years ago, a well-stocked "fine arts" curriculum might have featured painting, sculpture, printmaking, design, illustration and sometimes photography. Today, we offer majors ñ even whole departments ñ devoted to film, photography, design, painting, digital media, illustration, new genres, sculpture, works on paper, critical theory, environmental design, installation, book arts, ceramics, animation, drawing, fiber arts, printmaking and even the "self-designed major" e.g. interdisciplinary art-making. As a mirror of the complexity of the 21st century, the contemporary fine arts curriculum offers a bewildering number of disciplinary choices.

During the upcoming AICAD symposium, we will be asking how the disciplines serve contemporary art and design education. What are the disciplines we teach? How do we teach them? How can we teach them better?

FOUR THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

To foster group interactions between colleagues both within and between the disciplines, participants will be making presentations and engaging in discussions grouped within four major thematic areas: